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Un/Safe Texts:
"Madmen", Masochists and The Representation of Self-endangerment

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis identifies a fascination with self-endangerment within contemporary western culture, and addresses its disavowal within the popular imagination. The 1990s filmic and literary representations of self-endangerment as mental illness or masochism, which constitute the focus of the study, negotiate this 'interest in but denial of' self-risk. This negotiation takes place through their play-off between conventional and more oppositional qualities, between the reassurances and the dangers that these un/safe texts provide. A range of narratives is considered, from different media, different genres, and with different relationships to the mainstream. All the texts, although with varying degrees of explicitness, challenge the disavowal of self-endangerment and do so, precisely, through implicating the reader/viewer within it. The key concern of this study is the exposure and exploration of the reader/viewer's self-risking involvement and investment in these un/safe texts.

Self-endangerment entails the individual risking, consciously or otherwise, his or her primarily physical existence. It functions here as the risk-taking behaviours of both the narrative's protagonist and its absorbed reader/viewer. The chosen texts employ various textual strategies to construct and incorporate the reader/viewer within the preoccupation with self-endangerment, but also to reveal him or her as desiring the threats to the self, threats that the texts make more and more explicit.

In chapter one the 1990s memoirs of mental illness undermine the readerly securities inherent in such traditionally therapeutic or self-assertive narratives, thereby introducing strategies of implication found throughout the chosen texts. Chapter two's focus upon Hollywood's depiction of mental illness in Fearless (Peter Weir, 1993) and Mr Jones (Mike Figgis, 1994) reveals texts suffused with self-endangerment, through both content and style, but constrained by mainstream imperatives which seem increasingly superficial. Part II's representations of sexual self-endangerment more blatantly stage the reader/viewer's stake in dangerous pleasures. The erotic thrillers of chapter three not only align the viewer with the masochistic heroine, but distinguish and exploit the spectator's masochistic voyeurism. In chapter four, the issues and the textual strategies of implication identified and examined through the other texts are drawn together. Dennis Cooper's cinematic fiction, and its avowal of self-endangerment, defines and spotlights the desirous and complicitous reader/viewer.

Situated within contemporary critical debate, this thesis intervenes into the understanding of the nature of the contemporary or, rather, the 1990s self and its relationship to culture and its artefacts.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Jean and Martin Aaron

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The style I use combines the guidelines laid out by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Southampton with that of the MLA, or more formally, *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* Fifth Edition. Joseph Gibaldi (New York: The Modern Language Association, 1999).

Introduction

Self-endangerment entails the individual risking, consciously or otherwise, his or her primarily physical existence. This study is specifically concerned with the representation of this behaviour in contemporary film and fiction. Indeed, it takes as its premise the fascination with self-endangerment that 1990s western culture makes evident.

Self-endangerment is not a recent phenomenon. History is full of figures who have risked or taken their lives with good reason or no reason, of martyrs, suicides, soldiers and political activists, and full, too, of the poems, paintings, plays or novels that portray them. The figure of Christ, as the prototype for self-sacrifice, locates self-endangerment at the heart of western culture, as a fundamental, symbolic image throughout its annals. However, while the glorification or romanticism of self-sacrifice punctuates this study, it is risk for unpious ends, for self-interest, that is my chief concern. It is, then, the ambiguous renderings of the martyr, conjuring the aestheticisation and eroticisation of the suffering body (and of the devoted gaze), that will haunt the more recent representations of self-endangerment. Featuring as the "holy fool" amongst the mentally ill figures discussed in the first part of this thesis, it resurfaces within the masochistic aesthetics explored in the second part. The most obvious form of gratuitous self-risk is masochism, and it, too, is an age-old practice. It can be attached to figures as ancient as King Solomon or Herod Pherosas who used it to 'excite [their] failing virility',[1] or seen to underlie the joys of flagellation and the historical figuring of the ecstasy of religious experience, or traced within the evolution of what John Noyes has titled 'technologies of punishment, penance and pleasure' in his historical survey of the practice.[2]

But while self-risk, and a lurid fascination with it, could be identified within most eras of history and especially in the last half of this century, in 1990s western society it assumes a new cultural currency. This period witnesses an increasing interest in self-risk as the popularisation of dangerous acts. This popularisation is "mainstreamlined", in other words these unwholesome or at least contrary activities or behaviours are

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[1] Sacha Nacht, '*Le Masochisme* Introduction', *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 21.
[2] See John K. Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission: Inventions of Masochism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) 80-104.

ultimately contained: like the lurid fascinations of the past, they can be indulged so long as finally they are castigated. But what the representations that I address in the following study show is that the processes of containment have become increasingly superficial. This, then, is the primary goal of my study: to identify self-risk as a recurring theme of 1990s western culture and also to reveal the 1990s representations of self-endangerment as juggling the need to both perpetuate and limit the fascination with the activity--that is, to indulge but deny self-risk. The reader/viewer is identified as strongly invested in this juggling process.

1990s cultural products are replete with danger-tinged images and risk-laden narratives, whether it be the latest action film or advertisement for tyres, sunglasses or perfume. The tracks of this (re)surgence are also visible within the literary and cinematic popularisation of horror, the contemporisation of film noir and its heightened erotic dynamic between the male protagonist and femme fatale, and within another renaissance of disaster movies.[3] Outside of the mainstream also, the risky (but decreasingly marginal) practices of sadomasochism and body modification have grown in popularity.[4] While I won't be pursuing their range here, the pervasiveness of perilous pleasures is indicative of the cultural climate under scrutiny. Instead, I specifically focus on texts depicting and preoccupied with life-threatening situations, for these render the reader/viewer's relationship to self-endangerment most intensely and transparently. This thesis is divided between two areas: the representation of self-endangerment as mental illness (in Part I) and as masochism (in Part II). The pertinence of these behaviours to this project lies in their association with self-endangerment and in their strong cultural life in the 1990s, as ongoing social issues--as, for example, the care in the community initiatives for the mentally ill in both the UK and USA, or as the attention surrounding sex-crime in both

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[3] The late 1990s has witnessed a spate of disaster-oriented films such as *Outbreak* (Wolfgang Peterson, 1995), *Dante's Peak* (Roger Donaldson, 1997), *Volcano* (Mick Jackson, 1997), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998) etc., which like the proliferation of blockbuster horror and neo-*noir* is commonly attributed to technological developments and pre-millennial anxieties.

[4] For a discussion of sadomasochism as 'suddenly everywhere' see Melinda Blau, 'Ordinary People', *New York*, 28 Nov. 1994: 38-46; and of body modification see J. Myers, 'Nonmainstream Body Modification: Genital Piercing, Branding, Burning, and Cutting', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 21.3 (1992): 267-306, and D. Curry, 'Decorating the Body Politic', *New Formations*, 19 (1993): 69-82. I am grateful to Paul Sweetman for the latter references.

countries--and the translation of these issues into news, films or fiction. (These translations often take place within the genres noted above, and in the dangerous acts depicted inside and outside the mainstream.) The pertinence of mental illness and masochism also lies in their divergence from each other. Although each has at various moments in recent history been considered as malady or liberty, their representations generally direct different responses in the reader/viewer (such as fear or disgust), thereby suggesting contrasting examples of the reader/viewer's investment in such representations. That they have been equated historically as pathological states, and maintained as marginal identities, mental illness and masochism are both framed by a need to contain or deny the threat that accompanies them and as such are perfect for this study. It is important to emphasise, however, that here I am addressing them as cultural rather than medical conditions.

Each part of the thesis is split between attention to film and to literature, and framed by a complementary reading of media representations. The materials I consider are Anglo-American narratives. All the primary texts, the films and literature, are from the USA, and the analyses of them draw upon contemporary Anglo-American theory. This is indicative of the British critical context from which I write, but also of the fact that the USA has set the western scene of contemporary culture (in terms of Hollywood and, for example, youth culture) and of contemporary discourses of the self (in terms of the activities of its "cutting edge"--the boom in tattooing, piercing, and other "risky" body projects--as well as its burgeoning culture of self-help). I consider a range of media--fiction and non-fiction, film and the popular press--and a range of genres, such as autobiography, Hollywood drama and erotic thrillers, and American "blank" fiction. In so doing, I mean to invoke both an interdisciplinary intent and the pervasiveness of the representation of self-endangerment as a culture-wide characteristic. My chosen texts' negotiation of the "interest in but denial of" self-endangerment proves to be a negotiation of convention, and as such this eclecticism is essential in affording a range of (un/safe) texts differently positioned in terms of the rules or conservatism of the mainstream or of genre. This project seeks not so much to establish a hardened concept but to expose a spectre of self-endangerment, an unconscious theme; a threat romanticised, manipulated and, ultimately, indulged by the divergent cultural forms. An acknowledgement of the

inherent differences of the various media or genres will license my "reading" of the selection of representations *through* the notion of self-endangerment.

I am highly selective in my use of the mass media, of certain news stories, for my priority is to confirm through them the place of mental illness or masochism within the popular imagination, rather than to offer an extensive interrogation of the popular press. Through the precursory analyses of certain media stories I uncover the varying degrees of stigmatisation, but also their implicit denial of self-endangerment. In Part I this operates as the stereotyping of those with mental illness, which fosters a dismissal of their self-risk in favour of their murderousness. In Part II, masochism is denied in the popular imagination, as a consensual act or as a dangerous activity. In each chapter, then, the narratives, which revolve around the life-threatening characters, will be shown to negotiate this state of denial, and to favour various textual strategies that work to involve the reader/viewer in self-endangerment rather than to distance him or her through its denial. It is the exposure and investigation of this state of involvement, of the reader/viewer's implication, investment, agency or even complicity, in these un/safe texts that is a chief concern of my study.

The denial of self-risk, which underlies this project, corresponds to our fear of death. Ernest Becker claimed that the fear of death underlies all human neuroses: 'the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity--activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the fatal destiny for man'.[5] Conditioned to accept a sense of our immortality, he suggests, we repress this fear of death. Pursuing this psychic urge to distance death from the self, Becker confirms the significance of murder. He draws upon the work of psychoanalyst Otto Rank who states that 'the death fear of the ego is lessened by the killing, the sacrifice, of the other; through the death of the

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[5] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973) ix. The denial of death as destiny corresponds to the denial of Freud's theory of the death drive, which will be discussed shortly. Lacan has emphasised psychoanalysis's repression of this theory: '*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*...is the work of Freud that most of those who authorize themselves with the title of psychoanalyst don't hesitate to reject as a superfluous, even chance, speculation'. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966) 44-45, qtd. in and trans. Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytical Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (London: Routledge, 1991) 11.

other, one buys oneself free from the penalty of dying, of being killed'.[6] Alfred Killilea extends this idea of the displacement of fear into the representation of murder, to suggest that western culture's avoidance of the subject of death operates especially within its overt imaging of violence. Through the graphic visualisations of death and dying in films or on the news, we are inured to its place in our own lives, we locate it elsewhere: '[w]e continue to hide from the reality of our natural and unavoidable mortality by exposing ourselves to the more bizarre and violent manifestations of death'.[7] In this way, cultural representations are the natural sites for interrogating the issues at stake in this thesis: the reader/viewer's relationship to the graphic depictions of difficult acts. Killilea's argument also raises the fundamental question of whether the 1990s fascination with self-endangerment signifies a restaging of this denial of the fear of death or, instead, signifies a resistance to relocating or displacing it. This play-off between the reassuring or unsettling affect upon the reader/viewer, is a major thread running through my study, arising as the constant critique of the chosen texts' negotiations of conventional processes.

Self-endangerment, then, is not to be limited to the cultural portrayal of dangerous acts, to the concrete form of self-willed self-risk depicted within the cinematic or literary (or news) texts, but broadens into the less tangible sense of the reader/viewer's self-endangerment by implication. Through engagement with these representations of self-endangerment, the reader or viewer, I will argue, is affected in certain self-endangering ways--is incorporated, somehow, into their constructions. Of course, this less tangible sense of the reader/viewer's involvement in the text is difficult to prove, and another important strand of this thesis is the different ways that mainstream or more oppositional texts achieve or concretise this speculative potential. This will be borne out, especially, within the closing chapter's investigation of the controversial work of Dennis Cooper which explicitly constructs both self-endangerment and the reader's role and investment in it. An essential point, here, is that this thesis is not an audience study, but precisely a study of the textual construction, exploitation or determination of the reader/viewer's role. Self-endangerment, then, is identified both as a kind of

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[6] Otto Rank, *Will Therapy and Truth and Reality* (New York: Knopf, 1936; One volume edition 1945) 130, qtd. in Becker, 99.

[7] Alfred G. Killilea, *The Politics of Being Mortal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988) 6.

representation and as the reader/viewer's experience or subjective process, indeed, one that fuels these representations. As such, self-endangerment proves to be a culturally invested and culturally determined effect, and a psychically invested and psychically determined effect.

In this focus upon cultural and psychic roles of art, upon the assertion of an implicated reader/viewer's perhaps unconscious experience, two key methodologies underlying this thesis are reader-response theory and psychoanalysis. These will be discussed in detail shortly for they fund this study's understanding of the reader's self-endangering investment in the text and of the safeties inherent in such a supposedly dangerous state, and, thus, offer important paradigms for the declarations of this introduction and for the ensuing chapters. Self-endangerment reverberates within several methodologies from psychoanalysis to social philosophy to critical theory to film studies, and within their specific discussions since the 1960s. My focus upon the reader/viewer's investment in the cultural fascination with self-endangerment is indicative of this time-frame's shifts in theoretical attention to the reader/viewer/subject in a similar way across a range of disciplines.[8] The emphasis upon the subjective processes of reading integral to the development of reader-response theory into poststructuralism, emerged in parallel in film studies with the prominence of the psychoanalysis of cinema in the 1970s and the important work in France, Britain and the USA on spectatorial positionings, by, for example, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey and Stephen Heath. In this way, the 1990s surge in the representation of self-risk is not only to be acknowledged as a restaging and intensification of historically and psychologically invested themes but will unfold in the light of the recent history of ideas.

It is through reader-response theory's debates that the reader can be seen as implicated, and reading (and, by extension, viewing) as self-endangering. This state of self-endangerment is only temporary, however, and serves to strengthen the reader's self, thereby providing a traditional and conservative interpretation of the reader/viewer's experience. In briefly visiting the ideas of a number of reader-response criticism's key players I will set up crucial points for the ensuing study and its concern with

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[8] Literary theory has turned to the reader and reader-response criticism; film theory both to the spectator and to audience studies; and philosophy has turned to the subject. This point has been made by Judith Mayne; see her *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993) 6.

contemporary subjectivity as the reader's altering relationship to the text (the self's/reader's collapse into the other/text).

Reading as (Safe) Self-endangerment

Something particular happens when we read which has provoked theorists to describe it in a language that suggests that the "self" of the reader becomes entangled, encompassed or even lost within the "self" of the text. Involving critics from various schools of thought--formalists, phenomenologists, structuralists, psychoanalysts--the experience of reading has a special and well-mooted affect on the self: the self undergoes some kind of transformation, which I would like to call the self-endangerment of reading. Paul Ricoeur called it 'becoming other' and George Poulet saw it more as an inhabitation by another.[9] Stanley Fish refers to a disappearance, Jonathan Culler to a dissolution, and Roland Barthes to a kind of 'ecstatic loss'.[10] For Wolfgang Iser the self merges with the text, for Norman Holland it is effaced and for Wayne Booth it is occupied by the text.[11]

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[9] Paul Ricoeur, interview with Joël Roman, 'World of the Text, World of the Reader', *Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1991) 493. Georges Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading', *New Literary History*, 1 (1969): 53-68.

[10] For Fish the subject/object distinction ceases to be of relevance, for the "self" is 'a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it'. Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?: the Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) 335. Fish has been attacked for the self-perpetuating imperialism of his "interpretive communities" and his denial of a resistant readership; see Elizabeth Freund, *The Return to the Return: Reader-Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) 110-11. Also, Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975) 28 , and Robert Young's interpretation of Barthes' term *jouissance* in his preface to Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text', *Untying the Text*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 32.

[11] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Norman N. Holland, 'Unity Identity Text Self', *Reader-Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Thompkins (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Wayne C. Booth, 'Who is Responsible in Ethical Criticism, and for What?' *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 125-55.

The various schools represented here restage much older philosophical debates about the nature of the self and cognition, about intersubjectivity and intentionality.[12] They move away from the cornerstones of traditional literary criticism (old and New)--the authority and, in terms of meaning, the autonomy, of the text--in centring attention upon the reader.[13] But they also reflect their own theoretical investments. Phenomenologists, like Poulet and Iser, are specifically concerned with what happens to the reader during the experience of reading the text. Poststructuralists, like Culler, Fish or Barthes, are concerned with the agency of the reader amidst the confluence of signs that the text manifests. With poststructuralism, as deconstruction, the power of interpretation is handed back to the reader but s/he cannot determine meaning individually or independently. Structuralism's assertion of the various codes affecting the reader, becomes postructuralism's 'innumerable possibilities of meaning' determining his or her interpretation.[14] The 'interpersonal systems',[15] 'systems of intelligibility',[16] or 'infinite intercourse of codes'[17] render the reader a site through which the controlling systems of conventional thought shape the meaning s/he generates. Not only is the subject/object divide undermined, but the reader's agency doubted. The question of the agency of the reader within (and surrounding) the reading experience is fundamental to this thesis. While phenomenology revered the subject as the maker of all meaning, deconstruction undermined the subject's independence or autonomy, finding it instead

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[12] Edmund Husserl stands out here in his discussions of the status of the self in its engagement with the "other beings" in the world. For a discussion of intentionality directed to what is other, see the Fifth Meditation of Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977) 81-151.

[13] It moves on from New Criticism's rejection of the reader and Formalism and Anglo-American literary Structuralism's text-centredness according to Freund (69).

[14] M. H. Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 150.

[15] Culler, 28. Culler's book, seen as pivotal to the Anglo-American passage to deconstruction, inserted the primacy of the reader into the structural origins of interpretation.

[16] Fish, 335.

[17] Barthes, 'Theory' 45. Roland Barthes was the main protagonist in this dissolution of the "self" within "productive" reading with his seminal work *S/Z* in 1974 and 'The Death of the Author' in 1977. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (1970; New York: Hill and Wang, 1974); 'Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48.

the interface of numerous influencing factors. Yet, in separating out the two branches of thought that stem from Hegel on the one side and Nietzsche on the other, Vincent Descombes notes their mutuality: 'the absence of a personal subject is equivalent to the presence of an impersonal subject. In fact, it's not hard to detect the promotion of new subjectivities in many of the communiqués announcing victory over THE SUBJECT'.[18]

What all the theorists assert, however, is the undermining of the distinction between the subject (reader) and object (text). The sense of an endangered and implicated self resides within the disintegration of this distinction, for the concept of a secure, fixed uninvolved self is made impossible.[19] For Poulet and Iser the traditional subject/object disintegrates during the reading process as the subject and object become entwined and intermingled.[20] For Poulet, upon whom Iser among others based his ideas, the subject/object dynamic implodes as the work 'becomes...a sort of human being,...a mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own objects'.[21] For Iser, the "image-building" in the mind of the reader is the actualisation of the interiority of reading, of the conflation or perhaps reversal of the subject/object division. In constructing the image, described by the text, we incorporate the object to produce a subjectivised object.[22] But the self of the reader is not lost completely; it is joined by

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[18] Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 77, original capitalisation.

[19] Deconstruction has invoked the many different "selves" involved within the interaction of the text and the reader: the "author" who writes the text, the "narrator" who addresses someone, the "narratee" who is spoken to, and the "reader" who reads the text. These constitute the three "virtual" parties that are involved: the writer of the text, character/s in the text and reader of the text. The author while "he" writes the text has also been considered as, or separated from, the narrator who narrates the text as well as all the different narrators that a text can offer. The reader, who might identify with any character or any narrator, is also always potentially the one addressed, the narratee. See Gerald Prince, 'Introduction to the Study of the Narratee', Thompkins, 7-25.

[20] In philosophical terms, the subject and object prove to be dialectically related, albeit in a 'precarious balance'. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (1970; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 238.

[21] Poulet, 59.

[22] These processes of "visualisation" are indebted to Husserl's notion of passive synthesis, see Ellen J. Esrock, *The Reader's Eye: Visual Imaging as Reader Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 28-29. According to Esrock, visualisation or imaging is, in itself, a crucial (part of) reader-response. However, she finds the treatment or discussion of imaging inadequate and limited within reader-response criticism: marginalised by phenomenology, ignored by linguistics and restricted

another or doubled.[23] The original self would seem to continue to operate or rather, to exist, although within limits and at a distance: a 'strange displacement of myself by the work...takes place, a sort of schizoid distinction between what I feel and what the other feels; a confused awareness of delay'.[24] Iser moves on from Poulet's tentative positioning of a discombobulated possessed reader to emphasise how the 'reader will be "occupied" by the thoughts of the author...[but] although we may be thinking the thoughts of someone else, what we are will not disappear completely'.[25]

In this way, when the reader reads, although the self might be entangled, encompassed, or lost, there is always the "real" self operating silently, on hold, in the wings. The text always ends, the page or screen always empties and the reader's self re-enters, re-dominates. We are reunited with ourselves; "I", the self, indivisible, remains. Thus reading is a safe self-endangerment, it is temporary, it is limited, it is known and therefore without fear. When we read a book we hold it, we know its confines, its extent, when we go to the cinema we know what we have paid for, the limits of the screening. When reading ends, when we return *from* the reader, the self is stronger than ever in its subjectivity, in its selfhood:

> And it is only logical that, when the process of irrealization is over--i.e., when we put the book down--we should experience a kind of 'awakening'...always to a reality from which we had been drawn away by the image-building process...[which] eliminates the subject-object division

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in psychoanalysis. The "politics" of imaging, its radical place within the experience of reading, will become increasingly important in Part II.

[23] This sense of a doubling of the self was shared by Norman Holland, but not in terms of, or through, a division but through a replication. Within his psychoanalytical reader-response theory, in the act of reading the reader re-creates his own identity, the self is replicated: we project ourselves onto the pages and into the characters of the text while, at the same time, they enter and join onto us. See Holland, 'Unity', 124. Holland went on to develop this idea of the productivity of identity in his later work, *The I*, in which identity was a system with three roles: as an agency, a consequence and a representation. See Holland, *The I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 33-35.

[24] Poulet, 59. The original and conventional distinction between the reader and the text, the subject and the object, is displaced inward becoming between the self of the reader and the self of the text as intruder (however welcome).

[25] Iser, *The Implied Reader* 293.

> essential for all perception, so that when we 'awaken' to the real world, this division seems *all the more* accentuated.[26]

Not only is the self-endangerment of reading temporary but in its restoration the secure self is fortified. Thus, reading reinforces the security of that which is lost temporarily during the experience of reading, during engagement with the text. In fact this reinforcement, this self-consolidation can only happen through the temporary loss of the self, through self-endangerment. This self-affirming or reassuring process has much in common with the psychological significance of (safe) self-endangerment, as will become clear shortly, but what is important here is how the reader's investment in the self-endangerment of reading is, according to these reader-response theorists, a most conservative experience: reassuring and refortifying the self. This general description of the reading experience remains crucial to an interrogation of the reader/viewer; while the 1990s representations of self-risk intervene into this "safe" process, they are forever shadowed by this conventional need to reassure the reader. However, there are other important contributions to this debate, more oppositional ideas well suited to my project.

Response and Responsibility

Like Iser, Wayne C. Booth uses "occupation" to describe what happens to the reader during the reading experience: '[w]e are occupied in the sense of filling our time with the story....And we are occupied in the sense of being taken over, colonized: occupied by a foreign imaginary world'.[27] Occupation provides a suitably political term, conveying the sense of the reader's power or submission, compliance or opposition.[28] Indeed, Booth pursues the rather radical idea of the reader's involuntary consent to a text in terms of responsibility, or, as he prefers, an ethics of reading. He asserts the unavoidable part that readers/viewers play and that this part must have repercussions. In my pursuit of the readers' investment in self-endangerment, in exposing culture's contradictory denial of

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[26] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 140, emphasis added.

[27] Booth, 'Who' 139.

[28] Other similarly conflict-oriented terms suffuse reader-response criticism--such as the text's invasion, or resisting a text or, as William Ray notes, Maurice Blanchot's and Jean-Paul Sartre's use of the 'metaphor of liberty or freedom...to characterize reading'. William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) 11.

their fascination with such dangerous pleasures, it is undoubtedly my (political) intention to suggest some sense of individual accountability. Responsibility seems too loaded a term: I am not wanting to assign blame or any other morally laden position but rather to establish the fascination with what is set up as a radical desire or oppositional behaviour. This sense of accountability is pushed, I will suggest, by the prevalence of self-reflexive texts, a characteristic addressed at the close of Part I.

In developing this idea of occupation, Booth expresses problems with the use of 'identification' in connection with the experience of reading.[29] Booth sees identification as a diversion and one that is ideologically loaded. He states that '[t]he occupation can be so intense that some phenomenologists have misleadingly called it identifying'.[30] Such a term is misleading because, according to Booth, with the idea of identification we become embroiled in an historical argument that assigns a false power to the reader, a false power of resistance or distance from the text. Booth asserts that our identification--or, rather, our absorption to whatever degree it may develop--is unavoidable, as are its repercussions: 'even when we resist a story, even when we view it dispassionately, it immerses us in "the thoughts of another," unless we simply stop listening...we have had to "see" the picture in order to reject it'.[31]

Identification is too simple a term in implying a false passivity, a relinquishing of self when, instead, participation seems compulsory or involuntary. I also believe that something quite active, quite complicit occurs in reading or viewing, and, what is more, this thesis finds identification to be neither the sole site nor linear expression of the reader's involvement or self-endangerment. While we know what is going on, we know that we are safe, that we are only reading with all the suspensions, and multiplications, of selfhood that reading provides, our active responses can and do break the bounds of this safety. When Booth casts his notion of the reader's involuntary participation in the text upon a politically or socially weighted context he reveals the points of weakness in the safe shell of the reader's self, or, what could be seen as the faultlines in the "safe" self-endangerment of reading:

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[29] Iser also rejected the use of identification to *explain* what happens to the reader, when it can only *name* the process: '"identification" is not an end in itself, but a stratagem by means of which the author stimulates attitudes in the reader' (*Implied* 291).
[30] Booth, 'Who' 139.
[31] Booth, 'Who' 139-40.

This paradoxical need to embrace in order to decide *whether* to embrace is amusingly illustrated in the plight of anti-pornographers. How do you decide that a story is obscenely pornographic...you can do so only by 'listening' to it, discovering what your mind and body do in response, and confessing to the world that you have found something obscene in it--that is, made something obscene out of it. Only in intimacy with obscenity can one know what is obscene.[32]

When libidinally oriented it is clearer to see how the effect of the text escapes or spills over the bounds of the book, how the textual pleasures surpass the "safe" bounds of the text and the safe limits of the self-endangerment of reading. This is most easily understood when the pleasure is erotic, as in Booth's example, because the body--the physical marker of the silent "real self" during reading--is "unwittingly" aroused.[33]

While, through Booth, the involuntary response can subvert the safe structure of textual self-endangerment, elsewhere it has been seen as a hegemonic tool. Franco Moretti, in his consideration of "moving literature", asserts that the involuntary tears produced by emotive texts, rather than challenging the distance between reader and text, fortify it as 'a ritual of reciprocal collective absolution'. Moretti goes on to proclaim these tears 'a catharsis that implies a definite *disavowal* of the tragic'[34] and this is certainly an interesting point--that these involuntary reactions symbolise a requisite denial of the profundity or implications of the representation. This point becomes increasingly relevant in Part II, where the issue of involuntary involvement is intensified by considering the work of such "unconscionable" sexually graphic writers as Dennis Cooper, and catharsis is discussed as a ploy to reassure the reader.

In reassuring or restoring the self, even saving it, art can be seen as a zone of vicarious pleasures, of escapism, of mastery, in line with Becker's reflections upon the representation of murder. Yet, as Leo Bersani has argued, art can be anything but redemptive. Indeed, the thesis of his book *The Culture of Redemption*, that the

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[32] Booth, 'Who' 140, original emphasis.

[33] This spilling over, this unleashing of textual power, has a history of being deemed both dangerous and politically applicable: from its general threat (Plato) to the specific targeting or censoring of violence, sex etc., from the production of propaganda, to the right-wing opposition to Arts' funding for subcultural productions.

[34] Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (London: Verso, 1983) 173, original emphasis.

reparative role attributed to art, and with it the authoritative self, is to be refuted, resonates loudly within my study.[35] In *The Acts of Impoverishment*, his subsequent work with Ulysse Dutoit, radical art is shown to shatter, rather than to consolidate, the self of the reader (and to do so precisely through identification).[36] While the destructive potential of art and of identification proves pivotal to my analysis, it is the seeming-safety within the apparent danger, the '*delusion* of stability' of the popular and the mainstream--of art in general--which is to be heavily scrutinised here, and most importantly the reader/viewer's investment in it.[37]

In many ways, this thesis opens up the faultlines in the reader/viewer's safe shell of self-endangerment. Not through the more obvious areas of horror or pornography, but as mental illness and masochism which have a particular relationship to the security of the self. Rather than work through reader-response criticism in the more popular terms of the "implied reader" and the "constructed" reader, which assign the reader some virtual yet static role, my consideration of the relationship between the text and the reader adopts the implicated reader who can never be statically defined, or isolated or distanced from the text and, most importantly here, from its provocations. Each of the texts considered in this thesis intervenes into the process of "safe" self-endangerment, to assert and exploit the reader/viewer's participation. As the study progresses so too does

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[35] Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[36] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Acts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). As Maud Ellmann puts it in a review of their study: 'Film critics, in the wake of Lacan, have tended to regard the process of identification as intrinsically conservative, because it offers the spectator the delusion of stability, in contrast to the disorientating motion of the camera-work. For Bersani and Dutoit, however, it is identification which disorients: to identify, they argue, is not to take possession of the other but to be invaded by the other, exiled and denatured from oneself'. Maud Ellmann, 'Failing to Fail', rev. of *Acts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*, by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Essays in Criticism* XLV.1 (1995): 90.

[37] Ellmann, 'Failing to Fail' 90, emphasis added. Susan Rubin Suleiman has seen the particular relationship between the individual and its cultural environment as one marked by an enduring self-recognition akin to self-endangerment: 'stronger than mere identification, which most often disappears or dissipates when the reading or viewing experience is over'. Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) 7.

the sense of the reader/viewer's place in these un/safe texts, which evolves from the implicated reader/viewer of Part I to the complicitous reader/viewer of Part II.

Self-endangerment and Cultural Studies

Cultural studies provides the most obvious home for this project with its interdisciplinary focus on the exchange between contemporary society and its artifacts. Indeed, it has generated several interpretations of the current climate that complement my own. Late twentieth-century western culture has been described in terms of a 'risk society',[38] Postmodern Apocalypse,[39] or the AIDS crisis. Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter have called this period of 'millennial fever' 'The Age of Anxiety'.[40] These similarly distinguish the 1990s climate in its relationship to the threatened self,[41] but they also present potential reasons for it. However, the task of this thesis is not to establish reasons for this climate (despite each one's suitability) but to evidence the cultural fascination with self-endangerment and what it tells us about the contemporary western individual--as such these reasons are fairly superfluous. That is not to say that the general climate is not of importance, quite the opposite. As the title of this thesis, "un/safe texts" (echoing "unsafe sex"), illustrates, this study is deliberately located within the cultural and institutional response to 1990s life, as a period of sexual panic, but also, as that slash in un/safe indicates, as a period when the opposition between, say, pleasure and danger (or related binaries) is uneasily maintained.

The most influential complementary theory paralleling this study is postmodernism. It plays an important role here precisely in its inability to explain

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[38] Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, trans. Amos Wiesz (1988; Cambridge: Polity, 1995). Beck's subject is the 'hazards of technologically advanced civilisation' and '[t]he challenges of the atomic, chemical and genetic age at the turn of the twenty-first century' (1).

[39] Richard Dellamora, ed., *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

[40] Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter, eds., *The Age of Anxiety* (London: Virago, 1996) ix. It offers a range of essays on late twentieth-century British culture addressing the environment, AIDS, capitalism, and youth etc.

[41] Numerous other publications emphasise the association between society and danger, if by their titles alone; examples include Michael Vincent Miller's *Intimate Terrorism: The Crisis of Love in an Age of Disillusion* (New York: Norton, 1995), or Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

cultural self-endangerment. Although similarly rooted in the fragility of the contemporary self, postmodernism undermines the individual's agency where my argument works to underscore it. The memoirs of mental illness, for example, discussed in chapter one are distinguished both from the self-aggrandisement of the genre of autobiography, and from the self-dispersal of (postmodernist) anti-autobiography. In chapter four, Dennis Cooper's weakening of reality confers a (quasi) presence upon the reader (fundamental to my argument) where postmodernist 'fabrication' eradicates any presence, any trace of the concrete.

This thesis is inevitably a product of its critical contexts, but it is also, ultimately, a direct response to, and thus an investigation of, what I see as an inherent contradiction of western culture: its incessant desire for representations of risk and danger--for sensationalised violence and sex--and its concurrent denial of this desire. Integral to the cultural denial of this desire, is a denial of "our" implication within it, which is revealed as a denial of self-endangerment. Most importantly, this desire, I will claim, is masochistically invested and emblematic of what might be called an age of self-endangerment, an age that characterises the end of the twentieth century. In so characterising the reader/viewer's relationship to cultural products, my study can be seen to respond to Laura Mulvey's seminal formulation of a gendered spectatorship which does not afford a space for masochistic pleasure. In her 1973 article on the visual pleasure of classical cinema, Mulvey exposed its patriarchal and sadistic economy, within which women were passive objects while men were denied this masochistic positioning: 'reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like'.[42] In the revised argument in her 'Afterthoughts' piece, the female spectator was able to inhabit a more active role, albeit through a virtual transvestism.[43] While this relieves the passivity of the female spectator, it broadens the denial of a masochistic pleasure or investment. In chapter three of this thesis, I formulate an active masochistic gaze for the "general" spectator, but throughout I mean to promote his or her agency--the reader/viewer's active

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[42] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989) 20.

[43] Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989) 29-38.

involvement--unconstrained by gender. That is not to say that gender is unimportant within this study, indeed crucial discussions are overshadowed by the easy feminisation of mental illness and of masochism. In this, and in its investigation of a kind of cultural hypocrisy, my project is undoubtedly political.

Undoubtedly Political

This is not a thesis about the functionings of government, yet politics is of fundamental importance to it. Acts and bills and laws, and even politicians, do feature within the study--in fact, the legal debates on the determination of sanity or consent punctuate my discussions, and, what is more, the death of Stephen Milligan M.P. from auto-erotic asphyxiation in 1994 was its catalyst. Primarily, however, politics here operates as the ideological workings upon society of legal and social conventions. The politics of the representation of self-endangerment not only orbit the individual's socio-psychological investment in these cultural forms, but resonate within the ideologically laden areas of religion, censorship and notions of the popular as well as of human rights. Indeed, the notion of self-harm is pivotally placed in our understanding of politics and society: our fundamental rights, our place as "free" members of western society, hinge upon a sense of "wrongful injury", that violence shall not be done to others nor to the self. The issue of consent, which becomes increasingly important in the thesis, is conjured through this discourse at the start of Part II. Self-endangerment as self-harm is, thus, antithetical to some of the principles society holds dear.

With the legacy of God's 'fix'd...canon 'gainst self-slaughter' the act of self-endangerment has always been loaded.[44] While suicide is forbidden within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, religious martyrdom offers the primary politicisation of self-endangerment: 'setting up the prototype of suffering' but also the attendant moral and aesthetic issues.[45] Then there is the adjectival politic, encompassing both the qualities of unscrupulousness and prudence and, in this way, the title of this thesis points to the dual or duplicitous function of self-endangerment within the public arena. This function is

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[44] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.132. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* ed. and intro. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951) 1032.

[45] Theodor Reik, *Masochism in Modern Man*, trans. Margaret H. Beigel and Gertrud M. Kurth (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1941) 346.

most clearly traced within the discussion of the mainstream "management" of mental illness as self-endangerment in chapter two.

But the social force of gender is the most ideological presence in this study. From the beating fantasy, a core theory of masochistic origination, Freud and others, with varying degrees of sexism, firmly connect the child to a feminine sexual motivation: 'to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish, to have a passive (feminine) sexual relation to him and is only a regressive distortion of it'.[46] The tracks of this 'unthinking identification between masochistic passivity and the feminine'[47] are evident within this study's many discussions: of the denial of male masochistic pleasure underlying my introductory argument to Part II, or the problem of an active female masochism addressed in chapter three. The most conservative or misogynistic, feminine masochism is, according to Freud, the 'most accessible to our observation and least problematical'.[48] Controversial in its alignment of femininity with infantalisation and helplessness, it has been the source of much feminist intervention and charges of the theory's inadequacy. Not only does it narrow-mindedly equate masochism with all the "weaknesses" of femininity, but it also misreads the gender-play integral to it, ignoring its transgressive potential. As Nick Mansfield writes:

> Manipulating gender categories is one of [masochism's] most important types of play, but the appropriation of, or identification with, the feminine on the masochist's part is never at the expense of his masculinity, and is never simply undertaken because he understands femininity as more implicitly passive.[49]

The gendering of masochism, and self-endangerment, encircles this study, lending a suspicious eye to the ease with which females become figures of self-endangerment and self-endangering characters are feminised.

Self-endangerment harnesses the relationships between self and other, private and public, individual and society, and is entangled with issues of gender, sexuality and

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[46] Sigmund Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924) *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 11. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 424.
[47] Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997) xi.
[48] Freud, 'Economic' 416.
[49] Mansfield, xii.

patriarchy. It has emerged, more overtly, as a political tool in the public arena in terms of terrorism as suicide-bombing or hunger-striking, or as a politicised product of the private in terms of euthanasia, anorexia, abortion, suicide or sadomasochism.[50] These controversial issues pivot upon the politicisation of the body. It is not just the acts themselves that are politically engineered or motivated but their interpretation, representation and reception. Space restrictions do not allow consideration of all forms of politicised self-harm, but I hope to mobilise the scope of the related issues in my concentration upon mental illness and sexual self-endangerment.

The representations that I explore are not immediately political or *about* self-risk, but provide crucial discussions of the sensitive and ideologically textured areas of "madness" and "perversion". With the political importance of representation for under- or mis-represented groups--in raising social awareness, challenging discrimination--my general analyses of the representation of mental illness and masochism in contemporary culture are both deliberate and necessary companions to the larger project, and important cultural arguments in their own right.

In this thesis, then, I expose the cultural currency of self-endangerment and the politics of its representation which seeks to maintain its mythic status. It will be shown to be a source of both obsession and denial, a sacred myth and unacknowledged secret and as such a locus for disavowal. Through its various incarnations, self-endangerment emerges as a distinctive and politicised issue in contemporary cultural and social debate. It emphasises and complements existing ideas but also illuminates and adds to contemporary notions of the (western) self and the culture that determines it.

Through reader-response theory I demonstrated how the dual process of self-endangerment (and self-affirmation) functioned within the reading experience and the traditional understanding of it. What I want to do now is to turn to masochism, for this term, and the theory surrounding it, is very closely associated with self-endangerment (with the popularisation of what are, primarily, dangerous pleasures,) and a crucial

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[50] Several theorists have explored the connection between politics and self-starvation; see Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self* (New York: Times Books, 1985) and Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists* (London: Virago Press, 1993). Euthanasia and abortion, located at the edges of life, at birth and death, have been shown to be morally, philosophically and politically charged, especially within the current cultural climate; see, for example, Ronald Dworkin's *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

setting not only for the discussion of denials or desires, but for this entire project. There has been an explosion of texts on masochism in recent years, but these do not account for, although they contribute to, the range of representations of self-endangerment found throughout contemporary western culture. This thesis, then, joins in the attempt to update the theorisation of masochism, through a cultural analysis of the representation of self-endangerment, and of the climate that produces and requires it. I am far more concerned with the cultural representation of masochism--the focus of Part II--than its psychoanalytical interpretations, yet the latter offer illuminating and strangely complementary guides to the mechanisms of self-endangerment fundamental to the thesis as a whole. The following discussion will establish the importance of psychoanalysis, in order to move beyond it to analyse the socio-cultural phenomenon of self-endangerment. To this end I will identify masochism, and therefore self-endangerment, as a social, rather than purely sexual, phenomenon, to account for the toleration of unpleasure and the centrality of "cultural representations" within this, and to expose and emphasise the self-endangering economy underlying western culture.

The Meanings of Masochism

Masochism is the term attributed to the toleration of unpleasure, but 'has no universally agreed-upon meaning'.[51] It has been variously defined since first coined by Krafft-Ebing in 1886 in response to the novels of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.[52] These definitions complement, supplement or challenge Freud's theory with varying degrees of homage. They reveal it as a disorder, a phenomenon, a description of our combative society or as a common sexual practice.

In line with Freud, Sacha Nacht defines the mental disorder masochism as a 'neurotic state characterized by a search for suffering. The masochist feels a real need, an "appetite" for suffering'.[53] Similarly, Rudolph M. Loewenstein defines it as 'a tendency to seek physical or mental suffering in order to achieve, be it consciously or

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[51] Carol Siegel, *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 2.
[52] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886; New York: Pioneer, 1944).
[53] Nacht, 18.

not, sexual gratification in the widest sense'.[54] Other theorists have linked this personal predilection to a general state of submission to power. Shirley Panken locates masochism in the oppressive, and even fascistic, ideologies of western society, as 'a disturbing accompaniment to innumerable aspects of human action and cultural forms'.[55] Both Lynn Chancer and Gini Graham Scott, in their respective studies of sexual submissiveness, identify masochism within the sexual relationships of the majority.[56] Coming to describe not only the desires of an individual, but those of society, masochism evolves into a socio-cultural concept.

For Carol Siegel, ultimately masochism is a fabrication. It is not a symptom of pathology, but of the nineteenth century's textual 'response to the impact of specific developments in gender and sexual politics on the conventions of narrative poetry and prose'.[57] Masochism has, thus, been seen as distinct from sexuality, describing a specifically cultural disposition: a 'receptivity to the unsettling effect art can have on one's sense of a stable identity within a coherent cultural narrative'.[58] Yet, Siegel acknowledges that distancing masochism from the sexual is problematic, for the connection is drawn repeatedly in contemporary writings and cinema.[59] John K. Noyes also views masochism as an invention of the late nineteenth century, as venting 'the fin de siècle's profound sense of crisis concerning sexuality and violence and what it means to be human in an age of rapid technological development'.[60] The textual creation of masochism, then, is a cultural experience and response to the difficulties posed by the age, but it is also inseparable from its sexual origins. Where Freud's feminine and moral

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[54] Rudolph M. Loewenstein, 'A Contribution to the Psychoanalytic Theory of Masochism', Hanly, 35.

[55] Freud distinguished three forms of masochism: feminine, moral and erotogenic. See 'Economic' 415.

[56] See Lynn S. Chancer, *Sadomasochism in Everyday life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) and Gini Graham Scott, *Erotic Power: An Exploration of Dominance and Submission* (New York: Citadel, 1983). Lynda Hart, however, sees such texts as making S/M sexuality '*nothing in itself* because it is everywhere and everything'. Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 34, original emphasis.

[57] Siegel, 2.

[58] Siegel, 3.

[59] Siegel, 3-4.

[60] Noyes, 7.

masochism operated as the desexualisation of masochism, their erotogenic associations were always available.[61] Theodor Reik, a major interpreter of Freud, promoted both the sexual and desexualised applications of the term, acknowledging that it had "outgrown" the purely sexual.[62] He differentiates between what he calls sexual and social masochism.

Noyes attempts to reconcile its historical role and continuing sexual relevance: '[t]he invention of masochism both as an erotic practice and as a psychopathological and sexological figure is a symptomatic move, an attempt to resolve some of the crises in liberal concepts of agency'. He continues that '[o]ur fascination with masochism today is a perpetuation, but also a recasting, of these performative stagings'.[63] Masochism is, then, both sexually and culturally invested; according to Mansfield it 'exists at the intersection and overlap of a whole set of personal sexual practices, on the one hand, and public cultural ones, on the other hand'.[64] Deemed an invention borne of cultural crises, it is innately "political". That it pathologises what can be seen as a radical, and recurrent, sexual practice, 'allow[ing] incorrect aggressivity to be identified and circumscribed within the body and dealt with according to a definite set of rules', it is ideologically loaded.[65] It resonates within both conservatism and transgression, from the nineteenth century's theorisation of it as perversion to today's celebration of it as pleasure to its enduring mainstream denial. Masochism embodies this (familiarly) dual potential and as such is inherently subversive, precisely in terms of its self-endangering principle, its 'model of a power that can strengthen itself by self-renunciation, that can advance itself by acts of self-denial, even self-mutilation'.[66]

What this summary of the various perspectives on masochism makes clear is its ongoing, politically infused, cultural existence. The morass of masochism's meanings testify to its ambiguous position in contemporary culture (and to the increasing doubt surrounding its conservative renderings). In its socio-cultural identity masochism can prove synonymous with self-endangerment but it is beleaguered by associations, and accumulating interpretations, which I wish to avoid. Most importantly, masochism's

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[61] See Freud, 'Economic' 420-26.
[62] Reik, 4.
[63] Noyes, 8.
[64] Mansfield, xii.
[65] Noyes, 9.
[66] Mansfield, xi.

legacy as pathologised within mainstream interpretation and celebrated at its fringes, unhelpfully polarises it. My aim, here, is to locate a desire for self-endangerment within both the centre and margins: as rendered explicit within oppositional texts, but implicit in the mainstream. Self-endangerment can reflect personal and social desires, where masochism remains tethered to sexuality and, from psychoanalytic *and* cultural interpretations of it, to anxiety (personal or social). In chapter two's discussion of Hollywood's fragile male heroes, I suggest that the fascination with self-endangerment which they evidence could be seen as symptomatic of a contemporary crisis of subjectivity, but my overriding interest is in proving the pervasive investment in and *desire for* the self-endangering state. In leaving my examination of sexual self-endangerment until the second part of this study, I mean to look at the representation of masochism through the preferred context of self-endangerment. That is not to say that psychoanalysis will not be employed within Part I, or that this *desire for* self-endangerment is never sexualised--indeed, self-risk is entwined with *Mr Jones*'s romance narrative in chapter two--but that the psychic processes at play within my discussion will be connected to the social rather than to the sexual in the first instance.

I will now continue to investigate theories of masochism to further commend them to self-endangerment and to contemporary cultural representations. Freudian psychoanalysis offers the major theoretical framework to these (and subsequent) discussions, but is always found wanting, and, thereby, seasoned by the critiques of later theorists, be they Freudian, Lacanian or Deleuzian. Lacan's development of Freud's theory of the death drive is pivotal to the renewed interest in masochism, and I will incorporate ideas stemming from his work on death and desire. Another key player in the formulation of masochism opposed to traditional psychoanalysis and in the ensuing discussion is Gilles Deleuze.

The (Safe) Self-endangerment of Masochism

In both his theorisation of masochism as a form of mastery and his later assertion of the primacy of the death drive to all instinctual life, masochism is directed by Freud into the most "natural" and conservative of projects. In his 1920 essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud asserted the centrality of the Death Instinct to living organisms and

reassembled his thoughts on masochism accordingly.[67] The Death Instinct was '*beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it'.[68] In 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' in 1915 he had claimed that primary masochism did not exist, but he revoked this in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' in 1924.[69] In looking in more detail at Freud's evolving theory, the attempts to account for the toleration of unpleasure raise several discussions important to this study.

While Freud originally found the pleasure principle--the reduction or, at least, stability of excitation or tension, by nature unpleasurable--to dominate in mental life, he sought to account for the toleration of unpleasure, for a masochistic inclination. Claiming that the reality principle's 'postponement of satisfaction...[and] temporary toleration of unpleasure'[70] and repression's similarly disruptive action explained only a small proportion, Freud tracked the greater sum of the enduring unpleasure to compulsive repetition. Freud locates this repetition of unpleasure first with reference to war or traumatic neuroses, in which the ex-soldier revisits his disturbing experience during dreaming, and then to the fort/da game.[71] Unpleasure is also harboured within the negative therapeutic reaction: the curtailing of cure by the patient in revisiting past trauma and replenishing it through, for example, transference. The compulsion to repeat, as a more primary force, overrides the pleasure principle. A closer look at the fort/da game affords useful insight into the nature of masochistic pleasure. In this game the infant re-creates the departure and reappearance of "his" mother--her absence as "gone" (fort) and presence as "there" (da)--through the throwing away and regaining of inanimate objects of which 'there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act'.[72] Freud both locates and quantifies the pleasure within the unpleasurable scenario:

> The child cannot possibly have felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent. How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle? It may

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[67] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) *On Metapsychology* 275-338.
[68] Freud, 'Beyond' 287, original emphasis.
[69] Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915) *On Metapsychology* 113-38.
[70] Freud, 'Beyond' 278.
[71] See Freud, 'Beyond' 281-87.
[72] Freud, 'Beyond' 284.

> perhaps be said in reply that her departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game.[73]

Thus Freud suggests that the pleasure of recovery is not only experienced through the pain of loss, but is actually *increased* by it. The unpleasure is temporary and necessary for the greater pleasure to be experienced; it is an essential part of the achievement of joy. This is a crucial point, confirming a conservative paradigm for behaviour which becomes increasingly meaningful in my discussion: the indulgence in loss for the strengthening of the later gain, as revealed also within my reader-response interpretation of the (safe) self-endangerment of reading and viewing.

Deleuze has invoked a similar sense of this cycle of inevitable emotions in his discussion of masochism as 'waiting in its pure form':[74]

> The masochist waits for pleasure as something that is bound to be late, and expects pain as the condition that will finally ensure (both physically and morally) the advent of pleasure. He therefore postpones pleasure in expectation of the pain which will make gratification possible.[75]

This sense of waiting, of expectation, resonates within the dramatic strategies of entertainment, especially suspense. Similarly, the fantasy of pain, distinguished by both Reik and Deleuze, is a pivotal element of masochistic pleasure and can be seen as another dramatic strategy. In my ensuing textual analyses, the themes of fantasy, dramatisation or theatricality, all associated with masochism, prove integral to their constructions of self-endangerment. This is a radical step on from Freud. It recasts masochism as pleasure--which underlies its subcultural celebration as sexual preference, the stance most useful for my study--and based upon a "fantasy" (of pain, loss, injury or even death). While this gamut will be used to differentiate masochism (as sexual preference) from self-endangerment--the former framed by the possibility of pain, the latter by the possibility of death--it is precisely the representations' provision of the fantasy of pain or death for the reader/viewer that attributes the reader/viewer a masochistic position. The representation of masochistic fantasy constitutes Part II, but

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[73] Freud, 'Beyond' 285.
[74] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) 71.
[75] Deleuze, 71.

all the representations I address in this study can be seen as masochistic fantasies, offering the reader/viewer masochistic pleasure attached to the threat of pain but without the actuality of it.

Supplementary readings of the fort/da game also prove provocative for a developing understanding of masochism. The child can be seen to be taking or at least enacting control of an otherwise helpless situation, 'to anticipate actively what might be feared to occur to one passively'.[76] In this way the game is, as Freud goes on to suggest, an episode in mastery.[77] The child pre-empts displeasure, staging the sadness and the joy before they are imposed upon "him". The masochist, then, '[b]y imagining or producing scenes of torture or punishment...excludes the possibility of being tortured or punished in an unexpected and uncontrollable way'. Loewenstein continues: '[g]ruesome fairy tales, thrillers, mystery plays and horror films seem to be an institutionalized means of gratifying the same need'.[78] Becker wrote of masochism as the denial of death in similar terms, as a distillation of the anxieties surrounding death.[79] But the question arising from this for my work, reformulating that posed through reader-response theory, is whether the representations I consider can be seen as exercises in mastery: are they risks experienced and overcome? Do they represent unconscious anxieties or concealed desires? Where Loewenstein stresses the need to account for 'those masochists who derive pleasure through suffering rather than after suffering',[80] the *representation* of self-endangerment provides the exact environment to address this.

Although a potential for mastery was deemed integral to masochism, Freud concluded that accompanying the pleasure principle there must exist another basic force that works against the reduction and constancy of excitation, 'that tends not toward equilibrium and harmony but toward conflict and disintegration'.[81] Rather than being

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[76] Loewenstein, 37.

[77] Freud has also read the "gone" as a vengeful reaction to the mother's leaving him, and the child's compensation for "his" lack of complaint at her departure. See Freud, 'Beyond' 285.

[78] Loewenstein, 37.

[79] Becker invokes Rank who 'called masochism the "small sacrifice," the "lighter punishment," the "placation" that allows one to avoid the archevil of death'. Becker, 246, qtg. Rank, 129-31.

[80] Loewenstein, 38.

[81] Boothby, 3.

directed towards life, it is directed towards death. This 'primordial force' is the Death Instinct and, as Laplanche clarifies, '[e]very living being aspires to death by virtue of its most fundamental *internal* tendency'.[82] Thus Eros, the pleasure principle or life instinct, is joined by Thanatos, the Death Instinct. Freud would come to show how the two instincts work together, but their ultimate aim is the return to '*an earlier state of things*', the inorganic, the dead.[83] The primacy of the life instincts--of self-preservation, self-assertion and mastery--recedes. They serve the Death Instinct, merely defending against the 'unnatural' disruption (or, rather, fulfilment) of the Death Instinct. By erotically appropriating--or libidinally binding--the Death Instinct, the life instincts ward off premature death, postponing the Death Instinct's realisation by making it, for the time, 'innocuous':[84]

> They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself....Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly--by a kind of short-circuit.[85]

These "events" or "dangers" become overdetermined and overinvested with the heightened struggle against them. As in the fort/da game, they could be seen as the necessary precursors to a greater joy. These dangers need to be indulged that they can be surpassed for greater reward. The dangerous events, the self-imposed or externally enforced obstacles to life--the very stuff of self-endangerment--oppose the death drive, yet their challenge to it is necessary it seems for the efficacious functioning of the system which is not content merely to seek death but to perpetuate life until the natural and almost pre-programmed attainment of the inevitable. In this way the self-endangering act

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[82] Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. and intro. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 107, original emphasis.
[83] Freud, 'Beyond' 308, original emphasis. Only the sexual instincts, in contrast, pursue a 'state of things which has never yet been attained' and they were thus firmly positioned opposite the death instincts (314).
[84] Freud, 'Economic' 418.
[85] Freud, 'Beyond' 311-12.

is, thus, a *necessary* obstacle to the Death Instinct: in constantly testing itself the death drive would seem to be hardened in its resolve.[86]

Both of these stages of Freud's theorisation of masochism--as a form of mastery or as serving the Death Instinct--point to its conservative use, its role as a phase preceding and strengthening self-affirmation, and resonate within my exposition of self-endangerment. I now want to pursue masochism's relationship to sadism in order to instate masochism, and with it self-endangerment, as the governing economy of instinctual life. An essential premise to this study, this claim also licenses my reading of the violence of contemporary culture through the gauze of self-endangerment, to extract from the spectacles of death in Part II (or of danger in Part I) a masochistic and self-implicating gaze rather than a sadistic and self-distancing one.

'It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself'.[87]

Where masochism in 'Instincts' originated from sadism introjected, in Freud's later work, and in the formulation of the death drive, the opposite is true. As Nacht summarises:

> From the inmost depths of living matter emerges a primary 'organic' tendency toward self-destruction. One part of this self-destructive tendency will be projected onto the external world, in the form of aggression; the other will continue to be a part of the human being, as the death instinct, and will constitute the root of primary masochism.
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> The phenomenon of the turning back of aggression onto the subject will continue to manifest itself but will constitute a secondary masochism which will be added to the primary masochism.[88]

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[86] The sense of a natural or personalised death, each organism's desire for death in its own fashion incurring an upper limit or quota of self-preservation, is problematic. It raises unanswerable and suspect questions addressing not just the definition of natural but the use and abuse of such a definition. If an individual is predisposed to hereditary cancer, is death from cancer natural, but from something else unnatural? With developing technology a sense of the naturalness of death becomes ever more debatable. For Freud's speculation upon the possibility and validity of natural death, via biology or science, see Freud, 'Beyond' 311-12.

[87] Deleuze, 22.

[88] Nacht, 30.

Masochism and sadism are derived from the same core, primary masochism. In fact, sadism is just a permutation of masochism. As Richard Boothby confirms 'all aggression and destructiveness in human beings is, according to its original nature, self-destructiveness'.[89] As with Becker's reading of murder as the distancing of one's own death, so sadism here is asserted as the expression of the more fundamental masochism.

Sadism and masochism have a dualistic relationship. They are, according to Freud, inexactly identical. They are a combined form operating between individuals and within the individual: 'not only in the intersubjective conflict (domination-submission) but also in the structure of the individual (self-punishment)'.[90] In 'Three Essays on Sexuality' Freud asserts sadism and masochism as the active and passive forms of a single perversion, forms which 'are found to occur in the same individual....A sadist is always at the same time a masochist'.[91] David Cronenberg's film *Crash* (1996) offers a perfect example of such a marriage between sadism and masochism. In it the protagonists' primal link to the death drive (rendered transparent as the car itself becomes the vehicle for their self-destructiveness) is expressed as both a desire for the victim and a desire to be the victim. The combination is also perpetuated within erotic thrillers such as *Sensation* and *Whispers in the Dark* discussed in chapter three, where the audience is never quite clear if the desire expressed by the heroine is for the victim or for the aggressor, or whether the aggressor is the potential victim.

Just as sadism is masochism, so a sadist is always also a masochist at heart. While they seem inseparable in the individual because they stem from the same instinct, they are *not* compatible in intersubjective terms, as Deleuze and others have increasingly stressed. Deleuze's central thesis in *Coldness and Cruelty* is the difference between masochism and sadism, 'the very concept of an entity known as sadomasochism'.[92] He rejects their coupling and the Freudian inclination to equate them. It is here that the discussion becomes most critical to my project in questioning the relationship between masochism and its environment, and the reader/viewer and the text.

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[89] Boothby, 5.
[90] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988) 401, original emphasis.
[91] Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905) *On Sexuality*, PFL vol. 7. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 73.
[92] Deleuze, 13.

In the turning inwards of sadism to produce masochism, the subject's own self replaces the object of aggression. This 'auto-sadism', as Reik call is,[93] develops into (secondary) masochism only when '[a]n extraneous person is once more sought',[94] only through 'the execution of sadistic intentions by another person'.[95] Auto-sadism becomes masochism only with the presence of another party, only with a projection. This formulation is crucial to my study of representations, for it promotes the idea that masochism requires another party, that self-injurious behaviour can only become masochistic by someone else's presence. In the representation of self-endangerment, the reader/viewer is this other party--self-risk only becomes masochism through representation. This formulation might suggest that auto-erotic asphyxiation--the solitary act--which is discussed in Part II, is not masochistic. However, as will be shown, in its exhibitionism or theatricality, and masochism's in general, there is always an imagined spectator, even if it is only the self. The primacy of masochism is, thus, connected to the experience of representation. This quite clearly coincides with my agenda of instating the masochistic pleasures of contemporary cinema in chapter three and of Cooper's cinematic fiction in chapter four (as well as the prominence of self-endangerment within the cinematic experience in chapter two). This primacy also validates my privileging of masochism (and self-endangerment) as the governing tendency. Several theorists have deemed viewing a masochistic enterprise grounded in the pleasures of its very submissiveness rather than in the (safe) self-endangerment of psychoanalytic identification. Stephen Shaviro finds that 'distancing and alienation-effects serve not to dispel but only to intensify the captivating power of cinematic spectacle'.[96] In this way, the masochistic economy located behind spectatorship, is not purely dependent upon the viewer's identification with the victim's suffering, but upon cinema as a site of submission to spectacles that can be both unfamiliar and alienating: 'I do not actively interpret or seek to control; I just sit back and blissfully consume'.[97] Opposing identification, Shaviro claims that masochism offers an alternative scheme for

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[93] Reik, 171.
[94] Freud, 'Instincts' 125.
[95] Reik, 171.
[96] Stephen Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 43.
[97] Shaviro, 255.

the understanding of cinema and one that challenges the system of dualities, or 'opposing pairs' underlying Freudian thought.[98] Working from a Deleuzian model of masochism, Shaviro finds that '[t]he ambivalent pleasures of the masochistic body provide a rich field for contesting, evading, or eroding phallic power and the global binarization of gender'.[99] In this way, masochism is again charged with transgressive potential. This ambivalent inscription of masochism will arise in my discussion of the bipolar narrative of the film *Mr Jones* in chapter two.

Finally, I want to examine further the intersubjective dynamic of masochism and sadism, to foreground the importance of consent--underlying chapter four and my use of masochism as sexual preference--and further recommend masochism's relationship to the representation of self-endangerment. Masochism has been reclaimed as an active, even a positive, desire by psychoanalysts post-Freud and by cultural theorists.[100] This sense of masochism exudes from two points: the complicity between the masochist and the "torturer" and the incompatibility of the masochist and sadist. The inherent activity of masochism can thus develop as a transgressive potential and even a defiance.

