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RE-ENVSIONING THE MIND-BODY LABYRINTH: TRANSFORMATIONS IN/OF THE CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF STANLEY KUBRICK, PAUL AUSTER, CHRISTOPHER NOLAN, AND KATHY ACKER

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By

Amy Lynn Nolan

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ABSTRACT

RE-ENVISIONING THE MIND-BODY LABYRINTH:
TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF
STANLEY KUBRICK, PAUL AUSTER, CHRISTOPHER NOLAN, AND
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In the context of a twentieth-century analysis that includes contemporary Western texts, this dissertation examines those possibly "forgotten" places in which narrative is transformed by what could be death and/or renewal, rebirth. The larger questions outlining the scope of this project ask: 1) what is the relation between writing and death in narrative; 2) why does an analysis of contemporary narrative so thoroughly depend on the repression of the body; which continues to be relegated to a broadly defined "feminine" space; 3) how is the search for meaning and identity complicated by ritual, which "contains" transformative moments; and 4) why is the image of the labyrinth, our paradoxical resistance and desire to traverse it, still a powerful representation of transformation.

In a culture that is continually defined by the repression of the body, by the sharp losses of the natural world, and a postmodern mourning of "depth," it is becoming increasingly important to explore, within and without analytic discourse, the significance of the body, or a movement toward what could become

a more "graphic" discourse. The labyrinth as a symbol and structure links the body and narrative, and functions in each text within this project as a mode of transformation. What distinguishes this project, then, is its detailed exploration of the links between the labyrinth and the body in the following ways: via the body's connection to graphic representations of collage (in the work of Kathy Acker); of tattooing on the skin (in Christopher Nolan's film *Memento*); of photography and the shift from word to image (in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*); and of the labyrinthine digestive system as a site of hunger (in the work of Paul Auster).

Each of these graphic representations functions in narrative as a means for revealing transformations between transcendence and disintegration, wherein death is rendered a kind of "middle ground" more than "end result." Relying on the very narrative process that it at once interrogates, my project takes as a point of inquiry the self-reflexive task of reading texts that show us our own plight in/of the world of the text, from which we are at once separated and to which we are constantly joined.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father,
William Leo Nolan II
1932-1972

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INTRODUCTION

The point is not to know who we are, but rather what, at last, we want to become, how to represent mutations, changes and transformations.
--Rosi Braidotti, Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming

The authoritative representing act isn't questionable simply because it lies. For fiction and fact are wedded. It is questionable because it is the transformation of all the multitudinous languages of the body into a judgmental language, the language of the logos. Critical language, language which denies ambiguity and exists primarily for other than itself, reifies the Descartian mind-body split by denying the existence of the body.
--Kathy Acker, Bodies of Work

One legacy of Western history and culture is the notion that certain kinds of knowledge can only be achieved at the sacrifice of the body. In a patriarchal culture, where boundaries are paramount, the mind and the body must remain separate; further, Western culture positions the mind as superior to the body in order for the mind to maintain the control and reiteration of the philosophical thinking that has fostered this separation. Of course, mind and body are not separate; mind is body and vice versa. One cannot subsist without the other. Yet, even though this idea may be common knowledge, Western culture still operates on a Cartesian model that depends upon the hierarchical split between the mind and the body. The cultural fear of death is at the root of this illusion of separation; and language, especially written, is a means for attempting to circumvent that fear. The very notion of having, much less *being,* a body is the source of such fear, whether conscious or unconscious, and rules the drive to produce, to succeed, to overcome, in the Western (more specifically, American) imagination: to, in effect, "race" death. This project traverses the interface created by the presence (and absence) of the body, Oedipal narrative, and the shape of the labyrinth, which is in turn an analogue for both mind and body. What is the relation between writing and death in contemporary

narratives? How does the representation of death in turn enact and present transformations in and of narrative? Why do analysis, mind work, and detection so thoroughly depend on the repression of the body, which continues to be relegated to a still-broadly defined "feminine" space?

As a process and topic, narrative transformation concerns an incorporation of a knowledge "below the head" as well as in the head (via combined analysis and visceral experience) may provide a means for transforming the way(s) we currently read, write, and understand contemporary narratives, especially narratives *about* transformation: narratives that draw attention to transformation itself. Characterized by any kind of threshold, transformation as topic and process constitutes major and lasting changes in structure, character, appearance, function, and consciousness. The word itself plays upon notions of moving across: across meaning, across shapes, formations, and represents a quest *across* rather than *to* meaning. The texts in question within this project reveal such movements, by being on the surface "cerebral" texts that give way at some point to a "graphic," or bodily "truth." As a reader, I watch for places where I am cut to the core, where the fluidity of perceived psychological meaning meets the solidity of a narrative frame, where boundary-less desire fuses with the musical symmetry of critique. As a writer, I watch for moments in and of narrative wherein the body appears to "merge" with the text, or the reader's perception of the text: where there is synchronicity for a moment, between vision and sensation, intellectual understanding and emotional resonance. I am also looking for moments wherein the Oedipalized narrative falters, or stalls out, thereby creating openings that have yet to be explored. I keep in mind Walter Benjamin's famous claim, that the storyteller "borrows his authority from death," and

effectively leads the reader up and down into the world of her/his imagination, wherein death is at once a door, a promise, a suspension of disbelief, and an utter reality. These moments are defined by a palpable tension: a tightrope that stretches over an abyss of the unknown and inevitable, and holds the balance between the impulse to interpret and to trust in a process of reading and passionately intuiting that reading.

Specifically, the works I examine within this project preserve the enigma of what it is to die and be reborn, while presenting the body in the world of form, the body as the world in a Western, patriarchal culture whose structure is based upon the valorization of the illusion of mastery. Moving beyond the notion of mastery/universality and the illusion of separateness, these works reveal the importance of process and in-betweenness that characterizes transformation. To examine and narrate transformation in any setting, whether that transformation be instantaneous or gradual, is to confront one's own resistance to accepting change, embracing process. This confrontation is also that of death, or the unknown: that which is desired as well as feared. Transformation stirs up the abject, the repressed--reminders and remainders of what is both necessary to keep and to let go of in order to become, to in turn continue to transform. Contemporary, post-industrial culture in the West continues to be defined by the repression of the body, and by the increasing visibility of the loss of nature (life, "depth"). Under these conditions, it is important to explore, within and without a theoretical discourse, the significance of the body as a site of possible healing as well as wounding, and as means by which we can articulate transformation in/of narrative. The mystery of existence--the center, meaning, the blade of insight--can never be fully seen, thus known, only felt, experienced, held together by the desire of reader and writer. To write *about* transformation is to bring

awareness to process: to the value of moving through, and the value of the moving itself, rather than on the weight of the goal, or end. The "thing" that is supposed to happen--death--at the end of the quest is the very thing that enables transformation. To speculate on "infinite possibility" (which is a "symptom" of transformation) is to speculate that death is both an end and a beginning: a threshold, rather than merely an end of the body.

As my project has evolved, I have discovered that each narrative I examine here is driven by the presence (and absence) of a dead woman and a grave: in *The Shining*, a Medusa-crone-corpse rises out of a bathtub-grave to do harm, and the Overlook Hotel functions as a matrix of patriarchal history in America; in Paul Auster's narratives, *City of Glass* and *The Invention of Solitude*, mystery is enabled and driven by the death of the narrator's wife and son, and the disappearance of Auster's grandmother, respectively; in Christopher Nolan's *Memento,* Leonard Shelby's makeshift detective quests after his wife's murderer; and in Kathy Acker's narratives, specifically *Blood and Guts in High School*, a deceased mother becomes the source of Janey Smith's quest for unconditional love and full subject-hood. These proliferating dead women (and, as I also examine, absent fathers) signify a deep cultural loss, in the form of tangible ruin, of the feminine principle.[i] Rosi Braidotti's recent work on transformations in/of twentieth-century philosophy and "toward a materialist theory of becoming" in the twenty-first century raises the point that the "old mind-body liaison needs to be reconstructed in terms which are not nationally driven, topdown and hierarchical. Processes, flows, in-between-states have to be taken into serious account, that is, into conceptual representation" (Braidotti 63).

As a critic of literature, however, and not philosophy, I nevertheless take up Braidotti's challenge as best as I can, wherein I have discovered that the transformation at

stake in this writing is ultimately a confrontation with the repressed feminine: that is, "feminine" as death, darkness, monster, as "opposite" to the masculine. The "feminine" as I define it is the unspeakable: tears, the scream, intuitive knowing (wherein "women's intuition" is an essentialist myth), inappropriate laughter, softness, "feeling," affect, the sane madness inherent in one who deigns to step outside the dominant culture by going inside for the answers. There is no easy way to write "around" the obvious binary being perpetuated here, but in writing the "feminine" I do not claim a necessarily heterosexual space, nor universal, nor essentialist. At this writing, there is no other word to describe that which is denied, repressed, colonized, devalued, in all subjects, no matter what gender. Keeping this in mind, I explore narratives that depict what happens when the "feminine" is repressed, and again when it returns: what happens, what is transformed, when characters confront the repudiated feminine in themselves.

I. A Journey to the Mother: The Death, Burial, and Unearthing of the Feminine as Catalyst for Narrative Transformation

There seems to be no escape from our difficulties until the industrial system breaks down...as it nearly did in Europe during the second World War, and nature reasserts herself with grass and trees among the ruins.
--Robert Graves, The White Goddess

William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) anticipate and parallel the primary narratives I discuss in the following chapters, as they each address two key strains of this project: 1) the relation between writing and death, and 2) how the body (and its repression) functions as a site of

transformation as well as a graphic mode of transformation in contemporary narrative. At the outset, I am not looking to repeat well-established arguments about Faulkner's novel, but rather, to further illuminate the work by briefly showing how McEwan's contemporary novel presents the mother's corpse at the center of the text, "allowing" it to "speak" from beyond the grave. The novels graphically illustrate the difficulty in representing the unspeakable languages of the body, and how/why the feminine is systematically repressed in Western, patriarchal culture to enable a world of commodity exchange and legal boundaries. In these texts, there are two key factors which present the following four chapters: 1) the presentation and enactment of transformation in/of the structure of the labyrinth, and the body inside that labyrinth; and 2) the presentation and enactment of transformation via the burial and recovery of a feminine principle, as represented by two novels that vividly reveal the fear and desire surrounding the female body and its association with death and rebirth. Further, I simply like these novels for their unflinching, graphic depiction of how and why the feminine (in this case, the maternal principle) is "buried," how characters cope with this burial and the ultimate failure of that burial, and the transformations at stake within the narratives themselves.

Together, these texts "set up" the discussions that follow by raising the key questions of this project: why is the repression of the body (as the feminine principle) imperative to the maintenance of the symbolic order? What is transformed when that repression seeks a voice or a vision? What is the relationship between writing and death, and how is death transformed, once we reveal its conflation with the body, and the feminine? Although often dismissed often as an essentialist debate by many critics, the repression of what Western culture perceives to be a feminine principle has been at the

fore of ecological, anti-war, gender, and religious movements throughout the twentieth century. In *The White Goddess* (1949), Robert Graves summarizes the prime and ongoing causes of unrest in Western culture: the concept of a

> patriarchal God who refuses to have any truck with Goddesses and claims to be self-sufficient and all-wise; [and] that of a theocratic society, disdainful of the pomps and glories of the world, in which everyone who rightly performs his civic duties is a 'son of God' and entitled to salvation, by virtue of direct communion with the Father. (Graves 475)

This at-times painful, playful, and ultimately inevitable struggle between "god and goddess" plays out in the contemporary body, in the transformation from voice to vision (from telling to seeing) and in the increasing visibility of a multi-gendered world. Graves's observations are rooted in his personal experiences as a witness to and involvement in World War I, his study of myth and psychoanalysis, and his life as a poet. Echoing many of Graves's observations, anthropological readings of transformation (the most explicitly *about* transformation until now, with Rosi Braidotti's work) focus on cultural shifts and "crises" communicated via ritual, which is an attempt to contain, or make meaning out of, transformation, as Victor Turner, Claude Levi-Strauss, and J.G. Frazer have emphasized. For example, in Faulkner's and McEwan's novels, the unavoidable reality of death is sublimated by the funeral ritual.

As it relates to and is distinguished from transformation itself, ritual has the potential to bring to consciousness, or mark the moments (by writing, for instance) that help define, or render visible, a transformation. Barbara Myerhoff adds that in ritual, the

"perpetual play with borders and transitions make[s] self-reflection nearly inevitable, telling the individual what s/he is and is not at once. Another state may come about: transcendence, where one is aware simultaneously of being in flow as well as aware of his/her actions" (247).[ii] Although ritual is an important component to the social construction of meaning, it is in itself not the focus of this project. Rather, I am interested in the ways that ritual addresses (or attempts to contain) liminality, or process, discussed below, in Turner's terms.

The study of the goddess in Western culture disappears and re-emerges at different points in the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1960s, American society was its most "liberal" and "open" in terms of gender and sexuality, politics, and religion. These two periods of history signify times when myth and anthropology, religion and reverence toward a goddess, or feminine principle, were beginning to re-emerge in the mainstream culture, and thus be more visible than we had ever seen before The rise of the feminist movement during both periods, paired with the peace movement, and the resurgence of a more "free" culture, all signify times of process, not product, the exploration of the body, and the brief embrace of "flow," or expansion of the connection, rather than separation, between mind and body. As such, these periods are characterized by "liminality," which, in Victor Turner's terms,

> is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon...[Liminal beings' behavior] is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are

> being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life... The attributes of liminality or of liminal 'threshold people' are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these person elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and cultural space. (*Ritual Process* 95)

Liminality is a state of process, and in narrative, characters who at once alienate and resonate with the reader occupy this state: they are, in themselves, representations and embodiments of transformations that draw us toward that confrontation of death, or inevitable loss associated with change. As Turner posits, liminality comes up against the Oedipus complex in the individual's "search for wholeness." A confrontation with death is also a confrontation with transformation, and ritual is one means for making meaning out of the change: specifically, "a union with the Great Mother archetype [is] a symbol of the union between conscious and unconscious components of the mind that precedes the wholeness of 'individuation' [Jung]" (*Ritual Process* 163).

This confrontation (and attendant quest) is made explicit in both Faulkner's modernist and McEwan's contemporary novels, in which the signifier of transformation is the graphic representation of the process of ruin (of landscape), decay (of the mother's body). In the case of both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Cement Garden*, the mother's body signifies and presents transformations in every member of the family. The corpse is the "vehicle" of transformation: the silent (unspoken) progression of the decaying corpse is the signifier of both progressive and regressive journeys in the narratives. The horror

narrative shows us this in the form of the return of the repressed: the decaying corpse signifies unfinished business, no rest even though dead, the process of decay itself a living transformation beyond our volition, beyond logic, reason, an abject threat to our notions of soul, of transcendence. The significance of the dead woman's body as narrative "vehicle" is of greatest concern here.

As a kind of "precursor" to mid-to-latter twentieth century "cut-up" texts produced by William S. Burroughs and later, Kathy Acker, *As I Lay Dying* writes the body into/as the text as a topic and process of transformation, via a narrative of disintegration. Andre Bleikasten comments on Faulkner's fragmented vision of the body: characters' "ultimate dilemma will be life or death, yet their existential malaise usually begins with an acutely felt inner contradiction, the disturbing sense of being dead-in-life" (5-6). *As I Lay Dying* is an embodiment, via its vivid and surreal presentation of dying, death and decay, of a transformation in the communicability of experience via a shifting mode of narrative: from the epic tale to the written novel form. Faulkner's novel occupies the transformative narrative space between the "epic tale" and the novel form, which produces a "new" narrative form while also keeping in play the spectral presence of a world ("ruin") without the written word.

The uncanny and the ruin both figure prominently in the ritual burial of the feminine principle in Faulkner's novel, both for critics who draw links between Julia Kristeva's theory on the abject and the mother's body, and for those who might draw links between this burial and the shift in narrative itself. Addie Bundren's spectral and "anti"-maternal speech hearkens to an embodiment of the "uncanny ruin" or the absent mother, the vanquished goddess returning to haunt the symbolic, oedipal world wrought

by patriarchy. The claim that "Addie seems to incline...toward a primordial remainder, a kind of pre-symbolic chaos that is violent, dark, speechless, but, at last, real," serves to continue to idealize this darkness, thus keeping the feminine underground, so to speak, for the conflation of woman and death is one means by which patriarchy holds sway over humankind, intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually. This is a key impasse some feminist critics often seem to reach: that the feminine is always already produced and incorporated (morphed) into the symbolic realm, which seeks to control experience with language. Diane York Blaine argues that language "must attempt to expel anything that does not fit within the acceptable limits of...mortal consciousness" (435). Among the "anything" that does not fit within the symbolic structure, or must be expelled are the acknowledgment and integrative knowledge of a finite physicality (the body's eventual disintegration and abjection), the remainders of transformation in/of the living body (blood, sweat, tears, skin), and the material lack of transcendence that disintegration suggests.

In *As I Lay Dying*, the symbolic burial of the feminine principle parallels the transformative journey within an increasingly commodified twentieth-century culture, which manifests itself in the teleological ending of the novel. The ritual to bury Addie initially proves to be a failure, or, at least a failure to "restore" the lost feminine to a permanent place in the symbolic order. As Blaine argues, "[i]nstead we see woman as a symbol of power eclipsed as she ascends, her putative centrality undermined by the symbolic system that subsumes her abject corpse into the ground..." (Blaine 420). Upon arriving at the Bundrens' home after Addie's death, Peabody, the community doctor recalls a moment of insight about the mind's failure to comprehend death:

> ...when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind--and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town. (*AILD* 42-43)

The third option, or the "reality," as Peabody describes it, signals to the notion that transformation enacted by death is but a moving out and away, perceived only by the living. The novel heralds a transformation of the third option by embodying a fourth, thus both undermining the "balance" of a natural order the Bundrens obliviously reject, and changing the shape of the narrative quest.

The narrative "rhythm" of *As I Lay Dying* glides back and forth between tragedy and comedy, evoking a kind of "liquid theatre" that is ruled by the unseeing motivation of its characters, and the flow of a river-narrative that Faulkner seems to have released, rather than written. Addie is aligned with "the horizontal principle of movement...like the road," which also makes her "part of the land; not only does she cling to it by doing but she also becomes it, or rather it becomes her after she gives birth" (Hewson 563). The pull of the earth (red blood, red earth) forces women to stay put and not be the sojourner, but that which is "sojourned": woman as being "of the earth." Yet, as Faulkner's novel demonstrates, the more an author tries to "root" the feminine to the earth, the more it seems to "flood" the imaginary world. Dewey Dell characterizes the earth/road as the "womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events... I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had the time to

let her die. I wish I had the time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon" (*AILD* 114). In her refusal to become a mother herself, Dewey Dell displaces her absent menstrual blood onto the unraveling road behind the wagon [the road becomes a symbol for the lost feminine, as well as for the "womb of time" itself], colored red, narrow as a thread "unraveling into time." In this brief moment, Faulkner's narrative articulates the experience of these women, yet, perhaps to be true to "reality," he buries the body, leaving the voice "above ground," betraying an ambivalence about the feminine principle that permeates Western literature.

While the fecund landscape of Faulkner's novel is near-wild and uncontrollable, thus alive, as represented by the family's trials under fire, flood, and the rapid decomposition of the mother's corpse, the contemporary, 1970s landscape of *The Cement Garden* is dead, frozen, post-apocalyptic, exhausted and clearly in a state of ruin. The mother, nameless and "frozen" in cement, dies in nearly the same manner as Faulkner's Addie Bundren: both are exhausted and depressed, dying from an unnamed illness, and taken to bed. However, unlike Addie's body, which "swims," burns, even "speaks" from beyond the grave, the mother's body of *The Cement Garden* quietly seeps, and creates cracks in the cement tomb, hearkening to Robert Graves's observation (above), which concerns the return of the feminine principle as means of restoring difference, in doing so, balance, which "nature" always already seeks.

In *The Cement Garden,* both parents die, but while the father's body is interred during a funeral ritual, the placement of the mother's body above ground drives the narrative to reveal the mechanism at work holding family, culture, civilization together (mother as "glue"). Further, the ruined landscape in *The Cement Garden* mirrors the

imminent revelation that will come at the end of the novel, when the makeshift basement tomb in which the children place their mother is literally smashed. In *The Monstrous Feminine,* Barbara Creed calls this return the "dark side of the patriarchal unconscious, particularly the deep seated...extreme ambivalence to the mother who nurtures but...also helps to bring about the most painful of all separations, necessary for the child's entry into the symbolic order" (Creed 166). These two twentieth-century novels, one modern, one contemporary, most concretely represent this ambivalence, or "liminal" state that at once anticipates and resists death, and the possibility of rebirth.

As I Lay Dying and *The Cement Garden* are united by the simultaneous presence and absence of the mother's corpse, as harbinger of ruin and catalyst for transformations in the characters that surround the mother. Further, the unspeakable, yet envisioned, presence-as-absence of the mother wields, or at least enables, an invisible, yet heavy, posthumous power, which is characterized by unchecked bodily boundaries (incest), burgeoning madness, and the possibility of a revelatory moment that never comes. In Faulkner's novel, that moment is stalled out by Darl Bundren's descent into madness and his swift extraction from the family order: the revelation, which we may perceive, is not perceived by the other characters, and in Darl's case, is a full, horrific comprehension of the burial's comic atrocity and grotesqueness. A powerful irony of *As I Lay Dying* is that only Addie and Darl fail to fit into the changed/transformed "social order" that we see at the end of the novel, because they (symbolically and literally) do not fit into the system of exchange that the family has been moving *toward* throughout the journey. In a world (represented by more "urbanized" Jefferson) where boundaries are paramount, Addie and

Darl have no "place": they "flood" the imaginary world of ideology, the world of tradition, of ritual.

In McEwan's novel, the revelatory moment is stalled out by the narrative's end, wherein the reader is left with the sound and image of Derek's smashing the makeshift cement tomb in which the mother's body had been encased by her children. The children's initial burial of their mother in the basement had been for them the only means by which they could avoid being separated by the state and taken to orphanages. Further, the burial enables the transformation of eldest brother and sister into parents for the younger two. The revelatory moment would have been the full unveiling of the mother's decaying body, which, like Addie Bundren's corpse, holds sway above ground, imbuing the world with wordless, sensory presence. Preceding this moment in *The Cement Garden* is the sexual coupling of brother and sister Jack and Julie, whose rhythmic bodily movements run in sync with the rhythmic, faint smashing sound in the basement. Derek's smashing the cement is an act that serves to break the spell of suspended grief and interiority that permeates the family of siblings. It is also a means for "waking the dead," and attempting to restore an impossible order.

In *As I Lay Dying*, the Bundrens are on a "traditional" quest: there is a definite goal, a narrative center, and a movement toward and away from both. By contrast, *The Cement Garden* is a portrait of timeless ruin and transformation at once stalled out and enabled by the very thing (a body) that is buried, repressed, stilled. In *As I Lay Dying*, the father, Anse, is still the "head" of the household, although completely useless in his apathy and selfish determination to reach the "goal" of the quest. His presence as father, however, is unflagging and his inane and grotesque logic ultimately rules the road to

Jefferson, with all its attendant disasters and tragi-comic injury. In McEwan's novel, the father, a military, authoritarian figure, dies near the beginning of the narrative. As a dominant but fading force, he elicits fear and begrudging respect in his children, who really do not miss him that much when he is gone. Jack, the oldest son, narrates *The Cement Garden*, providing the "consciousness" that is denied Darl in *As I Lay Dying*. Jack is able to comment on the psychological dynamics of the family pathology, and although he too succumbs to that pathology (incest), he is free to reflect and "tell" without disguise, thus revealing the Oedipal tensions in the novel that require the repression of the feminine, and anticipate the parentified sister, Julie's, being the subject of Jack and Tom's competion. This also anticipates the father/son struggle that plays out explicitly in Kubrick's *The Shining*, the subject of the following chapter.

While Faulkner's novel reveals the early-twentieth-century transformations from a rural to urban landscape, as symbolized by the shift in burial practices and the shift in the symbolic order of exchange that characterizes patriarchal law, McEwan's contemporary novel reveals a built-in awareness of pending ruin. Further, its first-person narrative lends a more immediate awareness to the close proximity of transforming bodies, and a kind of claustrophobic sensibility to the enclosure of the home the children "inherit" once both parents are dead. Whereas the Bundrens move *toward* ritual burial, this family represses, moves *away* from ritual, though Sue (who is also the object of sexual play by older siblings Julie and Jack), like Darl, attempts to restore the ritual process as a way to make sense of, or restore a kind of integrity to, the chaotic events (most vividly the ensuing decay of the body) that are released in the wake of her mother's death. The narrative of *As I Lay Dying* actually restores the symbolic Law of the Father, while that of *The*

Cement Garden overturns it, or at least stalls out its return to the symbolic order. The locked room-house of McEwan's novel contrasts the fecund labyrinth of the road toward Jefferson, wherein the only "escape" is for one to pick up a sledgehammer and smash one's way out of the ruin/labyrinth or the urban landscape.

The explicit and implicit transformations in/of both novels is centered on the grave, which is the source and goal of the abject, as a remainder of transformation. The turning points, or key transformative moments, take place in transit (the in-between space) from one destination to the next, and signify a point of no return. These two twentieth-century texts present and anticipate the feminine principle as a palpable force that enables the transformation of death itself: where, in effect, death "speaks" and precipitates transformations in the people (characters) around it, in the narratives that these people create in order to "make sense of it," and in the seen (by the reader) actions fueled by their unconscious desires and fears.

II. The Labyrinth as Analogue for Transformation in Contemporary Narrative

The world is in my head...My body is in the world.
--Paul Auster, Why Write?

The combined tropes of the labyrinth, the body, and the Oedipus myth as analogues and embodiments of transformation illustrate links between texts (literature and film), narrative form and content, abstract theory and visceral practice in the latter third of the twentieth century. The labyrinth's power as a metaphor or symbol is only as great as the imagination of one who traverses it. Yet, it surfaces in narrative as a means for visualizing, opening, and articulating the significance of transformation and liminal space.

Labyrinths continue to fascinate and evoke enigma because of the paradoxes they embody: they at once represent and *are* cities, cemeteries, the interiors of houses, hotels, troubled minds, forests, as well as being their "own" structures, designed in gardens, churches, parks--places that invite silence and contemplation. They can be made of glass, stone, hedgerows, people: both abstract and concrete. Their walls are both penetrable and pliable strongholds. As symbols, they show up in dreams, ancient carvings and hieroglyphs, architectural design, and new age books about healing and personal transformation. In the world of the contemporary, televised image, the labyrinth consists of moving pictures, trick photography, computer generated puzzles, hypertext, and contradictory, often hidden messages in advertising and news reporting. In Western literature, they traditionally represent and enact the plight of the lost (male hero) protagonist in works from Homer to Kafka to Joyce, and in the psychoanalytic, or "anti"- detective story, from Poe to Borges to Auster. The labyrinth simultaneously suggests play and terror: it signifies both our control over our environment and our bewilderment within it; represents orderly disorder, and the systematic creation of a mystery more powerful than the creator who may subsequently become lost in it. These paradoxes enable the labyrinth to symbolize their "combination in a work of art as well as their presence in the exterior world" (Faris 1).

In narrative, the labyrinth is at once a verbal and visual structure: it can be configured as a flat surface, promising the illusion of depth, and it can contain "hidden depths" and chambers. The labyrinth in narrative has been employed as a mental exercise, like the game of chess, to bring the reader's awareness to the "mechanics" of storytelling, as exemplified by the work of Borges and Robbe-Grillet. Because the labyrinth is a visual

structure or metaphor for inner and outer quest, it serves as a means for exploring hidden and apparent transformations in the form and content of narrative. A contemporary understanding of the labyrinth's multiple functions in literature and film can also assist in illuminating or affecting transformation in the way we read earlier texts. Although it has been a present and pervasive image in Western culture for thousands of years, the labyrinth still manages to evoke a sense of mystery, attraction, and "newness," for it symbolizes and evokes inner, as well as outer experience (such as thought and physical movement). J. Hillis Miller, John T. Irwin, Wendy B. Faris, W.H. Matthews, and other critical theorists have extensively explored the labyrinth's pervasive presence in twentieth-century literature (in particular, concerning the modernist works of James Joyce, Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges, Michael Butor, Franz Kafka, and Alain Robbe-Grillet).

In these narratives, protagonists/traversers of the labyrinths are male, and the labyrinth becomes a "stand-in" for the mind, the city, or the text/matrix as a feminine space. The labyrinth both represents and functions as a site of ritual, initiation, an embodiment of paradox, and a symbol of all storytelling (Faris 2). In addition, the labyrinth represents the reader's journey through the text, as the protagonists journey through the narrative, reaching conclusions, solving mysteries, and transforming themselves (or experiencing various kinds of deaths). Conversely, in "the link between alchemical work and the analysis of the self," there is a "combination of an outer work (analysis of matter) and an inner work (analysis of mind) whose goal symbolizes the wholeness of the self" (Irwin 73).

A key characteristic of Western narratives is a concern with finding the center, or telos, in the midst of the story/journey. The center, solution, or end, is both desired and feared because it is where it is made most visible, or where disparate or fragmented thoughts, objects, forces, come together and pull apart, leaving the subject permanently changed. Further, the quest for the center evokes a paradoxical desire to maintain the illusion of the separation between mind and body, while at the same time a longing for unity between them. An example of this is in Henry James's short story, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), wherein Marcher's "awakening" comes in the moment when he realizes that he has chosen death over love, and instead of his lover's living body, he is left in horror next to her tomb, alone in his epiphany and alone in his overreaching for "it," meaning, which he comes to realize has been death all along. James's story presents the quest for the center as the "beast," which is also death, and the illusion of the "philosopher's stone" as/at the solution of the labyrinth.

Significant in James's story is Marcher's only becoming aware of his love for the female object of his affection when she dies, and her body is driven into the ground. As John Irwin writes in *The Mystery to a Solution,* this "rejection or repression of the bodily and unconscious...leaves man forever in conflict with himself and the natural world" (46). This rejection of the body underscores the notion that all important work consists of a "higher" striving toward the light of the intellect, toward vanquishing the darkness of the womb/cave and the monsters that lay within it, toward a "beyond" the crude matter of the body. If man can create, therefore "master" this knowledge, then he can elevate himself above the "baseness" of the body, which is as yet conflated with the "bodiliness" of the feminine.

Although extensive, especially in examinations of the analytical detective story, Irwin's work acknowledges the body only as a force from which the detective/artist/protagonist must escape. Irwin's account does not address the body except as something to transcend in favor of the mind. This is actually anorexic thinking, which continually posits the transcendence of the body as a desired goal: disembodiment as a superior mode of existence, which paradoxically denies the life of the mind. Further, a key problem with Irwin's assumption is that it positions the quest through the labyrinth as a primarily and traditionally male experience, wherein the female presence is equated with the body from which the subject of the quest must escape, or in some cases call upon for assistance as makeshift "Ariadnes."

When the center of the labyrinth (be it a solution, a death, a rebirth, an enlightenment) is absent, then the process of seeking the center becomes potentially the "point" itself. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade writes that the notion of the center encapsulates "the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality" (17). The center of a labyrinth, for example, is potentially where one faces him/herself, finds the answer to a riddle or question, receives intellectual illumination, or dies. The objects most commonly associated with the center of a labyrinth are the rose and the mirror. The rose symbolizes warmth, love, passion, intimacy, while the mirror, also at the center of the labyrinth, signifies at once unity and division, sameness and difference, and the uncanny presence of the double, which is at once familiar and frightening. The confrontation in the mirror between mind and body signifies a move toward transcendence, "imaged as a pervasive interpenetrability, the metaphysical realm's immanence in the physical" (Irwin 125). In other words, mirrors potentially make dupes of us all.

The labyrinth is even now a means for transforming old conflicts between mind and body, thus man's spiritual cravings and earthly imperatives; yet, it is still a potentially frightening trap for those who would seek, like Icarus, to fly above it and into the ether of "pure" thought and observation, ignoring the ground of experience in the body.[iii] The rose is a symbol of both the earth and the sun, and of fire, which is the most transformative element in alchemy, and symbolizes the confluence of mysticism and science. The inner/outer symmetry of the rose signifies proliferating centers, and evokes the body in its resemblance to the complex interconnectedness of the digestive system and the womb. As such, the rose remains one of the most commonly reproduced graphic symbols in the form of paintings, prints, and tattoos. Lauren Artress further suggests that the rose, "and its Eastern equivalent, the lotus, are almost universally regarded as symbols of enlightenment. Both images occur within the context of flowers and cosmic wheels" (59). By contrast, the mirror represents the mind's confrontation with itself, which can either lead one to disintegration (madness and/or death) or transcendence; at times, it may be difficult to tell the difference. The paradox of the rose and the mirror as embodiments of centers inspires narratives of both liberation and entrapment, transcendence and disintegration.

The written word encircles the unconscious world as the labyrinth encircles the central chamber (the feared and desired death and/or illumination). Further, as the unconscious contains/represents/embodies the "unsayable," it hearkens to the enigmatic absences most often associated with death: the paradoxical "solution" to the labyrinth, to transformation. The stomach (discussed further below) is one means by which the unconscious speaks. In mirroring, as well as embodying, the curved movements of the

body, thus at once connecting the body to the complex terrain of the mind and the abject remainders of transformation (waste), the labyrinth reminds us not only of death's inevitability, but of the recursivity in the reality that *includes* death.

The labyrinth's curved structure is not only an analogue to transformation in the world of form, but also to transformations on the inside of the body: specifically, the folding and unfolding of the digestive system, the stomach/womb as its central chamber. The labyrinth functions as a "matrix," which a male hero/protagonist traverses as if walking on the earth that he deems separate from his own body. This fantasy of the soul-identified man and the body-identified woman is embedded in the structure of the labyrinth. For Walter Benjamin, the Greek epic, the oldest storytelling form in Western literature,

> by virtue of being a kind of common denominator includes the story and the novel. When in the course of centuries the novel began to emerge from the womb of the epic, it turned out that in the novel the element of the epic mind that is derived from...memory...creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation. (97-98)

Benjamin describes this passing down as a "creative matrix" that holds together the "great epic forms" that produce history and memory (98). This continuous chain, or a kind of giving birth by writing, figures the feminine as an object or field in/onto which the male storyteller/artist creates his vision world, drives his cart and plow, buries his dead, creates his institutions and laws through which to hold the un-exchangeable, un-passable outcasts

in the world that has been drawn, planted over the "matrix"/mother that makes creation possible.

In its circular, winding motion, the labyrinth evokes the dark passages of the body, physically locating the human in the earth. Symbolically, the movement through the labyrinth at once signifies renewal and death, a journey made for its own sake, rather than for the central goal, contemplation, intellectual and spiritual growth, entrapment, security, and danger. As Wendy Faris observes, one's "progress through a labyrinth is progress, but progress that depends on circling back, or repeating the same process, sometimes even the same path. The explorer progresses by regressing, reaches new territory by retraversing the old...combination of linear and circular" (Faris 17). Within the labyrinths embodied and presented by the following contemporary narratives, confrontations between the mind and body play out in the form of doubles and mirrors, enacting and presenting a transformation between the seen, the felt, or intuited, and the physical transcendence and/or disintegration of the seer/feeler. In such confrontations, the mind subdues the body; and the mind is in turn overcome by the repressed urges of the body, or forced to succumb to bodily death, disappearance, and/or disintegration.

Such disintegration marks the narrative of Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film, *The Shining,* which is adapted from Stephen King's 1977 novel. The first chapter of this project, "Seeing is Digesting: Labyrinths of Hunger and Psychic Insight in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*," examines three interconnecting elements that fold into this film, and how these elements in turn set up the discussions that follow in the subsequent chapters: 1) the significance of a contemporary configuration of the labyrinth as a means for articulating and sublimating experience, wherein the "matrix" of the Overlook Hotel is

a labyrinth of spectral tracings, the psychic child shifts from a labyrinth of insight to a means for rendering intuition in the outer world, and the "literal" labyrinth, or hedge maze is a site for resolving the Oedipal tensions that permeate the family triangle; 2) the significance of the stomach as a site of bodily and intellectual transformation, and further, as a kind of conduit for the "gift" of "shining" that the child, and possibly the father, possesses; and 3) an examination of the "paternal matrix" that rules the film in the form of a feminine force (the hotel), which has been colonized by a specifically white, authoritarian form of masculinity that dominates Western patriarchy. In this light, the hotel is rendered a malevolent home/womb, wherein the illusion of "king-hood" seduces the father and transforms him into a monster.

An analysis of *The Shining* addresses the hold that the Oedipal myth has yet within the context of contemporary narrative. As a "specimen story of psychoanalysis," the Oedipus myth has forced us to recognize the relation between legend, or myth, unconscious drives, and personal history-as-part and parcel of the larger, more encompassing history that "contains" all personal narratives. The story of Oedipus has become a proverb, and a narrative frame for the importance of what Roland Barthes calls "finding one's origin" within the telling of our stories. Benjamin claims that the proverb stands as a ruin, a kind of story of a story, indicating the death of its former immediacy, and perhaps its giving way, via its ruin-status, to what subsists beneath it, or what supported it: in the case of the Oedipus myth, the transformation of its universality into its dispersal, or fragmentation--its "uncannification" as the ruin of a former wholeness. Through its presentation of the Overlook Hotel, which functions as such a ruin, Kubrick's film presents an implicit and explicit presence of the labyrinth as liberation and

trap for the mind and body, and signifies the visual representation of the knowledge/memory of the body in contemporary narrative. In addition, *The Shining* exemplifies the significance of film in a study of transformation in/of contemporary Western narrative, as a means for addressing and articulating the shifts, gaps, and tensions between transcendence and disintegration: the "writing" of absence into narrative.

The struggle between light and dark, transcendence and disintegration, paternal and maternal, and culture and nature, is played out in Kubrick's film as a family drama that also transforms the Oedipus myth, the anguish of the male artist/detective, and the monster in the labyrinth into a contemporary narrative that heralds the imminent end of Western patriarchy. In the "nuclear winter" coldness and silence that surround the caretaker-writer, the quest for "home"/father is ultimately not only the quest for death, but also the first step toward a kind of resurrection, or renewal. Kubrick's film presents the labyrinth as an emblem of the Oedipal conflict, and the psychically transforming (as disappearing) father, Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) whose grand pirouette into madness comes as a result of his accepting, as has key disappearing father-character of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, Peter Stillman, Sr., the "enactment of all thoughts in art the psychotic enactment of all thoughts in the real world" (Hoile 9). In its presentation of the above transformations, the film confronts and addresses (perhaps unconsciously) a connection between writing and death as it both enables and disables transformation within the story.

The film also confronts the illusion of mastery in the male artist's (detective's, scientist's, philosopher's, etc.) Oedipal search for origin via the palpable, "see-able" shape of the labyrinth. The body's location inside and outside the labyrinth all together

open up further conversation about the limits of narrative. The search for meaning reminds us that analysis is a kind of mental walking, wherein the body's situatedness in space mirrors one's mental situatedness, in the activity of seeking a solution. In *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool* (1999), Lauren Artress focuses on the spiritual potential of walking a labyrinth, noting that in fact "[t]he labyrinth does not engage our thinking minds. It invites our intuitive, pattern-seeking, symbolic mind to come forth. It presents us with only one, but profound, choice" (51-52). Movements often associated with labyrinths of all kinds include fasting and walking: these meditative actions "can create...an openness, a kind of broad attention" that can possibly clear the way for greater insight and renewal of energy (70). The multi-cursal labyrinth, or maze, offers "a choice of paths, some with many entrances and exits. Dead ends and cul-de-sacs present riddles to be solved. Mazes challenge the choice-making part of ourselves. Often they are made from hedges or other materials that create alleyways to limit the walkers' sight," which challenges one's logic, creating potential confusion and doubt (Artress 51). The maze's etymology is from the Swedish "'*maza,* to lounge, move slowly and lazily, to dream, muse'...to be lost in thought," which evokes the hedge or garden maze's invitation to meander slowly, to parallel the movement of inner thought.

In shifting my analysis from Kubrick's film to Paul Auster's contemporary narratives (both fiction and nonfiction), I explore more deeply 1) the lure and presence of the labyrinth in/as narrative, 2) the persistent trope of hunger, which laces throughout the author's fiction and nonfiction, and 3) the Oedipal drama between fathers and sons throughout Auster's work. Paul Auster writes into narrative what Kubrick renders visible on film: the possible transformations rendered by the presentation of non-verbal, or

bodily experience of thought about thought. The second chapter, "Walking Wounded: Lost Fathers, Hungry Sons, and Ritual Detection in the Narratives of Paul Auster," examines three key tropes of Auster's narratives: the tension between transcendence/the soul's escape and disintegration/death; a fascination with death (missing persons) as a kind of enigmatic disappearance (rather than a finality); and the paradox of renewal/rebirth and death.

In Auster's fiction and nonfiction, the lures of the locked room and labyrinth (both of which promise epiphany, or meaning) reflect the process, or enactment of ritual, of transformation always in play. The substitution of mind for body and the intellectual for the sexual also lies at the core of Edgar Allan Poe's and later, Jorge Luis Borges's detective-in-the-labyrinth stories: specifically, chess is a sublimation of the well-explored Oedipal conflict between father and son, and exemplifies the transformation from physical to mental "duel" in the valorization of the mind at the expense of the body. In particular, the short story, "Death and the Compass" is a kind of reverberation of Auster's *City of Glass*: a foundational echo of what many critics, including J. Hillis Miller, have observed about the reader: that s/he falls into the Oedipal "criminal/detective" bind of the characters, or the trap of attempting to become a "pure thinker" (230). In Borges's work, however, clues still "mean" something: although made conscious in Borges's work, the shape of the process of detecting, mastering, desiring answers is lain bare, or rendered skeletal (as remainders) in Auster's work. Ultimately, these narratives demonstrate that it is not the solution that draws the contemporary reader; rather, it is the mystery, and the *process* of discovery, that matter.

