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PHD

CREATIVE AND CRITICAL WRITING

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

AUGUST 2015

Luminol Theory *and the Excavation of Narrative*

&

The Dead Girl Scrolls *Unearthed Apocalyptic Fictions*

STATEMENT:

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

However, the thesis incorporates to the extent indicated below, material partially or wholly published during the period of registration:

“The Sky Became the Perfect Colour and Back Again,” was published online by *Metazen* in January 2013.

“The Death Bell,” was published in print in *The New Gothic* ed. Beth K. Lewis (London: Stone Skin Press, 2013).

“The Luminol Reels,” was published as a complete print book (New York: Calamari Press, 2014).

“Electric Light,” was published online by *Spork* in September 2014.

“SEIZURE,” was published online by *PLINTH* in September 2014.

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Signature:.....

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LUMINOL THEORY AND THE EXCAVATION OF NARRATIVE

This thesis is concerned with developing a new approach to reading and thinking about culture (especially US culture), which I am proposing to call Luminol Theory. Luminol Theory is a textual reading strategy that draws on both psychoanalysis and depth reading. It reveals what has been occulted and it illuminates the contemporary United States as a crime scene. I argue for the singular importance of Luminol Theory as it provides a dystopian account of contemporary culture in the US. A culture that is haunted, that is characterised by injustice and brutality, and that reads bodies as disposable.

I introduce luminol as an agent of forensic enquiry that excavates and illuminates narratives, particularly crime narratives, which have been erased. This interdisciplinary intersection of theory, forensic science, and literary criticism offers a specific, contemporary textual reading strategy. I situate Luminol Theory within its origins in feminism (with particular reference to Tiquun's theory of the 'Young-Girl'), psychoanalysis (with particular reference to Kristevan abject-analysis, queer theory, and the field of death studies), and depth reading strategies (working through Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and Michel Foucault's 'genealogy' and 'archaeology'). Though it draws on each of these fields, Luminol Theory is a new contribution to contemporary literary criticism.

The three critical chapters investigate the contemporary United States as a crime scene, moving through the exploratory steps that a forensic investigation might take. The first chapter opens with a reading of the crime scene itself by embedding Colorado crime fictions within the violent history of the state. The second chapter discovers artefacts at the scene, reading textual objects for hidden meanings and reading

contemporary experimental fiction from the United States as apocalyptic material, through the lens of the *Book of Revelation*. Just as *Revelation* literally *reveals* the cultural anxieties of first millennium Christians and their fears of impending apocalypse so too *Skin Horse* by Olivia Cronk and *Entrance to a Pageant where we all begin to Intricate* by Johannes Göransson are apocalyptic texts for the third millennium. The final critical chapter approaches the body of the dead girl at the heart of the crime scene in order to discover the aesthetic coherence between death and femininity and the violence wrought interchangeably by sexual violence and capital.

The fourth section of the thesis demonstrates Luminol Theory in practice. This collection of short fictions *The Dead Girl Scrolls: Unearthed Apocalyptic Fictions* is modelled on the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found serendipitously by shepherds in 1946 in the Qumran caves, West Bank. These scrolls contain a key to ancient languages, cultures, and narratives that were previously hidden. Later forensic analysis of the papyrus scrolls involved using UV light, a blue chemical glow that excavated layers of hidden narrative. By offering a secular version of these sacred texts, *The Dead Girl Scrolls* operates within a forensic imaginary; that is, it performs an empathetic and creative response to the secular aporia. It does this through offering dead women a central position that refuses to reify, objectify, or fetishise them or their bodies.

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Introduction Luminol Theory and the Excavation of Narrative

For an archaeology of knowledge, this profound breach in the expanse of continuities, though it must be analysed, and minutely so, cannot be 'explained' or even summed up in a single word. It is a radical event that is distributed across the entire visible surface of knowledge, and whose signs, shocks, and effects it is possible to follow step by step.¹