Reik introduces masochism as the desire for the idea of pain rather than its actuality. 'Masochism is not, as has been surmised up till now, characterized by the pleasure in discomfort, but by pleasure in the *expectation* of discomfort'.[101] Distanced from Freud, Reik began to explore this more transgressive permutation of masochism. Masochism is not about the reality of pain but about the fantasy, the idea, the potential or the performance of suffering. Most importantly it is not just that masochism is active but that it is a disavowal of activity. While Freud insinuated a certain activity of masochism, a sense of masochistic mastery, masochism remains a more complicated submission than he affords with the masochist's control inscribed on every level of "his" submission. As with exhibitionism, which Reik connects it to, control is inherent within its passivity: '[t]he showing or wanting-to-be-seen is actually a means to invite the sexually gratifying

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[98] See Freud, 'Three Essays' 73.
[99] Shaviro, 59.
[100] Mansfield's *Masochism: The Art of Power* invokes it as an implicitly subversive and liberating sexual practice.
[101] Reik, 67, original emphasis.

punishment'.[102] Masochism is inevitably transgressive in its silent yet audacious control, in its laughter in the face of convention:

> Masochism is a defiance. It is expressed through the masochist's apparently passive behaviour, by his compliance with the inflicted pain and humiliation, by his claims of being enslaved and used. In fact, the masochist knows that his position is simply the result of his own power: the power of endowing the executioner with the obligation of playing the role of master, when indeed he is only a slave, a creation of the masochist's desire. [103]

Reik distinguishes three principles of masochism that hinge upon its activity, or rather the activity inherent in submission. These are the pivotal factors of fantasy, suspense and the demonstrative or, as Deleuze more usefully puts it, the persuasive. Deleuze adds to the list the provocative, that 'the masochist aggressively demands punishment'.[104] He also notes the absence of a fifth factor which is the contract, a factor central to his thesis and, indeed, to mine in its suggestion of the reader/viewer's accountability: '[t]he masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade...to train his torturer'.[105]

Masochists are not the passive halves of the sadist-masochist meeting, but have fundamentally different agendas. The masochist does not legitimise sadism, as is dangerously implied by Freud among others, but wants a sadist as little as a sadist requires or desires a masochist. Thus the extraneous object for the masochist's scheme is the antithesis of a sadist: a persuaded and encouraged actor of purely 'fictitious power'.[106] Indeed, the sadists depicted in films or fiction could be seen to similarly possess a purely fictitious power, easily appropriated by the masochistic reader/viewer. The masochist requires another party for the fulfilment of his or her scheme: 'witnesses to his pain and degradation'.[107] This other party is not a sadist but the "torturer" in the masochistic dynamic or the spectator, invested with a power, albeit a fictitious power.

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[102] Reik, 73.
[103] Victor N. Smirnoff, 'The Masochistic Contract', Hanly, 69.
[104] Deleuze, 75.
[105] Deleuze, 75.
[106] Smirnoff, 69.
[107] Reik, 136.

While the spectator might, through his or her watchful fascination, render the representation of the self-injurious behaviour masochistic, their primary investment in it is also masochistic. Masochism in its strange position between activity and passivity, between pain and pleasure, between submission and control, inscribes a world in which the spectator as witness is similarly strangely positioned but always complicit.

Within her application of Deleuze's work on masochism to cinema, one of Gaylyn Studlar's projects has been to confirm the masochistic rather than sadistic motivation of spectatorial pleasures.[108] She asserts the consensuality of the masochistic relationship, the 'mutual agreement between partners',[109] and thus equates the contractual alliance of the masochist and his/her partner with the contractual alliance between the spectator and the screen:

> A willing volunteer in cinema's perverse intimacy, the spectator, like the masochist's partner, is not coerced into the alliance....Cinema is not a sadistic institution but preeminently a contractual one based upon the promise of certain pleasures. The masochist requires an audience to make humiliation and pain meaningful. Similarly, the cinematic apparatus is meaningless without a spectator to its exhibitionistic acting out.[110]

Within the contractual alliance between spectator and film (equally tenable between reader and fiction) the spectator cannot be positioned as sadist to the acknowledged masochist. The dynamic is about masochism and not sadism. If sadism is characterised by the involuntariness of the victim, then neither the masochist nor the spectator, who are by definition consenting, can be imposed upon by the sadism of cinema but rather their masochism directs the narratives.[111]

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[108] Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Linda Williams has made a similar point: 'Like the person engaging in sadomasochism, the viewer has made a kind of contract with the film to undergo a certain uneasy identification with a character experiencing terror or pain, at the end of which is the great pleasure of its relief'. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 207.

[109] Studlar, *Realm* 23.

[110] Studlar, *Realm* 182.

[111] This point is reiterated by Deleuze: 'The woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a

Notions of masochism require questions of consent, notions of sadism absent them. While the masochist agrees to--both desires and requires--the other party's infliction of pain within a consensual dynamic, the sadist opposes such a relationship (or, as in Cooper's work, is uninterested in it). The sadist's source of pleasure, according to Deleuze's reading of Sade, is the very absence of agreement or voluntariness, the exclusion of masochism.[112] Thus, cinema (and art in general) is a masochistic experience, and the violent acts on-screen are actually required and agreed upon elements of a masochistic world.

Through this discussion of masochism, the socio-psychic mechanisms and psychoanalytic context underlying my notion and application of self-endangerment have been introduced. As I stated earlier, self-endangerment manages to evade some of the problems attending masochism, to afford an assuredly cultural existence. It is certainly possible to translate the cultural fascination with self-endangerment as an expression and fortification of the Death Instinct, but, as shall become clear through this study's many analyses, the 1990s representations of self-endangerment actively, if not explicitly, negotiate and counteract such devices of self-assurance, and the prospect of death as a silent, disavowed presence.

My focus in chapter one is upon the 1990s surge of personal narratives of mental illness. While this surge might emphasise the reparative role of writing and reading, the memoirs I will look at undermine the safeties inherent in redemptive readings. They do not offer reassurances, in fact they exploit the implication of the reader as a means of combating the denial of self-endangerment. Texts such as Kate Millett's *The Loony Bin Trip*, Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*, William Styron's *Darkness Visible* and Susanna Kaysen's *Girl Interrupted* employ various textual strategies of implication which challenge both the stigmatisation of the mentally ill and the safe self-endangerment of reading. The oppositional quality of the memoirs is verified through their relationship to autobiography; to the historical reverence of the coherent--the singular, male and exemplary--self within this traditional genre. Self-endangerment is found to be pivotal to these memoirs and their cultural import.

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realization of the masochistic fantasy...admittedly she is not a masochistic character, but she is a pure element of masochism' (41-42).

[112] See Deleuze, 40-41.

Chapter two recasts the discussion onto the different medium of film and its most conventional of forms, Hollywood cinema. Suffused with the ideology of self-affirmation, such safe texts offer the reassurances of closure, but also of their "recovery momentum". The "mad" figure is easily stigmatised in popular cinema, as the necessary, but temporary, murderous disruption to recovery. My focus falls upon films that do not deny the self-endangerment of mental illness, but rather take it as the central theme of their narratives. *Fearless* (Peter Weir, 1993) and *Mr Jones* (Mike Figgis, 1994), are shown to be entrenched in self-endangerment in terms of both content and style. They are also, superficially at least, highly conventional mainstream texts. The discussion, therefore, negotiates this dual expression of risk and reassurance and how it impacts upon the implicated viewer. The weighing up of the films' transgressiveness--their embrace, solicitation and meeting of oppositional desires--is enacted in the final portion of this chapter through a discussion of their self-reflexivity.

In Part II the investment of the reader is heightened by the higher stakes, the sex and death amalgam, of the representation of sexualised self-endangerment. The reader's role is spotlighted and his or her consent explored as the texts become more fraught with obvious risks. Where in Part I, the reader/viewer's *implication* in self-endangerment was foregrounded through the texts, as Part II develops his or her *complicity* in it becomes increasingly explicit.

Chapter three addresses the erotic thrillers' popularisation of sexual self-endangerment. Through close analyses of *A Kiss Before Dying* (James Dearden, 1991), *Sensation* (Brian Grant, 1994) and *Whispers in the Dark* (Christopher Crowe, 1992)--three films exemplifying the scenario of the heroine's desire for a male murderer--the viewer is shown to be not only aligned with the masochistic heroine, but to operate a masochistic voyeurism enduring beyond the films' conventional sealing off of their heroine's dangerous desires. The instatement of masochism within spectatorial pleasures and processes is obviously (and deliberately) accentuated by my particular focus upon films which have masochistic story lines, if not visual representations of (sado)masochistic practise or fantasy. As well as providing case studies for the representation of masochism, my use of these films, through their undeniable connection to masochistic fantasy, blatantly challenges the popular denial of masochism and allows the exposition of the masochist's gaze.

In chapter four, the reader's desirous investment in the representation of self-endangerment is fully realised through my examination of the work of Dennis Cooper. Within his avowal of self-endangerment--his affirmation of it as a desire--Cooper clearly exposes the reader's consent and complicity in this desire. In reformulating his characterisation as a writer of "blank" fiction, I find that the universal quality of his cinematic writing is shown to demand and, potentially, critique the participation of the reader.

What is suggested through the numerous episodes of danger contained in these representations, is the nature of the contemporary or, rather, the 1990s self. The self that is endangered is the individual who is behaving in this perilous way, whether he or she is the risk-taking protagonist in the novel or its absorbed reader. Self-endangerment is not limited to the single self, but connected to the larger community, to a more general or universal self, and as such the personal is, inevitably, political. In investigating the implicated self-endangerment of the 1990s self, then, I draw upon various models of subjectivity, such as from reader-response criticism, psychoanalysis, feminism and even postmodernism, in order to examine how the relationship between self (reader/viewer) and other (text) shifts within the different representations. In isolation these models prove inadequate to describe or explain the 1990s fascination with self-endangerment, but together they lend my analysis a discursive shape, and license my assertion of the complicitous reader/viewer of the un/safe text.

What I hope to have established in this introduction is the primacy of self-endangerment, a primacy that is all the more apparent in the 1990s. Although psychoanalytically rooted, self-endangerment is staged on all layers of culture, and it is the cultural analysis of this phenomenon that is of importance here. More than just evidencing the pervasiveness of masochism within contemporary cultural products, the aim of this thesis is to expose the individual's investment in and determination of them: his or her implication in the staging of self-endangerment. As the representations of self-endangerment proliferate, becoming that much more present in the mainstream and that much more brutal on the margins, the tension increases between the acknowledged interest in this theme, and its castigation as unseemly. The enduring sense of the reader's involvement and investment in these representations reinforces my claim that there is no position of neutrality for the reader or for the individual within 1990s culture. It is this

politically inflected claim that is a fundamental motivation behind the project and a major thread running through it.

PART I

SELF-ENDANGERMENT AS MENTAL ILLNESS

In the first part of this study I consider the cultural meaning and significance of self-endangerment through an examination of the representation of mental illness in contemporary film and literature. The portrayal of mental illness proves a rich source of cultural commentary, staging several of the critical issues of the whole thesis, such as the location of public fears and desires and the relationship between the reader and the text. The surge of interest and cultural investment in these representations reflects the public's flirtation with self-endangerment, for all the texts, I will argue, are preoccupied with implicating the reader/viewer. The enduring question is why is 1990s Western culture invested in self-endangerment and its numerous incarnations?

> How can madness thus become a *commonplace*? As enticing and mystifying as this inflation of discourse may be, does it not in fact suggest that in the verysolitude of madmen there is something at stake for all of us?[1]

Mental illness abounds with meaning. This is hardly a new or fleeting phenomenon for its metaphorical applications hold a secure place in academic inquiry and social history. With the development of psychoanalysis the vocabulary of mental illness was instated within the common language. With new historicism and deconstruction, the "mad" have been reclaimed as harbingers of cultural change, yet it was the anti-psychiatry movement, at its height in the mid-1960s, that revealed the group's ideological determination.[2] The mentally ill figure has a long and generally inglorious history as social other. Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation* traces this history through the public's relation to the mad as the latter's distance and distinction from society. This could certainly be seen as a history of "them and us",

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[1] Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness: (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)*, trans. Martha Noel Evans and the author with the assistance of Brian Massumi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 13, original emphasis.

[2] While I use "mad" and "madness", rather than mental illness, in line with the terminology of those opposed to traditional psychiatry, my intention, instead, is to emphasise the social construction and mystification of a group within society rather than the illness itself.

enacted through society's changing perceptions and treatment of the mentally ill from being deemed irrational in their animality, criminal during their confinement, or exiled or observed.[3] Clearly, this history warrants political critique, for it reflects the prevailing systems of state control and oppression. The influence of such systems remains central to contemporary debates on mental illness, as is apparent within research into connections between mental illness and the factors of gender, sexuality and, more recently, race.[4] Mental illness remains socially and politically invested.

The influential, yet often heated, anti-psychiatry debate, focused on the re-evaluation of the meaning of mental illness and an attack upon the psychiatric establishment's power.[5] With its rebellious spirit and heroic leaders, anti-psychiatry brought the politics of mental illness into the public sphere, popularising the issue.[6] Mental illness was to be seen as a politicised symptom of society's ills; as Thomas Szasz put it: 'mental illness is a myth, whose function is to disguise and thus render more palatable the bitter pill of moral conflicts in human relations'.[7] The mad figure was the

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[3] See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (1961; London: Routledge, 1992).

[4] Numerous books address the historical and cultural relationship between madness and women or ethnicity. See for example Phyllis Chesler, W*omen and Madness* (New York: Avon Books, 1972); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987); Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Suman Fernando, *Mental Health, Race and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1991) and Albert C. Gaw, *Culture, Ethnicity and Mental Illness* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1993).

[5] The term anti-psychiatry, itself, was the site of much dispute. There were various conflicting definitions, see Zbigniew Kotowicz, *R. D. Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry* (London: Routledge, 1997) 5, and David Ingleby, ed., *Critical Psychiatry* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1981). In addition, anti-psychiatry linked fervently opposed individuals. Szasz resisted the label of anti-psychiatrist but, along with Laing in Britain, was one of its main proponents. While he certainly argued for a radical rethinking of understandings of mental illness, Szasz saw Laing's and David Cooper's practice as highly flawed. See Thomas Szasz, *Paresis and Plunder: The Models of Madness in Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry*, Noel Buxton Lecture (Colchester: University of Essex, 1975).

[6] In shifting attention away from the sufferers, anti-psychiatry has been blamed for denying them care. For a discussion of the consequences of anti-psychiatry see Agnes Miles, *The Mentally Ill in Contemporary Society*, 2nd ed. (1981; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 21-24.

[7] Thomas Szasz, 'The Myth of Mental Illness', *Mental Illness and Social Processes*, ed. Thomas Scheff (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 254.

victim of a sick society, of 'a government plot to insinuate a totalitarian system of coercion',[8] and psychiatrists the weapons of its oppressiveness.

Although engaging in the allocation of meaning to mental illness it is important to state that in my work it is the figure--the representation of the mentally ill individual--and not the illness itself that is the primary source of cultural import, even though social factors play a variety of roles in the illness. I see mental illness as an illness and not as a social construction. It is an illness, however, that resonates with social investment and cultural implication. And I do not mean to equate self-endangerment and mental illness--far from it--nor to imply a direct and simple link between mental illness and self-endangerment, but rather to expose the complex nature of their association. In the following investigation of culturally constructed and manipulated figures, within the media, film and fiction, the mentally ill come to embody and reflect contemporary concerns and these mediated representations form the key sites for focusing my overarching question of self-endangerment.

Self-endangerment as an aspect of mental illness becomes especially nuanced. Rather than suggesting an act of self-determination and autonomous will, self-endangerment becomes a symptom of an illness and one that throws such acts into question. In fact, the life-threatening behaviours of the mentally ill are seen to counter rationality and with it (other) basic tenets of selfhood: such as self-preservation or even autonomy. The compromised selfhood attributed to the mentally ill is integral to the cultural expression of their condition, but also frames their diagnosis, both legally and medically.[9] It determines questions of personal responsibility within the legal and medical assessment of competence or sanity,[10] and is epitomised in the conflict between the rights of the individual (as "civil liberties") and state intervention (as "sectioning").

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[8] Rael Jean Isaac and Virginia C. Armat, *Madness in the Streets: How Psychiatry and the Law Abandoned the Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) 44.

[9] The legal definition of mental illness as the state of being a danger to one's self or others, is the means by which an individual can be sectioned, that is, involuntarily hospitalised and treated.

[10] This underpins the legal designation of mental illness whilst confirming the precariousness of its definition, so readily staged in the "insanity defence" debate which addresses the use and misuse of the legal plea of insanity as diminished responsibility and its affect upon sentencing. For a thorough discussion see Lawrie Rezneck, *'Evil or Ill?' Justifying the Insanity Defence* (London: Routledge, 1997). There is a legal comparison for the issue of self-harm. The "rough-sex defence", whether the assaulted individual

These contemporary issues and conflicts are waged in many of the films, memoirs and media representations considered below. Several of the texts interrogate the meaning and assignment of insanity: state intervention is a central theme in Kate Millett's memoir *The Loony Bin Trip* and Mike Figgis's film *Mr Jones*. Similarly, the representations must be contextualised in terms of the UK and USA governmental moves away from long-term state mental hospitals towards care in the community, and the ensuing heated discussions about the individual's rights versus the majority's rights. It is the mainstream press which has provided the main social forum for these discussions which centre upon the opposition between the public good and the individual good.[11]

The point here is that mental illness signifies a challenge to subjectivity and one that is universal, by which I mean a universality which does not only incorporate the mentally ill figure but also each member of the viewing/reading public. The representation of mental illness comes to articulate every person's fragile sense of self: the "reader" is implicated in the mentally ill figure's undermined subjectivity. This implication is not simply the direct symptom of identifying with the mentally ill figure, but also operates in the resistance to such identification. This resistance is conjured most convincingly by the mainstream press. Similarly, the frailty or theatricality of the opposition between the mad and the majority resonates loudly within this study's interrogation of the public's supposed neutrality. The breaching of such polarised investments, of "them and us", forms a key theme in my analyses of the memoirs and films in chapters one and two, and of their strategies of implication, but also structures my readings of media representations here. Sharing in the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment and orbiting the same anxieties manifested in the other cultural forms, the popular press crystallises and perpetuates certain myths about mental illness (in line

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consented to or desired the "attack", similarly challenges the notion of criminal responsibility. Thus self-endangerment is a locus for legal discussions of the nature of complicity. This will be explored further in the introduction to Part II. A further twist in the question of responsibility for the criminal acts of the mentally ill was evidenced by the case of a paranoid schizophrenic man's successful suing of his ex-therapist for failure to prevent his actions. See William Glaberson, 'Killer Blames his Therapist, and Jury Agrees', *New York Times* 10 Oct. 1998: A1, A12.

[11] See for example Marjorie Wallace, 'How Many More Will Be Made To Suffer By This Crazy Care System', *Daily Mail* 2 July 1993: 30; Rosie Waterhouse's articles in *The Independent* throughout July and August 1993; Ian Murray, 'Victims' Relatives Brand Community Care A Failure', *The Times* 26 Sept. 1995: 6; Nick Davies, 'System Failure', *Guardian* 14 July 1998: G2, 3, 7.

with media or journalistic imperatives) that prove crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the representation of mental illness and the cultural significance of self-endangerment.

Endangered Members of the Public

In contemporary western society the popular press has functioned as perhaps the most likely forum for the reflection, discussion and, in many ways, the creation, of public attitudes towards mental illness and the mentally ill. However, as with other social issues or problems, the media has been seen to generate a public awareness that is 'based upon an information-rich and knowledge-poor foundation'.[12] In the following cursory glance at the 1990s coverage of mental illness by the Anglo-American popular press, as well as a more detailed reading of the particular "media event" of Ben Silcock's actions in London in 1992, I will distinguish the misconceptions or myths at play in the cultural figuring of the mentally ill.[13]

The popular press tends to emphasise the violent acts of the mentally ill rather than their plight within society and their greater danger of suicide. Their violence, especially the more dramatic and random killings by the mentally ill, provide major stories for the popular press of Britain and the USA. For example in Britain, Michael Buchanan beat to death Frederick Graver, a former policeman, in 1992. Christopher Clunis fatally stabbed Jonathan Zito in the same year. In July 1994, Stephen Laudat fatally stabbed Bryan Bennet. In December of the same year Jason Mitchell murdered an elderly couple and his own father. In New York City, in July 1986, Juan Gonzalez stabbed nine people on the Staten Island Ferry, killing two and, in September 1988, Jorge Delgado clubbed to death an usher in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Kevin McKiever was accused of stabbing a former dancer to death near Central Park in 1991. In January 1993, a homeless man, Christopher Battiste, bludgeoned Doll Johnson to death. In January 1995, Soon Sin was pushed under a subway by Reuben Harris.

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[12] Sanford Sherizen, 'Social Creation of Crime News: All the News Fitted to Print', *Deviance and Mass Media*, ed. Charles Winick (London: Sage Publications, 1978) 204.

[13] By media event, I am indicating the media investment and public attention assigned to certain occurrences, as well as referring to their cultural and political accessories, in line with Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds., *Media Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Within the coverage of each of these the list is revisited so that the new case becomes contextualised within the behaviour of the group as a whole. Reporting on the Battiste case in the *New York Times*, Joseph B. Treaster writes: '[t]hough most of these people are not considered dangerous, New York has seen a number of notorious cases in recent years--from the case of Juan Gonzalez...to that of Kevin McKiever...'.[14] Although consistent with journalistic technique of crime reporting,[15] the overall effect is a distortion of the reality of mental illness.[16] Such reportage perpetuates and reflects the stigmatisation of the mentally ill as dangerous and unpredictable, the characteristics typically attributed to them by the public.[17]

Within the legal definition of mental illness, an individual needs to be a danger to him or herself or others in order to be sectioned. Combining this with the lack of medical certainty about mental illnesses[18] and the cultural mystification of its meaning, the public's association of the mentally ill with violence seems almost understandable especially as some encourage the association to raise public awareness.[19] Either way, whether for salacious interest or public incitement, the mentally ill figure remains tethered to a mythic dangerousness. This is heightened, especially in the United States, by the increased influence of homelessness and drug use which accentuate the issues at stake: homelessness exacerbates the perceived threatening presence of the mentally ill,

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[14] Joseph B. Treaster with May B. W. Tabor, 'Little Help for Mentally Ill Addicts', *New York Times* 8 Feb. 1993: B4.

[15] See S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, 'Myth, Chronicle, and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News', *Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press*, ed. James W. Carey (London: Sage, 1988) 71.

[16] For discussions of the media's distortion of the facts about mental illness and its stigmatisation of the mentally ill, see The Glasgow Media Group, *Media and Mental Distress*, ed. Greg Philo (London: Longman, 1996) 37-44.

[17] See Miles, 61.

[18] For example John J. Ratey and Catherine Johnson's *Shadow Systems* (Bantam Press: London, 1997) claims that one in three people exhibit traits of mental disorder.

[19] This is a great dilemma for those engaged in the fight for improved care for the mentally ill: the *need* to sensationalise, to increase the emotivity and thus the effect on the public, is at loggerheads with the need to challenge the stereotyping and social stigma of mental illness. NAMI, America's National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, tries to combat stigmatisation, 'to deny that there is a genuine basis for that fear' (Isaac, 270). Others argue that change can only be achieved through focusing on the threat to the public; see Wallace, 'How Many More' 30, and Isaac, 272.

while drug addiction exacerbates their perceived unpredictability.[20] At the same time, this threat-filled environment readily speaks to the (thrilling) risks of modern metropolitan life:

> The fear is that from out of the chaos some maniac will emerge to pointlessly, stupidly, inexplicably hurl you, blast you, cast you into oblivion...And it's one of the myriad factors that keep New Yorkers on edge, that keep us aware more acutely than most that at any given moment something terrible can happen.[21]

In this way, the archetypal scenario is of a mentally ill man murdering a stranger in the most everyday of settings. As with the murder of Soon Sin, Jonathan Zito was also killed in the Underground. He was neither tragically young nor old, but rather, representatively "thirty-something" and thus his death was 'everybody's worst fears encapsulated'.[22]

The danger that the mentally ill pose to themselves is subsumed under their association with murderousness. This reflects both the public's ignorance and its investment, and results from a lack of social education, media imperatives, but also from the popular confusion between the psychotic and the psychopathic.[23] It is not that the public are not willing to discuss the plight of the mentally ill, but that the discussion seems only to be indulged with regard to the group's murderousness.[24] Similarly all discussions of policy reform and governmental pressure are fringed by the reminders of

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[20] Treaster notes that '[s]tudies estimate that about 15 percent of the [US's] homeless suffer from both mental illness and drug abuse' (B1). In Britain '40% of the single homeless have a history of mental illness' ('On The Edge of Madness', *True Stories*, narr. Marjorie Wallace, Channel 4, 23 July 1995).

[21] Bob Herbert, 'Double-Trouble Killers', *New York Times* 7 Jan. 1995: A23.

[22] That Zito's killer Christopher Clunis was a very tall and large "mad-eyed" black man adds further contexts to his representation; see Ian Murray, 'Inquiry into Fatal Stabbing Cites Racial Prejudice Among Carers', *Times* 26 Sep. 1995: 6.

[23] The mentally ill individual might suffer from psychosis, a severe mental disorder, but must be distinguished from a murderer, who is a psychopath. For a discussion of the societal confusion between the two terms and its place in the stigmatisation of the mentally ill see Otto Wahl, *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

[24] For an example of this deflection of focus see Louise Jury, 'Zoo Lion's Mauling Triggered Review', *Guardian* 13 Aug. 1993: Home 3.

the association.[25] While only a fraction of the mentally ill endanger others, the popular depiction of the mentally ill is as a threat to the public, and such representations fulfil contemporary society's thirst for the sensational, so often satisfied by murder.[26] Sensationalism can be seen as a form of resistance to self-endangerment: it privileges murder and, in aggrandising the spectacle, accentuates the distance between it and the spectator. Rather than implicating the reader within the randomness of the illness, the violent representations promulgate the distance and distinction between "them and us" through the randomness of the attacks. But the representations also suggest the public's investment in the maintenance of the danger to the self: a form of self-risk by implication.

In interpreting news narratives it is important to acknowledge how the nature of the industry determines their content and message. Theories of news selection reveal and weight the various factors at play in the creation of the news or, indeed, the media event, and as such range from the financial to the ideological. News selection has been attributed to the newsworthiness of the item ('News Values Approach'), to the pre-existing belief system of the journalistic system, with all its ideological trimmings ('Inferential Structure'), or to the interplay of the needs of the media and the public ('Transactionist Viewpoint').[27] These categories become especially loaded within the fraught relationship between the mass media and social issues. I have not been interested here in whether the cultural representations of self-endangerment as media events, are "media-inspired", a key notion within the debate upon the relationship between the mass media and violence, but rather how the public's investment in them is media-

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[25] 'The measures were unveiled in response to mounting public concern over killings and violence perpetrated by discharged mental patients'. David Brindle, 'Supervised Hospital Discharge for the Mentally Ill Welcomed', *Guardian* 13 Aug. 1993: Home 3.

[26] Psychotic illness might account for twenty to forty percent of UK murders (see Wallace, 'How Many More' 30) but twenty to thirty percent commit suicide or otherwise endanger themselves (see Waterhouse, 'Mentally Ill to be Better Supervised: Changes to Community Care Likely to Include the Power to Recall Patients', *Independent* 12 Aug. 1993: 5). There are, of course, far more sufferers of mental illness than murderers. For the cinematic construction of the "mad as monster", see Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell, *Images of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in the Feature Film* (London: AUP, 1985).

[27] These various news theories are outlined in Dennis Howitt, *The Mass Media and Social Problems* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982) 48-50. For a discussion of the newsworthiness of crime stories, see Steven M. Chermak, *Victims in the News: Crime and the American News Media* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

perpetuated.[28] News journalism in its story-telling depends upon the repetition and familiarity of its narratives to attract its audience: the fuelling and functioning of myths has thus been deemed central to it.[29] My reading of these representations is deliberately geared not to the financial or social incentives of the news but to how sensationalism betrays the broader cultural figuring of the mentally ill which haunts the characters discussed in chapters one and two.

While the various "shades of evil" account for the majority of images of the mentally ill in popular culture, and for all the men mentioned above, there exists another popular trope: the "holy fool" or *idiot savant*. The glamourisation of the mentally ill reflects the ethos of Laing and others who celebrated their creativity as innately rebellious and gifted, and their martyrdom as a symbol of the sicker society or, more immediately, the sicker family. The romanticised connection between madness and creativity or genius endures and is epitomised by the film *Shine* (Scott Hicks, 1996) and its considerable success. In it David Helfgott's 'dormant genius survives the tyranny of his father and is revived by the love of a good woman',[30] and the mentally ill are seen as mumbling yet endearing and gifted individuals. The heroicisation of Helfgott was staged in the press.[31] Simon Wessely's review of the film charges it with repeating two errors common to films about mental illness: the holy fool tradition and the (narrative) compulsion to assign mental illness a meaning and a cause.[32] This latter point introduces the theme of the narratival life of mental illness, a theme that becomes increasingly important as I focus upon such popular narrative forms as film and literature. But this heroic figuring, and its narratival weight, can also be detected within the personal stories of mental health experiences that appear in the press, as survivor discourses of triumph over adversity. These two examples of the narrativity of the representation of mental

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[28] For a discussion of the relationship between violence and the mass media, see Howitt, 85-102.

[29] See James W. Carey, ed., *Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press* (London: Sage, 1988).

[30] John Casey, 'A Film that Exploits its Audience', rev. of *Shine*, dir. Scott Hicks, *Daily Telegraph* 11 Feb. 1997: 18.

[31] See, for example, Charles Cumming, 'Back at the Piano after 20 Years', *Daily Telegraph* 10 Feb. 1997: 19.

[32] Simon Wessely, 'Mental Illness As Metaphor, Yet Again', *British Medical Journal* 11 Jan. 1997: 153.

illness--the cause and effect structure, and happy ending--raise the ongoing issue of this thesis: the relationship between self-endangerment and the conventions, frequently the narrative conventions, of representation. This issue develops in chapter one within the discussion of autobiography, and in chapter two within the classical trajectory of the filmic representations of mental illness.

From this brief survey of 1990s media representations of the mentally ill, from the USA and UK, the popular press can be seen to deny or resist the association of mental illness with self-endangerment. Along with the deflection of self-endangerment into murder, there is an additional deflection of attention to the public acts of murderous potential rather than the (more likely) attacks on family members. These deflections suggest a cultural attachment to, or desire for, the murderous mentally ill figure and the perpetuation of a general and grave risk to the public. This desire is dependent upon the denial of the existence of self-endangerment. This denial is evidenced and negotiated in all the literary and filmic texts considered in this thesis in which potential violence against the self is subsumed, for example, within the potential for violence against another. Elizabeth Wurtzel exemplifies this deflection in *Prozac Nation*:

> In fact, the way the head counselor looked at the Atarax bottle, you'd have thought that the pills were a danger to me and not, as was the case, that I was dangerous to myself.[33]

The self-endangerment of mental illness is resisted in the popular imagination on both the level of the "suicidal" behaviours of the mentally ill[34] and in terms of the implicated public for whom the emphasis upon the mentally ill's murderousness and their distinction from the public reinforces their safe and sanctioned separation from the rest of society. This distancing strategy operates as a "them and us" mentality. Within this polarisation, the reader of the popular press is always aligned with the innocent party, the victim of the violent attack, who represents all areas of life: the old man, the young man, the child, the parent. No one is safe in terms of being a potential victim yet all are safe

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[33] Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995) 17.

[34] Suicidal or otherwise life-threatening behaviours can be broadened to include the generally debilitating and detrimental state of mental illness as a prolonged period of self-harm, of 'gradual suicide'. Isaac and Armat, qtg. interviewee Edward Holder (pseudonym), 11. Rarely public behaviours, these do not warrant media attention, see Glasgow Media Group, 70-73.

from being mentally ill, from being implicated in the illness itself and, presumably, in its self-endangerment. In this way, media representations resist possible identification with the mentally ill, whereas the memoirs and films discussed below, with their different intents, promote and play with this possibility.

I would now like to focus on a case which I believe had such an effect precisely because it functioned in the common ground between the construction of the mad figure and the implication of the public within it (a common ground that my chosen texts will be shown to explore). This is the case of Ben Silcock who on New Year's Eve 1992 climbed into the lion's enclosure at London Zoo and was severely mauled.

'The day that Ben Silcock climbed into a lion's den and was mauled, the "forgotten illness"--schizophrenia--was forced on public attention'.[35]

There are many reasons why this episode provoked such widespread interest, from its mythical quality to the simple lack of other news at the time. Whatever the reason, it captured the public imagination and triggered a concerted attack on mental health provision and policy. It emphasised the status of mental illness as illness and drew it away from murderousness. What is interesting about claiming this case as a crisis point, is that it embodies the self-endangerment of mental illness, not just in terms of Silcock's life-threatening behaviour but because the audience were utterly implicated within it.

Like Daniel in the Lion's Den, the event established a clear sense of Silcock's innocence, his status as victim and the system stacked against him. Unlike Daniel, who was forced into the lion's den,[36] Silcock entered voluntarily. As the other party was a lion, Silcock was also clearly distinguished from the natural killer or predator. Perhaps it was that the lion's dangerousness was natural that provided an effective, if subconscious, counterpoint to the stereotype of the violent mentally ill figure.[37] His public act on a public festival, with all its biblical connotations, invested the event with universal

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[35] 'A Step in the Right Direction', *Daily Mail* 5 Aug. 1993: 8.

[36] *The Holy Bible: The Revised Standard Version*, Daniel 6 (New York: Collins, 1971) 784-85.

[37] Articles about the lion appeared which reiterated the normality and predictability of his behaviour; Colin Tudge, for example, notes that 'Silcock presented several kinds of novelty, some of which Arfur had to assume were threatening' ('But What was it Like for the Lion?: Colin Tudge Corrects Popular Myths about Predators after the London Zoo Mauling', *Independent* 17 Jan. 1993: 22).

meaning and Silcock with bravery, pity and hope. Most importantly, here, the public, well used to identifying with the victim--desiring and requiring their victim status--within these "mentally ill" events, were on this occasion forced to identify with the mentally ill figure himself. The incident while a veritable media spectacle--Silcock's experience was captured on amateur video and screened on the national news--was also representative.

However, Silcock's case can still be characterised by deflection techniques, by selective interpretation, as his mother states:

> One of the reasons why it generated so much interest...is that it was put forward as a cry for help and in fact I know this not to be the case whatsoever. Ben was not trying to get himself noticed...Ben had one idea, the public saw it quite differently, they saw it as a tragic case...[Ben was] in desperation doing some great symbolic act, that's what suited them to believe.[38]

This interpretation by the public was staged in the popular press and illustrates the rearticulation of the "them and us" divide, a reactivating of the distance between the public and this pitiable figure, with whom they have been forced into identifying. It also recalls the other popular way of figuring the mentally ill: as martyrs, heroic in their helplessness.[39] For Silcock, his appropriation as the lion-man confirms his charge that he, like other mad people (as he prefers to be called) are never listened to. Indeed, the memoirs and films that I will go on to examine will be shown to combat this voicelessness. Silcock's story, however, is fashioned to others' needs. This confirms the cultural role of the mentally ill but also how the story was deflected again away from the full implications of self-endangerment. The lion even becomes coopted into the murderousness of the mentally ill: '[a] Lion was needed to achieve action....Since then there have been a number of isolated but tragic cases in which mentally disordered

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[38] Sheila Silcock, personal interview, 23 Feb. 1997.

[39] Yet Silcock's intention was to comfort the lions in captivity, he had even brought them food: 'no-one was more shocked than Ben...he expected to be met with open paws' (Silcock, personal interview, 21 Feb. 1997).

patients have assaulted--and even killed--people in the community'.[40] However, it was Silcock's violent behaviour that secured his lasting care.[41]

In the figure of the mad, the double-side of danger operates within the constitution of the self, the individual. His or her dual status--as the vehicle for both suicidal and/or murderous potential--opens up the meaning of self-endangerment, allowing it to encompass the witting and unwitting behaviours of the individual but also, crucially, the implied desire or ambivalence of the readers or witnesses of self-endangerment and their implication within it. As I demonstrated in the introduction to the thesis, the reader/viewer is always drawn into masochistic identification. It is here that a politics of self-endangerment can be located, the sense of a cultural denial of this implication existing alongside a cultural investment in it.

My attention to the popular press's representation of the mentally ill is crucial to the discussion of cultural depictions, for the mainstream media hold an integral place within the formation and discussion of cultural issues and popular ideas and stereotypes. Its representations of mental illness frame my discussion not only as a historical pegging of information, as examples from an alternative media or from an especially ideological forum, but because they establish the key ideas that haunt the representation of the mentally ill elsewhere, namely the popular denial of self-endangerment and the public's investment and implication in their representation.

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[40] 'The Keys of the Caring', *Guardian* 13 Aug. 1993: 19.

[41] He was 'ordered to be detained in hospital indefinitely after admitting at Wood Green crown court that he slashed two police officers with a knife in March 1990' ('Schizophrenic Slashed PCs', *Guardian* 9 Sep. 1993: Home 3). This aspect of Ben's story was covered mainly by local press. Thus, the guarantee of care, of treatment and a hospital place was provided only with regard to danger to others. Thus the murderousness of the mentally ill would seem desirable to the sufferers too. Following Silcock's experience in the zoo, the Silcock family were inundated with offers of beds on psychiatric wards of various hospitals. Silcock was sectioned but released some time after.

CHAPTER ONE

A: Memoirs of Mental Illness and Self-endangerment

In this chapter I turn to narratives of mental illness, not the representation of madness within fiction but within autobiographical accounts. There has in the 1990s been a surge in the publication of memoirs and in the popularity of those pertaining to mental illness. According to Peter D. Kramer this new wave of publications is 'as much a product of the literary marketplace as it is of the *Zeitgeist*'. He notes that:

> Ours is the era of autopathography. Bookstore shelves groan with memoirs of heart disease and asthma. No mental disorder, from alcoholism and autism to schizophrenia, is without its confessions. Obviously, these titles represent niche book selling, a guide for every challenge. Perhaps they signal more: AIDS activism has expanded identity politics to include illness. Autopathography reflects a cultural commitment to diversity, a welcome, oddly joyous sign of tolerance.[1]

Whether '[t]he sheer number of these books helps to combat stigma'[2] in a spirit of tolerance emanating from the liberation movements of the last forty years, whether they reflect the pandemic proportions of diseases of affluent and/or liberal societies or the improvement in drug treatments and, hence, longevity that allow such narratives to be written,[3] this surge resounds with socio-historical import. The relevance of medicine or science within this "new era" of writing continues with the connection, noted by Jackie Stacey, between this cultural interest in illness, in the internal threats to life, and contemporary thinking in immunology as stated by Donna Haraway, who posits the body as a system under attack from dangers that lie within, rather than without, that 'we seem invaded...by our own strange parts'.[4] The cultural expression of this shift in the location

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[1] Peter D. Kramer, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', *New York Times Book Review* 7 April 1996: 27.

[2] Kramer, 27.

[3] Monica B. Pearl makes this point in 'Alien Tears: Mourning, Melancholia, and Identity in AIDS Literature', thesis, University of Warwick, 1999, 4-5, 289.

[4] Donna Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Other', *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Carey Nelson and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992) 321. See also Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (London: Routledge, 1997) 160.

of the threat is not limited to "autopathography" and can be detected within, for example, the recent rise of body horror.[5] The memoir of mental illness could also be seen as a by-product of anti-psychiatry, as a personal and often political tale of surviving the system. Of course, with its cause-and-effect structure, triumph over adversity and resolution of problems, the conventional memoir repeats the most basic tenets of traditional narrative form and in this way seems a natural site for the popular expression or comprehension of illness.[6]

In an issue of the *New York Times Magazine* in 1996, James Atlas introduced a collection of 'real-life stories' in 'Confessing for Voyeurs: The Age of The Literary Memoir is Now':

> Could it have been the tremendous success of 'Darkness Visible,' William Styron's memoir of his bout with suicidal depression, that opened the floodgates? Or was it 'Girl Interrupted,' Susanna Kaysen's best-selling memoir of life in a mental institution?...But if the moment of inception is hard to locate, the triumph of memoir is now established fact.[7]

For me the popularity of this rejuvenated genre, as a 1990s phenomenon, is emblematic of the contemporary obsession with self-endangerment and of the public, or cultural, desire for such representations. In discussing these narratives, many of the points raised below will recur later in the study and this chapter is intended to be expository in nature, a looser analysis uncovering issues and themes that will become increasingly significant as the thesis progresses.

Out of the array of 1990s memoirs of mental illness, I concentrate upon four that I found the most interesting, provocative and representative: Kate Millett's *The Loony Bin Trip*, Susanna Kaysen's *Girl Interrupted*, William Styron's *Darkness Visible* and

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[5] For a discussion of body horror see Linda Badley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) and *Writing Horror and the Body: The Fiction of Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Anne Rice* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

[6] For a discussion of the cultural investment in narratives on cancer and their ideological form, see Stacey's *Teratologies*.

[7] James Atlas, 'Confessing for Voyeurs: The Age of The Literary Memoir is Now', *New York Times Magazine* 12 May 1996: 25.

Elizabeth Wurtzel's, *Prozac Nation*.[8] I will also refer to other memoirs: Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*, *The Four of Us* by Elizabeth Swados, *The Quiet Room* by Lori Schiller and Amanda Bennett, Martha Manning's *Undercurrents* and Tracey Thompson's *The Beast*.[9] Although I will not discuss them in detail, the larger group forms the bedrock of my argument. Their commonalities qualify their genre status and my attention to them as a group. Variously defined as personal narratives, autopathography, autobiographical or life-writing, or memoir, such texts raise the question of the generic nature of autobiography, and especially its relationship to gender and to self-endangerment. This will be developed in the final section of this chapter.

Although inflected with a unique personality, writing style and, perhaps, motivation, all the memoirs contain similar material, sorrows and sources of relief in their narration of the writer's experience of mental breakdown, treatment/therapy and recuperation. From the powerful and political statement of *The Loony Bin Trip* that evinces sanity as a 'religion...an ideology' (87), to the often distressing emotivity of *Prozac Nation* in which Wurtzel aims to incite in the reader 'frustration and fury...that might even be akin to the sense of futility experienced...[in dealing with] an actual depressive' (356), the authors produce a complicated, entangled, readerly state out of different sources of anger or distress but with similar effect. The memoirs position themselves against the stigmatisation of the mentally ill and the uninvolved audience and thus against the division of "them and us". All end with an evocation of the human condition: as needing respect (*Loony*), as needing help (*Prozac*), as imperfect self-awareness (*Girl*), as hopefulness (*Darkness*). For Millett the division between "them and us" is coercive and corrupt, an ideological product of 'interfering relatives and state

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[8] Kate Millett, *The Loony Bin Trip* (London: Virago, 1990); Susanna Kaysen, *Girl Interrupted* (New York: Vintage, 1993); William Styron, *Darkness Visible* (New York: Random House, 1990) and Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically within the text.

[9] Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Elizabeth Swados, *The Four of Us: A Family Memoir* (New York: Plume, 1993); Lori Schiller and Amanda Bennett, *The Quiet Room: A Journey Out of the Torment of Madness* (New York: Warner Books, 1994); Martha Manning, *Undercurrents: A Life Beneath the Surface* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994) and Tracey Thompson, *The Beast: A Reckoning with Depression* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically within the text.

psychiatry' (315), for Kaysen it is an inadequate, if not irrelevant description of her relationship to society (or even to herself): 'I wasn't a danger to society. Was I a danger to myself? The fifty aspirin--but I've explained them. They were metaphorical. I wanted to get rid of a certain aspect of my character' (39).

Crucially, all of the personal narratives offer the interconnection of mental illness and self-endangerment, thereby justifying my application of the term to them but also locating them, as a group, within the cultural negotiation of self-endangerment that I am exploring. By its definition, schizophrenia, along with the other psychoses, involves the dissolution of a singular, authoritative, secure sense of self and a confused subjectivity. While these memoirs are mainly written by those suffering from manic depression, the shifting or confused identity of self or loss of selfhood that they express operates in a number of different self-endangered ways that suffuse the texts. Character or personality change is implicit to Styron's 'plunge toward the depths' (55), to the highs and lows of Millett and Jamison or to Wurtzel's 'mood swings' (335). Suicidal tendencies or attempts are found in all of the texts in the episodes of drug overdosing or thoughts of suicide: for example, Kaysen 'swallowed...fifty aspirin' (37), Styron 'stolidly prepar[ed] for extinction' (64), and Wurtzel had 'adequate reasons for suicide'(198). The loss of the sovereignty or the rights of self is conveyed through institutionalisation: Kaysen is hospitalised after her suicide attempt (39), Styron before his (67), and Millett is committed into a hospital in Ireland following her suspicious behaviour in an airport (190-96). The loss of autonomy in legal or social terms or in interpersonal relationships is expressed most adamantly by Millett. For her, mental illness is clearly the loss of self through the violation of an individual's human rights, a loss achieved through the assignment of insanity: 'to lift the judgement against me would be to have my selfhood again' (31). Here, mental illness is not only a civil liberties issue but explicitly aligned with self-endangerment.

The texts negotiate the authors' relationship to self-endangerment, although in different ways for each author. For Manning, as for Millett, there is a direct relationship between self-endangerment and mental illness although for her it is personal rather than political and purely self-ascribed. Depression is '[j]ust the slow erosion of the self, as insidious as any cancer' (*Undercurrents* 107). For Wurtzel the state of depression is itself similar to death--'[b]ut for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just

the walking, waking dead' (22)[10]--so too for Styron for whom '[d]eath was now a daily presence...blowing over me in cold gusts' (50). Kaysen, however, both labels and welcomes her post-stomach-pumped state as a 'partial suicide' (38). In this way, mental illness is clearly linked to self-risk, and death is a spectre overhanging their condition. Similarly, in Swados's engaging memoir there is neither a singular self-endangerer nor an indivisible self. The title, *The Four of Us*, alludes to the sense of the four mentally disordered family members and the way in which these four characters or selves are integrated into her identity, into her life or rather life-story (memoir being a narrativisation of a life). She charts her relationship to her brother Lincoln who suffered from schizophrenia, attempting suicide once, and his path to eventual death. Their mother suffered from depression and eventually commits suicide. Then there is their father's dismissive rationality and Swados's own brushes with suicidal impulses. The memoir also contains an episode where Swados passes her brother on the street but does not recognise him immediately. *The Quiet Room* includes a similar incident when Schiller's mother, walking down the street, passes a heavily dressed bag lady, whom she then realises is her daughter. This unrecognisability of the mentally ill person, further conveys the sense of an external or superficial loss of self. These moments are especially emotive not only because they conjure the severity of individual change but because they contravene or rather complicate one of the characteristics of the public stereotyping of the mentally ill, that 'they are assumed to be easily recognisable'.[11]

The memoirs represent self-endangerment through the mentally ill characters on various levels, but the self that is endangered is never clear-cut and the reader looking on

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[10] Her sense of the depressed as the undead, as neither dead nor alive, resonates within her later likening of her experience to a horror movie. It also resonates within my discussion of self-endangerment's inbetween status, as neither relating to life nor death, here, nor to activity or passivity as explored in the introduction to the thesis.

[11] Agnes Miles, *The Mentally Ill in Contemporary Society*, 2nd ed. (1981; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 61. This physical/external loss of selfhood is linked to the only two characters within this group of 1990s memoirs who suffer from schizophrenia. Neither solely narrate their own story, as if there is something within this self-impaired state that prohibits the self-awareness of writing and, similarly, something about the other forms of mental illness that allows self-expression. For discussions of mental illness and self-expressiveness see Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched With Fire: Manic-depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (London: The Free Press Paperbacks, 1994) and also Marilyn Yalom, *Maternity, Mortality, and the Literature of Madness* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985).

is never neutral. What I am most concerned with in this chapter is how these texts construct and use the implicated reader, how, in this case, the memoir compromises the subjectivity of both the narrator-writer and the reader. While Atlas initially and provocatively calls "us" voyeurs, he then focuses on the memoirists' driving force as the therapeutic potential of their self-exposure: '[t]he license to tell all has produced a virtual library of dysfunctional revelation....Our belief in the recuperative powers of letting it all hang out has never been stronger'.[12] However it is not just the recuperative power of writing that this new surge suggests, it is the recuperative powers of reading, perhaps the texts' cathartic potential for their readers, that comes under scrutiny: the complicitous and charged relationship of the confessional.[13] This relationship does not enjoy the potential safety or remove that voyeurism might suggest, nor is the reader simply masochistically implicated in a physical or libidinal way--stimulated by a text through its sexual provocation and incited pleasures of fantasy. Rather, through their strategies of implication the texts dismantle such clear or safe divisions, as between the writer and the reader, but also the sick and the well, them and us, the victim and the witness. They break down the distance between the reader and the text, a distance that isolates and stigmatises the mentally ill, and falsely assures the readers of safety in their containment. It is to these strategies of implication, to these attacks on the faultline of the reader's safe shell, that I now turn.

B: Crossing the Faultline: Spectacles of "Them and Us"

In the mid-nineteenth century, the lunatics ball was the 'most popular form of asylum recreation' held, sometimes weekly, for attendants, inmates and visitors.[14] Public interest in the lives of the mentally ill (rather than their sensationalised acts) endures, and what I want to stress here is the role of these memoirs as windows onto the world of the mentally ill, our present-day equivalent of the exhibition or spectacle of madness.[15] My

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[12] Atlas, 26.

[13] Indeed, this sense of a cathartic potential is identified throughout the textual analyses in this thesis and is itself to be scrutinised for its inherent safeties.

[14] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987) 38.

[15] With the approach of a new century, this surge of memoirs of mental illness could be seen to reflect a similar fin-de-siècle concern with the borders of the rational and of

attention to the best-selling memoirs reinforces this function. This sense of spectacle is the primary strategy of implication, operating on several levels in these texts but most importantly through the writers' negotiation of this legacy of public fascination to turn it around to their particular advantage.

As memoirs, "real" accounts, these narratives' status as true confirms both the authority and the thrill of the confessional: autobiography itself as a form of spectacle.[16] That several of them are written by well-established figures adds to the appeal or pomp of the self-exposure. This weight is increased by the fact that many of the writers have or emphasise a special relationship to the genre of autobiography. Millett played a key role in the redefinition of autobiography through 1970s feminism.[17] Kaysen and Wurtzel join, often self-consciously, with their female predecessors: 'a proud legacy of women who'd turned overwhelming depression into prodigious art' (*Prozac* 50).

The writers' exaggeration or aggrandising of visual events--the literary construction of a spectacle--is a key technique used to break through the division separating the reader and the text, and I want to interrogate it here in its power to implicate. The general idea of a spectacle--constituted by a visual event/object and a spectator/subject--relies upon fixed positions or perspectives. In these memoirs, however, the event is not sensational and the spectator no longer distanced. Indeed, the sense of spectacle is turned in upon itself. None of these works is about murder--the very stuff of the popular spectacle of madness. The two sides of endangerment that I previously established--of violence against the self and violence against another (resonating within "danger to one's self, danger to another")--are conflated within the

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identity which infused late-nineteenth century culture. I do not want to invoke any kind of historical essentialism but rather to acknowledge the cultural anxieties which circulate around certain socio-historical events. The significance of the millennium was suggested in the main introduction to this thesis.

[16] Beyond the lure of truth--the appeal of gaining previously private information--the texts' authenticity adds to the possible thrill or danger of reader identification (and implication) in that the events and outcomes represented are not invented possibilities but "actual" and therefore attainable experiences.

[17] For a discussion of Millett's autobiographical contribution to 1970s feminism, see Suzanne Juhasz, 'Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millett's *Flying* and *Sita*; Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*', *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 221-37, and to women's writing see Annette Kolodny, 'The Lady's Not for Spurning: Kate Millett and the Critics', *Women's*, ed. Jelinek, 238-59.

mentally ill figures here, not to yield unpredictability but rather to undo the clear distinction between self and other. This conflation (as well as that popular deflection of self-endangerment) is perfectly demonstrated by Wurtzel who writes: '[f]rom the way they were talking, you'd think I'd committed murder--not attempted suicide' (328). The other writers locate or determine the conflation themselves: self and other are firmly incorporated in that suicide becomes self-murder (*Darkness* 65) or 'premeditated murder' or 'self-abortion' (*Girl* 36, 39).

The contemplated acts of self-murder are presented within a fantasy of performance. The writers imagine scenarios of self-destruction, vignettes of self-endangerment. Kaysen writes of how she mentally stages her self-murder:

> Actually, it was only a part of myself I wanted to kill: the part that wanted to kill herself, that dragged me into the suicide debate and made every window, kitchen implement, and subway station a rehearsal for tragedy (37).

Styron similarly lists everyday items within the potential sites for suicide:

> [M]any of the artifacts of my house had become potential devices for my own destruction: the attic rafters (and an outside maple or two) a means to hang myself, the garage a place to inhale carbon monoxide, the bathtub a vessel to receive the flow from my opened arteries. The kitchen knives in their drawers had but one purpose for me (52-53).

This everydayness disturbs the exceptional status of the behaviour, superimposing the possibility of danger upon the general safety of home life. These vignettes inscribe the securest and most familiar of environments with risk thereby incorporating both a common and ubiquitous siting of self-endangerment. Most noticeably these fantasies involve visualisation--the envisaging of the various suicidal scenarios--that demands the alignment of narrator and reader. This will prove one of the main devices procuring the reader's intense identification with the narrator in these memoirs. As episodes in "image-building" these reiterate and depend upon the integration of the internal and the external--the narrator superimposed in an imagined scene--the subject-made-object. These death fantasies are acknowledged by Manning to be aspects of the illness itself: 'an image of dying comes to me: a car accident, a heart attack, a vicious and quick-killing disease. In the psychiatric vernacular these are called 'passive thoughts of death' (93).

While Manning's fantasies are similarly image oriented, they are distinctly passive. They involve the unavoidable, a willing yielding to fate, quite different from Styron's and Kaysen's active, deliberate suicide fantasies.

Within these suicide fantasies there is, in addition, the writers' collection of stage props for the performance of self-murder. These episodes are therefore noteworthy in their theatricality, a further signal of the spectacle, integral to the dramaticism of Kaysen's improvised dialogues or Wurtzel's reference to her life as a 'tearjerker movie' (49) and her almost camp cinephilia, all of which will be examined shortly. This theatricality also marks the memoirists' transgressive take on the spectacle by exploiting the different viewing positions and, again, collapsing the border between self and other, subject and object. As Styron acknowledges:

> There is a theatrical quality about all this, and during the next several days, as I went about stolidly preparing for extinction, I couldn't shake off a sense of melodrama--a melodrama in which I, the victim-to-be of self-murder, was both the solitary actor and lone member of the audience (64-65).

This spectacle is not an external display but an internal fantasy of split subject positions. Styron is his own witness or voyeur, as well as the possible protagonist. He is subject and object both, and we, by implication, can be too. In this way, the polarisation, or distancing, of the reader from the text, of the subject/object or performer/viewer pairings, is undermined. I am arguing here that the use of spectacle provides the key site for the memoirs' interventions into such polarities. But there are other cases. For example, both Kay Redfield Jamison and Martha Manning are mental health practitioners: Jamison the Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University and Manning a clinical psychologist and former Professor of Psychology at George Mason University. Their becoming patients dismantles the divide of doctor/patient. They enter the position of the ill individual, crossing over or breaching the divide between roles held in opposition. This disrupted state, or disruptive potential, resounds further with the fact that Manning is Jamison's patient.[18] In addition, in our role as analysts of these texts, the doctor/patient dynamic continues to be shaken by its translation into the new dynamic

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[18] For Kramer this piece of information marks the cyclical or self-serving nature of the genre that 'inured me to the category' (27).

here between the sympathetic reader and the ill narrator: the writer presents symptoms to the reader's interpreting eye. And to interject the notion raised at the start of this chapter of a recuperative or a self-therapeutic text (for both reader and writer), such "clinical" divides are mitigated against further. In this way I am firmly identifying the memoirs' disruptive potential as operating primarily through the spectacle, but manifested on various levels to conjure a more general atmosphere of implication.

Returning to the spectacle, Wurtzel similarly (but frequently) steps outside herself, to become the audience of her own performance: '[a]nd the thing that's really bugging me, as I lie curled up, is that the scene I'm enacting reminds me of something: It reminds me of my whole life' (7). She repeatedly makes herself her own object. Rather than the external subject (narrator) merging with the internal subject (reader) through the reading process, through the "occupation" of reading, here the external subject objectifies the self. It enters the object, becomes its own object. She adds: '[p]erhaps I, too, will die young and sad, a corpse with her head in the oven. Scrunched up and crying here on a Saturday night, I can see no other way' (8). The repercussions for the reader of this disruption of the narrator's subjectivity, depend upon the reader's identification with the narrator. This is a dependency that I have and will continue to suggest through the intensity of the first person narrative as well as through such tropes as the visual quality of the writing.[19]

While Wurtzel creates herself as a spectacle, again it is as a private not a public spectacle. It is only between the reader and Wurtzel and deliberately precludes an intra-textual witness. Nobody witnesses the spectacle she is making of herself in the world of the text, yet these are especially visually marked events. This spectacle (like the other authors' death or suicide fantasies) is conjured for the reader and not of "diegetic" intention. Translated into the terms of film theory, this serves to reiterate the sense that there is no surrogate for our gaze or, more precisely, for our objectification of her "on-screen" or rather "on-page": our objectification of her (our "male" gaze at classical

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[19] For a discussion of the intensification of the reader's response through visual writing, see Ellen J. Esrick, *The Reader's Eye: Visual Imaging as Reader Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). This idea will be fully considered in chapter four with regard to the extreme visuality of Dennis Cooper's writing.

cinema) is therefore denied.[20] In its place is her self-objectification, her own construction, for her own purpose. This furnishes her with a flexibility of subject-status and, in underlining our identification with her, it furnishes us with it too, thereby confirming our ability to breach the divide between subject/object, reader/text. This foray into film theory is also warranted by Wurtzel's frequent references to cinema: from the general--'I look like a living doll, a horror movie robot whose eyes have fallen out of their sockets' (9)--to the specific: 'I might as well be Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra*, receiving supplicants on the bathroom floor'(10).[21]

The memoirs challenge the traditional spectacle of madness, to expose the stereotyping of the mentally ill, but also, again, to undermine the reader's safe distance. The memoirs position depression against the sensational, and, in fact, against sensation itself: against event or effect.[22] Depression is distinct from conventional or traditional senses of madness, it is, in essence, anti-spectacle. As Manning notes: '[d]epression is such a cruel punishment. There are no fevers, no rashes, no blood tests to send people scurrying in concern' (107). Similarly, Wurtzel marks mental illness distinct from madness's removed and glorified accessories:

> Madness *is too glamorous a term...too exciting, too literary, too interesting in its connotations, to convey the boredom, the slowness, the dreariness, the dampness of depression....Madness is delightful to the beholder, scary in its way, but still fun to watch, a sport for spectators and rubberneckers who can't avert their eyes from the awfulness that they know they shouldn't be seeing....Depression is such an*

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[20] This draws on the gendered structuring of the gaze in classical cinema as described by Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989) 14-28.

[21] Such references necessarily endow the discussion with questions of objectification, identification and self-reflexivity. This richness of imaging as a certain visuality or cinematicness will be found to characterise all the literary representations of self-endangerment, and, as self-reflexivity, the filmic texts too. Indeed, it will be shown to be integral to these narratives' provocation and contribution to or intervention into the cultural fascination with self-endangerment.

[22] The combination of the provocation of the writing--its dramaticism, visuality or cinephilia--with an affectlessness or blankness (of the condition) will prove a key and recurring theme in the representation of self-endangerment.

> *uncharismatic disease, so much the opposite of the lively vibrance that one associates with madness* (294-95, original emphasis).

As ever, Wurtzel's knowingness shines through from both her cultural critique and her lived experience, but also from the honest exposure of the spectator's pleasure. Whilst our reading might still be indulged as a prolonged period of rubbernecking, the spectacle has dismantled itself and, thus, the distinctions between the different parties. This extract contains a self-reflexive moment for it draws the beholder's attention to the beholding of mental illness. In another similarly self-reflexive moment, Wurtzel offers an ironic turn that again forces the readers, as consumers of this tale, to consider themselves implicated within her statement on such consumers. What is interesting is that Wurtzel positions herself within the audience: she slips into the position of reader/viewer further evidencing the flexibility or switchability of subject/object, spectacle/spectator positions, as well as underlining the reader's prospect as potential self-endangerer:

> Many of the people who consented to talk about their private lives in front of millions of television viewers would say that they were sharing their stories as a way to comfort fellow sufferers, to raise public awareness, to give a voice to their pain. None of them would ever admit that it was all about ratings and voyeurism and lurid, grotesque curiosity. None of them would be able to see me and my friends sitting in our dorm rooms watching these shows in the late afternoon lull (173).