The enclosed rooms and buildings of Auster's narratives are graves-not-yet-graves, ritualistically ready sites for transformation: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual. Readers' and characters' awareness of possible "hidden depths," promised and denied by such structures, is present in the desire to find the solution/combination to the lock, or door to the room. Beginning with nonfiction works *The Art of Hunger* and *The Invention of Solitude*, and following with fiction works *City of Glass* and *In the Country of Last Things*, this chapter's analysis concerns the simultaneous presentation and enactment of enigma. These texts embody and present the labyrinth, as well as the "red thread" of the writer's notebook/manuscript, which serves as a *trompe l'oeil*, or false eye ("I"), thus leading the reader into a seemingly endless loop of uncanny repetition. For example, the narrative of *City of Glass* renders the text, like the city of its content, a labyrinth, wherein the detective/protagonist "loses himself" in thinking about thinking, using language as a map to find the elusive criminal. The author-turned-detective, so engrossed in his walking, loses interest in eating, and further isolates himself in the search for a man who may or may not be the criminal of a crime committed years before. Auster's notion of experience recurs in the actions of writing, detection, and hunger, all of which, like walking the labyrinth, embody a transformation, however enigmatic and un-resolvable.

My reading of Paul Auster's texts has led me to wonder if, at the root of every detective's searching (whether that "detective" be a writer, seeker, student, reader, or mystic) is a search for a moment in which s/he merges bodily insight with intellectual discovery. And if so, where and how does this happen? This quest for meaning in the face of an increasingly fragmented world comes to the fore in Christopher Nolan's 2001 film,

Memento, which evokes the end of *City of Glass,* wherein Quinn, stripped naked, finally exits the "purity" of the text, as symbolized by the falling white snow, which covers his "tracks." The third chapter, "From the Analytic Detective to the Digestive Body in Christopher Nolan's *Memento*" addresses the way Nolan's film recalls earlier labyrinthine texts. For example, *Memento* at times evokes Alain Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth* (1960), by embodying a style of narrative that emphasizes *process*, not *goal*, and the primacy of the unsolved, rather than the closure that the reader has traditionally expected and desired. This style of writing also signifies an important movement *away* from the author, the "I," and a "joyfully erotic" movement *closer* to enigma, multiple possibilities, and what Robbe-Grillet calls a "realism of presence" (R-G 8).

I chose to examine *Memento* because it presents transformation in three distinct movements: 1) in its presentation of anamorphosis, which is defined by multiple perspectives and possibilities, in the form of glimpses of truth/meaning (death); 2) its presentation of a character's transformation from an analytic detective to a graphic body, wherein the illusion of mastery/control gives way to the relinquishment of the desire for meaning, in favor of surrender to an unspeakable, yet tangible, process of becoming; and 3) in its at-first apparent embodiment of the labyrinth, a quietly implicit representation of the text itself in both Kafka's and Robbe-Grillet's narratives, which becomes for the viewer of *Memento* an explicit, conscious awareness of the instability of narrative structure (in the simultaneous backward and forward movement, described below). My chronological placement and examination of both Kafka's and Robbe-Grillet's novels following that of Auster will, I hope, provide a new way of seeing both authors' use of the labyrinth in *Memento,* a graphic, contemporary narrative.

Memento challenges and undermines perceptions of a master narrative, senses of plot, and exemplifies a searching narrative complicated by the search itself. The film's narrative seems to embody the shape of a labyrinth, which can be traversed in either direction, as it moves backward and forward simultaneously. Supplying and revealing a cumulative, "receding origin," wherein we find out more as we paradoxically find out less, and remembering "is like waking," the narrative is more aptly an analogue for digestion, which spins the reader in and spits him/her back out. The labyrinth, then, turns out to actually be a "lure" for transformation, wherein Leonard Shelby's construction of memory (thus, his "mastery" of the narrative) is unreliable, due to a short-term memory loss condition. Despite viewers' efforts to either shift outside the text, or play within it as if traversing a labyrinth, they may fail if they invest in the lure of the mystery's eventual solution. At this point, the narrative breaks down everything we have come to understand or take for granted about narrative itself. The end of the film preserves mystery as it rushes toward transformative insight, and at the same time denies that insight, or possibility.

As we find in the works of Kubrick and Auster, the labyrinth is a place of death and life intermingling, and as such, these narratives of mastery and desire function as a means to ground the self in a solid sense of origin. In the Oedipus myth, the source of tragedy is in the acquisition of special sight/insight, or knowledge (in *The Shining*, it is the psychic gift of clairvoyance, in Auster's work it is the apprehension of a criminal, or finding out *why*, in *Memento* it is the recovery of memory and the acquisition of revenge, and in Acker's work it is love), and the death of the father by the hand of the son. Further, the myth, refigured by Freud, became a means for transforming narrative into

theory; in bringing awareness to other layers of narrative by drawing out the stories told by others (his analysands) about themselves, and making those stories part of history (Felman 1022).

The Oedipus and Theseus stories function as myths of "heroes of consciousness," which John Irwin claims are "symbolic accounts of the development and stabilization of the self" (220). Metaphorically, the "devouring" monster represents the son/hero's fear of death, which is figured in the Theseus myth "not simply in the defeat of the subterranean monster but in the transformation of the mother figure, a change in the female image apparent in the gender difference of the victims in the two episodes--from a terrifying female to be defeated [Medusa] to a terrifying male who can only be defeated with the help of a woman [Minotaur]" (Irwin 245). The Minotaur's transformation from feared woman to be defeated into a masculine, biform creature to be defeated with a woman's help signifies the finalization of the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal culture.

If the Oedipus story is based on the perils of knowledge/insight, and the cost of knowing is the loss of vision, then what happens in contemporary narrative, when the acquisition of knowledge is denied, or that which the subject has been seeking disappears? What are the Oedipal forces at play that have sublimated, or suppressed, female experience and desire in/out of the labyrinth? Irwin posits that both Poe and Borges subscribed to "Platonic idealism," and the

> understanding of the allegory of the cave as a womb fantasy that translated the notion of origin (and thus of the self) from a physical to a mental plane and their further understanding that this fantasized return to origin could be assimilated to another structure

> governing their relationship to their art...that sense of the male artist's ability (personified in the muse) to conceive and give birth to the work, the artist's identification with the muse as mother. (Irwin xvi).

This "work" is animated by "the desire for a total return to the matrix (the space of origin and of original power) but a return wholly on the son's own terms" (xvi). One might argue that Platonism's valorization of the mind represents the return, in a philosophically respectable form, of the child's belief in and desire for "the omnipotence of thoughts" (Freud). The aforesaid plight is complicated by the female body's conflation with the very "dangerous and humiliating demands of the body" from which Irwin's writers/detectives defend themselves. Even if a female writer seeks "the idealized realm" of omnipotence, genius, or "mental dominance," she is still, in Western culture, defined by the contours of her body. To *be* the shape, object, from which the idealized artist deigns to run, or to which the artist wishes to attach himself, Pygmalion fashion, while attempting to be herself an artist, is a vertiginous undertaking, for if she is not helper to the male hero in his narrative design, then she becomes the monster.

As it concerns transformation in/of narrative, the seemingly "necessary" killing off, or repression of, the feminine/maternal/body as/and the female protagonist in traditional *and* contemporary narratives perhaps signifies a visible means for a meaning-seeking female reader to understand the deeper losses affected by the demise of the feminine principle in Western culture. If the labyrinth embodies the tension and the paradoxes of life and death, is at once a place wherein one confronts both, then it would also be a place where s/he confronts the light of insight, thus sloughing off a no-longer-

needed aspect of the self in order to make way for the new (rebirth). If the "gift" from the sky father "is desire rather than culture," then, as Wendy Faris notes, the entrapment or repression of that desire may "originate in the figures of Daedalus and Minos, in the patriarchal powers, who enclose the disruptive result of that desire in an increasingly formalized structure and who, as it is female and dangerous to the orderly male, describe it as bestial" (7). The labyrinth represents both the feminine principle (domain of earth mother, Ariadne) and the male principle (domain of sky father, Daedalus), and mediates between them, from the view of the "young culture hero" who "must make his way out of the devouring matrix in order to mature and activate the divine gift of his supernatural father" (7). In this context, Faris argues, the view of the labyrinth as "great mother, with its implication that the young culture hero must make his way out of her devouring matrix in order to mature and activate the divine gift of his supernatural father, suggests the possibility of a complementary reinterpretation from an avowedly feminist viewpoint" (Faris 6-7).

While contemporary narrative structure continues to represent a predominantly male experience of the labyrinth, or the search for truth, female experience is limited to that of being helper or hindrance, sex object or ego mirror. Having moved along the trajectory of primarily male contemporary texts, I move, in the final chapter, toward a primarily female experience of the labyrinth as a representation and process of transformation. Even if there is no getting beyond or breaking free of the Oedipal narrative as literature now exists and continues to evolve, there may be a way to write which, as passionately and bravely as Kathy Acker's narratives seek, integrates "languages of the body" into the world of the mind: where the "author" may die or disappear, but the

"writer" merges with the reader, and the act of seeking, the process of transformation itself, is the meaning. The fourth and final chapter, "Memorable Fragments": Dismembering and Re-Writing the Labyrinth in Kathy Acker's Graphic Narratives," asks, Why does it always look so bleak for women in narrative, still? Is death the best we can do, as female subjects? What possibilities exist for a female subject within the phallocentric construction that is a novel? Is subverting gender enough? What are alternatives to the plentiful madness and death?

An analysis and reflection on the narrative transformations effected by the novels and works of nonfiction of Kathy Acker returns the reader to the beginning, or to the entrance of the labyrinth that is this project. Here, I attempt to understand and reveal the places in narrative where there is "breakdown" or a stalling out of transformation, which in turn enables transformation itself. The novels, *Blood and Guts in High School, Empire of the Senseless,* and collection of nonfiction essays, *Bodies of Work,* together mark moments that verily explode and pulse in the body as well as the mind. Here, pain, suffering, and death are only the beginning, not merely the end. Here, the female subject struggles for her subjecthood, the labyrinth is much less conflated with the analytical detective narrative and more an embodiment of the search for love, the longing for a lost mother (or father), or part of oneself. I recall here Rosi Braidotti's observation and apt reminder that "before one can undo, deconstruct, re-define, or relinquish subjectivity, one has to be subject to begin with, otherwise, this would be a recipe for self-annihilation" (60). Through a more "violent play" and out of a desire to challenge the "given" Oedipal frame of narrative that surrounds her, Acker verily slices through the "forbidden" territories of the unconscious: her protagonists traipse up and down the texts' crumbling

steps, which evoke multi-layered labyrinths, wherein pieces of the structure are missing, chambers are flooded with incoherent dreamscapes and numbing violence, and the paths are overgrown with reiterative, weed-like language.

The cut-up, or collaged text, in its constant interruption of the traditional narrative drive toward unity, emphasizes the broken pieces of language (exemplified by drawings, Persian poetry, and "Mayan" ruins/dreamscapes on which the reader must depend in order to navigate her way through the text, as if stepping over the labyrinthine ruins of a great and lost city. One steps between the edges of structure and the destruction of that structure, which disfigures the page, but in that disfigurement, something new emerges: the "terrain of the page" transforms from a flat, smooth (continuous, unifying) surface into a multi-sided, at times jagged array of separate surfaces. Further, this fragmentedness lends itself to an examination of those places that mirror back to us the ripped up world that produces a narrative that is so conscious of the structural boundaries that govern its language and form. The act of collaging a text is akin to what Karen Jacobs calls the "haptic gaze," a mode of seeing that is based on mutuality, not surveillance. The haptic gaze forecloses wholeness and connects us back to the pre-Oedipal, pre-mirror stage: it is a mode of seeing that is gently tactile, like touching, a vision that "caresses." As a disfiguration of narrative, the collage, whether it be intertextual, word-to-image and back, potentially creates depths that were previously absent or invisible from the surface. In crossing and overlapping genres/genders and words/letters themselves, potentially produces the new out of that which has been discarded, or forgotten. Acker's narratives ask us to consider what other action would be "sane" in an insane system, which

represses Eros and whose dominant order repeatedly "colonizes" the feminine principle in *all* its subjects?

As a conclusion to this project, I step back in order to re-examine the late twentieth century fascination with death/transcendence (as influenced by the nineteenth century transcendentalist movement and perhaps as a burgeoning response to the "gleeful nihilism" often associated with postmodernism), which ranges from an embrace or fetishization of the abject to the desire to erase the "errant" body entirely. This embrace and desire to erase emerge in twentieth-century works ranging from Beckett to Burroughs, Kafka to Acker. Other contemporary writers, such as Carole Maso, reach for a "return" to the body as a site of transcendence at the level of language. For example, Maso's nonfiction narrative, *Break Every Rule* (2000), not only draws out the connection between wounding and writing, but is also a call for healing as transformation in a world of suffering: "I cannot keep the body out of my writing; it enters the language, transforms the page, imposes its own intelligence. If I have succeeded at all you will hear me breathing. You will hear the sound my longing makes" (Maso 70). Such a transformation in understanding and writing narrative, if linked more explicitly to the body, could, as Otto Rank describes in *The Trauma of Birth*, yield a more vivid sense of being (and becoming): "[i]n the Earth as in our bodies...while everything outside is just decoration, or at the very most operations of little weight, within it are pursued those works that are the most difficult and the most important" (180). Thus, in having raised these labyrinthine questions, to conclude such a project seems impossible, as all of the texts in question here "end" with an enigmatic, narrative opening. Yet, these openings draw me in as both reader

and writer, and make me continually aware of my own hunger for meaning, illumination, and insight, all the while maintaining the mystery that drives this very seeking.

As I write and traverse the labyrinth that creates and shapes this project, I in turn use the image of the labyrinth to aid me in interrogating 1) the importance of a "return" to the body as a means for understanding narrative; 2) the significance of the demise of a feminine principle in Western culture; and 3) how the above are affected by and in turn affect the conflation of writing and death in the specific contemporary narratives outlined below. In writing about transformation, I inevitably write while in the midst of my own transformation (learning process), and as such, I choose narrative as a vehicle and a lens through which to interrogate this, because it presents and enacts at least the illusion of understanding, or of seeing more clearly certain "mechanisms" of transformation. As I began to write, I became keenly aware of an emerging and persistent struggle with the form my writing would take. At once embracing the scholar's task of critique and the poet-essayist's desire to realize inner wisdom and articulate insight, I see that I write as if I am traversing a labyrinth, wherein I make connections in circular fashion, often seeming to return to where I once covered ground. In order to treat the texts outlined in this project (texts which are themselves labyrinthine, enigmatic in narrative style and content, and affective in their employment of the abject as well as the ascetic world of "bodiless" mysticism), and in order to "chase down" the monster in the labyrinth, or the many "lures" of transformation, I must consciously enact and present a labyrinthine style of writing in order to more effectively understand, as well as *experience*, the world of the texts in question. As I "enter" these texts as a critic and reader, I notice that my own

language at times becomes reflective and intimate as it traverses the narratives that challenge me to resist interpretation.

III. The Stomach as Center of the Labyrinth, Hunger as Transformation

Mystery and life do indeed lie at the centre; everything that is hidden lies deep, everything that lies deep is living and vital; the formative spirit--the formative mind--is 'subterranean.' --Otto Rank, The Trauma of Birth

On a still, cold white day, I sit amid the pressurized din and quiet desperation that imbues the concrete labyrinth of suburbia in the early twenty-first century. It is so quiet that I can hear fall crickets slowly chirping through closed windows. Against the sound of the distant highway, I hear a child's grating, repetitive cry for its mother, whose voice remains silent. I can see neither mother nor child when I look out the window toward the impeccable, treeless, American-flagged house that closely resembles a fortress. I notice how my stomach seizes upon each relentless cry that grows progressively hoarse. I notice how my body is fatigued from the effort of thinking and staving off thought about thought.

This moment gives me pause, wherein I consider the effect of seeing and hearing on the stomach: the outside coming in where senses seem to converge into response. The sound of the child's screaming rises and triggers old memories in my body. My stomach squeezes slightly as I remember myself as a child of six or seven, in bed in the next room, tightly plugging my ears against my youngest brother's raw cries that seem to be pulled from the depths of his body. He is locked in his room, and stands at the crack between the door and wall, pulling hard on the door so the chain yanks rhythmically with his cries. As I "take in" this memory and observe how the present moment has affected it, and vice

versa, I feel, or sense in my body the effect (and affect) of the vision. I learn that I can at once step outside as a critic and observe, while I freely associate what I am feeling in the center of my body. I learn that this exchange between voice, insight, image, and written word into narrative signifies and enacts a transformation in how "I" see the world around me.

What distinguishes this project, and what I hope will become clear in the following chapters, is its reflective, yet analytical exploration of the body's graphic connection to narrative: specifically, the body's link and situatedness within labyrinths. Further, the body's increasingly visual links to collage in narrative (film and literature), tattooing, photography and writing offer potentially new understandings of how the shift between word and image transforms narrative itself. The center as goal of the quest, or search for meaning, is also represented by the graphic body; specifically, the stomach is the center of the body, and an analogue for transformation. The stomach at once creates and destroys, is a signifier of the body's mortality and of its life (hunger), and represents a different kind of "knowledge" in the form of intuition and sensory perceptions of reality. Another means of repressing the feminine is to starve the body in order to transcend it (and its laws): to reach upward, like Icarus, for the sky (God). As center of the body's labyrinth, the stomach functions in narrative as a representative of bodily experience that is centered on the tension rendered by food (and its denial) and knowledge acquisition: first, both are presented in and by the characters of the texts in question, as well as in reader/viewer responses (whether affective or intellectual) to those texts; second, both embody and create death/the abject, and life/transcendence.

As it relates to narrative and transformation, the stomach is linked to what is "unspeakable" about experience. As "center" of the body's labyrinth, the stomach is an analogue for transformation because of its literal role in the digestion of food and knowledge: of turning objects into energy, then into remainders of that energy. The stomach is also a figurative site of transformation: to "eat one's words," so to speak, means that one must swallow, stall out words in favor of images. The stomach is, above all, a site of life and death intermingling: nourishment and its lack; it embodies the relation between the body and transformation, and it is one means by which the unconscious speaks. As such, the stomach functions metaphorically as a kind of "locked room" inside the labyrinth.

Perhaps more so than the heart, the stomach is an emotionally-fraught organ: its association and role in the digestion of food parallels its association with intuition, or psychic insight, which is also invested in the "ingestion" and "regurgitation" of knowledge, of revealing and concealing. Like the central chamber of the labyrinth, the stomach is a site for potential psychological insight, emotional awareness that stimulates and affects transformation (in thought and in body). When advised to heed one's intuition, s/he hears, "Listen to your gut" or has a "gut reaction" about an event or problem. When goaded into an act that may feel "wrong," one may hear, "Don't you have the belly for it?" One may be encouraged to "breathe from the belly" when engaging in stress-relieving activities or other body-awareness exercises. Due to its central location in the core of the body's torso, the stomach embodies both vulnerability and power. No bones, only a sheet of muscles, protects it. Depending upon one's conscious acquaintance with his/her own body, the stomach can be the terrifying (because *feeling*) site of events

out of the control of the mind: one can mistake a stomach ache for a heart attack, psychosomatic illness can take form in the stomach, wherein the organ involuntarily rejects a traumatic experience (most often a physical, psychically comprehended violation of the body's borders).

The digestive system most concretely negotiates the boundaries between the inside and outside of the body, signifying and enacting a transformation of food into energy into waste (the abject). In the essay, "The Myth of Digestion," Gaston Bachelard examines how the process of digestion was defined in a medieval, "pre-scientific age." The stomach was seen as a silent kettle of acid and fire which alchemically and rhythmically changed that which was ingested. After entering the stomach, outside matter disintegrates and shifts to a new shape: what does not become absorbed becomes waste, and returns to the outside as product, or "remainder" of transformation. Known in antiquity as "the king of the internal organs," the stomach was considered an "'animate, philosophical millstone that grinds without noise, melts without fire, and dissolves without corrosion, all this by a force as surprising as it is simple and gentle; for though it surpasses the power of a prodigious millstone, it works without fuss, operates without violence, and stirs without causing pain'" (Bachelard 174). Significantly, digestion is a process that most visibly "roots" our living bodies to the earth and reminds us of our mortality. It is a process that signifies and creates at once life and death, or dead matter out of living tissue, as a cycle rather than as a finality. Further, the stomach is a reminder that our bodies are rooted to the earth by the need for food.

In alchemy, which is defined by the culmination of science and mysticism, or where the physical grounding of scientific work meets the intuitive world of feeling, the

myth of digestion came to be used as a ready metaphor for any and all transformative operations, wherein the corrosive powers of fire and acid "hungrily" devoured metals, in the way a "famished child" will eat up and transform "into its own nature" the food it has eaten (Bachelard 178). Bachelard's essay stops short of examining the natural phenomenon of hunger; in fact, in the pre-scientific philosophies explored in his essay, the process of digestion takes on a kind of gluttonous, or bulimic, emphasis: "Gluttony is an application of the principle of identity. Everything can be eaten. And vice versa, everything is eaten" (Bachelard 180). The essay ends with a disturbed summary of the medicinal properties of cow urine and oils derived from human feces, which would improve the look and feel of the skin. Bachelard moves back and forth between summarizing the "romanticized" beauty of digestion (its "gentle, perfect, and kindly" aspects) and being appalled by its clear connection to the abject: the disavowed and efficient disposal of waste, and the voluntary and involuntary compulsion to vomit. This utilitarian "play" in/with the abject disavows the necessary emptiness of the stomach, and the purity and silence of hunger that prefigures ingestion.

The condition of hunger is a bridge between the denial of death and the private, grim, acquiescence to death as the body grows closer to its bones. The desire to reach beyond the body, and a key characteristic of anorexia nervosa (a proliferating, yet silent contemporary affliction in the West), encapsulates a desire for a desire. Hunger alone signifies absence and emptiness, a dark kind of purity. In the case of self-imposed fasting, the force and satisfaction of desire is forestalled, denied, and channeled elsewhere by the starving self. The body's need for food is stalled out by the mind's formidable desire to transcend, by purifying, the body's material presence on the earth. Leslie Heywood

posits that, in becoming anorexic, some individuals (mostly women) attempt to defeat that aspect of themselves "that equates them with the grave ['a woman's body/*is* a grave'--T.S. Eliot]," but in becoming anorexic, they align themselves with death (Heywood 46). Female anorexics, who are ruled by the pervasive mind/body split that characterizes patriarchal culture in the West, exemplify the illusion of a "perfect needlessness" that paradoxically interrupts the ingestion of the knowledge and insight they crave. Heywood argues that "the anorexic physically performs this transformation upon her own flesh in order...to prove that she is not the lack, the cipher, the nothingness that, influenced by the tradition, she truly believes she is. Without her body, she thinks she will finally *be*. Exist. As she nudges herself toward non-existence" (28). Maud Ellmann, Susie Orbach, and Susan Bordo, among others, have also commented extensively on the pervasiveness of hunger in contemporary culture, citing the self-control of appetite as a symbolic language that many modern individuals of all genders adopt in order to "cancel out their bodies" and identify with the "pure logic" of a masculinity that is equated with the light of the intellect and the mask of individualism.

The contemporary condition of self-imposed hunger anticipates the always-already *end*. Yet, there is currently a strong pull toward the restoration of balance between masculine and feminine principles that function and exist in each person; this pull in turn reveals the desire for transformation in a world subsisting within and upon a post-apocalyptic sensibility. This state of mind requires one to always anticipate the end, to see the world (body) in a state of ruin. In the essay, "The Anorexic Ruins," Jean Baudrillard argues that a proliferating, contemporary disorder such as anorexia embodies

> disgust for a world that is growing, accumulating, sprawling, sliding into hypertrophy, a world that cannot manage to give birth. The principle of satiation and inertia can be read as the desolation of time, of the body, of the land. In the human order there is no longer an ideal principle governing these things. What remains is concentrated, satiated, miniaturized effects. This body, our body, appears only as nonessential, basically useless in its size, in its multiplicity, and in the complexity of its organs, its materiality, and its functions, what with being everything concentrated today in the head and in the genetic formula that alone, in turn, encompasses the operational definition of being. (Baudrillard 30-31)

The emphasis on miniaturization in a "land of plenty" echoes (anticipates?) Deleuze and Guattari's celebratory notion of a "body without organs" and reflects just why a *return* to a body *with* organs, an acknowledgment of the body's complexity and wisdom, is key to restoring any connection to the earth. Why would this be desirable at this point in history, and how is it related to transformation? First, we really have no choice; our bodies are already of the earth. The illusion of separateness is ethereal and perhaps beautiful, but to live that dream is to deny life (Eros) in favor of death (Thanatos). Second, it takes courage--intellectual, spiritual, physical--to face the innate abjection in/of the body, and the remainders of transformation in proliferating landfills and graves: to know that we are just as connected to these as we are to the firmament, or that which we hope will pull us away from the finality that we associate with the earth.

The tension created by hunger holds within it the sense of the indeterminate, and the ongoing, constant process of transformation: a negotiation between need and desire, transcendence and disintegration, which also undermines and constitutes the shifting historical ground between modernism and what many now call postmodernism. If it is true, that, as Fredric Jameson claims, the "[p]ostmodern is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good," then the only options are to kill yourself before the ugliness begins in earnest, or accept, even embrace, what this condition offers (ix). In the midst of disintegration, perhaps the only "transcendence" can happen if we dismantle culture and collectively build a *new* social system. Jameson further argues that virtually any observation about the present can be mobilized in the very search for the present itself, and pressed into service as a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern, which imperceptibly turns into its own theory and the theory of itself:

> What 'late' generally conveys is...the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive. (Jameson xxi)

In effect, this condition of postmodernism is a labyrinth which, like *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel, is an enclosed, isolated structure on which a "sheen" of depthlessness, a mere hint of historicity, and an apparently seamless order functions. Yet, it barely

conceals an underside of "blood, torture, death and terror," which is in turn integrated into culture and commodity.[iv]

While Baudrillard's and Jameson's arguments seem to me rather limited with respect to my concerns here, I am haunted by their tenacity as I subsist in a climate of relentless transformation, in the midst of late capitalism in the early twenty-first century. Baudrillard struggles to reconcile at the end of the 1980s (and the Cold War) the geographic shift inherent in the re-mapping of the world, as drawn by men who win wars, perhaps because the nuclear threat remains as a harbinger of ruin. The only transformations possible, then, would seem to be those limited to repetition. "Everything has already been liberated, changed, undermined; what more do you want? It is useless to hope: things are there; born or stillborn, they are there, done. Imagination reigns; enlightenment and intelligence reign. *No future*" (Baudrillard 34). In other words, since we now live in a constant state of the uncanny, the costs for sublimating the body in service to the mind are immeasurable. One such cost is the cultural disregard to the destruction of the environment: the earth, which will go on without us, but is also our bodily home. In such a world, with such realities, the form and content of narrative inevitably changes in order to more vividly, if not accurately, represent that world and attendant realities.

Ultimately, the transformations outlined in this project reveal a desire to pull away from an ascetic response to a rapidly and radically disintegrating order: that is, the desire to withdraw from it completely, as opposed to seeking meaning within it, and within the transformations that will inevitably emerge from it. In the narratives that emerge, I find a tension between an eroticism that pushes toward play, foolishness, radical "becomings" (Deleuze), the loving embrace of difference, and a death-affirming grip

on the denial of such things, as rendered by fear, withholding, doubt in process, resistance to transformation as a movement *toward*, not away from, the body. The ascetic existence of the mystic who deigns to transcend the body exemplifies an eroticism that is channeled up and outwards. However, a true mystic does not seek to transcend, or sacrifice the body for the expansion of the mind. Some say that anorexia, for example, is a passionate inward turning: one channels his/her passion into the act of starvation as a means of investing in the illusion of control. To opt for a life of asceticism is ultimately a life obsessed with death, of walking the edge of non-being. Rather, a true mystic learns to hear and respect the wisdom of the body for all its complexity and paradoxical, sometimes terrifying simplicity. The body, because it is always in the process of dying, is always in the process of transformation and because of this, so is the mind. As long as we hold to the powerful, yet out-moded notion that the body is inferior to the mind, only another object to be controlled out of fear, then we rob ourselves from receiving the wisdom we may actually be longing for: the wisdom that emerges when one accepts, acknowledges, respects, even loves the body. When pondering the question of what I find erotic, I am surprised by what emerges: my judgment of myself softens. My shame dissipates. My desire for greater meaning gives way to an acceptance of what *is*. My fears step aside and what emerges is love and insight. Memories of the past surface, but I am no longer haunted by them. I see, without judgment, where in the past I have held back from receiving an erotics of love, of beauty, of creativity, of becoming.

As I write, I walk the high wire between Baudrillard's view of this "late" time, and my own, persistent faith that in effect, all transformation yields growth and greater insight, which in turn enable understanding and wisdom. For me, the labyrinth is at once a

narrative emblem, or symbol, and it is a healing tool: it provides and is a "container" for the searching body, whether that body belongs to a detective, a lover, a writer, a warrior. I am drawn to the struggles that writers, readers, and characters alike experience when they enter the labyrinth in any form. I am drawn to these struggles because I see something of myself in them, and in the literature I see possible means for transforming doubt, fear, and reticence into strength, love, and clarity. Yet, even as I seek the center, I also know that I cannot stay there: that the end is also a beginning, and I must keep moving.

CHAPTER ONE

Seeing is Digesting: Labyrinths of Hunger and Psychic Insight in Stanley Kubrick's The Shining

The world we live in is a mistake, a clumsy parody. Mirrors and fatherhood, because they multiply and confirm the parody, are abominations. Revulsion is the cardinal virtue. Two ways may lead us there: abstinence or the orgy, excess of the flesh or its denial. --Jorge Luis Borges, Ficciones

As the physical eye is to visible objects, so the inner eye, insight, is to the invisible spiritual shining forth of the idea. --J. Hillis Miller, Ariadne's Thread

The stomach is a place almost as private as the grave.
--Maud Ellmann, The Hunger Artists

The narrative of Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film, *The Shining* (based on Stephen King's 1977 novel), is a self-conscious labyrinth that is keenly aware of the several "openings" that it presents: 1) a means to interrogate the Oedipal conflict as it relates to the insight of a son who inadvertently kills his father; 2) a means to interrogate digestion as an analogue for transformation, and in turn, hunger as an analogue for the stalling out of transformation; 3) a means to explore connections between writing and death, or the obsession with history and its traces (ghosts). The labyrinth of this chapter, though it picks up many threads, seeks no "solution" to the film itself, but explores these threads as they are presented and enacted in a film that serves as an introduction to the narratives that follow in this project. Throughout this otherwise linear chapter, these threads intertwine and overlap, setting up and revealing the various "openings" that shape transformation in play.

The Shining explicitly focuses on an Oedipal struggle between father and son. Implicitly, the film reveals an ongoing struggle between the mind and the body:

specifically, the mind's endeavor to "master" the errant, "feeling" body. The "self-contained" Torrance family unit--Jack (Jack Nicholson), Wendy (Shelley Duvall), and their seven-year-old son, Danny (Danny Lloyd)--plays out on the surface a modern family drama of physical abuse, alcoholism, and failed communication inside a temporal and spatial labyrinth of American history and the collective "ghosts" of that history's violence. Dennis Bingham suggests that in the film, the father-writer's descent into madness reveals "a process of violence, colonization, and patriarchy throughout American history and centered in the American family" (Bingham 296). Although Kubrick's film contains and presents elements of Bingham's claims, this chapter is more invested in how the film enacts and embodies transformation in/of narrative, via its presentation of the "unspeakable," interior struggle between one's mind and body, and further, how this struggle is represented in its contemporary narrative.

The Shining graphically "sets up" the remaining three chapters of this project, by presenting photography as a means for "writing" in absence, for it is always already "finished," and in this "finished-ness" renders it at once alive and dead. In *Camera Lucida,* Roland Barthes claims that his own interest in the photograph is rooted in the desire to "explore it not as a question (a theme), but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think" (*Camera* 21). Similarly, like the wound that brings the writer to the need to write, the detective to find out *why,* the photograph embodies and chronicles that wound, it is itself a clue, an "Ariadne's thread" winding through the labyrinth of all searching. Barthes has also explored how a photograph, like a body, is alive, and therefore touches, via vision: the "loved body is immortalized by the mediation of a precious metal, silver; to which we might add the notion that this metal, like all the

metals of Alchemy, is alive" (*Camera* 81). The photograph, like the collage and the tattoo, as non-verbal "narratives," captures the in-between state that is transformation: at once a ruin of past presences and a harbinger of present and future absences. What may appear to be the most obvious representation of "vision" or graphic art is the well-explored territory of the photograph, which can itself be collaged, can disfigure, represent, embody, and be a topic of narrative. Further, the photograph communicates a non-verbal image that is felt in the body before the mind, as an affective response before an intellectual one.

In *The Shining*, the shape of the labyrinth, implicitly or explicitly, emphasizes photography as a means for revealing transformations between transcendence and disintegration, wherein death is a kind of "middle ground." In each narrative, the photograph is an emblem of the simultaneity of absence and presence. The photograph claims a representation of what Susan Sontag calls a "neat slice of time," rather than a "flow," or sequence, wherein transformation can be traced, its contours made visible (Sontag 17). All photographs evoke hidden depths, or histories, even while their surfaces betray a flat image. Photographs, like bodies, transform with age, dying, decaying, eventually disintegrating, this disintegration a condition of being a "container" for depth, the transformation moving in only one direction. A living body looking upon a photograph also transforms, but not as definitely or finally, and in indefinite directions. In that body's looking, the contents of the photograph create other contents (memories, emotions, reminders): a subjective experience that cannot as effectively be accounted for, that is, the mind's eye, the spirit, what the looking subject sees in the photograph and thus chooses to be affected by. In this way, the living, looking subject is haunted by an

image that "lives" on the surface (paper) and creates potential depths by awakening memory in the body as well as the mind.

Kubrick's film interrogates the pliable line between history (as death) and the contemporary (always becoming history) by presenting a time loop amid two key time periods (the 1920s and the 1970s) in American history, when relative sexual freedom, feminism, and a (re)turn to myth and psychoanalysis as means for exploring human relationships, art, and literature were both pronounced and clashing with a transforming (disappearing) patriarchal order. This order has in turn dominated one form of masculinity, which subsists and depends upon the successful repudiation and repression of its opposite. Kubrick was fascinated by the production of this kind of masculinity in Western culture, in particular as exemplified by British and American pre-occupation with war, conquest, and the hierarchical systems that make war possible (and inevitable), and how they shape the male psyche. Kubrick critics have argued that in a sense, all of his films are horror films and war films. Richard T. Jameson posits that his films "constitute a Swiftian vision of inscrutable cosmic order, and of 'the most pernicious race of little vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth'" (R. Jameson 245). In *The Shining*, the Oedipal myth is re-told and its prophecy is fulfilled: the maturity and survival of the son depend on the death of the father. Like both Oedipus and Theseus, Danny is exiled as a child (he is taken out of school, and thus away from contact with other children, and, along with his parents, is essentially exiled to the already-isolated hotel); his father attempts to kill him; he is unwittingly responsible for his father's death in the maze; finally, he takes the place of his father, if temporarily, beside his mother on the throne-like seat of a Sno-Cat.

The Shining presents Jack Torrance as a writer-father who succumbs to the "paternal matrix" of the Overlook Hotel, which at once provides sanctuary and releases his repressed murderous drives. As explored in the first section of this chapter, "The Repressed Feminine and the Paternal Matrix," The Overlook Hotel functions as a "matrix" under the following definitions: 1. as uterus or womb; 2. as a place or medium in which something is "bred," produced or developed--a place of origin or growth; 3. as an embedding or enclosing mass.[v] The "paternal matrix" then is where patriarchal law meets "maternal" landscape, or domain of the repressed body: where the outer world of form meets that which formed *it.* It is near-impossible to discuss what a balance between the two would look like; such a transformation is always within reach, and yet, the ongoing reality is that patriarchal law seeks to traverse, dissect, subdue, and reify the maternal landscape into its written history. *The Shining*, perhaps inadvertently, reveals the costs of such insistent dominance.

Jack Torrance sees "visions" of who he could become if he could only overcome his writer's block and erase his past transgressions (abuse of his son, alcoholism), and the son possesses the gift of clairvoyance ("the shining") that reveals to him the bloody past of the hotel, and a possible bloody future in which he and his mother are victims of his father's murderous rage. The father-would-be-writer sees the act of writing as a chance to reclaim the lost creative potential within himself. In Jack's attempt to write into a space of mastery (over his "craft," his family, etc.), he paradoxically moves closer to oblivion, and the more he represses his murderous urges (which surface in nightmares), the more fervently he is pulled into the assimilation with death (embodied in the locked room/labyrinth of the hotel). Jack's eventual death (he freezes inside the hotel's hedge

maze) mirrors the singular, frozen sentence that populates the myriad pages of his "writing project." The father dies at the hand of his own pen, so to speak, and becomes trapped inside his own head at the expense of his repressed body. He becomes lost inside a maze that in turn mirrors a disintegrating patriarchal order over-ridden by clichés ("Women--can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em" and "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy") and a rigid (frozen) structure that can only exist now in a state of contemporary ruin.

The posthumous photograph of Jack-as-caretaker in the 1920s demonstrates the early-twentieth-century "sheen" that dominates the visual field of the cavernous hotel, which in turn reveals the repression at stake in being a person of importance in history. Further, *The Shining* presents and enacts the transformation between writing and death by showing how the photographic images function as a labyrinth of surfaces along the walls of the hotel. The second section of this chapter, "The Photographic Ruins and the Stomach-Wound," examines the presence and significance of the stomach as a site of bodily and intellectual transformation, and as a conduit for the gift/wound of "shining" that the son, Danny, possesses. Through Danny's photographic visions, the viewer sees the hotel's history as signified by the image of blood flowing through the hotel's elevator doors, the death of the Grady sisters, and Danny's own possible death.

From the beginning of the film, Danny's vision is dominated by physically overwhelming glimpses of the hotel as shown to him by his imaginary friend, Tony, a "boy who lives in his mouth" and hides in his stomach, which is the center of the labyrinth-body. At the center of the Overlook Hotel's labyrinth is the locked room of 237, which is forbidden to Danny by the hotel's chef, Dick Hallorann, who also

possesses "the shining." Inside this room is the living corpse of a dead woman, and at stake in this presentation of the locked room/dead woman is the male psyche's confrontation of the repressed or repudiated female body. As we see with the room 237 sequence at the center of the narrative, the return of the repressed feminine enables a paradoxical transformation and stalling out of transformation, wherein words give way to the womb-like heartbeat soundscape and the oddly hypnotic confrontation between mind and body.

Jack attempts to master the unruly process of writing in order regenerate a "lost" masculinity through spatial isolation from culture and family, and surrounding himself with the pure emptiness of snow covered mountains. Yet, this masculinity is predicated on the destruction of a feminine principle (in himself, his family, his culture and history): this destruction is in turn mirrored by the Overlook Hotel's past. Fredric Jameson points out that "the sequence of dying generations is the scandal reawakened by the ghost story for a bourgeois culture which has triumphantly stamped out ancestor worship and the objective memory of the clan or extended family" (90). The genocide of American Indians, blatant and violent racism, sexism, all signify the dominance of a once-powerful patriarchal order that depends on the repudiation of the feminine, which I define here as that which has been essentialized to "nature," "darkness," "wildness," "softness," "intuition," "mysticism," "the body," "the abject." Embedded within the spare narrative of *The Shining* is the signification of a patriarchal nightmare: the timeless, bottomlessness of forever, the bleeding womb, a dead aliveness as represented by a woman's rotting corpse in a locked room at the center of the labyrinth-hotel.

Current criticism on the film does not address the presence of the dead woman, but the contrast between her abject presence at the center of the film's narrative and the stark, austere "dead white male ghosts" of the hotel's Gold Room reveals the cost of the repression of the body (the feminine) in order to "free" the mind from its "base" urges and the fact of its eventual decay. Significantly, the action within room 237 is the only departure from a linear narrative; the room becomes a site of transformation as it releases and sharpens Danny's psychic strength, Jack's assimilation with the ruins of the hotel, and reveals the source at which a woman's body becomes a grave that "drives" the historical and personal narrative. The oceanic merging of these elements in *The Shining* creates a portrait of the struggle of the mind to meet itself while the (repressed) body demands its presence.

Jack's experience of writing inside the Overlook Hotel, poring over its scrapbooks of history, sitting in the Colorado Lounge amid stuffed buffalo heads and "authentic Indian designs" proves to be a "Gothic fantasia" of American history. His *experience* of writing is also a failure to sublimate the abject, into which he is ultimately drawn by his attempt to write "away" from it. Jack's transformation in turn reveals how the pursuit of knowledge depends so thoroughly on the repression of the body. By contrast, Jack's son, Danny, depends on his body (his imaginary friend/psychic voice, Tony, "hides" in his stomach) for survival. The film shows what happens when Jack and Danny transform in opposite directions, from the repression of the body to the embrace of its innate wisdom.

Ultimately, *The Shining* is the story of a failed writer obsessed with death.[vi] Yet, as Fredric Jameson argues, this is "not someone who has something to say or likes doing things with words, but rather someone who would like to *be* a writer, who lives a fantasy

about what the American writer *is*" (F. Jameson 93). This fantasy is by and large rooted in a modernist vision of rugged, individualistic, "Hemingway-esque" masculinity, and in the film this fantasy is confronted by the problematic relationship between writing and death. To sublimate is to cause a change in a state of being, to modify the natural expression of (an instinctual impulse) in a socially acceptable manner. Instead of being a liberating or cathartic experience that would take him deeper into himself, Jack's writing traps and isolates him in a loop of surface banality, wherein the real nightmare is sheer repetition, where nothing comes to consciousness.

I. The Repressed Feminine and the Paternal Matrix

To speak, and above all to write, is to fast. --Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature

Digestion is a kind of fleshly poetry, for metaphor begins in the body's transubstantiations of itself, while food [its disintegration in the stomach] is the thesaurus of all moods and all sensations. --Maud Ellmann, The Hunger Artists

When I was just weeks away from being hospitalized for anorexia nervosa, I saw a full version of *The Shining* for the first time. I had seen parts of the film as child; now I was fifteen and weighed 80 pounds. My days were spent thinking about how I would avoid food or eat as little as possible without anyone noticing, and when I could carve away time in order to exercise. My worth was based on the wobbling needle on the scale, and how flat my stomach appeared in the mirror. My intellectual comfort came in the way of music, into which my mind would reach; I could "leave" my body when I ran, or lay prone on the surface of my bed, letting my mind soar. As I watched the film, I was mesmerized by the haunting (non)music, which is impossible to describe, and how this

music seemed at once so light and so heavy. The music, along with the opening camera shots following a small car up a mountain highway to an uncertain destination, moved me: not emotionally, but intellectually and physically.