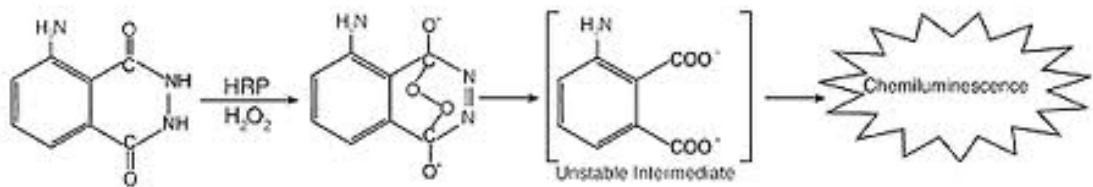


Figure 1 Chemical Structure of Luminol

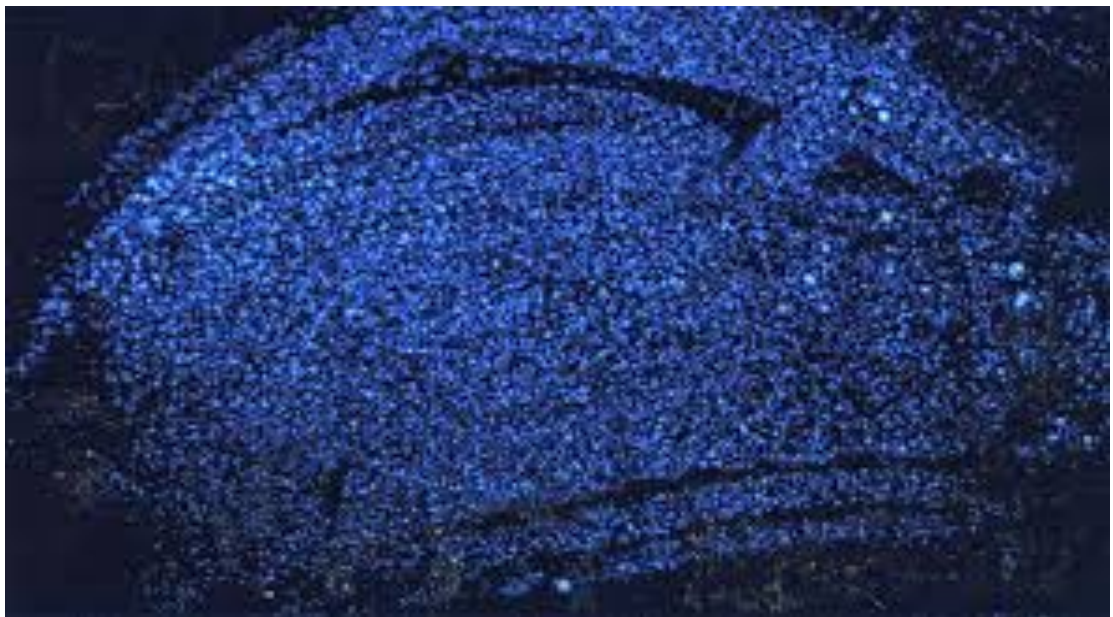


Figure 2 Image of Luminol Smear

1. A Short History of Luminol

When human blood reacts with luminol it lights up a ghostly blue-green. Most commonly used to detect whether violence has taken place at suspected crime scenes this reaction combines the human and the chemical in a moment of violent transformation. According to James and Eckert's *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes* (1998), luminol is a chemical that 'produces a bright luminescence

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), 236.

when in the presence of the most minute amounts of blood.² There is a long and fascinating history of the application of luminol in crime scene analysis. A. J. Schmitz is cited as the first chemist to synthesise luminol in 1902³ though Stuart and Eckert claimed that ‘a paper by Gill states luminol’s discovery to be around 1853.’⁴ Huntress, Stanley and Parker coined the term ‘luminol’⁵ in their 1934 paper ‘The Preparation of 3-Aminophthalhydrazide For Use in The Demonstration of Chemiluminescence.’ The process of chemiluminescence is a simple one; I here reproduce James and Eckert’s explanation:

Chemiluminescence occurs when a molecule capable of fluorescing is raised to an excited level during a chemical reaction. Upon its return to the ground state, energy in the form of light is emitted. Only a few molecules are known to emit appreciable amounts of light, and of those, luminol is one of the most outstanding.⁶

Essentially, the reaction between two chemicals (in this case blood and luminol) causes the ‘molecule capable of fluorescing’ (i.e. luminol) to rise to an ‘excited’ level; that is a state of transformation, of reaction. According to Kenneth Williamson:

Oxidation of luminol is attended with a striking emission of blue-green light. An alkaline solution of the compound is allowed to react with a mixture of hydrogen peroxide and potassium ferricyanide. The dianion (5) is oxidised to the triplet excited state (two unpaired electrons of like spin) (6) of the amino phthalate ion (Scheme 2). This slowly undergoes intersystem crossing to the singlet excited state (two unpaired electrons of opposite spin) (7), which decays to the ground state ion (8) with the emission of one quantum of light (a photon) per molecule.⁷

When this reaction is complete, luminol returns to ‘ground level’ and the excess energy that has been created during the reaction is expressed as luminescence, as light.⁸

² Stuart H. James and William G. Eckert, *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press LLC, 1998), 159.

³ Stuart H. James and William G. Eckert, *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press LLC, 1998), 159.

⁴ Stuart H. James and William G. Eckert, *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press LLC, 1998), 159 – 160.

⁵ Ernest Huntress, Lester Stanley, and Almon Parker, “The Preparation of 3-Aminophthalhydrazide for Use in the Demonstration of Chemiluminescence,” *Journal of the American Chemical Society* 56, no. 1 (1934): 241–42, doi:10.1021/ja01316a077.

⁶ William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes* (New York: Elsevier Science Ltd, 1989), 160.

⁷ Kenneth Williamson, *Macroscopic and Microscopic Organic Experiments 4th Ed + Molecular Modeling Kit + Chem Office Limited 8.0*, 4 edition (Houghton Mifflin College Div, 2005).