It seems that the reader/viewer's positioning in relation to the self-displaying text, to the narrative of suffering, is never as simple as, and cannot be reduced to, catharsis or voyeurism. After all, these imply or even require a distance between the text and the reader, the subject and the object, if not their polarity. Wurtzel exposes the glorification and romanticisation of mental illness for all its faults and, most importantly, false distances.

These memoirs of mental illness are markedly different from their predecessors--novels of the personal horror of madness, such as *Sybil*.[23] They are not spectacular or sensationalist yet manipulate their relation to both. In many ways the texts are combating the myths about mental illness. The extreme behaviours they contain are not offered as exceptional, as removed from possible futures, but rather they are

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[23] Flora Rheta Schreiber, *Sybil* (New York: Warner Books, 1974).

presented within a universal potential: as being everyday, attainable by all. The sense of spectacle operates most importantly as a means to implicate the reader, to incorporate her into the slant of the textual event rather than distancing the reader in the feigned intimacy of sensationalism. What seems most remarkable is the normality, the familiarity or everydayness of the memoirs' protagonists. In fact it is precisely their normality that is deemed so disturbing. This is illustrated by Kaysen, here exposing the public's investment:

> There's always a touch of fascination in revulsion: Could that happen to me? The less likely the terrible thing is to happen, the less frightening it is to look at or imagine. A person who doesn't talk to herself or stare off into nothingness is therefore more alarming than a person who does. Someone who acts 'normal' raises the uncomfortable question, What's the difference between that person and me? which leads to the question, What's keeping me out of the loony bin? (124).

Normality is disturbing because it implicates everyone not only through the absence of event, as in this quotation, but through the deluge of it, as in this comment by Wurtzel: '[t]hey react as if my family situation was particularly alarming and troublesome, as opposed to what it actually is in this day and age: perfectly normal' (33). Normality, here, encompasses all. It is presented as the everydayness of extremes: '[b]ecause--what courage!...Twenty aspirin, a little slit alongside the veins of the arm, maybe even a bad half hour standing on a roof: We've all had those' (*Girl* 17). Normality, according to these writers, allows extremes and cannot be reduced to the polarity of the presence or absence of event (or be used to siphon off certain unimplicated members of the community). Rather it is a middle ground between the two, it is the random possibility of either state. Indeed, this is what Wurtzel hopes to establish--the randomness of mental illness: not its unpredictability as the dangerousness of the mad, but as our implication within the illness, the inevitable possibility that "it could be you". She dislodges mental illness's connection to the spectacular and in its place instates the random:

> When I was reading a copy of *Lear's* in the Miami Beach sun, I chanced upon an article titled 'The Plot Sickens,' in which Fanny Howe, a college writing instructor, says that the gruesome, pessimistic nature of her

students' submissions is like nothing she's seen in twenty-one years of teaching....'The figures in their fictions are victims of hideous violence by accident; they commit crimes, but only for the hell of it....Randomness rules.'

And Howe seems surprised by what she's reading. For me, and for everyone I know my age, such stories seem normal, peculiarly ordinary. In the world that we live in, randomness does rule (340).

Thus Wurtzel, very much acting as a voice of the 1990s and its affair with mental illness or just extremity, connects these ideas to the very act of writing. Writing, as an expression of the personal and of an era, as the site of myriad stories, seems the logical location for the breakdown of boundaries, for the inscription of social change. Writing or rather the self-conscious text presents the subject objectified, the object's subjectivity, necessarily breaching divides as the 1990s interface of self and other.

The memoirs' relationship to the spectacle promotes the dissolution of the subject/object divide to suggest the reader's implication within the text. While the memoirists vary in their implicating intent, in the self-consciousness of their projects or its message, I am drawing them together in distinguishing this as a characteristic of their works, of, in fact, the representation of self-endangerment. I now want to consider other ways in which this state of implication is achieved. Mental illness's challenge to such polarities, such anxiety-laden opposites as "them and us", marks it as threatening in many ways. In the following discussion I suggest that it is an aim of these memoirs to reveal the public's investment in the maintenance of these divisions.

The Great Containment

In *Madness and Civilisation* Michel Foucault traces the public's relation to the mad, their distance and distinction from society.[24] He connects the treatment and definition of the mentally ill to the anxieties and changing beliefs of the rest of society. My subtitle here alludes to Foucault's discussion of the Great Confinement as one isolatable and yet similarly constructed period in the social history of madness. I would like to promote the 1990s as a new period, an "age of implication" perhaps, of which the strategies of

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[24] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (1961; London: Routledge, 1992).

containment are the flipside of strategies of implication: two sides of the same process. By the containment of the mentally ill, I mean to connote the sense of suppression, of control and institutionalisation, but also of attempts to limit their effect, their powers of implication.

In Millett's politicised interpretation of her experience, she reveals how much is at stake in the definition and distinction of the mentally ill. The very act or indeed desire to label and control the insane reflects society's fear of mental illness, a self-generating fear based upon the problematised distinction of "them and us":

> What silenced me, finally, was coming to understand how absolutely those who locked me up had to believe in the correctitude of what they had done; nothing in the world could let them doubt it. They would never give in, never see a middle ground of being a little crazy (flipped out, upset, frazzled), or see crazy as a mixed state, an ambivalent affair, or that crazy was not a crime but rather a point of view and need not be locked up, that locking up is an invasion of every human right, an invasion essentially insane--no, no, they stood against all that, they had to (86-87).

It is this middle ground that is the threat: the unchartered area defying containment, denying distance, lying between extremes. This strongly connects with Wurtzel's reverence of the random as precisely the realm that defies order and control, or the system of binary thought. The public fear of the random as normality--perhaps a 1990s normality that embraces these extremes, that poses madness as normal--is exposed in these texts.

Similarly, Kaysen conveys society's frailties or fears and far more candidly than Millett. *Girl Interrupted* opens with just such a scenario: '[p]eople ask, How did you get in there? What they really want to know is if they are likely to end up in there as well' (5). Implication is revealed as the unspoken yet instinctive reaction to the mentally ill. This immediately establishes the dynamic between the mentally ill figure and the public, between the reader and the narrator. As the opening to the book, the reader is immediately implicated within this revelation of ulterior motives, this unspoken investment. This is exacerbated by the fact that this is another self-reflexive moment, where the witness to a confession of mental illness is reminded of their performance as witness, is laden with self-consciousness. Kaysen, returns to this sense of an unspoken

investment later, when she provides another improvised and dramatised dialogue that displays the guises and different degrees of implication:

> 'You spent nearly two years in a loony bin! Why in the world were you in there? I can't believe it!' Translation: If you're crazy, then I'm crazy, and I'm not, so the whole thing must have been a mistake.
>
> 'You spent nearly two years in a loony bin? What was wrong with you?' Translation: I need to know the particulars of craziness so I can assure myself that I'm not crazy.
>
> 'You spent nearly two years in a loony bin? Hmmm. When was that, exactly?' Translation: Are you still contagious? (125).

In each case the investment is repressed and invisible. As with Millett, self-endangerment is seen to be denied. Fear functions at both extremes, through a denial of implication/self-endangerment--in Millett's example--and through an overdetermination of implication, an indulgence in self-endangerment in Kaysen's. Both of these examples acknowledge society's resistance to identifying with the mentally ill.

The memoirists may call for a middle ground, for the instatement of the normality or randomness of madness, but how is this to be attained? To achieve the middle ground, to breach the divide, Millett establishes as fragile the sanity of the sane rather than that of the insane. For Wurtzel or Kaysen, the divide is breached by the writing itself, its confrontational style, visual quality and self-reflexivity, precisely those elements discussed that absorb and implicate the reader, that disband the safe borders between spectacle and spectator, sane and insane, subject and object. In the conclusion to her work, Millett calls for the universality of (in)sanity: '[l]et sanity be understood to be a spectrum that runs the full course between balancing one's checkbook on the one hand and fantasy on the other' (314). Here, universality is again the broadening of the state of implication. Similarly, it operates in each turn of Millett's story, where each gesture of entrapment enters the realm of possibility for the implicated reader: '[a]n eventuality I once would have regarded as absurd, impossible, someone else's bad luck but not mine' (11). In *The Loony Bin Trip*, the reader finds herself journeying with the narrator through days of what other characters judge and penalise as strange behaviour, without much alarm. Nothing seems particularly unusual about her behaviour in the airport in Ireland, for example, yet she is sectioned as a result of it. She might treat the ladies

room at Shannon airport like that of a hotel with its 'nice hot water [and] plenty of towels if the linen roll on the wall is viewed charitably', but her humour is spot on, after all 'where else do you get marble?' (171). If we acknowledge her obvious strangeness to others, we do so retroactively yet stay unconvinced. So totally involved with her, "sane" with her, are we, that the act of identification seems a vote of faith, an act of sanity and marker of our merger. Or is it that the power of Millett's narrative is such that we, like her, are persuaded of her (our) sanity. Has Millett so effectively but subliminally articulated the normality of madness that its shockingness--its differentiation of the sick and the well, the "them and us"--is undone. Undoubtedly the text procures a state of intense identification with the protagonist and one reliant upon dissolving such boundaries.

For Wurtzel, the state of implication works not only through the universalising of insanity, but as an inevitable product of life in general. She does not call for the acknowledgement of a spectrum of behaviours, that after all maintains some sense of increment, but rather points out that polarity or extremity is essential to implication: '[m]y mom feared the outside world and my dad feared me and my mom; we lived in a paranoid household in which everyone defined his own enemies and pretty soon everyone was implicated' (28). Extremes cannot be dissolved by a scale but, in revealing their mutual implication, their interdependence, their political charge, their ability to articulate and in some ways undo the attitudes to mental illness (or to any kind of difference) is also revealed.

Implication, here, is the revealing and encouraging of the reader's ability to "really" be the mentally ill or self-endangering figure (i.e., beyond textual identifications and fantasies), and the equating of the mentally ill figure with the individual reading. Wurtzel emphasises this by rendering herself as cultural consumer, but also by acknowledging that appearances can be deceptive, that the mentally ill could be anyone: 'all these women who seem to be in enviable positions are in fact mired in misery' (229).[25] Wurtzel's memoir is the one that most effectively, yet most insidiously, implicates the reader. As Amanda Filipacce states this is a 'dangerous book to read.

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[25] Similarly, in *The Beast*, Tracy Thompson reveals the shocked reaction when a successful woman journalist, in fact her role model, commits suicide (81-83). This of course resonates in the esteem by which Millett or Plath and Woolf are held: the mentally ill could be anybody but not just *anybody*.

You begin, intending perhaps to get acquainted with the interesting topic of irrational, demonic depression, but after just a few pages, you get the uneasy sensation that the topic is getting acquainted with you'.[26] As Wurtzel states in her Afterword this was her explicit wish: to make the experience of reading her book 'akin to' (356) that of dealing with a depressive, to involve the reader profoundly in the realities of the illness. A knowingness runs through her narrative, and through her astute humour and insightful detail Wurtzel reverses the terms of the discussion, the states of power, more than the other memoirists. The irony of the following extract resounds beyond the articulation of the denial of self-endangerment and its familiar deflection into a murderousness, to the fact that it is not Wurtzel who has been unmoored from subjectivity, not her confusing her pronouns:

> To demonstrate how upset she is, my mother opens up my bedroom window and tells me she is going to throw herself out if I don't swear that I'll never do anything like this again...
>
> And she keeps saying, how can you do this to me?
>
> And I want to scream, What do you mean, how can *I* do this to *you*? Aren't we confusing our pronouns here? The question, really, is
>
> How could *I* do this to *myself*? (106, original emphasis).

Wurtzel establishes a general state of implication not through challenging the traditional definitions but rather through revealing society's irregularity. Wurtzel's work operates precisely in the middle ground, between spectacle and everydayness, "them and us", subject and object. Her breaching of the divides, her middle ground, is not about a levelling of interpretation or experience, but an acceptance of their leaky borders, their faultlines perhaps. Her approach is at once more daring, more radical and less innately political/diplomatic than Millett's, reaping the benefits of post-liberation movements, the privilege of being 'young and depressed in America'. Subsequently perhaps, Wurtzel's narrative is interwoven with a steady stream of cultural references. In her array of quotations, from Bruce Springstein to Einstein (205, 133), Wurtzel places her life in a historical and cultural context and thus a general and shared context. She creates a community of equals through the general pronouns of common experience: '[b]y the time the radical sixties hit their home bases, we, the kids, were already born....A little too

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[26] Amanda Filipacce qtd. on the flyleaf to Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*.

old to take full advantage of the cultural revolution, our parents just got all the fallout' (24-25).

Wurtzel also incorporates into her rhetoric statistical figures on the disease (confirming how widespread and how youth oriented it is, and how its male constituency is growing and equalising in proportion to that of females).[27] She steadily broadens the state of implication, to encompass a nation, a Prozac Nation:

> But all this coverage is not just about Prozac. It's about the mainstreaming of mental illness in general and depression in particular. It is about the way a state of mind once considered tragic has become completely commonplace, even worthy of comedy. It seemed that suddenly, some time in 1990, I ceased to be this freakishly depressed person who had scared the hell out of people for most of my life with my mood swings and tantrums and crying spells, and I instead became downright trendy. This private world of loony bins and weird people that I had always felt I occupied and hid in had suddenly been turned inside out so that it seemed like this was one big Prozac Nation, one big mess of malaise (335-36).

Wurtzel's memoir ends with the ultimate implication of the anonymous masses. In the Afterword to the paperback edition of the book, she states her aims in writing the memoir: to present the truth of the illness and its randomness, but also, 'I wanted so very badly to write a book that felt as bad as it feels to feel *this* bad, to feel depressed' (356). To procure this intensity of identification (and of implication) required an attack on the faultline in not only the reader's safe shell of self-endangerment--that defensive wall of reassurances, within engaging with a text, and of distancing the mad--but in her own and in society's.

What I have been exploring in this chapter so far is how it is not only the subject matter that directs the discussion to self-endangerment, but, as will prove true of all the texts under investigation in this thesis, the style in which it is presented: the literary (and, later, cinematic) tropes that convey self-endangerment on other levels. The tropes employed within these memoirs' strategies of implication--such as the theatricality,

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[27] See Wurtzel, 337.

visuality, or self-reflexivity of the writing--introduce themes and techniques that will be increasingly scrutinised as the study develops. Often integral to the interrelation of the representation of self-endangerment and this question of style, is the matter of media or genre. In the final discussion of this chapter I want to consider the status of these memoirs as autobiographical accounts, to locate them in terms of the genre of autobiography--a genre traditionally oppositional not only to self-endangerment, but to illness and even to women--but also in relation to counter-theories that are insufficient to contain them and their representations of self-risk.

C: A Sense of an Ending:

Memoirs of Mental Illness as Anti-autobiography

'Autobiographers give their lives to be understood by others in a dangerously elaborate form'.[28] While John Sturrock, in the introduction to his study of classical autobiography, supplies a witty, albeit unwitting, reference to a work's self-endangerment, autobiography as a genre must be seen as inhospitable to the representation of self-endangerment and thus to these memoirs as autobiographical texts. That is not to say that the autobiographer doesn't narrate life-threatening experiences. Indeed, not only must autobiography 'involve a degree...of struggle',[29] but many of this century's autobiographies, according to Marilyn Chandler, 'focus upon episodes of crisis' both physical and mental.[30] But such "crisis narratives"--often tales of grave personal risk by 'victims of extremity'--are precisely about self-*recovery*, about 'purging guilt and pain' and 're-centering the self'.[31] Indeed, classical autobiography has a specific relationship to the establishment of self; its legacy is the veneration of the self's strength. Sturrock exposes the aim of autobiography as the subject's strike at unity, at 'singularization': 'the

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[28] John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 1.

[29] Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 3-4.

[30] Marilyn R. Chandler, *A Healing Art: Regeneration Through Autobiography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990) ix.

[31] Chandler, ix. Otherwise the memoirs of mental illness correspond to Chandler's general characterisation of crisis narratives from post World War I to the 1970s, as self-conscious, as focused 'upon a single critical period' rather than a life, and as frequently 'written toward the beginning rather than at the end of a career' (9, 10).

autobiographer wishes to stand forth in print in the form of a *whole*'.[32] Autobiography marks the self as complete, contained, sturdy and assured.[33] Thus it appeals to a sense of the linear, the monologic, and a decidedly patriarchal project: 'as a literary genre [it] has traditionally been one of those masculine institutions: by and about men'.[34] As such, it is stained with ideological intent and autobiography studies has become a site of contention not only for poststructuralism, which rejects such distinctions of the self, but also for feminism.[35] These theories' claims will certainly aid in the location of the memoirs of mental illness as forms of anti-autobiography but also differentiate them as representations of self-endangerment. Before moving onto this discussion, a further characteristic of classical autobiography is pertinent here--its exemplariness: '[t]he very authority of masculine autobiography derives from the assumption held by both author and reader that the life being written/read is an exemplary one'.[36] That these memoirs tell of tantrums, tears, and tragedy, they are far from idealising their subjects. Autobiography's self-reverence, then, is not just as the veneration of selfhood per se, but of a particular kind of selfhood: a good, worthy, heroic and necessarily male selfhood.

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[32] Sturrock, 14, 4, original emphasis.

[33] Theorists of autobiography offer variations on this theme of its characteristics. Estelle Jelinek, for example, summarises them as 'orderliness, wholeness, or a harmonious shaping' in her edited collection (*Women's* 19), and Juhasz sees them as '[s]ignificance, objectivity, distance' in her essay within Jelinek's collection: 'Towards' 222.

[34] Juhasz, 221.

[35] Indeed, in her introduction Jelinek notes James Cox's "gendered" connection of the history of America and the history of Autobiography: 'the periods of greatest productivity in autobiography correspond to important events in American history....The periods of increased diary writing by men, for example, during the Revolution and the Gold Rush, are periods of decreased productivity by women'. Jelinek, *Women's* 5 with reference to James M. Cox, 'Autobiography and America', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 47 (1971): 252-77.

[36] Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 2-3. This idealising tendency has been deemed necessary to the universal potential of autobiography--'[m]en tend to idealize their lives or to cast them into heroic molds to project their universal import' (Jelinek, *Women's* 14)--but has been criticised as a measure of a text's worth. Laura Marcus, for example, strongly criticises feminist (mis)recognition and veneration of exemplariness within women's autobiography, presumably as a perpetuation of the 'maleness' or ideology of autobiography; see her 'Coming Out in Print: Woman's Autobiographical Writings Revisited', *Prose Studies*, 10.1 (1987): 102-07.

The memoirs of mental illness are immediately outside of classical autobiography in their depiction and perpetuation of self-endangerment rather than self-consolidation, in the fragile selves of their predominantly female anti-heroes, and in their emphasis upon implicating the reader. They oppose the "self" of classical autobiography on each of its fronts: as singular, and as exemplary and male--i.e., as heroic. While this corresponds to the poststructuralist approach to the genre, these memoirs must also be seen to oppose the dismissal or dispersal of self that such an approach warrants.[37]

The Singular and the Heroic

'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel'.[38] This, the opening directive by Roland Barthes in his autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, identifies autobiography as fictional literature. With reader-response theory's reorientation of meaning to the reader--the reader's determining of interpretation, however independently--all texts become fiction and all truths that they assert are unhinged from the restrictions of fact or singularity. Autobiography's promise of self-certainty is found illusory: its self-advertisement, self-effacing.[39] The very idea of the author is dismissed by "his" death--that popular battle cry--and by myriad challenges to "his" singularity. Wayne Booth, for example, identifies '[w]riters, [d]ramatized [a]uthors, [i]mplied [a]uthors, [c]areer [a]uthors, [p]ublic "[c]haracters"' as 'five figures to whom the word "author" is sometimes applied'.[40] Similarly, Katherine Goodman sees the autobiographer, who like every writer 'creates "a second self"', as 'a linguistic construct severed from authentic experience'.[41] Like the divided process of reading invoked in the introduction to this thesis, so, here, a divided process of writing denies

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[37] This idea of discounting the self, denying its agency, becomes an increasingly important factor in this thesis, especially in distinguishing these representations from postmodernist intent and inquiry.

[38] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (1975; London: MacMillan, 1977) flyleaf.

[39] 'But if modernist self-effacement is a form of self-advertisement, then, by the logic of paradox, self-advertisement is conversely a form of self-effacement'. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) 199.

[40] Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 268.

[41] Katherine R. Goodman, 'Elisabeth to Meta: Epistolary Autobiography and the Postulation of the Self', *Life/Lines*, ed. Brodzki, 308.

any wholeness of autobiography. Neither can autobiography be seen as static or one sided. As Elizabeth Freund has noted of Holland's psychoanalytic reader-response theory, '[t]he novelty of the model lies in its large-scale licensing of the intrusion of biographical materials. Interpretation willy-nilly, becomes a confessional mode'.[42] In this model, then, autobiography is limitless and ubiquitous. All autobiography is fiction and all interpretation autobiographical.

In many ways these memoirs of mental illness, and my interpretation of them, correspond to this anti-autobiographical rejection of a secure or singular sense of self. This is true not only in terms of the illness which distorts, shakes or splinters the writers' selves--so that Kaysen, for example, only wants 'to get rid of a certain aspect' of her character or to kill only 'a part of' herself (39, 37)--but in terms of the memoirists' writing styles which undermine the sovereignty or exclusivity of any one position, of the subject or object within Kaysen's or Styron's suicide fantasies or Wurtzel's self-spectacles. However, these texts are powerfully distinct from poststructuralist thinking in crucial ways: they maintain a clear sense of personal experience, 'asserting unique knowledge of that unique subject, the self',[43] even as they distance themselves from autobiography, and, as I suggested in the last section, they mean to unmask the implication or agency of the individual reader even as they disperse the specificity of events. While (mental illness's) randomness might conjure poststructuralism's convoluted highways of multiple systems of signifiers, rather than the self being lost in the endless deferral of meaning, the memoirists mean something quite specific. Wurtzel, for example, strains to evoke her particular intent 'to write a book that felt as bad as it feels to feel *this* bad...to be completely true to the experience' (356). The memoirists exploit the universal potential of the autobiographical self to implicate all in the particular, albeit random, experience of mental illness. They dismiss the singularity or exclusivity of the self, but do so in order to include or implicate the reader within mental illness--discharging the possibility that, as Millett puts it, it is 'someone else's bad luck but not mine' (11)--and within the pleasure in witnessing it, '*delightful* [as it is] *to the beholder*' (*Prozac* 294, original emphasis).

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[42] Elizabeth Freund, *The Return to the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) 125.

[43] Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Selves in Hiding', *Women's*, ed. Jelinek, 112.

Rather than staking their path from 'an anonymous "we" to a self-affirming "I"'--'autobiography's ostensible project'[44]--the memoirs move from the self-endangered "I" to the implicated anonymous "we" in a synchronised assertion of identity. With the insecurity and denial of the stability of the narrator, the reader is strangely positioned as both intensely and intimately connected to the narrator and yet reminded that that sense of self is undermined. Yet even within this, a very strong sense of self is maintained--a self-consciousness--so that it is, instead, the notion of the singularity or sovereignty, or even, as for Millett, the sanity of the self, that seems suspect, as a 'religion' or 'ideology' (87). There is no recovered or cured self at the memoirs' conclusion, at least not cure in a safe, irreversible, triumphant autobiographical way. Styron invokes Sisyphus in fear of relapse into illness--a useful symbol for each writer's reservations, reservations which 'haunt [Manning] daily' (*Undercurrents* 196)--but is otherwise joyful in his improved mental health and state of recovery, in being 'no longer a husk but a body with some of the body's sweet juices stirring again' (*Darkness* 75). Lori Schiller 'still hear[s] the Voices from time to time' but 'shake[s] [her]self back to reality' (269). Jamison 'long ago abandoned the notion of a life without storms' but rejoices in the 'limitless views' her illness has afforded (213, 216). Millett is triumphant, not in overcoming the illness but rather in overcoming the diagnosis and medication: she stops taking lithium and '[n]othing happened. Nothing ever happened' (310). Yet, for her, it is not the depression that required curing, but the ills of society, and the narrative ends with the non-event of withdrawal and her anti-psychiatric address. Kaysen and Wurtzel seem gratified in their self-awareness, concluding their texts with reflections upon their illnesses. Kaysen's 'misery has been transformed into common unhappiness, so by Freud's definition I have achieved mental health' (154), whilst for Wurtzel '[t]he black wave, for the most part, is gone. On a good day, I don't even think about it anymore' (331). Each writer seems grateful in his or her own way, but there is no final secure, isolated, or authoritively known self; there is no fixed sanity.

With the move away from any sense of a singular or, rather, unique author or reader, the idea of an anonymous community, recipient or "we" can enter. But while it is anonymous it is not devoid of the responsibility that such an attribution usually carries.

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[44] This project is, as Marcus continues, only 'invented...some way into the text' (*Auto/biographical* 276).

Indeed, one of the key elements to come out of the strategies of implication is the emphasis upon individual agency as the reader's active implication in mental illness and in the representation of self-endangerment. Rather than self-endangerment continuing to be disavowed, it is to be unmasked or "owned" as, for example, the instinctive reaction to the mad--of Kaysen's translations of imagined dialogues: '[i]f you're crazy, then I'm crazy' (125) or Wurtzel's voyeuristic 'rubberneckers' (294)--or even as the best-seller buyer's purchasing preferences.[45] Where poststructuralism (or postmodernism) pursues the unfixity of the final "I" of autobiography, these memoirs seek in some ways to fix the "I" of the anonymous masses. If there is a sense of a secure differentiated "I" by the texts' conclusion, or at least a more secure sense of the narrator's self, it is deliberately constructed as attainable or available to the reader (and public); indeed each of the four memoirs ends with a gesture of universality.[46] Kaysen concludes her memoir with a return to the Vermeer painting that had haunted her illness and her articulation of it. But no longer does "the girl at her music" embody Kaysen's personal entrapment and desperation but a universal (and seemingly random) condition: now the girl 'sits in...the fitful, overcast light of life, by which we see ourselves and others only imperfectly, and seldom' (168). Like Styron, Millett's conclusion is brimful of charges of the universal condition and lacking in personal pronouns. For her this is not to inspire the conventional "conquerability" of mental illness, the vanquishing imperative of humanity 'trudging upward and upward' as in Styron's narrative (*Darkness* 84), but to halt 'interfering relatives or state psychiatry. The human condition is helped best by being respected' (*Loony* 315). Wurtzel, as I stressed in the last section, ends with the uttermost evocation of the anonymous masses as a 'Prozac Nation' (336). But she also differentiates herself from them, in order to reinstate the individual: 'to make sure people know that I am not just on Prozac but on lithium too, that I am a real sicko' (*Prozac* 342).

These memoirs of mental illness seem to unite elements of autobiography and poststructuralism and, in doing so, provide perfect examples of the negotiation of the

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[45] Jill Ker Conway notes that '[a]utobiography [is] the most popular form of fiction for modern readers' in her *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography* (New York: Vintage, 1999) 3.

[46] Likewise, Jamison notes how '[w]e all build internal sea walls to keep at bay the sadnesses of life' (212).

two areas' conflicting aims. This kind of negotiation has been seen as the challenge facing contemporary autobiography: to reconcile autobiography's importance as socio-historical record with 'political and theoretical perspectives sceptical of traditional concepts of subjectivity, individualism and textual authority'.[47] This challenge arose from assertions, within feminism and left-wing politics, of the dangers of anti-autobiography which denied women (and all other oppressed groups, the mad included) the verity and validity of their personal histories. As Goodman notes of deconstruction's anti-autobiographical intent:

> It is difficult to imagine a concept of writing and expression more antithetical to traditional definitions of autobiography or to recent feminist concerns with women's experience. Barthes's and Foucault's analysis dissolve the very interiority of the autobiographical subject into a pose or, at best, a role and nothing more...
>
> Feminists, however, know that it makes a great deal of difference who is speaking.[48]

These memoirs, as (predominantly) women's writing and as writings about the reality of illness, could be seen precisely as representing the working out of this conflict between the dissolution of the singular self yet the validation of individual experience.[49] The combination of these politicised needs is the fertile ground of autobiography, its mediation of the contemporary status of the self:

> A feminist reconstruction of women's autobiography, against a backdrop of twentieth century philosophical questioning of the self, can begin to use autobiography for the fertile ground it is. Autobiography localizes the very program of much feminist theory--the reclaiming of the female

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[47] Laura Marcus, '"Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me": Recent Autobiographical Writing', *New Formations*, 1 Spring (1987): 77.
[48] Goodman, 308. Her discussion refers to Barthes, 'Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48, and Foucault, 'What Is An Author?' *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).
[49] Similarly, women's autobiography has been seen to gain a 'political edge' in combining the assertion of first-hand experience with that of 'collective testimony', see Julia Swindells, 'Conclusion: Autobiography and the Politics of "The Personal"', *The Uses of Autobiography*, ed. Julia Swindells (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995) 213.

> subject--even as it foregrounds the central issue of contemporary critical thought--the problematic status of the self.[50]

In these memoirs, this mediation operates through the strategies of implication: the very methods of insinuating the reader (the "we") within the unstable self of the personal experience (the fragile but enduring "I").

But what of these memoirs as typically female texts? I don't want to be drawn into the vast area of writing and gender to support a claim that these memoirs are distinctly feminine in my concurrence that they 'obfuscate the boundary between the self of the author and the subject of the discourse, as well as between the self and the audience, whereas the male mode tends to accentuate such boundaries'.[51] Nor will I celebrate them simply for 'challeng[ing]... conventionality by the very fact of [their] existence'.[52] Rather, with reference to the theorisation of women's autobiography, they will be differentiated to show once more that the representation of self-endangerment is not to be subsumed under the aegises of other discourses.

Historically, however, memoirs are female forms. The classification of women's work as memoir was meant to mark their difference from (and inferiority to) autobiography but also their exclusion from the genre.[53] These personal narratives of

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[50] Brodzki, 1-2.

[51] Thomas J. Farrell, 'The Female and Male Modes of Rhetoric', *College English* 40.8 (1979): 910. For a discussion of the relationship between gender and language see Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1985). For the implicit male "point of view" of language see Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 159-78. For a discussion of "*l'ecriture feminine*" and Hélène Cixous's "writing the body": a feminine (although not exclusively woman-owned) writing borne of the direct inscription of the experience of the body onto the page see Cixous, 'Laugh of the Medusa', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* ed. and intro. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981) 245-64.

[52] Mary Elene Wood, *Writings on the Wall: Women's Autobiography and the Asylum* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 13.

[53] This was deemed a result of both form and content: 'private, personal, and secret writing occur[red] in the diary. No one would question the autobiographical nature of such writing; but its status as "autobiography," which is a formal and public literary genre, has traditionally been denied' (Juhasz, 222). Marcus notes the general distinction between the two forms of life-writing: 'autobiography as the evocation of a life as a totality, and "memoirs" which offer only an anecdotal depiction of people and events' (*Auto/Biographical* 3).

mental illness might seem to fulfill the contemporary ascription of memoir,[54] yet not only do they lack the domesticity or limited focus of female life-writing, but my argument here is specifically about claiming them as important historical and cultural texts, representative of the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment.

The memoirists' approach to some extent is typical of women's autobiography, for they do not conduct the male's secure and sure self but 'exploit instead a rhetoric of *uncertainty*'.[55] Patricia Meyer Spacks goes on to state of women's autobiography that:

> In writing of themselves, these women of public accomplishment implicitly stress uncertainties of the personal, denying rather than glorifying ambition, evading rather than enlarging private selves. They use autobiography, paradoxically, partly as a mode of self-denial....Even as they tell of unusual accomplishment, in other words, they finally hide from self-assertion. Their strategies of narrative reflect both a female dilemma and a female solution to it.[56]

She promotes this writing style as that compromise between deconstruction and feminism, reading into a (familiarly female) lack of self-assertion, the reconciliation of self-reverence and self-effacement, of dismissing the singular self whilst confirming the individual life story. While she seems to present a legacy of women's "self-denying" autobiography, these memoirs of mental illness are quite different from them. They are not the modest accounts of exceptional lives, rather they are immodest revelations of disturbed and disturbing experience: the 'fidgety recklessness' (*Darkness* 44) of 'freakishly depressed' people (*Prozac* 335). There is no feminine self-deprecation lining their charm; their self-denial is not essentially female. (While Millett's feminist work certainly connects self-denial to patriarchal oppression, this is only ever a problem, never a solution.) Estelle Jelinek's discovery that women's autobiography is 'often powered by the motive to convince readers of their self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to

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[54] Jelinek has noted how '[w]oman's self-portraits are still classified as memoirs or reminiscences because of their fragmented forms, their focus on others, and their lack of heroic self-assertion, all of which are considered obstacles to the shaping of "true" autobiography', in *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 188.

[55] Spacks, 131, original emphasis.

[56] Spacks, 132.

authenticate their self-image',[57] is, similarly, alien to these memoirs, as Kaysen illustrates: 'I often ask myself if I'm crazy. I ask other people too' (159).

While a critique of the memoirs of mental illness so obviously benefits from feminist theories of autobiography, gender seems peripheral to their concerns. Even for Millett the dominant factor of her personal record is, instead, illness.[58] Although these memoirs can, thus, be recognised as innately oppositional, they are not about the illness of the physical body, its corporeal signs of illness, its display of disease, but instead they are about the illness of the mind: the realm of reason, of the rational, of the male. A sceptical response to this would attribute the books' popularity to just this retained strand of "masculinisation".[59] However, the overwhelming anti-autobiographical evidence dismantles this proposition, instating instead strategies of implication unconstrained by gender. William Styron's memoir, I would suggest, is not feminised by association with the others, as autopathography, as a memoir of illness, but rather in its tone. While he was seen to spearhead this new genre of what's been called autopathography (by Kramer and G. Thomas Couser) or a literature of depression (by Wurtzel), his memoir is noticeably different. As Wurtzel says of *Darkness Visible*:

> [It] always rang false to me, always seemed too polite, too apologetic, too careful--it was often as if Styron was ashamed of what he experienced....[D]epression for him must have seemed a very embarrassing thing indeed, something to hide, to keep inside (360).

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[57] Jelinek, *Women's* 15.

[58] Yet illness is also, historically, gendered female. In the classical autobiographical tendency, the Western privileging of health over sickness has been seen to correspond to the valuing of male over female, as G. Thomas Couser writes:

> According to Woolf, illness has not been a prime literary subject in part because of a masculinist valorization of the mind over the body....With recent developments in autopathography, then, we have a return of the doubly, or perhaps triply, repressed--an overt, unembarrassed, unapologetic representation of the ill, female body.

Couser, 'Autopathography: Women, Illness, and Lifewriting', *Voices from the Front, A/B: Autobiography Studies*, ed. Marilyn Chandler, 6.1 (1991): 73. Additionally, for a discussion of the relationship between narrative and the feminisation of illness, see Stacey, 8-13.

[59] Indeed, the lack of critical attention to autopathographies, noted by Couser, would confirm this preference; see Couser, 65.

In this way, Styron would seem to exhibit exactly that "female dilemma and solution to it", that Spacks wrote of, and which Wurtzel firmly distances herself from. But was his memoir so powerful and popular because it represented that much more of a transgression of the rules of (male) autobiography than for the female writers?

These memoirs of mental illness oppose the very tenets of autobiography, not only in terms of the linearity or consolidation of the self, but in terms of its exemplariness, its worth and validity. In fact, they directly confront self-preservation which is surely one clear aim of autobiography, resonating as it does in the immortalising function of the word. While the popular press's representation of the mentally ill suggests the denial of self-endangerment, these memoirs instead implicate the reader within this self-endangerment. They combat the stigmatisation of the mentally ill, the false but popular images of them. Yet, the fact that these memoirs are popular--as bestsellers--means that there must be a desire for this unsafe self-endangerment. Is this desire simply a symptom of the *zeitgeist*, of '[m]isery chic' (*Prozac* 349), of the need for increased thrills in a technological society, or of a cheapening of life? Is it about a proliferation of discourses surrounding contentious topics or a mere 'celebration of our own survival'?[60] Is this simply the age of self-endangerment?

In this first chapter I have proposed how the memoirs of mental illness undermine the safe distances constructed for the reader by the popular representation of mental illness, and the reassurances essential to both autobiography and to reading itself. Reading, or engaging with a text, had been shown to be a self-endangering experience which is made safe by the text's conclusion, by the end of engagement. In turning to film and its dominant form, classical Hollywood narrative, such reassurances prove all the more explicit in their ideological intent. Where the memoirists confront the conventions of social decorum, and of genre, the mainstream filmic texts in chapter two, will be shown to both indulge and contain the fascination with self-endangerment that they evidence.

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[60] Doris Grumbach offers this reason for the appeal of newspaper obituaries in *Life in a Day* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 47.

CHAPTER TWO

A: Self-endangerment and Mental Illness in Contemporary Mainstream Cinema

In this chapter I will cast the implicated reader (of reader-response theory) against the absorbed viewer (of film theory)--the cinematic self against the fragile self of fiction--and thus relate the psychic self-endangerment of viewing to the representation of self-risk as mental illness in contemporary cinema. In considering how the end of viewing, especially of the mainstream film, corresponds to that restoration of subjectivity occurring at the literary text's close, I continue to explore the reassuring role, or dualistic potential, of self-endangerment. My key concern, here, is how the representation of mental illness as self-risk translates onto the screen. The status of the spectator's implicatedness necessarily accompanies this exploration of the cinematic construction of self-endangerment, but it is in the final section of the chapter that I weigh up the safety for the spectator through a discussion of self-reflexivity. My focus, here, is Hollywood cinema and in particular the films *Fearless* (Peter Weir, 1993) and *Mr Jones* (Mike Figgis, 1994). These films intervene into the ideological conventions of narrative form and their dealings with madness precisely in terms of the representation of self-endangerment but, ultimately, "manage" their affects or implications. Before moving onto the filmic examples, I need first to establish the relationship between classic cinema, classic spectatorship and the ideology of self-affirmation.

Classical Narrative Cinema and Self-affirmation

Like the reader, the viewer's primary mode of engagement or absorption in the film text has been best understood as identification: the various degrees of 'assimilation by the subject of an other'.[1] This process has been seen, through psychoanalytic film theory, as the primary means of understanding visual pleasure and the psychic and psycho-social role of cinema. I am not concerned here with charting or accounting for the various degrees of identification, but rather with demonstrating how psychoanalytic film theory

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[1] Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, eds., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 1992) 149.

adds important insight into a developing sense of the duality of self-endangerment. In so doing, film is shown to depend upon and enact key psychic processes that entertain and reassure the spectator and, like all cultural representations, play a crucial role in the formulation of the self.

Christian Metz, in his influential work on psychoanalysis and cinema, *The Imaginary Signifier*, connected Lacan's mirror stage of child development to the spectatorial experience of cinema (a connection that formed the basis of Mulvey's focus on gender). This crucial event in ego formation (primary identification)--when the infant, held up by its mother to a mirror, 'sees itself as an other, and beside an other...[and] identifies with itself as an object'[2]--provided Metz with the perfect paradigm for the spectator's experience in front of the cinema screen: his or her ability to identify with the on-screen figure. This identification with the screen-image can only occur because 'the spectator has already known the experience of the mirror (of the true mirror), and is thus able to constitute a world of objects without having first to recognise himself within it'.[3] This reviving of the early experience was called primary cinematic identification by Metz. The important point here is that the spectator's engagement in the filmic text is rooted in the machinations of self-consolidation. Yet, while the mirror stage was an essential part of the differentiation and consolidation of the child's ego or self, identification incurs a temporary loss of ego or self, as was suggested in the thesis introduction. Thus, we again confirm reading/viewing as a dual process--as self-affirmation only through self-loss.[4] The self-endangerment of viewing is rendered safe not only through any reassurances of closure, but through those of identification itself. However, as will become clear through the path of the chapter, this self-affirmation is only a 'delusion of

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[2] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (1977; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 45.

[3] Metz, 46.

[4] This combination has been seen as 'part of the cinema's fascination [which] comes from the fact that while it allows for the temporary loss of ego (the film spectator "becomes" someone else), it simultaneously reinforces the ego (through invocation of the mirror phase)' (Stam, 152).

stability',[5] a delusion that performs the most protective or conservative of roles yet will be revealed as ever more frail and functional.

Like autobiography, mainstream popular cinema has a particular narratival relationship to self-affirmation.[6] Broadly put, narrative closure is traditionally marked by the triumph of the protagonist's self over adversity (even though closure can involve the death of a character, even the protagonist).[7] This trajectory can be recast as a narrative investment in recovery, a formulation that proves especially meaningful for the analysis of filmic representations of illness.

Classical Hollywood cinema is the defining system at the basis of mainstream film production and has become synonymous with its principle characteristic, the traditional narrative--the succession of events in a '*cause-effect relationship*'[8]--of which closure is a key feature. It is the ultimate expression of narrative intent, confirming the meeting of expectations, the answering of questions and the stilling of movement. In chapter one I recalled how narratives of illness often follow traditional paths of bravery and triumph, but narrative itself can be seen as a passage to the resolution of problems, to the recovery of harmony, as, in fact, about cure. Cure, a recurring theme in this thesis, will be discussed through *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* in its capacity to embody both the

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[5] Maud Ellmann, 'Failing to Fail', rev. of *Acts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Essays in Criticism*, XLV.1 (1995): 90. In line with Bersani and Dutoit, identification will prove to be not only self-endangering but unfixed. However, the camera *does not* '[rescue] us from these self-shattering identifications' (Ellmann, 'Failing' 90), but in *Mr Jones*, especially, aids the characters' alternation between subject and object status, between their availability as figures for identification.

[6] Auteurism--the distinction of a singular self (the director) who controls the film--is an obvious site for the exemplification of this point. However, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, I am choosing instead to qualify it through the psychic mechanism of viewing, based upon my accordance with the poststructuralist dismantling of the privileged author.

[7] For a discussion of the 'ideological tendency of death as closure' in mainstream film, and how it is split from closure in new wave cinemas, see Catherine Russell, *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure, and New Wave Cinemas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 2. See also Richard Neupert on the varying degrees of closure in film: *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

[8] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* 4th ed. (1979; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) 65, original emphasis.

conservatism of the text and the implicated viewer's therapeutic investment, but, here, let us call this passage the "recovery momentum" of the narrative.

The will to closure is a formidable force. It is crucial to mainstream film, condensed into the happy ending and, frequently, its gestures of conventional love: unification, domestication and marriage. As we look further into the recovery momentum of mainstream narrative, as a psychic and social passage to self-reaffirmation, we find strategies for not only maintaining the status quo but, more explicitly, maintaining it as the reinforcement of patriarchy, of sexual difference and of heterosexuality. While both *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* suggest this reinforcement (both end with the bonding of the romantic couple), at this juncture it is not the meaning or ideology of narrative that is of importance, but rather its structuring, the idea of closure as a return following disruption. Two key theorists of narrative, Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov, speak to this sense of recovery. Todorov turned Propp's conception of the narrative's struggles between, for example, good and evil (as hero and villain),[9] into the equilibrating path of a narrative: the opening state of social harmony suffers a disruption, usually in the form of a villain's intervention, before order or, as John Fiske puts it, 'another, preferably enhanced or more stable, state of equilibrium' is restored.[10]

The recovery momentum proves a useful analogue for mainstream cinema's investment in self-affirmation and for my filmic examples' conservatism. The classic narrative film and the contemporary Hollywood product are generally resistant to the representation of the protagonist's self-harm, and it is highly unusual for a film to evade the self-restoration of closure. Death and suicide feature within film history but predominantly as conservative elements of the narrative: ideologically incorporated into

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[9] Propp posited a universal structure of popular narrative through his study of one hundred Russian folktales. Regardless of the numerous differences in their stories, the tales shared a fixed group of functions. While evidencing an irreducible structure to the tales, these functions charted a highly moral or social imperative in the struggles between, for example, good and evil as hero and villain. These struggles were implicit to the narrative and fortified in closure. See Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

[10] See Todorov, 'The Two Principles of Narrative', *Diacritics*, 1.1 (Fall 1971) 37-44, and John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987) 138-39. As Fiske continues, the degree to which this equilibrium represents convention is not expressed overtly but, rather, it is confirmed through contrast to the disruptive force.

the recovery momentum. In tragedy, the closing death of (at least) the protagonist is a requisite of the genre (and of the aggrandisement of the narrative), and consolidates "his" self, in terms of class, power and nobility. Suicide often serves as a necessary punishment of a "deviant" character, for example of the homosexual in *The Sergeant* (John Flynn, 1968).[11] Such examples are very different from the representation of a desire for the taking of one's own life. While mainstream cinema's action movies are replete with risk-taking heroes or villains,[12] self-endangerment *for its own sake* is rare; indeed, it seems antithetical to the project of self-affirmation. The power of the exceptions, such as *Leaving Las Vegas* (Mike Figgis, 1995) and *It's My Party* (Randal Kleiser, 1996), lies precisely in the fundamental difference--and extreme emotivity--of having the protagonist, with whom we so strongly and so subjectively identify, aim to die. The former film tells of an alcoholic's aim to drink himself to death, the latter of a man about to die of AIDS who takes a lethal dose. Although these films certainly contribute to the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment, their willed, inevitable endings are set up as the logical conclusion to the cause-and-effect narrative passage. Neither are about the protagonist's mental illness but his mental release: premeditated actions which over the whole course of the film are reasoned and worked for.

The investment in self-affirmation is also evident in mainstream cinema's inhospitality to certain representations of mental illness, that is, as an enduring "fragile" state, yet welcoming to others, that is, as a condition or enemy to be overcome. Indeed, the general representation of mental illness corresponds to this scheme. Mental illness often provides the disruptive adverse conditions, the mad monsters or crazed killers that flood the thriller and horror genres, or the state of emotional disorder that the hero conquers in the melodrama, restoring equilibrium. With the monstrousness of the mad, from for example *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) to *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan

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[11] See Vito Russo's necrology in his *The Celluloid Closet* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) 347-49.

[12] Numerous mainstream thrillers in the 1990s--such as *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995), *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995)--abound with the death of male characters. This is, however, usually out of pride or integrity. Even so they testify to the altered cultural investment and one can detect filmmakers' (and the audience's) increasing interest in disrupting this linearity, or conservative momentum.

Demme, 1991), or their temporary instability in melodramas like *Now Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) or *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944), the self-endangerment of mental illness is resisted or denied in a similar way to the popular press's depictions.

Where mental illness is represented as an enduring fragile state is in the made-for-TV movie (made-for).[13] However, these "films", which include *Murder of Innocence* (Tom McLoughlin, 1993), *Out of the Darkness* (Larry Elikan, 1994) and *In the Best Interests of the Children* (Michael Ray Rhodes, 1990),[14] also resist the self-endangerment of mental illness and mirror the popular attention to mental illness in their sensationalism. This is, as Laurie Shulze has argued, a necessary requirement for the made-for's marketability which 'depends on a high degree of responsiveness...for its economic survival and effectiveness in commanding an audience'.[15] The three films withhold any enduring threat by their happy or at least resolved endings. In each, madness acts as the disruptive force of the narrative and all progress conventionally to resolution/equilibrium, as the overcoming of the enemy, the enemy in this case being mental illness. *Murder of Innocence* is more a horror film which, although it declares itself to be based upon a true story, has the primary aim of eliciting extreme fear and pity for the innocent and ends with order restored through the protagonist's (Laurie's) death.

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[13] The first made-for-TV movie was screened in 1966. Increasingly commissioned, by 1972 they were 'established as a force on network television in the United States'. Douglas Gomery, 'Television, Hollywood, and the Development of Movies Made-for-Television', *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches--An Anthology* ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983) 126. They remain a significant feature of both television programming and the cultural marketplace due to their continuing popularity and profit margins, and the greater diversity of film exhibition: the growth of home and foreign video markets and the creation of Home Box Office which was the prime cable company increasing the production of made-fors. See George Mair, *Inside HBO: The Billion Dollars War Between HBO, Hollywood and the Home Video Revolution* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1988).

[14] Other examples are *Call Me Anna* (Gilbert Cates, 1990) and *Trapped and Deceived* (Robert Iscore, 1995).

[15] Laurie Shulze, 'The Made-for-TV Movie: Industrial Practice, Cultural Form, Popular Reception', *Hollywood in The Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 362. Indeed, with the made-for, television is seen to be at its most manipulative, and the audience at its most gullible; see Shulze, 353-54. The films' additional label as True Story can be seen as part of this economic and sensationalist imperative, heightening the stakes of the social problem and the interest of the audience. For a discussion of the ideology of the True Story's "promise of facts", see Derek Paget, *True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

In the Best Interests of the Children and *Out of Darkness* end in hope. Each covers the worsening and then improving condition of the mentally ill figure, the recovery momentum is inscribed by screen titles conveying the passing of time. Determined by quite different factors of production, distribution and exhibition to the feature film, the lack of complexity of these made-fors proffers limited interventions into my study.[16] However, within this chapter's quasi-survey of mental illness in contemporary film, they emphasise poignant issues on the sealing off of mental illness's implications which will be carried into my analyses of Hollywood movies.

All three films depend upon shorthand signs of madness: various condensed gestures of the heroines' mad--unpredictable and dangerous--behaviour. For example, in *In the Best Interests of the Children* or *Out of Darkness*, the ill woman (Callie and Pauline, respectively) draws on the bedroom walls (in *Murder of Innocence* it is the bathroom mirror), and in this way the illness is enacted in the most domestic of spaces or in childish behaviours. In addition, in one scene in *Out of Darkness*, Pauline is lying in the common room of the hospital curled up on a sofa at night. Although the television is on, the screen is filled with static or interference. A similar image is found in *Murder of Innocence* where Laurie is staring at the television interference, a shot previously cross-cut into a montage of scenes of her frenetic activity. It is as if this image becomes a ready symbol for mental illness: that the set is not tuned properly, the frequency is wrong.[17] But what this image clearly demonstrates is how these films not only rely upon and perpetuate the stereotyping of madness, but seek to maintain the distancing of the mentally ill, the spectator's remove, for the "fuzz" on the women's television screens exists in sharp contrast to the clear image on ours.

Like the 1950s social problem film before them, made-fors gain an air of radicalism in engaging with problematic social issues.[18] But also like their predecessors,

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[16] Made-fors are often dismissed by media theorists as trivial in their blatant sensationalism and ratings dependency, and have received little critical attention. As Shulze argues, the made-for-TV movie has been plagued by bad press through its association with low budgets, poor production and exploitational plot lines.

[17] This resonates within the frequent symptom of schizophrenia that messages are imparted to the ill individual through the television.

[18] Made-fors were 'approvingly labeled the "sociological film" by Whitney and the "public service drama" by McGilligan'. Shulze, 352 qtg. Dwight Whitney, 'Cinema's Stepchild Grows Up', *TV Guide*, 20 July 1974: 21 and Patrick McGilligan, 'Movies are Getting Better Than Ever on Television', *American Film* 5 (1980): 52.

they can be seen, ultimately, as conservative texts: in revering the family but also in marking full female health or cure as motherhood.[19] Pauline, Callie and Laurie want to be, but cannot be, good mothers, in contrast to the other women in their families. Both Pauline and Callie lose their children through their condition, which is presented as the true sadness of the story, and Laurie, in her melodramatic and horrific excesses, murders children. Each film repeats the domestication of women and, like the predominantly women's memoirs, repeat a feminisation of mental illness. While this recalls the made-for's categorisation as a feminine form--not just in terms of its "female" subject matter but the female audience that it targets[20]--it also enlarges the ideological framework to my project. This seems especially telling as I move on now from these crazed women to the apparently wise men in *Fearless* and *Mr Jones*. These two films, with their male protagonists and their emphasising, even mythologising, of recovery, allow the men to overcome fully their self-endangering condition. They offer representations of self-risk through the main character's mental illness, not as a murderousness perpetuating the denial of self-endangerment, but as the cinematic representation of the mentally ill figure as the life-risking and implicating central protagonist. *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* integrate these seemingly oppositional characters into their mainstream projects, and in so doing negotiate the interplay between an emphasis upon self-endangerment and conventional reassurances. Although repeating and even reiterating Hollywood's narratival favouring of the male existential experience, *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* are suffused with self-risk and as such offer the fascinating incidence of contrary motivations.

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[19] In social problem films like *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Otto Preminger, 1955) the problemed character (drug-addicted Frankie) is domesticated (by the love of a good woman, Molly) and the institutions and the system validated so that the difficulties are used to reinforce the system. Their 'ultimate function...[is] a celebration of the family'. Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1991) 113.

[20] Shulze has noted how, 'with its reliance on the family melodrama and the romance, its tendency to take up domestic issues, and its penchant for female protagonists and female stars, [it] may indeed lean toward what has come to be called a feminine narrative form' (354-55).

B: Courting Crashing:

The Cinematic Construction of Self-endangerment

The films *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* were released within a year of each other, and what drew me to them initially was a shared image: they both emphasised a scene in which the male lead stood on the ledge of a tall building. It is a recurrent image in *Mr Jones*, framing the narrative--it is where the film starts and where it ends--and in *Fearless*, as well as being pivotal to the plot, it provides the advertising picture; it represents the film. However, while the similarities between these two films run beyond this shared image, so contrary an image of a male lead in a Hollywood narrative, they do not stray far from their association with self-endangerment. In the proceeding discussion I continue my interrogation of the cultural interest in self-endangerment with analyses of two films that will be shown to be strongly invested in it, but to "manage" that investment within their mainstream projects. The discussion is divided into three portions. In the first I explore how their reliance upon popular constructions of the mad (as martyrs) and of narrative (as recovery) seems to distance the viewer from textual implication, while in the second and third, their cinematic emphasis upon self-endangerment is found to work against such distancing effects.

The Holy Fool in Hollywood

Having been rescued from the ledge, Mr Jones (played by Richard Gere) is admitted to a mental hospital, but soon released. When readmitted, he is confirmed as suffering from manic depression. He wins his competency hearing and is discharged rather than involuntarily committed. This displeases his psychiatrist Dr Bowen (played by Lena Olin) to whom an attachment continues to develop until he "crashes" and agrees to remain in hospital as her patient. Bowen uncovers the roots of his problems partly through investigating his story. Taking this as betrayal, Jones leaves the hospital. The doctor pursues him, they are reconciled and their relationship becomes sexual. Bowen eventually resigns, having had Jones transferred. Jones, again betrayed by her, gets released and returns to his earlier manic ways. Warned of his potential suicide attempt, Bowen follows him to the original ledge. Because of her presence he does not jump. The film ends with them reunited, sitting on the roof.

In *Fearless*, a Boeing airplane has crashed. Max Klein (played by Jeff Bridges) is one of the few survivors and leads the others to safety. Suffering from post-traumatic syndrome, Max keeps proving his invincibility to himself by acts of self-endangerment. These include eating strawberries, to which he had been dangerously allergic. Having befriended another traumatised passenger, Carla (played by Rosie Perez), he "cures" her feelings of guilt for her baby's death by reenacting the impact of the plane. She is restored to her self, but Max ends up in intensive care. Recovering, he goes home with his wife (played by Isabella Rossellini) from whom he had separated earlier. He "reacts" to a strawberry but returns from the edge of death.

The central character in each film suffers from a form of mental illness: Jones from manic depression and Max from post-traumatic stress disorder. Both illnesses manifest themselves in the films as self-endangering activities, as suicidal behaviour. However, suicide implies the individual's wittingness of self-destruction, which the films avoid. There is no sense, in advance, that death is the desired outcome of their actions, even when Jones is depressed. In his manic cycle, Jones believes he might fly and during his depression he engages in similarly life-threatening behaviours. Max believes he is immortal, and tests his ability to survive self-endangering stunts. Although the denial of their condition is symptomatic of the illness, both characters assert that this is who they are and they like it. They claim a freedom through these activities, or attach this sense of freedom to a threatened self. While both Jones and Max recall the unpredictability of the mentally ill figure (for the two men are, at times, aggressive as well as self-destructive), their combination of free-spiritedness and uniqueness tinged with self-sacrifice heroicises the "madman". In this way, the films seem to celebrate self-risk and re-create in their protagonists that popular, distanced figure of the madman as "holy fool".[21]

However, this liberatory potential has much in common with anti-psychiatry, within which the holy fool is recast as a kind of implicating intimate. David Cooper, along with R. D. Laing and others, reversed the rules in the treatment of mental illness. In 1962, he conducted the first counter-treatment, replacing the role-bound behaviour of the mental ward with a freer patient-determined routine, what he called an experiment in

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[21] This reading of Max was confirmed in reviews of the film; see for example Terrence Rafferty, 'After the Crash', *New Yorker*, 25 Oct. 1993: 121.

anti-psychiatry.[22] Within this new approach the mentally ill were deemed not only products of a mad society but people to learn from. In the spirit of the 1960s counterculture, they were victims of a mad society but their madness was seen as a process of self-healing. The process was likened to the experience of taking psychedelic, mind-altering drugs, an experience that provided a window to the soul, to heightened perceptions. Thus Laing posited what has been termed his psychedelic model in which mental illness was to be seen not as a period purely of breakdown but of "breakthrough".[23] Much was made of the dramatic self-healing of Mary Barnes, the principle resident of Kingsley Hall, the anti-psychiatric community established by Laing in 1965. Treated by Dr Joseph Burke, her healing process was a reciprocal journey through madness as a voyage of self-discovery, of enlightenment, through which she was guided by the doctor. Although in *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* the freedom that the characters associate with their risk-laden behaviours is ultimately shown to be illusory, the films' (conventional) narrative trajectory of self-awareness follows the psychedelic model. Neither film promotes cure through conventional medical treatment (as in the made-fors), but through various psychoanalytic and anti-psychiatric processes. Like Barnes, Jones's journey/cure is shared by both patient and doctor, by Bowen and Jones, and involves that even more anti-psychiatric potential of the sexual relationship between them.[24] Similarly, both Max and Jones are established as figures to be learnt from: for Carla and for Bowen, respectively.

Although there is this anti-psychiatric emphasis upon reciprocity or implicatedness--the patient and doctor, madman and witness (as doctor or viewer), as mutually involved--it is overshadowed by the figures' detachment as martyrs. *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* combine the anti-psychiatric figure's mystical or spiritual potential--their

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[22] For a discussion of 'Villa 21--An Experiment in Anti-Psychiatry' see David Cooper, *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967) 83-104.

[23] R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1967) 110. For a critical discussion of this psychedelic model, see Miriam Siegler, Humphrey Osmond and Harriet Mann, 'Laing's Models of Madness', *Laing and Anti-Psychiatry*, ed. Robert Boyers and Robert Orrill (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1972) 112-21.

[24] See 'Orgasmic Politics', chapter three of Cooper's *Language of Madness* (1978; Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1980) 65-76. This inter-influencing dynamic is similar to psychoanalysis's transference, but differs in terms of the mutuality of the healing process.

being deemed sacrificial victims of a sicker society--with that of the popular figuring of the madman as holy fool, in their Christ-like depictions. Both Jones and Max are figured as Christ on various occasions. The camera lingers on their crucified poses during self-sacrificial moments, framing them with their arms up and with a bright light behind them. This operates more overtly in *Fearless* where Max is consistently figured as Christ-like: '[s]ymbolism begins intruding when it's evident that Max was injured on his side in the same place as Jesus'.[25] He "saves" the people on the plane. He leads a baby and a child through scenes of chaos, of disaster and destruction. He wishes to save Carla, and does through a self-sacrificing act. He is even labelled the good Samaritan.[26] In one scene his wife kneels at his feet and attends to them while he sleeps in a composition reminiscent of Mary Magdalene's washing the feet of Christ.[27] Jones in many ways wishes to save Elizabeth (Dr Bowen) and can be seen to do so, but his charm and the extent to which he is presented as remarkable are linked more strongly to his masculinity than his divinity.[28]

But why might Max and Jones be figured as Christ, beyond the obvious self-sacrificial inferences and glorification of madness? Most importantly, the use of Christ-like imagery reiterates that cure or resolution shifts its onus from the treatment of illness to the reconciling of mortal restraints, the limits of self, an emphasis upon subjectivity that I identify throughout this study. Also, in detracting from the sense of illness it allows self-risk to operate independently of madness. Self-endangerment escapes the bounds of purely medical diagnosis while drawing attention to its configuration within everyday life and its iconography. The crucifixion as an act of martyrdom is a central cultural reference even to a secular society. In this way, the representation of mental

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[25] Todd McCarthy, rev. of *Fearless*, *Variety*, 18 Oct. 1993: 50.

[26] Jonathan Rayner offers some particularly vivid readings of this theme: '[Max] is coaxed out of his motel room dressed only in a sheet, like Lazarus called forth from the tomb, and on arrival at his home throws the psychologist Dr Perlman and the lawyer Brillstein out of the apartment in an echo of the merchant's expulsion from the temple'. See Jonathan Richard Rayner, 'Generic Dreaming: The Films of Peter Weir', thesis, Sheffield University, 1994, 258.

[27] *The Holy Bible: The Revised Standard Version*, John 12.3, Luke 7.38 (New York: Collins, 1971) 90, 63.