Watching the film, in particular the camera eye slipping over a cliff, the music rising with the movement, I felt chills along my skin, and at the same time I watched my mind follow the camera's forward flying over the shining expanse of a still lake, tall trees rising in the distance like spikes. All of it was terrible and beautiful, rendering a sullen madness: the outer depiction of isolation rendered by the mountains, the snow, the hotel, and the unhappy family mirrored my own inner isolation and coldness. The heavy redness of blood pouring out of the hotel elevator, and the whiteness of winter symbolized for me the great passion that fuels starvation, which is disguised by indifference. The writer-turned-murdering father in the film is plagued by nightmares of violence, and somewhere inside I identified with this fear of madness, as my own dreams were violent and bloody: life trying to get back in. As the father is more deeply seduced into the hotel's past, and thus moves closer to death, I was being pulled by the impulse to starve (I had reached a point where my body was finally doing it on its own, and this is why I had to be hospitalized), moving closer to death--to the precipice of madness. Fear and indifference clouded my vision, and in some way the film articulated this for me: that I was walking a tightrope over an abyss, and as beautiful the abyss may have appeared, it could only lead in one direction.

The Shining opens amid the deep, oppressive notes of Bela Bartok, the careful symmetry of the camera eye in slow forward motion, first following the mirrored surface of a placid mountain lake, then the serpentine line of a mountain road, upon which a

barely-perceptible car seems to crawl to a solitary hotel, looming and gray, situated high in the Colorado Rockies. The viewer soon notices that the camera implicates him/her as a character following behind the car, forcing the viewer/reader into a predatory identification with the a seemingly all-encompassing vision. Kubrick's camera eye appears to at first take on a "God's eye view," but soon it becomes apparent that the assumed "objective" stance has given way to one that is "subjective": not predatory, as is often the case with "Hitchcockian" horror and suspense films, but with a pensiveness that horror films do not usually possess. As the music rises, the view closes in on the back of the car, and one can perceive in his/her body the rolling sensation of the road slipping away beneath, as the camera eye suddenly and smoothly veers over the rocky ledge, betraying "an exhilarating sense of the power of the mind" (Rasmussen 235). At this moment, the ghostly, echoing, high voices playing along the slow, dark music rise into giddy trills, the sound itself shrill and flying, rendering at once a soaring in the mind and a sinking in the body. The body's sensory participation amid the mind's impulse to fly above the earth and observe, see the whole picture, is a kind "promise" of transformation, wherein the mind's mastery is always already canceled out by the body's "fall" to earth.

When envisioning the labyrinth, one often pictures looking down into it from above, or along the surface of a map most depictions of the structure are rendered from this perspective, so that one can better see the winding path and center chamber. When it is re-produced this way, it appears skeletal, hollow, untouched, awaiting entry (to be filled, or fed, so to speak). This is the most common graphic image of the labyrinth, which allows the viewer to see the contours of the structure all as one surface. From this perspective, it does appear "empty" even as its shape appears whole, undisturbed,

unfractured. From above, there is no mystery, as it is a perspective of dissection, or seeing the inside before the outside, using the map as a guide, only "knowing" the structure by virtue of the map. The mystery within, or uncertainty about what lies around each curve then remains intact, for it is quite different to be inside a thing, figuring it out step by step, than standing outside and above it, looking down and being sure one understands, upon merely observing, the structure itself.

To "play" with narrative in this way is similar to engaging in a game of chess, only the reader can merely turn the page; the game itself, that is, the text, has already been "plotted." In addition, to endeavor to "play" with the text in such a way arguably indicates a privileged position; that is, most authors writing in this vein are male and of European descent, with a long-standing tradition and canon from which to derive and appropriate a reality which already represents their experience. Borges, for example, sees the labyrinth as an "enclosed amphitheater...site of the chess game with his father, a game of kings and queens played out on a labyrinthine network of squares [which] represents the maternal space of origin for whose possession they are competing" (Irwin 287). Clearly, however, the "mastery" implied by a game like chess is an illusion: that which is left behind in this quest most inevitably find its own way back in the form of the return of the repressed, wherein that which is now monstrous was once part of a balance, wherein unity, absoluteness, truth, coexisted consciously with difference, uncertainty, ambiguity, and hiddenness.

Yet, the film reveals, through its pensive stillness, the significance of a contemporary configuration of the labyrinth/maze as a means for articulating and expressing bodily experience within it. The timeless history embodied in the temporal

labyrinth, or maze, of *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel has been colonized and written over by a masculine principle that renders the feminine a malevolent home/womb. In this way, the hotel becomes an "emotional crucible" that "both defies and resembles nature" (Rasmussen 232/235). Nature and history collide in the film; this collision in turn reveals a transformation that releases the repressed body, which has been relegated to the feminine. Wendy Faris reminds us that in "stories where the labyrinth figures centrally, a character's voyage through it usually ends in death" (Faris 105). Although this ends up being true for Jack, it is not true for Danny, who both plays in the maze of the hotel and the literal hedge maze, and in the end runs through it to save his own life. Ultimately, the merging of body with mind allows Danny to bear the sharpness of his "shining," or psychic wisdom, and by making himself the lure of the labyrinth, is able to save himself. As Jack Torrance's repression of his past failures renders him vulnerable to the historical loop trapped inside a perpetual, 1920s party, this repression in turn reveals his transformation from a man to a grunting, murderous beast: a Minotaur inside the labyrinth.

A "ruin" of American history, a labyrinth and a locked room, the Overlook Hotel is an enclosed structure, wherein transformation is sublimated by the rules of the "house," or by the ghosts that inhabit the hotel. Frank Manchel observes that the "frequent shots of photographs and [Indian] artifacts decorating the hotel's corridors, floors, and rooms add credibility to the diabolical hold that history has on us today" (Manchel 70). From the first sequence, "The Interview," the "hidden depths" beneath surfaces are already apparent. Rasmussen points out that "a very old tradition of sexual stereotyping is laid out, barely visible, beneath the egalitarian surface" (Rasmussen 236). A female secretary

serves coffee, young blonde women defer to authority, though thinly veiled by informal banter, and the family's "quarters" are in an old, cramped part of the hotel, signifying their "servant" status. According to Rasmussen, although "a casual atmosphere pervades the hotel, distinctions of rank and power remain subtly in force" (242). Out of this world of unspoken, but very visible hierarchy, Jack's madness takes shape and is exacerbated by the absence of conventional social inhibitions. According to Hoile, Kubrick presents the labyrinth as a "container" for the Oedipal conflict that ensues between the isolated family members:

> when the Torrance family is isolated from society, it loses all checks not only against the release of oedipal tensions but also against the resurgence of the equally primitive animistic world whose "residues and traces" still remain to embody these tensions.
>
> (Hoile 7)

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of the correlation between Oedipus and Theseus is the conflation of criminal and detective in their respective stories. Oedipus and Theseus "belong to a class of mythic characters often referred to as 'heroes of consciousness,' a designation that generally indicates two things about their stories. First, their myths tend to emphasize the hero's mental rather than physical abilities. Second, their myths tend in part to be parabolic expressions of the development and stabilization of individual self-consciousness" (Irwin 207-208). As a "hero of consciousness," Theseus descended

> into the subterranean labyrinth to defeat the man-killing monster with the bull's head who represents the solar bull trapped in the darkness of the underworld [winter]. In slaying the Minotaur,

> Theseus frees the principle of light from the dominance of the material [maternal] world (a dominance of body over mind symbolized by the Minotaur's animal head and human body) and by establishing the ascending of the human in his own nature he releases himself from the monster's subterranean realm and reascends to the light. (Irwin 314)

Both figures are linked to patricide, as well as a need for acknowledgment/recognition from the father. Both Oedipus and Theseus were exiled as children; each had a father who attempted to kill him; each was responsible, wittingly or not, for that father's death; and each succeeded, as a result of his father's death, to the father's position as ruler of a city (Irwin 210). In a patriarchy, the "master plot" underlying all narrative is the idea that the son desires the authority of the father, and that "there are two ways he can gain it--with or against his father's will. He can receive it as a transmission from the father (patrimony) or he can seize it by force" (Irwin 211). The costs to each method are considerable: in a catch-22, the son's new authority is undermined if he receives it by inheritance, as it betrays a lasting dependence on his father; and if he seizes that authority, "then the very manner in which he possesses that authority seems to destroy the thing possessed" (211).

A month after Jack's interview and acceptance of the position, and before the snow falls, Wendy and Danny playfully (and bodily) explore the labyrinth/hotel together while Jack claims the cavernous space of the Colorado Lounge at the center of the hotel's first floor. Ignoring the two-dimensional map, Wendy and Danny explore the grounds of the hotel, where a giant hedge maze, a double for the hotel, functions as "a passive

institutional structure which favors no one and, depending on circumstances, serves anyone" (Rasmussen 234). At the same moment, inside the hotel, Jack, already frustrated and wandering out of the Colorado Lounge, finds a model of the maze and looks down into it. Here, the camera shifts from his bemused face to follow his point of view, which is punctuated by mesmerizing, dreamy music. As it slowly pulls back, the camera eye reveals an illusion of mastery and clarity: here the viewer sees a proliferation of multi-cursal paths, and begins to hear the barely-perceptible voices of mother and son, before we see their movement at the center of the maze. The photograph-like presentation of the "dissected," visible-from-above image of the maze makes the viewer aware of other "openings" in the text/frame, and creates a vertiginous sensation around the question of mastery.

The structure of the hotel is made up of several chambers that contain "numerous exits which hint at liberation yet merely lead to other places of confinement" (Rasmussen 259). The viewer "explores" the Overlook as the camera (the now-famous Steadicam innovation) follows Danny's Big Wheel tricycle. The fluid movement transforms the hotel's spaces into a unicursal circuit: this allows us to see the potentiality of the spaces inside the hotel, and as the wheels run over the carpet/wood floor, the alternating sounds echo in a rhythmic *muffle-THUMP,* to reveal the boundaries between self and institution, visible and invisible, presence and absence, disappearance and return. These explorations at the beginning of the film (including the long tour of the kitchen, which is explored in the second section of this chapter) reveal the lure and potentiality of spaces, and show the viewer not only the magnitude of the hotel's labyrinthine space, but also its warmth and

enclosure: its dead-ends and cul-de-sacs, which, like the photographs on the walls, draw the eye inward.[vii]

For most of the first half of the film, Jack isolates himself in the Colorado Lounge, where he sits in an almost comically "throne-like" chair at a long, solid, Napoleonic table, typing, a fire raging behind him in the giant fireplace. The Colorado Lounge's magnificence mirrors the heights to which Jack aspires, and where he will write the "project" he has been outlining (which is never named). Significantly, the Overlook Hotel is lit with chandeliers, which are most noticeable as the camera dissolves from one scene to the next. The always-shining chandeliers emphasize the spaces in which Jack works and/or stalks the corridors of the hotel; further, most noticeable in the dissolves between scenes, they resemble crowns. Jack is increasingly pulled by the illusion of being "king of the castle": master of his creative energy, the need to control his wife and son, to fulfill his "duties" as caretaker, even though his wife, Wendy keeps the hotel boiler running and communicates with the forest rangers by radio after the phone lines fail. At the same time, he slides more deeply into a stillness disguised as a time that can be retrieved and transformed into a constant present-past: a present embodied by the illusory "forever-ness" of the photographic surface. This surface, as Barthes reminds us, "does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*" (*Camera* 85). A "distortion between certainty and oblivion" characterizes the "anguish" of the seeker, the writer, the artist. Jack's struggle to be that writer/artist, alongside his detective-like quest (most vividly chronicled in King's novel) to uncover, via searching through scrapbooks, the Overlook's past, is a desire for origin, for mastery which forever eludes him.

As a king who is about to lose his crown, Jack wanders aimlessly through the labyrinth of the hotel, first becoming lost in his own head, and finally fatally lost in the snow-covered hedge maze, where "[t]he advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes" like his son's tracks in the snow (Frazer 854). The "shining" star of the doomed king, also named for the Minotaur ("Asterion") draws Jack into the ghostly authority of the hotel, as represented by the figure of Delbert Grady, who murdered his wife and daughters with an ax ten years before (in 1970). The labrys, or "House of the Double Axes," is often associated with the Minotaur and is the root word of labyrinth: specifically, it is connected to the story of Minos the King, the Bull Cult, the Cretan labyrinth, and the lightning bolt, which is the symbol of the sky god Zeus. The lightning bolt also evokes the mirror, which emerges as "a function of the reflection of light," wherein mirror and light together figure "the mind's dual status as source of illumination and reflection of images" (Irwin 256).

The Minotaur, or Asterion/ "Star," was in Greek myth encountered and overcome in the center of the labyrinth, and enlightenment was symbolically attained by the hero. Mythologically, the monster/doomed king represents the son/hero's fear of death, which is figured in the Theseus myth "not simply in the defeat of the subterranean monster but in the transformation of the mother figure, a change in the female image apparent in the gender difference of the victims in the two episodes--from a terrifying female to be defeated [Medusa] to a terrifying male who can only be defeated with the help of a woman [Minotaur]" (Irwin 245). The Minotaur's transformation from feared woman to be defeated into a masculine, bi-form creature to be defeated with a woman's help signifies the finalization of the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal culture. As it concerns

transformation in/of narrative, this seemingly "necessary" killing off the feminine/maternal/body, as/and the female protagonist in traditional *and* contemporary narratives perhaps signifies the face of an internalized misogyny which then in turn provides a visible means for a female reader to understand the deeper losses affected by the demise of the feminine principle in Western culture.

Although Jack is not the Minotaur in the maze, he is lured by a form of masculine power that no longer has an unquestionable place in the contemporary world. This lure of transformation is the labyrinth-as-paternal matrix of the Overlook Hotel, and its many male-identified ghosts. Significantly, the dominant time period inhabited by these ghosts is the 1920s, a period the marks a resurgence in myth criticism. Sir James Frazer's account of the Priests of Nemi in *The Golden Bough* (written during what would have been the "heyday" of the Overlook Hotel's modernist history), the cyclical demise of the Priest of Nemi (King of the Wood) was part of an eight-year cycle of renewal based on astronomical grounds, and revealed "people's basic sense of the relationship between the celestial and the earthly realms...[and] 'signified the dissatisfaction of the higher powers with the state of the commonwealth' as embodied in the person of the king or that 'every man had his star in the sky, and that he must die when it fell' [Frazer]... The killing of the Minotaur is a symbolic killing of the masked (blind) king" (Irwin 308-309).

The doomed king embodied the idea that every man had his star in the sky, and that he must die when that star finally fell. In *The Golden Bough,* Frazer claims that Diana, like Artemis, was a goddess of fertility and Virbius was the King of the Wood/Grove (and consequently, first in the succession of kings to be sacrificed). The golden bough grew from the sacred oak tree in the grove of Nemi, an idealized "Eden" in

Italy. At Nemi, Virbius, the "first king," guarded the sacred oak tree, which embodied the moon goddess Diana. Virbius "may have personated in flesh and blood the great Italian god of the sky, Jupiter, who had kindly come down from heaven in the lightning flash to dwell among men in the mistletoe -- the thunder-besom -- the Golden Bough -- growing on the sacred oak in the dells of Nemi" (Frazer 852). Here, a "fair lake" called "Diana's Mirror," became a scene of originary tragedy when as it was dominated by a prowling "grim" figure: a man who was "a candidate for priesthood [and] could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier" (1). When humanity and the singular sky god were separated (and magic transforms into religion, the sorcerer becomes the priest, and on another level, mind separates from body), a whole framework of thought is forever transformed, and the language one employs in order to express this transformation is also transformed.

The Priest of Nemi was a patriarchal guardian of the "old ways," even while fully comprehending the inevitable demise by his successor. Perhaps this violent succession was a last vestige of respect for a cyclical rather than linear, process of life. The transformation from the worship of the earth (goddess) to the worship of fire (the sky god) signifies an ending to pre-sky-god cultures and goddess worshipping societies and the beginning of singular god-worship. It is also, according to Frazer, the beginning of a time when magic gave way to religion, which later yielded to the primacy of science and reason. We see this vividly in detective fiction that consciously employs the labyrinth as an analogue for narrative transformation, wherein the presence of the colors red and white function as a reversal "of that harmonious union with which [they] are associated in

alchemy" (Irwin 73).[viii] Anti-thetical doubles, reason and intuition, in a sense "duel" with each other, and are often symbolized by the colors red and white, "symbols borrowed from the alchemical 'great work,' the marriage of sun and moon, Red King and White Queen--the union that produces the ultimate goal of the alchemist's art, the Philosopher's Stone" (Irwin 55). For Frazer, psychological process, or thought, was signified by the red thread of religion, the white thread of science, and the black thread of magic; these colors signify alchemy, the "science" of transformation.

Frazer uses the story of the Priesthood of Nemi as a template from which to find similar customs beyond the Western world, thus discovering both universal and individual motives (origins, meanings) for humanity's existence. The scientist/author's re-telling of Western myth is at once a means for understanding narrative, with the innocent hope and blind arrogance of a detective-- that something new may arise or be revealed about the meaning of existence--and an excuse to seek the same, or the primacy of the Western everywhere else in the world. Frazer's anthropological study, popular in the 1920s and at the fore of a cultural transformation wherein Western science was joining and replacing myth as a means for studying and explaining the behavior of non-Western cultures, parallels the historical landscape of *The Shining.* Jean Baudrillard claims that we "live now only as wearied explainers of that furious epoch (the 1920s) in which all the invention of modernism came about in a language that still attached importance to magnificence in style...[that the] maximum in intensity lies behind us; the minimum in passion and intellectual inspiration lie before us" (40). The reflective, near-revolutionary periods of the 1920s and 1960s/70s are both when myth and anthropology, religion and reverence toward the goddess/feminine principle, were beginning to re-emerge, only to be

re-repressed. Yet, this repression, as Kubrick's film demonstrates, is never complete nor final.

In the present (the late 1970s), Jack is "nothing" in his contemporary society (that is, he occupies traditionally "feminine" roles such as caretaker and teacher) while in the still-photograph past, as represented by the 1920s, he learns from the hotel's male ghosts that he is/was a man of importance. As he spends more time alone, neglecting his appearance and not eating, Jack begins to have waking nightmares, bouts of insomnia, flights from reality: the dominant and domestic contemporary present "intrude" on his fantasy of merging with the past as represented by the shining, photographic world of the hotel's jet-set parties. After he wakes up screaming from a nightmare in which he has killed Wendy and Danny, Wendy tries to comfort him, while in the foreground Danny emerges from a doorway in a trance and sucking his thumb, clearly traumatized with bruises on his neck. As there is apparently no one else in the hotel, Wendy assumes Jack has done this, based on the previously inflicted injury on his son. Jack sits stupefied in his throne-like chair, facing the accusation, shaking his head and saying, "No." As the scene dissolves, he appears to be wearing a crown, which "fades" into a chandelier in the following scene which, via a backward tracking shot, captures his oddly small form stalking down a corridor to the Gold Ball Room, almost comically waving his arms in anger, looking increasingly hunched and grizzly (more like a monster).

Enacting a family drama cliché, Jack, after the argument with Wendy, "escapes" to the bar in the giant Gold Ball Room, where all the alcohol has been removed for the winter, and, facing himself in the mirror over the bar, and defeatedly states, "I'd give my goddamned soul for a drink." At the moment of this Faustian pact, an "opening" appears

where the mirror was: the bar is apparently now stocked with alcohol, and Jack now faces 1920s bartender, Lloyd, in whom he confides. Evoking the center of the labyrinth, the bathroom's bright redness embodies an interior, claustrophobic atmosphere: womb, heart/stomach, and as the men begin their conversation, the song, "Home" wafts through the walls. Outside the bathroom, the Gold Ball Room has transformed into a ghostly 1920s party, where Jack has spoken with Lloyd, who, like Grady, defines Jack's "kingly" status: "Your money's no good here. Orders from the house."

In the blood-red men's bathroom of the Overlook Hotel, Jack meets his double, Grady, for the first time. As Brigette Peucker writes, "It is here that body enters film, [where] photographs...become 'material'" (666). Grady, the previous caretaker who killed his family with an ax, is a servant in the perpetual 1920s-era time loop that dominates the hotel's unicursal history. After literally crashing into him, Jack faces Grady inside the bathroom, where the two men stand in front of each other as if they are gazing into a mirror. At first deferring to Jack, Grady hunches and fidgets with Jack's clothes in a miming of servitude. Grady tells him, "You're the important one" as the song, "Midnight, the Stars, and You" plays wistfully in the background. Soon, however, Jack, carefully making eye contact with Grady, confronts him about murdering his family ten years before: "I saw your picture in the papers. You chopped up your wife and daughters and then you blew your brains out." More delighted that he has figured out the mystery than appalled by the acts, Jack stands up straighter, and it appears as if the two men are facing off. Grady has straightened his posture and chides Jack for not "correcting" his family as he has done with his own. Jack's eyes appear to glass over as he takes in this new

knowledge, the lights in the bathroom illuminating his face, which will become more illuminated as he moves closer to committing murder.

In the meantime, Wendy Torrance, at first apparent "helper" to Jack, soon becomes a perceived "obstacle" to her husband's quest to be a writer. She serves him breakfast, talks encouragingly and softly, careful not to step in his way, and is in many ways a "classic" enabler to her alcoholic husband. She is clearly afraid of him, and her shaky, teary demeanor, chain-smoking, and often wide-eyed, little-girl stance places her in a position of apparent subservience, a "walking-on-eggshells" aura about her. And yet, having failed to protect Danny from Jack's abuse in the past, having made excuses for her husband in good faith, Wendy now exhibits a fierce protectiveness, particularly when "cornered," or finally placed in a position wherein she must face the unraveling family structure of which she is a part. As her character concerns transformation, and the demise and return of the feminine principle, Wendy, and her body (the way she carries herself, her anorexic appearance, and her constant acquiescence to Jack's increasingly disintegrating logic), represent the internalized misogyny experienced by many women in American culture, despite the apparent strides made by and in feminist consciousness.

By the end of the film, Wendy has transformed, or at least "reached inside herself," to access through her fear of her husband the imperative to rescue herself and her son, escaping from the hotel as we hear Jack's monstrous bellowing in the blizzard wind. In an interview with Leon Vitali, who served as Kubrick's assistant during the making of *The Shining,* Shelley Duvall stated that during the filming she had been "in and out of ill health" and had recently ended a relationship. This rendered her body at times overwrought in appearance, as well as looking gaunt and malnourished. Her body

functions in the film as what I call an "anorexic subtext" which imbues the film's narrative silence. As Jack Torrance is lured into the hotel's "collective" of white male supremacy and misogyny, Wendy is pulled more deeply into a compulsion to be competent as a mother and wife. A classic feature of any affliction, denial is, until very near the end, Wendy's way of life: we never see her "shine" or see ghosts, as do Jack and Danny, because Wendy is busy attempting to keep the family from disintegrating, all the while exhaustively holding up a pathetically upbeat, if banal, attitude. Yet, the very isolation that stifles Jack's creativity and exacerbates his frustration and eventual psychotic break enables Wendy's transformation into a strong, capable, if pained, woman who clumsily but surely takes a stand for her life and her son's.

Jack's transformation is an unconscious spiral into a gradual assimilation with the dead, wherein writing-as-creative birth, or connection to the 'divine' transforms into sheer, meaningless repetition: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." As Fredric Jameson claims, Jack does write; but the text in question in very explicitly a text about *work*: it is "a kind of zero point around which the film organizes itself, a kind of ultimate and empty auto-referential statement about the impossibility of cultural or literary production" (F. Jameson 93). Work without community hearkens to the isolated state in which the family subsists, and in such absolute isolation inside the hotel, "overlooked" by history, "the drive towards community, the longing for collectivity, the *envy* of other, achieved collectivities, emerges with all the force of a return of the repressed" (94). The forms of writing style are myriad: the same sentence is released in poetic stanza form, in dissolving funnels of words, in MLA citation format, and block paragraphs. When Jack

"peers into the darkness hunger has created for him...what he finds is a void of language" (*Art of Hunger* 15).

Here, the *lack* of transformation is the source of horror. The shape of the line in Jack's writing changes and gives the appearance, via its mass quantity of pages, of transformation, of creation, forward movement being the key: "page after page piles up, producing a modernist [text] that is a material object, a sculpture--a text whose relation to temporality is distorted in favor of the image" (Peucker 670). Yet, this transformation signifies regression, a movement away from creativity into instead a proliferating stagnation: transformation turned in on itself, or stalled out. The sentence "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" is not even of Jack's own devising. Nothing has been born, except a mass production of an insane order, from a mind beating itself against a dead-end wall in the labyrinth/maze. In similar fashion, Jack, brandishing an ax, freezes to death inside the hotel's hedge maze after exhaustively chasing Danny through the deep snow. Danny erases his tracks and retraces his steps and Jack-as-monster, who has been relying on his son's traces, comes to a seeming dead-end in the middle of the maze. The final image of Jack, after the grotesque "still" of his snow-covered corpse, is the slow, ghostly dissolve toward the interior of the hotel, where myriad photographs line the walls. At the same time the clarity of one photograph emerges, so does the clarity that Jack has "always" been part of the hotel. His upper body and broadly smiling face fills the bottom of a photograph still, in which he is partaking in a July 4th celebration in 1921.

The film reinforces the notion that the unconscious "still perceives an animistic universe, a labyrinth with death at its center, a maze both liberating and entrapping," and

that the hotel, beneath its "veneer of modernity," reveals the pull of the paradoxical dead-end/door embodied by the photograph at the end of the film (Hoile 11). There is no "new myth to live by" (Kathy Acker) here, and Kubrick can do little more than reveal the past's hold on the present, via the symbolic structure of the hotel as "carrier" of America's bloody, repressed history (discussed further in the next section) as played out in the artificially constructed, contemporary ("history"-less) nuclear family. In the Gold Room, we see clearly that Jack is situated between the two time periods, and perfectly willing to succumb to the (dead) notion that he lives in an unchanging world of fathers and kings.

The narrative of *The Shining* begins not with human characters, but with the "invisible" camera eye following the winding mountain road and veering over a precipice. This "unspeakable" moment encapsulates the confrontation between mind and body that dominates the film. The shift between the ineffectiveness of language to create meaning, and the "non-said" of the maternal space of the Overlook Hotel reveals a gap, or a transformative moment, wherein the "return of the repressed" *is* the narrative, rather than the "underbelly." The Overlook Hotel is a container for suffering on historical and personal levels, and perhaps Kubrick transforms transformation by showing us that this suffering can only be comprehended by the body--via, for example, the eyes' and stomach's identification with the camera eye flying over the precipice, or the dizzying circles Danny's tricycle creates around the hotel. Kubrick makes apparent the power of horror to represent the co-existence of surface and depth, inner and outer, word and image: and perhaps more specifically to *The Shining*, what Kristeva calls "the dividing line between nature and culture" (*Stabat Mater* 115). What may draw viewers to

Kubrick's films is that they present thresholds: places where one may identify with the apparent intellectual distance his films afford, yet at the same time feel an ache, or a draw, at the pit of the stomach. *The Shining* graphically comprehends the thin edge between existence and its opposite: that invisible line between disappearance and return.

II. The Photographic Ruins and the Stomach-Wound

The maternal body is itself abject, and we must break with it through the power of language. --Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror

Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.
--Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida

Revealed in the myriad photographs that line the walls of the Overlook, the always-present past is a time loop of the 1920s, significantly a time of American prosperity and optimism, strides in technology, and a rise in feminism. Beneath this golden, Jazz Age sheen, the Overlook Hotel (where "all the best people" have stayed) houses a grisly history of murder, racism, Mafia-related corruption, and its very presence on the Western landscape seems to mock the decimation of Native Americans, the old-growth forests, and the extinction of myriad animals and plants. When he arrives at the hotel for his job interview, Jack learns that it was built in 1907 on the sacred space of an Indian burial ground (hotel manager Stuart Ullmann remarks off-handedly to Jack, "They even had to repel a few Indian attacks while building it"). The Overlook Hotel is a crucible for the American twentieth-century, the horrors and "triumphs" of the move West (Manifest Destiny, the Gold Rush, the hope for "something better out there"), and the sacrifice of the body (destruction of wildlife, native people, based on the fear of the

"wild," the dark, feminine principle) for "progress" (greed). The nineteenth-century transformation of a sacred Indian burial ground into a monstrous, twentieth-century artifice barely conceals the horrors of white settlers' experiences of starvation, cannibalism, and murder (most notably, the 1843 fate of the Donner Party, which is mentioned in the film) as they headed West into the labyrinth of forests and mountains.

Well into the initial interview, Ullmann reluctantly tells Jack about the previous caretaker, Grady, who had, ten years before, "run amok" and murdered his wife and two daughters with an ax before putting "two barrels of a shotgun into his mouth." Upon hearing this story, Jack appears even more determined to carry out his assigned duties as caretaker and insists, as a writer who has been teaching only "to make ends meet," that he will relish the five months of solitude. Now relegated to benign, black and white photographs that cover the interior walls of the hotel, twentieth-century American history has transformed into a singular, contemporary family's experience of mental stagnation and isolation, exacerbated by the burgeoning Reagan era of blind individualism and what Paul Auster, in *The Art of Hunger,* calls a "modern nothingness." Paul Mayersberg claims that there is the "sense in the Overlook Hotel that it represents the world after the bombs have gone off; the loneliness, the incredible store of food, ways to survive...*The Shining* may be the first film of the post-nuclear age to come" (258). The Torrance family subsists in this "post-nuclear" winter, a limbo state in which nature has trapped them and overtaken them, and set free the depths that have been "held in check" by a commodity-laden, surface-dominated postmodern culture. This surface, whether it is embodied in the labyrinth of photographs along the hotel's walls, in the still sheen of water along the lake in the film's opening credits, or in the many mirrors and doubles,

"promises" and forbids transformation that would liberate the mind from the "matrix" of the (maternal) body.

As one of the "body genres," the horror film in Kubrick's vision transforms the structure of narrative into a series of still photographs which, like the ghosts that inhabit the film's setting (a hotel/labyrinth), materialize and are revealed to have "touchable" bodies. As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, literal photographs cover the surface of the hotel's interior and create a sheen, or artifice of history. Photography in Kubrick's film, besides functioning as a surface upon which history can be glimpsed, if not understood, also functions as a catalyst for seeing and internalizing what one sees: as a means for representing an "inner" vision, or the personal experience that undermines the presentation of banal photographs that populate the hotel and barely conceal its "true" history, just as the presentation of banal conversation between family members barely conceals the rage and fear beneath the surface. Indeed, as Peucker claims, *The Shining* is clearly "haunted by photography, [which] resurfaces as an aspect of the film's imaginary, as a return of the repressed--a 'return of the dead'" (666).

While the historical photographs express, in Barthes' terms, the *studium* (that which in the photograph may arouse in the viewer vague, "docile" interest), the photographic images of Danny's "shining" emphasize the *punctum* (that "which attracts or distresses...[and is] slightly repellent"), or wounded vision (*Camera* 40/45). The uncanny emblem of the photograph as a specter, or "a micro-version of death," wherein a subject is aware of him/herself becoming an (absent) object, surfaces in the film as a means for allowing the "still" to speak, to become character (*Camera* 14). The *punctum* functions in *The Shining* as a means for revealing places where seeing and digesting are

joined: specifically, at the site of a dead woman's corpse, the blood pouring from the elevator, and the macabre vision of the murdered Grady daughters' bodies. The *punctum* also serves as a remainder of transformation: when the photographic image is "digested" by the viewer, or witness, it leaves a trace--perhaps a wound--within the viewer's body. A feeling of sickness in the stomach, the release of tears, an increased heartbeat due to fear, are all remainders of transformation, and reveal a merging in process between the experience of the viewer and that of the characters.

If, as Barthes claims, photography is a kind of "primitive theater" or cult of the Dead, a site or force that "excludes all purification, all catharsis" and cannot be placed in a ritual unless one avoids looking at it, could it also be possible that a viewer of horror films, in particular those best "seen/felt" with the body, is searching for a similar kind of ritual? That is, to dare to see, thus confront, via narrative, via the communication of vision, that which one fears most? Can fear be transformed? What is feared more than death, absence, oblivion?

In addressing and presenting such a confrontation, if not communication, Kubrick's' film replaces the verbal with the visual: in this way, the narrative pictures characters who are "pictured internally as well as externally" (Jenkins 70). Further, virtually every shot of the film is "photographic"; that is, each possesses a two-dimensional quality, as the literal photographs on the walls. The viewer is not always certain as to what constitutes a "real" image or one that has emerged from the imagination (most likely from Danny's "shining"). As "looking bodies," viewers of *The Shining*, as well as the characters themselves, witness the disintegrating veneer of the hotel and finally see the temporal and spatial labyrinth. Peucker explains that "the camera emerges as a

character rather than as an embodiment of authorial presence," evoking the uncanny "evil eye," and "the affective response missing from the unlocalizable narrative voice is displaced into the spectator, in whom camera movement and imagery produce sensations of vertigo and nausea" (667-68). This "affective response" in turn elicits a bodily transformation in the viewer, for, as Paul Auster argues, "seeing is a process that engages the entire body" (*Art of Hunger* 192). The horror film in particular, according to Barbara Creed, elicits a "digestive" response from the viewer: one says of such films, "It scared the shit out of me" or "It made me sick to my stomach" (5).

The viewer is not granted, via language, an inside perspective on what the Torrances think and feel. In distancing the viewer from the Torrances' "inner world," and instead creating the effect of gazing upon a series of photographs, the film grants viewers their own perspectives and seduces them by reaching right for the body: for the stomach as well as the mind/eyes. The "gift" of psychic insight has come to Danny with the wound of having been abused by his father; in turn, the viewer witnesses how this wound transforms the child's vision by sharpening his sensitivity to danger, to the knowledge of death, and to the notion that his true protector lies deep within himself. The death of the father-writer opens the graphic, non-linear world of the child-storyteller. While Jack writes, he does not tell a story. Rather, his *body* is the story; his situatedness inside the maze of the hotel is the story. Danny, who possesses the gift of psychic awareness, takes over the narrative where Jack fails as a writer or storyteller. As literal voice to Danny's vision, Tony serves as a guide-self. When Tony emerges, Danny can "converse" with him, but when Tony shows Danny a vision from the future or past, the child goes "under," as if to clear a path for the vision to be released. Danny is also plagued by the

inner knowledge of his "stomach," or Tony, who *is* Danny's intuitive voice; the source of this voice is the unspeakable comprehending of his body, and the result is that he "knows" things without understanding how he "knows" them.

The conflation of seeing (a photographic surface of history) and digesting (intuiting/comprehending the grisly depth that co-exists with the "see-able" history) is located at the site of the body, and occurs as a result of attempts to "say," or write, beyond that body. Sight is an important component to Kubrick's films: the characteristic "Kubrick stare" reveals cold, silent communication, comprehending moments, and often signals turning points in characters' sliding from sanity to insanity. Further, the stare captures frozen, photographic moments in the narrative, where words dissolve or stall out. As Maud Ellmann posits, "the verb 'to stare' is related to the verb 'to starve,' which used to mean to freeze or turn to stone...staring and starving both have the effect of reifying bodies into spectacles" (102).

Rendered by Kubrick's vision, *The Shining* is not only an exploration of a contemporary Oedipal narrative and its hold on history; it is also a subtle, yet macabre tribute to the anorexic psyche, which holds within it the threat of an internalized, perfectionist father who must be pleased at all costs. To avoid identifying with the sniveling mother-figure in Wendy (who, ironically, "triumphs" in the end), the anorexic would rather align herself with the ax-wielding father, who would seem to have the power/mastery of body and spirit. Yet, *The Shining* presents this as a myth, wherein the contemporary father actually fails to wield the power that would appear to be his "birthright" under patriarchy. Instead, the "natural" world--the repressed maternal principle of blood, symbolizing life and death in one place--confronts the writer-father

with his own repressed feminine. Further, Kubrick presents no other form of masculinity to which the father can relate, and this condition exacerbates Jack's descent into madness.

At the same time the mountain snow storms render the Torrances' communication with the outside world impossible, the viewer is left to "read" the signs of the family's transformation in clues left by facial expressions, movements of/on the body, visions revealed by Tony, and the ghosts/hallucinations Jack increasingly sees. The increased tension and isolation between family members becomes most clear in the sequence in which, at the moment Wendy discovers the family is cut off from phone communication, Danny "shines" the photograph-vision of the butchered Grady girls. As they beckon him to "play" with them "forever and ever and ever," Danny covers his eyes with his hands as if watching a horror film, and, though wounded by this terrifying vision, he transforms his fear into strength. Speaking to himself via Tony, he remembers that Dick Hallorann has reminded him that some things leave traces behind, like "pictures in a book," and that only people who "shine" can see them. The interspersal/weaving of the frontal, photograph-image of the present and ghostly "alive" girls holding hands, situated between the bloodstained, sprawling corpses of the girls in the same clothes and the same hallway evokes Barthes' observation that

> ...if the photograph becomes horrible, it is because it certifies...that the corpse is alive, or *corpse*: it is the living image of the dead thing. For the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that

> delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past, the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (*Camera* 79)

Beneath the historical implications of the photograph is the personal trauma. The imposed finality in the photographic scene of death by slaughter, signifies a constant present always already ruled by death--interrupted by imminent absence.

The photographic images of the dead girls while alive, standing side by side (evoking the photographs of Diane Arbus) haunts Danny because the image moves; in addition, Danny has not as yet "surmounted" the "primitive" omnipotence of thought that in part characterizes the uncanny. As Freud reminds us in "The Uncanny," as soon as "something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny" (248). This seeming "re-animation of the dead" is uncanny because it creates in the body a feeling of helplessness associated with being lost or disoriented (as if trapped inside a maze): where temporality and spatiality seem to merge. Photographs in Kubrick's film function as a way to confuse and combine past, present and future. Photographs in general give the illusion of a constant present. No matter if the subjects in the photograph are dead; in the still perfection of the graphic image, they are flawlessly alive (that is, not literal corpses).

The illusion of a constant present (or continual present) provides the "eternal value" of which Barthes writes, and yet, death always usurps that "superior" value (that is, imbued with the notion of an afterlife). The difference between the image of the girls standing side by side, two-dimensional, beckoning from a distance to Danny, and the image of their bloodied, limb-strewn corpses (in the same spatial field), is that in the latter

image, the horror is literal because it is confirmed. The past is inside the present. In Kubrick's film, photographs are ghosts; they are palpable, touchable. The conflation of seeing and digesting evokes the center of the labyrinth, which potentially contains a mirror signifying illumination and/or infinity.

As "center" of a labyrinth, the mirror surfaces three times in the film within three different bathrooms: first, at the beginning of the film, in the bathroom of the Torrances' apartment, where Danny receives glimpses of the horrors within the hotel; second, in the middle of the film, in the bathroom of room 237, where Jack embraces the dead woman/crone (discussed in greater detail below); and third, near the end of the film, in the blood-red men's bathroom of the Gold Ball Room, where Jack confronts his double, Grady. In each instance, the mirror functions as a "center" that is both desired and feared: Danny both desires and fears the revelation Tony communicates to him about the grisly possibilities of the hotel; Jack is both sexually pulled to and repelled from the woman in the bathtub; he is also both drawn to and hesitant about the notion of murdering his family, as his Grady-self pressures him to do. In Kubrick's films, bathrooms are sites of transformation that always end in the abject, and function as containers for transformative/pivotal scenes that in turn reveal the body's earth-boundness and mortality via the dependence on digestion.[ix]

In the search for the center, which encapsulates the unknown (or possible death), one sees/comprehends, enabled by "gut reactions"/intuitions in the body. At the center of the labyrinth, as "the bright world of intelligible forms becomes the sublime womb, the ultimate escape from the trials of bodiliness" (Irwin 317). The male subject who seeks absoluteness, or "Godliness" in his work is traumatized by the thread that links his

creative process to the abject, physical presence of the female body in labor (317). If one can survive the center, where the mirror shows the truth--illumination, all buried characteristics, the imminence of death--then one can return to the world of the living with new insight, knowledge, psychic awareness. One then may see that the labyrinth is ubiquitous, like food in a land of plenty, necessary, literal and figurative. One may see that where there is death, there is in turn life.

In contrast to Jack's experience, the mirror-as-center in *The Shining* functions as a life-saving device for Danny. When Jack has completed his assimilation with the dead and begins to hack down the door to the Torrances' hotel quarters, Danny/Tony wakes up his mother by shouting "REDRUM" (MURDER). The viewer sees that he has written the word on a white door, in Wendy's bright red lipstick ("REDRUM") which appears in the mirror where she will see it as ("MURDER"). At this moment, the hotel's history, personal and epic, merges in both meanings of this word: red rum is the blood that signifies mass slaughter and inevitable death; it is also a signifier of the alcoholism that enables such violence and has claimed the Torrance family. Murder is the means by which past, present and future are linked: the deaths of the past cannot be changed, the present is full of menacing signs, and the future, because unknown, is always already defined by death.

At the beginning of the film, paralleling Jack's interview and introduction to his own double, Grady, the camera dissolves to introduce Danny and Wendy inside the Torrances' cramped Boulder apartment three hours away from the Overlook Hotel. As Danny stares into the mirror in the bathroom and asks Tony why he does not want to go to the hotel for the winter, Danny's eyes widen and his vision fills the frame to reveal a

slow-motion torrent of blood emptying out of an elevator and flooding a corridor. Music (Penderecki's "The Awakening of Jakob") rises tunelessly and moves with the vision, evoking the merging of seeing with digesting, as the blackening wave of blood fills our vision. Interspersed with this vision is a blink-fast, frontal "snapshot" of two girls in identical dresses, whom we later learn are Grady's murdered daughters. As the wave of blood in overwhelms the camera eye it seems to wash over the viewer, and the field of vision turns black. Danny awakens to a doctor looking into his eyes and asking him questions about what he remembers before he fainted. When she asks him about Tony, Danny tells her, "He's a little boy that lives in my mouth." She asks, "If you were to open your mouth now could I see Tony?", to which he replies, "No. He hides...in my stomach." Still "grounded" in his "feminine" body, Danny has "given birth" to Tony in order to fend off death, in turn keeping Tony "safe" in his stomach, or, his "metaphorical womb" (Peucker 669).

The epi-center of intuitive (psychic) knowledge, the stomach surfaces as a means for perceiving and digesting experience; here, it is clear that Danny, has created a double to transform his isolation/exile into a place of refuge from the violent images of his father and the hotel (Hoile 7). Further, that Danny perceives from the center of his stomach is significant, as the stomach is a physical analogue to and embodiment of physical transformation: it is the center, or a chamber, of the labyrinthine digestive tract. Like the labyrinth, the stomach is at once a metaphor for safety and danger: here, ideas, like food, are digested, transformed into remainders, and brought to light as traces left behind. Like the bathroom, the kitchen is a site of bodily awareness (in the form of hunger) and the place where we first learn about the "shining" from the head chef, Dick Hallorann. When

the Torrances arrive on closing day, Dick takes Wendy and Danny (and the viewer) on a lengthy tour of the huge stores of food that will more than supply them for the winter.

In the traditionally "feminine space" of the huge kitchen, Wendy half-heartedly comments that she will need to leave bread crumbs behind each time she enters the labyrinthine kitchen. The presence of all the extra food ironically underscores the isolation of the small family, hearkening to other "doomed" families that set out for the West. For example, on the way to the hotel, as the car winds through the mountains, Wendy asks Jack about the Donner Party, whose infamous descent into cannibalism upon getting lost in the Sierra Nevadas has become a "surface sound-bite" in this post-nuclear family (when Danny replies, "I know all about cannibalism. I saw it on T.V."). The kitchen, at once a space of potentially warm community and isolated, seething togetherness, is in *The Shining* also a space of ingestion (of food and knowledge), violence (near the end of the film, Wendy locks Jack in the pantry after he attempts to kill her), and, as we find in the bathroom, a harbinger of death (in body and/or mind).

In the privacy of the huge kitchen, amid the sounds of employees leaving and locking up, Dick asks Danny about "the shining": further, he links this ability to a matrilineal source. He tells Danny that when he was a little boy he and his grandmother could have entire conversations "without ever opening our mouths." The emphasis on the non-verbal over language signifies a "feminine" authority that "feels" boundary-less because it is not constrained by language and is only "heard" or comprehended by few. Danny's "shining" is communication "without words" or "voice"; it is based on vision, and yet, even without opening the mouth, something (an image) is taken in and incorporated into the body--digested. By this definition, the "shining" is a form of the

abject, as it both enacts and forestalls transformation, and is linked to a pre-linguistic, maternal body: it does not "respect borders, positions, rules...[and] disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers* 4). The borders, rules, etc. signify the world of the father and language, which are imposed on the developing self. In the kitchen, Dick also warns Danny not to enter room 237, about which the boy is then of course curious. His mouth stained with chocolate ice cream, Danny stares earnestly at Dick and says, "You're scared of room 237, ain'tcha?"

Room 237 reveals that the center of the labyrinth is living death: the horror encapsulates what it is for feminine space to collapse on itself. This room is important because it is a lure for transformation in/of the narrative, and as such it contains enigma: it implies a crime scene (in revealing a dead elderly woman in the bathtub), a sexual scene (a young woman exits the tub seductively), and it marks a turning point in the narrative, wherein history, dream, present reality, and memory are joined in a non-linear departure from the narrative of the film. The door to the room is "mysteriously" opened to Danny, but it is from Jack's perspective that the viewer sees the inside of the room. The purple, black and green decor, gilded mirrors and bold patterns on the floor and bedspread imbue the scene with a shrine-like atmosphere, and the sheen of the room enhances the Torrances' meager living quarters. The entrance to the light green bathroom evokes the upward slope into a temple, as steps lead into the illuminated center. A nude woman stirs from behind a shower curtain, evoking the scene from *Psycho*, only it is Jack who is afraid.

When he sees that she is naked, his stricken stare transforms into a leer, and he moves toward her. She is thin, mannequin-like: an Ice Queen. Jack embraces and kisses

her, and before looking into the mirror, he notices (feels) that something is wrong: his body pre-empts his mind, and both are met in his gaze into the mirror. There he sees the slippage of skin on the back of the body of an old crone, who still embraces him but now laughs. Cut into this scene is that of a different old woman rising from the bathtub, perhaps a reference to what Danny had seen earlier in the room. The spell broken, we see a collage of scenes revealing Danny frozen in a trance, drooling and "shining" to Dick, who is vacationing in Florida; Dick lying in his bed frozen, eyes wide open, shivering; and Jack, initially aroused by the sight of the naked woman, is then, upon gazing into the mirror at the rotting body of the old woman, rendered stiff with terror, and stumbles backwards out the door.

Danny and Dick have seen the center of the hotel/labyrinth and survived, physically and psychically, though they are wounded as a result the experience. They both have integrated the experience, however, into their conscious existence and can talk about what they have seen. Jack, on the other hand, cannot integrate his experience of the room (he cannot discuss it with his wife, nor can he write about it); as a result, he succumbs to the return of the repressed. As a representation of an "animistic universe" (evidenced by its having been built on an Indian burial ground, decorated with authentic Indian designs, "an Art Deco recurrence to the primitive"), the Overlook Hotel holds "residues and traces" of a bloody past, which in turn is embodied by the animistic world (Hoile 7). Danny and Dick are invested in a belief in spirits, or what Freud calls "projections of man's impulses" (*Totem* 92).

Belief in an animistic universe has supposedly been surpassed by adults and "civilized" people; further, we are socialized out "inhabiting" our bodies as children, and

learn to doubt our own perceptions (when our stomachs talk to us)--to move "beyond" imagination, play, liminality--and adhere to reason and rationality. The belief that he has surpassed the animistic universe, a world still inhabited by Danny, paired with his burgeoning rage toward his wife and son, exacerbates Jack's terrifying experience in room 237. Further, as Hoile posits, each of Jack's entries into bathrooms "represents another dead end in his thinking" (10). Jack recognizes that he is beginning to experience a very real madness, and in an attempt to "cover his tracks," or the increasingly visible traces of that madness, he does not tell his wife what he saw. He does not validate her fears, nor his son's experience in room 237; he drives himself further away from his family, and his sanity.

Jack is given a chance, when he looks into the mirror of the bathroom, to embrace a rejected part of himself, which has by now grown decrepit with neglect. He can embrace the young, nude female body as an object (outside himself) of desire, but in the mirror he sees a rotting, cackling crone. He cannot embrace this thing; he must (r)eject it from himself: repudiate the abject female (maternal) body, in order to maintain his psychic integrity. Of any effort to reject such internalized parts of the self, Maud Ellmann suggests that

> just as Poe's cadavers burst out of their cerements, bringing down the houses constructed to contain them, so these phantoms ultimately overwhelm the ego in which they are entombed. When this happens, the ego can no longer claim to be the master of its mansion, because its own incorporated objects eat it out of house and home. (Ellmann 41-42)

What would happen if instead he embraced that body, held her hands, stroked her hair? What courage would that take? To merge fear with fascination--to risk madness in order to restore one's sanity. To say that Jack has confronted in the mirror his own rejected feminine aspect may be a stretch; yet, the hotel/labyrinth full of ghostly white male authority-figures and murdered women and children often reads as a dream, wherein one confronts different aspects of him/herself. The unconscious speaks through the body, and in dreams; what one cannot "process" in the waking world s/he works through in sleep. In horror films, sleep is often made an explicit harbinger of death, wherein the dreamer who dies in sleep dies in "waking life." In sleep, one is more vulnerable to "monsters," predators, and the like; at the same time, one is also more open to receiving unspeakable gifts of insight, and possible answers to complex problems.

The woman in the bathtub signifies all that Jack has been attempting to stave off: first, her corpse is the abject, which constitutes the "non-distinctiveness of inside and outside...[which is] unnamable, a border passable in both directions by pleasure and pain" (Kristeva 61). Second, symbolically, the woman could also represent the female monster of mythology, who, like Medusa (also formerly known as the goddess of sexual wisdom), turns men to stone when they gaze upon her face. Demetra George, in a study on the dark goddesses, claims that

> Medusa once ruled over the regenerative mysteries of sex and death, and protected these rites from being discovered and abused by the uninitiated. As the third, crone/destroyer aspect of the lunar triad, Medusa's message was one of wisdom, and it concerned the inevitability of death. The patriarchy, in their fear of the wise

> woman, of death, and of the sexual power of the menstruating feminine, demonized Medusa into a monstrous figure of the devouring, castrating mother. (George 163-164).

The problem of "woman as monster" has been explored extensively by feminist critics such as Barbara Creed, among others. Most monsters are depicted as pagan (that is, earth-based) and the avenging fathers as Christian (as in the *Dracula* story). The crone/witch, accused of everything from cannibalism to castration, is, in pagan religion, an embodiment of wisdom and strength. Her visual connection to imminent death and decay in turn enacts and presents transformation and rebirth. Further, as stated in the introduction, the anorectic female who does not wish her body (as a woman) to be identified with death, rails against this image in the denial of food, and will do anything to avoid taking up space or making demands on (devouring) anyone. Wendy Torrance at first evokes such an aesthetic, as her worried, tearful voice, her emaciated body, and her near-death experience (nearly being axed to death by her husband) place her in the realm of living death. Yet, she in turn experiences rebirth, when this same connection transforms her into as strong a person as she needs to be to undo her paralysis-fear and leave an abusive situation, even at the sacrifice of her husband's life.

In the center of the labyrinth-hotel constructed on years of bloodshed and white male oppression, the conflation of woman with death is nothing new or even shocking. What remains frightening about the 237 sequence, however, is that a woman's naked body signifies male injury, violence, and further fuels the male artist's flight from, or distancing from, the body, which is still, in contemporary narrative, linked to the female, to the earth, to disintegration, to entrapment. The monster's shift in mythology, from a female

who must be slain to a male who must be slain with the help of a woman, is one signification of the transformation from matriarchal to patriarchal rule. In Kubrick's film, the woman-as-monster is tucked away as victim/seducer inside the locked room, where a male hero must venture in a rite of passage: Dick and Danny have gone inside and emerged, wounded but alive, even strengthened by their experience. Jack, on the other hand, has gone inside and embraced the decaying victim as embodied by the female figure, and as he gazes into the mirror, he comes into contact with the "female" part of himself that is victim: that which he has cast off, or repressed in order to become what he believes constitutes a "true" male in white patriarchal society (as defined by the "orders of the house"/paternal matrix).

The doubleness of mythological creatures (the Minotaur, the Sphinx, Medusa, the Centaur) is a "dramatic means of posing...the problem confronting the hero of consciousness--the question of differentiating the human" (Irwin 221). This killing the monster (self) is also killing "wonder," or the part of the "mystical" self that reason will not accept. The word monster comes from the Latin word "monstrum," which also means "wonder" (Kathy Acker, *Bodies of Work*). Monster/wonder is, according to Demetra George, that to which

> the masculine may desire to sink back and dissolve into the pleasure of the womb, [but] this is seen as a regressive trend to the development of the male ego. The hero needs to slay the monster in order to prevent his return to the feminine uroboric unity and to free himself from the power of the mother in the unconscious. The violence to the feminine is a reaction to the pull of the mother. (George 168)

In the moment of embrace with the woman, Jack locks eyes with the monster in himself, and emerges with no new knowledge, for he remains determined to repress the experience, instead of (like Dick and Danny) integrating it within his identity. In attempting to keep it out, Jack paradoxically slides more deeply into the abyss of madness and death.

As it concerns transformation in/of narrative, the monster is always a figure of bodily transformation (vampire, zombie, werewolf, psychopath), because it signifies the boundaries between the human and the non-human, between culture and nature. Creed claims that most contemporary analyses of horror narratives exclude female rites of passage, adopting Freud's notion that woman terrifies because she is castrated, already constituted as victim (Creed 7). Once seen as a victim (by the male character/subject), the female body is abject, thus reinforcing patriarchal definitions of woman, by nature, as victim (7). When the female viewer sees this same phenomenon, she sees a conflict between two opposing domains: the worlds of the mother and of the father (70-71). *The Shining* depicts a patriarchal world inside a temporal labyrinth, which in turn "inhabits" the maternal space of the hotel. Maternal power is symbolized by the bright blood pouring out of the elevator (representing both slaughter and life-giving sustenance), and by central image of the maiden-turned-crone in the bathroom of room 237.

The three male points of view are linked by the locked room, and by the "non-music," heartbeat soundscape, which anticipates another pivotal scene wherein Jack completes the transformation from man to monster, and has nearly completed his assimilation with the dead world of the hotel. After Dick, now worried about Danny, flies from Florida to Colorado to find out what is happening at the Overlook, he enters the now-dimly lit hotel and calls out. The hall of the hotel vaguely resembles a Greek temple,

and when Jack leaps out from behind a pillar and ambushes Hallorann, the three male screams--Dick screaming in death as Jack axes him in the heart, Danny "shining" the murder and screaming from his hiding place, and Jack screaming as he commits his first murder--merge as if in a macabre death ritual. After the screams end, an empty frame is slowly filled as Jack rises from his first kill: "a frightening image of a man suddenly released from *all* inhibitions, of private conscience as well as collective rule. He is at once a free man [king] and a slave to his own aggressive urges [monster]" (Rasmussen 280).

Jack's mental breakdown is made manifest by the repetitive typing of the one, perfectionist line and signifies the loss of the "shining crown," the light of the creative "product" of the male artist who gives birth. John Irwin's analysis of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" reveals the male artist's fear of the psychic stagnation that ensues when he remains "enclosed" in the "matrix" of the locked room, house, or lost in the labyrinth of thought. In Poe's detective and horror stories, the cave is associated with the library or study (of the master/artist/scientist/detective), wherein the "idealized pre-natal condition had become associated in Poe's own life with the image of a dead mother, linking the sleep of the womb with that of the grave and the goal of reunion with the means of reunion (the mother with death)" (Irwin 232). Further, the dead or dying woman "tends...to be coded as a mother-surrogate, and to the extent this makes her an object of the man's desire, it also makes her, in a double sense, a threat to his life" (233). Jack succumbs to the figuratively subterranean labyrinth as he becomes increasingly enamored with and horrified by the ghosts of the hotel. With swiftness and an odd grace, he grasps his moment in the sun, to "shine," to speak, when he commits murder.

From that moment, the viewer sees his face in shadow (more animal-like, as his mind is now ruled by his id), his body increasingly hunched over, pulling closer to the earth as he clutches the now-bloodied ax and shuffles toward his son, the symbolic Theseus/Oedipus who "frees the principle of light from the dominance of the material world (a dominance of body over mind symbolized by the Minotaur's animal head and human body) and by establishing the ascendancy of the human in his own nature he releases himself from the monster's subterranean realm and reascends to the light" (Irwin 314). Danny lures his father/monster into the darkly lit, snow-covered hedge maze, re-traces his footsteps (a trick of Native American warriors to elude predators), and hides, intuiting his moment of emergence. When he does, he follows his tracks out into the light and into his mother's arms. As mother and son leave the hotel behind, we can hear Jack's doomed, bellowing voice fading on the snowstorm wind. Like Oedipus, Danny unwittingly causes his father's death and is re-united with his mother on the "throne" of the Sno-Cat that carries them to safety.

The narrative concludes with a sudden, harsh-daylight photograph image of Jack's frozen corpse inside the maze. His frozen body, overcome by the falling snow, is usurped by the hotel's time-loop history, and becomes another trace or imprint in collective memory. From this image the camera eye returns to the interior of the hotel, and a ghostly tracking shot gradually dissolves toward a group of black and white photographs on the Gold Ball Room wall. The final image features a youthful Jack, smiling broadly at the center of a photograph from 1921, clearly in the midst of a Jazz Age party, and we hear the repeated refrain of "Midnight, the Stars, and You" dreamily drifting behind the image. The dissolution between body and mind, or, what Peucker describes as the difference

between "'things seen and things felt,'" is manifested in the end when photographs (and ghosts) finally surge forward like the river of blood, an "incorporated object" that transforms the "house" into a vessel of the inner and outer, the present and the absent, and the differentiation between them no longer holding together.

Where Kubrick's horror film unflinchingly depicts the unmasking of timeless depth thinly disguised by contemporary American existence, Paul Auster, as we discover in the next chapter, plays with the language of that existence, looks into the mirror and writes what he sees: the horror of the absence always already present in the inevitable wounding that precipitates the uncanny comprehension of the split self. The act of fasting, which requires such a splitting (much like the act of writing, as we find in the next chapter), has been linked to sacrifice and death, as well as healing and regeneration. As Michel Foucault points out,

> writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears. (Foucault 116)

In *The Shining*, the act of writing, rather than the creation of a narrative, leaves Jack behind: literally, to die in the hedge maze where he attempts to murder his son, and symbolically, to die in the labyrinth of his mind, where he has attempted to become "master of the house" and ultimately succumbs to mental and bodily death.

Kubrick has created a film that unites body and mind: it is at once a story about a father who attempts to "master" his crown (head) and is eventually overtaken by monstrous madness, and about a son who bears the weight of psychic wisdom not in his head, but in his stomach, a bodily site of intuitive knowledge. The austere, often ponderous, deceptively simple narrative of *The Shining* presents the viewer with a rich, bodily experience: below the beautiful, yet banal surface of the Overlook Hotel are the hidden depths seen by the mind and not necessarily the eye alone. The film envisions Foucault's notion that the author function will disappear as society changes, and "that fiction...will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint--one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, *experienced*" [my emphasis] (119). The "wisdom" of the stomach, in particular, provides an important link between narrative and experience: the film presents its narrative *as* a bodily experience, wherein language is not so much "authored" as it is embodied.

As a viewer "seeing with my stomach," I wanted to reach in to that feminine space, to become seduced by it, pulled into the labyrinth of longing, following tracks in the snow and facing the madman who is really just the anorexic girl's animus: that king of a perfectionism that dissolves into one useless, yet overwhelmingly prophetic sentence: "All work and no play" makes us useless. The brief, insane triumph of the nursery rhyme, a child's chant enables escape into a madness that I knew then that the light inside me--the light of hunger, of life, of the intellect--would never completely stand for. A precipice over which I could never altogether fling myself: a vast precipice I now walk,

occasionally peering over the edge, that vast edge, over and over wondering about wonder, about flying, but waiting, holding fast to the ground, to the faithful earth.

CHAPTER TWO

Walking Wounded: Lost Fathers, Hungry Sons, and Ritual Detection in the Narratives of Paul Auster

To want nothing...to have nothing, to be nothing. I could imagine no more perfect solution than that. In the end, I came close to living the life of a stone.
--Paul Auster, In the Country of Last Things

[W]e must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers. --Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"

It is at the end--for Barthes as for Aristotle--that recognition brings its illumination, which then can shed retrospective light. The function of the end...continues to fascinate and to baffle.
--Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot

In *The Art of Hunger*, Paul Auster writes that "[t]he book...is a kind of parable, a spiritual journey in the form of a treatise" that belongs to the writer as the wire belongs to the high-wire artist, and that both reduce us all "to our common humanity," wherein we become "equal...and therefore a part of each other" (255/257). Perhaps this "common humanity" is both what we long for and fear, as we fear the labyrinth with certain death (corporeal or otherwise) at its center, because it (death) at once embodies all transformation, and sanctions all the narratives that can possibly be written. As expressed in the previous chapter, and as Peter Brooks argues, in both photography and film, "narrative seems ever to imagine in advance the act of its transmission, the moment of reading and understanding that it cannot itself ever know, since this act always comes after the writing, in a posthumous moment" (34). This "posthumous moment" of which Brooks writes in *Reading for the Plot* functions as a potential site of transformation in/of the contemporary narratives of Paul Auster. In these narratives, the tropes of solitude,

hunger, and the presence of the stomach as "epicenter" for intuitive comprehension of outcomes (knowing the answer but not knowing *how* one knows it) function as processes of transformation via the act of detection, or the unraveling of a mystery in order to stave off death, whether it be *of* the father or at the hands of the father.

This chapter examines Auster's narratives through the lenses of : 1) the tension between transcendence/the soul's escape and disintegration/death, as demonstrated by the consistent trope of hunger, which laces throughout Auster's fiction and nonfiction; 2) a fascination with death (missing persons) as a kind of enigmatic disappearance (rather than a finality), as represented by the lure and presence of the labyrinth in/as narrative process; and 3) the paradox of renewal/rebirth and death as expressed in the Oedipal drama between fathers and sons throughout Auster's work. What is the relation between writing and death in these contemporary narratives? How can a writer articulate a transformation in/of narrative, when s/he returns again and again to the constant presence of death? Writing is one means for staving off death, as Walter Benjamin writes in his essay, "The Storyteller." The storyteller "has borrowed his authority from death," which is in turn the "natural history to which his stories refer back" (94).

The storyteller leads the reader up and down into the world of his/her imagination, wherein death is at once a door, a promise, a suspension of disbelief, and an utter reality. In the essay, "What is an Author?", Michel Foucault claims that the act of writing has been traditionally linked to sacrifice and the forestalling of death, wherein the storyteller spoke late into the night "to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator" (Foucault 102). The author's link to sacrifice no longer provides the immortality of the hero, as in the Greek epic, but, as Foucault argues, celebrating, or valorizing this

point is not enough: "[i]nstead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (105). Watching for these openings is the task of anyone who deigns to seek out the places where transformation is always already in play, in order to allow for the possibility of rebirth in the wake of death. If the text *is* the meaning, the labyrinth the process, how do we articulate a transformation in/of narrative, when we return again and again to this constant presence of death? Auster's notion of experience recurs in the actions of writing, detection, and hunger, all of which, like walking the labyrinth, embody a transformation, however enigmatic and un-resolvable.

In Auster's narratives, transformation happens when the search for a "something" on the outside of the body is replaced by the search for a "something" on the inside: the presence of hunger, the acts of walking, detecting, and writing, all indicate the desire to transform the "within-ness" of oneself in a world in which the inner and the outer are kept separate. What Stanley Kubrick renders visually Auster seems to render on the white space of the text: the places where language breaks down and can no longer communicate meaning; the presence of doubles, now well-trod by critics; the proliferation of mirrors, twins, fathers and sons, and ghosts. These "emblems" of the uncanny are also vehicles of transformation, in/of narrative, because they potentially help the reader/viewer see more clearly the connectedness of the inner and outer. The first section of this chapter, "Transformation, Absence, and the High Wire of Hunger," examines two nonfiction narratives (*The Art of Hunger* and *The Invention of Solitude*) that depict a stillness and spareness that evoke the power and purity of hunger.

In each of these narratives, the starving body functions less as a representation of a "pure" shape, than an unviolated silence, a transparent visibility from which all trauma has vacated: where the "private" spirit, its analogue the emptiness of the stomach, can grow and where, in effect, "[h]istorical time is obliterated in favor of inner duration" (*Art of Hunger* 10). For Auster, hunger

> is not a metaphor; it is the very crux of the problem itself. It is first of all an art that is indistinguishable from the life of the artist who makes it. That is not to say an art of autobiographical excess, but rather, an art that is the direct expression of the effort to express itself. In other words, an art of hunger: an art of need, of necessity, of desire. (18)

Auster reminds us that "where no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again...For we will never manage to say what we want to say, and whatever is said will be said in the knowledge of this failure. All this is speculation" (*Art of Hunger* 75). What else can we do but go on writing, reading, questing, attempting to understand, disavowing the knowledge that we may never reach the center of the labyrinth? What if there is no center? What if there is instead a continual "place" that moves, undulates, folds over and over and creates crinkles and centers, voids and crystalline reflections?

All of Auster's novels and essays dip into the "abyss" at some point, yet because the work is "limited" by language, or the planned written word, the writer cannot follow his thoughts all the way down. Instead, he takes the reader to the edge and seems to leave the rest to chance, vagueness, uncertainty, and possibility: "Let everything fall away and then let's see what there is. Perhaps that is the most interesting question of all: to see what happens when there is nothing, and whether or not we will survive that too"

(*Country* 29). The second section, "'Taking the Bull By the Horns': Walking a Labyrinth of Ruin in *The New York Trilogy,*" explores further the notion of a quest for meaning in the midst of this "interesting question" as it transforms into a quest on, or across meaning. The collection *The New York Trilogy* reveals places where author, "main character," and reader experience a series of "balancing acts" that problematize the "inner" search for meaning within the "outer" language of the narratives. As if trapped in a winding maze of possibility, the reader faces the same questions as writer and character: "What, if anything, can we know? What, if anything, is real? How, if at all, can we rely on anything besides our own constructions of reality?" (Merivale and Sweeney 4)

Similarly, Pascal Bruckner poses the following question to readers of Auster's trilogy, which "constitutes a summary-cum-commentary of classical American literary reflections on the nature and meaning of the words to be inscribed on the white walls of consciousness: what would it mean to understand?" (Bruckner 40) Passion for and of meaning both generate the reader's investment in the narrative; like *City of Glass's* Daniel Quinn, who "dares" to voice a kind of certainty that he will find meaning in the midst of mystery and puzzlement, the reader is driven to seek out a central interpretation. For reader, character, and possibly the author, "[e]verything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end" (*CG* 9).

Paul Auster's work has often been compared to that of Jorge Luis Borges, in that both authors' labyrinthine narratives resist closure (and both are deeply influenced by the work of Edgar Allan Poe, who "fathered" the metaphysical detective/murder story). Lawrence R. Schehr claims that the "reader must regard the text as being an infinite series

of transgressions actualized by the process of reading," and he defines transgressions as "hedges against death, nothingness, absence...attempts to fill the void...but they are also hedges against the imposition of transcendental meaning" (188). The texts' resistance in turn is also a resistance to yielding meaning, and force the reader to turn her/his search for meaning toward the language itself, in the movement, the shape of the very words strung together. This too is a "dead end," that merely accepting that the "non-solution is the solution" produces the same foreclosure as does a tenuous "achievement" of meaning (188).

Labyrinths and locked rooms, both visual embodiments and symbols of transformation, at once represent and enact the search for a missing transcendental signifier (Schehr 183). In Borges's fiction, for example, in which the labyrinth functions as a both a disruption and an analogue to the narrative, the storyteller uncovers the meaning at the center: death, which always collapses the narrative "system." If, according to Schehr and other critics, this "rigid" meaning is the center, which is death, held up for interpretation and analysis, then it is also the end of transformation, and the end of narrative. The substitution of mind for body and the intellectual for the sexual, lies at the core of Borges's stories: specifically, chess is a sublimation of the well-explored Oedipal conflict between father and son, and exemplifies the transformation from physical to mental "duel" in the valorization of the mind at the expense of the body. In particular, the short story, "Death and the Compass" is a kind of reverberation of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*: a foundational echo of what many critics, including J. Hillis Miller, have observed about the reader: that s/he falls into the Oedipal "criminal/detective" bind of the characters, or the trap of attempting to become a "pure thinker" (Miller 230). In Borges's

work, unlike Auster's, though, clues still "mean" something: clichés such as the crude, bumbling policeman, although parodied in Borges's work, have completely disappeared in Auster's work, and the shape of the process of detecting, mastering, desiring answers is lain bare, or rendered skeletal (as remainders). Ultimately, in Borges's, and to a less "intense" degree, in Robbe-Grillet's narrative, it is not the solution that draws the contemporary reader; it is the mystery, the process of enigma.

To answer the question of what it would mean to understand, a reader must enter the labyrinth him/herself, in addition to seeing it from above. Understanding, like transformation, is always already present in any narrative, in that it embodies infinite possibility (of interpretation, discourse, shift in perspective, etc.): it heralds further transformations in the way(s) readers approach narrative in an increasingly vision-based culture, where contemporary texts increasingly replace the author with the reader. If we read to "know" the text and its inhabitants, we must come to recognize the desire to disappear as a "symptom" or "clue" to the notion, or the awareness, that everywhere things are shifting, falling away, disintegrating, including our own bodies that think and write and produce texts. In *The New York Trilogy*, we are witness to a kind of representation of a "disintegration" of self, which is complicated by the possibility of a return to that self: that one must die in order to live. Auster's texts bring to a reader's awareness the notion that mastery in interpretation is impossible *because* of the infinite possibilities of interpretation. This paradox also reveals the mind's susceptibility to thought about thought, which, though a kind of "intellectual high" (as revealed by Daniel Quinn's purchase and investment in the red notebook, which becomes his "Ariadne's thread" and talisman, or symbolized by the "subjective" camera eye seeming to fly off the

curving mountain road in the opening credits of *The Shining*), stalls out, because it attempts to control, or usurp, the processes of transformation already in play.

One question Paul Auster seems to wrestle with, in both his fiction and nonfiction, is how to write absence into narrative. What transformations could be effected out of such writing? Perhaps the source lies in walking the high wire between experience and observation, participation and dissociation, while risking the "free fall" into madness, or the mind's comprehension of itself as irrevocably separate from the body that houses it. If the center is everywhere, then so is meaning, familiar yet elusive, and therefore, uncanny as the presence of death/home. This dissociation implies a delicate balance between disintegration/disappearance and transcendence/rebirth--a high-wire walk that implicates virtually every reader of Auster's work. For the reader of Auster's fiction and nonfiction, is the tension between the possibility of death and transcendence a kind of trap, a kind of liberation from the cold, lonely reality of the seemingly infinite walls of the modern city (and the reality of Daniel Quinn's family's mysterious death), or it is both?

I. Transformation, Absence, and the High Wire of Hunger: *The Art of Hunger* and *The Invention of Solitude*

There has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open. Instead of burying my father for me, these words have kept him alive, perhaps more so than ever. I not only see him as he was, but as he is, as he will be...lying in the coffin underground, his body still intact...A feeling that if I am to understand anything, I must penetrate this image of darkness, that I must enter the absolute darkness of earth. --Paul Auster, The Invention of Solitude

The process is inescapable: he must eat in order to write. But if he does not write, he will not eat. And if he cannot eat, he cannot write. He cannot write.
--Paul Auster, The Art of Hunger

When one looks into the mirror, s/he sees at once a physical representation, a surface, yet also receives a sense of his/her own pending absence, or mortality *through* that very seeing. This experience is akin to Lacan's mirror stage, wherein a child can project him/herself as a separate being (or "subject") for the first time, and from this moment, there is no returning to the "blissful" state of pre-oedipal oneness with the mother, a state which Freud also describes as the "oceanic feeling" in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Although we more or less successfully "forget" this experience, it is always present under the surface of our daily development and life. Further, this experience is connected to the notion of the wound of "seeing" being our collective awareness of death (always staring back at us from photographs, paintings, and narratives).

In Paul Auster's nonfiction, we "see" the photographic stillness in the language, as we have seen the camera eye traces the uni- and multi-cursal paths of the labyrinth/hotel in *The Shining*, and as we later see the white and red labyrinth and thread running through the narrative of *The New York Trilogy*. Writing from a balancing point over the dizzying high-wire between his identities as father and son, Auster creates, through narrative, a

ritual without an emergence: a transformation that shapes itself into a retrieval of his father's traces, so that he might become "his own father and his own son" (*Invention* 79). To enable this "becoming" would, for the writer-son-father, be an attempt to mend the wounds, clearly re-opened in the wake of Auster's father's death. Avoiding the often-self-aggrandizing pitfalls of autobiography, Auster transforms memoir into a critical inquiry, thus evoking in the reader what Bruckner refers to as a kind of "strangeness...for whom being or becoming someone constitutes the ultimate difficulty...Auster does not condemn, like classical writers, the self's wretchedness in the face of God's grandeur. He does worse: he dissolves this self, declares it a nonentity" (31).

In the 1982 memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*, and 1992 collection of essays, *The Art of Hunger,* Auster confronts the doubt inherent in such a self, and not for the first time, uses hunger as a means for communicating, and ultimately, perhaps transforming, that dissolution of self into a new, more integrated self. Hunger, not merely as metaphor, as several critics suggest, but as a tangible condition and experience of the writing body, complicates this kind of transformation, because, especially if the hunger is self-inflicted, the only outcome, if followed in a linear fashion, is hastened death by starvation. In effect, it would seem that hunger would then stall out transformation; yet, in Auster's narratives, fiction and nonfiction, hunger gives way to a dissolution of excess, if not in body then in spirit. Although solitude can potentially become "a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery" (*Locked Room* 327), it is, in Auster's narratives never quite a liberating one. Instead, it poses the problem of "How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as [the character/reader] stays in the room" (*Ghosts* 202). The reader is thus drawn in to making connections that potentially

transform the significance of the author's function as a "father who gives birth" to narrative in order to ward off death.

The Art of Hunger

In the tradition of Kafka and Beckett, Auster muses that "[t]he world of art has been translated into the world of the body--and the original text has been abandoned" (*Art of Hunger* 19). I wonder whether we are at this point already: if, in fact, the openings and closings of the labyrinth are places where the reader's experience becomes manifested in the text itself, wherein death itself is a door and transcendental meaning (or philosopher's stone, or crystallized illumination) is circumvented by a continual *flow* of meaning. Auster begins his 1992 collection, *The Art of Hunger,* with an essay that effectively writes hunger as the desire and need for art to express itself:

> If there is such thing as an art of living, then the man who lives life as an art will have a sense of his own beginning and his own end. And beyond that, he will know that his end is his beginning, and that each breath he draws can only bring him nearer to that end. He will live, but he will also die. For no work remains unfinished, even the one that has been abandoned. (*Art of Hunger* 80)

Akin to the act of walking the high-wire, hunger "cannot really be taught: it is something you learn by yourself. And certainly a book would be the last place to turn if you were truly serious about doing it" (255). This "seriousness" in turn mocks the reader's reliance on the text/book as site of learning, gaining insight, and discovering a meaning beyond his/her individual existence.

Even though a book "would be the last place to turn" to learn something of starvation, Auster draws heavily upon Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1890), Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1911), even James Joyce's vertiginous prose, in order to write from the dizzying space of starvation already accomplished. In doing so, Auster skips over the bodily process inherent to the psychic reality that takes the mind to that space: "Hamsun's hero is no Stephen Daedalus, and there is hardly a word in *Hunger* about aesthetic theory. The world of art has been translated into the world of the body--and the original text has been abandoned. Hunger is not a metaphor; it is the very crux of the problem itself" (*Art of Hunger* 18). In effect, he is already inside the "locked room" of hunger, from the very beginning of the narrative. In *The Hunger Artists*, Maud Ellmann claims that "the notion of interiority is bound up from the beginning with ingestion, and the notion of exteriority with anorexia; that is, with the sentiment that 'I should like to keep that out of me'" (Ellmann 40). The redundancy of titles around the conflated subjects of hunger/starvation/anorexia/writing betrays a dullness of spirit: a non-discriminate stalling out of the necessary ingestion (of food and/as knowledge) to enable transformation, whether it takes the form of disintegration or transcendence. Echoing fellow critics in Dennis Barone's collection of essays on Paul Auster, *Beyond the Red Notebook,* Tim Woods suggests that "Auster is particularly intrigued by the experience of living at the edge of one's physical and emotional endurance, of ridding oneself of the weight of the body, of freeing the mind from its corporeal shell, and the concomitant experience of a transcendent mental activity" (119).

Indeed, when the body begins to give in to starvation the life of the mind transforms from a burning flame to a pilot light. After an initial sharpness and euphoria,

the mind becomes weary and aimless as the body makes its last ditch effort to insist upon living: pain announces itself, shoots up through the legs, starting with feet that hit the floor with barely enough fat padding; infections set into the chest, sinuses, laboring already difficult breathing; black outs become more frequent, terrifying and yet comforting as the creeping darkness wraps around the eyes, rendering nausea, a quickening pulse, sweat squeezing from cold hands. Even here, in this noisy silence of the body's insistence upon being seen at last, the mind still tries to separate from itself, and watch this drama unfold. An "art of hunger" is "an art of need, of necessity, of desire," which are, paradoxically, all the things that terrify the anorectic subject. Here, "[c]ertainty yields to doubt, form gives way to process. There can be no arbitrary imposition of order, and yet, more than ever, there is the obligation to achieve clarity" (*Art of Hunger* 18). The mind's desire to become one with itself is manifested in the quest to achieve purity above and beyond the body; and Auster's narrative, in the form of critical essays that always return to this subject of purity, enacts a process of mourning that winds through the surfaces and hidden depths of all of his narratives.

Hunger/starvation, usually in Auster's narratives a solitary action/condition, surfaces, for example, in the 1987 novel *In the Country of Last Things,* as a macabre game, a means for clarity/purity, as well as a ritual means for starting over again after great loss. Amid the ruin and clutter of a post-nuclear mass culture, Auster's characters seek a ritual of cleansing, in which the ascetic process of starvation provides a clarity of mind, thus an opening, a rebirth, of sorts. Here, as Auster points out, starvation, "which opens up the void, does not have the power to seal it up" (*Art of Hunger* 13). What Maud Ellmann calls the "wisdom of starvation" is also the understanding that this "outside" yet "inside"

reality (the empty stomach) "can never be annulled because it occupies the very core of what we call the self" (Ellmann 33). If this core is also a void, then birth and death are one and the same; starving is at once a performance, or a spectacle, and an intensely private, solitary action, wherein the stomach is an analogue for the locked room, which, like the labyrinth, is a lure of transformation.

The process of mourning in the quest for purity (perfection) is not surprising in the journey of the (male) artist/Daedalus who deigns to rise over his creation and transcend the crude matter of the body: in doing so, depth is sacrificed for surface, and upon the surface, the artist can only see other versions of himself, thereby transforming his quest into an obsession with perfection. Through the act of self-sacrifice, and one's willingness to offer him/herself up to agony, the starving individual is given the opportunity to use her/his mind to discipline the soft body, overcome its limitations, vulnerability and needs, and "to become the self-sufficient male icon offered in American culture as the embodiment of self-hood" (Heywood 6). This "splitting" between mind and body lies not only at the "heart" of Western narrative; it also supports the systematic and historical enslavement of the body and continual emphasis on the mind's superiority, thus supporting an illusory separateness that stalls out, or rather, dams up, transformation.

In every writer/artist's work that Auster examines, the author experiences a confrontation with himself, with his mind as well as his body, as the text transforms into a hall of mirrors (of repetition). Such a hall of mirrors evokes and exploits the obsession with food and mirrors (refusing or ingesting the world, seeing the self everywhere) that plague the anorectic, who sees the body in terms of mathematics: pounds, width, length,

calories, clothing size, size of portions in relation to the size of the plate. Anorexia teaches one to distrust numbers, which, like mirrors, supposedly do not lie. The clock, the scale, size tags in clothing, portions in proportion to plate size--these are magnified and thus constitute a warped sense of identity. Auster's passage evokes for me a memory, in which after locking the bathroom door I would pull out the cold, copper-metal scale that was always shoved back out of view under the dampness of the sink like an unnamed artifact. The elongated, black numbers fanned out and wobbled when I stood on it, trying to control my breath and the growing panic--for by now it was the scale that determined my worth. It was the scale, with the smooth silver handle that divided its gold frame, and the red needle--always constant, always true, that would point to the indifferent numbers, stiff and brutal in their cold objectivity.

The transformation in/of narrative in Auster's collection reveals "an exemplary tale of one man's search for perfection," the outcome of a book having morphed into a quest: "[w]here no possibility exists, everything becomes possible again" (*Art of Hunger* 255/73). Cold but not altogether objective, Auster's narrative attempts to explore how starvation is akin to walking the high-wire, wherein both are "an art of solitude, a way of coming to grips with one's life in the darkest, most secret corner of the self" (*Art of Hunger* 255). To face death without "wanting" to die: to face, rather one's fear of death, and to find the place where the mind meets itself in the quest to deny mortality, is for Auster "a life lived to the very extreme of life...that doesn't hide from death, but stares it straight in the face" (258). Indeed, to return from the edges of starvation, as from the dizzying heights of the high-wire, is to have "kissed" death in a sense, and in turn, to potentially witness the self being born anew: to, in effect, have returned as a kind of

veteran from a war with the self. Yet, in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), a "critical memoir" that explores the loss of Auster's enigmatic, absent father, and respectively, "A's" own experience as a father, the reader learns that the act of writing, like the act of detection, serves as a means for keeping open the wound (that which ignites a sense of loss, incompleteness, and creates need, desire) that brings one to writing in the first place.

The Invention of Solitude

One winter, twenty years after my father's death, my brother Tim and I visited the cemetery where he is buried. As we stood under the bright morning sun, Tim asked me to take a photograph of him standing next to the grave stone. As I later gazed upon the photograph, I was struck by the split image of my brother on one side of the photo and the gravestone, its etched writing barely visible, on the other: I could see where the sun streamed down on Tim in his dark winter coat, the grave in a morning shadow, which rendered the appearance of both figures being at once inside separate rooms, and being outside in the simultaneously light and dark cemetery. I realized that the last time my brother had been to the grave site was the day of our father's funeral, when my mother was nine months pregnant with him. The uncanny co-existence of absence and presence in one place--the simultaneity of the stark grave that betrays the historical distance between me and my father, and the alive earth and sunshine warming my body, pumping my blood, reminding me of my aliveness, and thus the ability to think these thoughts--struck me as somehow unfathomably tragic, and/thus meaningful, full of intangible promise, imbuing time with greater significance. It is difficult to walk away from this "impossible symmetry," the knowledge that any kind of transformation always already involves a

kind of death.

Described by Timothy Adams as a narrative photograph album, Auster's memoir, *The Invention of Solitude* is an act of detection embedded in a ritual of grieving, of picking up the minuscule traces left behind by a father-shadow whose past is, like memory, littered with gaps and the hint of grisly tragedy: tracing the legacy between his grandfather, father, and himself, Auster uses photographs "not to reinforce memory but to invent memory" (Adams 39). In this memoir, which moves back and forth between the personal and the critical, Auster enacts a kind of ritual of attempted resurrection, a coming to terms with the facts, not only the meanings, that lay embedded in the "real world" of chance, coincidence, and an acceptance of meaninglessness while seeking meaning:

> Like everything else, his life is so fragmented that each time he sees a connection between two fragments he is tempted to look for a meaning in that connection. But to give it a meaning, to look beyond the bare fact of its existence, would be to build an imaginary world inside the real world, and he knows it would not stand. At his bravest moments, he embraces meaninglessness as the first principle, and then he understands that his obligation is to see what is in front of him (even though it is also inside him) and to say what he sees. (*Invention* 147)

This seeking is inherently tied to a deeper hunger that is borne by absence; in this case, the living absence of Auster's father, whose distance and silence in life always seemed to foreshadow his death. This, for Auster as a young boy, was a cut on the invisible interior of the body, a wound of which he could not speak until much later in his life.