[28] Max, as Christ, could be discussed as similarly sexualised, but this is not made relevant to his illness in the way that it is in *Mr Jones*. Indeed, the irrelevance of sexuality has been seen as characteristic of Weir's films; see Marek Haltof, *Peter Weir: When Cultures Collide* (New York: Twayne, 1996) 124.

illness as self-endangerment assumes not only a broader significance, but a universal intent--a parabolic function emblematic or meaningful for the general population. *Fearless*'s religious indulgence of the exceptional becomes the parable of "everyman" in, or rather as, Mr Jones.[29] The self-endangering figure is known throughout the film as Mr Jones or, even more symbolically, as "man" which his friend Howard also calls him. As well as providing the irony of his status as patient, of a formal address during the couple's growing intimacy, it introduces and maintains the mystery of his identity whilst simultaneously broadening the implications of his condition.[30]

The films' Christ-like depictions are a strange trope. They combine the distancing effect of stereotype and the unattainability of the divine character, with an anti-psychiatric and devotional inducement. They are ambiguous in their intent, conjuring distance for the spectator in their singularity, but also implication in their universality or social significance, and thus, I would suggest, typical or indicative of the films' negotiation of seemingly conflicting forces, of self-affirmation and self-endangerment. The symbolism of the martyr fosters not only religious and spiritual signification, but a masochistic aesthetic, recurring in the imagery of religious martyrs, such as Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* but especially the portrayal of St. Sebastian.[31] It is in its erotic potential that any ambivalence, any conflicting or

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[29] *Fearless* can also be seen to be about everyman in that its narrative is similar to all of Peter Weir's films in its emphasis not only upon 'dreams and visions, myths and archetypes' but the experience of the contemporary man as having 'lost his way'--that "we" are only able to rediscover 'the promptings of our bodies and our souls...through getting in touch with our dreams and sustaining myths'. Don Shiach, *The Films of Peter Weir* (London: Letts, 1993) 9, 8. Similarly, this emphasis upon the mystical has been seen as 'the common thread that bonds Weir's films' (Haltof, 128). While the male protagonist's self-deification might also characterise Weir's *The Mosquito Coast* (1986), his interest in the human condition is expressed as self-endangerment only in *Fearless*.

[30] The universal potential of the Jones character is increased by the fact that to jones or jonesing is American slang for the physical effects/craving that follows drug withdrawal. Indeed, Jones's madness happens because he comes off his medication. While this is a typical occurrence for those suffering from mental illness, the use of the name could imply that his is a physical condition rather than a mental one, that, in anti-psychiatric mode, the drugs cause rather than cure the condition.

[31] Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. As David Morris suggests, the shift from Guido Reni's painting of St. Sebastian (c.1611) to Yukio Mishima's re-creation of it in a photograph by Kishin Shinoyama (1970), confirms not only the aesthetics of the figure of the martyr, but its eroticism. Mishima, in his autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Mask*, trans. Meredith Weatherby (New

controversial role, is most readily available, for it colours the spectator's relationship to the image with suppressed intent and introduces desire into the supposedly pious dynamic.[32] At this point it is useful to consider the potent yet ambiguous function that the Christ figure has played historically and brings to these films, in order to develop the sense of the self-endangerer's accessibility to the audience--whether the films exploit this trope to contain or open up the spectator's interest in self-risk.

The widespread depiction of Christ in Renaissance art provides a rich site for this discussion, in providing two sources for the ambiguous effects of the figure. Firstly, as Leo Steinberg has demonstrated, there is a progressive eroticisation of Christ, a 'demonstrative emphasis' upon his genitals in 'a large body of devotional imagery'.[33] Although 'a long-suppressed...fact',[34] this provides the legacy of the contradictory approach to, and appreciation of, the subject. Secondly, while Jonathan Sawday traces

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York: New Directions, 1949), describes a young man whose first ejaculation occurs upon seeing Reni's portrait. See David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 130-32. This erotic potential is apparent not only in discourses of sadomasochism, but in academic inquiry addressing society's investment in masochism or in murder: a St. Sebastian image dons the covers of Kaja Silverman's study of masculinity and masochism: *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Joel Black's *Aesthetics of Murder* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

[32] Contemporary cinema provides a number of examples of the exploitation of this ambiguous image. The troubled reception of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) evidences the problem of the sexualisation of Christ. In independent cinema, however, the ambivalence of the image has been compellingly expressed in, for example, *Love and Death on Long Island* (Richard Kwietniowski, 1996). In it an aging writer (John Hurt) falls in love with a teen screen idol (Jason Priestly) precisely through an image of him fallen and wounded. Having found the actor, and befriended him, the writer confesses his love in the most self-sacrificial of gestures. The film confirms his attraction to the masochistic aesthetic, and also his entry into it. Jean Genet--renowned for his visions of rough-edged male homosexual desire--has been noted as a major influence on Kwietniowski; see Jane Giles, *The Cinema of Jean Genet* (London: BFI, 1991) 89. A similarly homoerotic veneration of the wounded man can be seen in another doyen of Gay Cinema: Jarman's *Sebastian* (Jarman and Paul Humfress, 1976), but also in Paul Schrader's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990). We might also look to the love of the fallen comrade depicted in *Gods and Monsters* (Bill Condon, 1998) and *Mrs Dalloway* (Marleen Gorris, 1997) as further expressions of this trope.

[33] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 1. He continues that in 'many hundreds of pious, religious works...the ostensive unveiling of the Child's sex, or the touching, protecting or presentation of it, is the main action'.

[34] Steinberg, 1.

the catholic rendering of Christ in the art and poetry of the Renaissance as an often erotic and feminised figuring,[35] his focus is upon its representation of the body's inner volume (the 'canonic *ostentatio vulnerum*'[36]). For Sawday the self-demonstration or self-display of Christ's wounds traverses both catholic and protestant investments, and in so doing reveals the figure's ambiguity:

> But if the catholic tradition tended to stress the *passive* nature of Christ in his passion, protestant versions of the theme tended to place emphasis on active self-scrutiny. This emphasis, in turn, led to the development of the imaginative participation of the observer in the stages of the passion.[37]

It is through the poetry of John Donne, 'replete with self-reflexive images of dissection', that Sawday evidences this 'imaginative participation'.[38] Within them, it is not just that active and passive roles are reversed, but that such polarities become unworkable. Indeed, 'this blurring of roles...is completely consonant with the tradition of sacred self-dissection'.[39] In his replications of the passion narrative, and his role as self-anatomist, Donne affirms the ability of the imaging of Christ and the sacred anatomy--the 'microcosm of creation'[40]--to unite the private and the public, subject and object, victim and perpetrator.[41] It is this blurring of roles that resonates within the various identifications or pleasures available to the spectator at the spectacle of self-sacrifice, both historically and in terms of these films. Indeed, the multiple positions of identification made available within this scenario, exposed by Sawday, is reminiscent of Freud's formulation in 'A Child is Being Beaten' that has been used to convey the flexibility of viewing perspectives adopted by the spectator.[42] It is, then, this blurring of roles--arising from both the eroticisation and inner-display of Christ--that supports the

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[35] See Sawday's discussion of Richard Credshaw's divine epigrams in his *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 119-22.

[36] Steinberg, 1.

[37] Sawday, 122, original emphasis.

[38] Sawday, 122.

[39] Sawday, 127.

[40] Sawday, 96.

[41] For a discussion of a selection of Donne's Poems, Sermons and Devotions in terms of the self-reflexivity of self-dissection, see Sawday, 122-29.

[42] See Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten' (1919) *On Psychopathology*, PFL vol. 10. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1993) 163-93.

claim for the viewer's involvement in these representations, distinguishing a legacy for these Christ-like depictions as strategies of implication within *Fearless* and *Mr Jones*.

But all this happens within the subtlety or slipperiness of subtext. Steinberg's and Sawday's analyses flirt with that which is unconscious or masked, and while I am similarly engaged in asserting its importance--as the concurrent but repressed forces fuelling these contradictory representations--on the surface these films favour shorthand signs of madness both in terms of the two protagonists and in the collection of patients in *Mr Jones*. A farcical table-tennis match in the hospital in *Mr Jones* repeats the caricatural depiction of the group of patients who are firmly established as outside the rules, as colluding in its irregularity by, for example, not keeping the score properly. The collection of patients, in what might be called the "asylum scene", not only provides another subgroup in the cinematic depiction of mental illness, enlarging this chapter's quasi-survey, but confirms *Mr Jones*'s reliance upon stereotypes as a characteristic of Hollywood.[43] In, for example, *Suddenly Last Summer* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1959), the bewildered and bewildering patients who rock, cry or laugh in their dungeon-like common area are the threatening unpredictable mass to our otherwise sane if not saintly female protagonist (Elizabeth Taylor). In the extensive asylum scenes of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975), based upon Ken Kesey's novel of the same name, the men are endearing and humorous--the wise fools and innocent victims who epitomise the mythic image of the mentally ill.[44] The *Fisher King* (Terry Gilliam, 1991)

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[43] *Fearless* holds no asylum scenes. In fact, it doesn't present any general image of mental illness: Max's illness is contained within his character and within the story-time of the film; his symptoms have a direct and traumatic origin on-screen rather than being the result of unknown or repressed events in childhood. Freud, himself, distinguished those neuroses arising from "disasters" from all others: '[i]n every case the later neurotic illness links up with the prelude in childhood. It is possible that what are known as traumatic neuroses (due to excessive fright or severe somatic shocks, such as railway collisions, burial under falls of earth, and so on) are an exception to this: their relationships to determinants in childhood have hitherto eluded investigation'. Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' (1940) *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 15. trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1993) 418-19.

[44] This film must be seen in the context of the anti-psychiatric momentum, even though Kesey and others protested its departure from the more radical book.

unites the "holy fool" figure, as Perry (Robin Williams), with the collection of patients as monstrous shells of men: gaumless, haunted, even bleeding.[45]

Alongside this "hollywoodisation" of mental illness in the asylum scene, Jones, in many ways, fulfils the media's classic portrayal of the mentally ill, as delineated by Otto F. Wahl:

> These characters...tended to be identified mainly by their mental illness. Almost three-fourths of them had no family connection; they were either unmarried or of unspecified marital status. Almost half had no clear occupation...are not part of the usual fabric of society, of home and work.[46]

He is rootless and his family unknown. He is named through and in terms only of his illness: in the hospital and with the formal address of the patient. While he appears to be multi-talented, his source of income is unclear.[47] That Jones is potentially dangerous corresponds to the popular mischaracterisation of the mentally ill, yet as he is a danger to himself this is, somewhat, corrected. Similarly his portrayal as a misunderstood or neglected genius corresponds to a glorification of the mentally ill, yet the realistic focus on his depression diminishes this.[48]

This popular characterisation is reminiscent of the alienated and fragmented individual of *film noir*. The noirish effect, reverberating later in my analysis of *mise-en-scène*, confirms the sense of tension, instability and unpredictability. It invokes *noir*'s subversiveness (such as its intersection of '[i]ssues of transgression...stylisation and

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[45] In its negotiation of self-endangerment, (anti)psychiatry, cure, and the borders between reality and fantasy, *The Fisher King* has much in common with *Fearless* and *Mr Jones*. Indeed, Rayner finds that *Fearless* 'favours a more parabolic tone, after *The Mosquito Coast* and *The Fisher King*...also starring Jeff Bridges in the role of outsider and convert' (Rayner, 257).

[46] Otto F. Wahl, *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) 42-43.

[47] *Fearless* however emphasises Max's occupation and his family.

[48] It could be argued that *Mr Jones* means to subvert the classic portrayal of the mentally ill figure, that it means to be ironic rather than only recapitulating. However, while Jones might appear average(ly crazy) in his unique personality, his cure, although not his achievement of balance per se, is unattainable to the average patient, it is outside the realms of medication and "normal" realistic illness or, perhaps, recommended practice. The film can hardly mean to promote sexual relationships between psychiatrist and patient, even if this has been deemed efficacious by some.

realism'[49]) and its conservative potential (closure's restoration of order). Most importantly, *noir* summons the sense of a socially rooted crisis of masculinity. Frank Krutnik associates the proliferation of such an image within the *noir* tough thrillers of the mid-to-late 1940s, with 'some kind of crisis of confidence within the contemporary regimentation of male-dominated culture'.[50] He states that '[t]he postwar era required a reconstruction of cultural priorities' and these films were 'one of the principal means by which Hollywood, in its role as a cultural institution, sought to tackle such a project, by focusing attention upon the problems attending to the (re)definition of masculine identity and masculine role'.[51]

In reading this intent in *Mr Jones* and *Fearless*, undoubtedly these films can be seen to repeat the trope of compromised masculinity. *Mr Jones* underlines the impotency of its male protagonist when, during a hospital drama therapy session, Jones bitterly describes himself as 'an erection'.[52] However, what I want to stress is that, here (and in all the representations of self-endangerment) this trope evidences, instead, a contemporary crisis in subjectivity expressed through this fascination with self-risk. This can be, and is, articulated on the plane of gender (or, as later in the thesis, sexuality), so that the representations are shaped by its ideological bearings, but the governing issue is the self-endangerment of the contemporary individual (male or female etc.) While this "crisis" offers another compelling reason for the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment, what I continue to be most concerned with here is evidencing how this fascination is manifested in the texts. How it functions as a recurrence of the theme of self-endangerment but also as its constant negotiation and suppression--in other words, how it is played out as an enduring personal but politicised process rather than an historicised event.

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[49] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1988) 74-77.
[50] Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Men, Masculinity and* Film Noir (London: Routledge, 1991) 91. Much has been written about the crisis of gender identities arising from the end of the war, one of the main results of which was, according to Krutnik, 'the dislocation of men from their former sense of being the prime movers of culture' (64).
[51] Krutnik, 64.
[52] Impotency often results from the medication for mental illness. It has also been seen to characterise Weir's heroes, and to reach 'its zenith in Max Klein' (Rayner, 52).

Fearless and *Mr Jones* draw upon the mythic conceptualisation of mental illness to contain the threat that madness represents, albeit superficially. The films also rely upon the conventional progression of the narrative, I would suggest, for the same purpose. Indeed, their emphasis upon cure underlines the recovery momentum, and the closing off of mental illness, in the most conservative of fashions.

In both *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* the self-endangerment of mental illness orders the narrative. The films are organised around episodes of, or the theme of, risk-taking. As events or behaviours, these mark the passage to cure as closure and the possibility of happiness as resolution. Closure is marked not by death or the end of self, but by its reassertion: self-restoration. This strikes obvious chords with my discussion of the self-endangerment/self-consolidation of reading as well as the commitment to closure in conventional narrative cinema. While the memoirs of mental illness were shown to disrupt this ideological trajectory, like the made-for-TV movies *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* follow the traditional narrative path and end in the triumph over illness. However, in these two films illness is not overcome gradually, but in a singular climactic and *curative* moment, at once more mythical than melodramatic and more fantastic, more romantic (more Hollywood), than authentic.

In each film, the climactic final scene involves a self-endangering situation which is founded upon revisiting the "primal" one: the opening one of the film. In *Fearless*, Max mentally revisits the plane crash while he is asphyxiating on a strawberry. Jones returns to the ledge from which he was about to jump at the beginning of the film. Cure, especially in *Fearless*, hinges upon the revisitation or repetition of the original trauma: a highly therapeutic message akin to psychoanalysis. The films offer themselves as healing processes and as such they invoke madness as illness, as disequilibrium, temporary and contained, but also, as processes, they integrate the viewer into the experience. I will trace this play-off between the two, as a further example of the films' management of mental illness as self-endangerment.

The talking cure within Freud's early writings and practise of hypnosis, involved the recalling and reliving of the suppressed feelings that originally caused illness, which '*permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying*

effect'.[53] This re-enactment, or "abreaction", undid or cured the original trauma. The importance of re-enacting to recovery remained central to psychoanalysis as it developed, even as the talking cure was dismissed in its simplicity, in its inability to account for the repetition rather than disappearance of trauma-inspired symptoms. When emotions caused by the original psychic trauma are suppressed, the patient is destined to repeat them, or rather repeat situations that provoke them: 'the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment'.[54] In this way, the "compulsion to repeat" allows the patient to dwell within his or her trauma, rather than to expel the traumatic emotions: 'the patient repeats instead of remembering, and repeats under the conditions of resistance'.[55] The repetitive compulsion is only undone through its interpretation (by way of an analyst) and working through (by the patient). In this way, as Freud stressed, cure is not as simple or immediate as the moment or act of discharge, or abreaction, implicit to his and Breuer's earlier work.[56]

The narrative in *Fearless* is a variation of this curative process, of "remembering and working through". The life-threatening situation of the airplane crash is the origin of Max's trauma. He represses the anxieties it produced in him, such as his fear of death or will to live, feeling himself instead to be fearless if not immortal. The film follows his repetitive "fearless" self-endangering activities, as revisitations of these emotions of resistance. It is only when his self-endangerment, in the final scene, allows him to submit

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[53] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, 'On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication' (1893) *Studies on Hysteria*, PFL vol. 3. trans. James and Alix Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 57, original emphasis.

[54] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988) 78, original emphasis. The return of the repressed, the leaking out of the unconscious of those emotions suppressed through trauma, as compulsive repetition, can also occur in dreams and in transference: the emotions are often repeated and played out through the relationship with the analyst which will 'render the compulsion harmless'. Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis II' (1914) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 12. trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958) 154.

[55] Freud, 'Remembering' 151.

[56] See Freud, 'Remembering' 155-56.

to the original anxieties that he is cured. That the curative process is inscribed within the social and domestic space rather than the medical realm, it is made more accessible to the audience.[57] Rather than the plane crash being forgotten by Max it is a constant presence in the film: in his dreams, memories and drawings--those areas where the unconscious slips through.[58] The heavy presence in the film of Max's thoughts or, rather, memories--what could be called his "mindscreen"[59]--both signifies subjectivity and intensifies identification for the spectator who is strongly aligned with the protagonist during these periods of heightened subjective experience.[60] In this way, the curative process is not only available to the audience but confirmed as the governing experience of the film.[61] The spectator shares in the trauma but also in its discharge.

The initial life-threatening behaviour of Jones is not meant to be the origin of his "illness", but a symptom of it. However, the narrative of *Mr Jones* can be seen as an episode in illness and cure, in that this original scene, whilst not the originating trauma for the character, serves as the original trauma for the viewer which is then revisited at closure. (In fact, narrative itself could be seen to follow this path, so that recovery is always precisely about a form of repetition, a repetition of equilibrium.) Where cure in *Fearless* involves the resurrection of the past and rejection of self-endangerment, in *Mr Jones* it is simply a question of balance.

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[57] Cure operates only through Max's own processes of self-awareness and not directly as the result of therapy. In fact *Fearless* takes itself out of, or at least diminishes, the medical discussion of mental illness, and the therapist is postured as something of a buffoon.

[58] His repression of the trauma is evident in the sharp contrast between his retrospective idealisation of the catastrophe and his place within it, and the sheet-soaking trauma of his nightmares that he does not admit to himself or the therapist assigned to him.

[59] See Bruce F. Kawin, *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and the First-Person Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) 10.

[60] Another form of "visualisation" for the reader/viewer, this recalls its heightened implicatedness previously discussed.

[61] The narrative emphasis upon cure is reiterated further by the fact that it corresponds to an additional therapeutic system--homoeopathy. Cure, here, is homoeopathic, a demonstration of its primary Law of Similars--'*similia similibus curantur*'--which literally means 'let likes be cured by likes'. Miranda Castro, *The Complete Homoeopathic Handbook: A Guide to Everyday Health Care* (London: MacMillan, 1990) 11. For homoeopathy's principles and practice see Samuel Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 6th ed. (London: Gollancz, 1986).

Mr Jones proposes the need for balance throughout the film, a balance which can be seen as a compromise between the high of risk-taking and the low of risk-avoidance or between mania and depression. This sense of balance can refer to stabilisation through drug treatment, but is channelled into the meeting of Jones and Bowen with his taking fewer risks and her taking more. Closure in this film is the achievement of this balance as a joint process. Jones comes back from the edge and Bowen comes up to meet him, as an answer to his earlier question 'what would you risk everything for?' While this film might be seen to offer a less conventional path or representation of mental illness, the mutuality of its ending seems more reflective of the heterosexual momentum of the piece, the union of the man and the woman fundamental to Hollywood narrative, than the machinations of transference that it nevertheless plays out. Where *Mr Jones* subsumes self-endangerment within the romance narrative and the rather lame but fashionable mainstream plea for moderation, *Fearless* closes off self-endangerment with the grand and unrealistic gesture of the final curative moment, so that it seems, ultimately, a point of plot. Where *Mr Jones* has been reduced to the status of 'conventional melodrama',[62] Max's return from death at *Fearless*'s end 'smacks of a loss of nerve'.[63] In both cases, again truer to the conventions of Hollywood narrative cinema than the treatment of mental illness, the men are saved by the women who love them, and the films trace the passage back to and recover the lost or self-endangered self: a quest for identity confirmed by the final scenes in which the women call the men back from the edge of death by shouting their names, asserting their identities.

I have argued that *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* foreground popular configurations both of madness and of narrative development so that on the surface, in siding with the spectacular and with self-affirmation, mental illness appears to be contained in its effect--the protagonists' self-endangerment rendered safe for the removed spectator. But the films' use of self-endangerment does not operate only in terms of acts of self-risk, as singular events with specific participants. Neither is it to be subsumed into the extraordinary experiences of a particular character. Instead, in *Fearless* and *Mr Jones*,

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[62] Geoffrey Mcnab, rev. of *Mr Jones*, *Sight and Sound*, 4.10 (1994): 51.
[63] Philip Kemp, rev. of *Fearless*, *Sight and Sound*, 4.5 (1994): 42.

self-endangerment pervades the films structurally, thematically and cinematically. It is inscribed beyond the spectacle of suicidal behaviour or the male existential experience--beyond its mainstream management. Bound up with the cinematic experience of the two films, they would seem to intend to implicate the spectator. This will become clear below.

Mr Jones and the *Mise-en-Scène* of Self-endangerment

In *Mr Jones*, self-endangerment not only operates within the shorthand sign of madness, but as a more complex articulation occurring within the very fabric of the film.

The opening scenes of *Mr Jones* establish its cinematic intervention into the construction of mental illness. The first shot tracks back and forth over a messy bed upon which lies a book (*The Psychological Society*, which identifies the film's territory), a cat asleep and half-eaten food. A woman's hand appears and knocks one alarm clock off the bedside table, to turn off a second alarm. Over this disorderly state and reluctant awakening, the man on the radio chirpily asks 'How do you feel?' The irony is accentuated as the James Brown song 'I Feel Good' plays as the film cuts to a man cycling, smiling, on this sunny early morning in a park. As the film cross-cuts between the woman's preparation and the man's journey, the two are deliberately compared. The woman sighs at her mirror, trapped in her morning ritual: the man is exuberant, alive, free. Shown again in front of the mirror, the woman changes what she is wearing. Her interactions with the mirror, with herself, incite her dissatisfaction, whereas the man seems self-assured and happy. For the man there is a profusion of visual imagery and movement yet the woman has still not left the house. He seems to have moved so much, horizontally and vertically. He cycles, raises his hands as a plane passes, dances and mounts the roof of a house he has been hired to work on.[64] Against this sense of height, depth and space, everything for the woman is constrained within one location, her house, and there is only one plane: ground level.

These scenes deliberately parallel the two characters and, juxtaposed to their official introduction as patient and doctor, suggest and challenge the false markers of mental illness--as disorderly or irritable--whilst introducing those markers that the film will use to connote mental illness--as physical and emotional excess. While the scenes

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[64] There is also the implied vertical movement of falling.

establish the inadequacy of the former markers (rejecting the stereotypical recognisability of the mentally ill)--one cannot tell who is mentally ill; the doctor is frustrated and lives in disarray, the patient is joyful and liberated; both they, and indeed the film as a whole, imply that Dr Bowen needs help of some kind, that she equally requires change. In fact there is a steady play upon Bowen's mental state. During a hospital visit Jones asks Howard to identify the patient within a group of three doctors unknown to his friend. Howard selects Dr Bowen: 'the sad looking lady'. Jones even calls her 'very very sick'. When Bowen accuses her ex-partner of cruelty, he says from the other room: 'what, you talking to yourself Libby?' In a later scene, Bowen, who has fallen asleep at her desk, is awakened by a voice calling 'Libby'. This off-screen calling of her name, unconnected to a person or indeed a context for the scene has just begun, allows the implication that Bowen is hearing voices. The entry into the frame of Dr Shay, the origin of the voice, is delayed and thus the film deliberately indulges the possibility of Dr Bowen's madness--or at least our assumptions about it. This challenge to the (mis)representation of mental illness is important for two interrelated reasons, which I will be taking in turn. With it, the film initiates its construction of mental illness within the *mise-en-scène*, a construction that is always framed by self-endangerment. In confusing the markers of madness, it necessarily extends the ambit of self-endangerment to involve not only the mentally ill figures but, potentially, the wider world outside the film and its immediate representative, the viewer.

In the several scenes of Bowen's sessions with different patients, the distinctive use of *mise-en-scène* serves to code and connect the ill characters (and, in this case, to distinguish Bowen from them[65]) but, more importantly, allows mental illness an additional, and distinctly cinematic expression as self-endangerment, which becomes a theme underlying the film. In the first session, a Japanese girl presents an exuberant monologue. Her swaying from side to side, her voice rising and falling is, like Jones in the opening scenes, all movement. Her frenetic gestures contrast to Bowen's stillness and inexpressiveness but there is more evidence in the *mise-en-scène* which divides them. Bowen is seated, still, straight and central. Where Bowen is dressed conservatively in a pale blue shirt and brown cardigan, her hair tied up, the girl wears more vivid colours, an

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[65] Her connection with Jones, therefore, is more about the romance narrative than her mental state.

unzipped bright red sweatshirt with a navy T-shirt beneath. Her long hair is down and she wears red lipstick. She moves her hands all over the frame, across it and out of it, and speeds through her hysterical monologue, semi-crying. Whereas Bowen occupies the frame symmetrically, as a portrait, the girl moves within it and partially out of the frame. The final frame of the session has the girl crying with her hand on her head, on the right side of frame.

These shot, reverse-shot medium close-ups exploit (and emphasise) the ability of the frame to construct order and disorder and, I would suggest, self-endangerment through the compositional balance of screen space.[66] In the subsequent sessions, the patients are all similarly to the right of the frame. Their imbalance is asserted against her balance (however contested it may be) through frame composition. While this off-centre composition could just imply Bowen's presence--a technique often used to create balance between shots in the shot, reverse-shot--Bowen is not off-centre to compensate, in fact she is excessively centralised.[67] This play upon the frame confirms the self as the site of imbalance. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the most skewed framing is that of the Japanese girl--the only suicide in the film. In her session her head actually leaves the frame and with her red clothes and lipstick this indicates or prefigures both her self-endangerment and the blood-letting of her slit-wrists. Similarly, in a video seen after her death, the Japanese girl is still and central, her self-endangering potential has passed. In achieving this centrality, the Japanese girl is no longer self-endangering, she is, after all, its opposite: dead. Self-endangerment and death remain strongly distinguished, for death is not simply the end-product of this behaviour (although it is a possible end-product) but rather its end: it prevents this behaviour. The focus, instead, continues to be on potential death--the fantasy of it distanced from actual death--that is, upon risk.

The succession of these framings of patients, accentuates a further cinematic aspect. Behind the patients is an institutional blue wall: behind Bowen we receive numerous depth cues; we see the room, window, files, and light coming in on her right

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[66] Within a frame each constituent can be viewed as perfectly placed to convey meaning and deliberately balanced or imbalanced depending on the desired effect and, presumably, the directors' innovativeness or counter-cinema aspirations.

[67] 'Each man is framed somewhat off center, so that the empty space in each shot implies the other man's presence offscreen....[T]he cut does balance the frame area from shot to shot: each man fills the space left vacant in the previous shot' (Bordwell, *Art* 253).

side. For Bowen there is always some sense of depth in the composition, but the compositions with the patients are shallow fields, emphasised by the absence of shadow. Thus the frames from the patients' sessions are like photographs, their vignettes like short films, in that they are visual objects, flat, dimensionless. That the sessions are filmed by Bowen, emphasises and explains this quality. A main effect of this objectification of the patients and centralisation of Bowen is an emphasis upon the viewer. The frame is normally centred on the body not only as the 'simplest way to achieve compositional balance',[68] as I have discussed, but to ensure that 'narrative action [is] addressed to the spectator'.[69] These compositional conventions of classical cinema stem from traditions of Western Art, from post-Renaissance painting as well as 'principles of scenography from Greek and Roman theater'.[70] Thus, the exploitation of the frame not only instates the inscription of mental illness and self-endangerment into the film's most basic element, but does it with the spectator utterly in mind. The frame is artificial, experienced purely by the spectator it has no diegetic life: this cinematic unfolding of self-endangerment is, therefore, specifically aimed at the viewer. Bowen in watching the videos, experiences some of these framings, but, in doing so, our role as spectators is rendered visible. I will pursue this foregrounding of the spectator's role shortly through *Fearless*, but what is important is how self-endangerment, here, is constructed to meet the spectator's needs.

Framings have been recognised in their potential to 'become motifs unifying the film',[71] and my attention to frame formation and composition stresses their capacity to connect or express the characters' mental illness through the lack of balance within the frame and *mise-en-scène*, a capacity exploited throughout *Mr Jones* and linked to self-endangerment. But the cinematic articulation of self-endangerment takes place not only through this formal use of balance but through its thematic presence. It is, as I indicated earlier, a central issue in the film, integral to the recovery and romance trajectories as the harmony between the extremes of mental states and between the central couple. The need for balance infuses the film as what could be seen, instead, as its equilibrating

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[68] Bordwell, *Art* 165.
[69] Bordwell, *Classical* 51
[70] Bordwell, *Classical* 51 .
[71] Bordwell, *Art* 215.

momentum--the characters' and the film's passage towards a state of stasis, a passage entangled with self-endangerment. For Bowen, the need for balance operates as the tension between her disordered and distressed private life and her professional life. For Jones it is between his mania and his depression. The equation of Bowen and Jones confirms that they each need to achieve balance, through, in fact, altering their relationship to self-endangerment and to each other.[72] For example, in one scene Jones tries to get Bowen to walk on the pier's ledge saying: '[i]f you want to know who I am, you have to go where I am'. Indeed, Bowen's passage through the film is directed to his question of 'what would you risk everything for?' and his, to the final decision not to endanger his life.

This equilibrating momentum is not only fashioned retrospectively in the (heterosexual) harmonies of closure, but, most importantly, operates as the fluctuations on the path there, so that an ebb and flow characterises the narrative. This pattern will prove another major source of the film's implication of the spectator within the representation of mental illness. These fluctuations exist as the extreme but contrary behaviours (and depictions) of Jones and Bowen, but, additionally, as the film's series of repeated and contrasted elements.

Both protagonists fluctuate between various positions. Jones would seem to pass from one state or zone to the other, to alternate between object and subject, and balance and imbalance. He is visually coded with markers attached to the patients and those attached to Bowen: he is sometimes manic, sometimes motionless. In our first view of Jones as ill, he is still and drugged and lying down on his side, dislodged from centrality but not frenetic. Similarly, in a central scene of his "crash", Jones is positioned standing on a street all in pale grey but with a colourful abstract mural behind him. This shallow field of flattened colour--recalling the patients' sessions--emphasises his mental state, but also his status as object. Yet at the same time, the film avoids the objectification of Jones. He might be set up as dimensionless and a spectacle of self-endangerment--during

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[72] They are even given similar lines. Bowen declares to her ex-boyfriend: 'you're a robot...you're not a real person, only mutants would pull a stunt like this', while Jones, says to her, 'you're not human any more, none of you, you're like gold fish'. Both are concerned with mortal or human confines.

his crash he walks dazed in front of cars[73]--but he is never seen being filmed: he films himself and even when Bowen watches his recording, she is shown crying rather than viewing, and he asks her questions from the screen. This is bound up with the heterosexual plot, for in resisting the objectifying gaze of Bowen as spectator, Jones remains the virile male of the romantic narrative.[74] Bowen, however, appears similarly resistant to being objectified. In the opening scenes, in which she is getting ready, she is dissatisfied as she looks in the mirror, self-consciously uncomfortable with her "looked-at-ness" and, similarly, slams the door of her closet in which the camera was then positioned, shutting out its traditionally male and objectifying gaze. Although portrait-like during the sessions with her patients, this connotes her sanity and comparative balance and not her objectification, for she is firmly established as the gazer in this scenario. Thus, Bowen too alternates between subject and object status.

While Jones is not Bowen's spectacle only ours, Bowen, at least on one occasion, is his: Jones spots her being attacked by another patient in an adjoining glass-lined corridor. (That Jones leaps to her rescue, confirms the conferral of her rightful position opposite the active male, here, allowing the heterosexual union at closure as a reinstatement of order--lacking in the opening scenes.) The glass-lined corridors are reminiscent of Bentham's Panopticon, or rather, of Foucault's interpretation of it in his discussion of the relationship between the history of surveillance and visual power in *Discipline and Punish*. However, unlike the panoptic mechanism 'in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible',[75] there is no authoritative viewer within this configuration other than us. This seemingly open, visually exposed environment in *Mr Jones* conveys, instead, the threat to authority not its implementation. Bowen is attacked, and in her helplessness she is cut off from other people rather than

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[73] This scene is similar to Max's walk in *Fearless*, but is also a frequent scenario in other films depicting the lives of a mentally ill individual, the True Stories, such as *Murder of Innocence*.

[74] In fact, Bowen never sees him when he is unbalanced--during his private dances on the street or his robust conducting of a Beethoven symphony. Only the spectator witnesses him as spectacle, as object.

[75] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 200. This, he continues, 'induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (201).

rendered accessible. Instead, what is exposed is an anti-panopticon. In its inversion of the model it emphasises the spectator's role as the all-seeing power.

These alternating positions of the protagonists joins the film's more general pattern of fluctuation. As well as the overtness of cross-cutting (in the opening scenes) *Mr Jones* echoes gestures and moods as well as phrases and locations to procure a markedly interwoven narrative. This is achieved cinematically through the repetition of the tonal colouring of scenes with the use of a limited palette. Blue light pervades bedroom scenes, it connects the opening shots of the film with Jones's initial sedation in hospital and with Bowen awaking at her desk, and contrasts with the sharp natural light of Jones's various excursions--his cycle in the park, his walk with Bowen on a beach or their final union against the backdrop of sky. (Indeed, their walk on the beach epitomises the oscillation, or ebb and flow, of the narrative. As they walk together along the wave edge, they both have to sway in their path as the tide forces them higher at moments, lower at others.) The achievement of balance is conveyed tonally too. The film ends with Bowen and Jones on the ledge of the now finished roof seated side by side kissing.[76] The sea is in the background, the blue has receded, and the brown "natural" light of the waning day is foregrounded. Scenes also run into each other, with one of sadness frequently following one of excitement, a path often mirrored in the music that changes or is echoed in the following scene's different circumstances. For instance, as Jones is carried back into the hospital room, he "sings" Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy', the symphony he interrupted in the previous scene's concert. These constant mood or tonal shifts in the film invoke both a promise of, and a need for, balance, but more importantly entangle us in the narrative's equilibrating momentum or bipolar state.

What I want to suggest here is that the film, in its fluctuating and alternating constructions, offers itself as a bipolar experience. It re-creates directly (through, for example, Jones's mania and depression) or cinematically inscribes (through mood or more formal polarities) the turbulent experience of mental illness. In this way, it achieves, to some extent, what Wurtzel was hoping to conjure in her memoir, the creation in the spectator of how 'it feels to feel *this* bad...to be completely true to the experience' (*Prozac* 356, original emphasis). This "feeling" is not the same as, or indeed

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[76] Closure as the consolidation of the male self is reiterated and embellished by the consolidation of the virile or, rather, heterosexual male self.

as simple as, the viewer's identification with the mentally ill character. Indeed, the film resists fixing the lines of identification (or, indeed, mental illness) for the spectator--favouring the ambiguity or multiplicity of positions of identification (or universality of madness) extrapolated earlier--to promote instead a bipolar experience of the characters but also for the spectator.

In *Mr Jones* self-endangerment suffuses both content and style and, perhaps as the intersection of the two, it structures the narrative. The protagonists' relationships to self-endangerment provides the story, framing techniques and composition underscore this relationship, and the self-endangering constructions--as activities or motifs--provide the signs of passage and closure. Self-endangerment translates as both the activity of self-risk, through life-threatening behaviours, and as the fragility of, or challenge to, the (unified) self, through, for example, compositional imbalance. This analysis of the representation of self-endangerment is particular to the medium of film, as the cinematic construction of the self of the latter combines with the blatancy of the spectacle of self-endangerment of the former. The emphasis upon self-endangerment is not limited to the risk-taking protagonist but becomes a distinct element of the viewing experience itself.

Mr Jones has been shown to play with the conventional polarisation of subject and object and male and female. However, with its triumph of the self, its sealed narrative, the potential of self-endangerment seems contained as the film fulfils the conventional resolution of the reinstatement of identity, of self and of (heterosexual) order. With their self-restorations of closure, ultimately, both *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* appear traditional texts. In the following concluding section of this chapter and Part I, I want to continue the discussion of the dual (or fluctuating) potential of self-endangerment--to both challenge and reassure, to radically dismantle the primacy of the self and to conventionally reaffirm it, to convey the transgressive and the conservative--through an exploration of self-reflexivity. In chapter one, I demonstrated how spectacles were of strategic importance to the memoirs and their multi-layering of self-endangerment. This discussion of *Mr Jones* has made several links between the implication of the spectator in the representation of self-endangerment and its very cinematicness. It is, then, to the broader discussion of the self-reflexivity of

representation, the sense of the texts drawing attention to themselves as fabrications, as texts, that I now turn.

C: Self-reflexivity and Self-endangerment

All the key texts addressed so far in this study could be said to be self-reflexive--to draw attention to themselves as texts, as mediated representations. The memoirs of mental illness do this through their self-conscious emphasis upon the spectacle or upon performance--whether as Styron's theatricality or Wurtzel's cinephilia--and *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* keep returning to the signifiers of cinema and of viewing. What is more, this self-reflexivity is entangled with the representation of self-endangerment.

In *Mr Jones* an enduring play on framing, for example, was shown to delineate or separate characters, as the arbiter of self-endangerment and the characters' relationship to it. In *Fearless* there is a recurrent use of a primary icon of watching or being watched and, therefore, of film: the eye. Each "eye" is directly linked to self-endangerment. Max drives his car at speed into a graffiti-covered brick wall, on which the central image is a large eye. When Max's wife, following their separation, looks at the paintings he had been working on in his office, she finds that they are all depictions of the crash and all feature eye-like images. These eye-like images are sources of light, a divine vision or a vision of the divine, yet mark the possibility of death. The film also provides several medium close-ups of Max's face, which emphasise the eyes during his self-endangering activities. As Max drives through the desert, away from the town where the plane crashed, he sticks his head out of the window and closes his eyes. During the crash itself, which is revisited in parts throughout the narrative, when Max realises they are going to crash, he looks up, the camera above, focuses on his eyes and he says 'this is the moment of my death'. Again, these intensive focuses on personalised moments accentuate the character's subjectivity and the spectator's alignment with it. The former example could be seen as an invocation of life--Max smiles, seems happy--while the latter is obviously associated with an awareness of death. In this way, self-endangerment operates between the two, in the interstitial zone precisely between life and death, danger and safety--a zone of potential, of risk--in the interface between reality and fantasy, an interface it shares with self-reflexivity.

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There is, it seems, something about the construction of self-endangerment, here, that requires expression in self-reflexivity.[77] What I want to begin to address in this section is why this is,[78] why the representation of self-endangerment is so characterised, for this convergence becomes more blatant and increasingly important in Part II. The immediate interpretation of the convergence in *Fearless*, mirroring my conclusions in chapter one, asserts that the film makes the self-endangering acts self-reflexive precisely in order to implicate the spectator within them. Self-reflexivity reminds the spectator that she is watching a film: making her aware of herself as spectator. This awareness might be thought to allay any fears of the spectator, for in exposing its own artificiality, the risk-laden experience is rendered safe: unreal and distant. However, this is not the case, for in exposing its devices, it implicates the spectator. It underlines her role in the contrivance, her activity, for she is not passively absorbing entertainment but reminded that, like the various looks in the film, she has her own investments and desires. Indeed, in my discussion of *mise-en-scène* in *Mr Jones*, self-endangerment was shown to be set-up for the spectator. The self-reflexive film is a metacinematic text, it cannot but engage with the debate on the power of the visual within itself. Rather than only highlight the artificiality of the medium, it specifically questions the spectator's part in it. In *Fearless*, her role of watching is aligned with Max's act of risk, so that the spectator can no longer claim distance or neutrality in the self-endangering act, but is, instead, implicated in it as an invested party.

That it is the eye that is the central motif here adds to this sense of implication. Carol Clover, questioning the frequency of, and obsession with, imaging eyes in horror film, sees the goal of this form of self-reflexivity as the creation and increase of fear through audience identification and implication, for 'the ocular opening images of cinematic horror apostrophize its collective eye'.[79] The eye is the perfect, potent image, not only because it implicates the audience in breaching the divide between image and spectator--the safe distance of viewing--but between other restrictive divisions too. An

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[77] The connection between the two is apparent within immunology. Self-reflexivity has been used to describe the immune system as 'in a state of dynamic internal responding' (Haraway, 323) or 'as an infinite process of self-referentiality' (Stacey, 161).

[78] There is something inevitable about this correlation in that self-endangerment is itself a self-conscious state.

[79] Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 166.

eye-image is non-gendered and non-power-specific. It can signify killer or victim, male or female, active or passive. Thus it has a political potential in undermining gender and power prescriptions, and one in harmony with my earlier assertion of the non-gendering or universality of self-endangerment, or, indeed, of the alternating roles of *Mr Jones*'s protagonists. The sense of the spectacle can firmly differentiate between self and other, as spectator and spectacle, but the eye seems to do the opposite. Where the spectacle challenges the realism of representation, the eye challenges the responsibility of viewing.

While *Fearless*'s numerous eye-images emphasise this rather radical issue of the spectator's implication and investment in the representation of self-risk, the film is sheathed in reassurances. This is, as I have suggested, typical of popular culture's translation of the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment which evidences the interest but attempts to contain it through conventional codes (such as through closure, recovery or the stigmatisation of the mentally ill). Although these attempts are to be revealed as ever more fragile or flimsy, and thus the desire for self-endangerment increasingly apparent, such representations disavow the desire. Self-reflexivity, and indeed the theorisation of it, is enmeshed in this process of disavowal, of implicitly acknowledging whilst explicitly denying a thing, of doing two things at once.

Self-reflexivity has proved an important theme in film studies, encompassing the extremes of cinema's function as entertainment, propaganda or art, as conservative or transgressive. Its demystification of fantasy has been regarded as a ploy to seduce the viewer further into the spectacle, and ideology, of, for example, the musical.[80] Alternatively, directors like Jean-Luc Godard and Louis Malle enlist its ability to dismantle the codes of classical cinema. Their films 'interrogat[e] their own narrativity',[81] and have been distinguished for their radical practices.[82] *Fearless* and *Mr*

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[80] See Jane Feuer, 'The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment', *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Altman (1981; London: BFI, 1986) 159-74. In this genre, self-reflexivity operates on two main fronts: through spectacles (the overt artificiality or staged-ness of the musical numbers with their non-diegetic orchestral accompaniments) and through their frequent depiction of putting on a show, most commonly in the Backstage Musicals.

[81] Feuer, 173.

[82] Inez Hedges, *Breaking the Frame: Film Language and the Experience of Limits* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 13. Hedges identifies the aim of Malle's 'metafilmic dimension' as the disintegration of traditional film language: 'to purify it and liberate it from the strictures of convention' (5). In addition, the "Voyeur film"

Jones in their mainstream "management" of mental illness and self-endangerment would seem to combine the ideology of the conventional text with the potential politics of oppositional practice, through employing self-reflexivity's dual potential.

What self-reflexivity's oppositional function depends upon, and what the theorisation of it negotiates, is the spectator's distance from the effects of the text. The discussion of the memoirs in chapter one found the self-reflexive tropes employed to dismantle exactly this distance. In terms of cinema, self-reflexivity is implicitly contra-disavowal, in breaking the contract of distance between the film and its audience. It disobeys the 'fundamental disavowal'[83] of the non-reality of cinema: drawing attention to, rather than covering up, the absence of reality (by exposing its technology say, in the musical, or through non-seamless or "visible" editing in avant-garde film practices). Based upon *and* reviving the psychoanalytic understanding of fetishism, film is confirmed in its self-protecting function, and self-reflexivity positioned against it.[84] As Kaja Silverman puts it: 'when a film covers over the absent real with a simulated or constructed reality, it also makes good the spectating subject's lack, *restoring him or her to an imaginary wholeness*'.[85] Self-reflexivity, in this way, seems fundamentally interventionist. Yet, this situation can be recouped for conservative ends.

According to Jane Feuer a key purpose of the musical's self-reflectivity, as she calls it, is to perpetuate the "myth of spontaneity" and its attendant pleasures of fantasy,

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challenges 'the camera's truth-telling gaze' according to Norman Denzin. But although an example of self-reflexivity's increasing prevalence in and critique of contemporary culture, this critique is questionable for '[t]he machine that mocks the copy controls the copies that are made'. Norman K. Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (London: Sage, 1995) 34, 37. In *Fearless* and *Mr Jones* the emphasis is not upon the spectator's ineffectuality within cinema as (postmodern) institution, but upon the psychic participation of an active spectator.

[83] Metz, 94.

[84] This idea of cinema, itself, as a structure of fetishism draws upon Freud's essay 'Fetishism' and Metz's application of it to film. The male child's compensation for the mother's lost penis (and his own castration anxiety) serves as a metaphor for the spectator's relationship to the screen--so that representation is a substitute for reality--indeed it serves as an 'affective prototype of all the splittings of belief which man will henceforth be capable of in the most varied domains' (Metz, 70). See also Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927) *On Sexuality*, PFL vol. 7, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 351-57.

[85] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 10, emphasis added.

through naturalising artificiality itself.[86] This is achieved through masking the artificiality of the spontaneous performance, either by concealing technology or through overwhelming, or distracting from, the sense of contrivance with the depiction of characters' innate energy and/or sincerity.[87] In *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952), for example, the exuberance of Gene Kelly's character outshines the camera lights he manipulates in his love song to Kathy (Debbie Reynolds). *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* also naturalise the artificiality that is exposed in their self-reflexive moments, in their exhibition of film-making or film-viewing apparatus. If the fantasy of the films is diminished by the reminders that it is a fabrication, then it is fortified all the more forcefully through the excesses of mental illness, which renders fantasy symptomatic. The emphasis upon the holy fool or mythical figure in each film normalises fantasy, reasserting its importance.[88] This process can also be seen to perpetuate myths, in this case the divinity or unpredictability of the madman. Additionally, in *Mr Jones* some of the most affecting moments for Bowen, and presumably for us, are the taped sessions which come to mark her emotional involvement with the patients.

In horror, self-reflexivity similarly serves to emphasise the pleasures particular to the genre, that is, the creation of fear, but it does this through the previously oppositional function of implicating the spectator--increasing fear specifically through grafting the spectator into the text. Here, spectatorial implication can be viscerally and emotionally (as well as ideologically) manipulative, but at the same time it retains precisely that more radical charge that I mean to locate within the representation of self-endangerment: the *complicity* of the spectator--complicity as the heightened and politically laden state of implication which will form the basis of my analyses in Part II. In their study of the self-reflexivity of the film *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (Irvin Kershner, 1978), in which a woman is taken over by the vision of a murderer, Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy see its primary

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[86] See Feuer, 159-74.

[87] See Feuer and also Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment as Utopia', *Genre* ed. Altman, 175-89.

[88] This is supplemented by the skillful character acting of Gere and Bridges, and the emphasis upon an alternative reality which characterises Weir's work according to Shiach.

function as the implication of the spectator within the depiction of violence against women; the (male) sadism of cinema:[89]

> The [film's] orchestration of male and female, fictional and 'real' spectators, threatening and random surveillance are concentric, all leading to the same object of regard, the focus on the female and on scenes of violence, creating a bond of complicity between the internal and external spectators to the film....The reflexivity not only assimilates the audience into the narrative but also creates a sense in which the audience is implicated vicariously or actively in the act of looking at and of experiencing a world where there is no escape from media manipulation, psychopathology, and aggression.[90]

In the perpetuation and inevitability of this violence, self-reflexivity is a coercive force, yet it remains intimately connected to the issue of responsibility--the spectator's complicity in the perpetuation of this violent world. Silverman raises a related issue in her discussion of *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) a film which also portrays extreme violence towards women, emphatically aligning the spectator with the murderer, and which is, according to Clover, a '*horror* metafilm: a film that has as its task to expose the psychodynamics of specularity and *fear*'.[91] (Here again, it is cinema's sadistic gaze that the spectator shares, a conclusion that my thesis challenges, largely in chapter three in which I repostulate such narratives of fear as masochistic economies.) For Silverman, *Peeping Tom*'s self-reflexivity exposes the mythic processes at the heart of cinema: the safe distances which characterise (fetishistic) spectatorship:

> [A] recurrent motif in the murder sequences--a series of images seen through the cross hairs of the view finder...[--]functions as a powerful metaphor for the barrier Mark tries to erect between himself and his

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[89] They also provide other functions for its self-reflexivity: the film's emphasis upon vision is part of an eclecticism typical of such 'genre films', but also symptomatic of market forces as one of the 'mere strategies for seducing the broadest possible audience by means of the most diverse techniques'. Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy, '*The Eyes of Laura Mars*: A Binocular Critique', *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. Gregory A. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 72, 78.

[90] Fischer, 75.

[91] Clover, 169, original emphasis.

> victims so as to dissociate himself from them, and thereby consolidate his own claim to the paternal legacy. Here, too, Mark's project converges with classic cinema, which also turns upon the fiction that an irreducible distance isolates the viewer from the spectacle.[92]

It is the navigation of these safe distances by the representations of mental illness, that has lain at the heart of my study so far. Where the memoirs were more forthright in their mad authors' oppositional license, the Hollywood film is strongly tethered to the illusion, at least, of self-affirmation.

Self-reflexivity questions the spectator's mythic distance and safety, the irresponsibility of looking on. It performs that radical Brechtian practise of distanciation, drawing attention to the myth of separation, of dissociation, and the necessary fiction of self-coherence.[93] But the line between a representation perpetuating or critiquing conventional myths--merely unfolding or instead shattering them--is a thin one, perhaps based upon the rigour or optimism of certain theorists or the quirkiness of certain writers or filmmakers, as the contrary opinions of horror (as misogynist or as parodic) testify. Self-reflexivity appears a major strategy of implication, a deep faultline in the reassurances of spectatorship, and as it becomes all the more frequent and psychodynamically charged, so the reader/viewer's implication becomes that much more apparent. But implication is not enough anymore to conjure the spectator or reader's investment in the text. It becomes too vague a term, for it can be generically or conventionally determined or desired. What beckons now is where implication turns to complicity, where the spectator's participation gains its dramatic edge. But how does implication tip over into this more indisputable, more politically weighted marker of investment? In my pursuit of the cultural investment in self-endangerment, I turn, then, to texts that are, in various ways, especially provocative, where the reader/viewer's investment will prove the most apparent and the least contestable.

In Part II, therefore, I move on to the filmic and fictional representation of sexual self-endangerment. Not only is the depiction of sexualised risk an especially popular theme in the 1990s, but it offers a more blatant and more complex construction of the

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[92] Silverman, *Acoustic* 34.

[93] For the connection between Brecht and psychoanalytic disavowal, see Stephen Heath, 'Lessons from Brecht', *Screen* 15.2 (Summer 1974): 103-28.

issues at stake in this thesis. Most important is the fact that the reader/viewer's experience and reactions are likely to be involuntary, instinctive reactions to the erotic or unconscionable material. What is more, the representation of self-endangerment becomes part of a dynamic, the reader/viewer's implication in self-endangerment is in certain ways enacted on the screen as the narratives, themselves, involve the negotiation of the consent or complicity of each party. In these films, that self-consciously deal with the taboo, fantasy and desire, the disavowal of self-endangerment integral to mainstream practice becomes ever more flimsy or formulaic.

In *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* self-reflexivity might dismantle the myths of the safety of spectatorship, revitalising the self-endangerment of viewing, but the textual reassurances remain to display the bricks with which these myths can be rebuilt. These mainstream representations of self-endangerment reveal or, rather, revel in the (postmodern) reader/viewer's desire for the threat more real, the self more safe, the fiction more functional. But these safeties and functionalities are increasingly tokenistic and the attempts to expose them, like self-reflexivity, ever more customary.

PART II

SEX AND SELF-ENDANGERMENT

In the introduction to this thesis I distinguished as a primary aim of the study the interrogation of a contradiction in western culture: its intense interest in the representation of self-risk but simultaneous denial of this interest. This interest in self-risk operates both as the portrayal of self-endangering acts and, most importantly, as the reader/viewer's relationship to such portrayals. In Part I the representation of mental illness provided a lucrative site for the evidencing of this managed interest or desire. It revealed how the risks that the representation of mental illness both inscribes and excites (as the characters' and reader/viewers' self-endangerment) are, necessarily, temporary. The reassurances of closure or the distancing of sensationalism, for example, shelter the reader/viewer from any lasting threat. This temporariness of, or safe, self-endangerment bespeaks a useful mechanism--the condoning of the reader's claim of neutrality or removal from any enduring implications of the text, thereby supporting the aforementioned contradiction. What I am arguing, however, is that this mechanism functions as a tactic to resist involvement, to deny implication. Such safety, therefore, is to be seen as suspect and such reassurances a ruse to deflect personal and cultural anxieties.

My analyses of the 1990s memoirs and films depicting mental illness delineated various strategies of implication: the textual attempts to exploit yet undermine this mechanism, not only as a challenge to the popular denial of the self-endangerment of mental illness but to the safety of the text. These attempts were variously effective. Self-reflexivity, in particular, was a recurrent strategy adept at mediating contradictory interests, in both the mainstream and more marginal cultural products. In this second part of the thesis I continue my interrogation of the reader/viewer's investment in self-endangerment but raise the stakes as it were--heighten the socio-psychic or even moral repercussions of implication--by focusing upon sexual stories. Although a deliberately neutral name for narratives which deal with erotic themes,[1] such narratives are especially

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[1] For Maurice Charney such a labelling avoids the loaded and abused categorisations of pornography or erotica. See Charney's introduction to his *Sexual Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1981).

effective in their inscription and excitation of the reader/viewer's investment (at revealing the ruse of reassurance). It is within the representation of sex, as Wayne Booth rightly claims, that the involuntariness of textual affect, of readerly response, becomes most powerful, emotive or undeniable.[2] But "affecting" genres like the sex film, also afford a more radical potential according to Linda Williams. She notes that such films 'that promise to be sensational, to give our bodies an actual physical jolt' are not merely gratuitous in their excesses but 'their very existence and popularity hinges upon rapid changes taking place between the "sexes" and by rapidly changing notions of gender'.[3] It is the investigation of sexual self-endangerment, of eroticised self-risk as sexual preference, which constitutes Part II.

Although potentially heralding life, sex has always had fatal or risky associations, whether because of the dangers of infection, pregnancy or childbirth or because of the social and moral conventions and taboos that haunt or criminalise its acts. As suggested earlier, the desire for eroticised self-risk has a firm place within psychoanalytic theory as a Freudian source of repression (in the libidinally expressed death drive or theories of perversion) or post-Freudian cause for celebration (in discourses of eroticism and transgression which deem masochism a liberating form of sexual expression). However, in mainstream culture despite its apparent chicness or rifeness (as a central motif in contemporary western culture), erotic self-risk remains disavowed. Sex stands out as an obvious site for the mediation of cultural and personal desires and denials, veiled as it is in secrecy yet fervency, fantasy yet morality, and all the protective layerings (and sensationalised uncoverings) of the illicit. Before pursuing this rich cultural site through filmic and fictional examples, I want first to demonstrate how self-endangerment as masochism is disavowed within the popular imagination.

I will provide a cursory look at two "real life" episodes which conjure the conventional denial of this activity and highlight the important issues of the continuing discussion. The first episode involves the practise of auto-erotic asphyxiation by Stephen Milligan, the Conservative MP for Eastleigh, who was found dead on his kitchen table in

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[2] See the main introduction of the thesis and Wayne C. Booth, 'Who is Responsible in Ethical Criticism, and for What?' *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 140.

[3] Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess', *Film Quarterly* 44. 4 (Summer) 1991: 2, 12.

1994 as a fatal result of this practice. As the ultimate symbol of the end of a life in politics this case seems a perfect example for this study. As he was alone, there were no suspicious or disputable circumstances to cast doubt upon the nature of his sexual activity. The second episode is the Brown case, more commonly known as Operation Spanner, in which 15 gay men were arrested and sentenced for sadomasochistic activities in 1987. Following several appeals, the European Commission's reconsideration in March 1997 upheld the British government's right to prosecute. This case exemplifies the representation of sadomasochism within the public arena. Together these episodes invoke important distinctions between masochism and sexual self-endangerment. They introduce the legal definition of self-harm, and with it an additional institutional forum for the denial of self-endangerment. In general, they suggest the precarious and political positioning of the masochist in mainstream society, which underlies my analyses of the textual examples.

(The Denial of) Self-harm: Solitary Pleasures and Sadomasochism

Auto-erotic asphyxiation involves an individual, usually male and usually heterosexual, cutting off the oxygen supply to the brain to intensify sexual excitement during masturbation. The practise has various names, from the sexual colloquialisms of "scarfing" or "huffing", to psychoanalytic discourse's "sexual asphyxia". It is also entitled Kotzwarism after Franz Kotzwara, auto-erotic asphyxia's earliest recorded victim who died on September 2, 1791. This is the same year as the publication of de Sade's *Justine*, which includes an episode of sexual pleasure induced by hanging.[4] It is, therefore, the first example of the practice's ongoing relationship to cultural representation.

Stephen Milligan, like many of his fellow scarfers, died as a result of the practise going wrong: '[u]nfortunately, during the excitement it is easy to make a mistake and go too far. This results in loss of consciousness and then inevitably, since control has been lost along with consciousness, death'.[5] It is through its "victims" that auto-erotic asphyxiation has come to be known: it is through its association with death that it

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[4] This is noted in Louis R. Franzini and John M. Grossberg, *Eccentric and Bizarre Behaviors* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995) 103.

[5] Michael J. Apter, *The Dangerous Edge: The Psychology of Excitement* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 115.

becomes self-endangerment rather than simply masochism. Although often recorded as suicide, death is rarely the desired outcome; only in a 'very few cases...it is clear that the deceased did intend to die in the throes of autoerotic asphyxial ecstasy'.[6] That it is framed by potential death, the practice's self-endangering status cannot be underestimated, but the label of suicide serves to nullify masochism: to desexualise the practise. While it is associated with masochism, masochism is a necessary but inadequate interpretation of sexual self-endangerment which is to be confirmed as both erotic and as life-threatening.[7]

The practice of auto-erotic asphyxiation has becomes both more widely represented and, it seems, more widespread. Newspaper articles have evidenced an increase in the practice, not only as the tragedies of "single party" acts but within sexual encounters. In 1985, for example, Patricia Bosworth reported on the growing concern among forensic scientists and coroners at 'the rise of hanging deaths among teenagers in the United States'.[8] In 1994, Brian Edwards was accused of strangling his twelve-year-old classmate 'as the two engaged in rough sexual intercourse'.[9] The *Guardian* in March 1995 reported the growing concern at the number of children engaging in 'pleasurable asphyxiation' and the participation of an 'aiding' party.[10] In 1999, a fifteen-year-old Eton boy died during self-strangulation: a 'fainting game' (which is noted as producing a high, but not sexualised) apparently well known in boy's schools.[11] Similarly sensational stories are provided by the "bizarre" demises of the practice's famous victims: the press's veritable field day over the discovery of Milligan in tights and suspenders and with an orange in his mouth, and over the death of pop star Michael Hutchence, discovered in his

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[6] Franzini, 107.

[7] As a note left by one fatal auto-erotic asphyxiator, states: 'I'm really terrified by a sadistic thrill'. R. E. Litman and C. Sweringen, 'Bondage and Suicide', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 27 (1972): 80-85.

[8] Patricia Bosworth, 'Let's Call It Suicide', *Vanity Fair* March 1985: 54. Bosworth continues that '[t]he F.B.I. estimates that from five hundred to one thousand such deaths occur each year'.

[9] 'Rough Sex Led to Boy's Death, Officer Says', *New York Times* 19 July 1994: B4.

[10] *Guardian* 1 Mar. 1995: 12.