In *The Invention of Solitude,* as he enters the darkness to assuage the wound suffered as result of being a son and a father in the wake of his father's absence, Auster writes of being plagued with stomach pains as a child: the "insurrection" at his center, which he and his mother failed to quell. This pain, alongside a hunger for his father's presence, is brought to the consciousness of narrative, where Auster creates an opening in the labyrinth of his searching. The stomach, as I have discussed elsewhere, is the center of "bodily seeing," and becomes for Auster a complicated site of mourning, as well. When wounded, the stomach becomes the center of vision, or the silent scream from the center of the body, wherein the unspeakable is at once absorbed and released. Similarly, and as we see in the following chapter, the wounded soldier, as the disappearing object at the "center" of the Robbe-Grillet's novel, *In the Labyrinth,* becomes the process, thus meaning, through death, which is caused by a hit in the center of his being/body--his stomach (259).

Auster is haunted by the photographic relics of his recently deceased father, and these relics embody the enigma of absence and presence in the shape of a man who the author is not certain was even there to "begin" with. Further, the relics signify for Auster "meaning only in function of the life that makes use of them. When that life ends, the things change, even though they remain the same" (*Invention* 10). Photographs signify not only the dead (even if the subject is still alive) image (signifying absence), but also how that image is transformed by one's gazing upon it, thus evoking memory, imagination, association, etc.--in other words, thus re-creating narrative from a space of present absence. Auster's empty family photo album, which is entitled, "'This is Our Life: The Austers,'" *The Invention of Solitude* chronicles the author-son's bare-bones, futile search

for meaning, and does so by balancing between the author's impulse to interpret the clues to his father's life, and his relief upon simply accepting the enigma of his father's opaque existence, which has made his own life possible.

Auster's memoir is not only an unconscious template for *The New York Trilogy*, but also a loop in a labyrinth, wherein one can see across meaning, the ghostly space where s/he once stood. As a graphic, "collage-able" emblem of transformation, the photograph complicates and reveals the inside/outside by way of presenting the viewer with life and death at one site. Photographs present viewers with images to invest in order to avoid death--to render a kind of immortality to the subject of the photograph. At the same time, the mortality of the subject, as well as that of ourselves, is reflected back at the viewer, anamorphically (define). In *Camera Lucida* (1981), Barthes asks, "What does my body know of Photography?" (9) The "I" of the body "knows" both death and life: like the uncanny maternal body, upon which one gazes and thinks, "I've been there before," the photograph evokes a feeling, or "longing to inhabit," as well as a sense of always being on the outside (*Camera* 40). This clear evocation of the uncanny heralds the moment when one realizes s/he is neither subject nor object but a subject who feels s/he is becoming an object--who then experiences a micro-version of death: that is, truly becoming a specter (14).

In the long, lonely winter-narrative that is *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster-the-son-writer mines the labyrinthine history of his father's family, thus implicating the often hopelessly elusive complexity of an otherwise hopeful archaeology that would bring clues, like artifacts, to the surface. In the first half, "Portrait of an Invisible Man," Auster attempts to piece together the after-death presence, out of the pre-death absence, of his

father, Samuel. The centerpiece of this searching is the embedded narrative that surrounds the powerful photograph of his father as a baby, sitting on his mother's lap, and it is apparent that the right side of the photo has been ripped and then taped back together, so that Auster's grandfather is absent. The rip has the angry appearance of a wound, or gash, and this, as well as the stern expressions of Samuel's mother and siblings, further emphasizes the ghostliness of the grandfather's fingertips still present in the photo, "as if he were trying to crawl back into the picture from some hole deep in time" (*Invention* 34). This rip in time exemplifies what Barthes terms the *punctum,* which "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me...that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is important to me)" (*Camera* 26-27). Distinguished from the *studium,* which elicits "general enthusiastic commitment...but without special acuity," and functions as the "theme" of the photograph (what we are "supposed" to see), the *punctum* is "a subtle beyond" and moves the viewer like lightning rips through the sky (*Camera* 59).

Similarly, evoking the grotesque image of the grandfather as a fragmented body part, returning from the realm of the repressed, the photograph has the uncanny appearance of being taken *after* the grandfather's death, and serves as a reminder that time, like history, like absence and presence, can merge and blend on the way up or down. Perhaps the question is not absence, but the presence of *traces*, such as the rip in the photograph, and the wounds, these traces evoke. Kept a secret for years, the facts of the Auster case "come to light" when Auster meticulously studies the newspaper articles that he now must integrate into his narrative: "It is not that I am afraid of the truth. I am not even afraid to say it. My grandmother murdered my grandfather. The facts themselves do

not disturb me any more than might be expected. The difficult thing is to see them in print--unburied, so to speak, from the realm of secrets and turned into a public event" (*Invention* 35).

The violence of his grandfather's death, along with the strangeness of the photograph that chronicles his absence, propels Auster to identify, as a reader would, with his subject, his father, Samuel: "A boy cannot live through this kind of thing without being affected by it as a man" (*Invention* 36). Ironically, only after his father's death can Auster "freely" examine the events that shaped his father's life, and enter the mystery that connects him to his father's absence, which is the subject of the second photograph shown in the memoir, and featured on the front cover of the text. Here, his father, Samuel, is seated at a table in darkness, and appears to be facing four other reflections of himself. The trick photograph, featured on the cover of the book itself, creates the illusion of there being more than one man, and "denies the possibility of eye contact among the various selves. Each one is condemned to go on staring into space, as if under the gaze of the others, but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man" (*Invention* 31).

The photograph is also the subject of the second half of the narrative, "The Book of Memory," wherein the narrative shifts to a third person narrator, who describes the actions and thoughts of "A."-as-father, scholar in a dark, cold room, writing, distanced from himself via his hunger. Instead of reaching into his past, "A." reaches across the labyrinth of infinite possibilities rendered by intertextuality: an exhaustive litany of dates, and myriad reflections on historical figures, the deaths of children all over the world, commentaries on chance, and, like small chambers in a labyrinth, fascinating but dead-

ended, how we are all haunted by history, by the actions of our ancestors, of rooms, whole buildings, forever inhabited by ghosts, memories, and a dusty silence.

In Auster's narrative, the autobiographical distance thinly veiled, and is, like Kubrick's film, ruled by an impossible symmetry, wherein the reality reflected by that narrative is "an infinite series of containers within containers. For here again, in the most unlikely of places [one example the death of Yankee baseball captain Thurman Munson], the theme had reappeared: the curse of the absent father" (*Invention* 117). Ironically, while the writer-son, fragmented and broken, struggles against the "the modern nothingness" that he longs to embrace, the narrative flows smoothly from his pen, intact, a beautiful, hopeless circle around and around an elusive meaning, a possible depth, an opening from death, much like the invisible, yet present door "in" the Robbe-Grillet's tavern painting and endless, unchangeable history of *The Shining.*

Auster-as-writer-narrator is conscious that he is trapped inside a labyrinth, and all the research into his family's past will not change that, but the searching will yield an acceptance, and in that, a transformation. In attempting to create a presence out of an enigmatic absence (a literal rip, or *punctum,* in history), Auster has transformed longing into meaning, and has made conscious to the matters of his own soul. Barthes claims that this act of writing is "that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (*Image* 142). In *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster begins already in this space, in the wake of his father's (his subject's) death, holding an empty photo album, sifting through the barely-there traces left behind. But in writing the memoir, Auster relinquishes the search for the philosopher's stone, the elusive, marble truth that later haunts *The New*

York Trilogy, and claims even a "feeling of magic" in the power of transforming words--a power available in any language (*Invention* 160). The beautiful and disturbing aspect of the critical memoir (read and written) is that it forces reader and writer alike to claim a place in history, upon the surface of the fleeting culture we know, and in the ever-transforming order of things. To claim this place is to claim also a rootedness, even where there seems to be no ground beneath.

II. "Taking the Bull By the Horns": Walking a Labyrinth of Disappearance in *The New York Trilogy*

To be inside that music, to be drawn into the circle of its repetitions: perhaps that is a place where one could finally disappear.-- Paul Auster, City of Glass

Stories without endings can do nothing but go on forever, and to be caught in one means that you must die before your part in it is played out. My only hope is that there is an end to what I am about to say, that somewhere I will find a break in the darkness. The hope is what I define as courage, but whether there is reason to hope is another question entirely.
--Paul Auster, The Locked Room

Throughout *The New York Trilogy*, Auster's detective-protagonists continually attempt to come to terms with the possibilities that "knowing too much" about nothing or everything offer and deny, most of the time wishing to avoid knowing altogether: as Blue, in the second novel, *Ghosts*, muses, "There is something nice about being in the dark...There is something thrilling about not knowing what is going to happen next" (*Ghosts* 182). Very much the prototypical, contemporary dilemma faced by Oedipa Maas, of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49,* this situation makes the reader aware of her own position of ignorance, of "being in the dark," where an "objective knowledge" breaks down. The structure of Pynchon's novel, like the enigmatic Tristero, doesn't *convey* information or meaning--it only refers back to itself, seeming to say, *I am content*:

"[b]ehind the hieroglyphic sheets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth" (Pynchon 181). Official and underground systems of communication operate in the same way (they mirror each other, but there is a difference): one *believes* it delivers content, the other is a reflection on pure process *of* delivering content. The exchange of envelopes without content represents the postmodern condition of reproduction, repackaging, where nothing new is produced, but the action of repetition eventually does lead to a change in the signal: a quantitative change that eventually leads to qualitative change.

The Underground logic of the novel is that there is always the possibility of transformation; this is what Oedipa awaits at the end, but the transformation is not revealed, it is unimaginable--non-representable. This condition, a kind of "stalling out" of transformation, could be an example of what Peter Brooks refers to as "the 'dilatory space' of narrative [Barthes]...the space of retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation--is the place of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through" (Brooks 92). Oedipa Maas illustrates the tension between hero and victim; in this way, she becomes a kind of "Everyman" who discovers that the stamp has no meaning in itself but to accentuate itself: its envelope is a container and a screening for the contents, which eventually do not exist in the novel. This kind of de-centered narrative, according to Fredric Jameson, "makes it virtually impossible for us to reach (in our reading) and thematize those official 'subjects' which float above the text but cannot be integrated into our reading of the sentences" (23). The focus is instead on form, which turns out to be more key than the message; further, the focus progressively centers on the notion that there *is* a system (even though we cannot

see or feel its contours) that transmutes a message.

The quest for meaning, detection, and the search for identity are problematized by the disappearance of key elements of detective fiction--namely, the detective, criminal, and solution to the crime. Likewise, our common conception of an "interpretable" plot-line is disrupted--a conception that, as Brooks posits, "derives from...most of all, perhaps...the great nineteenth century narrative tradition that, in history, philosophy, and a host of other fields as well as literature, conceived certain kinds of knowledge and truth to be inherently understandable only by way of sequence...temporal understanding" (Brooks xi). Along with the uneasiness, or "suspicion of plot" that came with the rise of Modernism, has come an awareness of that uneasiness--a sense of our "dependence" on them: we still read forward, seeking "in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intuition and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning" (Brooks 7, xiii). Further, where the act of reading parallels that of detection, it has been widely asserted that Poe not only originated the detective story but also the "'reader of detective fiction'...from the reader's point of view, I am following (as I read), and mirroring, as I follow, the movement of a man who is detective, criminal, and victim in one" (Merivale 107).

Although aware, at different points, that they are getting in over their heads, the characters in Auster's *The New York Trilogy* are compelled to wander through the maze-cities, "noting that the signs that fate strews along [their] path is the only way to combat the arbitrary: suddenly, in the randomness of existence, a certain order appears just below the surface...[t]here is meaning in the world, but this meaning is only suggested, never clearly expressed" (Bruckner 29). The desire to "read" meaning, or order into the act of

wandering/writing is inevitable, and yet, important to keep in check, lest one lose his/her footing on that figurative high wire, on which psychic balance depends. Significantly, the search for clues and patterns betrays the nature of mystery itself: that there is no depth, only surfaces, only a text that is self-referential. As Stephano Tani suggests in *The Doomed Detective*, the post-World War II rise of the anti-detective novel "decentralizes and deconstructs the old rules that already had been undermined by the hard-boiled school [of detection] and by Naturalism" (150). In addition, this transformation, according to Bernd Herzogenrath, is characterized by a move from the modernist notion of "city as machine" to "city as text" (52). The skyscraper, like Peter Stillman, Sr.'s "tower of Babel," evokes "the illusion of the transcendental ego...omniscient author, [who has] absolute control over the perfectly readable text of the city" (54). Likewise, Daniel Quinn-as-detective-writer-posing as detective relies on a map of words, in order to catch his quarry; yet, the perspective on which a map depends is impossible, for, according to Stephen E. Alford, "it represents a space from which perspective has been removed" (Alford 627). Quinn's desire to transcend the ground and place himself in the perspective of omniscience is akin to one's desire to rise above the earthly needs of food, water, and sleep: it cannot be done without spiraling into madness and death.

Like the city, as we discover in *City of Glass*, and examined at length in John T. Irwin's *Mystery to a Solution* and J. Hillis Miller's *Ariadne's Thread*, the very image of the labyrinth presents a potential endlessness, as well as a kind of "linear" circularity, to the search for meaning, in which the quest for identity is overcome by seemingly relentless repetition that precipitates the "intellectual vertigo" that overcomes Quinn, as well as the reader who ventures into the text. In addition, the symbolic presence of the

locked room, like the labyrinth a prominent figure in traditional detective fiction as a site for the evidence (dead body, killer) functions as both a hiding place and prison. In Auster's trilogy, we come to find that the locked room inside the labyrinth is also a metaphor for the story itself: it gives us an "outer" surface, but we cannot penetrate its depths; further, we are not certain that any depth even exists. Significantly, in detective fiction locked rooms are "places where the deepest understanding of the self is possible, but where one might just as easily (or as a result) slip beyond unitary subjectivity entirely" (Bernstein 144). According to John Irwin, in both the labyrinth and locked room motifs, "the problem is one of understanding how an apparently exitless enclosure may be exited, in one instance by following a figurative clue that leads to the discovery of the criminal's 'means of egress,' in the other by following a literal clew that leads out of the maze" (Irwin 179). Like the text itself, the labyrinth denies a linear means to clarity; the protagonists of *The New York Trilogy* all experience this: they realize that they "can no longer depend on the old procedures. Clues, legwork, investigative routine--none of this is going to matter anymore" (*Ghosts* 175).

Configured as a labyrinth that has no center (which would point us to a solution, or "key" insight or epiphany), the anti-detective novel offers the reader this sense of "perpetual possibility" that implies both freedom and restriction: for the postmodern detective, as well as the reader, "choice is a limitation of freedom and of the power of creativity as it turns the potential into the actual" (Tani 46). The disappearances and rituals of detection throughout the trilogy signify a kind of "anxiety" about finding the center of the mystery, when perhaps the mystery itself is the center, the dissolving "point" of the narrative.

The contemporary configuration of the quest is not the opposite of its predecessor, which is based on a depth model of meaning. Rather, the quest is now on a different trajectory: instead of a quest *for* meaning, it transforms into a quest *on,* or *across* meaning: language and signs replace identity and intention. Instead of containing an elusive "truth" to be discovered, the text *is* the quest, the circular play of words, symbols and identities refer back to themselves throughout: "when he is compelled to go beyond the surface, to derive some insight from his observations, to hypothesize about underlying meaning, [the detective/writer] finds that things don't 'yield themselves' in reality as easily as they are made to in fiction" (Sorapure 78). He cannot but fail here, because he remains, however unconsciously, steeped in the notion of the epic, or fairy tale, which was supposed to teach us something universal about life itself: a moral, lesson, or deeper meaning about our existence.

City of Glass emphasizes "a kind of outside of the text (chance, the real, the unsayable), a kind of hope for a 'transparent language,'" a hope that implies a "lack, which serves as the basis of both life and fiction, fiction not as a mimetic mirror-image of life, but fiction *as* reality, reality *as* fiction" (Herzogenrath 11). In moving across the surface of the city as text, *City of Glass*'s Daniel Quinn struggles against a "depth reading" of his case; in turn, it becomes our struggle, for the case/search for meaning becomes overshadowed by and synonymous with the problem of identity as character addresses reader and author (and himself): "to remember who I am. To remember who I am supposed to be. I do not think this is a game. One the other hand, nothing is clear. For example, who are you? And if you think you know, why do you keep lying about it? I have no answer. All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not

my real name" (*CG* 49). The problem of identity and the search for meaning and transformation of loss into insight is perhaps most evident in the presence of intertextuality, which, like the red thread/notebook, weaves in and out of the narrative, paradoxically offering Quinn and the reader more clues, or further strands on which to hold for grounding a kind of literary analysis. In postmodern fiction, Fredric Jameson observes that intertextuality is "a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and...the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history" (20). In this configuration, intertextuality functions as a means for transforming "history" into an inexhaustible present, wherein any "grounding" in analysis is transformed into a current of referents that hearken to connections that do not stay still long enough for one to hold onto.

This condition (of intertextuality) famously plays out in Auster's narratives, and is analogous to the act of walking, which both Quinn and Stillman, Sr. do as they collect/connect found relics and fragments of their contemporary objects, language, and selves. On the surface, they appear to be the traditionally reliable clues that the detective utilizes in order to break the code, solve the case, come to a deeper understanding of the history being created in the moments of his searching. In *City of Glass,* these "clues" and references, particularly those of nineteenth century American authors like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, are so obvious that one might be tempted to dismiss them; however, perhaps this obviousness is a means to see more clearly the surface nature of the quest as it relates to contemporary narrative: that depth-readings have been quite possibly exhausted, especially if intertextual clues do not yield a coherent pattern. Or, as Brooks suggests, the "possibility of following a narrative and making sense of it, belong

to the reader's literary competence, his training as a reader of narrative. The reader is, in this view, himself virtually a text, a composite of all that he has read, or heard read, or imagined as written" (Brooks 19).

For reader, writer, and character alike, the quest/text and its apparent lack of solutions "stands for the lack of answers to any question of essence, knowledge, or meaning. What the word 'really' is, or who 'I' really am, are questions not only unanswerable, but essentially not even formulatable" (Merivale 103). Like Quinn, the reader becomes seduced by the notion that further understanding will ensure clarity. As the reader follow Quinn follow the murderous father/criminal and "fallen king" Stillman, Sr. through the streets of New York, s/he may share the difficulty resisting the notion that

> human behavior could be understood, that beneath the facade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation. But after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman than when he first started following him. He had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability. Instead of narrowing the distance that lay between him and Stillman, he had seen the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes. (*CG* 80)

"Trained" as a detective writer on "gumshoe" detective stories, Quinn mistakenly assumes that cold hard facts will add up to a solution. Similarly, Jack Torrance makes the mistake of assuming that five months of solitude is all he needs in order to be a prolific

writer. Further, Auster's own search for the missing fragments of his father's life in *The Invention of Solitude* mirrors the plight of the "postmodern" detective in search of a transformation that would yield meaning to his searching. To the detective's horror, the search brings him closer to himself--to his body, to hunger, to pain, to a perhaps traumatic past that seems to be written upon every clue, behind every "fact" that would in effect "solve" the metaphysical puzzle that is his life.

To solve the case would be a way for Quinn to, in effect, "solve life," or, more specifically, somehow "fix" the past by saving a life in the present, suggesting that, perhaps paradoxically, one may need to move "outside" her/himself in order to attain some level of self-knowledge, while moving toward the "inside" of her/himself in order to find "the prism of memory or separation. That which is closest is often the most enigmatic, and distance, like mourning and wandering, is also an instrument of redemption" (Bruckner 28). Quinn's knowing "he could not bring his own son back to life, but at least he could prevent another from dying" (*CG* 41) reveals a kind of "uncertain certainty" that manifests itself in the "interview" of Peter Stillman, Jr., the now-adult son once abused and neglected by his father, and now, as perceived by Quinn, needing the protection of a kind of "father-surrogate," another role, like detective, that Quinn clearly, if not unconsciously, falls into. Peter Stillman, Jr., like a ventriloquist's dummy in his distinctly white appearance, displays a kind of Warhol-esque, "rigid yet expressive," fragmented presence, or demeanor, and embodies, through his image and speech, the transparent, yet depthless quality of the text's narrative (*CG* 17). He is human yet resembles an automaton, and his controlled, robot-like, "fitful" childlike

movement contrasts his descriptive, linguistically beautiful, adult-yet-childlike-honesty-driven speech:

> Sooner or later I will run out of words, you see. Everyone has just so many words inside him. And then where will I be? I think I would like to be a fireman after that. And after that a doctor. It makes no difference. The last thing I will be is a high-wire walker. When I am very old and have at last learned how to walk like other people. Then I will dance on the wire, and people will be amazed. Even little children. That is what I would like. To dance on the wire until I die. (*CG* 22)

Like Pinnochio, a figure with whom Auster is concerned in *The Invention of Solitude*, Stillman, Jr. describes himself as "the puppet boy," not wholly real, somehow "new every day" (21). Here emerges, according to Marc Chenetier, a language stripped of transcendence: "[s]hort of poetic rebellious attempts, the language of the Father imposes its authority, forbidding any construction of the self. Once the Father's authority has been removed, such phenomena as Peter Stillman, Jr.'s glossolalia can emerge; whenever it asserts itself anew, it dictates the normative clichés of father-son conversations" (Chenetier 42).

As a blank, white surface/page, the wounded son reflects an uncanny feeling in his character as the text offers mirror/double reflections of itself, other works, tangling plot-lines. In turn, the text reflects the reader's perplexity right back to her, back "out there" from within the "container" of the text, as Stillman's fragmented narrative confounds Quinn's understanding and reminds him of the death of his son, also named Peter. One of

many disappearing (or disappeared) fathers in Auster's narratives, Quinn is, from the outset of *City of Glass*, already dissociated from his existence, in a kind of twilight, or in between state of inside/outside his life/the text. Numb with apparent and proliferating grief and boredom over the deaths of his wife and son, "he no longer wished he was dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it. He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little begun to fascinate him--as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a post-humus life" (*CG* 6).

Quinn's obsession with the Stillman "case" is not necessarily a desire to apprehend the criminal, as his hard-boiled detective stories indicate. Instead, or in addition, his obsession lies within his desire to *understand*, to move toward some recognition of a world that has been lost to him (elusively indicated by the deaths of his wife and son), and a kind of indifference masked as a desire to die (or just disappear). The reader, like Quinn, is potentially "disillusioned" because she too imagines that "the key to good detective work [is] a close observation of details" (*CG* 80). But, as Brooks cautions, "...once [an] interpretation has been made, the reader turns the line around and interprets neighbors and self according to models encountered in novels" (Brooks 97), a natural but problematic means of access to the self, for once we arrive at the self-reflexive, contemporary text, or "hall of mirrors," we potentially see the self everywhere. Further, Miller suggests that "any novel already interprets itself. It uses within itself the same kind of language, encounters the same impasses, as are used and encountered by the critic...[who] may fancy himself safely and rationally outside the contradictory language of the text, but he is already entangled in its web" (Miller 23). Both the sinister and

potentially liberating aspects of the labyrinth are enacted and embodied in Quinn's ritual, which echoes J.G. Frazer's haunting claim in *The Golden Bough*: that "[t]he advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes" (Frazer 854).

Quinn's obsession with clue (or clew, the thread that the detective follows through the maze of the case/story) precipitates his apparent mental breakdown; however, it is the reader's obsession with interpretation (if she has a penchant for finding answers, meaning, understanding root causes) that leads her down a path of joyous frustration, or seduces him/her into continuing to "read" for further clues that could illuminate the meaning of the story. Early in the novel, Quinn muses, "The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell" (*CG* 3). The seemingly insignificant and self-conscious remark that the text itself seems to make reveals instead the possibility of a reader to assume the role of the detective, searching in vain for clues, signs, that would lead, or lure, her toward a meaning beyond or behind the words themselves. The challenge the reader, as well as Quinn, takes up is resisting a traditional reading of the text/mystery, one that insists the meaning lies underneath the clues, that it can even be found, by simple deduction and attention to detail: the trilogy's "protagonists are never sure whether anything actually exists behind the mirror, through the looking glass" (Bernstein 136), which, like language, "is a surface promising depth" (Herzogenrath 67).

In attempting to seek order/meaning in detection, or literary analysis, we find, along with Quinn, that language, ever-fluid and -changing, like identity, cannot be "mastered," or "truly known." For Quinn, Stillman, Sr., author *and* reader, "the dilemma...is a philosophical one: how to proceed from the raw material of words to

transcendent metaphysical work" (Merivale and Sweeney 13). This transformation of "raw material" to "metaphysical work" manifests itself as ritual, in the triad of reader, character, and writer/author/storyteller: in a kind of alchemy of narrative, language and experience become blurred in Auster's novel, drawing the reader into a kind of identification with not only the character, not only with the writer, but with the "spirit," if you will, of the text.

Quinn's shifting identity moves him, along the surface, toward the possibility, through becoming "Auster," of "being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts. And if there were no thoughts available to him, if his own inner life had been made inaccessible, then there was no place for him to retreat to...He consequently had to remain solely on his own surface, looking outward for sustenance" (*CG* 75). The detective writer's creation of a "triad of selves" (including himself, William Wilson as Poe-influenced pen-name, and gumshoe cliché name Max Work as his created character), the act of detection "becomes a quest for identity, as the mystery outside releases the mystery inside the detective" (Sorapure 76). Further, in becoming "yet again somebody else [when he claims to be "Paul Auster"], Quinn hopes to finally return to himself" (Herzogenrath 30). In searching for identity, Quinn's position becomes one of "submission to the 'grip' of language rather than of mastery" in his "creating" his quest for identity (29).

The indeterminacy of language, Quinn's "play" with identity (not merely personas), and the quest for meaning within these elements lead to a kind of "cleaving," a word which in itself is ambiguous, due to its paradoxical meaning--both the joining together and breaking apart--that obsesses Stillman, as well as Quinn, who searches for

coherence in the face of impossibility. A key example of this contradictory implication of meaning lies in the historicity of the Tower of Babel as a paradoxical symbol of the unity and separation of humankind, via language. Further, the balance between such binaries as mind/body, seen/seer, meaning/meaninglessness, death/transcendence, are indicative of the constant tension that keeps Quinn on the quest to break open the "case," the writer on the quest to complete the self-reflexive task of writing, and the reader on the quest to decipher the possibilities and patterns within (and outside) the text.

The presence of the red notebook as a "red thread" functions within and throughout the trilogy as a means of tracing the city, and transforming confusion into knowledge. Quinn's increasing dependence on the red notebook reveals the spiraling thought-about-thought that causes him to ultimately face psychic and bodily death. Like an umbilical cord, of sorts, the red thread/red notebook is a "leader," a (plot) line cast out into the confusion and chaos of the city/text/world, so that Quinn might remain hinged to "reality." By contrast, if one examines and follows the clue/red thread as that which, in its unraveling, precipitates and indicates a kind of loss, she finds that this loss is paradoxically necessary in order for one to reach, or gain, a sense of understanding, however incomplete or seemingly unlimited. This paradox (one of many in the trilogy) is exemplified in a word that is, "more than any other, associated with the analytic detective story," and carries a double significance: as "clue," it is that which "leads out of a maze, perplexity, etc., or helps to solve a problem," as well as being *clew*, "a ball of thread or yarn: in Greek legend, a thread was used by Theseus as a guide out of the labyrinth" (Irwin 176). Symbolized as Ariadne's thread (and also described as such in the narrative theory of J. Hillis Miller), the clue/*clew* signifies both the labyrinth and a means of

retracing the labyrinth: "thread and maze are each the origin of which the other is a copy, or each is a copy that makes the other, already there, an origin" (Miller 16).

For Quinn, the red notebook functions as this "red thread," for not only does he hold it closely, as if it were a kind of lifeline, or connection to his "true" identity, but it also serves as an assurance, or extension of himself, proof of his existence, or possible emerging self (where death and birth merge). And, like the thread that winds through the labyrinth, thereby taking on the shape of that labyrinth, the red notebook allows Quinn to remember *where* he has been: like the physical act of writing, the thread turns back on itself, and even if its "straightforward linearity" is disrupted by repetition, it (the thread/line) can still be traced:

> The intelligibility of writing depends on this twisting and breaking of the line that interrupts or confounds its linearity and opens up the possibility of repeating that segment, while at the same time preventing any closure of its meaning...A straight line conveys no information beyond the fact that the line is there, like a continuous dial tone...Only the curved, crossed, or knotted line can be a sign making the line simultaneously something intelligible, conveying meaning, standing for something else, and at the same time repeatable, already a repetition. (Miller 8)

The red notebook is the means by which Quinn (and reader) attempts to complete that tracing (and re-tracing); in turn, it is this movement, and the *potential* for further movement (implied by his disappearance at the end of the novel) that compels the reader to follow the red notebook as not only the thread, or clue, but as the labyrinth/text itself.

As readers we rely on plot to assist us in sorting out the various codes, symbols (for example, the colors red and white show up consistently throughout the text, perhaps most enigmatically in the description of severely isolated children being obsessed with the colors, and intertextual references. Brooks defines plot as "the logic and dynamic of the narrative...an embracing concept for the design and intention of a narrative...a structuring operation elicited by, and made necessary by, those meanings that develop through succession and time" (Brooks 12). The very word "plot" implies a boundary, looped thread, or line of organization in all its definitions: some kind of measurement, plan, outline, or scheme that the reader (or detective) must decipher. Further, what animates the detective, and the reader of narrative, is what Brooks calls "*la passion du sens*, [which translates] as both the passion *for* meaning and the passion *of* meaning: the active quest of the reader for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle" (Brooks 19). Just as the plot functions as an "organizing line and intention of narrative," the red notebook functions for Quinn as a similar sort of line that he hopes to follow through the winding streets of the city. Similarly, the reader follows the trajectory of the plot "line" as s/he ventures into the text as labyrinth with the "certainty" that some unified meaning will emerge, if only s/he can piece together the fragmented clues that are scattered about like the wind-strewn bits of junk that Stillman, Sr. collects, before he, too, enigmatically disappears, blends into the text.

Quinn's own eventual merging/disappearing into the city/text at the end of the novel turns the plot line/thread back on itself, back to the reader, who becomes entangled in possibility that s/he too is potential fiction that can be "written out," as well: if

characters in a fictional work can be readers/spectators, then, as Borges claims, "'we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious'" (Barone 5). Just as the reader's choosing to read a text is motivated by a desire to gain knowledge, insight, or a sense of pleasure in understanding, Quinn's choosing to purchase the red notebook is motivated by the need for a sense of direction; he has an "irresistible urge" to pick up this particular red notebook, which appears to be like every other spiral notebook: "He was at a loss to explain to himself why he found it so appealing...something about it seemed to call out to him--as if its unique destiny in the world was to hold the words that came from his pen" (*CG* 46).

Quinn's first writing in the red notebook evokes a kind of birth ritual, or new discovery, of the pleasure in the act of writing, of "carving" out an existence, creating his own reality, making one's linear mark--line of words--on a "blank," or naked, surface. Simultaneously, the act evokes the aforementioned "textual weaving," in a sense, of a web, or a kind of horizontal/linear tapestry of joining lines and patterns; as he writes and draws, Quinn figuratively takes up the thread that will lead him through the winding labyrinth of his own design, and through the text into which he is written. As he draws the shades, takes off his clothes, clears his desk and places the red notebook at the center, noting that he has never written his initials in a notebook before, Quinn precipitates his own entry into the labyrinth.

In the contradictory, yet parallel acts of removing one's clothes (a regression/return to birth) and placing language on the page to create order (a progressive, "civilized" movement), we recognize through Quinn, "the mind's quest to comprehend itself totally, to be absolutely even or at one with itself" (Irwin 34). Even as Quinn

weaves his own web of clues, playing the "game" of identity with himself, he cannot avoid that in "constructing his own subjective labyrinth [he] also encounters within himself the withinness of others" (Miller 145). Quinn encounters the "real" of his desire through the search for Stillman, Sr., in the reminders of the loss of his family nearly everywhere he ventures. For example, after Stillman's disappearance, Quinn attempts, in a desperate move, to consult the "real" Paul Auster, and, confronted with the apparent contentment and harmony in Auster's family life,

> Quinn is abruptly reminded of his own desolate private situation. The split between... "the way up and the way down"--inherent in the figure of Poe's William Wilson, Quinn's pseudonym, is projected into the 'outside' and mirrored in the split between Quinn/Auster and "Auster." Quinn is thus profoundly faced with his own traumatic past, and the fragile condition of his actual "identity." (Herzogenrath 64-65)

Quinn's fumbling with Auster's son's (red) yo-yo embodies the twisting movement of the thread that connects him to Auster, yet is disrupted by the repetition of bringing back painful memories of his own lost family: in his "rewinding the spool for another attempt" (*CG* 121), Quinn faces what he wants and cannot have, and by doing so, comes to a deeper knowledge of himself; however, instead of embracing this knowledge, "[h]e pray[s] to himself for deliverance," and becomes yet more determined to solve the case (to keep walking), for this knowledge is only a reminder of his own mortality, and his apparent indifference toward it.

Quinn, by pure chance (a key trope of Auster's), has entered the case based solely

on the speculation that the father-criminal, Stillman, Sr. will once again hurt his son; however, the Stillman case becomes, for the reader-as-detective, the case of Quinn's own traumatic and repressed past, and perhaps most important, his fragile sense of identity, which is fragmentedly mirrored back to him with nearly every encounter, leaving him, finally, "nowhere...He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine" (*CG* 124). In turn, the general fragility of identity is mirrored back to the reader, as a condition of modern human existence, which is largely based on this wound of insight. Perhaps it is at this point in the novel when the reader suspects that Quinn has created his own "hidden depth," that he has become the mystery: there is no Minotaur at the center of the labyrinth, no father to kill nor apprehend. There is nothing to overcome/transform but the self.

The "cleaving" of identity play and detection creates a tension and doubling in the organizing line of the text: thread and "labyrinth, thread intricately crinkled to and fro as the retracing of the labyrinth that defeats the labyrinth but makes another intricate web at the same time--pattern is here super-imposed on patterns, like two homologous stories themselves" (Miller 12). The reader creates her own story as she absorbs Quinn's story, wherein the "high wire" of detection and writing one's identity, on which Quinn balances, seems to sway each time he reminds himself that "he had not really lost himself; he was merely pretending, and he could return to being Quinn whenever he wished...imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world" (*CG* 62). Paradoxically, Quinn's attempt to move farther from the "core" of his identity

in order to understand, to solve the mystery of depths in a city of surfaces, signifies the attempt to return to some fundamental knowledge of the self, to some assurance that to declare, "I am I" does matter. For the reader, "the persistence of the character who says, 'I have and am no I'" (Miller 98), reaffirms the notion of character, or the reader's belief in character/self--to somehow reaffirm the notion that depth readings do matter, even as s/he knows s/he can only scratch the surface.

The act of seeking out a coherent, inscribed pattern within the city/text ultimately produces the opposite effect to that which Quinn thought he would find: the letters that Stillman seems to "spell out," inscribe onto the text with his walking, both reveal and conceal any "true" meaning, in that the pattern, "while intricate and seemingly premeditated...seems to be completely without purpose" (Sorapure 81). Quinn attempts to trace an "order" or logic to Stillman's path, which appears to spell out "TOWEROFBABEL"; in the red notebook, Quinn draws this path, but comes no closer to discovering the meaning of the coherent yet nonsensical pattern that Stillman "writes" into the city/text. Enabled by the act of walking, a meditative, and transformative, via its repetitive and progressive movement, Quinn struggles between rejecting the light of logic and embracing the dark uncertainty of intuition that plays out in his movement through shifting identities. The more firmly he holds onto the three identities that he believes are necessary in order to "detect" clues, get closer to his object/quarry, the more tenuous his grip on the reality around him. Similarly, he relies on the red notebook, fooled by its apparent concreteness, in place of his intuition (hunger), which finally fails him when he ends up homeless, camped out near the Stillmans' apartment.

Even as city/text is inscribed with clues that would lead to a greater understanding of what happens to Quinn, it unravels with great speed in its final pages. After Quinn enters the Stillmans' apartment for what we assume will be the last time, he (the text) spins out a litany of seemingly direction-less thoughts that are simultaneously charged:

> He wondered what would have happened if he had followed the second Stillman instead of the first. He asked himself why Christopher, the patron saint of travel, had been decanonized by the Pope in 1969, just as the time of the trip to the moon. He thought through the question of why Don Quixote had not simply wanted to write books like the ones he loved--instead of living out their adventures...He thought about Peter Stillman and wondered if he had ever slept in the room he was in now. He wondered if the case was really over or if he was not somehow still working on it. He wondered what the map would look like of all step he had taken in his life and what word it would spell. (*CG* 155)

Near the end of the narrative, readers may experience a kind of anxiety upon examining this passage, as it captures and collects all the debris of the narrative and rapidly falls over an edge. A realized anxiety may come from the sense that it is beyond impossible to say everything that "needs" to be said in one's short life: that even though our minds can conceive of endless problems, desires, goals, solutions, and questions, the one-way current of time, to which all of us are subject, exacerbates our awareness of this impossibility.

What Quinn discovers is that the red notebook is not sufficient to contain these

myriad connections--that the authority borrowed by the space of the mere page is that of a language stripped of transcendence, chasing its own tail. The overwhelming stack of content, like Jack Torrance's "All work and no play..." verily drains, swirls into the dark, snow-filled night, of all the things Quinn could have put into the red notebook. This passage also evokes the unraveling journal of Anna Blume, in *In the Country of Last Things*, as she approaches the end of the text/letter:

> I've been trying to fit everything in, trying to get to the end before it's too late, but I see how badly I've deceived myself. Words do not allow such things. The closer you come to the end, the more there is to say. The end is only imaginary, a destination you invent to keep yourself going, but a point comes when you realize you will never get there. You might have to stop, but that is only because you have run out of time. You stop, but that does not mean you have come to the end. (*Country* 183)

As the mind rails against its eventual death, its potential tools for immortality--the pen and blank page--transform into a relic, a ruin that will go on existing beyond the life of the mind, and this vertiginous reality is the closest a writer can come to experiencing the end without an end. Tim Woods suggests that, in an "intriguing fashion, death, rather than functioning as a form of narrative closure, actually spices up the narrative and urges a new opening to life" (122).

Finally, Quinn lets go of the red notebook, and at the same time, lets go of the search for meaning, identity, seeming to embrace nothing but "the beauty of all this," all that has ever been written, and that which will never be possible to complete writing.

Appearing to have inscribed himself into the text, Quinn wonders "if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again" (*CG* 156-157). As the line of narrative gives way to "another" voice, that of a detective-like narrator, snow falls on the city, concealing its texture, as does Quinn's disappearance into Auster's text: "as unconscious, as rendering 'old traces invisible and, like the blank page, is ready to receive new ones'" (Herzogenrath 70).

The red notebook/red thread ultimately leads Quinn to a chamber within the labyrinth, where he has "entered the realm of the dream, the level of free-play" of words, where before, at the start of his quest, he seeks to secure order in "setting things down as they seem" (Herzogenrath 68). Here, the "interior space" of *City of Glass* "becomes the locked room of the psyche" (Bernstein 143), which in turn mirrors the inner/outer dynamic that prevents one from getting his/her bearings, so to speak, in the search for identity/meaning. Like the object of his quest, Quinn, in an attempt to somehow place himself outside it (via language/writing), "dissolves" into the text/labyrinth: "Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by the horns: Anywhere out of the world" (*CG* 132). The "bull" evokes the Minotaur at the center of the Daedalian labyrinth, and turns out to be a vanishing image, whether it is the Stillmans, or Quinn's own "character" identity. Even the act of writing cannot prevent "the image [from vanishing] as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done" (*CG* 86). Quinn pushes himself "to the limits of hunger and physical deprivation. This self-destructive passion, which barely avoids total annihilation, transforms this

confinement in one's room into a sort of asceticism without transcendence, without God" (Bruckner 28).

Further, the reader, who has followed the red notebook to the "center" of that still, blank room, reaches the understanding that "refraining from interpretation" is impossible, contrary to the narrator's claim. In effect, in the "end," in accepting the mystery within and along the surface of the text, it is the reader who then passes on the red thread by leaving it inside the room. This leaving signifies an acceptance, which demonstrates, as J. Hillis Miller reminds us, that "each...reading is unrepeatable in the sense that it leaves the reader in a different place from where s/he was before, unable even to go back to the starting point or ever to be the same as a reader again" (224). In a progressive reading of the narrative, it is possible that the reader identifies less with Quinn's own journey through the labyrinth "than with the strangeness[s/he] feels about [him/herself]--for whom being or becoming someone constitutes the ultimate difficulty" (Bruckner 31). Paul Auster-as-novelist clearly appreciates and expresses this "cleaving" of disappearance and emerging, beginning and ending, blank, passive (white) page, full, active (colorful) ink pen, as he wryly seems to pass on, to the questing detective-reader-character, the "red thread"/line of narrative that will (possibly) lead him/her through the game/text/labyrinth. Miller further reminds us that "the image of the line cannot be detached from the problem of repetition, [which] might be defined as anything that happens to the line to trouble its straightforward linearity: returnings, knottings, recrossings, crinklings to and fro, suspensions, interruptions" (Miller 17). In particular, returns of memory, traces of what has been left behind, inscribed into the past, affect this constant back and forth, hide and seek play between the inner and the outer.

A potential site of transformation is the reader who, at the end of *City of Glass,* also stands in that empty "impeccably clean" room, where, evoking Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth*, the narrative shifts its burden to a "conscious" narrator, another narrator enters the room to pick up the red notebook, and attempt to "unravel" the thread/clue to understanding what happened to Quinn. Yet, this "new" narrator, who I sense has somehow been with me all along, has already resigned himself to the futility of ever "fully" knowing: "it is impossible for me to say where [Quinn] is now" (*CG* 158). The reader cannot ignore the fact that Quinn himself is "inscribed" into the text, to intertextuality, try as he might to find or repress his own "inner world" (Herzogenrath 34-35). Even as the book comes to an end, we often find that "no discovery is final, no discovery is a solution but rather a tendency, an approximation, since the past is full of unsolved mysteries waiting for their detective" (Tani 46). Further, the renewal of the story the next night, and the next, would keep the fire going, so to speak, until the last ember dies. In this seemingly sheer repetition of narrative telling, the transformation occurs at the site of the reader. She has listened, she has imagined, she has read, in the meantime, other stories that would connect to the one being told, and she has integrated the stories into her memory. Reading contemporary narrative may very well depend on the disappearance of the writing subject, but it is up to the reader to create this "space" in which the disappearance can take place, and the potential for transformation can be opened.

The reader is left with a choice: she can assume the labyrinth is continuous, has no end, betraying a kind of grotesque, looping immortality and an Overlook Hotel-brand of eternity, or she can close the book that goes on being written, close the door behind her,

and begin a new labyrinth, wherein the traces of the red notebook are stepping stones, rather than secrets. As in the narratives of Kafka and Robbe-Grillet, Auster's narratives' resistance to providing "answers" or "definitive transformations" seems less crucial (or vexing) than their ambivalence. According to Barthes, writing (not "literature"), "by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text) liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law" (*Image* 147). This refusal is not a rejection of "God," necessarily, as human perceptions and experiences of "God" are infinite. It is, rather, a refusal of an evolutionary stage of *Western* humanity and its particular *version* of God (the singular, sky-god), and all that man has deemed important about that God. It is a refusal of a particular kind of narrative: a means for writing experience, and valorizing the hypostases which emerge from that experience.

The "vanishing" that takes place at the end only makes us more conscious of, and thus question what "end" means, and returns us to the precipice of infinite possibility: the space, or line between death and transcendence, wherein neither is a polar opposite of the other, for both imply potential ends, and potential beginnings. Further, Auster's keen attention to the dilemmas associated with "writing" absence into narrative reflects a sense of endless possibility: or infinity, which "unconsciously (and sometimes not so unconsciously) figures [in] the dominance of mind over matter; the concept of infinity serving in effect as a marker of the mind's transcendence of the three-dimensional world..." (Irwin 383). Perhaps finding the "center" of the labyrinth, like a goal-seeking

"archaeological" reading, is not as important as the movement itself, which, visible and configured on the surface, is besides death the truest thing we can know.

CHAPTER THREE

From the Analytic Detective to the Digestive Body in Christopher Nolan's *Memento*

It is my intention to suggest that for us, discontinuous beings that we are, death means continuity of being. --Georges Bataille, Eroticism

The body is cherished in the perverse certainty of its uselessness, in the total certainty of its non-resurrection... --Jean Baudrillard, America

The city is a labyrinth of hunger, and all his days are the same.
--Paul Auster, The Art of Hunger

In *Eroticism,* Georges Bataille writes, "For it is written that we must die that we may live" (230). Emphasizing the paradox of "being and passion," Bataille in turn emphasizes the process of becoming in the transformation from death to life to life and back again--the movement between presence and absence that characterizes a search for meaning. In the case of Christopher Nolan's 2001 film, *Memento*, which embodies and presents such movement, the passion in attempting to remember--that is, to *feel* what it is to love and be loved in return, or to enact revenge upon one who took away that object of love--surfaces as a struggle to transcend loss from within a progressively disintegrating memory. This chapter, as well as providing a "filmic link" between chapters that examine the texts of Paul Auster and Kathy Acker, is in some ways a "capstone" to this project, because it embodies and presents a transformation from the analytic detective's search for meaning and consequent dependence on clues, to the graphic body-centered narrative, wherein that search is inscribed on the skin of characters who undergo transformation in the *process* of searching for meaning.

As in Kubrick's *The Shining,* Auster's *City of Glass*, and as we see in the following chapter, Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, the present absence of a deceased woman's corpse (visible or not) drives the narrative process of transformation in *Memento*. Further, this process reveals a transformation from the make-shift detective-insurance salesman's outer reliance on clues and "facts" to the internalization of those clues: the body "speaks" in the form of an emaciated, tattooed man who has lost his short term memory, and as such, becomes at once victim, narrator, perpetrator, and the text being narrated (upon).

In an examination of Nolan's film, upon which as yet very little academic criticism exists, this chapter focuses is the interconnection between two key threads: 1) the two-way, simultaneous back and forth movement of the labyrinth, its links to the analytic, ascetic world of mind-based detection, to the ritualization and negotiation of the grieving process with memory loss, and to the ongoing problem of articulating the relation between writing and death; and 2) the narrative's enactment and presentation of the body's graphic transformation within the act of detection, wherein the illusion of mastery, or the ambition to uncover origin, gives way to a surrender to the process of searching. This surrender is experienced by Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) at the "end" of the film, and by the viewer who realizes that *Memento* does not embody the structure of a labyrinth as much as it embodies the digestive system itself.

In the search for meaning, questors/detectives shift between the "realms" of the analytic and the graphic. As we see in Auster's narratives, and in the following chapter, with Kathy Acker's fiction, such questors walk a balance between the hunger for truth and the satisfaction of that hunger: the resistance to, or attempt to transcend death and

the acceptance, even surrender, to death. The illusion of mastery/control, or ambition to uncover origin (an analytic move) gives way to the relinquishment of desire for meaning, in favor of surrender to the process itself. The reader shares the modernist detective's cluelessness and perspective in solving the case, while the postmodern detective searches for clues after the reader knows the punchline/motive. In the latter, we are removed: we observe, as voyeurs, as Others. In the former, we are one with the protagonist; we share his struggles. In *Memento*, we shift back and forth between these two, emphasizing perhaps the transformations always in play in how we define these narrative influences.

In the end, however, as I have realized, not unlike Daniel Quinn, that none of this matters; rather, there is a kind of "relief" or "release" in the relinquishment of the labyrinth, in which I am lost when I attempt to interpret *Memento* as a clear-cut detective story. In attempting to reconstruct the complex system of memory and loss in Leonard Shelby, the film undercuts viewers' notions of "trusting" what they see in front of them. Further, the narrative challenges and undermines perceptions of a master narrative while it simultaneously attempts to preserve that narrative's integrity. The film is at once cumulative, betraying a kind of receding origin (exemplified by the Polaroid "developing" in reverse at the film's "beginning"), and repetitive, moving at once backwards and forwards. In the first section of this chapter, "'A Sickness of Uncertainty': Grief and Ritual in the Two-Way Labyrinth," a brief reading of Marcel Proust's "Overture" from *Swann's Way* may further illuminate the connections between the two-way labyrinth and Leonard's quest to somehow "ritualize" his grief that he cannot experience, due to the loss of memory and the blindness precipitated by the desire for revenge. The act of writing, whether on Polaroid photographs or etched on his skin in the form of tattoos, is a

means for Leonard to ensure that he still exists, and to ensure the legitimacy of his quest for revenge.

In Nolan's film, which combines the acts of detection, tattooing, writing, and photography in a winding labyrinth/text of memory and recovery, viewers participate in the narrator's experience of "creating" a narrative as he improvises his way through the labyrinth. Convinced that he really needs "a system if [he's] going to make it work," Leonard paradoxically disavows the fact that his memory, in effect, is a locked room inside the revenge narrative that he has created. In turn, this revenge narrative never finds its purchase, thereby stalling out any transformation that would seem possible through enacting that revenge. Further, his memory loss determines the structure of that narrative; as Peter Thomas suggests,

> *Memento*'s manipulative use of a highly suppressive narrative and the extreme emotional proximity it constructs with Leonard has constantly tempted the viewer to jump to retrospectively regrettable conclusions. In this way, what is stressed is the place of the reader's own desire in the unavoidable gamble of interpretation. (Thomas 207)

Evoking the now-familiar problem of reading "postmodern" narrative (and similar warnings about Auster's fiction), Thomas's observation leads me to wonder if perhaps viewers are more aptly in the position of witnesses rather than vicarious detectives. The distancing, yet more immediate form of film as a narrative places viewers in a position wherein they at times see what Leonard cannot; therefore, this draws further attention to

the way narratives are created, and allows us to see the gaps between what is "written" and what is transformed in the process of that writing.

Specifically, the act of writing into/on the body functions in *Memento* as a means to personalize the otherwise distancing work of the analytic, "postmodern" detective. This personalization in turn renders Leonard's perceived subjectivity central to the narrative, while it also renders his body an object, a site of clues. All his wounds, which appear to "heal" in reverse, supply an anamorphic element to *Memento*'s vision-based narrative. Like Roland Barthes's *punctum*, these wounds reach out from the flowing, yet photographic film, evoking the ongoing presence of death (pending absence), which has already happened. Yet, the presentation of Leonard's wounds is also complicated by the forward-reverse narrative, which at once enables and "erases" the presence of death. The clues, wounds, and even Leonard's subjectivity, however, turn out to be "lures" for the reader: yet more objects for the eye to settle upon and invest in, and which ultimately take us nowhere. What may actually be happening in *Memento,* despite its very real attention to the lures loss, trauma, detection, and memory, is the process of digestion itself, wherein the viewer is taken in by the film's narrative (ingested) and then regurgitated at the end of the film, which ends where it began and promises only to repeat the same process. The second section of this chapter, "Becoming Graphic: Reading *Memento* as a Digestive Narrative," examines this transformation from, confrontation between (and ultimate merging of) the analytic mind and the graphic body.

As a viewer of *Memento*, and holding tightly to my own notions of narrative as emulating the structure of the labyrinth, I freely admit that until very recently I supplied the narrative with my own desire for meaning, some kind of truth or illumination to be

revealed, even though intellectually I "knew" that the film would not deliver. I realized that it would be necessary for me to first explore the film's narrative in terms of its apparent labyrinthine structure, and then shift my analysis towards another possibility that nearly escaped me. My current reading of *Memento* is, therefore, a departure from the scholarship I have thus far discovered on the film, which focuses primarily on the narrative's evocation of trauma and memory, temporality and space. In my quest to examine the interface between the body, the Oedipal narrative, and the labyrinth, I have thus discovered that this contemporary film operates more as a "digestive vortex," wherein, as Bataille writes, a kind of death is always necessary in order that we live. The vertiginous frustration evoked by the film's "swirling" narrative has led me to ask, If *Memento*'s narrative is more a vortex of digestion than a white-washed, city-labyrinth, then what is transformed in the process?

I. "A Sickness of Uncertainty": Grief and Ritual in the Two-Way Labyrinth

How am I supposed to heal if I can't feel time? --Memento

A key difference between *Memento* and other postmodern detective stories is that the narrative appears to render itself skeletal, or transparent: the narrative lays bare the hunger in the search for meaning out of fragmented memory, obscure objects, and virtually no clues. The relation between writing and death in *Memento* is a transformation enacted by the process of mourning. In this process, unlike in Auster's *City of Glass* and Kubrick's *The Shining*, the body is released, rather than repressed. Further, Nolan's film presents a writer who narrates his plight: viewers are granted Leonard's interiority, however fragmented due to his short term memory loss. As Leonard struggles with his

analytical impulses to *solve*, to drive forward and assume, gumshoe-detective style, that his clues do indeed match reality, he occasionally catches glimpses of his own intuitive process, which in turn reveals his "clue-less" vision of what "actually" happened to him and his deceased wife.

The viewer shares this struggle, and is thus challenged to shift the impulse to interpret to an affective, or even reflective, response to the very process of reading and creating narrative: the very process to which these texts draw our attention. As Leonard wanders through an "invisible" labyrinth of memory, his own fractured interpretation of that memory, and attempts to analyze the "clues" that he both collects and creates, his body becomes a site for a graphic representation and enactment of transformation. By the film's end, it is apparent that Leonard is always moving toward healing, but never quite arrives. Further, often evoking Italo Calvino's *Mr. Palomar*, which centers on a man who watches "a wave," *Memento* refuses, unlike *The Shining*, for example, to "hold still" long enough for the viewer's perception to gain a foothold on any substantial meaning. What, then, characterizes the transformations at stake here?

The "analytic world" of Nolan's film is represented by the pervasive color of French blue, the near-transparent, glass-like and white-washed, dilapidated city-scape, and Leonard's near-emaciated body (wherein physical hunger is replaced by the "abstract" hunger for revenge). His tattooed body (discussed at greater length in the following section) links the analytic to the graphic world, which is represented in the form of rituals of transformation (tattooing, burning objects of Leonard's deceased wife), and the expression of passion for ideal (in the quest for revenge, tears, longing, refusal to accept the truth of death). Leonard's multi-faceted position (as narrator, subject of that

narration, victim, criminal, etc.) renders the narrative unstable, always aware of its proximity to death. Specifically, Leonard is at once driven by death (his wife's) and is always nearing his own (as he ends up in a few comic, yet highly dangerous situations). He also reaches points of near-surrender, wherein his desire for revenge is "forgotten" in the wake of always-new realizations of grief. Leonard engages in a movement *toward* mourning, toward affect: specifically, as we will see, in the attempt to ritualize the losses of memory and of his wife. Yet, he never quite reaches the state of grief that would move him *through* that grief. Rather, he circles around it, like a lost bird searching for its nest. Leonard's need to cling to other bodies around him as a means for easing the struggle clashes with his resistance to trust others. For example, he meets Natalie (Carrie-Ann Moss), who is both helper and destroyer/trickster, and is drawn to her because "she too has lost someone."

Yet, Natalie's presence, as a kind of dark Ariadne, is in the film to arouse doubt in the viewer's mind, as well as Leonard's, as to who can be trusted (a classic film noir trope). Ironically, Leonard's intuition, rooted in his body and his wound (in the reflexive stretching of his hand after he has hit Natalie but cannot remember) is potentially his truest source of information, but he instead relies on outside "facts" from unreliable sources. The presence of an Ariadne in Leonard's labyrinth of searching betrays for the viewer a gap in what perspective s/he shares with Leonard, and what s/he sees in his "blind spots." Similarly, his need to "memorialize" his experience in the form of tattoos and photographs transforms into at once a functional ritual and a work of art: on the surface of his body he creates a "collage" of "facts" which are for us partial emblems of suggested meaning. At stake in the transformation enacted by detection is the expression

of ritual as a means to forget, rather than remember, thereby staving off grief: clues that might solve the mystery are transformed into relics, remainders, rather than keys to a solution.

Mementos themselves are traces, litanies of clues, which, like puzzle pieces, are fragments of an identity, or meaning, which the detective believes he can unlock or discover with utter certainty. Leonard writes in fragments on the surface of his skin and on the surface of photographs: crossed out names, undeveloped thoughts, hampered, not helped, by memory. They are mementos of the past--a dead past--and as disintegrating, fragmented objects they represent a graphic transformation from presence to absence and back again. Thomas posits that the film "offers a close engagement specifically with [the] act of reading narrative from fragments and absences, and with the stakes of this reading" (201-202). As fragments and reminders of absence, these objects fail as a "red thread" that could help Leonard unravel the mystery of his wife's death.

As a result of this failure, Leonard subsists in a constant present, wherein he "remembers" the reality of death anew each time he pieces together the immediate past. In a brilliant moment of clarity, unclouded by revenge, Leonard closes his eyes, which helps him remember his wife before her death. In doing so, he *feels* details, the unspeakable pieces that create the shape of memory. Occupying an impossible, fluid position, Leonard enacts a transformation between writing and death that cancels out the relevance of origin: the more he seeks meaning/the answer, the further it recedes from view, as symbolized by the photograph developing in reverse at the opening of the film.

Memento opens with a man's tattooed hand holding a photograph of a murdered man. As the hand alternately waits and waves the photograph in the air, the image fades,

appearing to "develop" in reverse. Finally, the photograph turns the telltale light blue-gray of an undeveloped Polaroid, and the dominant color in which the film (and Leonard's mind) remains through the narrative process. The color blue also emphasizes the constant "blank slate" state of Leonard's affliction. The introduction of the Polaroid is significant to *Memento* for three reasons: 1) the Polaroid is unique from other kinds of photographs because one can "watch" the image transform from a gray-blue haze, to copper-metallic colors hinting at images, to the finished image itself; 2) the Polaroid, as its name suggests, is ruled by the sun--light/illumination--and light determines its development/clarity, as well as mirrors clarity in the mind; 3) the Polaroid's photographic image is always surrounded by a frame, with enough space at the bottom of the square on which for one to write.

A "frame," itself a shape, *contains* a shape, image, etc. within it and provides a boundary or border of support/imprisonment/protection around that which exists (stays?) in the center of that frame. The "Overture" of Proust's *Swann's Way,* as another prototypical narrative to *Memento,* reveals what Gerard Genette refers to as "a subtle dialectic between the 'innocent' narrative and its retrospective 'verification'" (Genette 61). Proust moves to and fro between memory, interpretation of that memory, and interpretation of the narrator's interpretation of that memory (namely, the crisis surrounding the mother's goodnight kiss). Marcel fears the "sickness of uncertainty," which the "good angel of certainty" remedies in the daylight: things retain their "right" shape in the day. The "sickness of uncertainty" relates to time and space and our lack of control over the twilight, or in-between states that seem to have no end. For Marcel, the mother is so close and yet so far away (in the same house) and the smell of varnish on the

staircase signals her inaccessibility. Like the smell of varnish, the taste/cup of tea is a trigger of all Marcel knows and has yet to know (what has already happened): "I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed" (Proust 49).

In *Memento*, the narrative is similarly ruled by Leonard's negotiation between memory, his interpretation of memory, and the viewers' interpretation of Leonard's interpretation. In the constantly receding graphic image of the Polaroid, we witness the futility of illumination wrought by memory. Leonard experiences no illumination, yet moves *toward* it, toward the ritual of grief, surrounding himself with rem(a)inders of his wife: such rem(a)inders in turn signify the "sickness of uncertainty" that fuels his quest for meaning and revenge. The conflation of photography and writing presents and embodies a transformation in the narrative, and supplies the "system" by which Leonard operates. The photograph at once becomes a substitute for his memory, in that he takes Polaroids of everyone with whom he comes into contact in order to better associate him/her with his quest for revenge. The photograph also denies memory; as soon as Leonard forgets (again), the photograph is rendered a dissociated object. Leonard keeps the photographs in his pockets, along with a black pen, so that he can write down his analytical or intuitive sense of the person in the picture. In the case of "Teddy," words are scribbled out and replaced: "Don't believe his lies."

As discussed in chapter one, the photograph is a "memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (Sontag 15). The conflation of writing and photography also presents a key transformation in *Memento*: it enables the graphic to "speak" the unspeakable. Further, photography "penetrates" the body: through the act of seeing, the viewer comprehends

the *punctum*, or wound. The photograph at once touches us, yet, in its being "a certificate of presence...[it is also] a reality no one can touch" (*Camera* 87). I would add that in this "abstract" touching, it in turn signifies pending absence. For Leonard, taking photographs and writing are both acts and representations of the illusion of a constant present, which renders grief and mourning also continuous. When one carries around this knowledge, it renders a kind of paralysis in the face of loss, wherein transformation cannot be sublimated. Barthes reflects on this process, which is embodied in Leonard's plight: "I suffer, motionless. I cannot *transform* my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image's finitude: the Photograph--my Photograph--is without culture: when it is painful, nothing in it can transform grief into mourning" (90).

For Barthes, the photograph is an emblem of becoming (disappearing and/or appearing), and the Polaroid is an especially powerful example of this phenomenon. In another contemporary film, *Back to the Future* (1985), a photograph is present to signify the protagonist's capacity to exist or not exist: when Marty McFly has to go "back" to the future and make sure his parents meet and fall in love in order to insure that he will be born, he carries a photograph of his family, wherein one by one they disappear the further Marty strays from his goal. At one point, as his own photographic image begins to fade, he watches in horror as his actual body begins to disappear. When his parents meet, kiss, fall in love, Marty is "restored," as is the photograph. The transformation between "being and not being," disappearance and return, is a distinctive component to *Memento*, because this transformation takes place in Leonard's mind, which is constantly trying to re-frame the experience of his wife's death. The obsession with solving her

murder replaces the process of grief that is necessary for one to transform--that is, to heal.

The immediacy of the Polaroid is important to the narrative of *Memento*, because it heightens the tension between darkness and illumination, knowing and not knowing, certainty and uncertainty, and supplies the viewer with a graphic mode of transformation on which to hinge the narrative. Leonard's obsession with clarity is mirrored by his reliance on "facts": he has a large file of police reports, notes, Polaroid photographs with notes on them, and the tattoos of "facts" he etches into his skin, as if to "cement" their significance. Peter Thomas suggests that "Leonard's need for textual fragments to gain some access to the past allows the film to externalize the making, revision and distortion of memory...the original report, like an original memory, is not available, and this and the process of transformation are concretized through the altered report" (205). Like a detective, Leonard relies on concrete "facts," clues, to reach *clarity*--a word, though never spoken in the film, is symbolized by the ubiquitous presence of the color blue, and the presence of mirrors. Leonard's stolen shirt, the motel's walls, bed spread, key, in the painting of an ocean wave on the wall, as well as in reflections from glasses of water, mirrors, the inside of Natalie's house, and the bar in which she works all reflect variants of light blue. Leonard is sufficiently surrounded by the illusion of clarity, and in the color blue, of purity and transcendence.

As if to further emphasize the drive towards clarity, Leonard speaks in second person, evoking a split self: that is, one of origin ("I know all about myself") and one of a persistently forgotten present, inhibiting the creation of new memories and rendering the present more important than the past. The graphic narrative of *Memento* is focused

almost entirely on Leonard's body: his wounds in various stages of healing, his stricken expression as he attempts to remember from moment to moment where and when he is, and the tattoos that proliferate on his skin, offering letters and numbers framed as possibilities for unraveling an impossible mystery. From Leonard's struggle of disappearance and return, substitution and memory, an ambivalence about the past emerges as a result of loss (death), that the loss of his wife (and her "traces" as found objects) precipitates this ambivalence as part of the process of releasing the objects through ritual.

In two pivotal scenes, Leonard enacts rituals that do not transform his condition, nor the narrative, for the purpose of the rituals, to allow the process of grief, is overshadowed by the impossibility of remembering to grieve his wife: "I can't remember to forget you." In the first scene, Leonard arrives at the roofless, concrete ruins of a building, and sets fire to his wife's belongings. Leonard's burning the hair brush, tattered novel, and shabby bra reveal intensely personal objects that have lost their past meaning, and yet intensify Leonard's repetitive and ultimately unquenchable desire for revenge. This split between the apparent meaninglessness of a ritualistic gesture and the magnification of its importance evokes the struggle Paul Auster experiences in the midst of impossible grief for his father. Of the death of his father, Auster writes that

> [t]here has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open. Instead of burying my father for me, these words have kept him alive, perhaps more so than ever...if I am to understand anything, I must penetrate this image of darkness, that I

must enter the absolute darkness of earth. (*Invention* 32)

Unlike Auster, though, Leonard never "enters the absolute darkness of earth." Depth, meaning, understanding, healing, implied by the dead/alive space of the grave, are all denied to him because he cannot see past his hunger, the desire to *do*, act, slide on the cerulean surface, on an illusory quest for revenge.

The second scene (combined in the first and last frames of the film, where Leonard kills Jimmy G. and John G.) is also situated in a ruin--a dark, abandoned building punctuated by refracted light, a kind of mini-labyrinth of dead-ends and disorienting down-stairways. The black and white sequence transforms/bleeds into the color sequence when Leonard, after killing Jimmy Grantz (who scratches Leonard's face in a double line--a wound that transforms--becomes more sharp and fresh throughout the entire film), watches the Polaroid of the dead body develop. After killing Jimmy, Leonard, in horror over what he has done, burns the photo he has taken of the body. The double lines that form the wounds on Leonard's face also signify the parallel narratives that run like separate rivers into an ocean of epiphany and illumination.

At the end of the film, Leonard, like Theseus, descends into a dark subterranean maze to defeat/slay the perceived "monster" who killed his wife. Yet, he gains no insight or relief from this killing, because he cannot remember. In this dark place, Leonard also receives the possibility-fraught illumination that *he* may have inadvertently killed his wife. In killing the monster/Minotaur, Theseus also kills the "masked (blind king)" (Irwin 309). Leonard suffers from a peculiar kind of "inner blindness," and although he does not kill himself or disappear into the text/labyrinth, he "dooms" himself to be stuck in the labyrinth of his own fractured memory. His vision is not "tainted" by the "false" clarity

of the world around him, as emphasized by the color blue. With his eyes shut, he can "see" his memories with his body/mind. In a beautiful scene near the end of the film, he "narrates" such a moment as he drives into the city: "The world doesn't just disappear when you close your eyes."

If the labyrinth in *Memento* is Leonard's memory, an interior realm made visible on the outside in the form of a confusing, timeless yet contemporary world, it is also a labyrinth that cannot be "mastered," due to its interior wounding (the constant loss of memory). Leonard proclaims, "We all need mirrors to remind ourselves who we are." The mirror here is a surface of meaning, and functions as an illusion of clarity, where Leonard always "remembers" his misguided purpose: revenge. Like the color blue, mirrors at once reveal and conceal the potential clarity all around him, as well as his "blind spots" in the labyrinth of his searching. Again, the mirror at the center evokes, according to John Irwin, the "doubly reflective condition of being lost in thought about thought" (95). In *Memento*, the presence of the mirror is further complicated by its shattering, which both precipitates Leonard's memory loss and failure to yield illumination at the center of the labyrinth.

Significantly, Leonard's head wound (and the cause of his anterial grade memory loss) happens after he has been slammed against the mirror in his bathroom during the assault on him and his wife. As posited in chapter one, bathrooms signify a confrontation between transformation and the remainders of transformation (the abject).The mirror, as explored in the previous two chapters, is at the center of the labyrinth, and paradoxically symbolizes illumination and transformation and/or death. In the center, the questor sees him/herself clearly and/or confronts the monster, who may also be a double of the

questor, or a part of him/herself that s/he has repressed, as we see in Kubrick's *The Shining*. The fragments and myriad reflections cast by the shattered fragments of the broken bathroom mirror represent Leonard's impossible position as a detective of *himself*, impaired by the inability to grieve--an inability that continuously enables and stalls out transformation. The universe is "multiplied and extended" by the shattered mirror (Borges); yet, this is an illusion. The shattered mirror has not only wounded Leonard, but precipitates his quest, which goes in as many directions as the broken pieces.

The mirror also brings together the graphic world of that quest, in the proliferation of photographs, tattoos, writing and the constant revision of that writing. Significantly, some of Leonard's tattoos cannot be properly read until he stands in front of a mirror. The connection between the quest for revenge and the illusion of clarity wrought by the mirror is made vivid when, in a near-hypnotic moment, Natalie gingerly removes Leonard's shirt to reveal, in gothic letters tattooed across his chest, "John G. murdered my wife." Mirrors create doubles (and vice versa), and Jimmy Grantz and John Gammel are the two men Leonard murders in the film: one is a drug dealer who was involved in the assault on Leonard and his wife, and the other is "Teddy," the undercover police officer who tries to help Leonard (is his Ariadne?) even though he does not trust him ("Don't believe his lies" is written on his Polaroid). Leonard kills Jimmy and then wears his jacket and drives his car, acts which create further "false facts." In the attempt to enact revenge, Leonard's act of violence does not release him from the labyrinth of searching. In fact, Teddy's confession that Leonard accidentally killed his own wife "reveals the implicit violence hidden in the will to identify, and identify with, pure victimhood...[Further,] the revenge narrative, coupled with the detective one, posits violence as a limit case of the

need for knowledge--the need to be quite certain that the right target may lead to further violence..." (Thomas 207). The ritual of killing only creates a double of killing, as posited by Borges's claim that "mirrors...are abominable" because they multiply and extend the universe, making the end unreachable. As a result, transformation is rendered by *Memento*'s narrative as perpetual, seamless repetition.

II. Becoming Graphic: Reading *Memento* as a Digestive Narrative

I should like to keep that out of me. I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself.
--Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror

As we know from Paul Auster's work on healing the wound created by the death of his father, writing keeps the present alive, and the only reassurance of its passing is a date that does not change (a publishing date, or a date written on top of a journal entry). Writing on photographs, as well as writing on (penetrating) the body in the form of tattoos, is another means for enacting a process of healing: the tattoo's stages of healing, in particular, stand out. First, the tattoo is raised on the skin, burning like sunburn, then it is covered with bandages for protection as blood continues to seep out. Second, as the tattoo begins to scab over, its surface-shape peels away, leaving behind the smooth dark ink over flesh. Surprisingly soon, there is no more pain--only the itchy remainder in the form of a portrait merged within the skin. The tattoo embodies a simultaneous vision of depth and surface, temporariness and permanence.

Many people receive tattoos into/onto their bodies because these etchings provide an illusion of permanence, as well as an outer expression of inner experience. The tattoo becomes a kind of bridge between the inner and outer, as the ink, which appears to be

"written on the body," is also embedded within the top layers of the skin. Blood must be drawn from the experience, and pain is unavoidable. The experience of receiving a tattoo is akin to a transformative ritual, wherein the self confronts the abjection of his/her body: in the blood, in the tears and sweat that may be shed, and in the direct awareness, via the pain, of the body's mortality. Intensely personal, a tattoo functions also as a means to communicate unspeakable experience with others who might understand, or share a similar experience. It thrusts that communication out into the open, uncompromising present, into the graphic world of transformation.

In the film, writing on/in the body is vital, for the illusion of permanence effected by a tattoo provides a kind of verification of facts that cannot be verified by memory alone. The wounds on the skin and in experience become more fresh as the narrative progresses. The graphic presence of tattoos also signifies the need for ritual: Leonard's "system" is repetitive, in keep with rituals that afflict the obsessed. These rituals overlap: the ritual of remembering his wife--that is, attempting to remember to "forget" her--accompanies the ritual of revenge. The ritual around the loss of his wife centers more on her objects--as Leonard hopes that he will remember he by the sensate remainders left behind. Just as a dead woman drives the narrative here, a prostitute is incorporated into the narrative in order to enable Leonard's memory of his wife. Yet another double, she becomes a "stand in" for the *absence* of his wife, not a substitute for her bodily presence. Further, her bodily absence, rendered by the truth of her death, in turn creates a narrative frame around the fruitless searching and mad questing that dominates, or fills the frame. As the maternal feminine, presently absent bodies of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, the body of Leonard's wife "speaks" around the edges,

along the skin, in the periphery, as a whisper of memory, nevertheless driving the dark ink of Leonard's furtively rendered tattoos.

In literally writing on his near-emaciated body, clues and insights in the form of tattoos, Leonard's "self" dissolves into text, wherein he is both the narrator who writes himself into and out of the story, and the hapless subject of the story: at once questor (in search of revenge for his wife's death) and victim (and because of this, as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, he is at the mercy of the manipulations of those around him). As if to signify this back and forth movement between narrator and narrative subject, the black and white segments of the narrative appear to follow a forward, or "real time"/cumulative pattern, while the color segments move backward, from the fading/reverse development of the photo of the film's beginning (end). Yet, while the color narrative also moves "backwards" it is still cumulative and linear--it simultaneously moves forward.

The scenes of the film all hinge upon one another, as links in a chain, at times overlapping, just enough so that we can "remember" what came before/after the previous scene. The black and white sequences, which feature Leonard always on the phone, "interrupt" the chain and appear to reveal "background" information (on the ultimately fictional Sammy Jankis) on Leonard's arrival at the motel. The black and white sequence finally reveals a "rip" in the narrative, or an anamorphic "stain," which stalls out the narrative when Leonard forgets who he is talking to and sees that he has had "Never answer the phone" tattooed to his arm. The other person on the phone holds a similarly "privileged," in-the-know position as the enigmatic narrators who "take over" the ends of *City of Glass* and Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth.* In telling his story about Sammy

Jankis, Leonard reveals (to us but not to himself) a slippage, in which we see Leonard instead of Sammy sitting in an institution after having accidentally killed his wife by overdosing her with insulin.

This slippage evokes anamorphosis (the Greek *ana* meaning "again" and *morphe* meaning "shape"), which is defined as "a distorted or monstrous projection or representation of an image on a plane or curved surface, which, when viewed from a certain point, or as reflected from a curved mirror or through a polyhedron, appears regular and in proportion; a deformation of an image" (myweb.tiscali.co.uk/artofanamorphosis/). Anamorphosis, as itself a mode of graphic transformation, enacts and reveals what David R. Castillo posits as "the arbitrariness and incompleteness of any total view" (2). Although Castillo's analysis focuses primarily on the Spanish Golden Age, it briefly links anamorphosis to contemporary narrative, wherein it forces one to question the function of language in the construction of reality, whether that comes in the guise of subliminal advertising, or "the place of the subject in the practices of authority, and the possibility of discourses of resistance and change" (3). That is, it forces us to pay attention to form as well as content, and the gaps between them.

In *Memento*, anamorphosis signifies a graphic transformation within the narrative, which is revealed by Leonard's memory loss: its gaps, its interludes of black and white mixed with color, its flow between backward and forward tellings, its doublings-back, its "blind spots" and its repetitions. The narrative lays all this out, so that the viewers share Leonard's plight: his interpretations of facts, his struggle to remember with whom he has just commiserated, his struggle to remember his wife. Yet, the narrative lays bare other

gaps: blind spots for Leonard, but details that lend doubt in the viewers' vision as to the clarity and efficacy of the detective's quest. These moments of doubt, however fleeting, take the viewer out of the constant present--the relentless surface that Leonard occupies--and allow us to see death staring back in the gap between a reliance on the mind's power to analyze and solve, and the body's graphic, intuitive process. This gap reveals a transformation in/of contemporary narrative because we can see clearly how these are both embodied and rendered in narrative.

These anamorphic gaps evoke Hans Holbein's 1533 painting, *The Ambassadors*, which reveals two French ambassadors staring directly at the viewer with two-dimensional expressions and poses. In the foreground, a three-dimensional, oblong image juts out into the line of vision below the ambassadors' feet. A subversive "smear," the image, when viewed from an obverse angle, is revealed to be a skull. According to Castillo, the anamorphic presence of the skull is intended to "remind us of the fact that earthly possessions, power, and knowledge are nothing but illusions that hide the face of death" (14). The resulting feeling when gazing upon such a vision is uncanny, for it evokes the return of the repressed.

The presence of anamorphosis calls the reader to do a double take, so to speak, and reconcile a whole painting with the uncanny presence of *The Ambassadors*' skull, which troubles the "calm of the transparent image," and in turn evokes the presence of what Sylvia Soderlind calls the "'phallic ghost' which is the image of the primordial lack" (216). Like the shape of the grave, the anamorphic image implicates the locked room in detective fiction, which signifies "an enclosure that appears, from both inside and outside, to be unopened, indeed unopenable without there being left some physical trace of the

operation...The solution generally involves a showing that the room's appearance of being unopened is only an appearance, an illusory outer show that does not represent an inner reality" (Irwin 180). The open grave is both a dead-end and a door; and it depends on the perspective of the seer. The psychological process of transformation via anamorphosis is "the curious, magic, or secret perspective...a variation of the angle of [view] transforms the object: the 'deformed' image [places] a double process of opening and closing," or the perspective of being at once inside and outside (Castillo 1).

An anamorphosis has to be viewed from an "unconventional" viewpoint. Unlike a *trompe l'oeil*, which comprises a reader/viewer being tricked into seeing an invented image as if it were reality, an anamorphosis requires that the viewer/reader seek out a different perspective. Here, uncertainty is the rule, wherein the viewer and the viewed (reader and text) intermingle, and move back and forth between perspectives, revealing and concealing "hidden realities" and possibly unspeakable and "unknowable" contents of the unconscious. The subversive aspect of anamorphosis is that the writer/artist is both inside and outside the text simultaneously. The reader must enact her own transformation--that precipitated by seeing--if she is to perceive the narrative anew, or gain insight, however "tainted" or fearful it may seem. In linking allegory and anamorphosis, Soderlind points out that the "curious effect of anamorphic art is a result of a primary misreading, or a thwarted attempt at interpretation, and the succeeding insight at the moment of formal restoration" (219). For example, an emphasis on what the mind, rather than the eye, sees releases access to what could be a cathartic depth. Yet, Soderlind argues that "every reading is a re-reading, which is also a re-writing, but...not in

the sense of writing anew, but of writing *again,*" thereby enabling the "compulsion to repeat" in the "allegorical" act of reading and writing (Soderlind 221).

In *Memento*, if Leonard's memory is "emblemized" by the locked box in detective fiction--that he is the ultimate detective of "self"--then the aforesaid repetitive loop is the trap in which he is caught. Likewise, this loop is the trap in which the viewer is caught. At this point, as a viewer, I reached an impasse, wherein I thought, *I was certain I "understood" this film and its relation to the labyrinth, the body, and contemporary narrative. But something feels wrong. I cannot go past this point of repetition.* I stopped, then, as any detective might, and wondered what I could do to remedy the situation; that is, what could I do to make clear what it was I "really" wanted to convey in an analysis of this film? I wanted to convey that there *is* indeed meaning, and that the nonsensical element of postmodern narrative, or that which *denies* meaning, is rubbish. Yet, in calling attention to process and not the goal, the narrative of *Memento*, rather than "cheating" me out of this elusive meaning I have been chasing, has actually "shown" me that a different approach may be necessary. After all, I am in the process of writing about the transformations that are possible in/of contemporary narrative, especially in the midst of such "crises" of meaning. For the viewer and sensitive critic, the transformation rendered by Nolan's film is that of perhaps shifting scholarly discussion to the possible valorization of process, not *over* goal, or meaning, but to the possibilities of meaning *within* process: specifically, the process of reading, seeing, and comprehending with the body as well as the mind.

At the end of the film, as he drives down a winding street, Leonard blinks his eyes as he reflects, "I have to believe my actions still have meaning." Although he will forget

this reflection in a moment, he will return to it anew as he remembers that he is always already in the midst of the process of searching, holding the balance between analysis and graphic surrender. Instead of disappearing or dying at the end of the narrative, Leonard drives through the labyrinth of an unnamed city, eyes facing forward, his own, "inner" narration taking over as he realizes his own power to render disappearance and return. Leonard emerges as a narrator who is the constant survivor of his own narrative: he does not disappear, a la Daniel Quinn, but "knows" he can. Leonard's quest to repair the breaks in his short-term memory loss reveals traces, or remainders of death; but as soon as they are revealed in the film's narrative (not his own), they are covered up again. Further, as soon as they are revealed as remainders, they are discarded and reiterated as traces-to-be-collected, once again.

Perhaps a more effective way of representing this process would be to address it in terms of digestion, wherein the stomach as center of the body, at once a site of life and death, produces remainders of transformation. The digestive narrative of *Memento* is characterized by its backward/forward movement (never holding still, and never "defining" itself as a structure, as does Kubrick's film), which is a whirlpool, or vortex. It pulls the viewer into its swirling movement, "flushes" him/her into its proliferation of clues, which, as we have seen, ultimately center on Leonard's body, and in the "end" spits the viewer out. At the end of the film, dizzy, I sit upon the "lip" of the vortex, having landed exactly where I was at the beginning, as I hear Leonard's last words in the film: "Now, where was I?" These words promise only a continuation and culmination of what came and went before: what the first section of this chapter has discussed above, all that Leonard-as-character suffers and learns, all the wounding and concurrent healing of

his skin, all murders done and undone, and ultimately, memory glimpsed, recovered and covered, at once revealing and concealing, only to be repeated (again).

In its evocation of digestion, then, rather than the "intact" structure of a city-labyrinth, or even a "fractured" labyrinth of short term memory loss, *Memento* may actually transform contemporary narrative through its embodiment of a vortex, which in turn "erodes" (disintegrates or disfigures) any attempts to grasp meaning. My own resistance to this possibility could be articulated as fear: that such a reading would be a "cop-out," or a meager compensation for the lack of scholarship on which to converse and upon which to "bounce" my own notions of these dilemmas in reading postmodern narrative. Yet, as I discover on the cusp of the final chapter of this project, such readings are worthwhile, if not important, to any attempt to understand and articulate a world in which notions of representation and meaning are themselves at once disintegrating and becoming.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Memorable Fragments": Dismembering and Re-Writing the Labyrinth in Kathy Acker's Graphic Narratives

We need to live first of all; to believe in what makes us live and that something makes us live--to believe that whatever is produced from the mysterious depths of ourselves need not forever haunt us as an exclusively digestive concern.
--Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double

Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred? Today, we dismiss Oedipus and narrative at one and the same time: we no longer love, we no longer fear, we no longer narrate.
-- Roland Barthes, Pleasure of the Text

Madmen embody the impossible configurations of a return to childhood. Shamans claim to have made fictitious voyages, transitions between the here and the beyond. Tumblers perform inaccessible, marvelous but inhuman figures with their bodies. The shamans turn themselves into birds; the tumblers into serpents; the madmen into stones. And more than any others, women bizarrely embody this group of anomalies showing the cracks in an overall system. --Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, The Newly Born Woman

Kathy Acker's novels both enact and interrupt the transformation of searching protagonists, thus mirroring, however fragmentedly, the author's attempt at a simultaneous, "graphically" rendered presentation of: 1) the dream-journey-vision quest of the protagonists, and perhaps of the narratives themselves; 2) the texts' resistance to performing an Oedipal narrative that it also cannot escape; and 3) the irresistible possibility in the pervasive presence and enactment of death as (or signaling) another kind of transformation, rather than "merely" an end. In contrast to Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, for example, in which narrators and protagonists routinely and cleanly disappear "into" the text-as-labyrinth, Acker's work textually dismembers narrators and protagonists, as the narrative itself is resolved as a display of "body parts" or of the

psyche as a kind of "autopsied" labyrinth. Specifically, as Karen Brennan argues, the "splitting" of the body and theory further directs the reader's attention to the problem of transformation in/of narrative, as it is expressed by contemporary women writers writing about the inscription of the feminine subject in a text which deigns to explore the loss of subjectivity (Brennan 404).

While other twentieth-century, labyrinthine narratives (Auster, Borges, Robbe-Grillet) self-consciously reinscribe the labyrinth as a narrative paradigm and symbol or perform a labyrinthine analogue to transformation, Acker's narratives disfigure myth around the labyrinth. These narratives in turn present a "stillborn" ritual and call into question the visibility (and viability) of transformation in/of contemporary narrative itself. The graphic world of the body is for Acker conflated with transformation and/of myth, as she writes toward what I characterize as a vast precipice in language, what she describes as "a place in which it is unbearable to the point of being impossible to be. An edge. A zone...the realm of myth, of the imaginary, which is more true than truth" (*Bodies* 54). In seeking a realm beyond language, Acker's narratives draw (out) the dreaming body, the fragmented ruins that Western culture leaves behind, where its inhabitants occupy a progressively polluted and contaminated earth. In this ruined, "post-nuclear" reality, Acker (re)turns to the body as the most direct form of communication and vision, and (re)writes the labyrinth as topic and process of transformation in/of narrative.

Acker's work attempts to dismember the narrative structure ruled by the Oedipus myth, to "smash" or break through the limits and assumptions that found the primacy of intellect over body. Some literary critics have suggested that Acker's "subversive" writing has achieved a kind of feminist resistance, or revolt against the traditional, Oedipal-based

narrative paradigm (in, for example, Acker's postmodern, plagiarizing brand of intertextuality). For example, Marjorie Worthington argues that such a revolt is an *attempt* at subversion and resistance, and "must necessarily fail in the face of traditional cultural structures...[i]nstead, what Acker's work provides is a possible means of communication within and negotiation with those structures" (248). In other words, Acker's narratives canno do much more than play with and manipulate dominant narrative structure; they cannot effect a transformation, but can merely expose the mechanisms at work, driving those structures.