[11] See 'Tragedy of Eton Boy', *Daily Mail* 17 Mar. 1999: 25.

hotel room hanging by his belt in 1997 in what has been argued as either an act of intended suicide or of auto-erotic asphyxiation.[12]

Although reiterating the attention-grabbing imperative of mainstream journalism, such representations also reflect contemporary vogues--the increasing demonisation of children[13] or excessive interest in the private lives of public figures. The selective coverage of the practice evidences the taboo-ridden nature of auto-erotic asphyxiation which combines the age-old prohibition of masturbation with that of suicide. This doubly forbidden practise innately opposes a fundamental tenet of life: procreative sexuality. Masturbation has of course been somewhat retrieved from ignominy, no longer deemed a sinful or deviant practise by the majority. A recent collection of academic essays even asserts its contemporary significance as a 'solitary pleasure...fundamentally generative...[and] deeply implicated in the creative process and therefore basic to much that is good and enriching in human life'.[14] Yet (like many reports of self-strangling deaths) it fails to mention auto-erotic asphyxiation. The invisibility surrounding the practise of scarfing maintains a general ignorance which might be intended to limit the imitation of the practise. It also, however, allows the practise and its dangers to remain undetectable and its "accidental" deaths therefore unpreventable. (It also, presumably, doesn't muddy the reclamation of salutary masturbation.) As with the self-endangerment of the mentally ill, statistics are severely limited indicators of its prevalence, for the practice frequently gets subsumed into

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[12] For the heated debates on Hutchence's cause of death see the British press during February and March 1998.

[13] The association of children with crime or sexuality (or, here, both) has been seen recognised as a theme in 1990s western society; see, for example, Julian Petley, 'The Monstrous Child', *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 87-107.

[14] Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario II, eds., *Solitary Pleasures* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 15.

suicide,[15] as Hutchence's death exemplifies, and, what is more, 'only comes to light when it goes wrong'.[16]

What I want to suggest is that the denial of sexual self-endangerment takes place here on two levels: through deflecting the acknowledgement of its existence but also of its dangerousness. The sexual practice is often used to convey a libertarian or experimental attitude: to construct willing, thrill-seeking adventurers but not suicides. As this comment from an interview with Grace Jones testifies: '[a]utoerotic asphyxiation is pretty hot...I've been dabbling. It's an interesting feeling. The throat. Strangulation. Sex. It's like cock rings, but it's the neck in this case'.[17] Similarly, the opposing sides of the Hutchence story identify him as either self-destructively depressed or as a fun-loving sexual experimenter. The practice becomes a site for the dramatic, the spectacular and, of course, the suspicious. Thus, it lends itself to detective stories, aiding the requisite mystery surrounding a death. Auto-erotic asphyxiation is falsely attributed to Mark Callender's death in P.D. James's novel *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* and in Patricia Cornwell's *The Body Farm*, which was noted for its 'Milliganesque sexual practices'.[18] In these texts, the practice is a fabrication and deflected into the mystery narrative; it aids the puzzle fundamental to their narratives but dismisses the authenticity of the practice. Milligan's death also fuelled its deflection into comedy. A Guinness advertisement, for example, 'depict[ed] a masked, leather-and-rubber clad Tory hanging by his neck next to a bowl of oranges' which 'not surprisingly, outraged the Conservative Party'.[19] Similarly, a *Guardian* dialogue teases of Hutchence's reputedly erotic demise: '[e]xactly how bizarre [a sex act]? Were there oranges involved?'[20] In this way, these mainstream

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[15] 'Researchers believe that in many cases these deaths are mislabelled suicide or homicide, or that the circumstances are covered up by parents because of the social stigma attached to a sexually related death....The code by which coroners classify death contains no such category, so even if it is diagnosed correctly, it is often reported differently' (Bosworth, 54).

[16] Apter, 115.

[17] Richard Lermer, interview with Grace Jones, 'Grace Jones Unzipped', *The Advocate* 10 Sep. 1991: 75.

[18] Book Reviews, *Gay Times* Feb. (1995): 76. See P.D. James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* 1972 (London: Penguin, 1989) and Patricia Cornwell, *The Body Farm* (New York: Scribners, 1994).

[19] 'Guinness Drops Kinky Tory advertisement', *Gay Times* Feb. (1997): 40.

[20] 'Pass Notes No. 1460: Paula Yates', *Guardian* 16 Aug. 1999: G2: 3.

representations displace attention away from the act itself and away from any socio-cultural phenomena (such as the increased interest in dangerous sex or the age of self-endangerment) that the practice might represent.[21]

While auto-erotic asphyxiation might offer all that is taboo, with its accompanying (selective) invisibility, and sometimes fatal outcomes, it evades legal judgement.[22] However, the concept of self-endangerment or rather self-harm is at the centre of legal notions of personal liberty. John Stuart Mill's classic lines of liberalist thought directed the principle of social intervention in terms of harm: 'the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others'.[23] As Joel Feinberg points out, this "harm principle" is inadequate to cater to the permutations of modern society (where people endanger themselves), yet the doctrine of legal paternalism, which amends it, is similarly problematic in licensing 'state coercion to protect individuals from self-inflicted harm' regardless of the willingness of the self-harmer.[24] The Brown case provides a perfect example of the permutations and problematics of self-harm.

In the Brown Case, as with rulings on the mentally ill, the doctrine was invoked 'to protect competent adults, against their will, from the harmful consequences even of

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[21] The same could be said of nonmainstream representations such as Bradley J. Braverman's photographs entitled 'Auto Erotic Suicide' in *Art and Understanding: The International Magazine of Literature and Art About AIDS* June-July 1994: 17. His aestheticised image of the naked torso of a hanging man maintains a painless, mythical and sanitary status of sex and death (even as it acknowledges fatality) and, especially in the context of AIDS, was seen irresponsibly to 'glorify and sexualize' suicide (Steven R. Rich, letter to the editor, *Art and Understanding* Oct.-Nov. 1994: 3).

[22] Legal inquests into cause of death are crucial to the recognition of the behaviour, and to insurance claims.

[23] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. and. intro. Gertrude Himmelfarb (1859; Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1974) 68.

[24] Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973) 45. Feinberg, in his reform of legal paternalism, calls for the teasing out of the gradations of self-harm through an understanding of risk, but also of autonomy. He calls for 'mediating maxims or standards of application' of the otherwise ludicrously general doctrine (46). A broad and compelling discussion of the political function of consensual crime is provided by Peter McWilliams, *Ain't Nobody's Business If You Do: The Absurdity of Consensual Crime in a Free Society* (Los Angeles, CA: Prelude Press, 1993).

their fully voluntary choices and undertakings'.[25] But for this group of men 'there was more than mere consent', as Lord Slynn of Hadley claims in his conclusion, 'the persons involved positively wanted, asked for, the acts to be done to them, acts which it seems from the evidence some of them also did to themselves'.[26] While Feinberg distinguishes between this, as hard paternalism, and soft paternalism which discerns the self-harm as 'substantially nonvoluntary'[27] in order to justify intervention, this negotiation of voluntariness was not even entertained by the prosecution. Consent confounds the notion of legal paternalism, as in the Brown case it has to be dismissed in order for the state to act. This dismissal of consent, of the men's voluntary choices, is a denial of masochism which is achieved through several means. The barristers for the prosecution made the firm distinction between the appellants and the victim, although the participants were not strictly consigned to one role or the other but, as Bill Thompson asserts, displayed a 'switchability[,]...and by repeatedly using the word "victim" their lordships could deliberately avoid addressing, let alone admitting, the obvious fact that the "submissives" were "masochists"'.[28] Similarly, consent becomes immaterial through the actions being deemed criminal. As Lord Jauncey asserted: 'the infliction of bodily harm without good reason is unlawful and...the consent of the victim is irrelevant'.[29]

Consent is dismissed within the differentiation between parties, and as a subject of debate: for to disprove consent would be to acknowledge its existence. The legally consigned victim cannot be charged with complicity, or even "aiding and abetting", for the assault charge necessitates his victim status as a diminishment of responsibility. What is embedded within this is the denial of the masochist's autonomy. Although unpunished legally, negating his consent or will, his self-government or self-sovereignty are also denied--the very terms for describing the autonomous subject according to Feinberg.[30] In this way, the masochist could be seen to have no self to endanger. A further cause for

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[25] Joel Feinberg, *The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law, Volume Three: Harm to Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 12.
[26] Lord Slynn of Hadley, R. v. Brown. 2 WLR 607. HL. 1993.
[27] Feinberg, *Harm* 12.
[28] Bill Thompson, *Sadomasochism: Painful Perversion or Pleasurable Play?* (London: Cassell, 1994) 192.
[29] Lord Jauncey of Tullichettle, R. v. Brown 572.
[30] See Feinberg, *Harm*, 27-51.

the criminalisation of self-harm given by the Lords wanting to dismiss the appeal was that self-harm is against the public interest. Thus, the self of the self-harmer comes to stand in for the public, and his universal significance, the social comment at stake within the acknowledgement of masochism, is clearly suggested.[31] This also indicates how the focus of the prosecution falls upon this state of compromising physical well-being, upon risk. The question of consent is untenable, yet replaced by the unregulatable quantification of risk. The crime becomes that 'the practices of the appellants were unpredictably dangerous'.[32] When the appeal was heard for the final time, the judges again supported this speculation and '[j]ust like the English Courts, the European judges condemned the Spanner men for what they *might* have done, rather than what they actually did'.[33]

This discussion has further evidenced the institutional need to deny the desire for self-endangerment, to deny the practice of masochism, that is to subsume it within other more easily explainable or acceptable actions. My discussions of auto-erotic asphyxiation and the Brown case contest the idea that sexual excitement and death are desired prospects for the self-harmer. In my ensuing analyses of several Hollywood films and the fictional work of Dennis Cooper, it is precisely the relationship of self-endangerment to these as desired prospects that will be investigated.

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[31] This conflation of the individual with the state is based upon the most traditional and nationalistic of principles. The criminal activity upon which the Brown case was charged was "assault against the body". Historically this was criminal within consensual activity if it led to maiming for that would not just be a crime against the person, but a crime against the "loyal subject", a citizen would be unable to defend his king and country: '[v]iolence which maimed was unlawful despite consent to the activity which produced the maiming'. Lord Templeman, R. v. Brown 560.

[32] Lord Templeman, R. v. Brown 564.

[33] Angus Hamilton, *Gay Times* April (1997): 10, original emphasis. This quantification of risk is suspect not only in its speculative nature but in its homophobic slant. The case was suffused with homophobia, as demonstrated by the fact that other supposedly unlawful activities that have taken place between a heterosexual couple, have been dismissed. In addition, in the first hearing of the case, Lord Lane states: '[i]t is some comfort at least to be told...that K. has now it seems settled into a normal heterosexual relationship', qtd. in Lord Templeman, R. v. Brown 564.

Whilst a masochistic origination is attached to both auto-erotic asphyxiation and S/M,[34] they seem more simple and more complicated than this classification would allow. The practices introduce the relationship of sexual self-endangerment to death: the man alone indulging in a sexual behaviour that hinges upon the desire for the danger of death but not for death itself, and the group practising sex acts marked by their safety yet judged on their prospective danger. Self-endangerment becomes a kind of default description of both: one that I am enforcing for auto-erotic asphyxiation (to supplement but exceed masochism) and one that has been enforced upon S/M (to dismiss masochism). In continuing my investigation of the relationship between self-endangerment and masochism this idea of a default self-endangerment--of self-risk by implication--comes to apply not only to the reader/viewer but also to certain characters, especially within the more conservative films discussed in chapter three.

In its expanding cultural life, albeit glazed in infamy and spectacle, the representation of sexual self-risk must, like mental illness, be acknowledged as meeting the market's interest in it. Hence, an important question raised here is whose voluntary choices are being represented by the films or fictions? Sensationalism and scandal surrounded the "real life" cases, as the resulting narratives and counter-narratives of, especially, Stephen Milligan's discovery. The two cases introduce the different premises to the interpretation of sexual self-endangerment: the realm of fantasy--masochism as sexual freedom, and the realm of traditional values--masochism as perversion. What all these cultural productions do--the press, film and fiction--is navigate between these two realms. Both cases are marked by the centrality yet absence of the spectacle (there were no photographs of Milligan yet endless reported reconstructions, and the video of the Brown defendants' activities was confiscated),[35] an absence subsequently reconstituted by the fantasy of the journalists, readers and public. Attention fell upon evidence--the details of the Spanner men's activities, the accoutrements of Milligan's final fling--and depended upon the recorded and reported of a few, superimposed onto the minds of

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[34] My abbreviation S/M is in line with the emphasis upon sadomasochism as a recognisable sexual subculture in contemporary western society. For a discussion of the status of the slash in S/M see Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 74-75.

[35] The home video made by the Brown defendants could not be used as grounds for prosecution, for contravening obscenity laws, because of lapse of time.

many. Indeed, the fixation upon details and evidence could be seen to function as a deflection or disavowal of the readers' voyeuristic investment in the stories, so that the quest for truth justifies or alibis the public's interest. It is through the filmic and fictional texts' overt use of voyeurism, both enacted and encouraged, that the reader will be shown to be engaged with and even complicitous in the provocations of the representations. Where in chapter three, there are various methods of justifying the sexual investment of the characters or the viewer, in chapter four, the absent spectacles of Dennis Cooper's work have the opposite affect.

Voyeurism, traditionally, is sadistic in nature, and aligned with the masculine and active within Freud's "opposing pairs" of sexual difference. In the main introduction I asserted the predominant masochistic economy of spectatorship; here I confirm it through my filmic examples and a developing notion of an active masochistic gaze or voyeurism. Where the self-reflexivity of the horror metafilms, mentioned at the end of Part I, merged the spectator's gaze with the (male) murderer's sadism--or so it was suggested--the self-reflexive films of chapter three divulge the masochistic investment of the general (male or female) spectator. It is to them, to the cinematic popularisation of sexual self-endangerment, that I now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

A: Sexual Self-endangerment and Contemporary Cinema

In this chapter I take as my focus the representation of sexual self-endangerment in contemporary mainstream cinema. This representation takes two forms. Primarily, the depiction of sadomasochism offers the most obvious filmic presence of sexual self-endangerment. Various mainstream films employ the iconography of sadomasochism for their assorted generic ends. For example, contemporary comedies, such as *Exit to Eden* (Gary Marshall, 1994) and *Preaching to the Perverted* (Stuart Urban, 1997), ground their humour in the seeming bizarreness of fetishism and the contrast between the respectable, average individual and the den of iniquity in which they find themselves.[1] In both films, S/M is a source of comedy but also meant to be somewhat appealing. It is appealing in terms of its status as fun, rather than it being contagious in terms of its status as sickness. (This latter status has determined the longstanding imaging of sexual deviants within Hollywood's repertoire of psychopaths as epitomised by William Freidkin's *Cruising* (1980), cinema's most notorious depiction of sadomasochism.) These films testify to S/M's erotic encoding and integration into the popular imagination but the depictions are tame. The stylised sadomasochism in these films (as in the nonmainstream Sex Film[2]) is almost a requisite element of titillation or a shorthand sign

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[1] In *Exit to Eden* a police man and woman go undercover in a fetishists' summer camp to catch a murderer. In *Preaching to the Perverted* a wholesome Christian lad infiltrates an S/M sex club to expose its debauchery to aid a right-wing MP's anti-perversion campaign. This contrast between respectability and transgressiveness is also employed in *Personal Services* (Terry Jones, 1987) although this film is far more polemical. In *Cruising* an undercover cop's infiltration of the gay sadomasochistic sex scene not only leads to his adoption of S/M practices but of those of the killer. While *Exit to Eden* and *Preaching to the Perverted* share *Cruising*'s basic narrative structure--as investigation, disguise and conversion--their representations of sadomasochism are aligned with 1990s discourses of sexual liberty, associating it with pleasure and theatricality rather than (simply) pain, perversion and death.

[2] Soft and hard core, gay and straight sex films (pornographic films intended only for the viewer's sexual stimulation) often use sadomasochistic imagery to enhance their provocation. They incorporate the accoutrements of S/M--leather, PVC, whips, handcuffs etc.--to "spice up" the spectacle, but, as Tanya Krzywinska points out in her investigation of the genre of Explicit Sex Films, while much feminist analysis might suggest otherwise, B&D (Bondage & Discipline, which exploits S/M) is not the most prevalent type of porn and these "exotic" acts ultimately support a conservatism implicit

for sexual freedom, but it is distanced from self-endangerment. The emphasis, instead, is on mainly "harmless" fun and sexual gratification, on the generation of pleasure rather than pain.[3] In other words, these are not explicit representations of self-endangerment, although they reflect a cultural climate that I have shown to be based upon a steady flirtation with a self-endangering potential.[4]

The second form of cinematic sexual self-endangerment, and what I am most interested in here, is the covert yet enduring and pervasive presence of a masochistic investment of filmic narratives rendered in the erotic thriller. Films within this genre locate a murder and suspense narrative within the dynamics of an erotic relationship. They often also depict sadomasochism but what is most important here is their underlying masochistic economy. It is upon a selection of films from this genre that I will come to concentrate and, in particular, their reflection of and intervention into the 1990s fascination with self-endangerment. Here, as previously, the representation of self-endangerment dovetails with the conventions of genre as well as of narrative--this discussion invokes groups of films which share common themes, iconography, narrative trajectories and cinematic practices: the raw materials of generic classification--but this

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to the genre. See Tanya Krzywinska, 'Economies of Fantasy, Pleasure and Desire in Explicit Sex Film', thesis, University of North London, 1996: appendix A, ix. One example that she gives of this hegemonic framework is how lesbian sex is 'frequently bracketed by heterosexual coitus' as in *Kinkorama 14*. Tanya Krzywinska, '*Cicciolina* and the Dynamics of Transgression and Abjection in Explicit Sex Films', *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desire and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 193. As with most Explicit Sex Films, no director or date is available. In Linda Williams's earlier categorisation of sadomasochistic pornography, two of the three groups she distinguished correspond to this generic functioning of S/M. See Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 196-99.

[3] *Preaching to the Perverted* certainly contains more extreme renderings of S/M.

[4] Only in Williams's third category of the Sex Film, 'aesthetic sadomasochism', is the self at stake, in its tales of impending death and the negotiation of subjectivity. The storylines of films such as *In the Realm of the Senses* (Nagisa Oshima, 1976) and *The Story of Joanna* (Gerard Damiano, 1975) revolve around potential death. In the former, the obsessive sexual relationship between Sada and Kichi ends with Kichi strangling Sada during sex and then castrating him. In the latter, the fatally ill Jason brings to his home his admirer Joanna with the hope that she will kill him, which she finally does. Rather than evidence the aggression of acts, these more rarefied films emphasise '[t]he moment of threat...and the confusing emotions of humiliation, degradation, and pleasure-pain are paramount' (Williams, *Hard* 199). They are, according to Williams, more obviously transgressive; see *Hard* 219-26.

correspondence remains subsidiary to my central interest in the cultural currency of this theme. My focus upon a group of 1990s erotic thrillers is based upon the films' commonalities and their contemporisation of *film noir*, in particular its protagonists' masochistic dynamic. While the representation of sexual self-endangerment might be directed by genre, what is most significant here is the erotic thriller's popularisation and accentuation of *film noir*'s masochistic legacy as a 1990s event. The 1980s and 1990s has seen a burgeoning interest in *film noir* as an area of critical inquiry (all of the books referenced below were published within this period) and of creative possibilities (the production of neo-*noir* films, within which the erotic thriller inevitably lies).[5] This chapter certainly responds to this revival, ultimately placing it within a cultural analysis of the period, which it so eminently fits. In this way, I am not concerned with *noir* itself but with how it informs my analysis of these contemporary thrillers.

The erotic thrillers that I will focus on include *A Kiss Before Dying* (James Dearden, 1991), *Sliver* (Phillip Noyce, 1993), *Sensation* (Brian Grant, 1994) and *Whispers in the Dark* (Christopher Crowe, 1992). This group is characterised by a particular scenario: a woman is duped by a seductive but dangerous man, an *homme fatale*. These films reverse the classic scenario of *film noir* and with it, perhaps unexpectedly, free the representation of (female) masochism from the confines of dominant ideology. A central concern of this chapter is the negotiation of the transgressiveness of these films--as offspring of a traditional "genre" they seem to offer the conventional (patriarchal) pleasures of "woman as victim"--and of the function of masochism within them, whether as a radical (1990s) sexual practice or as a familiarly oppressive categorisation of gendered roles. My argument will take place through two discussions. The first focuses on over-identification as a classic (masochistic) trope both of confining female representation and of safe self-endangerment, in order to expose the unconstrainedness of these 1990s reworkings. The second considers the depiction of masochistic fantasies in these films and specifically how they depend upon the complicitous voyeuristic masochism of the spectator's gaze.

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[5] For a discussion of neo-*noir* see Todd Erickson, 'Kill Me Again: Movement becomes Genre', and Alain Silver, 'Son of *Noir*: Neo-*Film Noir* and the Neo-B Picture', Film Noir *Reader*, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996) 307-30, 331-38.

Before commencing these discussions I want, in this opening section, to qualify my attention to the erotic thriller as a 1990s revision of *film noir* and my focus upon female masochism.

The erotic thriller and *film noir*'s masochistic legacy

It is within mainstream cinema, in the highly popular erotic thriller, that one finds the virulent depiction of sadomasochism, but, also, a more mundane, more familiar masochistic economy: the legacy of *film noir*'s representation of sexualised self-endangerment.[6] Sexual perversion--as any break with the norms of gender and sexuality--has, historically, been harnessed by the thriller film as a sign of evil, as a narrative device delineating the good and bad characters.[7] The perverse character, whether an overly aggressive female or overly submissive male, whether a gay man or lesbian, is punished as closure.[8] While there is a case for arguing that 1990s cinema does not so simply or swiftly equate sadomasochism and evil, where they remain conflated is in the erotic thriller and its contemporisation of *film noir*'s *femme fatale*.

The "trappings" of sadomasochism featured in one of the most popular films of the 1990s.[9] In *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1995) the male victim was tied up during sex and then murdered with an ice pick. In *Body of Evidence* (Uli Edel, 1992), a far less successful but no less telling erotic thriller, the male victim was similarly killed during a sexual experience within the context of an S/M relationship. The women in these films,

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[6] Willliams confirms that images of male masochism are more likely to be found within the mainstream than hard core sex films, see Williams, *Hard* 196.

[7] For example *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) or *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980).

[8] This is, of course, a familiar interpretation of the ideology of classical narrative cinema itself. There are numerous arguments evidencing this. Of horror, Carol J. Clover has written that '[k]illing those who seek or engage in unauthorised sex amounts to a generic imperative of the slasher film', *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 34. For an illustration of the filmic treatment of homosexuality see Vito Russo's necrology in *The Celluloid Closet* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1981) 347-49.

[9] The film grossed $352.7m worldwide, and $53m in rentals in the USA. It received Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, Sharon Stone, however, won two MTV awards: for best female performance and most desirable female. '*Basic Instinct*: Awards and Nominations', *The International Movie Database* Amazon.com, Dec. 1999 <http://us.imdb.com>.

Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) and Rebecca Carlson (Madonna), respectively, epitomise the *femme fatale* in their powerful presence and potential deadliness. Likewise their men, Nick (Michael Douglas) and Frank (Willem Dafoe), epitomise the other *noir* staple: the infatuated but duped male.

Sadomasochism, here, accentuates the traditional roles of the two *noir* protagonists. It underlines the dangerousness of the woman, as unconventionally active and aggressive, and the masochism of the man, as submissive and wanting.[10] These roles are the same as are found in such classic noirs as *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946), or *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) where, similarly, the man's attraction to the seductive but deadly woman is propelled by the threat which she represents. These 1990s erotic thrillers recode the erotic dynamics of *film noir* for the 1990s appetite, which is, as I have suggested, pinned to a desire for self-endangerment. The erotic intent (and contemporary investment) of this masochistic dynamic is especially pronounced within the emergence of the "filmic female sexual killer" whose murder of men runs concurrent with orgasm.[11] In, for example, *Indecent Behaviour* (Lawrence Lanoff, 1994) and *Sea of Love* (Harold Becker, 1989), as well as *Basic Instinct* and *Body of Evidence*, sex and danger are merged to the extent that they occur at the same time. The *femme fatale*'s danger is explicitly sexual, and her lover's sexual submissiveness is framed by potential death and as such is self-endangering rather than simply masochistic.

Throughout this chapter I refer to both sexual self-endangerment and masochism. The two are distinguishable, as I demonstrated in my introduction: masochism is about the fantasy of pain or subjugation, and self-endangerment about the prospect of death. Where the erotic thriller makes the hero/heroine's masochism clear by employing S/M, this masochism only becomes self-endangerment when the sadist is a murderer. However, the masochistic economy of the films, especially *A Kiss Before Dying,* which

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[10] *Body of Evidence* in particular revels in these inverted gender roles with its repeated staging of the couple's sexual play: one scene shows Rebecca dripping wax onto Frank's naked torso.

[11] For a discussion of the cultural construction of, and desire for, the filmic female sexual killer see Michele Aaron, 'The Exploits of the Female Sexual Killer: Taking the Knife to the *Body of Evidence*', *Sisterhoods*, eds. Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto, 1998) 167-82.

does not contain S/M, is about identifying the governing desire of the hero/heroine, and with them the spectator, as being about the possibility (fantasy) of murder. This remains the best way of describing the films' masochistic economy. (It also remains an apt description of the spectator's investment, in that the danger of murder is never real--it being fictitious--but always only a fantasy.)

Film noir has been beset with problems of definition, but of the raw materials contributing to its categorisation as a genre--its formal style, cinematic flagrancy, narrative structure--the *noir* quality that is most significant here is the central dynamic between the main characters.[12] This dynamic is implicit to definitions of the genre[13] and is updated within this particular group of modern *noirs*. While the genre has been theorised in various ways (in terms, for example, of its formal properties or its representation of gender), I am distinguishing it as a genre about masochism, ultimately finding the submissive man far more interesting than the *femme fatale*. These 1990s films update *noir* precisely through contemporising and accentuating the masochistic dynamic of the central relationship, often through the practice of S/M. While their preoccupation with sexual self-endangerment is foregrounded by this practice, I would suggest that an underlying masochistic aesthetic has always characterised *noir* and these 1990s versions render it explicit.

Basic Instinct and *Body of Evidence*'s reflection of 1990s discourses of sexual liberty, in their use of S/M, must be set against the legacy of male anxieties deriving from *film noir* of the 1940s. After all, do these films break with the traditional pleasures of *noir*? They repeat *noir*'s traditional representation of women: the *femme fatale* is assertive, aggressively sexual and independent yet clearly also a classic figure of fetishisation, disavowing the fear of castration. The overvaluation of her beauty and/or her punishment compensates for the threat that woman poses and, considering the

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[12] For discussions of the characteristics of *noir*, see Silver and Ursini, Film Noir *Reader* Part I; Jon Tuska, *Dark Cinema: American* Film Noir *in Cultural Perspective* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984) xxi-iv; Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Men, Masculinity and* Film Noir (London: Routledge, 1991) x-xii.

[13] For example, commencing her list of *noir*'s familiar components--'an urban setting...convoluted plot structure, chiaroscuro lighting'--Joan Copjec has 'a femme fatale [and] a morally compromised detective'. Joan Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir* (London: Verso, 1983) xi.

endurance of the genre, that she continues to pose.[14] The radical theme of male masochism--antithetical as it seems to "real" masculinity--is firmly instated within the patriarchal plot's drama of the phallic woman and *temporarily* feminised, weak and otherwise misguided man. Ultimately, *Basic Instinct* and *Body of Evidence* like their predecessors reinforce the equation between sexual perversion and murderousness, and invest it with the gendered threat, for integral to the *femme fatale*'s perversity is an autonomous female sexual expression: as lesbianism in *Basic Instinct* and as masturbation in *Body of Evidence*.[15] *Basic Instinct* might evade restoration--Trammel is not punished *and* her threat endures with the murder weapon revealed under the bed of the couple making love in the film's final shots--but *Body of Evidence* encapsulates the conservatism of closure with the dramatic punishment of Rebecca, and Frank's return to his wife.[16] The films seem to break the classic mould with *Basic Instinct*'s perpetuation of male masochistic fantasy and *Body of Evidence*'s unique depiction of sadomasochistic pleasure, but ultimately they tread familiar ground: the emphasis upon male fantasy and the male spectator maintains a familiarly patriarchal narrative pattern, resolution and system of representation.

Finding these seemingly subversive figures to be conservative, I have turned instead to the masochistic dynamic between a *male* prime suspect and his *female* lover: the *Jagged Edge* (Richard Marquand, 1985) model rather than the *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) model, of an *homme fatale* and masochistic woman. Still indicative of the evolution of *film noir*, films from this group actually intervene into this rubric of reassurance, into the restorative role of masochism. There are many films which depend upon this scenario. *A Kiss Before Dying*, *Sliver*, *Sensation*, *Whispers in the Dark* and *Bodily Harm* (James Lemmo, 1995) draw upon and adapt the traditional pleasures of the

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[14] See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: MacMillan, 1989) 14-26. In offering socio-cultural reasons for the continued popularity of *noir*, Todd Erickson connects male anxieties, arising from women's increased agency during the war, to, for example, those produced in the wake of feminism (312-13).

[15] Cindy Patton has noted the significance of this threat: 'the reluctance to entertain lesbian desire comes not from a fear of female homosexuality, but rather from a fear of constructing autonomous female pleasure'. Cindy Patton, 'Hegemony and Orgasm--Or the Instability of Heterosexual Pornography', *Screen* Winter-Spring (1989): 102.

[16] For a discussion of the conservatism of the filmic female sexual killer see Aaron, 'Exploits' 167-82.

erotic thriller and are saturated with noirish effects, in terms of lighting and setting as well as the central couple: a version of the duped investigator who falls for the dangerously sexual character. At the same time they raise the question of whether the female characters follow or depart from traditional representation of submissive women. Several of the films depict sadomasochism, but all portray various forms of masochistic fantasy. They will be shown to accentuate the sexualised risks of the central relationship, and of spectatorship, by their emphasis upon voyeurism and the complicity of looking: upon the perversity of cinematic practices.[17] In this way they can be, like the other texts investigated in this thesis, characterised by self-reflexivity.

The traditional *femme fatale*/male dupe thrillers of the 1940s and today, re-enact the narrative of conventional restoration: male mastery is rendered all that more masterful by contrast to the previous masochism. The 1990s representation of male masochism has radical aspirations and reflects masochism's current 'theoretical renaissance in which the erotics of submission have been reclaimed by a diverse group of scholars as an emancipatory sexuality for men',[18] but ultimately it serves traditional purposes. It is, instead, the filmic presence of female masochism that offers a more far-reaching commentary on the representation of sexual self-endangerment in contemporary cinema (and in contemporary theory). However, choosing to focus upon and, ultimately, welcome female masochism is inherently problematic, despite the cross-gender implications that I will expose. After all, the historical alignment of women with passivity underlies patriarchy, and the notion that women seek, incite or encourage male aggression is the virulent root of an enduring invisibility of male violence. This critical minefield necessitates explanation, and I will trace briefly the relationship between film and female masochism in order to qualify my intervention.

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[17] Williams in her discussion of cinema and sex distinguishes two concerns emanating from Bazin's theories of film realism: cinema's representation of perversion and, most importantly here, cinema as perversion where 'violence and abuse are understood less literally, not as real violence and aggression perpetrated on the real women depicted in films, but as perversions "implanted" in cinematic discourse itself: the sadistic, masochistic, voyeuristic, and fetishizing structures that operate throughout the whole of cinema to deny female subjectivity and to render women the exhibitionist objects of male desire and aggression' (*Hard* 189).

[18] Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 87.

Film and Female Masochism

Paula Caplan has argued that female masochism, as the (real) woman's need for suffering, is a myth which has been perpetuated by psychoanalysts and society alike to maintain the patriarchal status quo and women's subservience.[19] This myth encompasses the history of women's oppression and Freud's and his followers' assertion of masochism as a feminine trait[20] (expressed by men and women) as well as the ongoing figuring of the suffering female throughout literature, film and art (especially in genres popular with women).[21] Although masochism as a sexual preference has been reclaimed as an active desire,[22] and '[f]ew would now assert that women are "more" masochistic than men',[23] female masochism cannot, and to some extent must not, escape its misogynistic background.

As Williams points out: '[t]he recovery of masochism as a form of pleasure does not bode well for a feminist perspective whose political point of departure is the relative powerlessness of women'.[24] For some writers, masochism 'has become synonymous...with internalized oppression'.[25] This is the dilemma that has confronted some feminists: to reconcile female pleasure in submission with the damning of male oppression, to encourage female agency at the same time as effectively denying it. Film theory provides a lucrative arena for the staging of this dilemma, since submission and

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[19] See Paula J. Caplan, *The Myth of Women's Masochism* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985).

[20] For discussions of feminine masochism see Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924) *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 11. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 413-26; and also Helene Deutsch, 'The Significance of Masochism in the Mental Life of Women', *Essential Papers on Masochism* ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 411-22.

[21] Michelle A. Massé offers a very clear line on Gothic fiction's perpetuation of this ideologically loaded myth: 'what characters in these novels represent, whether through repudiation, doubt, or celebration, is the cultural, psychoanalytic, and fictional expectation that they *should* be masochistic if they are "normal" women'. Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) 2.

[22] Linda Ruth Williams finds masochism to be ultimately about 'control[ling] the other's control', 'Submission and Reading', *New Formations* Spring (1989): 14.

[23] Hanly, intro. to Part V 406.

[24] Williams, *Hard* 205.

[25] Hart, 87.

masochism, as I previously suggested, characterise the spectatorial experience. Indeed, the evolution of feminist film theory could be seen to pivot around issues of masochism. This is largely due to the effect of Laura Mulvey's feminist analysis of classical narrative cinema in 1975, which made compelling claims about cinema's gendered power dynamics. Mulvey found that within classical narratives the woman had a fixed erotic yet passive role as object of the gaze of male characters within the film and of the spectator outside of the film. The man was the subject and 'reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like'.[26] While successfully exposing the importance of the female spectacle, and her capacity to reassure, Mulvey's essay denied both female agency and male masochism.

Important contributions to the debate (not least by Mulvey herself) followed in the wake of these dismissals, addressing female pleasure in activity and male pleasure in submission.[27] The dilemma of gendering masochism is consistently negotiated by feminist film theorists addressing cinema's violent spectacles, their victims, and issues of identification, for example Williams's work on the Hard Core Sex Film, Clover's on Horror and Tania Modleski's on Hitchcock.[28] These theorists challenge not only Mulvey's supposition of the (male) sadism of cinema[29] (inherent in any theory of the objectification of women) but Kaja Silverman's and Gaylyn Studlar's expositions of its masochistic economy.[30] What surfaces is the assertion that spectatorship is more complex than both the reductive assignments of activity/passivity along gender lines and the embracing of masochism at the expense of women's history. Instead, Modleski

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[26] Mulvey, 20.

[27] For a discussion of the female spectator's adoption of the male garb of the gaze, see Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Visual* 29-38; and for a discussion of the male erotic object see Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up', and Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *The Sexual Subject: A* Screen *Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) 265-76, 277-87.

[28] See Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[29] As Clover points out: 'horror is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it--which raises questions about film theory's conventional assumption that the cinematic apparatus is organized around the experience of a mastering, voyeuristic gaze' (8-9).

[30] See Kaja Silverman, 'Masochism and Subjectivity', *Framework* 12 (1980): 2-9; Gaylyn Studlar, 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema', *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols, vol. 2. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 602-21.

promotes the interconnection of masochistic and sadistic spectatorial pleasures[31] and, looking also to the work of Teresa de Lauretis, Williams recognises a model of bisexuality as opening up the possibility 'of more fluid movements on the part of both male and female spectators'.[32] Indeed, it is the spectator's 'movement' or 'alternation' between subject positions and active pleasures, unconstrained by gender, that fuels my analyses of these 1990s erotic thrillers and their resonance within what I see as the masochistic investment of a general spectator.[33]

Female masochism in my chosen films can be seen as an autonomous and active desire, distanced from male violence that is assuredly and deliberately condemned. Male violence is not the allegorical force which determines the representation, or rather the masculinisation, of the female sexual killer. It is not a limiting factor in its marginal place, casting an unpalatable shadow upon her activity, but by its prominence and welcome rejection, allows room for the woman's unconventional desire, undermining the logic which states that 'women cannot *perform* the masochistic role because they *are* masochists'.[34] This allows not only for a "positive" female masochism but, in undoing conventional binaries, the possibility of cross-identification, and thus a non-gendered masochistic gaze by the (male or female) spectator. There are exceptions to this rule of liberatory female masochism and, it is important to add, that the readings of the films (of film in general) should maintain a healthy scepticism with regard to the eroticising of male violence.[35]

It is to this spectre of gender within the eroticisation of death that I now turn: to the haunting presence of potential death as the female protagonist's masochistic destiny.

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[31] See Modleski, *Women* 12-13.
[32] Williams, *Hard* 206.
[33] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 142, 143.
[34] Hart, 89, original emphasis.
[35] *Bodily Harm*, which repeats in reverse *Basic Instinct*, is a perfect example of the problems attending the unchecked sadism of the hero. Catherine Tramell's reincarnation as Sam Keen might promise the quintessential male sexual killer, but this paradigm can not be simply inverted for it is so loaded: Sam is hardly punished for the sadistic murders and a framed female dies in his place. *Bodily Harm* is far from being an accomplished erotic thriller, but is a telling reflection of the spectre of gender in the 1990s eroticisation of death.

Through the frame of over-identification I will analyse the films *A Kiss Before Dying* and *Sensation* and their relationship to (female) masochism.

B: Seductive Suspects and the Doubling Woman

In *A Kiss Before Dying*, *Sensation* and *Sliver*, not only does the susceptible female fall for the potentially murderous man, but the narratives hinge upon her strong primarily physical connection to a dead woman. This connection is over-determined--obsessive and self-endangering--by the heroine in the first two films especially, and by all other characters in the last two. While the heroine's connection is primarily physical, the heroine also occupies, or comes to occupy, other aspects of the dead woman's identity such as location, lifestyle or relationship. Each narrative offers a variation on this theme of over-identification. I will concentrate here on *A Kiss Before Dying* and *Sensation* and use Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) as a necessary frame to the discussion. Although *Rebecca* is thought of as a melodrama, its gothic or noirish aesthetics and its staging of the late Rebecca's torturous influence over her tricked husband (as a proto-*femme fatale* perhaps), render it a valid focus for this discussion. *Rebecca* also provides an ideal model of female over-identification for my ensuing analyses of female masochism.[36] Hitchcock is a central figure in the ensuing discussion for many reasons, above and beyond his thematic obsession with female over-identification: his seminal role in the thriller and, its most masochistic of elements, suspense, the feminist interest in his work which is rich in both female characters and potential misogyny, and the obvious connection between these 1990s films and his work, connections that some of the films make explicit.

Over-identification, as a recurring and obviously loaded theme in narrative cinema, will be shown to intersect with the misogynist patriarchal idea of the interchangeability of women: the woman as object, as commodity, as replaceable.[37] With

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[36] This also testifies to the non-fixity of *noir*, which operates as a style rather than a genre.

[37] This receives its most extreme rendering within the theorisation of the serial killer: 'accompanying the symbolic annihilation of genuine female presence, even distracting us from noticing it, is the concomitant manufacture of a ubiquity of interchangeable, unmemorable, literally fashioned, veritably glamorous "girls"'. Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1988) 174-75.

its role within feminist film theory, over-identification becomes a perfect theme with which to interrogate the feminising of masochism within the patriarchal determination of these representations of women (especially when my model is *Rebecca*, a "women's film": the male construction of a female genre) and thereby assess the significance and interventionist capacity of these 1990s representations of sexualised risk. This is because female over-identification, although resonating so firmly within patriarchy, is integral to the erotic thrillers' contemporisation of *noir*'s masochistic economy and their 1990s fascination with self-endangerment. I will firstly address over-identification in terms of female spectatorship, patriarchal narrative pattern and suspense. Having established these three issues I will reconsider them through readings of *Kiss* and then *Sensation* in order to illustrate how these films conform to or depart from patriarchal imperatives and the safe self-endangerment of spectatorship.

Over-identification has been used to describe woman's cinematic experience and, what is more, is characterised by masochism. Following Mulvey, the female spectator inevitably identifies with the passive, masochistic, female character (and the male subject off-screen with the male subject on-screen).[38] What is crucial here is that because this structuring of the image denies her agency, because she is 'constructed differently in relation to processes of looking',[39] this identification is marked by an excessiveness or closeness. It is over-determined, for the woman is unable to employ the defensive mechanisms of disavowal or objectification available to men, to distance her from the threats of the text. She is forced, therefore, to over-identify.[40] As Linda Williams points out:

> The psychoanalytic model of cinematic pleasure has been based on the phenomenon of fetishistic disavowal: the contradictory gesture of

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[38] According to Mary Ann Doane '[g]iven the structures of cinematic narrative, the woman who identifies with a female character must adopt a passive or masochistic position'. See Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991) 24.

[39] Doane, *Femme* 24.

[40] 'The association of tears and "wet wasted afternoons" (in Molly Haskell's words) with genres specified as feminine (the soap opera, the "woman's picture") points very precisely to this type of over-identification, this abolition of a distance, in short, this inability to fetishize'. Doane, *Femme* 24, qtg. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974) 154.

> *believing* in an illusion (the cinematic image, the female penis) and yet *knowing* that it is an illusion, an imaginary signifier. This model sets up a situation in which the woman becomes a kind of failed fetishist: lacking a penis she lacks the biological foundation to engage in the sophisticated game of juggling presence and absence in cinematic representation; hence her presumed over-identification.[41]

Mary Ann Doane confirmed that as well as over-identifying, the female spectator can cross-identify with the male gaze by means of, what Mulvey termed, a certain transvestism.[42] However, as Williams notes, '[e]ither way, according to Doane, she loses herself'.[43] Feminist film theorists have challenged this model of female spectatorship as implicitly self-endangering, and located female pleasure within or beyond such a structuring of the gaze. Williams, for example, uses *Stella Dallas* to demonstrate how female characters, and thus female spectators, can engage in the sophisticated games arising from *their* voyeuristic distance.[44] Doane, like Mulvey, looks to avant-garde cinematic practices to intervene into the entrapment of over-identification. Modleski finds that Hitchcock's recurrent thematisation of over-identification is less a problem for women than for men or for Hitchcock in particular.[45] In the films I will be discussing, over-identification functions as the narratives' masochistic promise, rather than simply as a female trait (or feminised symptom of the women's film).

Modleski links over-identification to a narrative's female oedipal trajectory and in this way the theme not only draws upon the female spectator's relationship to the text, but is emblematic of the female character's destiny. This suggests further evidence of the masochistic entrapment of women within the status quo, but, in applying this trajectory

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[41] Linda Williams, '"Something Else Besides a Mother": *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama', *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 156.

[42] See Doane, *Femme* 31-32, and Mulvey, 29-38.

[43] Williams, 'Something' 154.

[44] 'I would argue instead that this manufacturing of distance, this female voyeurism-with-a- difference, is an aspect of *every* female spectator's gaze at the image of her like. For rather than adopting either the distance and mastery of the masculine voyeur or the over-identification of Doane's woman who loses herself in the image, the female spectator is in a constant state of juggling all positions at once'. Williams, 'Something' 155.

[45] See Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988) 1-15.

to my chosen films, it also affords another measure of narrative deviation. While *A Kiss Before Dying* and *Sensation* (and *Whispers in the Dark*) offer rare representations of women's masochistic fantasies, these always prove to be haunted by their narrative function as stages within a realisation of female destiny. Modleski's psychoanalytic reading of *Rebecca*--the story of a young woman's (the new Mrs DeWinter's) appropriation of an older dead woman's (Rebecca's) life--reclaims the female oedipal trajectory as the pattern and rubric for the development of its female heroine. Such a reading is based upon Freud's articulation, in his lecture on femininity, of the girl's passage to maturity. This 'change to femininity' is marked by her shift from the clitoris to the vagina as the site of sexual pleasure--a shift from a female-identified self-pleasure to a pleasure in penetration--and the transfer of her original attachment to her mother to her father: the male--the correct--object of desire.[46] That this original attachment 'ends in hate' is essential to the transfer.[47] For, as Freud asserts, the girl blames her mother for her own castrated state which she seeks to amend by gaining the father's penis or its substitute, a baby. Psychoanalytic theorists have seen cultural narratives, especially mainstream narratives, as restaging these oedipal dramas, and in so doing maintaining the patriarchal status quo of sexual difference.

The Freudian narrative progression marks woman's maturation by ultimately allowing her to take up her rightful position as object of the male gaze, as 'giving preference to passive aims'.[48] *Rebecca* follows the heroine's initial over-identification with, and eventual rejection of, the "mother" to allow her to achieve happiness with the husband: '*Rebecca* shows the *heroine's* attempt to detach herself from the mother in order to attach herself to a *man*'.[49] This rejection, as hegemonic restoration, is dramatically marked at closure as the spectre of the absent woman--represented by her rooms, her monogrammed possessions, and devoted servant--is fully destroyed, consumed in fact by flames: '[t]his denial of the absent woman and the resultant

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[46] Freud, 'Femininity' (1932) *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 2. trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 151. In the phallic phase, both the small boy and girl gain pleasure from masturbation through their respective, albeit differently sized, erectile organs.
[47] Freud, 'Femininity' 155.
[48] Freud, 'Femininity' 149.
[49] Modleski, 50, original emphasis.

recuperation of presence form the basis for the reunification and harmony of the couple which closes the film'.[50]

Although Modleski argues that Rebecca herself is a liberatory female character, over-identification is integral to the reconstitution of patriarchal order in the film. The 1990s erotic thrillers under discussion break with the tradition of over-identification employing it instead for their own self-endangering aims. *A Kiss Before Dying* follows this oedipal trajectory to some extent, but challenges its outcome for women and its status as a solely female domain. *Sensation* offers interesting interventions into the rubric. While over-identification, in origin, occurs with the mother--Rebecca is a mother figure by default, through Maxim DeWinter's paternal role for his new wife[51]--the women with whom the heroine over-identifies in these 1990s erotic thrillers are not such obvious mother figures.

Like *Sliver*, *Rebecca* offers a variation on this theme of over-identification with a dead woman which is similarly circumstantial. It, too, is tied to location rather than appearance and to the other/male characters over-identifying the heroine with the dead woman. While this is established and developed some way into the film in *Rebecca*, in *Sliver* the heroine is initially and constantly reminded of her resemblance to the dead woman and, like the new Mrs DeWinter, her presence in the dead woman's house has been engineered by a man. In *A Kiss Before Dying* and *Sensation* the heroine determines or at least directs the course of the over-identification and in so doing offers a more transgressive take on what seems a conventional theme. This is a crucial point, for what is distinguished is this sense of the female characters' willed desire rather than their unwitting compliance to the patriarchal plot.

Of course, the female oedipal rubric is also one of reassurance, both as the confirmation of gender roles and as a system of (safe) self-endangerment. The films trace the familiar narrative path from self-endangerment to self-consolidation. The over-identification with a dead woman procures the loss, or at least fragility, of self and with

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[50] Doane, '*Caught* and *Rebecca*: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence', *Feminism and Film Theory* ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988) 210.
[51] Rebecca's default maternity is reiterated by her false pregnancy which is revealed at the film's conclusion.

the rejection of this state the self is securely reformulated.[52] My aim here is to demonstrate how these texts challenge the "safe" self-endangerment of over-identification and mark it as sexualised. Crucially, in all the films--*Rebecca*, *A Kiss Before Dying*, *Sensation* and *Sliver*--the heroine over-identifies not just with a dead woman but with a dead woman who was the victim, potentially, of her present lover. Over-identification, in this way, comes to symbolise the heroine's active flirtation with the possibility of death, a self-endangerment that is sexualised. The degree to which the heroine *chooses* this "perverse" emulation or desire for death, or is aware of their lover's culpability, varies. Rather than re-laying the tracks of female destiny, these texts languish in the sexual self-endangerment of the heroine as a prime source of suspense.

The third point about over-identification, then, is how it performs as the narrative device of suspense, a device which is, I would argue, intrinsically masochistic. The heroine's alignment with a dead woman in each film establishes the constant reminder of their shared destinies. Each cinematic act of over-identification builds suspense, charging the narrative with her inevitable demise. This inevitability, this masochistic charge to her over-identification, is accentuated in *A Kiss Before Dying* by Sean Young playing both sisters (Dory who is murdered and Ellen who over-identifies with her).[53] In *A Kiss Before Dying* suspense will be shown to be inscribed cinematically--as repetitions, motifs

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[52] It is important to note how this over-investment and re-creation of the dead, implicit to over-identification, corresponds to the process of mourning as outlined by Freud, in which the grieving subject reassigns his or her interest in the lost object to a new second object. This reassignment must be rejected for the completion of the mourning process, just as over-identification must be for self-consolidation. See Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917 [1915]) *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 11. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 251-68. This is especially applicable to *A Kiss Before Dying*, in which Ellen's over-identification is bound up with her mourning for her dead sister. The over-investment and re-creation of the lost loved one is the subject of Elizabeth Bronfen's discussion of mourning and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). Although it focuses upon the male protagonists' love of a dead woman, quite a different topic to mine, it confirms how the "doubled" female body comes to symbolise prospective death (to reiterate/confirm the dead-ness of the original loved one, or perpetuate the melancholic state). See Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) 339-46.

[53] That this was not true of the original *A Kiss Before Dying* (Gerd Oswald, 1955) emphasises the intent here. This is just one example of the earlier film's remarkable difference in terms of an absent masochistic charge. In *Vertigo*, however, this charge is similarly inscribed through Kim Novak playing both Madeleine and Judy.

etc.--and through the manipulation of knowledge which is central to suspense. The extent of the romantic nature of the relationship between the heroine and the potential murderer, and of the heroine's knowledge of the male's status as suspect, varies. The point at which, and degree to which, the heroine, and, equally importantly, the audience, knows or suspects this knowledge is crucial. This sense of timing, of the co-workings of knowledge and suspense, determines the dramatic potency of the films but it also determines the masochism of both the heroine (the focus of the on-screen masochism) and the audience in its identification and complicity (the off-screen masochism). Turning to *A Kiss Before Dying*, let us now investigate its thematisation of over-identification in light of the three factors raised--spectatorship, suspense and traditional trajectories--as well as Ellen's willingness to over-identify, and the cinematic strategies employed to convey it.

Ellen to Jay: 'Come On, Take Advantage of Me'

In *A Kiss Before Dying* Jonathan Corliss (Matt Dillon) pushes Dorothy Carlsson (Sean Young) from the roof of the building in which she believed they were to be married. Her death is taken as suicide until Ellen, her twin sister, starts investigating. She traces Dory's ex-boyfriend, Tommy, but Jonathan also kills him and makes it look like he committed suicide, having "confessed" on his computer to Dory's murder. Having married Jonathan, now Jay Faraday, Ellen uncovers his true identity as Dory's murderer. Jonathan is killed in a final scene as he pursues her across the train tracks behind his mother's house.

The television news report of Dory's death informs also of her mother's suicide and her brother's death in an auto-accident. Thus, a family framed by death is central to the film which is seeped in supposed suicides and gruesome murders in which women, mainly, are the helpless victims. From the opening murder, death is immediately associated with love, disguise and with ulterior motives. The film establishes the dangers of submission to the seductive male, Jonathan, which both shape and predetermine the rest of our suspenseful viewing. While Ellen's visual and symbolic connection to Dory is my initial point of attention, the film is rife with connections--repeated visual motifs or imagery--which surpass this simple coupling. One example of this (and of the film's potential critique of the victimisation of women) is how Carlsson Steel, the father's

business, the patriarchal institution, is connected to death: when Dory lands from the fall the blood splattering onto a nearby woman is reminiscent of the sparks of metal in the film's opening sequences of the steel works. Similarly, Jay's throwing of Dory's shoes into the apartment block's incinerator--his final annihilation of Dory's identity--is also reminiscent of the furnace.

When Ellen returns to the scene of Dory's death, the shot starts at the top of the building and tilts down in what is the first of many repetitions of falling or plunging imagery that are linked to death.[54] Paralleling these scenes connects Ellen to her potential murder and serves as a constant reminder of the proximity and possibility of her own death. Both the heroine and spectator are implicated within the inevitability of this repetition, as will be demonstrated. Once Ellen has entered the building, we receive a high-angle shot looking down from its roof. Ellen is then shown standing at the ledge, suggesting that this was a point-of-view shot: a shot which merged Ellen's and the camera/audience's gaze. Ellen's alignment/identification with Dory, and ours with Ellen--suggested here through camera angles--serves to confront both her and us with the prospect of death. The narrative is punctuated by this visual memory (of Dory's death) and prophetic device (of others' deaths). This functions for the spectator as a constant suspenseful charge, but also reiterates the spectator's privileged information about Dory's murder so that tension is based on fear through knowledge rather than through ignorance. This is at the core of suspense, as Charles Derry reveals: '[i]f the creation of curiosity demands that information be withheld from the spectator, the creation of suspense demands that enough information be revealed to the spectator so he or she can anticipate what might happen'.[55]

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[54] When the head of Dory's friend, Patricia Farran, is identified, Ellen drops a cup of coffee and its fall is shot from above in slow motion. Similarly, Jay is shown dropping Patricia's body over the bridge. The frequency of this imagery--within this film but also others--corresponds to a motif of self-endangerment previously discussed: the figure on top of a high building. *Sliver* also begins with a woman pushed from a tall building. This image seems emblematic of the risks of urban life, a trope both of the cinematic representations of self-endangerment and of *film noir*, but it also represents the prospect of death and as such is an important ingredient of the films' masochistic charge.

[55] Charles Derry, *The Suspense Thriller: Films in the Shadow of Alfred Hitchcock* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988) 31.

In *Kiss*, the spectators' privileged information, and Ellen's over-identification, more than fuels their anticipation: it determines their masochistic identification with her. Suspense, through Derry's exposition, is determined by the gap or distance between what the audience knows and what the heroine knows. In "suspense films", the spectator is made more aware than the character yet suspends that awareness, that privileged knowledge, in participating in her confusion and distress, thereby procuring an especially complicitous relationship. Suspense, like masochism, requires the disavowal of knowledge and like masochism it depends upon a consensual relationship: the creation and covering up of complicity is essential to suspense. The spectator undergoes a necessary forgetting of knowledge, of the predictable--suspending knowledge in favour of submission. *Kiss* provides a prime example of how the viewer's privileged perspective or knowledge is used in a suspenseful way and how the proximity of death creates a special environment for his or her complicity. In this case, the spectator is the sole witness to the film's first murder and thus complicity through knowledge is achieved via a murder scene. None of the other films reveal the murderer's identity but instead give out clues for the creation of suspense: they rely solely upon the inevitability of over-identification. When Ellen goes to Pennsylvania University to investigate Dory's death, we see Jay lurking in the background--her previously mentioned 'lover-boy' and Jay remain distinct until later. Thus the audience's horror and surprise at Jay and Ellen's relationship is displaced from the awareness that Jay is her lover, to the fact that he is her lover already. This exists beyond audience knowledge and as such encourages the audience, in its diminished privilege or mastery, to suspend judgement--they are no longer all-knowing--and to continue to identify with Ellen and with the desire for the murderer, an identification now that much more clearly masochistic for the viewer.

Ellen returns from her trip to see Jay that same night, and her passage in these first few scenes reverses that of her sister's--the fall, the roof, Jonathan/Jay. Ellen withdraws into identification with Dory, to take up her position. When Ellen says to detective Corelli 'don't worry there won't be a repeat performance' she confirms the ease with which she adopts and is seen as adopting Dory's place as well as a certain pleasure in it. This pleasure is again apparent in her enjoyment at confronting Tommy. She seems fearless of the murderer and revels in her identification as Dory. Alongside Ellen's pleasure in over-identifying with the dead woman is a certain sexualisation of

murders occurring in the film, promoting the association of sex and death. When Jay strangles Tommy, Tommy is on the floor face down and Jay is on top of him, behind him. The scene is interspersed with Ellen listening to a radio report about a spate of sexual attacks that have been 'homosexual in nature', making the homosexual coding of the murder deliberate. The sexualisation of murder is repeated in Jay's strangling of Patricia Farran. This time he is on top of her and she is on her back, maintaining conventional sexual positionings.

When Ellen's suspicions about her sister's murder are renewed, Jay for the first time expresses anger. Music starts at the end of this scene and the film cuts to its source, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, which Ellen is watching on television. In the *Vertigo* clip as Scottie pursues Madeleine towards the bell tower, Jay is then shown approaching Ellen. This clip also parallels Jay's pursuit of Ellen at the film's end and questions who is being aligned with Scottie as the innocent party who is subsequently revealed as both manipulated and complicit. That Dory, like Madeleine, is murdered--does not commit suicide--is already known. Thus, the significance of this reference to *Vertigo* lies with the woman's doubling and disguise for it directly focuses on one woman's adoption of the identity of another and the (general) acknowledged desire for this over-identification to continue. (It also reiterates the connection between the prospect of death and tall buildings.) Where Ellen elects to change her appearance, Judy is persuaded to, but that Judy's over-identification ends in her death reiterates the prospect for Ellen.[56]

At the point where Ellen is most interested in solving the case, most aware of the still existing danger, she dyes her hair blonde and fully identifies as victim. It is then, as Dory, that Jay's past comes to light. Ellen's full adoption of Dory's visual identity is also marked by her appropriation of the identity of "whore" and by the two sisters alignment with the mother. As her father says: 'Dory was a whore, just like her mother'. Jay says

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[56] The uncontained fantasy of the make-over that *Vertigo* projects is also to be drawn from the fact, as Peter Wollen has noted, that Kim Novak replaced Hitchcock's first choice for the role of Madeleine: '[t]hus not only was Judy made-over into Madeleine--to match the image of Scottie's obsession within the film and Hitchcock's outside it--but Novak, playing Judy, was simultaneously made-over as Miles, the real object of Hitchcock's obsession outside the film'. Peter Wollen, 'Compulsion', *Sight and Sound* 7.4 (1997): 16.

to Ellen: 'I don't like your hair, it makes you look cheap'.[57] Ellen is not only aligned with the mother as whore but also as saint, as a hospital nurse says to her: '[m]ust be nice to play Mother Theresa'. While Ellen rejects her over-identification with Dory/the mother as whore--the negative patriarchal construct of woman--she remains aligned with women, with mother as saint, through her job as social worker. In addition, her separation from the (m)other is not about taking up her position as object of the male gaze but of rejecting it. (It is Jay, in contrast, who is unable to separate from the mother and is finally punished.)

Ellen's over-identification becomes, comparatively at least, a self-assertion rather than its opposite. Next day, back as a brunette, having rejected the (m)other, Ellen identifies Jay as Jonathan. As Ellen became aware or even suspicious of Jonathan's guilt her disgust and distance from him were made obvious and thus her desire exists completely outside of masochism (and her actions finally lead to *his* death). However, the spectator's desire does not: s/he is aware from the beginning of the murderer's identity and aligned with Ellen, drawn into identifying with Ellen's desire for him and specifically positioned as masochistic. Indeed, the film depends upon the spectator's masochistic investment, his or her specifically sexualised self-endangerment. That Ellen distances herself from masochism, from her desire for Jay, could be seen as the requisite disavowal of masochism, which is simply disregarded and replaced by the standard battle between good and evil. That there is no diegetic reckoning with, or acknowledgement of, Ellen's risky pursuits to seal them off, the spectator's masochism, however, endures unchecked.

While the spectator's masochistic investment is encouraged and reinforced by the narrative, the heroine's masochism is contained within the narrative trajectory: over-identification is merely a stage in her progression through the story, it must be cast off so all can be resolved. Beyond the film's play on doubling--Dillon's role as Jonathan and Jay, and Young's as Dorothy and Ellen Carlsson--both the central characters indulge in processes of over-identification; for Ellen it brings about her triumph and independence but for Jonathan it generates and marks his destruction. Ultimately, Jonathan is unable to identify fully, or healthily, with the father or to escape his connection to the mother to

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[57] Discovered blonde, Ellen wears only a red, thigh-length, jumper and lies for the first time--because she is more knowledgeable, because she is a "whore".

take up his rightful position within society, as "proper" male socialisation requires (according to psychoanalysis).[58] This leads to his demise because he remains within the non-differentiated, feminine position. Combined with his bisexual inscription through the murder scenes, this confirms his monstrousness, his perversity, his evil. Like Ellen's default masochism, it is a narrative device, a subversive quality that is discharged for the conventional resolution.

Sensation, in contrast, eroticises rather than demonises its "bisexual" male. The unfixity of sexuality and desire in this film is not simply part of the traditional and temporary dangers of the thriller narrative, but allows the operation of a cross-gendered gaze, so that in constructing the film's masochistic investment, both the male and female spectator are masochistically positioned and the on-screen masochism is untied from sex if not from gender. In *Sensation* diegetic masochism endures beyond the superficial conventions of closure, and self-endangerment, implicit within the heroine's over-identification, is both sexual and desirable.

Sensation: Masochism and Bisexuality

Sensation seems to follow the conventions of the female oedipal trajectory more closely than *Kiss*, especially in terms of its closure, yet it also invites the possible homosexuality of its main characters and, by implication, the homoerotic gaze of the audience. In this way, it will be shown to untether masochism from gender and to support a masochistic investment for the general (the male and female) spectator. The murderer is finally killed, yet while this is the climax of *Sensation*, closure is not achieved until the heroine takes up her position as object. The film offers a more transgressive story-line than *Kiss* but more conventionally--more tokenistically--resolves it. Where *Kiss*'s masochistic economy was sealed diegetically (albeit superficially), *Sensation* offers a more explicit and radical representation of masochism.

Leila (Kari Wuhrer), a University student with strong ESP, becomes infatuated with Dr Ian Burton (Eric Roberts) for whom she is conducting tests. She increasingly has sensations of contact with a dead woman, Kerry Reiner, who was his lover. As he becomes a more likely suspect in Kerry's murder, Leila becomes more infatuated with

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[58] Interestingly Jay's first murder stems from the knowledge that Dory is pregnant. It represents his inability to take up the identity of father.

him and insistent that he is innocent. As she nears the truth, her friend Mary Ann is murdered whilst wearing Leila's coat. Finally the murderer comes to Leila in the night and having been revealed as Paula, Ian's current girlfriend, is overcome and killed by Leila aided by Ian.

Leila's maturation runs concurrent with her over-identification. Her sexual inactivity or immaturity is established immediately in several ways, including her (comparative) difficulty sketching the naked male during an art class (Leila, having problems, says: '[y]ou're so good at that part' to which Mary Ann replies 'I've had lots of experience') and the fact that she doesn't use birth control. Throughout the film Leila is pursued by Danny, a boy with a big crush. It would seem from the film's closing sentiment--Ian's paternal encouragement that Leila 'listen to him'--that her final acceptance of Danny's male gaze parallels her self-awareness, her (sexual) maturity.[59] *Sensation* does not offer the classic exchange of roles implied in the Freudian dynamic, whereby the heroine relinquishes her gaze, her voyeurism, to come under the hero's visual control. It is not Ian who is successfully coupled with her at the film's conclusion. It could not be Ian for he is established as the object of her and the audience's gaze: he is the general object of desire and feminised throughout. Again, as with *Kiss*, the film seems to pursue unconventional expressions of masculinity: while Jay's is contained and damned, Ian's is not despite his (perverse) predilections.[60]

As its title suggests, the film focuses on the validity, trusting and danger of sensations, a problem embodied by the heroine Leila. It traces her progressive identification with the murdered woman and her developing fantasy world. Over the course of the narrative Leila's transformation into Kerry is not simply physical. She becomes increasingly haunted by the dead girl's life. Crucially this is brought about by Ian but precedes him as well, as shown in the opening sequence of Leila's prophetic nightmares that shadow her life and frame the film. Rather than being distinct from her sexual interest in him, Ian's identity as the murderer is bound up with it. He is immediately established as possessing a dangerous sexuality, an idea that increases

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[59] The conventional force of this narrative passage is emphasised by the fact that Danny is hardly the ideal suitor in that he is unreasonably possessive if not frighteningly demanding.

[60] He does, of course, lose two women he supposedly loves yet there seems no fear for his emotional or sexual future.

throughout. In tracing the stages of Leila's identification with Kerry, I wish to demonstrate how it is intrinsic to the more general sense of (female) masochism with which I am concerned, and one that is dependant upon a homosexual subtext that this over-identification, amongst other things, allows.[61]

While *Kiss* highlights the female masochism inherent in identification with the victim, which is then passed on to the audience whilst the heroine fights for her life, in *Sensation* the love-object's identity as potential murderer is intrinsic to the heroine's attraction to him. This provides a different instance of female masochism and a different, more mutual or consensual relationship of film to audience. In *Sensation* the uncertainty of identity not only applies to the murderer--although this remains unknown until the end--but to the object of desire. *Sensation*'s success at creating suspense operates through the construction of confusion rather than just disguise, and in so doing necessarily implicates the viewer within its erotic, and I would suggest homosexual, economy.

Sensation opens with a kind of dream sequence, a montage of images, involving most of the protagonists of the ensuing story: muffled whispers, a fan, Leila's painting, Ian. All the shots are either distorted or spinning but then come into focus and the audience is immediately drawn into the subjective world of a mystery narrative: where we will be privy to Leila's thoughts and all will come to light. Leila awakens in bed, a site revisited throughout the film in its endless connecting of the past, the present and the potential, the source of and site of questioned or unclear reality and of constant fantasy. The first external image is of the buttocks of a male model in Leila and Mary Ann's art class and the audience is immediately located in terms of their voyeuristic positioning. The gaze becomes sexually weighted but its sexuality--with the passive male figure and the spectator's historically male gaze--is questionable.

Leila's bumping into Paula upon leaving Ian's office is the first bodily contact in the film. Ian kisses Paula hello and says of Leila, for no obvious reason, that: 'she thinks I'm her research project'. A dynamic among the three characters is immediately established as well as its sexual nature. The lesbian potential of Leila's relationship to

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[61] An awareness of the problem of equating the pervasive homosexuality with the pervasive masochism or masochistic aesthetic needs to be acknowledged here and in terms of Dennis Cooper's "gay" texts.

Kerry and to the murderer is suggested throughout the film. Thus over-identification is revealed as bound up with the bisexual charge of desire to be and desire for the character. While the spectator is made aware and suspicious, through Leila's honesty, of the "flirtatious" nature of Leila and Ian's relationship, Leila's fantasies, her sexual awakening, are bound up exclusively with Kerry initially. Leila's voyeuristic pleasures are introduced as homoerotic in nature. With the later entry of the murderer, they also become masochistic.

Leila is hired by Ian to conduct tests: reading sensations from objects that he gives her. As Leila had walked towards Ian's apartment door a woman's voice called "Leila": the first stage of her progressing identification with Kerry. The first package contains hosiery which provides Leila with strong images of a sex scene of which she admits: '[i]t's hard to tell if this impression has anything to do with the hosiery or if they're just my imagination'. This idea of a confusion between the two, between her received images and her own fantasy, provides the licence for play upon the boundaries of the real and the imagined all within a film intent on a sexualised suspense and by a character steeped in visualisations: '[w]hen I was a teenager...my senses were so strong I couldn't tell if it was real or not'.

When Leila opens the third package, a cigarette case, and looks into the mirror-like metal, she sees Kerry's face in place of her own. She immediately shuts it but cannot resist looking again. That night she dreams of an apartment to rent, considers herself led there by Kerry and obliged to pursue all clues. Her move to the new location--Kerry's old apartment in the same block as Ian--marks her geographical over-identification with Kerry.[62] It is interesting to note how '"that ironic notion of the pleasant place imbued with unexpected menace"...accounts for the suspense thriller's fascination with specific locations'.[63] This recalls the "noirish" play on the melodramatically lit large houses of *Basic Instinct*, *Body of Evidence* and *Bodily Harm* (as well as of *Sunset Boulevard* [Billy Wilder, 1950] or Manderley), but most importantly, here, the constant imaging and eeriness of the apartment block in *Sensation* and especially in *Sliver*. In inscribing the

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[62] This is similar to *Sliver* where the heroine also moves into the victim's apartment, albeit unwittingly.

[63] Derry, *Suspense* 11, qtg. Gordon Gow, *Suspense in the Cinema* (New York: Castle, 1968) 38. The distinctly masochistic combination of "the dangerous and the comforting" will be discussed further with regard to *Whispers in the Dark*.

domestic with uncanny danger--and Freud's notion of the uncanny, the unhomely, is especially resonant here--the everyday becomes fraught with possibility thereby increasing the suspense or affect of the film.[64] The menace of the location is increased not only by the (imminent) presence of a murderer but by the warranted (as well as unwelcome) surveillance associated with modern living. In *Sensation*, the ubiquitous yet unseen vision provided by Kerry is joined by the caretaker's peeping and the detective's investigation. In *Sliver*, the spectator's voyeurism is obsessively re-created in the camera-lined corners of the apartment block's every room.

At this point in *Sensation* Leila starts painting a woman whom we recognise as Kerry. Unlike her encounter with the naked man, she has no trouble constructing a sexualised image of a naked woman. While this suggests her (hetero)sexual naiveté, her over-identification with Kerry procures a passion that is woman-oriented.[65] This sense of the absent woman (with whom the heroine over-identifies) as artefact has confirmed the impossibility of female spectatorship, for Doane, the inevitable problem of female agency both on-screen and in the audience: 'the image of an absent woman as the delayed mirror image of a female spectator who is herself only virtual'.[66] Photographs and paintings of the absent woman (made present) haunt these suspense thrillers of over-identification, and with them the fragility of female subjectivity which they represent. Yet, most strikingly, of course, they recall the recurring self-reflexivity of these films in their very depiction of the tools and art of representation. The near delirium of this scene in *Sensation* is broken when a stone comes through Leila's window, making her jump and streak red paint across the neck. At this point she realises that Kerry is dead, but the mark symbolises both the murder/death of the woman, her own death and her own

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[64] See Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) *Art and Literature*, PFL vol. 14. trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1990) 339-76.

[65] Over-identification as a description of a woman's fascination with another women has been seen as integral to the notion of female bisexuality. As Modleski notes: 'Koch speculates that men's need to prohibit and punish female voyeurism is attributable to their concern about women's pleasure in looking at other women'. Modleski, 6 with reference to Gertrud Koch, 'Why Women Go to Men's Films', *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 110.

[66] Doane, '*Caught*' 214. These ideas will haunt my continuing discussion as they have so far within my attention to the layers of representation and its self-reflexivity. Doane terms these films 'paranoid texts' (198).

involvement or complicity. When Leila looks up Kerry's death she discovers that Ian was Kerry's lover and the primary suspect.

Rather than stalling the process, Leila increasingly identifies with Kerry. Mary Ann says: '[t]ruth is I'm having a little trouble telling the two of you apart, part from she's dead', and a police detective that: '[y]ou're even starting to look like her'. Leila cuts her hair to Kerry's style, and starts writing Kerry's diary, relating (sadomasochistic) sex scenes between Ian and Kerry, whom she now plays in their visualisation. Leila's identification as Kerry and her desire for Ian is necessarily masochistic. This masochism is recognised by many of the other characters and incited by Ian. Her subjective experience--her visualisations, dreams, fantasies--is the dominant economy of the film, and through it the spectator is firmly aligned with her. All the sex scenes are sadomasochistically charged--whether Leila's visualisation of Ian binding Kerry/her hands or Ian and Paula's use of erotic asphyxiation--so that the sex is implicitly dangerous and death is undoubtedly sexualised.

Ian to Leila: 'You Want To Think I'm a Killer, Go Ahead'

Having suggested Leila's self-endangering positioning in her desire for Ian and over-identification with Kerry, I would like to develop the sense in which the film intervenes into the traditional binaries which determine gender's representation (male/female etc.) and the consequential influence upon the characters' sexuality and that of the viewer. This sexual ambivalence allows the detachment of masochism from gendered predetermination, rendering it available to the general spectator. In other words, self-endangerment, as my thesis argues, is to be seen as available (and desirable) to the general reader/spectator. Sexual difference is actively played with, for example, in the film's use of dressing up and disguise. Leila's change in appearance is not the only one in the film, for Paula (cross)dresses to kill. *Sensation*, like *Kiss*, uses an excerpt from another film, to provide further clues. The excerpt, from a Roman Polanski film,[67] causes Leila to ask: '[w]hy's he trying to dress up like her?' thereby drawing attention not only to dressing up but also to cross-dressing.

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[67] The televised film is not visible to the spectator.

When Ian goes to get the second package for Leila, we receive a fantasy sequence that places him firmly as the object of Leila's sexual interest and as possessing a dangerous sexuality. In a tinted blue screen, Ian enters, semi-clad, masked and clasping his genitals. He thrusts his pelvis back and forth as he sticks out his tongue. With his animal and tribal or exotic connotations, Ian is established as a natural, albeit over-determined, object of desire. The stuck-out tongue makes the first of several connections between Ian and victim-status in its association with strangulation. This sense of Ian's objectification and feminisation persists within his relationship to the gaze, but his eroticisation within this is not compromised. While it has been convincingly argued that the eroticism of the male object must be disavowed to ward off, as it were, its unwelcome association with homosexuality, Ian is conjured specifically as erotic spectacle by Leila without recourse to an alternative reading. That said, the exoticness of Ian's home "explains" the vibrancy of the scene. [68] It is important to note how "fantasy"--whether as visions here or as dreams/daydreams in other films--can be seen to disavow reality and that here these images of the sexual spectacle take place within Leila's mind, removing them from the responsibility of reality for the audience.

Ian is established as the object of a general (non-gendered) gaze. The film contains numerous stagings of the viewing dynamic, confirming Ian's status as object but also the theme of self-reflexivity. Leila attends Ian's lecture. Across one wall of Ian's bedroom is a poster of a man (there is a picture of a woman on the wall of another room). When Ian gives Leila aspirin as she is seated beside his desk, the mirror upon it perfectly frames the reflected face of the male image. The *mise-en-scène* positions both Leila and this figurative other (necessarily male, necessarily breaking the exclusive heterosexual dynamic) looking off-screen at Ian. When we first meet Ian his back is seen through windows with a large clock face opposite, in front of him. We then receive a full frontal view from Leila's eyes. Yet again he is counter-positioned in terms of the gaze. When we see Leila the camera is positioned behind Ian, showing his ear. The audience immediately identifies with Leila through the subjective point-of-view shot, yet

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[68] Male objectification, according to, for example, Dyer or Neale, needs to be disavowed in its eroticism through, among other things, a recourse to the athleticism or naturalness of the image and the assertion of masculinity distinct from the feminisation intrinsic to eroticisation. See Dyer or Neale, *The Sexual Subject* 265-76, 277-87.

is deliberately separated from Ian. We might see with him, our eyelines matched, but we are positioned against him. Leila has control over the gaze but Ian shares it, is not in sole possession. We are denied the murderer/sadist's gaze. While Ian is not the murderer (in fact he is the masochist) restricting our identification with him maintains the mystery but underlines the film's denial of the murderer's gaze. This contrasts to films such as *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (Irvin Kershner, 1978) or *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1996) which draw their effectiveness (and controversy) precisely from the alignment and, in these cases, merging of the spectator's and murderer's gaze. This is achieved by the fantastical (through ESP in the former and technology in the latter), but while *Sensation* shares in this capacity, it uses ESP instead to align the spectator exclusively with masochism.

When Leila puts on the lingerie of the fourth package in front of a mirror there is no separation between herself and her impressions this time. She dances, undresses, touches and caresses the painting of Kerry, her hand running across her breast. The sense of Leila's sexual awakening is bound up with her desire for and to be the other woman. This sensual romp and subsequent attempted seduction of Ian, is provoked not only by a woman's lingerie but by the combined sexiness of Ian and Paula. Leila goes to Ian's block, waits until Paula takes her long draw on an obviously after-sex cigarette, before going to his door, to find an equally, although more sleepily, postcoital Ian. In a further fantasy sequence of Leila and Ian having sex, whether Leila is superimposed in her vision of Kerry or whether this is just her fantasy is unknown and no longer matters. Where Leila had previously run her hand down her painting of Kerry, the next scene opens with a woman running her hand down the sculpture of the female body and breast. She, revealed to be Paula, and Ian then have sex. This is the only "actual" sex scene in the film. In its transgressive eroticism it is hardly removed from fantasy but the fantasy rests solely with the audience. Paula says 'I know what you like' and clasps her hands around Ian's neck as she encourages Ian to orgasm. Their interest in erotic asphyxiation--the cutting off of the blood supply to the brain to heighten sexual pleasure--is confirmed but revealed to Leila only when she discovers a book open at a chapter on 'Sex and Asphyxiation' in Ian's apartment. What remains unknown to Leila, although not to us, is that it is Ian, the man, who enjoys being strangled rather than strangling. Ian is identified in the feminised, masochistic, position and Paula in the

aggressive one. While this is consistent with the largely heterosexual male constituency of (auto-)erotic asphyxiators--as exemplified by my discussion of Stephen Milligan--it contravenes expectations encoded in the film: death as (hetero)sexualised and the murderer marked as male.

As muffled cries mark Mary Ann's murder, the camera focuses on the overspilling fountain. This image of ejaculation suggests not only that the murderer is male but that the attack is sexual. This is confirmed when the detective says that he wouldn't be surprised if he found the same marks on Mary Ann's neck as on Kerry's: the leather cord's strangulation. At this point Leila decides to be the bait, to return the diary, in which she identifies Ian as the murderer, to him; if he is guilty he will come to kill her. She repaints her own face on the head of her painting and her identification, her merging, with Kerry is complete. The film's climax follows: Leila's ultimate self-endangerment and the death of the murderer, Paula. Over-identification is the mechanism leading to maturity: Leila does reject the (m)other to take up her position as object of the male gaze in the final scene. However, the roles of the (m)other and the masochist are unfixed. It is Paula, a mother by default from Ian's paternal role, who is dispatched at the film's end. Kerry, instead, is incorporated. Rather than clearly delineating roles in line with "pre-existing patterns", *Sensation* allows for the inscription of masochistic desire beyond that dictated by this erotic thriller's whodunnit plot. In doing so, it inscribes a homoerotic subtext, or bisexual gaze, removed from the conventional inscription of perversion but affording the self-endangerment of an agendered spectator.

In *Kiss* the heroine's self-endangerment--as her over-identification with the victim--was distinguished from the spectator's masochistic investment. In *Sensation*, the heroine's masochism is integral to her sexual self-endangerment. When Leila firmly believes that her object of desire is the murderer, rather than separate from him like Ellen, she waits for him in bed (albeit with a gun). I would now like to pursue this explicit representation of masochistic desire through the film *Whispers in the Dark*. Like *Sensation* it offers the representation of masochistic fantasy, but it is especially self-conscious in its portrayal, so that the spectator is more than implicated in the masochistic economy, s/he is exposed as complicit.

C: Masochistic Fantasy and the Blushing Spectator

In *Whispers in the Dark* and *Bodily Harm*, as in *Sensation*, the heroine's self-endangerment is explicitly sexual. It is not the case that the murders take place during sex--even though they are all sexualised--but that the narratives are fuelled by the heroine's unequivocal desire for the murder suspect, and convey her masochistic fantasies with varying degrees of blatancy. Each of the films contains, or refers to, the heroine's masochistic fantasies--as dreams, visions, or confessions--which do not simply depend upon the man's potential guilt, but exist independently, occurring before his status as murder suspect is suggested. The representation of sexual self-endangerment as masochistic desire is therefore undeniable in this second group of masochistic thrillers.

With their blatant flirtation with sadomasochism and the dangerousness of the male protagonist, these films expound a different relationship to masochistic fantasy, and the heroine's desires are *confirmed*, rather than determined, by the known threat or available danger. At the same time, the heroine, and spectator, waver between believing the "hero" to be guilty and believing him to be innocent: the films are characterised by and exploit this oscillation, with the truth revealed at the film's conclusion. In other erotic thrillers, the heroine is, necessarily, convinced of the man's innocence until then (as in *Jagged Edge*) or necessarily distanced from him once she does know (as in *Kiss*). Such plots disavow the heroine's self-endangerment: removing her, albeit superficially, from a charge of masochism (although, a masochistic economy still defines the films). In *Whispers*, in particular, this oscillation between not only her convictions but her subject positions, will prove integral to the film's masochistic economy. Indeed, this alternation is central not only to the film's stylistic qualities but to the spectator's positioning within the text. According to Gaylyn Studlar, these two interrelated elements represent masochism's dual cinematic role: firstly, the '*masochistic aesthetic* as a specific film style offering certain narrative and visual strategies as well as textual pleasures', and secondly, 'spectatorial pleasures that extend beyond a single text or an aesthetic to embrace the psychic processes engaged by the cinematic experience in general'.[69] *Whispers*, I will suggest, offers a self-conscious reflection of the masochism of cinema itself: it is replete

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[69] Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 9, original emphasis.

with visual and narratival images of sexual subjugation, whilst emphatically charging the spectator with complicity. Beyond the specific self-endangering spectatorial identifications encouraged by *Kiss*, *Whispers* exposes the very apparatus of cinema as being reliant on an economy of self-endangerment. The demonstration of this combination, through *Whispers*, is the central concern of this section.

Whispers's representation of sexual self-endangerment operates on several levels: primarily, as the heroine's erotic attachment to the murderer, but also as the stock of masochistic imagery within it (fantasies, descriptions, paintings) and as the portrayal of the risks, the masochistic dangers, of spectatorship. In looking more closely at these last two, I will uncover the film's self-conscious masochistic economy. Doing so necessarily revisits and reinvests familiar discussions: of the textual strategies of implication or of the curative momentum of conventional narratives. Rather than being an element of traditional narrative forces--of female or noirish trajectories--the representation of sexualised self-endangerment produces texts which seem to break with the traditions of patriarchal narrative.

Dr Ann Hacker (Annabella Sciorra) fantasises about one of her patients' sadomasochistic exploits with her boyfriend. When the man she has started seeing, Doug McDowell (Jamie Sheridan), turns out to be this boyfriend, she ends the relationships with both him and the patient. She seeks advise and therapy from her friend Leo (Alan Alda). The patient, Eve (Deborah Unger), is found dead. Ann suspects Doug. Detective Morgenstern (Anthony LaPaglia), who is in charge of the case, believes the murderer is her other patient Jonny (John Leguizamo) previously convicted for sadistic acts against women. He pleads innocence and in an attempt to prove it dies. Ann returns to Doug. Jonny's alibi comes through and Morgenstern suspects Doug. Ann believes that Doug is responsible for Morgenstern's murder; he chases her as she flees. Ann's ex-boyfriend, who has followed her, runs him over. Ann recovers from her ordeal at Leo's beach house. She discovers that Leo has been in love with her for many years. Leo, discovered, confesses that he murdered Eve and Morgenstern and attempts to murder Ann. Ann, instead, manages to kill him. The film ends with Doug and Ann happily reunited.

I stated in the last section that suspense depended upon fore-knowledge (as the initial revelation of the murderer in *Kiss*, but more importantly as the inevitability of

over-identification) but it has also been characterised as a prolongment of uncertainty: 'our continued hesitation in choosing between two different actions, both of which create tensions'.[70] This oscillation is an active visitation of or movement between two fixed zones. This is not only central to suspense, but to masochism also. For masochism is the sexual pleasure drawn from this ambivalent state:

> Masochism obsessively recreates the movement between concealment and revelation, disappearance and appearance, seduction and rejection, in emulation of the ambivalent response to the mother who may either abandon or overwhelm the child. In the masochistic fantasy, seduction offers the promise--and the danger--of symbiosis. The masochistic aesthetic weaves a tapestry out of the mythical figure and the mystical to represent the female who is but a powerful figure, both dangerous and comforting.[71]

In *Whispers* this movement is reflected in Ann's wavering between the belief in Doug's innocence and the belief in his guilt. The sense of movement also operates within characterisation, within the dualities of representation that suffuse the film.

Whispers exploits the central duality of the creation of the "dangerous and comforting" potential as operating a contrast between characters and within the same character, as reflecting the spectator's relationship or response to the screen's offering, and as locating and harnessing masochistic motivation. This central masochistic duality is inscribed in the various roles that the film utilises, especially the parent/child and lover/murderer configurations. Ann is both the mother--the projected source of and site for her patients' masochistic fantasies--and the grieving child possessing or operating her own masochistic fantasy. She is depicted as mother/lover to her patients Eve and Jonny

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[70] Derry, 50, with reference to Altan Löker, *Film and Suspense* (Istanbul: Altan Löker, 1976) 32.

[71] Studlar, *Realm* 21-22 with reference to Deleuze on *Venus in Furs*. This suggests the significance of the professional woman, especially when associated with masochistic fantasy. She appears as a further guise of the patriarchal representation of women; the same old acting out of male masochistic fantasy in the ultimate duplicity of woman. That the women in all these films are introduced as intelligent, accomplished but sexually unsatisfied and alone--publicly professional but privately frustrated and confused--adds to this sense of patriarchal contrivance.

and child/lover to her "lover(s)" Doug and Leo and to her father.[72] Doug, for example, embodies security and danger in his commanding presence as a pilot (the occupation of Ann's father)--he is professional and reassuring yet ultimately risk-taking. The film traces Ann's acceptance of her father's death, as she works through her anger towards him. (This processing takes place within her growing intimacy with Doug and therapy-like conversations with Leo and his wife.) Ann's journey ends with her able to take up her position, within an oedipal passage, as partner to the "good" father figure, Doug, and not the "bad" one, Leo. Both figures I would suggest are recoupable for masochistic desire: Leo is reassuring (as therapist) and finally punishing (as murderer), Doug is both solicitous (in courting Ann) and cold (after she has rejected him). The film constantly displaces the idea of gentleness with violence, security with fear, trust with betrayal, all within sexual dynamics and a self-consciously psychoanalytical narrative mediated by masochistic fantasy indulged.

Pornographic Posturing: The Voyeur's Masochistic Gaze

Despite its convoluted (and implausible) plot, *Whispers* offers a radical depiction of masochistic fantasy as an active sexual desire within an unconstrained system of identification, unconstrained that is by gendered alignments. Yet, it also tokenistically seals it. The visualisation of Ann's masochistic fantasies stop once a murder has been committed and her desires get sublimated into a more palatable dangerous activity--flying. In this way, the film seems firmly to distinguish masochistic fantasy from the reality of male violence, but also, potentially, to offer masochism as a condition to be cured. Masochism, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, is an active desire, based upon the contractual alliance between masochist and punisher, and upon the prospect of pain rather than the actuality of it: the fantasy rather than the reality. Ann's masochistic desires express a sexual preference and willingness, and exist only as personal fantasies. Her object of desire does not engage in such a dynamic, he is *never* the murderer, so the

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[72] As well as being adult to their "childish" confessions, both patients involve Ann in a sexual scenario, Eve during her session and Jonny when he awaits her in her apartment. Doug is likened to Ann's father by Leo, who had slipped into her father's role as therapist to her after her father died. Ann's position as child with Doug is emphasised when in one scene in the film they are seated at a table in her apartment, either side of a large painting of a female child.

threat of death from him remains "unreal", her desires remain as masochistic fantasy. Of course, for the spectator this is all, always, fantasy: the threat is never "real". *Whispers* can be seen to represent the masochistic desires of the characters but also of the spectators. In examining the representation of sexual self-endangerment as the film's masochistic fantasies, I now want to demonstrate how *Whispers* embroils the spectator in its sexual agenda through its play upon voyeurism and masochism.

Like *Sensation*, *Whispers* opens with the dream sequence: a sex scene preceding and joined by the opening credits and only then revealed to be the dream of a sleeping woman who turns out to be our heroine, Ann. While in *Sensation* this is visionary--Leila's ESP--here the dream is firmly placed as fantasy. It is a highly choreographed sequence: the warmly orange-tinted scene has body-curves and shadow displayed for maximum erotic affect. The scene is interspersed with the view from above of a woman in bed and finally settles on her repeating thrusting movements in her sleep, participating yet unconscious. She then awakens, disturbed and alone. This is the first of several representations of sexual fantasy in *Whispers*. Each of them depict the complicity and fragility of the fantasiser (a state which becomes increasingly flavoured with masochism) and, increasingly, of the spectator.

This first sex scene/dream involves Ann only as witness. She is not identified as a character in it; in fact the woman is deliberately contrasted to Ann with her long blond hair, and Ann's participatory rocking accentuates her distance. When we are subsequently introduced to the long blond-haired Eve, she is immediately associated with the woman in Ann's dream. This sexual connection is intensified by an enduring lesbian dynamic which heightens the erotic intent of the film but also, in confusing Ann's desire *for* the victim and *to be* the victim, stages the ambiguity surrounding the masochist's relationship to other parties discussed in the main introduction. In her therapy session Eve recounts a recent sexual experience and the film provides the second heavily sexualised scene of its first few minutes. We do not receive the patient's name until later, so, still identity-less, the sexual scenario remains more open to the spectator. As Eve describes her encounter to Ann, images of the sex scene are interspersed with the session, making it unclear whether they are meant to be the doctor's or the patient's visualisations. That this is inconclusive again leaves it more open for possession by the audience. This interspersing, or cross-cutting ('one of the many means widely associated

with suspense',[73]) accentuates the film's deliberate erotic intent, prolonging the sexual tension. It also affords a breadth and overlapping of subject perspectives, breaking the privileging or linearity of reality. The scenes of Ann's imagings establish Ann's voyeuristic pleasure and sexual fantasy, and, in the audience's alignment with their heightened subjectivity, correspond to the engagement of the spectator in a general and self-conscious voyeurism. However, identification is not linearly established, but rather the spectator enjoys multiple positions of identification, abetted by the imagings' deliberate mystery about the identity of the players.[74]

This scene affords the rare offering of sadomasochistic content. Its aural and visual representations--the visual imaging corresponding to Eve's spoken description--imitates the process of fantasy projection within a pornographic engagement.

Eve: He noticed these pipes...he wanted to tie my wrists to them and make love to me from behind and I came when he said that, spontaneously, he hadn't even touched me.

Integral to this pornographic posturing is audience manipulation and involvement. Eve stares right at the doctor and directly at the camera--the audience--to provide an intense and implicating pornographic gaze. Ann's, and the spectator's, sexual involvement is noted as Eve, in an extreme and intentional self-reflexive moment, says to the Doctor: '[y]our cheeks are pink...Aren't I the one who should be blushing?' She prolongs this exhibitionistic and implicating intent with: 'you like my stories about him, don't you?' The neutrality of the witness is undermined, his/her voyeurism unmasked. Ann, with a psychoanalytic nod to transference, responds that the stories are sexy, and in so doing confirms an ongoing assertion of this thesis of the spectator's involuntary participation in the text, especially when it is sexual in nature. The film is explicit both in its sexual intent and in its noting of the involvement of the diegetic and non-diegetic audience. This

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[73] Derry, 36.

[74] As was mentioned in chapter two, Freud suggested the range of identificatory options within sexual fantasy in his essay 'A Child Is Being Beaten'. Significantly, this essay's discussion of the origins of sexual perversion exposed the fantasiser's masochistic identification with the victim. See Freud, 'A Child Is Being Beaten' (1919) *On Psychopathology*, PFL vol. 10. trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1993) 163-93.

involvement is both voyeuristic and masochistic: the opposites posited by Mulvey's Freudian alignment of activity (and masculinity) with voyeurism and passivity (and femininity) with masochism.

Eve's next therapy session exploits the lesbian erotic charge (following soft core conventions) as Eve undresses in front of Ann.

Eve: I want to bare myself physically to you, the way I have psychologically...I've never felt closer to another woman...I fantasized that I would masturbate in front of you.

The erotic fantasies have issued so far exclusively from the women characters (and will continue to be associated solely with them). While an identity-less man features in them, in this scene the dynamic is completely lesbian. Eve breaks off her performance and breaks down telling of an S/M scene with her boyfriend. With each description, a black-and-white visual enactment is shown, like a photographic negative (although the images are not stills): a necktie binding her wrists, the rope thrown over the rafter, then her head being placed into a noose. With the flash of a camera a man whispers in her ear and only his mouth and Eve's head are shown. While this might suggest that, unidentified, the position of sadist remains available to the spectator, I believe that given the camera's alignment with masochistic desire, it serves instead to accentuate the mystery and therefore uncontainedness of the threat. Cross-cutting engages and entangles the spectator, while the photographic-negative effect positions the spectator with the photographer as well as with Eve, as necessarily voyeuristic but identifying only with her. Ann's identification with Eve and with the man/photographer--her desire for Eve and desire to be Eve--are both apparent, here, as is the audience's.[75] Thus Ann and the spectator occupy all positions. In re-creating the different removes of viewing Ann and the spectator are aligned with both the voyeur and the victim. This is not a failed voyeurism but, like Clover's findings on *Peeping Tom*, a 'positively successful' masochism.[76] Masochism encompasses its active and passive persuasions, and the

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[75] When Ann says that they must terminate their relationship, the sexual essence is confirmed and reciprocated by Eve's comment that 'you're jilting me too'. Eve incites sadistic as well as masochistic fantasies, for Jonny confesses to thoughts of 'bondage, sexual subjugation' brought on by her.

[76] Clover, 179.

evidence--the hot flush on the cheek and, in a later scene, broken glass on the viewer's empty chair.

This later scene, in which Ann watches Morgenstern interrogate Jonny, again marks voyeurism as masochistic, as framed by potential danger, but provides a resounding statement on the spectator's incorporation within this. As in Clover's work on horror, the self-reflexive trope again consolidates the spectator's 'masochistic stake'.[77] Ann is seated in front of a blind which Morgenstern pulls up to reveal a large screen through which she will watch Jonny being interrogated. In this overtly spectatorial positioning Ann is shown photographs of Jonny's victims, of cigarette burns on women's bodies. Interestingly, what she sees on the screen will subsequently become her reality and a clear connection is made not between a sadistic reliving of screen violence but of a masochistic reliving of it. Aware that someone is watching, but unable to see him or her, Jonny throws an ashtray at what is for him a mirror, but Ann has gone--the spectator remains invisible and anonymous (and, therefore, ubiquitous). While this shattering of his own image provides a prophetic indication of Jonny's self-endangering potential (and deems masochism integral to sadism), the camera's lingering on the glass pieces on Ann's chair--where she would have been--accentuates the image of masochistic promise; her proximity to pain or danger is firmly aligned with that of the general spectator.

The film's active pornographic engagements elicit and exploit a sexualised spectatorship and then challenge the safety of fantasy through which this is achieved. The film is a series of "show and tells"--as responses to images of women, as the visualisation of narrative description--marking the machinations of fantasy, the creation of and implication within the image. Ann is the passive recipient, the voyeur, of others' fantasies that fuel her own. However, Ann is not only the witness and voyeur of the masochist, but the witness and victim of the sadist. In this way her masochism (and ours) is fuelled by its own dangers. Joel Black has asserted the value of this position of witness by isolating it from the murder/victim pairing. It exists between the two, accessing the thrill of either and, as such, so obviously favours fantasy. Except that Ann is witness and always the potential victim. Where Black attributes a thrilling distance to

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[77] Clover, 179.

this position, Ann's experience involves increasing threat. Black also makes clear the spectators' position in this. Their privileged position both within and outside of the text marks their pleasures as ambivalent: '[i]dentification with the murder witness rather than exclusively with the murder victim allows the reader or spectator to experience terror-at-a-distance, so to speak, terror without the lurid torment of suspense'.[78] Here, again, with the witness also always the potential victim, the spectator is denied this distance. As I stated earlier, the oscillation between believing the heroine at risk or not affords a masochistic charge of ambivalence.

Ann's position as masochist becomes part of, and in some ways is undone by, the representation of others' sadism, to which I will now turn. The issue of voyeurism becomes more problematic here, as I have previously mentioned, for having established a voyeuristic gaze, the spectator is forced into the position of potentially witnessing male violence to women, although none is actually enacted. The shift from the romanticism of the opening scenes to Jonny's violence, is further marked by the increasingly violent associations with women's naked bodies and their distance from "sexiness" or any soft-core aspirations or sense of consent. Ann's interactions with Jonny provide the main examples of this problem. Ann is audience to Jonny's paintings, active listener to his therapy session but also spectacle, object of his drunken frustration. He offers the "real" presence of sadism and of self-endangerment, as well as the "unreal" representations of his paintings.[79] A drunken Jonny is at Ann's apartment when she returns home. The scene cuts to Ann already bound and gagged, and the emphasis is again displaced from the staggering of sexual suspense--emphasised and prolonged earlier through cross-cutting--to the frozen imagery akin to paintings. Rather than providing the stages of binding and gagging, the stylised acts, we receive the finished product of Ann captive: the frozen image, the tableau, rather than the performance of fantasy.[80] Masochistic

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[78] Joel Black, *Aesthetics of Murder* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 67.

[79] Of course, the film challenges the unreality of these paintings, by incorporating the images of the women Jonny has tortured and having Eve's death pose mirror Jonny's painting.

[80] These two registers of depiction--as enactments and as tableaux--pivot, familiarly, upon movement providing a further sense of (masochistic) oscillation.

fantasy in *Whispers* remains as fantasy. Ann's "dreams" are distinguished from this traumatic reality.[81]

In the same way as Jonny smashed the screen shielding Ann--the silent and invisible spectator--in the police station, he smashes the window of her apartment, another figurative screen.[82] In so doing, Jonny, again breaks the contract of distance, the disavowed screen between actors and audience. As such he exposes, what Metz calls, the 'fundamental disavowal' inherent in spectatorship but also in the representation of self-endangerment: 'I watch it, but it doesn't watch me watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it. But it doesn't want to know'.[83] Thus the relationship between these two groups is revealed as an 'active complicity which works both ways', and fittingly within a focus on masochistic fantasy and an ascertaining of spectatorial involvement.[84] After the first murder, Ann's masochistic fantasies, or rather the inscription of them, stop. Similarly, it is the glass and not Ann found on the chair; she has removed herself from this scenario, she retreats from her voyeuristic investment in her patients' lives. *Whispers*, like *Kiss*, would seem to fulfil the requisite distancing of masochism when the threat becomes real. However, the film's striking emphasis upon spectatorial complicity, its almost blatant intervention into the psychic processes intrinsic to cinema, challenges such easy distances, such "safe" self-endangerment.

The Self-consciousness of *Whispers*

The theme of self-reflexivity recurs within, perhaps even characterises, the representations of self-endangerment that I address in this thesis. *Whispers*, however, offers more than a subtle meta-textuality--a repetition of the icons of looking--it actually stages the dynamics and debates of voyeurism. The film contains various spectacles--as

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[81] This "reality" can still function as the spectator's masochistic fantasy however--the scene still raises the stakes of the danger, while remaining devoid of actual pain or death.
[82] Preceding this, Jonny grabs a candlestick and runs towards a screaming Ann only to rush past her, smash the window with the candlestick and jump onto the ledge. Glass is again broken in another of Jonny's self-destructive moves. Carefully positioned camera angles create different perspectives of fear and danger, different painful possibilities: firstly as Jonny's attack on Ann, secondly, as his smashing glass, thirdly, as his suicide.
[83] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (1975; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 94.
[84] Metz, 94.

the sexual scenarios and frozen imagery--but always also addresses the repercussions of experiencing them. The film's therapy sessions, as Eve's striptease or Jonny's "show and tell" of his paintings, serve as performance pieces but, simultaneously, as forums for interpretation or interrogation. Detective Morgenstern refers to therapy as performance. When he visits Ann he provides his own "monologue of a patient" and his interrogation of Jonny, what he calls his therapy session, takes place on-screen before the seated Ann. The centrality of psychoanalysis affords the overt privileging of subtext. While giving the appearance that everything is out in the open, however, it permits the more striking contrast of disguised intentions: the still silent suppressed desires, as held by Leo.[85]

The film's self-reflexive elements hold important roles in the film narrative. The tapes and transcripts of therapy sessions, for example, are significant not only as other reproducible presentations but as points of plot forming part of the larger performance that is the film: both Ann's tapes of Eve, which are stolen, and Leo's tapes of Ann, which are found, are crucial to the investigation and solving of Eve's murder. Jonny's paintings, which are of female nudes, are significant not only in terms of the recurring use of aesthetic objects but as female versions of the St. Sebastian image which trace the narrative's passage from fantasy to "real" violence. His paintings represent the three stages of this passage from the angel, to the St. Sebastian-like figure, to the dissected woman. These trace the course from fantasy, to aesthetic/erotic murder to violent murder, marking the gradations of the victimisation of women and of their sexual objectification. In this way, female masochism seems firmly placed within the systematic violence against women. Although the film distinguishes harmless S/M fantasy from "real" sadism, it always implicitly connects them--a conservatism that haunts the film but, as argued throughout, licenses the indulgence (by the film and spectator) in transgressive sensations. At the same time, the aesthetic objects which so clearly represented the absent woman in my previous discussion--the paintings found in *Rebecca*, *Vertigo* and *Sensation* and photographs in *Kiss*--here allow more than the shadow of death: they envisage murder. They represent not the absence or virtuality of female agency, as

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[85] This recalls Foucault's claim that psychoanalysis provided the platform or tools for masking meaning rather than simply liberating it: 'Misunderstandings, avoidances, and evasions were only possible...against the background of this strange endeavor: to tell the truth of sex'. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1. trans. Robert Hurley (1976; London: Penguin, 1990) 57.

Mary Ann Doane conjured it, but the attempted eradication of it and as such provide an extreme statement on the patriarchal plot.

With its explicit representation of both sexual self-endangerment and therapy, *Whispers* is self-conscious in its erotic and its *curative* intent: its narrative focuses on curing sexual perversions within the film and potentially, I would suggest, extra-textually through the viewer's cathartic experience. Although instantly recalling the traditional narrative's curative momentum, here a discussion of the therapeutic value of art is placed precisely within an ongoing negotiation of the safety (or benefits) of spectatorship. In terms of this conservative trajectory, sadomasochism is installed as an aspect of emotional disturbance, rendered in its extreme form in Jonny, less extremely in Eve, and as an aspect of Ann's loneliness. Both of the patients die, punished for their perverse fantasies. The central "patient" is therefore Ann who works through her perversion, her masochistic desire. The film closes with all apparently resolved, the socialised happy couple reunited to form the bedrock of hegemonic Hollywood. Ann and Doug walk away from the plane that Ann has just landed. The final image is of her risk-taking, but a far more acceptable risk-taking--risk, presumably, in its proper place.[86]

Whispers would seem to want to cure the hysterical woman, and, in the same way, cure the spectator: Ann plays out her fantasies, as the spectator does through her, and by the end both are, supposedly, rid of their perverse pleasures.[87] The path to this evacuation--the re-experiencing of traumatic events which allow Ann finally to discharge them--mirrors several notions of cure, most obviously the abreaction of psychoanalysis, and as such emphasises the therapeutic intent of the narrative.[88] I will be exploring this

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[86] This conclusion provides an inversion of the characters' presentation: Ann is flying and Doug is unable to, he is limping. This maiming of the male is a familiar and classical ending to tales of female passage (such as the Victorian novel) and illustrates reconciliation, through the male's relinquishing of power, and a realisable equality and future.

[87] Ralph Harper has seen the Thriller genre as therapeutic, as providing for readers 'release from the tensions of their own lives by transferring their concern to the tensions of fictional reality'. Ralph Harper, *The World of the Thriller* (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969) 59.

[88] As discussed in my analysis of *Fearless*, this sense of cure through repetition corresponds also to homoeopathy--cure as like treating like--so that repetition undoes the original danger. Similarly, Sylvère Lotringer's work on the treatment of sexual perversions, examined the curing of offenders by repetitively subjecting them to the visual images of their fantasies. See Sylvère Lotringer, *Overexposed: Treating Sexual*

idea in detail in the next chapter, but what must be stressed here is that *Whispers*'s curative theme remains, ultimately, suspect. *Whispers* offers the specific guiltless and vicarious pleasures of witnessing and of cure, while allowing for the lingering possibility of self-endangerment. In other words, *Whispers* enacts the spectacle of cure, but the viewer cannot be so swiftly or easily disentangled from the desire for self-endangerment (nor perhaps can our airborne Ann).

The suspense thriller has been seen as 'the genre that most consistently presents to its audience a series of vicarious thrills',[89] and in *Whispers* the character of Jonny provides the voice for the recognition of artistic production as vicarious therapy for the eventual attainment of a cure. When his art is used as proof of intent for Morgenstern's accusation of murder, Jonny charges that in painting, in inscribing his fantasies they remain within the realm of fantasy and are not realised in reality--he 'keeps the poison off the streets'. In a sense, then, this vicarious function is suggested as the social value of screen violence rather than the reason for its prohibition--a necessary and "harmless" alternative for the satisfaction of dangerous desires. Common to both the voyeuristic and the vicarious (that which is '[p]erformed or achieved by means of another'[90]) is the sense of the spectator's alignment with but distance from the spectacle. Both processes mark the "safe distance" of identification and enforce its boundaries and in so doing reconnect with my earlier discussion of cinema as the site of safe submission to confirm the disavowal of (knowledge and) distance within the processes of masochism and suspense. 'Through disavowal, the spectator retains a measure of illusionary ego control over the autonomous fantasies presented....The cinematic apparatus is a safety net against the overwhelmingly frightening possibility of a total release of control'.[91] However, as I stated above, *Whispers* constantly tests and even shatters this illusory

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Perversion in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). In addition, discussions on censorship have considered repetition--as, for example, the proliferation of violent imagery--as approaching an excess which renders the recipient immune or no longer affected by it: cured of its effects.

[89] Derry, 22 with reference to Michael Balint, *Thrills and Regressions*, *The International Psycho-Analytical Library* 54 (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959).

[90] 'Vicarious', *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1971; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 3624.

[91] Studlar, *Realm* 181.

distance. The spectator is *told* of both his or her voyeuristic and vicarious pleasures and in the telling the safety of such pleasures is denied.

The safety is illusory but essential to our participation or rather our acknowledged participation in an illicit representation. *Whispers*'s shattered glass on the spectator's seat is reassuring in "our" absence--Ann and the audience remain unscathed and unidentifiable--but its "promise" as prophecy and fantasy (the combined devices of masochism and suspense) prevents our full escape. *Whispers*, with its screen smashing and play on performance and fantasy, denies the boundary or safe distance between the spectacle and the spectator. What remains is the complicitous spectator, confronted with his or her part in all fabrications, which s/he more than consents to, s/he actively propels.

The films which I examined in this chapter undoubtedly reflect the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment, and especially its sexual edge, and *Whispers* in particular revels in the centrality of masochistic fantasy to the 1990s representation. Having further exposed the general desire for the representation of self-endangerment that exists on-screen but more insidiously off-screen, contemporary western society seems not just fascinated with self-endangerment, but drawn hopelessly and willingly into revisiting it and, or rather through, denying it. However, it is in the nonmainstream that sexual self-endangerment might perform more radical functions, or rather where its more radical functions, only hinted at in the mainstream, are more fully expressed. In the final chapter I will continue and conclude this project with a shift of attention to more marginal fictional texts, in particular the work of American novelist Dennis Cooper.

CHAPTER 4

A: Sexual Suicide: Dennis Cooper and the Realms of Responsibility

In this the final chapter, I draw together and extend the issues that have been raised, and have recurred, in the various discussions of this study, through an examination of what are the most severe representations of sexual self-endangerment: the works of Dennis Cooper. His writing, with its self-conscious subversity, its radical content and style, has been deemed typical of postmodernist fiction and late-capitalism. But while it no doubt speaks of its socio-historical context at the end of the twentieth century--a context which resonates for all the texts considered in this thesis--it is my aim here to establish Cooper's work in the more meaningful framework of the representation of self-endangerment. That said, the postmodernist debates on the real and self-reflexivity will prove important to my reading of Cooper's writing. As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, postmodernism inevitably informs but inadequately explains the contemporary fascination with self-endangerment. While there is a case for reading Cooper's fiction as postmodernist, I only want to invoke it here in terms of these two discussions. The "culture of self-endangerment" stands out, instead, as a more compelling and critically useful description of contemporary western life, and a more apt tool for its interpretation.

Cooper's work, like all my chosen texts, was selected because it depicts self-risk, but his writing offers the most extreme rendition of contemporary culture's fascination with self-endangerment. As such it will be shown to combine, intensify and ultimately clarify the main issues already distinguished--the cultural disavowal of self-endangerment, the curative narrative, self-reflexivity and the implicated reader--which become united within a discussion of Cooper's construction of complicity. Cooper's work brings together the texts' flirtation with suicide considered in chapters one and two, and the spectator's masochistic voyeurism of chapter three, to offer strikingly disturbing narratives, distinguished as marginal yet nonetheless repetitive and indicative of mainstream preoccupations. Before exploring Cooper's writing in the light of these claims, my focus needs to be both situated and justified further.

Cooper's writing has been located within a contemporary American literary movement associated with the "cutting edge" writers of New York in the 1980s and

1990s.[1] There has been a limited theorisation of this movement, perhaps because it represents, as Robert Siegle suggests, 'a striking renaissance that our traditional critical institutions have had enormous difficulty recognizing'.[2] The main studies have been provided by Siegle's *Suburban Ambush: Downtown Writing and the Fiction of Insurgency* of 1989, Elizabeth Young and Gary Coveney's *Shopping in Space: Blank Generation Fiction* of 1992 and James Annesley's *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* of 1998.[3] For Siegle, Cooper's work holds brief interest for his study but major promise for the future: '[a]s this fine stylist's books emerge (a story collection, *Wrong*, is in the works), he will secure his place in the forefront of our narrative renaissance'.[4] And Cooper does come to occupy a central position in the two later studies. These books are joined by a few academic essays and various newspaper articles and book reviews on Cooper's work which collectively form the critical perspective on Cooper today, and hence the secondary sources for my discussion.

This literary movement has been variously termed as 'Downtown', 'Post-Punk' or 'New Narrative',[5] but both Young and Coveney, and Annesley state their preference for its categorisation as "blank". For Young and Coveney this attribute underlines 'the necessary link with punk and conveys something of the flat, stunned quality of much of the writing'.[6] Annesley similarly emphasises these formal characteristics, alongside the thematic preoccupations of the group. As he puts it:

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[1] Cooper now lives and writes in Los Angeles but he had previously been part of the New York literary underground.

[2] Robert Siegle, *Suburban Ambush: Downtown Writing and the Fiction of Insurgency* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 393.

[3] Elizabeth Young and Gary Coveney, *Shopping in Space: Essays on American 'Blank Generation' Fiction* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992); James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[4] Siegle, 317. Cooper is mentioned only briefly within the author's attention to *Between C & D*, 'America's most interesting fiction magazine' (273), where an extract from *Closer* was published in its anthology in 1988. See Joel Rose and Catherine Texier, eds., *Between C & D: New Writing from the Lower East Side Fiction Magazine* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1988).

[5] Young, *Shopping* vii.

[6] Young, *Shopping* vii.

Instead of the dense plots, elaborate styles and political subjects that provide the material for writers like Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon and Norman Mailer, these fictions seem determined to adopt a loose approach. They prefer blank, atonal perspectives and fragile glassy visions. This familial resemblance is strengthened by a common interest in the kinds of subjects that obsessed William Burroughs, George Bataille and the Marquis de Sade. They are, as Amy Scholder and Ira Silverberg suggest, preoccupied with 'sex, death and subversion'.[7]

Although I situate Cooper, here, in terms of an additional group of contemporary American fictions, the term blank will remain a fitting description for his work. It so usefully characterises the writing, as well as intimating the text-reader dynamic, in ways that Cooper's work will be shown to follow but also surpass.

Blank fiction, like the other groups of texts considered in this thesis, is very much a movement of the 1990s. It reflects an 'extraordinary period of literary creativity in New York'[8] predominantly in the 1990s, although key novels by Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney were published in the second half of the 1980s.[9] While the blank fictions have been characterised by their mixture of sex, death and, according to Annesley, decadence,[10] a more telling feature of Cooper's and others' work is their preoccupation with sexual self-endangerment. Writers such as Ellis, A. M. Holmes, Gary Indiana, Heather Lewis and Susanna Moore impart extreme tales of sexual violence and/or the perimeters of perversity, but novels by the last two--*House Rules* and *Into the Cut*--join Cooper in the eroticisation of *self*-destructiveness.[11] However, this theme is not restricted to these writers of the New York writing scene, but also exists and perseveres

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[7] Annesley, *Blank* 2, with reference to Scholder and Silverberg, eds., *High Risk 2: Writings on Sex, Death and Subversion* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994). The assertion of such blank qualities (a depthlessness or lack of affect) is typical of postmodernist interpretation and within my differentiation of Cooper from this literary blankness, lies his distinction from postmodernism.

[8] Young, *Shopping* vii.

[9] For example, Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (London: Picador, 1985); Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (London: Flamingo, 1986).

[10] See Annesley, *Blank* 112.

[11] A. M. Holmes, *The End of Alice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Gary Indiana, *Rent Boy* (London: Serpent's Tail Books, 1994); Heather Lewis, *House Rules* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); Susanna Moore, *Into the Cut* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1995).

elsewhere in 1990s American literary culture with novels such as Susan Taylor Chehak's *Smithereens*, Ellen Miller's *Like Being Killed* and Carole Maso's *Defiance*.[12] But it is in Cooper's work that it is most relentlessly presented: from *Wrong*, his collection of short stories, to *Jerk*, his collaboration with artist Nayland Blake, to his cycle of novels--*Closer*, *Frisk*, *Guide* and *Try*.[13] It is through his work, through these six texts, that I will explore the representation of this sexualised self-harm. In this way sexual self-endangerment is distinguished within blank fiction, but also outside of it, and Cooper is positioned within a larger group that combines these two areas of 1990s American fiction. This larger group of the eleven named texts possess similar qualities both in terms of content (the sex, violence, murder, drug-taking or even snuff scenarios) and style, such as the haziness or self-reflexivity of the narration. I want briefly to visit some of their common characteristics, in order to delineate the main issues that are to be explored through Cooper within this chapter's various discussions.

Primarily, and most importantly, each of these texts asserts a character's desire for self-risk which is expressed in sexual terms. In *House Rules*, fifteen-year-old jockey Lee "willingly" takes the drugs and sadistic sexual practices doled out by horse-trainer Linda. In *In the Cut*, the protagonist lusts after the man she associates with and ultimately suspects of serial killing. Its numerous graphic sex scenes are framed by past and potential murders, and the novel ends in her own sexual death. In *Like Being Killed* Illyana looks to her emphatically sadistic lover to go that one step further and kill her in their next encounter. In *Smithereens*, teenage May's flirtation with death frames the narrative; the same sentences are repeated at the novel's start and finish: '*I was a girl, and my dreams were of Death...I found him beautiful. It felt dramatic*'.[14] *Defiance* tells of a woman killing two young men during sexual intercourse with each. Cooper's work is replete with young men seeking dangerous sex, and the sadistic men who provide it.

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[12] Susan Taylor Chehak, *Smithereens* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Ellen Miller, *Like Being Killed* (London: Virago, 1998); Carole Maso, *Defiance* (New York: Dutton, 1998).

[13] Dennis Cooper, *Wrong* (New York: Grove Press, 1992); Cooper and Nayland Blake, *Jerk* (San Francisco: Artspace Books, 1993); Cooper, *Closer* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989); *Frisk* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); *Guide* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998); *Try* (New York: Grove Press, 1994). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically within the text. The fifth and final novel of the cycle is, at the time of writing, unpublished.

[14] Taylor Chehak, 1, 310, original emphasis.

While these narratives vary in intensity and extremity, they all establish a desire for self-endangerment. This desire is not so simply explained by masochism: the character's self-destructiveness is neither exclusively sexual nor always in line with the theories of masochism. An examination of this explicit desire for self-risk, as the avowal of self-endangerment, will shape the first discussion of this chapter. It will be tempered, however, by the frequent challenges to the trustworthiness of the desire for self-risk. The presence of drugs fuels both the sadomasochistic fantasies of *House Rules*, *Like Being Killed* and Cooper's work, and the hazy, memory-filled, dream-soaked narratives of these and *Smithereens*. Drugs are the stimulus to, and symptom of, the characters' self-endangerment. Drug-aided or not, all the texts are fantasy-rich, with dreams or hauntings (*Smithereens*), sexual imaginings (*In the Cut*) or, simply, '*those awful italicized voices*' (*Defiance*).[15] Operating, often, in the twilight between reality and imagination, these texts blur boundaries, a postmodern condition which reaches its apotheosis in Cooper, where it is at its most extreme and most acknowledged. His centrality of fantasy might gesture towards the undermining of reality, thereby disclaiming self-endangerment, but rather than performing as a distancing device, fantasy is instead about the pivotal positioning of the self, about agency. In Cooper's work, then, fantasy serves, still, to avow self-endangerment rather than undo it and this first discussion distinguishes Cooper from the de-meaning intent of (postmodernist) debates on the "real".

All the texts except *In the Cut* seem to render the extreme acts and hopeless lives of their self-endangerers that much more terrible and more wrong by making these characters teenagers or youths. Their youthfulness, as a traditional marker of both innocence and hope, accentuates the emotivity of their demise, and the texts might seem, therefore, inevitably moral: clearly assigning pity and responsibility. In addition, several of these narratives of sexual self-endangerment--*House Rules*, *Like Being Killed*, *Smithereens* and Cooper's *Frisk* and *Guide*--follow quasi-curative paths; quasi in that all does not necessarily end well, but it ends somewhat better. In chapter two, this curative passage was connected to the conventional narrative trajectory towards resolution, recovery or harmony: closure in *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* was marked by the male protagonists overcoming their ill behaviours. In this way, these novels again seem to

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[15] Carole Maso, 6, original emphasis.

offer moral tales, in that the traditional return to order (traditionally ideological) parallels a personal journey towards an improved condition. Yet the attribution of blankness defies such a moral bent, and figures such texts as devoid of any kind of ethical message; of any distinction between right and wrong. In the second section of this chapter, I will reconcile the texts' curative momentum with their unconscionable content, through a consideration of Cooper's potential moral agenda.

Cooper's work is distinct from the larger groups in its explicitness, its lack of compromise or modesty. It stands out through both content and style: the relentless and multiple presentation of quintessential sexual self-endangerers conveyed through his headily self-conscious and self-reflexive writing. In its shocking undeniability, Cooper's work demands political interpretation (lending itself to this project) not only because of the recognition of his transgressive writing, but its relation to issues of pornography, censorship and child abuse. As Elizabeth Young writes, '[h]is work has been dismissed as chicken-snuff porn and splatter fiction. Gay activists have found his necrophiliac emphasis on the torture and murder of teenage boys to be unconscionable'.[16] Yet the unconscious is at the root of the unconscionable, the reader is always, if not especially, implicated in the unconscionable. Cooper's provocation sustains the most crucial and timely questions of contemporary notions of self and self-endangerment that have determined and directed this thesis: the consent and complicity of the reader. It is this graduation of the implicated reader to the consenting and firmly complicitous reader which will be evidenced in the final part of this chapter.

An additional context for Cooper's work is that of queer literature. Cooper is a gay man writing almost exclusively about homosexual encounters[17] whose style and content, in its transgressiveness, its layering of reality, its 'horror, dissociation, or emotional numbness',[18] has been identified as queer. Indeed, Reed Woodhouse in *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* calls Cooper the 'queer writer *par excellence*'.[19] While this epithet bears little import for my argument--questions of gender and sexual identity

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[16] Elizabeth Young, 'King of Cool', *Guardian* 12 Apr. 1994: 12.
[17] Only in *Try* are heterosexual encounters involved in the narrative.
[18] Reed Woodhouse, 'Five Houses of Gay Fiction', *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* 1.2 (1994): 22. For a discussion of the characteristics of queer writing, see Monica B. Pearl, 'Alien Tears: Mourning, Melancholia, and Identity in AIDS Literature', thesis, University of Warwick, 1999, 109-12.
[19] Woodhouse, 23.

again "tail" the discussion but prove peripheral to my analysis of the representation of self-endangerment--it does confirm some important points.[20] Firstly, it emphasises the temporal specificity of this thesis for the development of queer identity and theory is 'generally understood to have been popularly adopted in the early 1990s'.[21] Secondly, the attribution of queerness to Cooper's writing suggests the oppositional quality of his work for '[q]ueerness can be seen as an oppositional stance'[22] and in this way Cooper's texts would seem to intervene into conventional processes or practices. Finally, queer's connection to postmodernism in their common tropes, such as the blurring of reality, or self-reflexivity, consolidates a more expansive definition of contemporary western culture.[23] This location of the texts under scrutiny in this thesis within a broader cultural perspective is supported by the presence of the other queer/postmodern writers of both blank fiction and of these representations of sexual self-endangerment: like Cooper, Lewis and Indiana can be deemed queer writers; Carole Maso has also been noted for her queer and postmodern writing.[24]

Of course Cooper also exists within a legacy of radical gay writing where 'evil, criminality, and homosexuality are inextricably entwined'.[25] Richard Dyer in writing about Jean Genet locates him, and other twentieth- and late nineteenth-century gay writers, within 'a longer and not uniquely gay tradition of French literature' in which writers, 'many of whom were themselves criminals, [had] a facility for making poetry out

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[20] Similarly, Earl Jackson, Jr. has noted that Cooper's subject 'is rarely "homosexuality" *per se*...[but] decidedly inflected and nuanced by the sexual orientation of his male characters'. Earl Jackson, Jr., 'Death Drives Across Pornotopia: Dennis Cooper on the Extremities of Being'. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1:1 (1993): 143.

[21] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 76, qtd. in Pearl, 104.

[22] Moe Meyer, 'Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp', *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994) 3, qtd. in Pearl, 110.

[23] In her discussion of queer literature and its association with postmodernism, Pearl identifies the various criteria for "queer" out of the confusion and vagueness surrounding the term; see 'Alien Tears' 104-12.

[24] For Indiana and Lewis, this attribution is more a reflection on the writer's sexual identity and cultural milieu than their radical writing styles, whereas for Maso, this reflects her writing style more than her personal identity. For a discussion of Maso's "queer" writing see Pearl, 102-54.

[25] Richard Dyer, 'Shades of Genet', *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London: Routledge, 1990) 61.

of low life, degradation and social damnation'.[26] While the queer eroticisation of violence long predates the 1990s, Cooper's texts are neither about criminality nor "low life"--the law is irrelevant to his rich-kid characters. Nor do they offer uniquely chilling themes from the margins of culture. Instead they are representative, albeit *in extremis*, of a more pervasive, more general fascination with self-risk.