Indeed, in its utilization of collage, the language of Acker's novels performs a grim and playful response to the paradoxical power and loss of that power in/of the trap that is language dominated by "patriarchal linguistic and narrative structures" (Worthington 251). However, as seems implicit in Worthington's analysis, if structuralist-based narrative theories cannot account for the disruption in form and content in/of Acker's narratives, then perhaps a more "liminal" even tenuous, or intuitive, analysis would be more helpful: not necessarily to *account* for Acker's form and content, but to better acknowledge the *life-force* swelling the narrative structure, or lack thereof, even as it careens toward the death ending with which we are now so familiar.

Out of a desire to challenge the "given" Oedipal frame of narrative that surrounds her, Acker's prose slices through the "forbidden" territories of the unconscious: her protagonists traipse up and down the crumbling steps of texts that evoke multi-layered labyrinths, wherein pieces of the structure are missing, chambers are flooded with incoherent dreamscapes and numbing violence, and the paths are overgrown with reiterative, weed-like language. The first section of this chapter, "The 'Vision World' of

Blood and Guts in High School," examines Acker's 1978 novel as an embodiment and enactment of transformations via pain, desire, and ritual: the use of "the graphic" (collaged poetry, drawings of tattoos, maps of dreams) surfaces as a performance of transformation, or a means for opening further possibility in the final face of death. Acker's novel is obsessed with the Oedipus myth and how it plays out in all narratives, despite her attempts to interrupt it, or step outside it. As Worthington argues, regarding the 1986 novel, *Don Quixote,* Acker's work may *enact* disruption, rather than actually disrupting the narrative "process." Yet, the relation between collage/graphic intertextuality, the journey-performance of the artist/dreamer, and the significant death/absence of the mother (a consistent trope in most, if not all, of Acker's narratives) presents a potential means for opening up further discussion about the function of death and/as transformation in/of contemporary narrative.

As a "profane mystic" or shaman-bird, protagonist Janey Smith careens into the blind emptiness at the literal end of the text, madness and death at her heels, in order to find "a society that allows...*the fullness of what it is to be human*" (Interview 184). The "end," or the ruin, is the whole novel: it is present before we even begin to read, as is Janey's "Journey," where finally page numbers disappear, white space crowds in on the ink-drawings, and thick, poem-prints appear, reading as a string of infinite epitaphs. The function of death and/as transformation in Acker's narratives may reflect a means for articulating how death can effect another kind of transformation, when it would seem that transformation of the narrative has been stalled out, or halted. Specifically, a ritual *sparagmos* of the Oedipally-dominated narrative potentially brings to bear the body's immediacy (via its wounding) in Acker's novel. A closer look at *sparagmos*, as

exemplified by the myth of the Bacchae provides a different way of reading death in Acker's texts, after we have acknowledged the pervasiveness of the Oedipus myth within her work: where the warrior/king/hero is absent. An analysis of *Heavenly Creatures,* Peter Jackson's 1994 interpretation of Euripides's play, "The Bacchants," illuminates the means by which Acker's narratives follow a fractured, yet labyrinthine progression from enacting and presenting transformation via destruction/deconstruction (tearing apart the text), toward enacting and presenting transformation via creation, or healing wounds, incorporating the body's pain into and onto the text.

Acker's transforming protagonists seek the means to reach Artaud's longing-rendered thesis: "[t]o break through language in order to touch life..." (13). This "breaking through language" constitutes the subject of the concluding section of this chapter, and conversely, of this project, "'Moving Into Wonder': To Face the Monster and Exit the Labyrinth." Here, I examine the process of transformation for which Acker's later novels seem to call, by focusing on narratives that follow what Kathryn Hume calls *Blood and Guts in High School*'s "almost unbearable scream of desire, pain, and hysterical frustration caused by male hierarchies of power" (Hume 430). Having moved along the trajectory of male contemporary texts, thus exposing the "foundation" of the labyrinth as artist's analogue for transformation, I now move toward articulating a female experience of the labyrinth as a representation and process of transformation: one that faces the conflation of text/landscape/body as experienced by female protagonists. Of writing her 1988 novel, *Empire of the Senseless,* Acker claims to have learned that "there's no more need to deconstruct, to take apart perceptual habits, to reveal the frauds on which our society's living. We now have to find somewhere to go, a belief, a myth.

Somewhere real...[this is] my first attempt to find *a* myth, *a* place, not *the* myth, *the* place" [my emphasis] ("A Few Notes" 35). In writing *Empire,* a counterpart and contrast to *Blood and Guts,* Acker attempts to make visible the transformation at work in the desire for *a* myth, rather than *the* myth. Abhor, the cyborg protagonist, embodies the myth of the bi-form creature, a kind of Minotaur, or better, sphinx, who is at once monster and object of wonder and desire. Abhor becomes the subject of Acker's novel, traversing the devastated landscape in order to find what it is to love (beyond language) in a world where unity continues to dominate difference.

As Acker explores in her least-critiqued work, *Bodies of Work* (1997), a collection of nonfiction narratives, the monster signifies the boundaries between human and non-human, yet also represents that which we disavow about ourselves. At once repudiated and embraced, the figure of the monster embodies mystery, thus wonder, the territory of a childhood to which Acker hearkens but can never quite give form. In this collection, also her final work, Acker attempts to answer a question that also plagues Paul Auster: "Why bother to write at all?" The essays are a combination of meditations on the author's own works, reflections on the influence of the male artist/genius, modernist art, body-building, the works of DeSade, Colette, and William S. Burroughs, and, winding through virtually every piece is the presence, implicit or explicit, of the labyrinth. For Acker, transformation in/of narrative is itself writing, which "is change, is rhythm," and to embrace rhythm is to embrace wonder, the monster, or all our own abjectness in order to transcend (*Bodies* ix).

Espousing passion, bodily awareness and anarchy, despite most postmodern "decentering" arguments, Acker's narratives do in fact reveal a hope for utopia, wherein

the threshold is transformation and pain. The potential reconciliation that accompanies such a search may best be realized only when we might see and feel the influences, motions, and motivations of the dominant narrative "wheel," which, as the culture that produces it, depends on the destruction, pollution, and demarcation of machine-less, "fecund" spaces. Acker's attempt to "stall out" this wheel of "progress" is ultimately a performative, collage-form of narrative, which may function as a sharp object thrown, or shoved, into the center of that wheel, thus potentially halting its movement. If literature indeed has the "power" to stall out, or interrupt its own transformation (as it reflects the history that produces it), what could be produced in the wake of such a stalling? What possible "empowerment" can there be in death?

I. The "Vision World" of *Blood and Guts in High School*

What can communication be [besides expression]? All of me screams out: vision.
--Kathy Acker, Bodies of Work

Dying is one cure for love.
--Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts in High School

Both written and drawn, scenes from Kathy Acker's 1978 novel, *Blood and Guts in High School* possess an immediacy, with its insistent visual markers that flourish with geographical presence. Graphic images (vivid, violent, and sexual) are collaged into the language, disfiguring, interrupting, cutting, thereby transforming the present into a sense of "wasness," which permeates the "new" image created by the collage. In turn, this "wasness," perhaps in the form of a disembodied voice, or vision, creates a paradoxical presentation of degeneration and regeneration, of healing and wounding; and for a moment, there is no distinction between them. Within this graphic presence, the collage artist

places seemingly unrelated pieces of text (photographs, cut-outs, "straight" narrative texts) in a random order, wherein the resulting chaos reflects a simultaneity that is enacted but not exactly rendered in Acker's novel, because the text is still ruled by a linear narrative structure. Visual "cues" like the captioned beginnings are impositions, and the ends are places where words give way to images: where vision bears down on voice, and as the above passage reflects, the a-signifying languages of the body merge with the "vision world" of the mind.

Blood and Guts in High School enacts the swift and symbolic transformation of a girl to a woman who never quite becomes a woman, but, paradoxically, at ten years old, has never been a child. From the first sentence of the novel, the absence of Janey Smith's mother is offset by a incestuous, "hysterical" relationship with the father, who functions as "boyfriend, brother, sister, amusement," and signals the ten-year-old girl's unflagging search for love (*Blood* 7). This search in turn enacts and embodies a desire to recover a pre-oedipal state, which came with the mother's body and then had to be abandoned for the language-world of the father. If, as critics such as Karen Brennan argue, Janey is "trapped in a language system signified by the phallus," then the only way out of such a system-labyrinth is to disfigure, or somehow warp, that language: to resist the inevitable death at the end of the novel (408). Unfortunately, this merely reveals the classic trap of binary gender: that all narrative is ruled by a language system signified by the phallus. What kinds of transformation are then possible, once we acknowledge the binary, and attempt to restore, if not deconstruct, balance within it?

Transformation at once signifies and *is* the middle, change, and because it is then also motion and *in* motion, it resists language: to place this movement into language

requires a removal, a stepping outside of experience that is difficult if not impossible, unless one is not or refuses to be "touched" by that experience. As a "cut-out" or composite character, Janey is a representation of a human being, caught between "an alligator and a bird, who wants to be a bird," who embodies the paradox of being at once trajectory-less, yet also in the midst of an intense "search for love" (a quest that haunts most, if not all, of Acker's narratives), who is without (her own) narrative, but careens into the center of that narrative to be a "flying consciousness" that transforms into a disintegrating body, into an empty page (*Blood* 147). That Janey, discarded and forgotten by the world around her, is vulnerable to the effects of the dominant culture demonstrates the inadequacy of language to give "voice" to transformative experience. Indeed, to what extent does a self-inflicted transformation of the body represent or enable a transformation of a world or system? In the torturous search for love, or the place beyond language, beyond theory, Janey repeatedly subjects herself and is subjected to torture, humiliation, and bodily invasion so that she might strip away the stillness that threatens to envelop her:

> Once we've gotten a glimpse of the vision world (notice here how the conventional language obscures: WE as if somebodies are the centre of activity SEE what is the centre of activity: pure VISION. Actually, the VISION creates US. Is anything true?) Once we have gotten a glimpse of the vision world, we must be careful not to think the vision world is US. We must go farther and become crazier. (*Blood* 35/37)

"To go farther and become crazier" is to disperse violently fragments of a self, enacted when one no longer trusts what one sees--when, in effect, "vision" is transformed, or lost.

Even in turning inside out the visual, or abstract world of her disintegrating protagonist, the narrative fails to imbue Janey with a subjectivity that can exist (let alone thrive) within the confines of a patriarchal, Oedipal narrative.

The cut-up, or collaged text, in its constant interruption of the traditional narrative drive toward unity and resolution, emphasizes the broken pieces of language (exemplified by drawings, Persian poetry, and blueprint-like dreamscapes) on which the reader must depend in order to navigate her way through the text, as if stepping over the ruins of a great and lost city. One steps between the edges of structure and the destruction of that structure, which disfigures the page, but in the disfigurement, something new emerges: the "terrain of the page" transforms from a flat, smooth (continuous, unifying) surface into a multi-sided, at times jagged array of separate surfaces. Further, this fragmentedness lends itself to an examination of those places that mirror back to us the ripped up world that produces a narrative that is so conscious of the structural boundaries that govern its language. As a disfiguration of that narrative, the function of collage, whether it be intertextual, word-to-image and back, potentially creates depths that were previously absent, or invisible from the surface, and, in crossing and overlapping genres/genders and words/letters themselves, produces the new out of that which has been discarded, or forgotten.

For example, when Janey Smith, imprisoned in the locked room of the Persian slave trader, discovers, "in a forgotten corner," the materials on which she can begin to write the "book report" at the center of the novel, she creates a "wild and public" space out of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (*Blood* 65). Secluded in a twisted version of a "room of her own," Janey undermines the boundaries between the descriptive reality of

her cell, the dream-world of her free-associative, non-rational reporting/writing, and the imagination that flows between the two, mediating between her "who-ness" and "where-ness." In this room, where she "learns to be a whore," Janey collages the story and "bodily wisdom" of Hester Prynne, who, like herself, is a fictional character who represents the "real" of female existence under patriarchy, and was hated "because she was a freak and because she wouldn't be quiet and hide her freakiness like a bloody Kotex and because she was as wild and insane as they come" (65).

In "the book report," Janey reveals and confronts the importance of women's resisting the impulse to turn against themselves, which is nearly impossible to do when one is surrounded by unlimited opportunities for self-destruction, which are often disguised as opportunities for liberation. Living in a culture in which "crime is the only possible behavior," Janey embodies and writes the plight of being a female "outside the road" of male-dominated culture. In such a place, she, like many women raised in the dominant Western culture, "depend[s] on how the people around [her] behave toward [her]":

> Everyone I know lives on the roads...the roads are our civilization. They're the order men have impressed on chaos so that men's lives can be safer and more secure and, thus, so that we can all progress...Couples make up the townspeople world. If you're not part of a couple, you don't exist and no one will speak to you you outcast. Go to hell outcast. Outside the road. (*Blood* 67/94-95)

By connecting the historical narrative of the Puritans and early white America with a fragmented psyche, or inner world, of her own plight, Janey, in writing down her vision

of history, commits the "crime" of cultivating a self in a world where female subjectivity cannot exist, let alone thrive. This articulation of *lived,* or bodily wisdom, renders Janey (and the reader) caught in the space between disintegration and transcendence, all things that make up what in the novel is perceived to be the decay and "stillborn" products of Western culture: the excess of garbage, money, parents who stink, and the overarching, still-pervasive Puritanical mainstay of sexual repression. Not until she begins to "write down her life" does Janey reveal, via the very narrative that produces her and propels her toward certain death, the connection between the violence done to her, her own propensity for self-destruction, ensuing pain from genital disease and neglect (Janey is a ten-year-old child), her progressive and simultaneous assimilation with death, and the state of the culture under which she subsists in/as a commodified body: "It's possible to hate and despise and detest yourself 'cause you've been in prison so long. It's possible to get angrier and angrier. It's possible to hate everything that isn't wild and free" (*Blood* 66).

Janey Smith and Hester Prynne are collaged composites of all who exist "outside the road," and are persecuted by overlapping male networks: incestuous or warmongering American "father-kings," Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, landlords, capitalists, slave traders, lobotomists, and educators (Hume/ "Books" 419). In *The Newly Born Woman*, Catherine Clement argues that "every society has an imaginary zone for what it excludes" : outcasts (women, madmen, shamans, tumblers) held in institutions for prisoners, the insane, the poor and homeless (8-9). Shrinking the historical distance between Hawthorne's time and her own, Janey emphasizes not only how little has changed in the way of Puritan influence and repression in American culture, whose

"progress" depends on the wheel and its road, but also how this "road of progress," built on the rules of ancient Greece, results in the culturally requisite "divorcement of body and mind" (*Blood* 65).

Collage is one means for Acker to, if not restore mind and body, then to break down this binary, by dispersing images, at once cutting them up and pulling them into a cohesive whole. Of this form of pastiche, Brennan reminds us "that [it] is hardly a neutral mode but is impelled by some utopian longing of the male soul to reclaim its place in the 'center' of language" (403). Even though Acker's novel self-consciously announces, via its bold captions, beginnings and endings, and character-journeys in between, the reader experiences more a sense of dissolution instead of the traditional "end," or resolution (or discovery of a greater meaning). In the "anti-tradition" tradition of the Beat irreverence of William S. Burroughs, and as a "cut-up" or postmodern collage-pastiche artist, Acker attempts to break open the "institution" of culture by exposing its narrative system. Unlike Burroughs, though, Acker's writing resists the abstract theory of "Woman, split into body and theory-of-the-body" (Brennan 403). This splitting is also a kind of death, and a reconciliatory problem that contemporary women writers and artists continue to navigate.

The desire to resist this split surfaces in Peter Jackson's 1994 film, *Heavenly Creatures,* which is expressed as a *sparagmos* narrative. Set in mid-1950s New Zealand, the film re-tells a true story of how two adolescent girls, Pauline Yvonne Parker (Melanie Lynskey) and Juliet Hulme (Kate Winslet) meet and create an ecstatic, celebratory friendship based on an intricately shared vision world, which is ruled by a combination of myth (the revels of the Bacchae) and desire for an "oceanic" merging with a perceived

eternal feminine principle. The girls' longing for love, or a continuous pre-oedipal merging, akin to that of Acker's exiled female protagonists, is usurped by the threat of the outer world of authority figures and "parents who stink" (*Blood* 7). Their movement into the territory of madness and murder is a contemporary narrative representation version of a ritual *sparagmos*, in which the Bacchae tear to shreds anyone who would interrupt or otherwise threaten their merging with the Dionysian life force: a world beyond language, ruled by the "unspeakable" passions and urges of the body.

As one of the most powerful elements of transformation, water, when it emerges in narrative, reflects an uncanny quality achieved by the writer who can, as Freud writes, "guide the current of our emotions...dam it up in one direction and make it flow into another" ("The Uncanny" 251). The river's ceaseless current eventually carries everything to open water, to death, to engulfment, and, in turn, to potential rebirth, for the oceanic waves bring return, in washing ashore "repressed" material, corpses, fragments of civilization, or pollution, making visible the remainders of transformation. The river is a key analogue for transformation in the Acker texts central to this project, because it signifies shifts in borders between inner and outer territories (as in the graphic depictions of Janey's dreams, and as signifying the boundary between life and death for *Empire*'s Abhor after the Algerian revolution), and as we see in the following section of the chapter, functions as a bearer of all transformations that link people and places, words and images, disintegrations and possible transcendences.

Significantly, the river's transformative journey "ends" at the open ocean, which represents the eternal, the unknown, source of both life and death, and to where everything eventually returns. The story of the Bacchae evokes the presence and function

of the "oceanic feeling," a psychoanalytic and religious state of transformation, wherein exists a "monumental fury...a drive to destroy civilization" (Parsons 155). In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud describes the "oceanic feeling" as a state in which spirituality, or mysticism, merges with psychoanalysis: where one experiences an unspeakable sense of connectedness with the "natural world," and a pre-Oedipal "memory of unity" or "oneness with the universe" (Parsons 35). Freud relegates the "oceanic feeling" or life-force to a "pre-Oedipal" desire for the mother's lost body, or the unity felt, but not fully remembered, in the womb. The *sparagmos* of myth serves as an important analogue to a different kind of transformation; that is, death as a form of transformation in/of itself. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud further claims that death "itself is not extinction, is not a return to inorganic lifelessness, but the beginning of a new kind of existence which lies on the path of development to something higher" (*Future* 23).

Where transformation in the story of Oedipus plays out as a tragic, paradoxical loss and gain of (in)sight, Euripides's story of the Bacchae is death as transformation: no one in the story is left unchanged by the ritual dismemberment of Pentheus, who has attempted to infiltrate the revels of the Bacchae, to which his mother, Agave, is joined. In her essay, "Scenes of the Crime," Christina Stachurski draws links between Euripides's "The Bacchants" and the contemporary play, *Heavenly Creatures*, on which Jackson's film is based. The Bacchae were a group of women who worshipped Dionysus, the dark god of fluidity and fecundity, "'which encompassed all of the rippling, pulsing, erupting, sluicing forces of life: blood, water, sap, semen, milk and wine'" (Stachurski 114). According to J. Hillis Miller, Dionysus becomes "the ambiguous seducer-rescuer in a family story involving defeat or death for the father figures and a complex role for the

female figures as murderous mothers, self-slaying victims, and transfigured mates for the god" (14). Dionysian "revels on hillsides" in ancient Greece brought people and the natural world together, and subverted the social constructions of gender roles. In Euripides's play, Pentheus is brutally murdered and ripped apart by the "unseeing" female hordes, killed by his own mother because he interrupts the Bacchanal revels. Similarly, Acker's female protagonists, in their searches for love/the lost mother, seek a merging with the life-force from which they have been separated.

Pauline and Juliet are trapped in a militaristic, precision-based, all-girls' school. They bond their friendship by sharing their physical and emotional wounds/scars: when Pauline grows despondent about the memory of how she received the scar, Juliet, reverently beholding Pauline's jaggedly scarred leg, exclaims that "All the best people have bad scars and diseases...It's all so frightfully romantic!" Like the female protagonists of Acker's novels, the two girls, outcasts in the cultural institution of high school, use their scars, like tattoos, to create an intimacy within a world based on vision, dreams, spirits, and the promise of transcendence: proof of the life-force pulsing within their bodies, and proof of their shared experience as outcasts in their society. In "The Bacchants," the Greek revels of the Dionysus-enamored women parallel Pauline and Juliet's feverish experience on the New Zealand hillside, where they name a "Fourth World": a fusion with the life-force that pulses through the natural world, and the rhythm of the sea. Their conjuring the "Fourth World" comes about after Juliet is once again abandoned by her already-stand-offish and emotionally cold mother. Devastated, and prone to breathless excitement, Juliet stumbles away weeping; when Pauline joins her on the hillside, they create, through a "crack in the heavens," the idyllic world that later fuses

with their creating a story about a royal family whose identities the girls "take on" or share, by sculpting them out of clay and bringing them to "life" in their merged inner world.

Two means of achieving Dionysian ecstasy play out in the film as a means to reach transcendence: 1. rhythmic dancing and music (poetry, performance art); and 2. rhythmic chanting (poetry, incantation). Juliet and Pauline dance in dizzying circles around Juliet's house, obliviously knocking over her frail and stiff father, and swooning over the operatic voice of Mario Lanza. The girls write poetry and chant incantations to their "gods," whom they "conjure" in imaginative play, in order to sustain a state of passion and ecstasy. In *Bacchae*, "Dionysus is not so much a god but an anthropomorphic representation of the normally suppressed passionate life-force which runs through human beings as well as all other living organisms" (Stachurski 114).

In *Heavenly Creatures*, Dionysus is represented by the girls' devotion to "the saints" of their "Fourth World," who, untouchable as gods, are the popular film and music stars of the day: Mario Lanza and James Mason, among others, who come to represent the characters the girls create in their story of the royal family. In one scene, early on in their friendship, Pauline and Juliet create a ritual to honor the "saints": sitting near a river, candles lit all around them, they gingerly place photographs of the different men on a rock altar, chanting "Him, He, This, That..." until Pauline places a photo of Orson Welles and utters, "It." Juliet screams, revolted by the image, claiming it "the most hideous man alive!" As the music builds ominously in the background, casting a comic yet foreboding tone, Juliet disgustedly tosses Welles' photo in the river, where, the film focuses closely on the image floating with increasing speed, until it is "washed away" down a small

waterfall. The river signifies a return, which is evoked when the girls finally consummate their friendship sexually, each morphing, via imagination, into the identity of their clay gods; the image of Welles' face, which they link to their creation of Dionello.

Significantly named, as the flow of sound resembles "Dionysus," "Dionello," the son of "Charles" (Pauline) and "Deborah" (Juliet) the agent of violence, who, in a series of darkly comic scenes, rushes into the girls' fields of imaginary vision, in order to "kill off" interlopers who interrupt their play and fantasy: Dionello slices and dices a boy who loves Pauline, skewers a priest who visits Juliet in the hospital were she is recovering from tuberculosis, and disembowels a psychologist who promises to "cure" Pauline of her burgeoning "homosexuality." The Bacchae constitute a "no-man's land," where women, rebels of indeterminate gender, robots, children, enact a process of destruction and dismemberment, which is, in turn, also creation. In slaying the interlopers who would interrupt their fantasy world, Dionysus/Dionello "liberates [the girls] from their repression by fathers [priests and psychologists] or by self-righteous perjuring lovers" (Miller 14). Herein lies the underlying theme of "The Bacchants": that there is price to be paid for resisting the darker gods who "'reside in human nature itself, whether they demand expression in sexual passion or in the ecstasies of an extraordinary religion'" (Stachurski 115).

Pauline's mother, Honora, becomes a target because she represents stark, sober reality: she is poor, brutally honest, wants her daughter to get an education (stay within the "safe" confines of institutions), has a sad and lined face from years of hard work, and loves her children with an often intense ferocity. Besides relieving the tension of pent-up rage, the desperate act of killing Honora does not logically offer the girls any greater

freedom, nor gain them more solid ground in their imaginations: the murder does not allow the girls transcendence, nor any greater understanding of the experience they have shared together. On what would be their last day together, the girls lead Honora on a walk around a labyrinthine path along a hillside, covered with trees and rocks. Juliet drops a phony gem stone on the ground; when Honora bends down to pick it up, her daughter beats her with a rock wrapped in a stocking. Screaming, the girls take turns beating her as shining, gray visions of their running along a steamship amid confetti, happily shouting, "Mummy!" dissolve into the stark images of blood streaming down their pale faces. This liquid interspersal of images signifies their loss of vision, their awakening, so to speak, to the dismemberment of their merging and the death of Pauline's mother. Similarly, in *The Bacchae*, Agave is yanked out of her fantasy world, believing at first that she has killed a lion. When she brings Pentheus's head to Cadmus, her father, she expects to be rewarded, the horror she experiences for what she has done comes in a cloud of confusion and incomprehension: "Are all the limbs fitted together in one piece?.....But Pentheus! in my folly how was he concerned?" (Euripides 361)

The final image in the film is Pauline's face filling the screen, stained with her mother's blood and gazing wildly upward, while the film dissolves into a terrible, echoing, animal scream, which resonates beyond the image. We are made to feel the agony of the girls' separation, and empathize with them, despite their grisly action. This abrupt ending also evokes/enacts a "stillborn" ritual, in that it has not completed itself, or, if it has, it has not led to any kind of understanding, insight, or meaning. Instead, the meaning of the event is in the mere fact of its existence; and the movement toward meaning, desire, play, even love, is not merely expressed, but is seen, made visible, graphic and unspeakable.

Like Danny Torrance's vision of the river of blood in the hotel elevator of *The Shining*, the myth of Bacchae is a scream that shapes, transforms history, thus narrative: "History shapes all of us; history is the lives and actions of dead people. As soon as I'm dead, I'll be part of this history which shapes. Memory or history runs human blood through the river of time" (*Empire* 66).

Both Euripides's play and Jackson's contemporary film act as obverse labyrinth narratives to Acker's narratives in which the mother is already dead or absent. In *Heavenly Creatures,* the mother is an intruder, and represents a world the girls repudiate: a harsh reality of subservience, gray, gritty work, and married life as a kind of prostitution. As Pauline and Juliet delve more deeply into their "vision world," they ironically and subconsciously open themselves to being entrapped by the very world they reject: they move from the institution of the all-girls school to the institution of prison. By contrast, the female protagonists of Acker's novels are alone, or meet "others" of different genders (and species) along their journeys, and they do not worship gods outside themselves; rather, Janey, for example, subjects herself, her body, to pain and suffering in order to *feel* in a world devoid of love: to find a place where loving is being, becoming, a subject. Like Juliet and Pauline, however, Acker's protagonists seek a naturalized representation of love, of transcendence, a "pure" state in which they are merged with a fleeting life force, both denied and sanctioned by the body, or the terrible balance signified by imminent disintegration.

Acker's many female and/or multi-gendered ("othered") protagonists reach for subjectivity while completely surrounded by and embedded in an Oedipally-based vision of female experience, wherein the "search for love" functions as a metaphor for that

ultimately futile reaching. As "profane mystics" in exile, characters Janey Smith, Don Quixote (*Don Quixote*), Abhor (*Empire of the Senseless*), Airplane (*In Memoriam to Identity*), and Acker herself slice through the very "foundation" of being to find the source of "the most Real" (Parsons 71). In addition, this search is, particularly in Acker texts which are populated by lost, dead, or dying mothers, an attempt by the fleeting protagonist to retrieve, or put back together, a lost mother/self. In *Blood and Guts in High School,* the absent/present mother connects the historical with the psychoanalytic (outside/inside). Conversely, the textual ruin of the novel is made most visible by the presence of Janey's dream-maps, which depict what appear to be lost cities or temples, two-dimensional, written commentary next to the drawings: "tiny tiny rock steps I climb. very scary" (*Blood* 15).

As Janey's travels around the world reveal, the text is itself, in representing such ruin, a signification of "absence and uncanny presence... crumbling over time" (Brennan 406). In "The Uncanny," Freud states that "When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted,--[but] which has become a thing of terror" (236). Once assuring us of our immortality, via the belief in ghosts, for example, the double has become a harbinger of death, wherein the ruin is built into creation, the sacred built into the profane. The dream-maps are also broken sites: the attempt to render visible, by drawing into narrative, the absence of a maternal presence within a patriarchal world. Brennan suggests that, in the novel, the first site of Janey's travel, "Merida," which resembles that of lost Mayan civilization, "is also a figure for the mother's cut-up body, a figure that itself resembles Acker's pastiche text, suggesting...not only the dreamy

half-remembered semiotics of the pre-Oedipal but also the geography of a woman's body, a site that is all too often perceived by patriarchy as 'memorable' fragments" (Brennan 406).

In contrast to Merida, the New York site of the novel is an attempt to represent the "unrepresentable" remainders of transformation: it is a place of abjection and chaos, and if it were representable, it might be that which replaces "order based on a certain kind of capitalism, [which] is disintegrating while another world, one of tribes, criminal and other, anarchic, is rising out of the rotting streets, sidewalls, and bridges" (*Bodies* 135). It is the world of the slave trader, where Janey writes down her dreams, which slide, transform, into visions permeated by the abandoned buildings, trash, and "blood and guts" world dying around her. Here, language is usurped by seeing and feeling; that seeing and feeling is relegated to a terrible space of proliferating absence and decay. The text visualizes the world (which Acker equates with the mind itself) as a place no longer describable by language while it is at the same time rooted to language. This is the place where transformation seems to be stalled out, broken, dammed up, so to speak. For Acker, according to Brennan, the Real "may be unspeakable, but it exists. Like feminine subjectivity, the 'other' logic of slums and crime has been relegated to the outskirts [of the city] where it may be ignored and...repressed" (Brennan 413).[x]

In the novel's fragmentation of Janey's "self" the reader recognizes a character who, at once a child and a weathered, tired "adult," carries a kind of post-ritual wisdom that pours out of her body in the life-giving, bodily alchemy of the abject life-force:

> A girl is wild who likes sensual things: doesn't want to give up
>
> things being alive: you keep on going, there are really no rules: it

> doesn't matter to you whether you live or die, but every now and then there's a kind of territory and you might get stuck; if you get stuck that's OK too if you really don't give a shit, but who doesn't give a shit! Loving everything and rolling in it like it's all gooky shit goddamnit make a living grow up no you don't want to do that. (*Blood* 66-67)

This lengthy passage embodies the struggle inherent in the narrative movement between word and image: where transformation is at once experienced and witnessed, or observed. The passage is also imbued with a Dionysian embrace with the abject, or pre-Oedipal, pre-language space that is most often relegated to the "feminine principle." As such, the "feminine" text remains ruled by the very language that it resists, and as a result, the narrative reveals the inner and the outer world of the experiencing subject. The narrative "speaks" to the reader, the often-ambiguous second-person voice implicating the reader in the shift from language to the visual image, and back and forth, implying at once an analogue for certain narrative death, and its surmountablity. Janey's death is imminent; the reader may intuit its quickening as a river reaches a waterfall. This quickening is made explicit in the text's many references to and descriptions of disintegration: an almost-joyful embrace of things breaking down, or relief, as a words like "rolling in it" and "loving everything" reveal--relief in giving up the resistance to rules, or the laws that sublimate transformation, marking it up and sublimating it via ritual, which renders transformation visible.

One way that Acker's novel enacts and constitutes narrative transformation is by presenting the text-as-world-as itself already a ruin, because of its constant disintegration,

as rendered visible by the text's graphic violence, as well as its drawings and map-images. Brennan describes this notion of the text-as-ruin as being a "signification...of absence and uncanny presence...crumbling over time...a figure for the mother's cut-up body...not only the dreamy half-remembered semiotics of the pre-Oedipal, but also the geography of a woman's body" (Brennan 406). The mother's strongly *present* absence also enacts what Barthes describes as the "disfiguration of language," or, "the place where the death of language is glimpsed":

> As textual theory has it: the language is redistributed. Now, *such redistribution is always achieved by cutting.* Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect. (*Pleasure* 6).

In plagiarizing canonical texts, Acker's narratives uphold a binary-based system, or structure. Yet, her narratives may also enact, or effectively represent, layers of consciousness wherein the "death of language" is not necessarily glimpsed, but the transformation between narrative history and personal narrative, or personal history is lain bare. The "cutting" rendered by Acker's texts is an attempt to at least draw attention to the ruin-status of the feminine in Western culture, wherein literature is as firmly held in place by the Oedipal narrative as is history itself. Under Barthes's configuration, Acker's texts actually conform to the very system they attempt to reject. This paradox is also embodied by the anorexic female who attempts to "disappear" through starvation as a

means for resisting the order into which she must grow, to which she must conform. Her silent, yet visible, starving body cuts through the generous space of the feminine, and her resistance holds her within the very structure she resists. No transformation can happens here, except that which is rendered in death: the only "power" is in the unknown. Yet, what good does that do us here in the world of the living? What transformation is possible once one becomes aware of these seemingly immovable binaries?

The "ruin" of the mother's "cut-up" body is in Acker's fiction more akin to a "buried treasure," not in decay, but simply gone, disappeared, thus suppressed, evoking hidden depths along myriad surfaces. The uncanniness of the mother's body is so because disappearance does not necessarily signify death; perhaps more accurately, the "dreamy half-remembered semiotics of the pre-Oedipal," or "oceanic feeling" signify the longing and desire that come with separation, death or otherwise. The ritual, or rite of passage, in Acker's novel is the daughter's endless search for "love," which is the obverse of death, the "buried" mother being not separate from but a part of herself. In this search, the daughter is willing to risk, even embrace, death in order to reach what is ultimately a merging with her own fragmented self.

As with the movement between word and image in the narrative, the transformation in this search is signified by the repetitive, back and forth movement of an unstable ball (Janey's identity), which in turn hearkens to the threshold between death and narrative. Further, this movement enacts a means by which transformation, its markers, as well as its absences are made visible, or *visual*:

> You, the thing called 'you,' was a ball turning and turning in the blackness only the blackness wasn't something--like 'black'--and it

> wasn't nothingness 'cause nothingness was somethingness. Your self is a ball turning and turning as it's being thrown from one hand and every time the ball turns over you feel all your characteristics, your identities, slip around so you go crazy. When the ball doesn't turn, you feel stable. (*Blood* 55)

Perhaps, then, the wheel is not history, culture, or a mode of production (capitalism), but rather, ever-changing notions and experiences of one's identity, subjecthood: the fact of a transforming body battered about in a sea change, subsisting in a culture that fears change to the death. Of course *I* feel stable when *I* am not being thrown from hand to hand, at the mercy of forces within and without. When I can no longer tell the difference, I am spinning out of control; in fact, I am not sure I am an I, or ever was.

By "cutting up" Janey's character-identity and collaging her two-dimensional form into the crude drawings and (a)symmetrical poetry within and woven between the narrative, Acker denies the character a language that is intrinsically connected to an identity. Brennan suggests that "[i]n Acker/Janey's reading of her 'cancer,' we witness the transformation of the hystericized body, passive and impotent, to the hysterical speaking subject, powerful and articulate. Wildness made public" (Brennan 415-416). As explained earlier in this chapter, Acker/Janey's re-telling of *The Scarlet Letter* is also a critique of the historical influence of narrative: how the same forces at work in Hawthorne's Puritan society are the same forces at work in contemporary urban America, where Janey's shouting, diseased body is as much a signifier of patriarchal rule as is the "A" stitched upon Hester Prynne's chest. The personal stories of women "outside the road" meet the influence of history, joined by narrative in transformation, wherein "Law

is patriarchal because it denies the bodies, the sexualities of women. In patriarchy, there is no menstrual blood" (*Bodies* 78-79).

At the point of transition between Janey's movement from the world of her father ("Inside high school") to the slums of New York City ("Outside high school," or, the world of the slave trader, another version of the world of her father), the novel shifts to a detailed, "page-less" section of the text. This section finally "abandons" words and moves to the flat, mapped out representation of the inner world brought out into the "real," outer world. Here, the unspeakable washes into words, and neither the image nor the language that surrounds it yields decipherable meaning. The first image, "A Map of My Dreams," juxtaposes the trajectory of a flying, predatory bird and Janey's learning to fly, over and in the midst of myriad folds and smoothed surfaces, slow and swift currents of water, branches and roots. The boundary of the "road to the city" breaks in, but the images focus on several animals, and the thriving "natural" world of tree groves, grassy meadows, water, "the land of childhood." In the second map, "My Dreams Stop and the Visions Begin," the drawings become more stratified, sharp-cornered, structured, and oddly off-balanced: its crude attempt at depth makes it appear more "cut-up" than the first map, as boundaries become more apparent: raised platforms, streets with hidden corners, dead-ends, and multi-layered fences and boxes direct the reader's eye to the inside of, or behind, them, while the outside remains transparent.

Finally, the third map, "The Fairy Tale Begins," emphasizes terrifying white spaces, and resembles a stratified, schizophrenic landscape of rays and icicles in the unflinching winter light, which plays on surfaces that separate from and collide with themselves, wherein Janey describes "A desolate country. Gray air...Everything is white

and cold. I'm scared of everything. That's what life is until I change completely" (*Blood* 50-51). For Janey, to "change completely" is to succumb to the inevitable end while the text goes on being written. Collaged into the final pages of *Blood and Guts in High School,* is a seemingly separate section, "The World," which, following Janey's death, presents a series of thick-inked drawings. Kathryn Hume describes this section of the novel as a representation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, or "a flicker of postmortem consciousness" that displays the tension between the alligators and Janey's winged soul (403). Further, "The World" presents four versions of the goddess Kali, who does not obviously figure into Acker's novel. Yet, according to Hume, "Tantrikas of this tradition delve into the 'revolting dissolution of the body,' for only by accepting the total reality of death can they come close to the death-goddess Kali and to illumination" (432). This acceptance affects the relation between (absent) mother, daughter, and pain, and the ongoing and futile "search for love" ultimately shapes the tension that presses against this acceptance of "the total reality of death."

As the end of the novel reveals in its printed drawings of Janey's bird-like transformation into the world of the dead, Acker resists "resolving" that tension, instead making it (her version of "the high-wire") the point: that disintegration and transcendence are embodied in the same movement. Within a shape that appears to be a crest, under which are written the words, "So we create the world in our own image," an alligator holds a human figure within its jaws, while another human figure sits atop what could be a wall, or a tightrope, legs spread open, a snake making its way toward him/her (*Blood* 164). Always suspended between one evolutionary form and another, between the "reptilian" body and "phoenix-like" spirit, the bodies we inhabit hang in the balance.

Above the hieroglyphic human figures, inspired by the Egyptian Book of the Dead, a two-dimensional line/wall/tightrope features two birds hanging from it by their necks. A bird with spread wings reaches midair for a square object, and yet more birds fly above it, reaching the top of the crest. These drawings lack the immediacy of the earlier, more cut up, close-up drawings in Acker's novel. What this suggests is perhaps the disembodiment Janey experiences as her journey comes to an end: that the body, never fully inhabited until she becomes fatally ill, must ultimately be left behind.

The transformation in/of these drawings mirrors, however jaggedly, the transformation between the immediate and the distant: the narrative gives way to greater "white space," and rather boldly states its failure to keep Janey inside the "body" of the text. At the end of the novel, when Janey dies of cancer, sacred and profane merge in the river (evoking the Egyptian river Styx), wherein "finally, it is the imagination that Acker believes will create our freedom; fictions, hysterical and female, may make possible our human transformations" (Hume/ "Books" 419). On the accompanying last page of the novel, the caption, "So the doves..." briefly chronicles the aftermath of Janey's death: "Soon many other Janeys were born and these Janeys covered the earth" (*Blood* 165). Emerging from the chaos of graphic, "copulating bodies and death goddesses," Janey transforms into a kind of bird-shaman, coming up out of the river of alligators (Hume/ "Books" 433). The absence made present by Janey's death has until now caught her situated between alligators and birds: the devourer and the devoured, or the ones who in a sense stand watch over the dead, "whispering of their own events" over the graves, these "blank spaces," those "no-man's lands" to which we all travel (*Blood* 165).

II. "Moving Into Wonder": To Face the Monster and Exit the Labyrinth

It is imperative to return to the body, to return the body.
--Kathy Acker, Bodies of Work

The possibility of madness is...implicit in the very phenomenon of passion.
--Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization

In the final pages of *Blood and Guts in High School,* the winged soul lifts up out of the devouring river in "The World," only to find an afterlife fraught with struggles that mirror those faced on earth. The folly, Acker's own work seems to say, is that one cannot effectively seek Oedipal unity unless one is willing to also relinquish the assumption that the body, its death, its unbearable abjectness, must give way to something "greater": that the body's wounds might in themselves generate meaning. Or, that a ritual *sparagmos,* a ripping apart of language, would necessarily yield a new, "pure" means for expression: that even vision is constituted by myth. As Acker has stated, and countless artists have demonstrated, Western patriarchal culture "gives us *nothing*...nothing that gives us any wisdom, that gives us any way of dealing with death, that gives us any way of going from one stage of life to another, or even telling us what a stage in life *is*...We don't have any language with which to talk about these things" (Interview 184). Freud and his modernist contemporaries could not quite reach what they were seeking: to explain the world in Western, patriarchal terms. Freud himself could not quite reach the words for what he seemed to want to say about the oceanic feeling, which is beyond language. If the traditional Oedipal narrative is constituted by Western "civilization and its discontents" (Freud) then perhaps Acker's work constitutes the "unconscious" of a visually apparent "civilized" narrative structure. Her disfigurement of narrative reinforces the notion that

death, or disintegration, an interruption to life, enables a subjectivity that cannot exist in life, as it is Oedipally narrativized.