Cooper's work emphasises the general desire or market for sexual self-endangerment on several levels. Each of the texts tells of the making of hard core pornography and/or snuff; some tell of its "users" (of videos and magazines in, for example, *Jerk* and *Frisk*). But all his texts can also be seen to function as pornography itself, that is, as the cataloguing of sexual acts with the aim of stimulating the recipient. Cooper's novels not only portray the trade in extreme sexual acts; they also acknowledge and feed the larger market for them. They do so not simply within the covert networks of an illegal minority (such as Philippe's connections in *Closer* or Ken's in *Try*) but within the American literary scene, and Cooper's move from small and relatively obscure publishing houses like Sea Horse to much greater exposure with Serpent's Tail and Grove Press, evidences the diminishing marginality. His books are remarkably alike thematically and stylistically--there is no mystery about the content of a Cooper novel--and thus the readers' active and educated choice of this material, their consent to it, must be assumed and with it their expectations and desires.

It is to Cooper's blatant and shocking recognition of the desire for sexual self-endangerment that I wish to turn: to its avowal. One of the main charges which I isolated in my analysis of masochism in the Introduction to this thesis, and confirmed within the popular conceptualisation of mental illness and sadomasochism, is that self-endangerment is shrouded in disavowal. Such is the taboo that surrounds it, such is its cultural threat, that its intent is always denied or displaced. While I have shown in this study how a variety of representations of self-endangerment counter this disavowal, expose rather than mask the will to self-harm, nowhere is this intervention more dramatic, or more universalising than in Cooper's work.

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[26] Dyer, 'Shades' 60. In this way de Sade, Bataille and Burroughs, already seen as Cooper's predecessors, are joined by Genet, Gide or Baudelaire. For a longer list see Dyer, 'Shades' 60.

B: Dennis Cooper and the Avowal of Self-endangerment

Cooper's texts are crowded with characters who desire death, and littered with corpses. All his novels tell of drugged-out yet attractive young men and the often older others who satisfy the boys' self-destructive urges as well as their own sadistic fantasies. His writing avows self-endangerment in that it offers the open admission or affirmation of the desire for self-harm. This occurs in two main ways: through characters explicitly wishing for death and through characters aligning themselves with the murder victim.

From the punk in *Closer* who says to John 'Kill me' (12), to the projected words of the young man on the plane in *Frisk* ('Kill me, Dennis' [53]), to Chris in *Guide* who tracks down someone to fulfill his fantasy ('[t]his is Chris. We made a porno together last year. Anyway, shit ...do you feel like killing me?' [83, original ellipsis]), Cooper's self-endangerers don't mince their words. While the "sadist" might control the narrative--as narrator--the victim's desires are always acknowledged. In *Jerk*, for example, young men turn up at the murderer's house in order to be killed: Buddy says 'I want to go' and Brad that 'I'm ready to die tonight if he's figured out a way so I won't be too uncomfortable' (17, 33).

Some of Cooper's characters deliberately, and often gleefully, align themselves with the "victim" in less declarative ways. This is especially true of *Frisk*, which contains several of these characters. There is Joe, the central figure of the mystery novel which the narrator is writing: '[w]hen his coffee got cold the next morning he studied the bone he'd found, occasionally rubbing his own bones by way of comparison. It almost matched the size and shape of the one in his forearm' (42). This identification with the dead is not only expressed by the "fictitious" Joe, but by Julian, the narrator's best friend, who also positions himself as "victim", albeit playfully: '[s]o these were the rafters the punk had supposedly dangled from, spewing stuff. Julian leaped up, grabbed one, did a few wobbly chin-ups' (*Frisk* 113). Then there is Henry, the model in a snuff photograph which forms the pivotal image of *Frisk*, who continues to assume the position of the dead boy.

This desire for death, which Cooper's texts communicate, is not restricted to the morbid youths, nor to the world of the book. It is not the privilege of the masochistic

men only: the fictional sadists might also express or enact suicidal urges.[27] For example, in the short story 'Wrong', Mike, after a spree of sexual murders, takes his own life, and Dennis in *Guide* notes how '[w]hen I get angry, I tend to isolate, drink very heavily, lie around, stare, and play strange mental games like...Devise the perfect suicide'(93, original ellipsis). The desire for death is expressed on each level of "reality" that the texts negotiate--by the characters in the books, by the characters in the novels within the books, and by Cooper's readers themselves: there are those who send Cooper 'fan letters, beseeching him to come and kill them'.[28] This sense of the blurring of fantasy and reality will become more pronounced in my discussion of postmodernism, but it is the pervasiveness of the desire for death (and the inevitable implication of the reader) that is all important here. In this way, the desires expressed are not exclusive, they are not the desires of a single or even exceptional character but represent the feelings of an unbounded and therefore unknown group of individuals. They lean towards the universal rather than the particular, and this universalising quality, as the undermining of any sovereign or exclusive position, will be identified throughout Cooper's work. Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment surpasses the parameters of the book and does so unavoidably, explicitly and intentionally. In avowing self-endangerment, Cooper asserts it as an active and existing desire. In his explicitness, its existence seems undeniable. However, Cooper is neither simply embracing nor privileging self-endangerment, for while he avows the desire for it, he also seems to offer disclaimers for such a desire's integrity or trustworthiness. The aforementioned universal quality of his writing and the centrality of fantasy in his texts are the two main disclaiming forces or challenges to the specific reality of self-endangerment. Before turning to these as a reappraisal of Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment, I want first to revisit the place of masochism within this discussion. This is not only because masochism is an ongoing concern of this study, but because it serves to introduce two dominant themes in Cooper's work which both differentiate it from 1990s discourses on masochism as erotic preference and suggest Cooper's alternative agenda.

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[27] The "sadist" never asks to be killed, never shifts into the sexual self-endangering position. For example, Dean in *Jerk* is unwillingly murdered.
[28] Roger Clarke, 'Books: Over their Dead Bodies', *Observer* 25 Sep. 1994: Review 16.

Masochism v. Self-endangerment

It becomes necessary to clarify the relationship between masochism and self-endangerment within Cooper's work: to respond to this emphasis upon death and justify my containment of the "sadist" and "victim" within the scepticism of quotation marks. Although self-endangerment is sexualised in these texts--and each murder is sexual in nature--it is not so simply explained by masochism. Indeed, masochism will be confirmed as an inadequate synonym for sexual self-endangerment.

Sexual self-endangerment in these books, is distinct from masochism as erotic preference, in that it is not borne of desire but rather of despair. The characters might be turned on by their self-endangering activity--*Guide*'s Chris and *Jerk*'s Brad both find the scene of self-destruction "hot"[29]--but their suicidal urges are not erotically determined but rather the result of the (drug-assisted) emptiness of their lives. In fact, such characters often declare their lack of reasons for living: 'I haven't done shit in my life' (Chris in *Guide* 40); 'I'm sick of life' (Buddy in *Jerk* 17); 'I'm fucked up. *Totally*' (Brad in *Jerk* 33, original emphasis). While many of the novels indulge in the staging or theatricality of sadomasochism, with the punisher's cold stares and the submissive's plaintive posturings and wishful thinking, ultimately the characters' self-risk is to be distinguished from purely sexual concerns or preferences. As I have said, self-endangerment is predominantly about death rather than a series of risky sexual encounters. In this way, Cooper's work diverges from S/M theory and practice, and does so deliberately. In his array of self-endangering individuals and their problematic associations with sadists, in the lack of sovereignty attributed to any party, his work seems to affirm the impossibility of a singular or stable definition of masochism or of a purely sexual motivation for either party. Sex provides the medium for self-endangerment--rather than self-endangerment providing a medium for sex as it did in the last chapter--an attractive, available and constructed medium. I will delineate Cooper's major points of diversion from theories of masochism and in so doing suggest how Cooper's reinvestment in death and consent questions the avowal of self-endangerment.

A key feature of masochism as sexual pleasure or preference, as stressed in the introduction to this thesis, is the prospect of pain rather than its actuality, with death

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[29] Chris confesses his desire to die to Dennis in *Guide*: '[h]is hard-on is sawing my pant leg' (56). See also *Jerk*, 42.

completely absent from consideration. In Cooper's work, however, the avowed desire for self-endangerment is precisely about death; death which should be a 'gory mess' (Buddy, *Jerk* 17) but preferably a painless one, according to Brad. In this emphasis upon the spectacle of murder, rather than the promise of pain, Cooper's representation of sexual self-endangerment does not bear out arguments raised by the body of literature on the erotics of submission (even as it confirms the dominance of Thanatos within desire).

Throughout his work, it is death that is envisaged and fantasised about, not pain, and death is usually rendered painless.[30] Where it seems painful, it is the emotional rather than physical pain that we are made aware of: the "blubbering" of George (in *Closer*) and Brad (in *Jerk*). In 'Wrong', the character George provides, and experiences, the physically painless death as a veritable fest of liberating self-destructive behaviours, liberated that is from both pain and mortality: '[d]escending the stairs was exactly like falling down them, liberated and discombobulating....He walked west, sometimes right down the middle of streets, cars plowing through him' (*Wrong* 69-70). Cooper, here, would seem to offer the ultimate fantasy of self-endangerment unhampered by the actuality of pain or death.[31] As fantasy, and as "attractive" spectacle, death and self-endangerment seem to be idealised. However, George's "afterlife" is both short-lived and unique amongst Cooper's books. Where in *Jerk* the dead are briefly reanimated--the murderer ventriloquises the corpse's appreciation--this only serves to underline their speechlessness and the finality of death.[32]

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[30] The representation of physical pain is, according to Elaine Scarry, innately political: because of pain's inexpressibility its articulation is always loaded with ideological, psychological or, even, artistic intent. With the painlessness of the violence in Cooper's writing, he could be seen to avoid this political minefield. However, the absence of the inscription of pain is also loaded: '[t]he failure to express pain--whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once those attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body--will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power'. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 14.

[31] This scene is reminiscent of those popular scenarios of self-endangerment which I discussed in Part I. In many films representing self-endangerment through mental illness, characters walk in the road. In 'Wrong' George's investment in jumping off the World Trade Center recalls the central image of *Mr Jones* and *Fearless*.

[32] See *Jerk* 19-22, 46-47. Of course, the dead are reanimated throughout Cooper's work in that he often creates characters based on murder victims, such are the origins of Joe in *Frisk*, and *Jerk* is actually drawn from true events, from the confessions of an accomplice to the serial killer Dean Corll. The deliberate sense of reanimation and ventriloquism is accentuated by the centrality of puppets to Nayland Blake's art. What is so interesting

While Cooper avows the characters' desire for death, it seems an unrealistic and flawed desire. What is claimed as erotic for the murderer and victim alike, is the spectacle of murder. This appreciation of such spectacles--to create them or to star in them--funds the desires of many of Cooper's protagonists: Dennis in *Frisk*, Buddy and Brad in *Jerk* or John in *Closer* all state their appreciation for 'the most spectacular violence' (*Frisk* 54). However, not only does Cooper acknowledge the general appeal or aesthetics of the death scene, he demystifies such conceits. It is in noting the aggrandising or romanticising of death or murder (integral to the avowal of self-endangerment) that Cooper undermines them.

Cooper draws a sharp contrast between the sadist's ongoing desire and the end of the victim's. This is expressed literally in *Guide* but also functions within the rapid turnover of corpses in, for example 'Wrong', as indicative of Mike's enduring desires.[33] *Guide*, which in so many ways seems a response to his earlier works, includes a number of these demystifying sentiments. Chris speaks to Dennis Cooper, the protagonist, of the mutual pleasure of snuff, but Dennis corrects him:

> 'But isn't it perfect?' He pecked me again. 'Because then the killer and I would be equally happy.'
>
> 'Maybe for a second or two,' I said. 'Then you'd just be dead, and he'd be paranoid and guilty for the rest of his life' (*Guide* 42).

Similarly, in recounting his snuff daydream, starring Chris, Dennis reiterates the inequality between the parties and the undermining of the murderer's "high": '[c]ompared to Chris, the dwarf feels amazing. It won't last. He's just turned on. People romantacize these kinds of moments. I certainly have' (*Guide* 87). Cooper revels in the fantasy of self-endangerment, emphasising its lack of realism, but this fantasy is not meant to be utopian: as George says in 'Wrong', 'I blew it' (73). There is a clear sense here of Cooper's scepticism about self-endangerment. His avowal of it, therefore, is not simply celebratory: it acknowledges the desire for death but simultaneously questions it.

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about *Jerk* is that it parodies the "imitative" power or corruptibility of art: it inverts the possibility of the potential killer copying the extreme acts represented, by representing a killer's extreme acts. The interventionist role of Cooper will be discussed in the next section.

[33] Mike takes five lives in two pages.

A further feature of masochism is the contractual agreement between parties. In Cooper's work there is often a sense of the victim's consent and of a consensual relationship between the "sadist" and "masochist". Chris's explicit desire for death, illustrated above, is always about the satisfaction of both parties. In *Closer*, George keeps returning to Philippe to act out his role as corpse within their sexual engagement, and, later, Tom stops what he's doing to George when George's consent is clearly removed. George didn't realise that Tom wants to kill him, while Tom assumed that this is the reason for his presence:

> 'I said no fucking emotions!' Tom yelled. 'Do you want me to kill you or not?' 'No,' George sobbed. 'Well, then what are you doing here?' 'I don't know,' George blubbered, 'I don't know.'...'Get out of here!' [Tom said] (*Closer* 100).

However, the murderers are not always so caring and consent not always necessary, when Brad changes his mind in *Jerk*, the sadistic Wayne is merely disappointed in him. In 'Wrong' any sense of reciprocal interests being served during Mike's encounters is altered radically by the introduction of death. The men Mike picks up may want to be 'knock[ed] around' (*Wrong* 63) but they do not want to die. The reciprocal dynamic--the sense that both parties have complementary desires--is broken with Mike's murderous acts, and the masochist becomes victim.[34]

The blatant declarations of the desire for death, or willing assumptions of the position of victim, constitute consent to the sadist's murderous acts. Consent, as the marker of desire, is integral to the avowal of self-endangerment, but in Cooper's representation of sexual self-endangerment, consent is a flimsier thing, unsealed or reversible: it can be retracted; there can be a change of mind. Consent becomes more complex than S/M allows, and Cooper is fascinated by its issues and intricacies. Cooper reveals consent, and with it, unavoidably, the avowal of self-endangerment to be a construction, in itself a fantasy.

In *Frisk*, we receive the perfect example of the fabrication of consent. Found within the "everydayness" of television and entertainment, this scene contributes to the

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[34] This corresponds to the incompatibility of the sadist and masochist outlined in the main introduction.

spectrum of the representation of self-endangerment: its various incarnations and harmless guises. The character Joe is absorbed in the television:

> Two men were backing a teenager across the roof of a tenement....'Don't,' he said. As the three neared the edge, the taller of the two men grabbed the seat of the boy's blue jeans, lifting him off his feet. 'Don't!' The man carried the boy for a few yards, threw him over the roof. 'Do-o-o---!' (*Frisk* 61).

It is within the theatricality of Cooper's writing that boys submit to and/or desire the terrible ends the older sadistic men have in mind for them. Consent is contrived, gleaned even from its opposite. This scene enacts the ease with which consent can be constructed and Cooper's ability and willingness to do so. The desire for self-endangerment is avowed, it is exposed, whether as confessions, identifications or consent to the sadist's acts, but the articulation of this desire must also be seen as manipulated, as the stuff of fantasy, the very stuff of fiction. That this scene is expressed through Joe, and Joe, we are told, is a construct or fantasy of the main character Dennis, perpetuates the sense of fabrication. What this scene, and this reading of it, depends upon, of course, is the importance attached to and the desire for the young man's consent, for his desire for death. The spectators' or readers' desire is always at stake in the representation of self-endangerment, they have an investment in the avowal of self-endangerment, in the fantasy of consent. While I won't pursue this investment just yet, I do want to pursue this sense of how Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment is never about a single character or a small and exclusive group of individuals, but, rather, bears a more universal quality.

Disclaiming Desire?--Universality and Fantasy

Within Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment, his affirmation of the characters' (and later readers') desire for self-risk, there is a concomitant questioning of this desire. By this I mean that as well as demystifying it, the authenticity of the desire for self-endangerment is undermined in two main ways: through the constant play upon reality and fantasy--I will come to this shortly--and through what I am calling the universality of his writing. By invoking universality, I mean that a characteristic of Cooper's fiction is the denial of any singular or sovereign desire or state, in favour of a more pervasive, more general, interconnected or implicated state. As in chapter two, the actions or

desires represented are not limited to specific individuals, but made available or applicable to a larger group, to 'all individuals, cases or instances'.[35] This construction of a general or collective state does not undermine or deny the desire for self-endangerment but broadens it, making it pervasive rather than exclusive. In this way, Cooper, as will be shown, firmly instates the desire for self-endangerment as inclusively constructed.

The avowal of/desire for self-endangerment, as I have stated, is not confined to a set group of characters, nor to the book itself. There are several other examples of Cooper's universality: there is no singular or sovereign narrator, perspective or authorial voice, nor an exclusive sadism and masochism in his texts. In *Closer*, in particular, the narration is refracted into the voices of the various characters; each chapter is the subjective tale by a different member of the cast and titled accordingly: 'John: The Beginner', 'David: Inside Out' and so on. In this way, there is no one privileged voice or authoritative viewpoint, but an equalising of narrative authority and multiple positions of identification made available to the reader. *Frisk* and *Guide* have first-person narrators whose auth(or)enticity would seem to be accentuated by the fact that they are writers themselves: Dennis and Dennis Cooper, respectively. However, they hand the narration over to the characters they are creating or quoting[36] who narrate extensive subjective experiences--the dreams, fantasies or, simply, actions of Joe in *Frisk* or Chris in *Guide*. All of Cooper's texts are saturated with others' subjectivities, created by the distancing of the narrator, be he first or third person, from the narrative as he tells others' stories. *Jerk* is a good example of the combining of voices within a dominant but distanced third-person narration with its range of media, and voices, and its self-conscious expression of how these voices are "thrown": David Brooks, the serial killer but again the author within the text, stands before an audience directing them to read his autobiographical accounts in the files in front of them, and then watch the puppet show which he performs. Both the written and theatrical pieces refer to David in the third person. Cooper is obviously playing with and undermining the exclusivity of narration, not only in his use of puppets as the ultimate emblem of constructing others' words (ventriloquising) but through the irony of giving the narrators of *Frisk* and *Guide* his

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[35] 'Universality', *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1971; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 3517.

[36] There is always a confusion as to where the "book within the book" starts and stops, a key element in the place of fantasy within the texts which will be discussed below.

own name.[37] Rather than exaggerating the narrators' authority, the foregrounding of the writers' roles fractures the narrative yet again and parodies auth(or)enticity. What is created by Cooper is a remarkably unrestricted narration in that it works to counteract the specificities of what it conveys, to open them up, to implicate others rather than remain exclusive.

This sense of an equalising, and undermining, of authority means that the sadists' perspective is never privileged, despite the fact that they narrate the story. The murderers' fantasies and crimes may be purely about sex, but they are not such simple sadists. In flirting with their own death wishes (as Mike in 'Wrong' and Dennis in *Guide* do)[38] they confirm one feature of masochism isolated in the main introduction, that it is sadism turned around, and that masochism is the governing principle. This is obviously an important point for my reading of Cooper as preoccupied with self-endangerment rather than murder, but it also reiterates his refusal of an exclusive state, necessarily undoing the opposition of sadism and masochism. In 'Wrong' the murderer and the victim, Mike and George, are linked in their problem with intimacy not sexual desire: Mike states, of his lover, that '(o)ne night he strangled Will to be safe' (*Wrong* 65). The polarity of sadism and masochism is untenable, as is the subject/object dichotomy. The two characters together provide the various images of death in 'Wrong' and, in this way, occupy varying relationships to death and to subjectivity: Mike imagines others dead and dying, he kills others and kills himself and he is witnessed dead and photographed, reproduced by film and therefore potentially subject to endless incarnations. George witnesses death, imagines himself dead, is killed, and witnesses and experiences himself dead. Here, too, death loses its sovereignty. It is not simply the end, not a linear single activity, but, again, a witnessed dramatised event: 'George was across the loft watching himself kick. The sight was slightly blurred like the particulars in a dream sequence' (*Wrong* 69).

Within the shift of focus and the play on viewing in 'Wrong', there is a deliberate textual denial of the sovereignty of the subject. There is no single privileged subject position or no sovereign state: when Mike jumps into the river he becomes the spectacle

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[37] Cooper deliberately undermines the exclusivity of a name, by the recurrence of George and, of course, of Dennis.

[38] Dennis's idea of the perfect suicide is also reminiscent of the death fantasies in the memoirs of mental illness.

and very much a public spectacle. He is viewed by bored tourists and photographed by George--excessively reproduced. These witnesses are still passive recipients because they are seemingly the "least" responsible--tourists, child and masochist. Mike becomes the universal object or spectacle and, in this association with tourists and photography, confirmed as exhibit. While tourists are the quintessential subjects for they are defined by their relationship to objects, to inanimate things--tourists "sight-see"--they are general or amorphous subjects; the perfectly postmodern witnesses in Cooper's text.[39] Thus he maintains the instability of positions or the suspect subjectivity within and outside the text: the desired state of disorientation.

With the similarities between the young men, their perverse desires and disturbing lives, the youths appear an interchangeable group. This could be read as an extreme and sordid rendering of late-capitalist culture, in that the characters are commodified: consumable and replaceable.[40] While this reading works, especially through 'Wrong', more importantly here the interchangeability of the men attenuates the authenticity of self-endangerment, with the formulaic quality of the characters and their dangerous desires. At the same time, it affirms the pervasiveness of self-endangerment. These two things go together: the universality of Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment is precisely about broadening the application of self-endangerment, but always also about questioning the desire. This recalls my discussion of the universality of the representation of self-endangerment in Part I, that it is not a state which pertains only to the individual but implicates all. This claim is at play here, too. In the universality of his writing, Cooper does not dilute the avowal of self-endangerment but instead extends it. He does not mean to weaken the desire by making it more widespread, but to implicate a much larger group within its affirmation.

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[39] Indeed, tourists can be seen as innately insecure, state-less, in their subjectivity: '[t]ourism produces an escape from boundaries, it legitimates the transgression of one's static, stable, or fixed location. The tourist simultaneously embodies both a position of presence and absence, of here and elsewhere, of avowing one's curiosity and disavowing one's daily life'. Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and The Postmodernist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 59.

[40] See James Annesley, 'Commodification, Violence and the Body: A Reading of Some Recent American Fictions', *American Bodies: Cultural Histories of the Physique*, ed. Tim Armstrong (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 365-79, for a late-capitalist reading of Cooper's work as texts which 'produce a detailed vision of the increasingly commodified character of the contemporary world' (378), as well as his aforementioned book *Blank Fictions*.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the validity or actuality of the desires conveyed in Cooper's work is the centrality of fantasy, and his deliberate play upon its confusion with reality so that there is no clear sense of what is happening and what is imagined, of what is "true" within the world of the book. His novels are saturated with characters' vivid and excessive imaginings, and pivot upon their realisation. As the explicit expression, if not concretisation, of the '*mise-en-scène* of desire',[41] these fantasies would seem integral to the avowal of self-endangerment. However, the familiar recourse to daydream or imagination as an explanation of, or excuse for, the narrative events, seems to counteract the affirmation of desire, especially the desire for self-endangerment when the fantasies are "owned" by the sadistic narrators. Cooper's representation of acts of self-destruction are always as others' fantasies and/or mediated by drugs, and as such he *seems* to deny the existence of a simple, accessible, authentic or autonomous self-endangerment: its status as a "real" desire. I now want to explore this use of fantasy, as the final frontier in considering Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment.

Fantasy

All of Cooper's novels acknowledge the importance of fantasy to the lives and lusts of their characters. The texts are laden with daydreams, hallucinations and sexual imaginings and populated by imaginative men who name, state and live out their often drug-enhanced fantasies. Characters, such as Chris in *Guide* or Joe in *Frisk*, express their fantasies, pursue them and even have them satisfied. Fantasy punctuates the narratives through the outpouring of the desired scenarios: of the characters' wish fulfilments (such as Chris's narration of the prospective snuff scene in *Guide* or Dennis's writings in *Frisk*); through the construction or appreciation of representations of violence (such as John's artwork in *Closer*, Brad and Dennis's viewing of pornography, or Joe's searching through the television channels for violent images in *Frisk*); or simply through George's love of Disneyland in *Closer* and all the characters' love of drugs. Cooper constantly includes and even privileges the characters' fantastical thoughts; as Dennis states: 'inside my head the most spectacular violence is happening. A boy's exploding, caving in. It looks sort of fake since my only models are splatter films, but it's unbelievably powerful'

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[41] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988) 318.

(*Frisk* 54). The narrative of *Frisk* actually revolves around the narrator's sexual fantasies; they motivate the plot, direct the action and mark the text's closure. This novel provides the perfect example for consideration here, and I will look at it in more detail shortly, for it presents the ultimate representation of sexual death, as a series of snuff scenes, but repeatedly reminds us that these are in fact only fantasies. Cooper's texts could be seen as fantasies themselves, as the daydreams of the creative writer.[42] However my focus here is not upon the various registers of fantasy but rather upon how to reconcile these two potentially conflicting functions of fantasy--the affirmation yet undermining of desire--and to locate Cooper's intent within them.

The fantasies of self-endangerment would seem to be integral to the notion of avowal that I have been discussing, for they provide the admission and affirmation of the characters' desires: as with Chris, the desire for self-endangerment is expressed initially as sexual fantasy. This emphasis upon fantasy recalls psychoanalysis and Freudian theory which saw fantasy as the window onto an individual's unconscious and repressed desires. Due to defensive mechanisms, the window distorts the representation of these desires, so that they are masked within the fantasy. According to Laplanche and Pontalis: '[s]uch defences are themselves inseparably bound up with the primary function of phantasy, namely the *mise-en-scène* of desire--a *mise-en-scène* in which what is *prohibited* (*l'interdit*) is always present in the actual formation of the wish'.[43] In this way, desires, which have been repressed due to their difficult content, emerge within the fantasy. They are staged within the scenarios that it encompasses but not in their original form, and it is the psychoanalyst's job to 'unearth' the desires (or instigating fantasies) 'which lie behind'.[44] This theory of "phantasy", as it is sometimes called, is akin to the "there, but not there" of desire that I am negotiating, but has far more to do with *dis*avowal. In contrast, in Cooper's writing, desire is not conspicuous by its absence, but explicitly expressed. His textual fantasies have more in common with Freud's earlier discussion of daydreams as a more explicit expression of wish fulfilment, as 'a kind of *Autobahn* to the

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[42] Freud discusses fiction in this way in 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1908 [1907]) *Art and Literature*, PFL vol. 14. trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1990) 131-41.
[43] Laplanche, *Language* 318.
[44] Laplanche, *Language* 317.

unconscious'.[45] The fantasies Cooper inscribes radically depart from the Freudian definition of phantasy in their blatancy, and from Freudian daydreams which still disguise the primal fantasies albeit more transparently,[46] yet they also seem to exaggerate it in their emphasis upon the excessive--theatrical or spectacular--stagings of desire and their even cinematic *mise-en-scènes* (qualities which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter).[47] Where fantasies for Freudian psychoanalysis are complex articulations of forbidden feelings which remain hidden within them, for Cooper such desires are directly articulated, devoid of the defences arising from the moral and punitive workings of the superego, or, indeed, the State. Of course, it is possible to read the characters' sexually violent fantasies as similarly "about something else": Cooper often provides the traumatic causes of their actions such as George's dysfunctional family in *Closer* or Dennis's exposure to the most violent pornography as a child in *Frisk*. While there is more than just sex at stake in the texts' sexual fantasies and acts, what I am arguing here is that Cooper's blatant inscription of fantasies of forbidden desires, which somewhat inverts psychoanalytic fantasy in that it makes explicit or unearths forbidden desires rather than masking them, is undoubtedly an avowing mechanism.

While Cooper avows self-endangerment within his stagings of prohibited desires, doubt must be cast over its "reality". Cooper's texts deliberately blur the divide between reality and fantasy, creating a sense that the desire for self-endangerment is merely the sadist's fantasy, that the narrator has made it up: the desires are never actually the product of a "real" character but of the imagination of the artists (Cooper included amongst them). Cooper's deliberate undermining of reality, his flirtation with the boundaries of the real of representation, is a typical postmodernist trope, and postmodernism presents itself as a crucial theory to be invoked here. While postmodern

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[45] Rachel Bowlby, 'The Other Day: The Interpretation of Daydreams', *New Formations* 34 Summer (1998): 13.

[46] See Freud's discussion of the daydream of a 'poor orphan boy', 'Creative Writers' 135-36.

[47] Fantasy is a 'staging' or 'total context' of desire rather than a simple wish fulfilment, according to Victor Burgin's definition of it in Elizabeth Wright, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 85. He also finds that psychoanalysis 'contradicts the popular belief that fantasies are nothing but wishful scenarios in which a simple subject gains a simple object denied to it in "real life." Fantasy is a complex articulation of both the subject and its unconscious desire in a shifting field of wishes and defences' (87).

theory offers a reading of this trope (and of the denial of sovereignty within universality), ultimately it will prove inadequate as a model of explanation and, like psychoanalysis, functions as a point of departure for my reading of Cooper.

Cooper creates the doubting or blurring of reality in two main ways. Firstly, his narrators self-reflexively remind the reader that the narrative is "made up", that it is a fantasy, by '"metafictional" techniques--interruptions into the narrative flow by the writer to remind the reader that this is indeed fiction; an insistence on the unreliability of the narrative voice'.[48] In *Frisk*, we are told that Joe, an apparently "real" victim of a sadistic killer, provides the catalyst and material for Dennis's own creative writing:

> The case was perfect fodder for my interest in sexual death. I grew obsessed for a year, following it through the media, researching Joe's life via friends of friends, filling in blanks with my own fantasies. I even spent several months trying to channel the info I'd gathered into an artsy murder-mystery novel, some salvageable fragments of which are interspersed through the following section (*Frisk* 40).

Similarly, in *Guide*, the writer-narrator reminds us of his novelistic intent: '[t]hen magically or whatever, I start writing a novel....I start here--or, rather, a dozen or so pages back. That's where everything begins' (65). In this way, the self-endangerers contained in these narratives are meant to be deemed fabrications. And yet how could they and their creators, as fictional characters, be anything but fabrications? In this self-reflexive manner Cooper, and the writer-narrator, reiterate the fabricatedness of fiction.

Secondly, through Cooper's endless layering of reality, his inclusion of all manner and methods of representation--from writing (Dennis in *Frisk* and *Guide*) to painting (John in *Closer*) to performing (David in *Jerk*, David in *Closer*, Trevor in 'Introducing Horror Hospital' in *Wrong*); from filming (*Try*, *Jerk*) to photographing (*Frisk*, 'Wrong')--there is a perpetual re-creation or reproduction of the "real", of representation's removes from reality or from an original. This sense of art's proliferating distance from the original draws upon an ancient position which has been revitalised by postmodernism. Plato introduced the notion of representation's distance from reality. He located the work of the artist as two removes away from the original

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[48] Marguerite Alexander, *Flights From Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990) 13.

divine concept of a thing: a painting of a table was an imitation of the physical form of a table, which was itself an imitation of the divine idea of the table.[49] Plato's three-tiered system was morally grounded: the distance from the original was a distance from "God", from truth and thus from goodness.[50] Postmodernist theory, or more specifically Jean Baudrillard's influential work on the simulacra, has identified contemporary culture as an age of simulation, where the methods of representation are rife, and rather than their removes from reality, reality is removed in its irrelevance and meaninglessness (or, indeed, as a vector of accreditation) and replaced by the hyperreal: 'a real without origin or reality'.[51] Using the example of Disneyland, Baudrillard suggests how Disneyland realistically re-creates the United States, but the world which is reproduced is itself a fabrication. 'Baudrillard claims that in the postmodern world the boundary between image or simulation and reality implodes, and with it the very experience and ground of "the real" disappears'.[52] There is no original, truthful, meaningful or even discernible "real", only ubiquitous, illusory yet flawless models of it: '[i]t is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself'.[53]

Linda Hutcheon has provided a useful breakdown of the layers of the simulacra, especially in contrast to Plato's tiers of imitation:

> [Baudrillard] has argued that mass media has neutralized reality for us and it has done so in stages: first reflecting, then masking reality, and then

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[49] See Plato, *The Republic*, Book X, trans. Desmond Lee (1955; Harmondsworth, Middx: 1975) 421-39.

[50] Earl Jackson Jr. has also used Platonic ideas to discuss Cooper's layering of reality. The unenlightened cavedwellers, in Book VII of Plato's *Republic*, who know no better than to trust the false shadows they see reflected on the wall, are likened to the porn-users in Cooper's texts, similarly captivated by images. However, where reality exists elsewhere for the cavedwellers, in Cooper's texts there is no reality, there is no outside. (Siegle also posits as one of the characteristics of Downtown writing that '*[i]t knows there is no outside*' [390, original emphasis].)

[51] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) 2.

[52] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London: MacMillan, 1991) 119.

[53] Baudrillard, 4.

> masking the absence of reality, and finally, bearing no relation to reality at all. This is the simulacrum, the final destruction of meaning.[54]

In this postmodernist version of the dilution of the "real", the simple dynamic between reality and non-reality (or fantasy) becomes splintered by the different degrees of non-reality. These we can think of as various composite guises. Baudrillard sets the stage for the postmodernist debate on the status of the real, which is not simply a negotiation of reality and fantasy but of more composite forms like the fabricated and the fake. I would suggest that Cooper must be seen to respond to and indulge in this debate and precisely through these more advanced terms. His novel *Frisk* is the prime example of this, being preoccupied with the relationship between the fake and fantasy.

Dennis, the narrator in *Frisk*, saw a snuff photograph of a boy when he was thirteen years old. The novel is built around this image, which begins and ends the book and funds Dennis's sexual fantasies and, thus, the action in-between. The novel seems to be caught up in exploring the relationship between reality, fantasy and fabrication as Dennis comes to terms with the photograph's effects. The exploration is precisely in terms of the dismissal of the real and the photograph's status as hyperreal. Rather than the photograph being a representation of a "real" dead boy, it is a fake, a representation (photograph) of a representation (fabrication) of what a dead boy might look like. At the same time the novel tells of Dennis's sadistic murder spree in Amsterdam which he conveys as letters to Julian, and which is finally revealed as fabricated. There are no "real" dead boys in *Frisk*, or "real" representations of them, just various forms of simulated snuff. And what can ever be real in fiction?--just the truth reclaimed or reworked as fantasy and vice versa, and with the novel's self-reflexivity we are consistently reminded of this proliferating distance from reality.

What I want to suggest is that within these apparent disclaimers of reality, of the reality of "snuff", the desire for self-endangerment continues to be avowed. Where Baudrillard's postmodernist denial of reality promoted meaninglessness, Cooper's denial of reality distinguishes desire. Dennis learns that the snuff photograph is "not real", for he meets its model, Henry, early on in the book. Yet this knowledge does not infringe upon or undo his obsession, since his desire functions regardless. Dennis's knowledge,

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[54] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) 223.

and his authorial control, is preceded by Henry expressing his self-endangering tendencies. So the fake picture reflects the "reality" of Henry's desires. In this way, the fantasies and desires of both of the characters, operate independently, beyond the simulacra, outside of snuff:

> Maybe...if I hadn't seen this...snuff. Photographs. Back when I was a kid. I thought the boy in them was actually dead for years, and by the time I found out they were posed photographs, it was too late. I already wanted to live in a world where some boy I didn't personally know could be killed and his corpse made available to the public, or to me anyway (*Frisk* 70, original ellipses).

That Dennis's murderous acts are revealed to be, necessarily (un)convincingly, fabricated at the end of the story, establishes the traditional recoil to fantasy or to dream as a disclaimer for the responsibility of the writer (or, later, the reader), a disclaimer that I would suggest is ultimately irrelevant. There is no relief when we realise it is all just a hoax, such confirmation is made unnecessary. Like the debate on the actuality of snuff, and the details of the Brown and Milligan cases which I discussed earlier, it is not the evidence that is the most significant issue, but rather the process of seeking, presenting and enjoying the evidence.

The infamous *Snuff* film, debate, and scandal (which concerned whether the film involved a real murder or not) provides an example of the disclaiming of desire through outcry. Linda Williams notes the feminist concern over the appearance of snuff films in 1975 and in particular the feature entitled *Snuff* in 1976: '[t]he outcry over *Snuff* forced the New York City district attorney to investigate the circumstances of the film's making and to interview the actress who was supposedly killed in the final sequence'.[55] Ultimately it is the actual desire for snuff that is the issue, and not the (easily misleading) tension over the verity of the material which serves to distract from and even disavow the individual's desire for the representation of sexual self-endangerment and society's

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[55] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 193, with reference to *New York Times*, 10 March 1976. David Kerekes and David Slater argue that 'the *filming* of a killing would seem a greater atrocity than the act of murder itself' in their *Killing For Culture: An Illustrated History of Death Film* (London: Creation Books, 1994) vii, original emphasis.

investment in it. Snuff, and the 'motifs' of the snuff film,[56] is central to Cooper's novel *Frisk*, and rather than being preoccupied with its importance or status as real, in a postmodern fashion, he clearly focuses on the desire inherent in its production. Cooper's negotiation of the real/fantasy debate is about an avowal of desire, its affirmation, rather than the dissolution of such a position. Hutcheon has refuted Baudrillard's theory, claiming that postmodern art does not undo reality, but problematises it: '[w]e are not witnessing a degeneration into the hyperreal without origin or reality, but a questioning of what "real" can mean and how we can *know* it'.[57] Cooper, in true Baudrillardian fashion, dismisses rather than problematises reality in his media-soaked landscape, but this does not signal a degeneration into meaninglessness, for the evaporation of reality reveals the deposits of desire: inherent within it but enduring beyond it.

The centrality of fantasy in Cooper's work might be seen to undermine the avowal of self-endangerment in that firstly, fantasy often functions to disclaim reality by telling us that all was only a dream or a story, and secondly, it distracts attention away from desire into the postmodern debate on the status of reality. However, what I hope to have shown is that Cooper renders both of these distractions irrelevant, and distinguishes desire from them.

The emphasis in Cooper's avowal of self-endangerment, is not upon an accurate depiction of more unusual pleasures, but rather upon death and consent as integral to the fantasy of self-endangerment. His texts refute the cultural disavowal of self-endangerment. Instead, they assert it as a practice and a preference, but not as a "healthy pleasure". Self-endangerment is avowed but this is not a simple celebration of forbidden and unconscionable desires, for while the affirmation and even pervasiveness of this desire is firmly put, so too is a cynicism about its authenticity. There seems therefore to be method in his "badness", and while I am developing the sense of Cooper's agenda throughout this chapter, in the next section I want specifically to address the potential "morality" of his representations of self-endangerment.

C: Cooper's Agenda: the Unconscionable and the Curative

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[56] Kerekes, 225.
[57] Hutcheon, 223, original emphasis.

In the last section I demonstrated how Cooper's texts declare and stage forbidden desires and in so doing avow self-endangerment. Disavowal as a defence mechanism develops out of a sense of the wrongfulness of the desires experienced. Avowal, in contrast, might suggest an absence of a sense of the wrongfulness of these desires and, indeed, it is the seeming denial of the judgement of the extreme acts in Cooper's texts which fuelled the outcry at his work. However, as I have shown, Cooper is not merely exposing such desires, but questioning them. In this section, I want to build upon my previous suggestion that Cooper demystifies, doubts the authenticity of, or even criticises the desires which he represents, with a consideration of a possible moral quality to his writing. By invoking "morality" I mean only to stress Cooper's opening up of a distinction between right and wrong within his writing, and *not* to suggest that Cooper is moralising in his texts nor to incur an ethical debate. In so doing, I continue my investigation of his major intervention into the popular denial of self-endangerment as a distinguishable project. I will begin by looking at his aptly titled short story, 'Wrong', found within the collection of short stories of the same name. I will then return to the novel *Frisk* and examine its curative momentum, a quality which will also be identified in his latest novel *Guide* along with, it seems, a moral awareness.

Entitled "Wrong"

'Wrong' is the quintessential Cooperesque catalogue of snuff scenes. The first two pages of the story contain the swift third-person narration of four sexual deaths executed by Mike, and then his own suicide. The focus then switches to George who sees Mike's body floating down the river, whilst a tourist in New York. He later sleeps with Dan, who shares his hotel room, and the next night goes home with a man who kills him during sex. Once dead he walks around the city, returns to the hotel, reflects upon his feelings for Dan and his father, then disappears.

This story becomes an obvious focus here, not only because of its cold mass of murders but because of the resonance and provocation of its title. Primarily, it is the familiar quick fix of a title within the litany of condensed, emotive, monosyllabic and/or single-word referents punctuating Cooper's staccato world (of shortened lives): referents which label the tale, the collection, each chapter or each book. Then, as referent, "wrong" overhangs this jamboree of envisaged deaths, its weighty and possibly worthy

connotations draped incongruously over a seemingly shameless text. In considering the morality of 'Wrong', I will examine whether this story's blank expression of heartless acts are indeed devoid of judgement.

Firstly, with the cataloguing, almost list-like narration of the first four murders, Cooper provides especially dispassionate representations of terrible acts, without telling us that they are terrible. Cooper's short sentences of typically 'flat reportage'[58] convey Mike's actions in the most matter-of-fact prose:

> Mike dragged Keith down the hall by his hair. He shit in Keith's mouth. He laid a whip on Keith's ass. It was a grass skirt once Mike dropped the belt. Mike kicked Keith's skull in before he came to. Brains or whatever it was gushed out. 'That's that' (*Wrong* 63).

The regular, affectless rhythm, establishes a factual, neutral, tone. In the brief moments of more figurative description, the images are blunt and contained. For example, the metaphor of the 'grass skirt' feels sealed in its connotations, devoid of metaphor's usual layerings, distinct from the reflectiveness of simile. A later visual description is similarly clear, curt and closed off to more fanciful interpretations: '[h]e liked the kid's skin, especially on his ass. Sick white crisscrossed with gray stretch marks' (64).

Cooper's writing presents the most unconscionable of content in the most unconscionable of styles. 'Wrong' is the non-emotional, non-judgmental expression of the profoundest of violence and disrespect for life, where the young male victims are at their most commodified, reduced to a series of ever-replaceable 'pretty face[s]' (63). The writer offers no "guide" to the reader for how to read these scenes, there is no editorialising within the literal transcription of Mike's actions. In this way, with no other pointers present, the reader's interpretation is directed only by the title, which would seem therefore to cover *all* of the story's actions. However, Cooper, I would argue, does not mean simply to level all of the characters, to offer "wrong" as a meaningless blanket term.

While, as I suggested earlier, the young men clearly do not consent to Mike murdering them, Cooper still provides a strong sense of the victims' self-endangering desires. 'When Mike saw a pretty face, he liked to mess it up, or give it drugs until it wore out by itself' (63). These, the opening words of 'Wrong', convey both the sadistic

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[58] Eileen Myles, qtd. on back cover of Dennis Cooper's *Wrong*.

and masochistic motivations of the characters. Mike's sadism would seem to predetermine the pretty face's masochism. His desire is the more authentic or, rather, the more accessible. It is unswayed by artificial means whereas the self-endangerment of his victims is natural or innate *only* when released from the unconscious by the use of drugs. While sadism seems to be privileged, and the snuff scenes one-sided, the victims' desires are still noted: Mike thinks that Steve 'should be dead' (64), but Keith had asked to be knocked around (63). In a similar vein of equalising the characters, 'Wrong' does not employ the narrator-as-writer strategy to undermine the "reality" of the actions; especially of the self-endangerer's desires. Its style opposes such a stance. While the victims' desires or submissiveness do not justify or excuse Mike's actions--there is never a declaration of their desire for death--they do offer the platform for them to happen. Cooper seems to suggest a levelling of the "rights" of the sadistic and masochistic desires, but this is off-balanced when there is a break in any reciprocity, and this break is what is "wrong".

The "wrong" of the title invokes social philosophy's complex dynamic between the harmer and the willing harmee, "wrong's" difficult definition within notions of consent. Entitling the story, but also the whole collection of short stories, "wrong" is a locus of attention invited and encouraged by Cooper and resonates within the discourse of consent and selfhood with which it is entangled. Joel Feinberg has distinguished between the implications of harm's relationship to "wrong": its status in the realm of harm to others, and in legal paternalism which determines the criminal implications of harm to self:

> Whereas the harm principle is understood to employ the word 'harm' in the sense of 'wrongful injury' (so that 'to harm' means in part 'to wrong'), legal paternalism...employs the word 'harm' in the sense of simple setback to interest whether 'wrongful' or not.[59]

Wrong is aligned with harm when the harm is against others, but when the harm is against the self, wrongfulness is not so immediately relevant. Within legal paternalism, wrongfulness becomes offset by the larger, overruling sense of "right", of the interests of society--the idea of the common good within which what is "wrong" is the consent to

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[59] Joel Feinberg, *The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law, Volume Three: Harm to Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 11.

self-harm. In the legal reckoning of self-harm, the wrong against society overwhelms the status of the individual's right or desire. Cooper, in his emphasis upon "wrong", could be seen to intervene into the controversy over this denial of the consent to self-harm. He firmly distinguishes between the self-endangerer's wishes and the murderer's dismissal of them and in so doing he could be seen to emphasise the self-endangerer's rights against the murderer's wrongdoing. However, as I have stated, there is no firm sense of Mike's wrongdoing. Indeed, "wrongful injury" to others tends to go unpunished in Cooper's texts. Mike's death is a personal testimony to the cheapness of life, it is not a punishment: '[h]e put a handgun to his head. "Fuck this shit." His body splashed in the river, drifted off' (65). However, self-harm, which is presumably not to be seen as wrong, frequently ends in death whether consented to or not. Chris in *Guide* and Joe in *Frisk* might get what they want, but Cooper provides numerous self-endangerers who die "unwillingly": Mike's many victims are joined by Brad in *Jerk*, and by the premature deaths (from AIDS) of, for example, Samson in *Frisk* and Sniffles in *Guide*.

The sadists and the masochists in Cooper's texts are shown to have different relationships to "wrong". The sadist's actions can be seen to be neither condemned nor aggrandised by Cooper. Along with the flat narration of Mike's actions, his behaviour is not exceptional: he is not the only murderer in 'Wrong', nor is he humanised in the way that George is. This trait seems typical of Cooper, as Young notes of *Closer*'s sex killer: '[e]ven Cooper, with his intense insight and pity does not attempt to humanize Tom'.[60] The only judgement upon the (sexual) murders in 'Wrong', is received through George's regret at pursuing his self-endangering fantasies. Yet, this is not a condemnation of Fred his murderer's actions but his own. Where the sadist's acts are assumed to be wrong, and by his title Cooper can be seen to acknowledge public, social and moral opinion, the masochist's acts must not be so simply labelled and dismissed: their wrongfulness is only available through understanding.

We are introduced to George through his investment in death. We meet George as he sees Mike's dead body and 'shot the rest of his roll of film' (65), in a gesture akin to the excited spending of reproductive energy, an ejaculatory gesture which confirms, again, the masochist's voyeurism. (Sadists contemplate suicide in Cooper's texts but masochists don't murder; they do however enjoy the spectacle of death, as I suggested

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[60] Young, *Shopping* 249.

through Brad in the last section.) The next stop on George's tour is the World Trade Center:

> [It] was not what he'd hoped. It wasn't like he could fall off. Big slabs of glass between him and his death. No matter where he turned his thoughts were obvious. The city looked like a toy, a space-age forest, a silvery tray full of hypodermics (65).

In George's section of 'Wrong' the narrative slows and the character becomes more personable. Sentences are longer, descriptions more vivid and the reflectiveness, or subjectivity, of simile allowed. George ponders, sits, and writes postcards to friends and family. His blankness becomes an aspect of his character rather than of Cooper's writing. When George is confronted with the array of torture equipment in Fred's loft, he is unmoved: '[t]o George it looked like a game. Whether it wound up that way or not was beside the point' (68).

George's blankness, his resistance to feeling, is the result of the most human of dilemmas, his failures at intimacy, his insecurities. Although, admittedly, his characterisation is not extensively developed in this short story, we do receive a clear sense of George's awareness of his personal errors, his own clear reasons for his self-endangerment. In contrast to Mike, George's character seems especially rounded. While George had fantasies about a public death, becoming a public object or spectacle, he comes to realise that he had been wrong about his attraction to impersonality, that he 'blew it'.[61] The tale ends with his remorse: that he didn't manage to express his feelings, to claim the intimacy that he craved. The ghostly George speaks to Dan who cannot hear him (just as in *Jerk* the talkative corpses remain silent):

> 'Shit,' and he started to tremble. 'I like you. What can I say? Or not you, but you're all I have.
>
> 'I blew it.' He blended in to the afternoon. Outside the window a car honked. Inside the room a man's watch ticked (73).

Finally, George, like his namesake in *Closer*, returns to the father figure at the moment of crisis. This is no regular oedipal scenario nor, in any way, a developed one, but

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[61] George is not reduced to object within the death scene. He is not a victim of Mike and he endures beyond death; his subjectivity transcends mortality.

Cooper does seem to invite psychoanalytical readings.[62] In flouting the force of Law or notions of the common good in 'Wrong', Cooper seems to inhibit the judging of the characters in conventional terms, whilst favouring instead the understanding of George. 'Wrong' is not about the simple judgement of unfair acts, but about the different ways that acts and individuals can be wrong. 'Wrong', it seems, offers a rather abstract morality. Where it lacks the moral pointers within the writing for the reader to follow, *Frisk* offers some explicit directions of judgement in terms of both content and style, as does the aptly titled *Guide*.

Frisk: Searching for a Cure

Frisk offers the most unconventional of narratives in its steady stream of snuff scenarios, its onslaught of the most disturbing and oppositional sexual fantasies. Yet, the whole narrative can be seen as a negotiation of the wrong of snuff, as Dennis, the narrator-writer, comes to terms with his sadistic desires. The wrongfulness of snuff is conveyed in two ways. Firstly as the explicit, albeit rare, judgement of it: Julian, for example, says 'I understand the appeal....I can picture it. It's crossed my mind...Still, you're actually murdering guys, and I'm not being moralistic. I'm talking fairness, which is not a particularly bad rule to live by, as rules go' (*Frisk* 112). Again, Cooper deliberately distances the appraisal from conventional notions of morality. Secondly, the narrative, I would argue, follows a curative path. In this way, as I suggested in my discussion of Hollywood's tales of cure in chapter two, it can be seen to offer the most conventional (and moralistic) of narrative trajectories. *Frisk* suggests that snuff is wrong in that it is unfair to the victims, but it also suggests that there is something wrong with Dennis which requires remedying. But *Frisk* is not a tale of cure in the conventional sense whereby the narrative starts with the establishment of an illness and ends with its disappearance. Dennis's fantasies about sexual death are never deemed to be an illness, and they are not removed at the conclusion. However, the narrative offers itself as a passage, as a self-confessed quest for resolution, and on the way the narrator's condition becomes managed rather than cured.

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[62] Young offers a psychoanalytical reading of *Closer*; see *Shopping*, 247-48. Cooper's work has been seen as critically informed, as Siegle points out: 'Cooper, who...has written on the visual arts, film, and music...brings to his fiction an analytical acumen that understands culture's death logic in a far more complex way than some writers' (316).

Again, the title snaps out my approach to the book. "Frisk" means a sprightly or brisk movement and to search someone for concealed weapons. I want to trace this sense of movement or searching through the novel's textual play, addressing its structure and content in order to reveal the project of the writer. This approach, this reading of the novel as a journey in self-awareness, is premised upon the narrator's confessed purpose: '[l]et me say before I go on that everything I do is based on an urge that I don't understand, though I keep trying to understand it' (*Frisk* 44).

Frisk's narrative is framed by two parallel descriptions of photo-scenes and the content in-between is the journey from one to the other. In the opening description: '[h]e lies naked on a bed with his wrists bound, legs splayed, ankles secured to the corners' (*Frisk* 3), and in the closing chapter: '[h]e lies naked on a futon with his wrists tied together, legs spread, feet jutting out of the frame' (*Frisk* 127). The first photograph is the original, primal, scene that founds and funds Dennis's sexuality, his desire and fantasy: the snuff image of a boy. It provides the starting point of the process. The last words of the first chapter are: '[a]t its center's a pit, or a small tunnel entrance, too out-of-focus to actually explore with one's eyes, but too mysterious not to want to try' (*Frisk* 4). In this way the photograph of the dead body offers the door, the point of embarkation, for the journey and the start of the passage through. It is the invitation to Dennis and the reader to begin a journey of exploration. That this is a passage undertaken, a destination achieved, is shown by the last words of the book when the "falsity" of the image is understood but more importantly transplanted from an abstract awareness to the direct experience of it:

> In the central indentation there's a smaller notch maybe one-half-inch deep. It's a bit out of focus. Still, you can see the fingerprints of the person or persons who made it (*Frisk* 128).

It is especially telling that it is fingerprints which are noted, for they are the markers of presence and responsibility but precisely within a criminal (supposedly moral) context.

Dennis is "cured" by this re-creation of the image of the dead boy at the conclusion, as the breaking of the spell, the photograph's haunting of his life. The re-creation is an idea of Kevin's, Julian's younger brother, to 'restage those photos with Chretien playing the "dead" kid. And if the daydream was truly prophetic I'd wind up cured or exorcised or something' (*Frisk* 121). This re-creation represents the curative

process in several ways. It is similar to the therapy investigated in Sylvère Lotringer's *Overexposed: Treating Sexual Perversion in America*, which argues that by revisiting and demystifying the same scenario that procured all the feelings previously, the desired scenario can become mundane, ordinary.[63] This 'boredom therapy' involves the subjection of sex criminals to endless images of their particular fantasies, so that they would experience a kind of burn-out, or rather a 'masturbatory satiation'.[64]

Frisk's curative process is also reminiscent of psychoanalysis's emphasis upon abreaction as fundamental to cure. The abreaction as described by Freud is the discharge of the repressed emotion: the exorcism, as it were, of the difficult feeling by a re-experiencing of it. Abreaction through the hypnotically induced "talking cure" was pivotal to Freud's earliest writings on the treatment of hysteria. In *Studies in Hysteria* the mechanism of the talking cure is rooted in the original belief that hysteria arose from the suppression of emotions produced by a psychical trauma. Treatment consisted of recalling those emotions through hypnosis, by 'bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect'.[65] Thus in re-experiencing the moment of trauma, in abreacting its effect, the traumatic symptom would be undone. Cure is achieved precisely through the re-enacting or reliving of the feelings that originally caused illness.

Freud swiftly abandoned the simplicity of the talking cure, of abreaction as 'in itself therapeutic',[66] focusing instead upon the importance of repression and the unconscious, the more complex psychic processes of resistance which inhibit abreaction. However, with the development of psychoanalysis, the idea of the reliving of the repressed emotions remained essential to cure. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, abreaction was implicit to key elements of psychoanalytic cure such as "working through" and "transference": 'the notion is retained in the later...[c]oncepts...[which] all

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[63] Sylvère Lotringer, *Overexposed: Treating Sexual Perversion in America* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
[64] Lotringer, 123, 124.
[65] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, 'On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication' (1893) *Studies on Hysteria*, PFL vol. 3. trans. James and Alix Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 57, original emphasis.
[66] Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* 2nd ed. (1968; London: Penguin, 1995) 1.

imply some reference to the theory of abreaction, even though they also lead us to more complex conceptions of treatment than the idea of a pure and simple elimination of the traumatising affect'.[67] Psychoanalytic cure involves the excavation of the complex feelings associated with the traumatic experience and a working through of them. This "working through" always depends upon the revisitation of the original trauma, as I suggested in my discussion of compulsive repetition in chapter two. In transference, the patient 'sees in [the analyst] the return, the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype'.[68] Transference is precisely about reinstating and reliving earlier events, rather than simply recalling them: '[the patient] acts it before us, as it were, instead of reporting it to us'.[69] Psychoanalytic cure has continued to be based upon the notion of an active revisitation.

This notion of the thing which caused illness being able to cure the illness also parallels homoeopathy, which is based on exactly this principle of revisitation, of "like treating like".[70] All these therapeutic forms of cure, are based on this simple principle of undoing the symptom by repeating it, and can be seen to be integral to the resolution in *Frisk*. It is interesting to note how the traditional pattern of narrative, "equilibrium-disequilibrium-equilibrium" as defined by Todorov, opposes this homoeopathic principle. The "cure" state of equilibrium is achieved in response to its *opposite*, disequilibrium. The therapy therefore is allopathic: conventional medicine which treats the symptom with its opposite. In this way, Cooper's texts continue to challenge the (reductive and) binarised logic of mainstream culture.[71]

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[67] Laplanche, *Language* 2.
[68] Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' (1940 [1938]) *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, PFL vol. 15. trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1993) 408.
[69] Freud, 'An Outline' 409.
[70] For a discussion of the principles of Homoeopathy, see Samuel Hahnemann, *Organon of Medicine*, 6th ed. (London: Gollancz, 1986). For a discussion of the connection between homoeopathy and psychoanalysis and its literary expressions, see Michele Aaron, 'The Historical, the Hysterical and the Homoeopathic', *Paragraph* 19.2 (1996): 114-26.
[71] Indeed, Cooper is seen as an anti-assimilationist writer, which he himself defines as those 'who refuse in different ways to make the kinds of compromises necessary for mainstream success'. Cooper, ed. *Discontents: New Queer Writers* (New York: Amethyst Press, 1992) xi.

The same therapeutic process is invoked in *Guide*, but this time as a means of "curing" both the self-endangerer's and the sadist's obsession with sexual death. Dennis Cooper, the narrator-writer, suggests to Chris that in fabricating his desired snuff scenario they could both satisfy and cure him (and Dennis's own desires): '[e]ssentially, the porn would recreate the fantasy he'd just related. My logic was: Maybe if Chris's fantasy could be enacted on film, he'd have it to study but he would still be alive. And, on a purely selfish level, I'd be halfway to literalizing a dream' (*Guide* 42-43). In this way, what was merely implicit in *Frisk* is made explicit in *Guide*.[72] Dennis Cooper, the narrator, is aware of and responsible for his own 'sick' fantasies, he even labels them sick: 'Chris's face is very bloated and purple, but his eyes are just blissed. And without their disapproval, he does make one's mind wander in scary directions. Or my mind, anyway. But then, I'm sick' (*Guide* 41). This "sickness" or judgement is here specifically linked to consent, to the sense of Chris's (dis)approval. However, the therapy is not undertaken. Dennis fails to cure Chris who fulfils his fantasy via someone else. Dennis also fails to cure himself of his sick fantasies: 'to diminish their presence in my thoughts and, consequently, in my work' (*Guide* 72). This is especially resonant given *Guide*'s inevitable autobiographical charge which reminds us that the narrator-writer's books are 'all about serial murderers' (*Guide* 155), and here we are reading another of them. Other things also fail in this novel, a unique occurrence in Cooper's works: the pornographers, Pam and Sue, get caught;[73] Goof, the star of their kiddie-porn, 'drops dead' of natural causes. *Guide* seems far from the idealism or simple fantasy worlds of the other novels.

The cure can also be seen to fail in *Frisk*. The first and last chapters are the only ones without the single-word referent or title to them: their distinction is highlighted by the sign used in its place, the same sign for both, connecting them under a similarly abstract meaning. These titles, like the return to the opening image, reiterate the cyclical nature of the narrative. This sense of the cyclical, of return, defies progression--the working through beyond the revisitation--the essence of cure. That Cooper's novels are themselves part of cycle, reiterates this rejection of progress. The narrative passage is

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[72] Having formulated my reading of *Frisk* during research prior to *Guide*'s publication, the latter book can certainly be seen to build upon and respond to his earlier work.

[73] It is unfortunate that the first time anyone gets their comeuppance it should be the first important female characters in a Cooper novel, and lesbians to boot.

marked structurally also by the mirroring of the title of the second and penultimate chapter: 'Wild' and 'Wilder', respectively. This comparative shift does imply progress: an increase rather than a decrease in sensation or possibility. In this way, "reality" can be seen not to undo or break the spell of fantasy, but to intensify it: an opening up rather than a closing down of potential. The image that is returned to is not the same. An object is named, the bed is identified as a futon and the fabrication is invested with "reality", becoming more complex in its mediation of fantasy in a (postmodern) manner discussed in the last section. While the re-creation is supposed to undo Dennis's obsession, to finally tie down his "sick" thoughts, the fantasy is revealed as uncontained--just as the feet jut out of the frame of the final photograph, so desire exceeds the borders of the fantasy.