Further, it has become, for Acker, less crucial to find *the* myth which will replace Oedipus, for she (and her texts) understands that this is not possible. In the wake of writing *Blood and Guts in High School*, Acker realizes that she can write towards finding, rather, *a* possible myth that can better represent her vision: "The demand for an adequate mode of expression is senseless. Then why is there this searching for an adequate mode of expression? Was I searching for a social and political paradise? Since all acts, including expressive acts, are inter-dependent, paradise cannot be an absolute" (*Empire* 113). In *Empire of the Senseless*, author and character merge in the quest for a mode of expression that reflects bodily experience in a world of narrative dominated by Oedipal tragedy. This quest is more keenly, in her later narratives, part of Acker's utopic vision, or romantic hope for transcendence that begins to feed into her narratives despite the ripping and shredding. I see these actions as indicative of a desire to get to the bottom of things, in order to find, finally, a crystalline meaning below all the chaos and disintegration: something ongoing, beyond ourselves, natural, perhaps, but not absolute. After all, garbage, machines, toxic waste, etc., are all "natural," or "of the earth" and not all rivers are "pure." The point is that they *move*, and this movement signifies a process beyond language, beyond even desire, and is arguably impossible to reach. Acker's point perhaps is that it is the reaching itself that is meaningful, that brings a feeling subject to the apex of his/her desire, thus aliveness, signified by an eternal flow that is at once impossible to reach and yet always within the reacher.

While *Blood and Guts in High School* is such a journey of seeking, wherein the protagonist is constantly stopped and imprisoned by the institutions of her culture, in *Empire of the Senseless* the journey has become the whole story, the revolution a tangible thing. This is made clear by the presence of the river, which, significant at the end of *Blood and Guts* as a symbol of transformation from life to death to the afterlife, figures more prominently through the whole narrative of *Empire of the Senseless* as an analogue for transformation. As a symbol of death *and* life, the river denies nothing, represses nothing, and sanctions death as well as life, and therefore offers a means for seeing death as itself a transformation in/of narrative.

In *Empire of the Senseless,* Abhor writes that it seemed possible, ten years before, "to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning. But this nonsense, sense it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions" (*Empire* 134). After *Blood and Guts in High School,* Acker's novels gradually move away from the entrapment of institutions and locked rooms (from the locked room of Janey Smith's slave trader, the hospital of *Don Quixote*, the imprisoning all-girls' school of *Great Expectations*) and closer to the openness that follows their destruction. In *Bodies of Work,* Acker describes the transformation of her own writing, in what she has attempted to accomplish in novels of deconstruction, in the revolt against meaning.

The state of exile, passion, and the desire for "a new myth to live by" all come to a meeting place in Acker's *Empire of the Senseless,* which is also a "graphic" representation of transformation in/of narrative. The novel is dedicated to Acker's tattoo

artist, and the drawings in the book are all actual tattoos (wounds, marks of the outcast), placed in the novel as graphic captions, at places where the narrative shifts, or transforms, progresses. The heart, rather than the stomach, figures as the central part of the body (narrative) in Acker's novel, and signifies the rose and the cunt; further, the heart and rose together are represented as tattoos, repeated throughout the narrative, signifying the site of the outcast, who bears a wounding that is his/her identity. Whether it is in flames, or pierced with a sword or an arrow, the heart is the key that links writing and tattooing: like the act of writing, the act of *receiving* a tattoo is a return to the wounding that brings one to seek out a transformation of that wounding: "To write is to reveal a heart's identity...[t]o write or describe a heart...demands accurate observation of the self and of the self's world" (*Empire* 203). Ellen G. Friedman describes Acker's appropriation of the tattoo as a "precise metaphor for her writing, [as] the tattoo is an outlawed, magical language written directly on the body, becoming part of the body, the body turning into text" (46). For Acker, the act of receiving and creating a tattoo

> concerns taking over, doing your own sign-making...The meeting of body and...the spirit--it's a *real* kind of art, it's on the skin. It's both material and not material and it's also a sign of the outcast...people who are beginning to take their own sign-making into their own hands. They're conscious of their own sign-making, signifying values... ("Conversation" 18)

The tattoo itself, the "readable" vision of a tattoo on someone else's body, and the experience of receiving a tattoo, all signify the possibility of transformation via turning the body itself into a text, a work of art: "The tattoo is primal parent to the visual arts.

Beginning as abstract maps of spiritual visions, records of the 'other' world, tattoos were originally icons of power and mystery designating realms beyond normal land-dwellers' experience" (*Empire* 140). Further, as a shared emblem of experience, and as a graphic narrative written upon the surface of the body, the tattoo functions as both a ritual dismemberment and a ritual of renewal and creation, which, like writing, potentially opens up wounds in order to heal them. For Acker's outlaws and outcasts, the movement of writing and drawing are the same, signifying a means to communicate the unspeakable: the vision world.

As an exile, Abhor dreams the visions of Janey Smith (an uncanny ruin herself), transforming Merida into a jungle of the "Real," which is a habitable place in *Empire of the Senseless*, contrasting the "cut-out" vision of Janey in *Blood and Guts in High School*:

> I took my body and forced it, tamed it, to make it to the river. Though I was running slower and slower, I made it to the river, the birds were fucking, down white concrete steps slippery from the sun. I would have dived into the ice-cold water to escape fear. Daddy Monster Fear. All I've ever wanted is freedom from fear or to fly. But the ice-cold freedom which I've barely tasted...only in my imagination, was too weighty for a child whose identity is predicated on Monsters. (*Empire* 171)

This representation of fear, accompanied by the presence of ice, evokes the temples in Janey Smith's dreams, and the cold stone world of men who have frozen in a fatal glance at Medusa, the "monstrous feminine" force sublimated by patriarchal myth and transformed into the "Daddy Monster Fear" who becomes the Minotaur to be slain with

the help of a woman. The Minotaur, whose name "comes from the Latin word *monstrum* or wonder," roams the interior of the structure (*Bodies* 95). This passage at once embraces and resists the conflation of woman with death by drawing upon the transformative presence of the river, which *is* transformation because it is in constant motion as a site for cleansing, dying, rebirthing, in its constant flowing, even under thick ice.

The "feminine" seeker, no matter what gender, whose "identity is predicated on monsters," discovers that s/he is at once the monster within the labyrinth, broken, lurching toward transcendence, and toward a recovery of loss (an Oedipal loss of insight or knowledge), or of ruin. When Acker was a little girl she wanted to be a pirate. Carole Maso writes of wanting to be a horse. The world of pretend and dreams is the domain of the feminine principle: to escape the icy world ruled by the Law of the Father: the hall of mirrors that paradoxically draws one nearer to and further from any sense of self. Abhor's diving into the "ice-cold freedom" to escape "Daddy-Monster" fear evokes a diving into a mirror, wherein she returns to Daddy-Monster fear again and again. She seeks transformation, which for her, can only happen when she takes a stand, her own path, and faces this fear instead of running from it.

Abhor, is, in effect, a "transformer" in more than one sense: as part robot, part human, thus "monster," she evokes the 1980s toy (*"Transformers! Robots in Disguise! Transformers! More than meets the eye!"*) that changes from a robot-warrior to a mode of transportation, in her shape-shifting into a motorcycle, as she escapes from prison after being betrayed by Thivai. She has transformed by way of the river, traveling alone, having been jailed, beaten, then betrayed by Thivai, left to figure out her culture on her own, looking to no one but herself to answer her questions: "I stood there in the sunlight, and

thought that I didn't as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn't want and whom I hated. That was something. And then I thought that, one day, maybe, there'd be a human society in a world which is beautiful, a society which wasn't just disgust" (*Empire* 227). Instead of tearing apart the world, as the Bacchae, or, like Janey, dying/diving into an afterlife filled with the same tension between devoured and devourer, Abhor begins to pick up the fragments her world has left for her, as, Acker writes, "to desire to do is to do and to do is to desire to do in this world which is no longer dualistic" (*Bodies* 175). What kind of artist will Abhor become if such a world were possible? That is, in a world in which "the myth of Daedalus defines fiction [Joyce], literature...[where a] writer makes reality?" (32-33)

For some critics, the search for love, or "a new myth to live by," appears ultimately self-destructive because of the death that it demands from the female subject in narrative, since, as feminist critics have argued, narratives created/made under patriarchy are by nature Oedipal and misogynist ("Conversation" 17). Friedman argues that, in such narratives, "there is no room...to truly name oneself. Acker's narratives...are designed to be jaws steadily devouring...the mindset, if not the mind, of Western culture" (48). Evoking the river of alligators in the Book of the Dead graphics of *Blood and Guts in High School*, Friedman also hearkens to a sharp and oft-repeated phrase in *Empire of the Senseless*: "Your mind is a nightmare that has been eating you: now eat your mind" (38). To "eat one's mind" is to face, finally, the hunger implicit in the "search for love" that permeates Acker's narratives: her protagonists are willing to sacrifice themselves or what/whom they love to death, in order to open up a radical transformation of the imprisoned world of mind (and body).

Thus, to be an anarchist, a pirate, an outlaw (one who ignites and signifies transformation) is also to be a purveyor of pain. In *Empire of the Senseless,* "death" is the code for the rebels of indeterminate gender and humanity: "In ancient Greek mythology a river separated the living from the dead. The only event which any human can know is the one event he or she can't perceive, that he or she must die" (55). In Part I, which is an "elegy" for Oedipal society, according to Acker, Thivai and Abhor try to envision a culture that does not foster illness: "I thought all I could know about was human separation; all I couldn't know, naturally, was death...When all that's known is sick, the unknown has to look better" (*Empire* 33). The unknown is also the unspeakable, or the Real, and, as examined in the first section of this chapter, it is the uncanny ruin or ghostly double that supports the living world (of form) of the father. Like the absent or dead mother, the dreaming body, and the site of Merida, the ruin of the maternal body, or the repressed life-now-dead-but-not-really-dead, on which Oedipal society sustains itself, needed to have been rejected in order to ensure the survival of the reality that holds sway over every book written.

To stage revolution (framed in Part II of the novel, where the Algerians take over Paris), the rebels adopt the code, "Death" because "'death changes you,'" and it cannot be fully perceived (*Empire* 56). As an analogue for transformation and a code for revolution then, death becomes, in Acker's novel, a mirror image of life, as the body is a mirror image of the spirit: "the body is a mirror of the mind. A mirror image is not exactly the same as what is mirrored...the body must touch or cross the spirit to be alive, Touching they mirror each other. A living person, then, is a pair of twins..." (*Empire* 65/74). Revolution as death is another way of saying that revolution is a means for tearing down, smashing

aside, in order to *make way for the new.* Yet, revolution cannot claim to create anything new itself. It is important that Abhor is the one who expresses these thoughts, because she, of indeterminate humanity (part robot, part human), struggles throughout the novel to define identity--not merely her own, as if identity were something that could be taken for granted as "real," but as an idea/ideal in/of itself. Abhor "knows" everything she knows by way of imagination, and her body, which, she discovers, does not lie to her. She does not "know" how she knows things, but they ring as true: "Exile was a permanent condition. In terms of identity. But from what was identity exiled? Perhaps this society is living out its dying in its ruins" (*Empire* 63).

As "mystic divers [who] go where few dare to tread" (Schiller), Acker's protagonists do not seek to transcend the crude matter of the body; rather, they subject themselves to the body's wisdom, via the most direct means one can deign to do so in their culture: through pain as transformation. Kathryn Hume suggests that while the transcendental Romantics "looked for a 'higher' truth [in the experience of bodily and spiritual pain], Acker's focal figures look for a kind of 'lower' bedrock truth...in the body and physical pain...some kind of breakthrough in consciousness through pain" (Hume 507-508). Further, as a visual representation of this threshold, the bodily presence of the tattoo signifies, as we discover in Part III of the novel, (as both given and received, and as also a site where destruction and creation come together), the human heart is lain bare, "so that our world, for a second, explodes into flames" ("A Few Notes" 31).

In not joining any "gang," motorcycle or otherwise, as re-appropriated by the violent men in her midst who are already re-creating the same society that they destroyed, Abhor becomes an alternative kind of artist. In refusing to join with the pirates and

sailors, she realizes that though she, as an outcast, "longs for a home, her or his real love (home) is change. Stability in change, change in stability occurs only imaginarily. No roses grow on sailors' graves" (*Empire* 114). Abhor, like Don Quixote, is "forced to find a self when [she's] been trained to be nothing," and ultimately submits to a romantic hope for transcendence, where the way of the outcast is the river, in constant transformation, forever cleansing, forever collecting, renewing itself (*DQ* 171).

Although Acker's narratives push her characters to the edge of losing their "selves," they are always caught between the celebratory, yet imprisoning aspects of this loss. Acker's pirates, sailors, female outcasts, tattoo artists, and masochistic mystics all travel the fire-and-ice path of transformation, within fragmented narratives that invariably lead to what Anita Philips, in a study of masochism, describes as "pitiable deaths" (59). Yet, in these narratives, Acker's "edge" is the exposure of a world without women in patriarchy: a series of retellings in which a woman/girl/person of metamorphosing gender attempts to navigate a world in ruin, decay, a crumbling labyrinth, at once apocalyptic and revolutionary. The ruined landscape signifies a labyrinth situated atop the "pure," naturalized landscape (consistently symbolized by the river), or "the past," which is realm of living myth.

One question with which Acker's work seems to grapple is also one that has been important to this project: why are myths so important to an articulation of transformation in/of narrative? Myths from all societies represent and embody the imaginary of a particular culture in a particular place in time. The power certain myths hold over time corresponds to the degree those myths are re-told, changed, or repressed. As explored in relation to Western myth, by Sir James Frazer and others, earth-based

myths were usurped by sky-god cultures, who replaced a mother-creator with a father-creator in the dominant narrative of Western culture. All myths possess the potential to restore meaning to a culture seeking identity; in turn, the "truth" of any myth has the potential to suffocate, or disregard, the presence and possibility in other myths, when it comes to relegating that truth to personal experience or cultural reality. The Oedipus myth makes sense in a Western, patriarchal culture, yet even though this myth dominates Western narrative into the twenty-first century, it cannot account for every narrative, every experience.

Acker's work resists the crystallizing, or hardening, of myth into "truth" and instead attempts to convey to the reader that myth is fluid, ever-changing over time, and changing all who come into contact with it, as a river changes a landscape over time. In *Bodies of Work*, Acker places the myth of the Cretan labyrinth and its "players," Daedalus, Theseus, and Ariadne in the context of a female experience (reader and writer), wherein lies the question, what happens when women enter the labyrinth as artists? As a seeker herself, Acker longed for a transformation that would take her beyond the confines of language, of having to find her "voice," as is the cliché mantra of the burgeoning writer/author: "Why did I have to find my own voice and where was it? I hated my fathers" (*Bodies* 9). The sky-god fathers, as dominant myth proclaims, created creativity, the labyrinth, the woman as muse: even the notion of creativity oddly blocked from the experiencing, wounded body, the body who writes to write. Her narratives' searching for a "language of the body" illustrates the necessity of breaking down (dying) in order to build up again (to be reborn). Acker traces her center of seeking to childhood, where she

> ran into a book in order to find herself. I have found only the reiterations, the mimesis of patriarchy, or my inability to be. No body anywhere...I am looking for the body, my body, which exists outside its patriarchal definitions...But what is this language? I have become interested in languages which I cannot *make up*, which I cannot *create* or even *create in*: I have become interested in languages which I can only come upon (as I disappear)...I call these languages, *languages of the body*. (*Bodies* 166-167)

These languages already exist, and do not need to be created, nor conceived. They have only to be discovered, in a "spirit," if you will, of wonder.

Daedalus, the "first artist," created the Cretan labyrinth and lived in exile, having revealed "the realm of art [as] separate from and subservient to that of the political" (*Bodies* 97). As Acker "re-writes" the story of Daedalus, she reminds us of history's claim that he was a "highly skilled craftsman" because he knew how and what to sacrifice for his art:

> His king, Minos of Cretan Cnossus, honored him until he learned that Daedalus had helped his (Minos') wife fuck a white bull. Then Minos made Crete Daedalus' prison. Daedalus escaped prison by his art. He made wings for himself and his son. His son got too high, flew too high, soared into the sun, and drowned. Art is this certain kind of making. (*Bodies* 33)

Daedalus's position in myth as a male artist who gives birth signifies a world in which voice, rather than vision, corners the patriarchal notion of creating: "finding one's voice"

and "making it new" (Pound), whereas, according to Acker, "If there is a self, it's probably the world. All is real" (33). The re-telling of Daedalus's life as an artist circles back into the "ground" of the story, emphasizing that the "labyrinth...covered up the origin of art. Covered up the knowledge that art was, and so is, born out of rape or the denial of women and born out of political hegemony...When time is understood as linear, there is no escape. No escape for us out of the labyrinth" (97). Acker writes the center of the labyrinth as a place where

> one learns how little, if anything, we know and can know...[where] reason is useless, lost. In the labyrinth, remember Borges's labyrinths, the self becomes lost. In the labyrinth, paths, ways of knowing, seem subject to chance. Chance or fortune and chaos are simply those lands which lie outside and beyond our understanding. (*Bodies* 91)

To bear this ignorance, to find beauty in the sheer ugliness of the world, and to withstand the uncertainty "in which the 'I' (eye) constantly changes," is to accept silence, even death, and move, via pain, into wonder: "Now, I know, as much as I can know anything, that to travel into wonder is to be wonder. So it matters little whether I travel by plane, by rowboat, or by book. Or, by dream" (*Bodies* 159).

In her novels, and explicitly in her collection of essays, Acker asks, "How can the new world begin? [I]t is death that allows us to transmute. I am in this society, living in a reality dominated by failed attempts to reject death, to deny dream's presence, while more and more of my friends are dying" (*Bodies* 174). Clearly struggling with her own longing for transcendence in the midst of disintegration, as well as her own imminent

death (she was dying of cancer while writing *Bodies of Work*), Acker's narrative manifests a desire to embrace death (the monster) as a continuing process (the river), rather than to reject or disavow it: "To see clearly is to perceive that one must die" (90). Holding onto one's wounds constitutes identity for some, although those wounds may have been produced by the culture that increasingly forecloses identity, or wherein contemporary theory may have decentered the self to the point that no core remains that would permit agency; yet, Acker's work firmly commits to the position that meaningful action must be attempted (Hume/ "Books" 439). For Acker, to see the labyrinth clearly is to see that it both represents and produces the abject; it is where we must confront death, and the fact that our bodies are, become waste:

> When the colon or labyrinth is center, our center, we, human, learn how little, if anything, we know and can know...A colon's end is shit. Not transcendence, but waste. Beyond meaning...This labyrinth is also the labyrinth of language. It is these languages that I want to begin to find. (*Bodies* 91)

This confrontation emerges in most, if not all, of Acker's narratives: it is Janey Smith as a ball, turning and turning, unable to stop; it is the crossroads in *Don Quixote*, where Lulu writes, "I was face to face with myself. I was face-to-face with my hideousness. I wanted to run away, into having no mentality, but there was nowhere to run" (*DQ* 95). In coming face to face with the monster, or Minotaur, the dead sailor's corpse, the snake eating its own tail, Acker's outcasts exit the labyrinth with no new "knowledge," but "a desire to do" in a dualistic world. To accept this reality, that there is no escape from it, even via language, let alone culture, one must, perhaps, accept the charge given to Ariadne by

Dionysus: "'Must people not first hate themselves if they are to love themselves?...'Be clever, Ariadne!...You have small ears, you have my ears...Put a clever word unto them! *I am your labyrinth*'" (Miller 15).

Like Acker, I have been attempting to express and reveal what a return to myth, to the body, in narrative, might offer in a culture still ruled by the Cartesian mind/body split, the paradox of the Oedipus myth (wherein the murder of the king is at once *verboten* and sanctioned by patriarchal law) and thus still denies the bodies, the sexualities, of women. Acker asks, "[i]n a society defined by phallocentrism or by prison, how is it possible to be happy? *Empire* ended with the hints of a possibility or beginning: the body, the actual flesh, almost wordless, romance, the beginning of a movement from no to yes, from nihilism to myth" (*Bodies* 13). In turn, I ask, in contemporary narrative, what could it mean for a female writer/artist to create her own labyrinth? To question even the term "create"? For Acker, the term "creation" is questionable for it is inevitably tied to the history of the male genius: the Daedalus who creates/crafts the labyrinth/form that the seeker must enter in order to achieve the "philosopher's stone," illumination, or to slay the monster. For a female to enter such a labyrinth, what/who is she facing? What is at stake, especially if the labyrinth is a ruin? Perhaps at stake is the (re)discovery of myth, *a* myth, as Acker posits, and in addition, perhaps at stake is the winding of a new labyrinth: a labyrinth of her own design, predicated on the process of that (re)discovery.

Acker's analysis of body-building most vividly illustrates the necessity of breaking down (dying) in order to build up again (create the self/be reborn): "The general law behind body-building is that muscle, if broken down in a controlled fashion and then provided with the proper growth factors such as nutrients and rest, will grow back larger

than before" (*Bodies* 145). Acker's search for "a new myth to live by" parallels the search for "languages of the body," in that Acker attempts to teach herself how to create a labyrinth via repetition: "The language game named *the language of the body* is not arbitrary. When a bodybuilder is counting, he or she is counting his or her own breath" (*Bodies* 148). Creating via voice, rather than vision, signifies a world of repetition, wherein "every path resembles every other path" as envisioned by the listener/speaker. When repetition replaces the production of meaning, a kind of failure occurs--a failure, according to Acker, that ultimately reveals the point, which is the process of breaking down and building up again: "trying to control, to shape, my body through the calculated tools and methods of body-building, and time and again, in following these methods, failing to do so, I am able to meet that which cannot be finally controlled and known: my body" (150).

In re-envisioning the story of the construction of Greek labyrinth, Acker's narrative transforms into a dream, or vision, of the author/essayist running through, trying to escape, a labyrinth which opens into the fluid territory of dreams at the "center," where Acker's pirate ships drift across deep, green-blue waters, mercifully, away from solid land: "At every motion or moment of time, all that exists begins and simultaneously ends" (*Bodies* 96). Acker reminds the "us" of women that since "we" are not like Ariadne and do not hold Theseus as our lover, we can thus "deconstruct the labyrinth" and see/envision/dream what is at its center: "what is now central" (97).

To preserve wonder, we ought not slay the monster in the labyrinth, but rather, embrace it as part of the self: as wonder, which arouses awe, puzzlement, doubt, even admiration and surprise. Ariadne's lust allows Theseus to kill the monster, thus

destroying wonder and, like her mother, instead of traversing the labyrinth herself (being a subject), she opens it up to a stranger, a man "whose only desire is to murder...[and when he] 'emerged from the labyrinth, spotted with the Minotaur's blood, Ariadne embraced him passionately'" (*Bodies* 70). After Theseus deserts Ariadne, and her mother is long gone, the labyrinth in myth becomes a shell, a place, in the burgeoning patriarchal world, where "there are no women; there are only victims and male substitutes. And men. Nature is female because, as is the case with women, she does not exist. She does not have existence apart from that gaze which is always male or male-identified" (*Bodies* 71). The narrative journey through that gaze and across the labyrinth-as-ruin is, finally, perhaps about taking the fear of death by the hand, facing the monster in the center, or in the mirror, instead of running from its abjectness: to risk being destroyed by it in order to acknowledge it, integrate it rather than repress it. To know that the center is moving, not stationary, and that it is part of a process that continues long after narratives end. To know, finally, that the center is open, ongoing, at once beyond death, yet always part of it.

CONCLUSION

In much contemporary literature, the search for identity has all but been lain bare by postmodernism: the search for an "I" has become all but meaningless, the quest (rooted in the Greek epic) rendered circular and without depth. What my project addresses, and hopefully contributes to the study of late twentieth-century literature, is the notion that there is still value in preserving mystery in this search, and the text--even that which has been rendered meaningless--contains an openness, whether that openness

is interpreted as death, renewal, and/or repetition. In the course of researching and writing, I have come to see the survival or persistence of possibility in that search, and how the image of the labyrinth, the body and narrative together provide a glimpse into, if not a means for seeing more clearly, the thresholds wherein transformation happens. Each text I examine in this project witnesses and represents a particular approach to transformation: each reveals the importance of a "return" to the body as a means for understanding narrative, the significance of a demise of a feminine principle in Western culture, and how these are affected by and in turn affect the conflation of writing and death in contemporary narrative. These seemingly disparate texts at once fuse desire and music, longing and enigma, and at once hold onto and reveal the simplicity of the body *as* the world being traversed in a culture that is based upon illusion and the sublimation of desire.

In the nearly three years that I have been writing this dissertation, I have spent great amounts of time alone: oddly out of touch with the world of form in transformation, more at home inside my own imagination, where I reach for ways to express the search for meaning and the pain of growth. From the very beginning of this project, I was continually struck by a burgeoning notion that we are nearing (or in the midst of) another major shift in the way(s) narratives are conceived, presented, and represented, and the reader plays a key role in this shift. In negotiating the roadblocks and questions that would ultimately shape this project, I had to come to terms with the hugeness of what I was trying to do: write about transformation in/of narrative. I would have to answer, what kinds of transformation? what is so important about those transformations? What does transformation tell us about the operations of narrative and its changing shapes? Before I knew it consciously, I had been drawn to narratives in which opposite forces come

together, or merge: where life meets death, transcendence meets disintegration, horror meets the comic, sacred bumps up against the profane--where, in effect, the Western dualism that is often taken for granted actually blends and complicates a narrative's representation of a particular reality.

Early in the project, I had been exploring the work of Kathy Acker: specifically, in a seminar paper on her 1978 novel, *Blood and Guts in High School*, and way the graphic image interrupts the space of the narrative. I was fascinated by Acker's treatment of the body in her narratives; specifically, how the struggle to articulate the absent presence of the protagonist's dead mother transforms into a search for love. I wanted to somehow articulate a link between death, mothers, and the intrusion of the graphic, in the form of drawings, on the literary text. I named my burgeoning project proposal "A Vast Precipice," envisioning myself exploring texts that walked "edges," of sorts, spaces between vision and voice, mind and body. This led me to Julia Kristeva's theory on the abject, and to the following questions: Why is the abject always associated with the maternal body? How does the abject connect to transformation in narrative? Although these questions were initially engaging, I ultimately did not get very far in making the abject the center of my project, because the abject always already signifies a dead end--a product of a transformative event. Yet, I discovered that, in functioning as a *remainder* of transformation, the abject would play a key role in my project.

The vital connection between the abject and corporeality reminded me of my ongoing interest in the body as a site of transformation, and how this is represented in narrative. I began to ask other questions, directly addressing, rather than circumventing, transformation: in what ways is transformation itself a paradox; that is, the marking of

moments in order to control the event (such as death) that inevitably happens? How is the stalling out of transformation in turn a transformation itself? I thought about the enigmatic ending of Acker's novel, wherein Janey Smith's character disappears, apparently dead, but somehow continuing on. I also recalled the ending of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, which evokes the disappearance, or blending, of the main character into the text, wherein a shift in narrators also happens. I thought about Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, in which the ending is marked by a writer-father-murderer being frozen inside a maze, yet some trace of him seeming to "live on" inside the malevolent Overlook Hotel. These endings caught my attention, though I could not as yet make the connections I needed to make between death, the body, the maternal feminine, and narrative.

My fascination with the horror film, Kubrick's work, his evocation of the uncanny, and the potentiality of space, led me to explore the Overlook Hotel as a crucible, or matrix of American history and myth. Even as a child I had been drawn to this film: its ponderous beauty, multi-layered mazes, a monstrous, ghostly feminine presence, and alcoholic family drama captivated me, leading me to begin to write about my own desire to disappear, to be invisible, and explore a deeper fascination with death. I began writing a critical memoir on my experience with anorexia nervosa around the same time I was reading and researching the work of Paul Auster. I discovered many of the same qualities in his fiction as I had in Kubrick's film: specifically, the labyrinthine design of Oedipal narrative, the ascetic, pure spaces that mirror a kind of raw hunger, and the significance of ritual in the act of writing. One question that emerged through these explorations centered on the evocative presence of myth in contemporary narrative: why might myths be so important to an articulation of transformation? The power certain

myths hold over time corresponds to the degree those myths are re-told, changed, or repressed. As explored in relation to Western myth, by Sir James Frazer and other anthropological critics, earth-based myths were usurped by sky-god cultures, who replaced a mother-creator with a father-creator in the dominant narrative of Western culture. The Oedipus myth makes sense in such a culture, yet even though this myth dominates Western narrative into the twenty-first century, it cannot account for every narrative, every experience.

I began to study the history of the labyrinth, and how its stories are treated in the modernist turn in myth criticism the 1920s and 30s with the work of Freud, Jung, Robert Graves and J.G. Frazer, and its resurgence in the 1960s and 70s, with the anthropological work of Levi-Strauss, Victor Turner, and Mircea Eliade. What did these two periods in history have in common, specifically in Western culture? I began to explore the parallels between them, and learned that these two periods are most visibly defined by a near-revolutionary counter-culture element that centers on sexual exploration and freedom, the rise of feminism, civil rights, and other socio-political movements. Further, these two periods are punctuated by a brief but poignant fascination with the erotic, a return to the studies of gods and goddesses as a means for understanding the labyrinths of celebrity, popular culture, and to negotiate a search for meaning through bodily experience.

In researching ritual, wherein the abject is evoked, and as a means for articulating as well as sublimating life transformations, I became fascinated by the representation of psychological experience, subjectivity, and how the search for meaning shifts through the twentieth century. This led me to the work of Kafka, Robbe-Grillet, and Borges, along with the critical work of John T. Irwin, whose *The Mystery to a Solution* factors

significantly in my project. As I attempted to place my ideas within a definitive, theoretical conversation, I came face to face with the persistent, familiar, and fearsome question: so what? and had to come to terms with the arbitrariness of all the connections I was beginning to see. Further, I came face to face with the possibility that in writing a dissertation on transformation, I was also writing through my own transformational process. This inevitably returned my attention to Paul Auster, whose work directly addresses the perils of interpretation, the search for meaning, and the anxiety of detection, which in turn mirrors the reader's experience right back to her.

In re-reading Auster's work, and especially after viewing Christopher Nolan's *Memento,* which would become the third chapter, I found myself once again face to face with great uncertainty, and the fear that I may have nothing to say after all. In the winter of 2003, I wrote a collage essay entitled "Flycasting for Plankton," which seemed to characterize the experience of writing the dissertation--in which I wrote, "I am climbing a ladder that has no ground to support it, nor a clear destination above. Everything feels too big, all effort reduced to one drop in an infinite ocean: I am caught between the sense of the work's sheer magnitude, and its obvious meaninglessness in the larger scheme of things. I fear I have lost sight of what brought me here. What do you do when your ideas function more like hydras, growing new heads and limbs every time you try to fix those ideas into a page, a title, a number, an outline? I look out the east window of my attic apartment and seek out the beacons that would be others who might understand. I fling open the window and shout, cast out a line for the impossible."

I learned, in writing this essay in the midst of the first painful stages of my dissertation, that what I really needed to do was to step back and examine my process as

a whole. During this time I wrote and threw out an entire chapter on William Faulkner, wrote and threw out an entire chapter on Marguerite Duras and Freud's "oceanic feeling," read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and researched the Beats, started and discarded a chapter on the transformation of the "trip" narrative entitled "Unraveling into Time," a kind of tribute to Darl Bundren as "feminized" scapegoat of *As I Lay Dying.* Over a period of three or four months I wrote and threw out at least one hundred pages of work. Among the works I wanted to include but ended up discarding were Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy,* Marguerite Duras' *Sea Wall* and *Blue Eyes, Black Hair*, Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*, and Don Delillo's *White Noise.* Among the films were Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, David Cronenberg's *Crash*, based on the novel by J.G. Ballard, and Mary Harron's *American Psycho*, based on the novel by Bret Easton Ellis.

After stepping back and examining this process, and begrudgingly parting with a number of possible narrative threads, I began to see that I was creating or traversing a labyrinth of my own. I also noticed that John Irwin's study on detection focuses primarily on the labyrinth as a mind-based structure, wherein the subject, usually male, struggles to solve a problem, and in doing so subduing the mind. I thought about my own experience walking labyrinths, and of the luminous pain in having received a large tattoo of a labyrinth on my back: how, for me, the labyrinth was as much a body-based structure as it was an analogue for the mind. The "erasure" of the body, whether through transcendence, death and decay, or disengagement, functions in these labyrinthine narratives as a contemporary "answer" to a romanticized vision of the mind. This erasure and consequent return, then, of the body as a site of transcendence at the level of language, both surface and create tensions in the contemporary works under examination

in this project. The acknowledgment of the repression of a feminine principle is but one way of articulating those tensions, and what transformations are possible from within those tensions. I discovered then that the image of the labyrinth would be a key component of this project, because it provided a link between the body, narrative, and myth, which would later be specific to Oedipus.

Once I made this discovery, I could see more clearly the links between the narratives that I wanted to include in the project. I would need to release the fear that my writing style itself was not appropriate, remove the mask of the theorist, and have faith in my own vision, which is rooted simply in wonder and curiosity. I began to envision the work that springs from this project joining a conversation that attempts to unite sensory perception with intellectual analysis and critical play. New questions evolved: What is the relation between writing and death in contemporary narrative? Why do analysis and detection so thoroughly depend on the repression of the body? How does the representation of death in narrative in turn enact and present a transformation in/of narrative itself?

The labyrinth broke open the creative process that has finally driven me to finish, because I have learned that the labyrinth itself is a representation of transformation. It provides an image for inner and outer shifts in narrative. Further, it functions as a means for exploring transformations in/of the body; for example, the links between digestion, knowledge acquisition, hunger, and insight all come into play in the narratives examined in this project. The interface of the labyrinth, body and narrative have opened up into a larger conversation that links narrative theory, psychoanalysis, visual culture, as well as creative nonfiction. In shifting from a study of twentieth-century literature to one of

contemporary and primarily American literature and film, I learned that I could more freely bring to light the burgeoning mythological undercurrent that characterizes the return of a feminine principle to the study of American narratives.

As I reach the end of this project I am struck by the appropriateness of ending with Kathy Acker's work, which marks a moment in narrative that for me explodes and pulses in the body as well as the mind: that pain and death are only the beginning. In the midst of my research, I also discovered that Carole Maso's nonfiction work, *Break Every Rule*, is a kind of lyric accompaniment to Acker's jaggedly written *Bodies of Work*, and I was slightly disappointed that I was just now discovering this text near the end of my project. I had been learning all along, though, that the transformations I have been seeking in contemporary narrative are embodied in Maso's work, which voices Helene Cixous' "'desire to speak in a language that heals as much as it separates'...And maybe this after all is narrative" (*Break* 68/43). This project has been an attempt to uncover and articulate transformations in/of contemporary narratives, wherein the labyrinth is both a "fixed" and dynamic structure. Kathy Acker's examination of the labyrinth in *Bodies of Work* is a confrontation of the mythology that surrounds the shape and reifies the Oedipal narrative. This reification of Oedipal narrative in turn supports the necessity of the wounded, male artist-as-questor and dead woman to be buried and unearthed, or woman-as-monster to be slain, to drive that narrative.

The function of the woman's body as synonymous with death, or as a representation of death, fascinated me long before I started this project, and has, for lack of a better word, haunted me as I read text after text, watch film after film, that contains a dead woman's body driving the narrative. I thought again of Kathy Acker's absent mother

in *Blood and Guts in High School*, and the labyrinth as a maternal configuration, a matrix upon which or in which a male protagonist seeks meaning. In this way, I considered the labyrinth as a graphic structure, and how Acker's narrative is both sexually/violently graphic, as well as graphic in its many drawings that seem to "interrupt" the text. I wondered then if the graphic were not the mode of transformation, and the labyrinth, as an analogue for transformation, were not the vehicle for representing this place where words fail and images take over: where the center is at once desirable and fearsome, and where one finds both enlightenment and death. The hauntedness of the dead, female form driving such narratives also led me to re-examine my own experience with anorexia nervosa, since I was already writing about Auster's *The Art of Hunger*, which explores self-starvation and the act of writing as means for keeping wounds open, rather than healing them.

Although I intellectually understood that the act of writing can have the opposite of a cathartic effect, and cannot necessarily "solve" narrative, I collided with an embodiment of this phenomenon as I wrote the chapter on *Memento.* In writing this chapter, I again confronted the question of what transformation can tell us about the operations of narrative and its changing forms. I learned, at a moment which felt like running into a glass wall, that *Memento*'s narrative does not illuminate, or transform narrative in the way(s) that I had thought or hoped. I desired a "neat fit" or link between Paul Auster's Kafka-esque detective texts and Kathy Acker's *sparagmos* of language, and I found instead a swirling vortex--a deceptively simple embodiment of circular digestion, which generates the intellectual vertigo we have come to recognize in postmodern narrative. I could only step back from the whirlpool and articulate such a moment as a

transformation in critical perception, rather than in the narrative itself. After recovering from this collision, of sorts, I realized that part of this project has been an act of discovering, however much I may resist, the places where I must relinquish detection for wonder.

In *Bodies of Work*, Acker writes of wonder being synonymous with the word monster, and how the story of the labyrinth is really a story about monsters. In *Don Quxiote,* Acker writes, "I couldn't go to sleep. I was face-to-face with my hideousness. I had to see my characteristics. I was deeply bored. I wanted to run away, into having no mentality, but there was nowhere to run." This passage vividly depicts a kind of moment of truth--when one dares to look into the mirror and see herself clearly for the first time. For me, the experience of writing this dissertation has been such a sustained moment of truth: a moment right before rebirth, in the midst of transformation, right at the threshold between disintegration and transcendence. In exploring all of these connections, I discovered that what was fueling my dissertation (what in the field of creative nonfiction is called the "deep subject") was a desire to pin down the seed of misogyny inside myself--behind the reason why I starved myself, wanted to break free of my body, why being a woman seemed then so monstrous. Ending the project with the work of Kathy Acker evokes this discovery, of being between seeing oneself as a monster created by an alienating culture, and a vision of wonder, beautiful because always changing, growing, honestly facing all characteristics.

NOTES

[i] In this project, I want to make clear that I do not equate the "feminine" or "masculine" with biological females and males. Rather, I address the term in the Jungian sense, which defines the "feminine" as including the devalued human traits of receptivity, passivity, intuition, fluidity, liminality, darkness, and being "in the body." Many biological women (and men) have understandably taken issue with this configuration, as these often essentialized "female" traits have become another means for the perpetuation of stereotyping. I hereafter define "the feminine" in the following terms, as outlined by Jungian psychologist and theorist, Marion Woodman: "the part of us who is outcast, the part who comes to consciousness through going into darkness" (10). Ideally, the "feminine" is not merely in opposition to the "masculine," but taken in complementary terms (as in the Eastern principle of yin/yang). I also acknowledge that within this project, in taking up such a "loaded" term in order to discuss transformation, my analyses included in this project move gingerly between and seem to actually support the very binaries that it critiques. Until another term can be created for all the above qualities that are now still defined as "feminine," I will continue to explore and acknowledge those qualities as part of the binaries that still define Western existence.
Quote taken from The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1985.

[ii] What distinguishes ritual from transformation is that the latter is the goal of the former: rituals, as communicative performances, do not require a change in a subject's belief. Ritual is, rather, a form of sublimating, or modifying, the natural expression of an instinctual impulse within transformation, and renders the "phases" of transformation (as in a funeral ritual) visible.

[iii]Western narratives abound with cautionary tales about the mastery of mind and our scientific world (see *Frankenstein*, Poe's Dupin detective stories, *Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde, Jurassic Park,* the 2000 film *Pi*, and the Francisco Goya-inspired opening to Stephen King's 1977 novel, *The Shining*: "The sleep of reason breeds monsters."

[iv] I do not intend to enter the ongoing debate on what constitutes postmodernism, but I acknowledge the term, in light of the few contemporary texts I have chosen here, as a word to describe a movement away from depth and toward an "exhilaration of surfaces" (Jameson). In a "late" time, postmodernism appears to function as yet another labyrinth, another way to anticipate death as extinction.

[v] Taken from The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971: 238.

[vi] Unlike King's novel, which presents the haunted house as a supernatural force working against the benevolent, sexually virile father who loves his family, Kubrick's film focuses on the non-verbal bodily cues that reveal more between people than what is said. The "haunted" hotel is thus natural, rather than supernatural, for it is a crucible of history, and its ghosts are real; that is, ghosts are tangible representations of a past and quickly disappearing paternal order locked inside the "domain" of the archaic mother. The characters of Kubrick's version are thus part and parcel of that history; they are not "heroes" and they do not "overcome" the hotel in the end. In King's novel, the hotel is "othered," in that it is destroyed in the end (burned down), allowing the family to move forward; in Kubrick's film, the hotel continues to exist, and is even strengthened in the end when Wendy Torrance witnesses the ghosts her husband and son, Danny, have been seeing all along. The film hearkens to the older sub-genre of the ghost story and less a "horror story," as is King's novel.

[vii] The Overlook Hotel has been likened to the womb in many studies on the horror film (in particular, Barbara Creed's The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis). The hotel's seemingly infinite depths and surfaces, the color red, and the warm, "sanctuary-like" feel of the space, isolated in the freezing mountains, all signify the paradoxical, in-between state of the uncanny, or that which is at once

threatening and familiar. Further, the uncanny is linked to the pre-oedipal state of the mother's body, and in turn, to the abject. Elizabeth Grosz writes, "The abject defines a pre-oedipal space and self-conception: it is the space between subject and object, both repulsive and attractive, which threatens to draw the subject and its objects towards it, a space of simultaneous pleasure and danger...[pre-hierarchical, pre-regulated]...Abjection is the subject's and culture's revolt against the corporeality of subjectivity--its material dependence on others, its mortality and its sexual specificity" (94). The confrontation between mind and body in *The Shining* depends on the presence of this tension, and the pervasive awareness of death.

[viii] The presence of the colors red and white are pronounced in Kubrick's films, as well as in the work of Paul Auster, which is discussed at greater length in the following chapter. These colors emerge in narratives that present and enact transformations (as confrontations) between mind and body, whether in one character or within the narrative itself. The color red's association with the body and the color white's association with the spirit appear to symbolize this confrontation.

[ix] Bathrooms as locked rooms are pervasive in Kubrick's films: in A Clockwork Orange (1971), Alex's violent past is revealed as he takes a bath in the house of one his traumatized victims. In a grotesquely comic moment, Alex sings the same song he was when he brutalized the man and raped his wife. In Full Metal Jacket (1987), Private Pyle, the scapegoat of the Marine boot camp, kills the sergeant and then himself with his freshly cleaned rifle while sitting on the polished metal toilet. In Eyes Wide Shut (1999), Dr. Bill Harford is summoned upstairs into an ornate bathroom during a party, and is asked to cover up the apparent drug overdose of a young woman with whom the host has been cavorting.

[x] Brennan defines the "Real" in Lacanian terms: that is, "what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. [The Real] is what is prior to the assumption of the symbolic...Impossible to say, impossible to imagine...the return of the repressed." Lacan, Jacques. Ecrits: A Selection. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977: translator's note, pp. ix-x.

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