The reading of *Frisk* as a passage to cure emphasises the "negativity" of Dennis's feelings, that they should need to be cured. It also suggests the therapeutic charge at play within *Frisk* as the cathartic potential of art: its ability to allow the purging of the pent-up, potentially dangerous, definitely negative, emotions.[74] This is a classical argument for the value of the imitative quality of art and a current one for the social worth of pornography. Where Plato saw art's contrived incitement of "pity and fear" as corrupting the audience, Aristotle saw it as a convenient release.[75] The extreme incitements of pornography have been seen as a useful forum for dispelling desire, rather than merely encouraging imitation. The release or exorcism of Dennis's feelings in both *Frisk* and *Guide* through the re-creations is to be seen as his catharsis, functioning as it would through the experience of the image. Similarly, in *Closer*, John, the artist, enacts his fantasy as an art form: '[h]e wound up selecting the best-looking students because they were fun to deface, and pretty easy to bullshit' (*Closer* 4). The "messing up" happens on canvas, upon the unreal medium akin to the novel, the fantasy is inscribed as fantasy and remains so (John is asked to kill but cannot).

Art's cathartic function seems to lie at the heart of Cooper's "moral" intent: not to suggest that the fantasies can or even should be cured, but that they can be satisfied

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[74] This corresponds to the Freudian notion of the talking cure and abreaction. His early privileging of abreaction is 'typical of the period in Freud's work which is known as the period of the cathartic method' (Laplanche, *Language* 2).

[75] See Plato, *Republic* Book X and Aristotle, 'On the Art of Poetry', *Classical Literary Criticism*, intro. and trans. T.S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1965) 29-75.

and met by art and need never be acted upon. Catharsis haunts the theorisation of representation's social value. It haunts also my questioning of the meaning or purpose of the contemporary fascination with the representation of self-endangerment. This question has been raised in each of the preceding chapters as I explored the involvement and investment of the reader and/or the writers in the cultural production of self-endangerment. Here, the cathartic function re-emerges as a crucial issue, as the reader is not only entangled in Dennis's curative process, in the narrative journey towards release, but in the consumption and "pleasure" taken in the provocative textual fantasies on offer in Cooper's novels. Catharsis is also, as his narrator-writers remind us, relevant to the author, and Cooper himself admits of *Frisk* that '[w]riting it was a bit of a purge'.[76] In this way, Cooper's writing is always implicating the world beyond his books, it always exceeds the confines of the representation itself, like the photographic figure at the end of *Frisk*. This is not simply a statement on the social import of his work, but specifically about the individual's engagement and investment in the text.

However, while the cathartic potential of art--Cooper's explicit textual negotiation of forbidden desires and their management--is integral to his intense interest in the effect or repercussions of art (especially as embodied by the riveted reader), it is too lame, too conventional an interpretation of the power of Cooper's writing. His narratives are not sealed, rendered sanitary or healthy on any of their levels of provocation. If what I have presented in this section is a sense of the "moral worth" of Cooper's work, then its cathartic function is the cornerstone of such a reading and of my recouping of this unconscionable writer for his critical value. There is a sense of the wrongfulness of his character's acts and feelings, and a usefulness of the representation of the unconscionable. Nevertheless, Cooper's main agenda and political intent lies in his construction of the complicity of the reader, and his or her recognition of any "wrong" becomes not only a designation of judgement, but of interaction and accountability. Within Cooper's emphasis upon desire (explicitly stated throughout his work) and upon the effects of art (rendered so clearly in *Frisk*) one can distinguish the unavoidable involvement of the reader. It is this that is always at stake in Cooper's writing which is geared to both inciting and exposing the reader's complicity. The overwhelming goal of

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[76] Dennis Cooper qtd. in John Weir, 'Dark Man: The Mad, Mad World of Writer Dennis Cooper', *The Advocate* 8 March 1994: 60.

Cooper's representation of self-endangerment is the spotlight it places on the reader and it is with this discussion that I will end this chapter.

D: (Fill-in-the) Blank Fiction:
Dennis Cooper and the Complicitous Reader

In this final section I will distinguish the exposure and exploitation of the implicated reader as the central feature of Cooper's writing. The preceding discussion made various suggestions as to the reader's involvement in the text. Initially I demonstrated how Cooper's writing avowed self-endangerment. The desire for self-risk was not limited to the imperilling actions of a few characters but reflected a more general desire operating in the world beyond the text. This general desire was implicit within the pervasiveness of self-endangerment constructed through the universality of Cooper's writing, and by such evidence as the fan letters to Cooper requesting snuff movies and death itself.[77] I then showed how the reader is involved in a potentially moral reading of Cooper's work. The cathartic or therapeutic function of art is precisely about the reader/viewer's relationship to the text and was re-created here as his or her journey through it. In a way, then, the reader's desire was incurred through the discussion of avowal, and his or her moral or psychical investment was incurred in the discussion of cure and catharsis. The reader's role is "incurred" in these general terms, but generality dilutes responsibility. What I am concerned with here, still in terms of readerly desire and Cooper's agenda, is how the individual reader is rendered present and participating in the text and its extreme representations: how he or she is implicated and even grafted into the text through Cooper's use of various textual strategies.

Cooper's writing, the style and content of his work, is geared towards constructing the reader's implicatedness as an especially complicitous state. In this way implicatedness, which I have located and examined throughout this thesis, here assumes the full weight of readerly responsibility for the representation of self-endangerment--and by this I mean an awareness of and reckoning with one's "true" feelings as opposed to their disavowal.[78] For again in Cooper's explicitness, in his extreme portrayals of self-

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[77] See Clarke, 16.

[78] I do, in this thesis, flavour readerly responsibility with a far stronger dose of political and personal investment: it is the conclusion that has determined, and will be drawn from, this construction of the reader's complicity.

endangerment, the reader's investment is unavoidable, his or her desire for such representations rendered obvious and, perhaps, troubling. As before, self-reflexivity provides the main strategy of implication, but Cooper's use of it is both more blatant and more politically charged and at the same time so integral to the narrative that it is difficult to filter out. In this way, Cooper's self-reflexivity continues to permeate the discussion.

Both Young and Siegle have, at least in passing, suggested Cooper's readers' heightened state of implication, and in terms of their self-endangerment. Young finds the readers of Cooper's texts exposed--both revealed and unprotected--in their vulnerability or their status as potential victims:

> The reader is from the start face to face with the central mystery and terror of life. Nothing can shield him. Barthes says that the text must 'cruise' the reader. Cooper's text goes further. It is, as they say of serial murderers, 'trolling for prey'.[79]

Similarly Siegle, with reference to Cooper's early work *Safe*, dismisses the usual security of the "spectating" reader:

> In *Safe*, a character 'says his sentences are like bars on a cage that holds dangerous animals'. The only thing wrong with applying the line to Cooper's sentences is that his are more like the hinges on cage doors. The sentences swing open on readers who have come as tourists to watch Cooper's Blank Generation characters be exotic zoo creatures.[80]

In both these cases the reader is endangered by the threat which Cooper's writing poses: the reader is masochist to the text's apparent sadism. However this equation inadequately describes Cooper's writing and the reader's relationship to it. Sadism is neither a singular nor trustworthy force within Cooper's narratives but self-endangerment instead characterises his work, and, as I have previously argued and as is illustrated in Cooper's writing, the positions of sadist and masochist are not intrinsically mutually satisfying. What is crucial here, however, is the placement of the reader in

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[79] Young, *Shopping* 241, qtg. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: The Noonday Press, 1975) 4. This sense of the writer overpowering the reader is reminiscent of Amanda Filipacce's comment about Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*, noted in chapter one, that it is a 'dangerous book to read'.

[80] Siegle, *Suburban* 316, qtg. Cooper, *Safe* (New York: Sea Horse, 1984) 20.

relation to the dangers of the text and, as Young states, his or her potential complicity rather than passivity.

Barthes has written precisely about this issue of positioning the reader in relation to the text, as I indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, and is a key figure in the discussion of poststructuralism's "productive" readers. The shift to the reader as the site of meaning production is, for Barthes, the cause and proof of the "death of the author", but initially the goal of literary work.[81] This goal is 'to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text', a text which he calls a "writerly text" against the backdrop of the classic "readerly text" which is, as he continues, 'its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written'.[82] It is the "writerly" text which affords the liberation of meaning and the reader's creativity: the text as 'a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds'.[83] This distinction between the "readerly" and "writerly" text, ultimately between the authority of the writer and the agency of the reader, can be applied to Cooper. While Downtown fiction was seen by Siegle as utterly "writerly" in its playfulness,[84] Young has found Cooper hard to categorise. As 'such a subversive and anarchic writer' his texts would be eminently "writerly", yet in his 'weird passivity' she finds that they are not.[85] This section certainly continues and responds to this negotiation of the agency of Cooper's reader, particularly in terms of Cooper's textual playfulness *and* the 'weird passivity' of positions that his texts afford. What can be distinguished (and what qualifies my claim of his extreme brand of "writerliness" or "enforced" readerly participation,) are two textual strategies or registers through which Cooper grafts the reader into the text--constituting, provoking and ultimately relying upon the reader for the efficacy of the narrative, and demanding his or her reaction to and involvement in the texts' various but extreme provocations. These two registers,

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[81] See Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48.

[82] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (1970; New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) 4.

[83] Barthes, *S/Z* 5. This poststructuralist expansion of meaning parallels the dissolution of both the author's and the reader's self. While Cooper denies the self-sovereignty in the spirit of poststructuralist and postmodernist intent, he intervenes into their concurrent dispersal of meaning or agency, for his charge, which I am demonstrating, is to evidence the desire for this state--for the self-endangered.

[84] Siegle writes that '[t]he motifs of mastery, of readerliness, and of an Iserian fill-in-the-blanks system of coauthoring yield to those of playing...of writerliness' (391).

[85] Young, *Shopping* 258.

which are the focus of this final section, are a literary implicatedness and a cinematic implicatedness. I will continue to illustrate his practise of the former and its divulging of the desire of the consenting reader, before turning to the cinematics of his writing.

Cooper constructs a position or presence for the reader in various self-reflexive ways. Primarily, in writing about reading and writing itself there is always a sense of the constitution of the reader within the text: the reader and writer are named and placed in *Frisk* and *Guide* especially. In *Frisk* the narrator-writer Dennis acknowledges the reader status of Julian, Marv and Pierre, to whom he sends letters telling of his activities.[86] That *Frisk*'s and *Guide*'s narrator-writers share the author's name firmly connects the textual with the extra-textual world: the writer inside the text with the writer outside the text, the reader inside the text with the reader outside the text.[87] In *Frisk*, Dennis's confessed authorship, with his writings constituting the story, allows for the possibility that all the characters are fabrications so that, therefore, there is only Dennis and the acknowledged reader,[88] who is both himself--as writer and reader of his work in progress--and the imagined or fictional reader of the writing inside the text. The other characters are all, potentially, his creations, yet he himself is just a fictional character. Dennis is thus everybody and nobody: the absent object, the fading subject, and, ultimately, so is the acknowledged reader. In this way the only constant and trustworthy presence is our own. Whereas Cooper is only "virtually" present, long removed from writing the book and present only in his textual traces, the external reader is precisely marked by real presence. The untrustworthiness of the textual fantasy--the inconsequence of the "removes of reality"--is more than a method of implicating the reader, it almost concretises him or her in contrast.

Cooper's intense (and self-reflexive) confusion of reality and fantasy, creates an especially heightened state of intervention for the reader who is constantly thrown off

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[86] Pierre, the porn-star/prostitute whom Dennis pays for and then writes to, encouraged Dennis to 'make what you're saying a story' (*Frisk* 75). Pierre wants to be entertained to be able to understand. What is interesting here is rather than the story-teller paying someone to listen, we pay to "hear".

[87] *Guide*'s incorporation of the extra-textual writer is the most pronounced. The narrator-writer is called Dennis Cooper and his novels 'are all about serial murderers. And all the victims are boys. And all the boys look like you' (155).

[88] Cooper does not simply imply the reader of his novels, but has an acknowledged reader within the text and, as I am arguing, a profound sense of the implicated external reader.

balance by the wavering perspective created for him or her.[89] This is, as Cooper acknowledges, his intention: 'I'm interested in throwing people off, in disorienting them'.[90] He does this through playing with the autobiographical voice and anti-realist stance, but also tampers with reader expectations by unsettling genre.[91] The reader must negotiate the blurring of reality and his or her disorientation, he or she is "forced" to acclimatise, to negotiate the validity of the narrative and thereby attempt to regain his or her balance. In an interview with Kasia Boddy, Cooper confirms this active involvement and provocation of the reader as his aim:

> KB On the one hand, there is an abundance of realistic detail and dialogue; on the other hand, you and your characters are always pointing out how mediated our experience of all that is. So you find yourself seduced into the realism and then jolted out of it.
>
> DC Yeah, hopefully. In *Frisk*, where I guess I was using that tactic most elaborately, there's so much set up for everything to be false. Perspectives shift. There's so much hearsay.[92]

The reader's incited (or involuntary) negotiation of the fabricated reality of Cooper's works is not simply about repeating the (postmodernist) breaching of the divide between reader and text, but instead foregrounds the reader's desire to be 'seduced' and 'jolted out of it'. In *Frisk* the moments when the reader is most relaxed--surrendered to the fantasy--and most passive in his or her distance from Dennis, are when his intrusion is most obvious: '[t]hought of Marv's naked white body twisted for sex reminds Pierre of saliva, which makes him picture his own dribbling into my mouth' (*Frisk* 73). Dennis re-enters the fantasy in a shocking reminder of his presence, through the first person. The abrupt reminder of the reader's participation in the fiction is erotically branded. In

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[89] Undermining the singular state of reality again recalls postmodernism, but now this can be seen as an especially complicitous condition. Norman Denzin writes, in his study of cinema and postmodernism, that it is through this dissolution of absolutes that 'I must recognize that I am grafted into every action and situation I write about'. Norman K. Denzin, *Images of Postmodern Society* (London: Sage, 1991) xi.

[90] Kasia Boddy, 'Conversation with Dennis Cooper', *Critical Quarterly*, 37.3 (1995): 104.

[91] Cooper has acknowledged his use of comedy and imitation of horror (see Boddy) and Young comments that '[t]he comic-strip element helps to dispel any notions of one orderly genre--fable, realist, hyperrealist, pornographic' (*Shopping*, 252).

[92] Boddy, 111-12.

another example, Dennis acknowledges his place within the fabrication, his fantasy of himself: '[m]y eyes looked kind of drugged. Amphetamine, maybe' (*Frisk* 113). Narratorial command is both paramount and lost within its endless poses. Dennis's authority is re-established but undermined--it is ultimately fallacious. The reader must deal endlessly with the provocation of the material and with a writer who keeps reminding "us" of our roles; turning the lights on as it were. This then is how Cooper reveals and provokes the reader's active (and sexualised) role, but I will also provide more graphic evidence of how the reader's constitution in the text is literalised. In so doing I am distinguishing Cooper's particular spotlighting of the reader both from a heritage of literature which exposes or even addresses an implied reader (his is not the courtly self-conscious comment to the distanced beneficiary of a mild-mannered nineteenth-century realist narrative, there is no "dear reader" here) and from (other) metafictional or self-reflexive novels of the last thirty years negotiating the mediated experience of late twentieth-century culture.[93]

Fill-in-the-blank Fiction

Cooper stages the reader's entry into the text explicitly through his play upon the reader's propensity to "fill in". There are a number of instances in the texts where the reader is not simply required to assume a position or reaction, but where his or her assumption is graphically represented. In this way, the reader's complicity in the representations of sexual self-endangerment is literally marked.

It is important to note that Cooper sets up the need to "fill in" as fundamental to desire and fantasy:

> You still have to fill in a lot to desire him. For example, I've filled the Dutch boy's big lips with the words, 'Kill me, Dennis,' among other things....Otherwise he reminds me of every guy I've wanted to fuck and kill (53).

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[93] The addressing of the reader has been associated with, for example, the 'intrusive narrators of Fielding or Richardson' or the parodic flavour of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Mark Currie, ed. and intro., *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995) 5. For a discussion of the contemporary self-conscious text as an emblem of both mediatised life and the creative future of the novel see Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984).

It is the reader's proclivity to "fill in" that is then mapped elsewhere in *Frisk*. Joe's murder scene parallels the television excerpt, which I described earlier, as a deliberate play on the predictability of the suspenseful scenario, and on the construction of consent. In the earlier television scene, the words of the teenager being backed across the roof, turn from '[d]on't' to '[d]o-o-o---!' as he is thrown off it. Those final dashes, those blanks, are all important, for within them resides the viewer's (Joe's) desire, and the reader's assumption. They both invite and mark the reader's participation. The scene of Joe's murder is similarly provocative. He tells Gary that he doesn't want to be killed, however:

> Joe gazed at the nipple...He lowered his eyes to the smudge of pre-come on the head of his own cock....'God, Gary, you know what?' he said. 'I--'
>
> *Stab* (*Frisk* 64, original emphasis).

The final "I" with its suffixed dash is a gesture, a now familiar invitation to the reader, to fill in the gap. Is it "I consent"--a confession of desire or the possibility of it? Is it the realisation of pleasure, of subjectivity, of truth? Or is "I" enough as it is--a statement of existence, of a subject willing to be object, of consent? Cooper sets up the possibility of the phrase and through the play on the reader's propensity to "fill in"--to fantasise, to envisage, to participate--propels him or her on a complicitous course through the narrative.

A final key example comes in *Jerk* where Cooper's play-like text combines with Blake's artwork--of quasi-puppets--to create an especially parodic piece. *Jerk* seems thoroughly transgressive with its childlike images, expressions and format used to convey the sexual murders of young boys. A 'this book belongs to:' inset on the inside cover certainly confirms this, but with three blank lines beneath for the reader's name (and address presumably), it explicitly demands the reader's ownership of the text and his or her self-exposure.

Cooper's use of blanks or gaps marks the place of the reader's investment and participation, a process distinct from the filling in of narrative gaps with retroactive information in line with an Iserian model of reading.[94] The implicated reader doesn't just

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[94] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 194. Iser identifies "blanks" within the modern novel, such as Joyce's work, but while they also emphasise the productivity of the reader they intend to "disorientate" (Iser, *Act* 207-10).

participate mentally in the wordplay employed by the writer, but this participation is projected onto the page by literally inscribing the space for the reader (and by literalising the implicated reader's "image-building" as will be evidenced shortly). Cooper stages the reader's involvement in the text, "forcing" the reader to react to his textual provocation, which takes several forms. Cooper's writing is linguistically provocative: for example, he blurs reality and fantasy "forcing" the readers to negotiate the validity of his representations--in an involuntary quest for some kind of order--and offers structured blanks or gaps which incite the reader to fill them in.[95] It is emotionally provocative: he depicts extreme images of sex and violence which demand psychic reaction. It is physically provocative: his pornographic writing elicits involuntary sexual responses. The reader's responses can be said to be "forced" in as much as he or she consents to and desires to read Cooper's novels but also has involuntary reactions to them, reactions often represented in the texts and thereby both acknowledged and licensed. The reader's textual participation is charged with desire, consent and personal investment.

The Desirous Reader

Cooper's texts both portray the market for representations of sexual self-endangerment and feed it--they cater to the desire of the reader. This desire is evidenced in the popularity of Cooper's work, and within his textual avowal of self-endangerment, but Cooper also foregrounds the reader's desire in other ways. Firstly, as I have demonstrated, his playfulness, his blank writing's textual invitations--to "fill in"--"forces" the reader to enter the scenarios and "own" his or her desires.[96] Secondly, in his narrative focus on writing, the "acknowledged" reader (and "his" sexual involvement) stands in for the extra-textual reader. Thirdly, his writing exploits the reader's assumptions to reveal his or her consent to the texts.

Cooper's texts often centre on writing--of novels (*Frisk*, *Try* and *Guide*) or of magazines (*Guide* and *Try*). In *Frisk* there is a particular emphasis upon the role of the

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[95] In discussing Cooper's "spare" writing style, Andy Beckett has noted how 'ommissions...come to seem suggestive'. Andy Beckett, 'Whatever', rev. of *Guide*, *London Review of Books* 21 May 1998: 34.

[96] Another reviewer suggests that Cooper 'brings the reader into his narrative by creating a compulsive need in the reader for what the next moment brings, much like the porn film plots that Cooper scatters through his text'. Christopher Voigt, rev. of *Guide*, *Lesbian and Gay New York* 29 Jan. 1998: 30.

reader. Dennis's letter writing is precisely about his search for a kindred spirit. His letters, which are the focus of the second half of the book, are meant to trigger the sexual desire of his readers. He hopes they will encourage someone to come and join him in his exploits. While his key recipient (and former lover) Julian journeys to Amsterdam to refuse the offer and dissuade Dennis from acting out his sadistic wishes, it is the self-destructive and sexually submissive Bobby (Julian's younger brother and another of Dennis's former lovers) who decides to stay. Here, writing's unequivocal purpose is sexual provocation. Dennis's inscription of his extreme sexual practices is meant to excite the reader of his letter voyeuristically (just as Dennis Cooper's is meant to excite the reader of his books voyeuristically). As cinematic texts, this voyeurism will prove especially accessible: the images more vivid and the reader's "gaze" more pronounced. That it is Bobby the "masochistic" reader who is won over demonstrates that these representations of sexual self-endangerment offer a masochistic voyeurism (a "weird passivity" indeed), as was evidenced in the last chapter. This also concurs with the previous claims that the overriding positioning of the reader is as self-endangerer.

The reader must be firmly attributed a sexual reaction to Cooper's texts. While Cooper's work has been seen as anti-porn, as parodying pornography's pretensions and itself decidedly unerotic,[97] his texts are all about characters' deliberated and graphic attempts to fulfill their sexual desires. Cooper might be deriding gay male porn, its utopianism and mechanical, inadequate eroticism, but to those uninterested, unable or unwilling to accept his critical stance, his work appears as a form of utopian porn itself (or 'pornotopia' as Jackson Jr. calls it),[98] as a set of idealised fantasies of extreme practices. In the blatancy and self-consciousness of these practices--the way that some characters, such as Dennis in *Frisk*, describe their sexual acts and mounting excitement to an acknowledged reader--the sexual effect is meant to be involuntary. This idea of the involuntarily desirous reader recalls Wayne Booth's claim that the reader's compulsory participation in the text is especially loaded when the text is pornographic but supposedly prohibitive of pleasure (either because of the anti-pornographic stance of the reader or, as is suggested of Cooper, of the writer). Yet, while Young states that Cooper's works

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[97] See Young, 'King of Cool', *Guardian* 12 Apr. 1994, G2: 12; and *Shopping* 240. See also Woodhouse, 23, who speaks of queer writers' parody of pornography.
[98] See Jackson Jr, 'Death Drives'.

'are not intended to excite the reader to orgasm',[99] they are undoubtedly obscene, and '[o]nly in intimacy with obscenity can one know what is obscene'.[100] I would suggest that Cooper's representation of sexual experiences and excitation inevitably incurs readerly involvement, which is laden with "responsibility" given the inordinacy of the content. While one critic claims that Cooper's 'repellent portrayal of destructive lust excites one to nothing more daring than mating with a pair of slippers and a good book, aided by a drawing of the curling position',[101] Cooper constantly stresses how desire works *with* repulsion, how characters/individuals are shocked to find themselves excited, that desire and excitation are involuntary reactions that have little to do with wholesomeness. This is exemplified through Roger, the narrator of *Try*, whose disgust at the stench of Ziggy's body, of his 'gracefully designed exhaust pipes', is incorporated into Roger's desire for him: 'that stink, so generically B.O.-like to the casual sniff, came from *him*' (*Try* 110, original emphasis). Cooper's writing firmly instates sexual pleasure in seemingly unpleasant or unlikely situations (which could be seen as a kind of paradigm for the reader confronting this unconscionable pornographic material), and it encourages, as well as depicts, involuntary reactions in its graphic sexual images. In these ways it conveys and determines the reader's sexual involvement in the text.

Cooper makes the reader both aware of, and "forced" to share in, the arousal of the sexual self-endangerer. A prime example is Joe's sexual excitement during his own death scene in *Frisk*. As we know, Joe, or rather his story, is fabricated by the narrator-writer and in this way the untenability of his desire seems confirmed, for he is a figment of Dennis's fantasy. Yet in *Guide*, where Cooper similarly presents a snuff scene affording the "victim" sexual pleasure, rather than the desire being displaced onto the narrator, it is displaced onto the reader. The character Chris craves his own sexual death and when his lover Dennis refuses to provide it, he finds a willing sadist, the dwarf:

> When he wouldn't or couldn't shut up, the dwarf stabbed him a half dozen times. Chest, stomach, back. He fell backward. Things were way, way off game plan, but...oh, well. The world was becoming so dreamlike that Chris didn't need to reopen his eyes. But then he felt something down in his crotch that was incomprehensible.

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[99] Young, *Shopping* 257.
[100] Booth, 'Who' 140.
[101] David Buckley, 'Which Way's the Way Out?' rev. of *Try*, *Observer* 18 Sep. 1994: 19.

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(*Guide* 86, original ellipsis)

Accustomed to Cooper, the reader is led to believe that Chris's feeling in his crotch is an erection, in the same way as Joe had expressed his shocked delight in his sexual reaction. The narrative then pauses, the next section starting with the "true" occurrence, that the dwarf has cut off his testicles which are 'resting three feet away, in the dwarf's tiny palm' (*Guide* 87). Cooper exposes the reader's assumption of the involuntary sexual arousal; his writing relies on the reader's expectation of Chris's erection, forcing him or her to read it in. The narrative even pauses--yet another gap filled--to ensure the full affect. There is still no "real" sexually aroused snuff victim, but the ownership of the portrait, or investment in it, is shifted to the reader.

The almost contractual nature of this arrangement--the dangerous and powerful writer manipulating and pleasing, seducing and forcing, the knowing and willing reader--sounds very much like an S/M dynamic. While I have distanced Cooper from both conservative and libertarian formulations of masochism, it is certainly important to acknowledge here how Cooper's desirous and consenting reader corresponds to the notion that it is the masochist who holds the power ultimately, who is the one 'who controls the other's control'.[102] (After all, Cooper's manipulative writing is only manipulative when read.) This activity within submission seems certainly to fulfill the 'weird passivity' which Young saw as characterising Cooper's texts and denying his 'writerliness'. Yet, as I have demonstrated, the readers' active submission is performed precisely through their "invited participation" in the text, through, amongst other things, 'language games', and it is this that Young sees as defining a Barthian 'writerliness'.[103]

Cooper grafts the reader into his texts through both content and style. His representation of extreme and provocative activities stimulate the reader's involuntary reactions; his self-reflexive focus upon story-telling constitutes the reader in the text thereby offering a paradigm for his or her involvement; his literary playfulness--his use of blanks or pauses--draws out the reader's intervention and assumptions. But Cooper

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[102] Linda Ruth Williams, 'Submission and Reading', *New Formations* Spring (1989): 14. This "new" and implicating contractual state between reader and writer has been seen as typical of postmodern fiction. As Alexander writes 'the postmodernist novelist has re-drafted the contract between writer and reader along lines which many readers of more conventional fiction find unfavourable to themselves' (3).

[103] See Young, *Shopping* 258.

goes that much further in his involvement of the reader. He imbues his images with the concreteness of spectacle and in so doing invokes the active pleasures of spectatorship which attend the "reader" of film. While visual consciousness was an important strategy of implication in the memoirs of mental illness in chapter one (especially in Wurtzel's "film-cultured" text), Cooper's cinematics supplement and strengthen the exposure and exploitation of the implicated reader.

Cooper and the Cinematic Text

Cooper's writing is not simply self-reflexive--sharing the politically invested strategies of implication attributed to the other works examined in this thesis--but also "cinematic". Its staging of its own artificiality is frequently done on the level of the stylised and filmic construction of the visual image. This trope has been attributed to blank fiction by Annesley who draws upon Joshua Cohen's work on the cinematographic quality of American postmodern writing, in talking, in particular, about Susanna Moore's novel *In The Cut*. The cinematographic quality of Moore's novel--its 'emphasis on the spatial and the visual...that reflects the processes and techniques of the cinema'[104]--is, for Annesley, precisely about the commodification of the female spectacle in line with capitalism rather than, simply, the patriarchal gaze. He 'establishes a connection between graphic depictions of sexuality and objectification...in relation to [the] wider processes of reification'.[105] However, where Annesley is interested in the blank or passive consumerism represented by the novels, and in particular the economy of the object(ification), and where Cohen aims 'to establish [the] impulse to destabilise modern ways of seeing as a point of continuity between otherwise very different writers',[106] I am concerned with Cooper's exploitation of the agency of the consuming reader. Like Cohen, I detect a "politics of seeing" which 'dramatises a crisis of the perceptual opposition of subject and object' but rather than it "merely" 'explod[ing] the masculine narrator's optic control', in Cooper's writing it fervently challenges the passivity or submissiveness of the (agendered) spectator.[107] My preference for the cinematic over the

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[104] Annesley, *Blank* 46.
[105] Annesley, *Blank* 45.
[106] Joshua Cohen, *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing* (London: Pluto Press, 1998) 23.
[107] Cohen, 150.

cinematographic, as a description of his writing, reflects this emphasis upon the broader cultural significance of cinema and departs from the mechanisms or techniques of film, to privilege its popular and critical culture. And with this cultural bent rather than mechanistic specificity, it can also incorporate Cooper's general theatricality.

Cooper's cinematics take place on two levels. Firstly, in terms of content, his work demonstrates an absorption in and reflection of film culture: employing its vocabulary, techniques or fascination with the visual. Secondly, in terms of style, Cooper's descriptiveness can be seen to replicate the movement of the camera's eye and its techniques. These two work together to construct and emphasise spectatorial complicity, and, in so doing, to distinguish Cooper from an alleged legacy of cinematographic writing that has been traced within the evolution of literature (and from the postmodern "society of the spectacle").[108]

Within the development of film studies there has been a great deal of interest in the formal and creative connections between cinema and literature. Many theorists have addressed their commonalities often in terms of narrative structure but also realism, locating film as an extension of the late nineteenth-century's realist project of 'fixing fact'.[109] Attention, primarily, went to the way in which film reflects literature and to how 'many cinematic properties, especially those central to the definition of what has been called the "classic" film text, are analogous in their function to the devices of literary narrative'.[110] What is important to my discussion of Cooper, however, is the less addressed area of how fiction "reflects" film, and in particular to confirm how Cooper

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[108] For a discussion of this legacy see Robert Richardson, *Literature and Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

[109] Stanley Corkin, *Realism and the Birth of the Modern United States: Cinema, Literature, and Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996) 51. Studies attending to the literary origins of film include: William Jinks, *The Celluloid Literature: Film in the Humanities* (Beverly Hills, CA: Glencoe Press, 1971); Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Cranbury, NJ: AUP, 1975); R. Barton Palmer, ed., *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches* (New York: AMS Press, 1989); Phebe Davidson, ed., *Film and Literature: Points of Intersection* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997). Attention has also been paid to the "pictorialism" of literature: the "translatability" of a written image into a painting or other visual art. See for example Marianna Torgovnick, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[110] Palmer, 'Introduction' 4.

furnishes the reader with the complicitous voyeuristic perspective normally associated with the spectator.

Alan Spiegel has provided the key points in the discussion of fiction as in some way filmic.[111] In his book *Fiction and the Camera Eye*, Spiegel responds to the visual consciousness of literature, and counters Robert Richardson's compelling but overly liberal earlier study which values equally all evidence of film technique throughout literature,[112] to distinguish groups of cinematographic writers. Firstly, there are those who, prior to the invention of cinema, "remind us of", write "like" or "in the manner of" a film-maker,[113] in conveying a 'special kind of visualization--visualization through perspective'[114] which inscribes not only spatial relations but the 'presence of two factors...a seen object and a seer'.[115] Spiegel uses Gustave Flaubert as a standard for the evolution of cinematographic writing. While this form of visualization is not exclusive to this period, only in the nineteenth century, according to Spiegel, does it move 'to the center of a coherent and fully articulated literary form'.[116]

The cinematographic writers--the post-Flaubertians--"visualise" 'not scenographically but cinematographically; not through the stationary arch of a proscenium but rather through the frame of a moving camera in a series of *partialized* views...each aspect of the object momentarily severed from the whole by the camera frame'.[117] Cinematographic writing, then, is characterised by the "repetition" of the camera's mobile and fragmenting perspective; by the modernists' 'blocked, truncated, and discontinuous field' of vision in contrast to Flaubert and his followers' 'unified, unobstructed, continuous field'--a contrast between 'a large single vista and a

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[111] See Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976).

[112] Richardson studied all periods of literature finding 'unusual and purely visual effects before film even arrived' (60) as well as touching upon the "cinemism" of modern fiction. Spiegel finds that '[h]is greatest weakness, however, is a failure to distinguish finally between visual description in general (practically a constant in the literature of almost any era) and visual description of a specifically cinematic nature (a special condition of the modern literary situation)' (Spiegel, xiv).

[113] See Spiegel, 28-39.

[114] Spiegel, 33.

[115] Spiegel, 30.

[116] Spiegel, 33.

[117] Spiegel, 58, original emphasis.

multiplicity of peepholes; between scenography and cinematography'.[118] Crucially, it is also characterised by the "repetition" of the 'passive and affectless' quality of the camera eye, so readily recalling the discussion of blankness.[119] Turning to twentieth-century modernist novels, James Joyce is foregrounded as the key cinematographic writer. He incorporated film culture into *Finnegans Wake* but was said to be both fond of and familiar with cinema.[120] His writing employed film techniques, most importantly montage--the discontinuous juxtaposition of images--which for Spiegel not only characterises cinematographic writing but modernism itself.[121] Having identified the characteristics associated with cinematographic writing--visualisation through a partialised and affectless or neutral perspective and through montage--the question remains as to Cooper's correlation and distinction from it and the relationship between his cinematic text and the reader's complicity.

Cooper's writing does not simply "remind us" of a filmmaker--he isn't distanced from the age, practices or experience of cinema--but instead provides gaze- and spectacle-saturated scenes of self-conscious cinematics: not only is there a profusion of graphic visual detail presented it seems by a roaming camera eye, and frequent reference to film terminology and techniques, but often a photographer or filmmaker present. While Moore's blank writing style is likened, by Annesley, to "directing a scene",[122] Cooper's characters actually make films--Alex in *Closer*, Ken in *Try*, David in *Jerk* and Pam in *Guide*--or acknowledge their role as directors in other ways: Dennis in *Guide* says of one of his fantasies: '[i]t's more like I'm directing a scene in a porn film' (56).[123] Cooper's writing integrates both cinematic language and cinematic practice. For example, for Alex in *Closer* 'life is a series of gradual dissolves' (70), and Dennis writes of Chris in *Guide* that '[h]e'd been slouched in between his friends, lost in daydreams. I starred in one, for a second' (11). Music takes a central role and *Guide*, in particular, is suffused with song lyrics which function, self-consciously, like the soundtrack to a film:

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[118] Spiegel, 65. Repetition remains apostrophised for even when moving pictures exist, the writer's cinematography remains a retroactive attribution independent of the writer's awareness of film.
[119] Spiegel, 66.
[120] For the calculation of Joyce's cinephilia see Spiegel, 71-82.
[121] See Spiegel, 175.
[122] See Annesley, *Blank* 46-47.
[123] At the same time, however, 'the gaze of his sentences is quite blank' (Beckett, 34).

'[o]n the truck's staticky radio, Pavement's 'Cut Your Hair' cross-faded into...uh, Guided by Voices?' (13, original ellipsis).

However, though Cooper certainly puts the Peeping Toms to their "multiple peepholes", he often *also* covers a broad canvas depicting the larger scene or vista. *Jerk*, for example, favours the scenographic unified vision[124]: the micro-"proscenium" of the puppet show, the "whole" or body-shots of the puppet photographs accompanying the text, which contrast with the close-ups and "jutting out of frames" of the photographs in *Frisk*. Similarly, Cooper combines and contrasts the dispassionate mobile perspective of the camera with the emotivity of subjective experience (as yet another example of the demystification of neutrality). 'Wrong' perfectly illustrates Cooper's brand of cinematic writing, repetitive of the '"flat denotative function" that reproduces the viewpoint of the camera eye',[125] but also dispelling its blankness--the neutrality of looking--implicit in my earlier discussion of the story's avowal of self-endangerment. The first four pages of Mike's murders read like a series of set directions and wandering affectless filming. These are followed by and contrasted to the subjective intensity of George's experience. When narrative focus is handed over to George it is done with an almost directorial technique, a wide pan from the body in the river to George photographing it: '[h]is body splashed in the river, drifted off....George looked out at the Hudson. He saw a dead body. He shot the rest of his roll of film' (*Wrong* 65). The imaging of Mike's death is set with a film-like quality: the "camera" moves with the change in focus and narrative perspective, meeting the requirements or expectations of the spectators--their compulsion to view and their status as witnesses is accentuated by their role as tourists.[126]

Cooper differs from his cinematographic predecessors in that he combines the stagedness of the scenographic with the movement and partialisation of film. He charges

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[124] Scenography, within theatre studies, can be thought of as the 'singleness of vision', the unified and harmonious visual production of a dramatic work. Willard F. Bellman, *Scene Design, Stage Lighting, Sound, Costume and Makeup: A Scenographic Approach* (1977; New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 9.

[125] Annesley, *Blank* 46, qtg. Joshua Cohen, 'Dying to Watch TV: Film, Postmodernity, Systems and DeLillo's *White Noise*', *Overhere: Reviews in American Studies* 13.1 (1993): 23.

[126] The tourist has been aligned with the cinema spectator in terms of their sharing 'subjective effects[,]...the transgression of one's static, stable, or fixed location' (Friedberg, 59).

the camera's affectlessness with the power to implicate, all within texts doused in film culture. His cinematics are employed precisely to integrate and implicate the reader, and, in their accentuation of voyeurism, to render him or her fully sexually complicit. This is achieved through his "special" form of (cinematically invested) visual consciousness, which reworks the power of image-building, discussed in the thesis introduction, for Cooper's own entangling ends.

Cooper's graphic visualisations heighten the effects of "imaging", as Ellen Esrick calls image-building in her study *The Reader's Eye* which attempts to instate visualisation as a fundamental element of reader-response.[127] Across the range of its effects noted in her conclusion lies imaging's ability to increase the text's power in a manner most pertinent to this discussion. It has the effect of 'position[ing] the reader within the text...within the perceptual sphere of a particular character or narrative voice'.[128] It also improves the text's memorability; 'helps make a fictional world concrete'[129] or simply (in being image-rich, a text) "forces" the reader to become more involved and give it more attention and time:

> The reader who visualizes, whether in the service of dispassionate, cognitive understanding or affectively charged interest, is generally spending more time with the literary text than the reader who is reading without forming such images...he or she is [also] more likely to contemplate affectively intriguing and disturbing aspects of the text.[130]

A good example is David's description of one of his father's anatomical pictures in *Closer*:

> For instance, over my dad's shoulder, I'm trying not to distinguish a boy about my age. His back is turned and where his ass used to be there's this thing that looks half like drawn curtains and half like what's left of a cow once it gets to the butcher's shop (*Closer* 28).

The need to think and identify the images which David conjures, involves the reader in this extra interpretive work affording a greater intimacy with the disturbing text through

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[127] See Ellen J. Esrick, *The Reader's Eye: Visual Imaging as Reader Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
[128] Esrick, 196.
[129] Esrick, 192.
[130] Esrick, 193.

the recognition of these iconic images. In evoking 'the psychodynamics of vision', imaging, of course, '*promotes voyeuristic interests*'.[131] Having discussed the avowal of desire throughout this chapter, and voyeurism in the last, I have taken for granted the sense of the reader's voyeuristic relationship to the text. What needs to be added, however, is the sense in which Cooper promotes visual pleasures readily endorsed as voyeurism, through the film culture context, the sheer visual consciousness or cinematics of his writing, but also by the attention to pornography. These visual pleasures, however, do not incur the distances so often associated with the objectifying scopophilic gaze.

As I suggested in my discussion of reader-response criticism in Part I, the image-building incurred by the literary text is the primary method of breaking down the distance between reader and text. The reader's mental construction or visualisation of the written description requires that much more active an input or role than is required of the cinema spectator, for whom the image is already constructed. Literary descriptiveness might seem therefore more immediately incorporating of the reader. However, Cooper's cinematic writing lends this mental process a charge of exteriority, it makes the "virtuality" of the reader's implication more concrete: what is going on in the reader's mind is projected onto the larger cultural scene. Again, I am departing from the discussion of the reader/spectator's entry into the text as marked by identification, favouring what I see as a more convincing "local" mental process of entry. This is especially necessary with regard to such harsh narratives as Cooper's which seem to problematise identification by undermining reality, shifting focus, and expressing the unconscionable. In other words I am formulating a way of making readerly involvement undeniable, whilst still acknowledging the prohibitions of the text.

Cooper's appropriation of the cinematic lends his images a more graphic, dynamic and implicating edge. While Esrick was referring to all literature, Cooper offers the extreme and self-conscious articulations of imaging (and their sexual dimensions). A wonderful example is provided by Joe's death scene in *Frisk*. Here, the image-building of literature combines with the montage effect and emotiveness of film, the flatness or

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[131] Esrick, 193, 194, original emphasis. Esrick finds that this allows the reader to control or master a situation, linking it to sadism (although in the main introduction masochism was also interpreted as a form of mastery) while I have shown voyeurism to be masochistic elsewhere.

matter-of-factness of Cooper's language gives way to the cleverest and most vivid of images. Cooper's staccato descriptions are presented like snapshots dissolving into each other, or in their rapid succession produce perhaps a (discontinuous) moving picture:

> Joe gazed at the nipple. Then he gazed at the point of the knife. He raised his eyes to Gary's tight little smile. He lowered his eyes to the smudge of pre-come on the head of his own cock. When he shut his eyes a second later, the four things--pink nipple, knife point, crinkly smile, white smudge--were superimposed against the reddish darkness of his lids. It looked like a flower (*Frisk* 64).

The reader is not led to construct the sanitary, distant portrait of a neutral contemplative narration, but the character's lived experience of, or as, both image-building and montage. Where Joyce's discontinuous montage epitomised the passiveness or blankness of cinematographic writing--'dramatiz[ing] partialized fields without a sacrifice of authorial neutrality'[132]--in Cooper the technique is central to the absorption of the reader into the text as it merges with image-building and gives way, finally, to the subjectivity of simile.

The intimacy of image-building becomes the shared spectacle of montage. Cooper's cinematics stage the inner world; they project the mechanics of the character's experience and with it the reader's, whose personal involvement in the text becomes part of a larger cultural landscape. Similarly, the frequent reminders of the fictitiousness of the characters' acts and of the novels themselves, places the personal act of reading into the public realm of publication. The unfixity of narrative authority in Cooper's texts, as well as the multiple positions of identification that they offer, replicates the roaming and disinterested camera eye of an unrestricted film narration, whilst maintaining a nightmarish intimacy with the reader.[133] While the novel has been seen to favour the

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[132] Spiegel, 174.

[133] A film has an unrestricted narration when the viewer's knowledge is not contained by the experience or perspective of a single character. See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) 75-79. While an unrestricted narration does not privilege a single perspective, it is likely, in the service of narrative progression, to encourage the viewer's alignment with particular characters. In other words, the camera might be disinterested or unselective in the performance of its function, but it is rarely disentangled from the emotivity of what it captures.

'dramatization of inner conflict' and the film 'extra-personal conflict',[134] Cooper manages to involve both, making his world both radically personal and radically public.[135] This could be seen as replicating an initial aim of classical cinema: to mask the industrialisation of entertainment with the emphasis upon the individual, to manufacture intimacy.[136] Although further fodder for the cinematicness of his writing, most importantly this combination repeats a key idea of Cooper's writing, and of this thesis as a whole: that the experiences and desires of the individual (whether character or reader) are charged with cultural and political agency, that the representation (of self-endangerment) signifies both particular and more universal desires and both are politicised.

My emphasis upon Cooper's cinematics is not simply confirming a 1990s susceptibility to visual culture (which 'urges the reader of literature to fresh alertness to the visual and aural qualities'[137]) or the "usefulness" of film theory (especially when investigating the representation of violence[138]), or the postmodern prioritisation of the image so central to Annesley's and Cohen's analyses. Rather, Cooper's explicit flirtation with film heightens the grafting of the reader into the text, combining the state of implication inherent in engaging with a literary text with the complicity of voyeurism inherent in visualisation or spectatorship: combining the privacy of reading with the publicness of spectating.

While the reader is "forced" to take up these positions, to experience these reactions, what I have also tried to promote is how he or she desires but also consents to

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[134] Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997) 365.

[135] This writing style can be seen as typically postmodern, and similar to postmodern cinema in that it is preoccupied with both the 'effacement of boundaries' and with the 'unpresentable' which work together to show how what is being represented is the fear and desires of contemporary culture: '[t]he wild sexuality and violence that these films represent signify... modes of freedom and self-expression that the late-postmodern period is both fearful of, and drawn to at the same time' (Denzin, *Images* 68).

[136] Dyer presents a persuasive reading of this through the Musical; see his 1977 essay 'Entertainment as Utopia', *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: BFI, 1986) 175-89.

[137] Richardson, 3.

[138] Laura Tanner qualifies her appropriation of film theory in this way, in her study of literary representations of rape and torture. See Laura E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 11-12.

this experience. Indeed, the reader is often singled out in his or her desire or consent. Several climactic scenes--Joe's television viewing and death in *Frisk*, and Brad's death in *Jerk*--hinge upon and play with the victim's consent. In *Jerk*, the previously consenting masochist Brad, changes his mind during the encounter. The reader is forced into the self-conscious position of being aware that consent is no longer there, and thus made aware of his or her own consent. Cooper condones the questioning of consent which is found to be deceptive, an eagerly exploited and easily altered condition, but while his characters sway in their wishes (and his narratives sway in their focus) the reader is foregrounded as the maintaining player. The characters change their minds, but the reader keeps reading. When the text is unconscionable consent is necessarily risky or perhaps it is precisely because the text elicits consent that it is deemed unconscionable. (Complicity has become a more useful standard for asserting the reader's implication, for consent is misleading--it is performed, undermined and alibied--whereas complicity seems more enduring or indisputable an attribution.) A similar construction was noted in 'Wrong', where the reader is foregrounded as the only constant presence and voyeur within the proliferation of subjects and objects. The reader is isolated as the only constant presence, consenter and voyeur in Cooper's texts. The highlighting or even concretising of the readers' desires and agency is not a vindication of their subjectivity--this is not the happy ending of the reassuring narrative. Rather the reader is foregrounded, rendered present, participating and consenting to the threatening, the unsafe text; his or her expectations and engagement are, thus, unequivocable. The vulnerability, self-exposure or fragility incurred by this position is exactly what s/he was seeking.

Cooper's texts *are* blank in that they can be characterised by the mapping or incorporating of an empty space for the assumption and occupation by the reader.[139] These "structured blanks" are not about the reader's participatory scouting for what is missing, of 'what has been withheld' as Iser puts its, but about playfully integrating the

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[139] Annesley has also noted how Cooper's gaps are about provoking the reader: '[t]he text's blank response to corporeality compels the reader to reflect on this blankness and encourages a search for the elements that have been displaced in the narrative's attempt to appear empty' (*Blank* 34). However, the emphasis for me is upon the reader's compulsion and search rather than the "objects" he or she seeks.

reader into the text.[140] This is the primary form and purpose of Cooper's blankness: to instate the complicitous reader. What I hope to have shown in this chapter is how Cooper's work challenges the qualities that have been associated with blank (cinematographic) writing, yet his imitation of or departure from them serves to reiterate this primary form and purpose. Rather than being blank as in "flat and atonal" or 'uncommitted',[141] his work is characterised by an (unavoidably politicised) affirmation of the desire for self-endangerment.[142] This is conveyed through the multiple orders of representation in his cinematic texts (albeit that they maintain a monothematic air). Rather than being blank as in devoid of morality, of a sense of right or wrong, Cooper's work exploits the cathartic potential of art.

Cooper's representations of self-endangerment do not symbolise and reinforce society's repressed desires; they are not about disavowal. Rather they expose the existence and pervasiveness of these "reprehensible" desires--it is disavowal which perpetuates them--and the avowing process of Cooper's work seeks to meet and treat these desires. Where the disavowal of self-endangerment was about deflecting and distancing responsibility for the desires that such representations offered, the avowal of self-endangerment is precisely about reinstating responsibility. Cooper's writing is explicit but frequently ironic or parodic. The clarity of any message is shrouded by the endless layerings of truth, so that his work is certainly 'ambiguous and problematically blank'.[143] But the problem with his blankness is not, as others have seen it, that he fails to condemn the outrageous actions that he represents (or even to represent the pain of

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[140] Iser, *Reading* 194. Siegle identifies this 'fill-in-the-blanks system' within his definition of the "readerly" text in contrast to Downtown writing. As I have demonstrated Cooper's texts do not repeat closed and masterful processes of suggestion or metaphor, inferred by Siegle's association (drawn from Iser), but are explicit, playful and "writerly". See Siegle, 391.

[141] Annesley, *Blank* 4. Annesley concludes his study with the perpetuation of their uncommitedness: '[i]t is appropriate...that while the shape and character of this type of writing still seems mobile and prone to fashionable variation, the space allowed for labelling must, for the time being at least, remain blank' (*Blank* 138).

[142] Jane DeLynn has isolated a clear aim of his work: '[i]f Cooper is intent on eviscerating anything, it appears to be the conventional language of detached third-person narration'. Jane DeLynn, rev. of *Try*, *The Advocate* 8 March 1994: 72-73.

[143] Annesley, *Blank* 137.

violence),[144] but that the reader is forced to confront his or her desire for them. His loose style is tightly binding. Cooper's texts in their blankness command and confirm the reader's desire to "fill in". They invite and even require the reader's input, interaction and, ultimately, complicity. This is what I see as the key feature and function of Cooper's representation of self-endangerment: to firmly instate the reader, and his or her cultural community, within the desire for such depictions, thereby discharging the disavowal of self-endangerment and the hypocrisy surrounding it, which typifies contemporary western culture.

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[144] Laura Tanner, writing after Scarry, states that: '[a]s the victim's body disappears beneath the force of narrative abstraction or is rendered purely material through a focus on its mechanistic function, narrative may implicitly endorse a vision of violence that divorces an act of violation from its human consequences' (8).

Conclusion

In the 1990s the timeless thrill of danger takes on new meaning. Focusing upon the representation of self-endangerment, within contemporary narratives about mental illness and sadomasochism, this thesis has argued that the reader/viewer is increasingly implicated in the risks that such texts convey. The texts discussed employ various strategies to involve the reader/viewer in their preoccupations with self-endangerment, but also to reveal him or her as desiring the threats to the self, threats that the texts make more and more explicit. Where the disavowal of self-risk continues to characterise the depiction of madness or masochism in the popular imagination (as conjured by the mass media), these mainstream and more marginal filmic and literary works self-consciously construct and satisfy the self-endangering intent of their avid recipients, asserting rather than denying the reader/viewer's complicity in their unconventional or even unconscionable provocations.

In Part I, memoirs of mental illness were shown to intervene into the safe distance traditionally separating reader and text, implicating the reader in the self-risk of the condition rather than removing or reassuring him or her through happy endings or the self-assertions of autobiography. Hollywood's representations of mental illness, however, are greater slaves to convention. *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* were shown to be structurally, thematically, and cinematically infused with self-endangerment, and geared to implicating the viewer, yet, at the same time, bound by mainstream imperatives such as the recovery momentums or romantic reunions of their narratives. The suspected superficiality of these imperatives was underlined through a discussion, at the end of chapter two, of the films' self-reflexivity which worked to demystify their classical intent.

Where the depiction of mental illness mobilises the safety net of "them and us", the reassuring distinction between self (reader) and mad other which the memoirs and films were positioned against, the depiction of sadomasochism undoes such distancing devices in its sexual provocation--in the reader/viewer's involuntary involvement in the text. The sexual stories discussed in Part II aim to excite, to make the reader/viewer's implication blatant. They even stage the reader/viewer's reactions through on-screen/page surrogates, thereby also diegetically negotiating key issues such as desire and consent to self-risk. Mainstream conventions still govern the erotic thrillers but are

"truly" tokenistic as, with increasing self-consciousness, the films firmly assert the (agendered) spectator's masochistic voyeurism, as well as the protagonist's positive female masochism. But it is through Dennis Cooper's texts that the threads of the reader/viewer's desirous investment in the representation of self-endangerment are tied together. In his anti-assimilationist stance, Cooper evades the constraints which tempered the other representations. His texts might proffer an extreme (hence profound) cathartic experience in their self-styled therapeutic trajectories, but, ultimately, radical desires are stymied neither by the bounds of the diegesis (by the distinction between the story-world and reality) nor by its other gestures of containment (like closure or cure).

The discussion of Cooper's writing closes the study, consolidating the textual strategies and issues identified and examined through the other representations. Each chapter addressed how the various texts utilised different but related techniques to implicate the reader/viewer in the representation of self-endangerment. As such, they lay the ground for the distinction of Cooper's literary and cinematic implicatedness. The image-building, for example, of the memoirs of chapter one, and the self-reflexivity of the 1990s Hollywood films of chapters two and three, become the heightened state of complicity created by Cooper's cinematic fiction.

Challenging the disavowal of self-endangerment, this thesis traces a path from the implicated to the complicitous reader/viewer. As it progresses the reader/viewer's self-endangering intent, his or her textual complicity becomes ever more obvious. As the texts become more blatant in their expression of masochistic desire, so too does the reader/viewer's stake in it. In Cooper's explicit tales of sexual death this stake reaches its apotheosis as the reader is grafted into the text, and his or her desires rendered, to some extent, transparent. The notion of the implicated reader, of chapter one, is overlain with the reflexive reader of chapter two and then the masochistic reader of chapter three to afford finally the desirous complicitous reader of chapter four.

This, then, has been a thesis about un/safe texts. The representations of self-endangerment compromise the security of the reader/viewer; they render reading/viewing's various safety nets (of conventional reassurances) unreliable. But each text negotiates narrative, generic and even social conventions in its own (but related) way, each varies in its apparent safety or danger. The slash in un/safe texts signifies these differently positioned narratives. It also signifies their constant play-off between

tradition and non-tradition and between reassurance and risk, marking their relationship as oppositions uneasily but mutually maintained. The literary representations seem the most implicating, with Cooper and Wurtzel overtly engaged in the integration of the reader, in the (postmodern) breakdown of the barrier between reader and text. Indeed, I have isolated visualisation or image-making (predominantly literary techniques) as the most incorporating of textual processes. In cinema the image is already made, the viewer's interaction with the text takes place elsewhere (through, for example, the shattering of figurative screens in *Whispers in the Dark*). Yet, the filmic representations are found to wear their safety quite provocatively: their "classical" elements contradict their oppositional content but the former perhaps affords the latter...or pretends to. And as negotiations of the two, as *delusions* of security they are, perhaps, the most un/safe of texts.

This study splits its attention between mainstream and more marginal texts, male and female self-endangerers. Reinforcing the pervasiveness of self-risk, it exposes an agendered complicitous and self-endangering reader/viewer. Nevertheless, the issues of gender, genre and cultural location have proved crucial to my analyses. Although not specifically about the centre and the margin, this thesis addresses the oppositional qualities of a range of texts. It aimed to avoid the reductive distinction between the radical practices of the margin and more conventional processes of the mainstream. Instead, both are seeped in conventions and in the negotiation of them, or haunted by the will to self-affirmation that frames all narratives. Although not specifically about gender, issues of gender and sexuality have continued to be prominent. The "historical" feminisation of masochism frames this discussion of the erotic thrillers' heroines but also lends a suspicious eye to my analyses of all the representations. While my aim was to connect the contemporary fascination with self-risk to both male and female readers/viewers, the gendering of self-endangerment and the form which the representation took have proved to be critical contexts for my argument.

Interestingly, the most blatant figures of self-endangerment are men. Only in *Mr Jones* and *Fearless* and Cooper's work do we receive the "actual" spectacles of self-destructiveness. Only men get to die (Cooper) or come back from the edge (*Mr Jones* and *Fearless*). In the memoirs, self-risk is remembered or imagined; in the erotic thrillers it is similarly a fantasy. In this way, self-endangerment-as-act seems a familiar adjunct of

(portrayed) male privilege. However, the fragile men of *Mr Jones* and *Fearless*, and the morbid youths of Cooper's gay texts, are worlds away from the hypermasculine heroes of action cinema. What is more, the memoirs of mental illness are not exclusively by women, and male masochism has proven a powerful subject of 1990s erotic thrillers. The representation of self-endangerment, then, raises important contemporary discussions about gender and sexuality which, as I have argued, form part of the overriding issue of 1990s subjectivity.

My study has argued two main points: that the reader is complicit in the dangers of the 1990s text, and that this complicity is oriented towards self-risk. The un/safe texts make both the reader's self-endangering intent, and his or her complicity in it, increasingly explicit. While characterising textual engagement as self-endangering is historically unspecific, the emphasis upon complicity is a 1990s occurrence. Several lines of inquiry arise from this study. The first concerns texts which use similar strategies of implication to break down the distance between self (reader/viewer) and other (text), such as self-reflexivity, and whether these texts are about self-endangerment too. In the discussion closing chapter two, I linked self-reflexivity to the implication of the viewer, and in texts about violence found it to be masochistically oriented. But what of 1990s cinema and its proliferating, and increasingly interventionist, use of self-reflexivity--films like Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1998), and its murderous protagonist's direct address to the spectator, which aggressively aims 'to implicate the viewer in the spectacle of violent cruelty', but is distinguished as a 'sadistic' film?[1] As a postmodernist trope, what is the relationship of this (still implicating) self-reflexivity to the agency of the viewer? And what of the other involving strategies, such as visualisation or literary cinematicness--in what texts are they found, and are they always geared to the reader's self-risk?

Then there are other representations of politicised self-harm, such as terrorism, eating disorders or hunger-striking. What kinds of texts convey these behaviours and why? What is their relationship to conventions of narrative or genre? What do their particular constructions of compromised subjectivity tell us about the reader/viewer's self, and are they historically specific, or undeniably political? Finally, writing this in the last days of the twentieth century, when the individual's hope-filled resolutions for a new

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[1] J. Hoberman, 'Head Trips'. rev. of *Funny Games*, *Village Voice* 17 Mar. 1998: 59.

year have transmogrified into the globalised aspirations for a new millennium, how will the new decade deal with the fascination with self-endangerment and the reader/viewer's relationship to it? How will the end of "fin-de-millennial" angst and the "dawn of the new age" rescript this cultural trope, if at all?

Early in this study I suggested that we might call the contemporary fascination with self-risk, a culture or age of self-endangerment. I would, however, want to resist this for several reasons. While I have privileged the pervasiveness of this fascination and argued it through the texts' construction of the general reader/viewer's role, individual experience (the varied relationships to self-endangerment of the differently gendered, sexually oriented, or physically or psychologically able reader/viewer) must not be levelled here through generalisation, especially as the acknowledgement of personal agency is fundamental to this thesis. Neither can this cultural trope be smoothly or essentially encapsulated into a sealed moment. The 'containing' quality of this quasi-historical label ill-fits my arguments and these texts which are specifically about unmasking such containing intents.

I have also resisted assigning reasons to this contemporary fascination. My priority instead has been to expose it and to locate the reader/viewer firmly within it. This study substantiates and interrogates the contemporary fascination with self-risk, not through the grand spectacles of 1990s culture, the blood-splattered and blood-curdling depictions of imminent death that trade on the distancing capacities of art, but through representations that are *about* self-endangerment--as the protagonist's actions but also the reader/viewer's implicated experience. A politicised motive underlies my project: to unmask and undo the reader/viewer's claim of distance from the proliferating depictions of dangerous acts, from the contemporary hunger for extreme but mediated experiences. In asserting his or her desire for the un/safe text, I have wished to counter distancing reactions to representations of oppositional behaviours or perversity, that 'disgust' that greets masochism,[2] the "tut-tuts", shielded smiles and feigned surprise at the latest "shocking details".

This thesis, then, is not a celebration of the cathartic potential of art, and these representations of self-endangerment are not exercises in mastery. The un/safe texts undoubtedly offer the late twentieth-century individual something, and something that

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[2] See Anita Phillips, *A Defence of Masochism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 75.

they want, but it is not reassurance. For, as I have argued, *all* the texts are positioned against this conservative interpretation, against the sealing off or closing down of the reader/viewer's self-risk. The exposure and exploitation of the reader/viewer's role has promoted his or her agency, and in this way these un/safe texts might seem "empowering", strange by-products of our so-called 'culture of autonomy'.[3] However, not only is this agency *thrust upon* the reader/viewer by the texts, but it is precisely a sense of agency that the distancing reactions work to resist. Of course, this is only a *faux* resistance--the smile shielded, the shock feigned--and, as in the masochistic contract, the disavowal of agency is pleasure's essential ingredient. And so, in unmasking the reader/viewer's investment in un/safe texts, in shrieking at the emperor's nakedness, I must also acknowledge the appeal of keeping quiet. It is not only hypocrisy or self-doubt which compels us to deny or disown the unconventional, but the thrill of the illicit itself.

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[3] Willard Gaylin and Bruce Jennings, *The Perversion of Autonomy: The Proper Uses of Coercion and Constraints in a Liberal Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1996) 5.

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