⁸ For more on luminol read:

There is no direct explanation within the article as to why the name 'luminol' was chosen by Huntress et al. though the word has close etymological associations with

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other words relating to light. There are several etymologically similar words in the 2015 *Oxford English Dictionary*: *luminous*⁹ (a. Full of light; emitting or casting light; shining, bright; b. Of a room: Well lighted; c. applied to animals or plants which emit light), *illuminate*¹⁰ (a. To light up, give light to. b. Light to, or remove blindness from (the eyes), esp. *fig.* in religious sense), and *luna*¹¹ (1. The moon personified; 2a. Alchemy. Silver). These etymological roots are mainly concerned with light and it is this chemiluminescent aspect of 3-Aminophthalhydrazide that appears to be foregrounded in the term ‘luminol.’ But there are also sacred resonances (the personified moon; religious enlightenment) and even magical or miraculous overtones (removing blindness, alchemy). Luminol is assonant with *liminal*¹² (of or relating to a *limen*, relating to the point beyond which a sensation becomes too faint to be experienced) a term that describes the excavated, ghostly narratives which are revealed through the application of luminol. Finally, the term *limn*, bound etymologically to *liminal*, as well as to *illuminate* and *luminous*, describes the process of ‘laying on’, ‘adorning’, or ‘embellishing with’ ‘gold or bright colour’¹³ with particular reference to religious manuscripts in order to (literally) highlight important passages. The term *limn* is a useful way of thinking about Luminol Theory as the word combines two of the meanings of luminol; firstly, the process of chemiluminescence, the ‘laying on’ of ‘bright colour’ to palimpsestically reveal hidden narratives; secondly the annotational function of limning manuscripts allows for a careful editor to present a series of margin notes, a narrative in fragments, that can be clearly understood. Luminol Theory is a textual reading strategy that mimics the excavatory, illuminating function of luminol analysis. Like luminol, the theory operates by illuminating in flashes. It requires deep thought and careful interpretation on the part of the analyst who excavates from the known to the unknown, to piece together a wider narrative.

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Luminous.’ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2015. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/111129?redirectedFrom=luminous#eid>

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Illuminate.’ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2015. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/91536?rskey=l5uLRm&result=2#eid>

¹¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Luna.’ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2015. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/111161?redirectedFrom=luna#eid>

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Liminal.’ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2015. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/108471?redirectedFrom=liminal#eid>

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Limn.’ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2015. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/108501?redirectedFrom=limn#eid>

2. Luminol Theory as Depth Reading

This strategy that the analyst must undertake is a form of depth reading. Depth reading is an analytical process that seeks to uncover subtextual, or otherwise buried, meaning below the surface of the text and it is associated both with Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and with Michel Foucault's related concepts of archaeology and genealogy. Luminol Theory can be understood as a version of depth reading, and it has many points of congruence with existing methods: the forensic aspect of Luminol Theory aligns it to Ricoeur's use of 'suspicion' from the lexicon of the police detective; the excavatory function aligns it to Foucault's archaeological theory. However, it offers an entirely new approach to reading and thinking, which in this thesis will be applied to contemporary US culture.

Foucault developed his related concepts of archaeology and genealogy in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (collected in *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*)¹⁴, and in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.¹⁵ In the latter, Foucault outlines his archaeological metaphor as it pertains to the reading of historical and cultural artefacts:

The tools that enable historians to carry out this work of analysis are partly inherited and partly of their own making: models of economic growth, quantitative analysis of market movements, accounts of demographic expansion and contraction, the study of climate and its long-term changes, the fixing of sociological constants, the description of technological adjustments and of their spread and continuity. These tools have enabled workers in the historical field to distinguish various sedimentary strata; linear successions, which for so long had been the object of research have given way to discoveries in depth. From the political mobility at the surface down to the slow movements of 'material civilisation', ever more levels of analysis have been established: each has its own peculiar discontinuities and patterns; and as one descends to the deepest levels, the rhythms become broader.¹⁶

Foucault here articulates a complex set of ideas: that the tools which an historian uses are always in flux, and that these tools can be both pre-existing and improvised, both macro and micro; that history itself is an unstable category that was once perceived as

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

linear, chronological, a progression, but the archaeological thought perceives history as deep, as having ‘sediments’ and ‘strata’; perhaps most usefully for this thesis, that the deeper the archaeologist excavates, the more chaotic and unstable the notion of ‘history’ becomes, subject to ‘peculiar discontinuities and patterns.’¹⁷ Further, Foucault elaborates the unit in which history is measured out: the document. According to Foucault ‘history is the work expanded on material documentation (books, texts accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.)’,¹⁸ he claims that in ‘its traditional form’ history ‘undertook to “memorise” the monuments of the past’, that is, to reify historical experience in a specific, memorialising way. Foucault argues that after the archaeological thought, history as it is understood functions in the opposite manner, in that it ‘transforms *documents* into *monuments*.’ Once Foucault has outlined the field on which the archaeologist works, he goes on to define his concept more precisely as a tool to cut to the bone of the artefacts it reads, defining ‘discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules’ rather than seeking ‘another better-hidden discourse’; as ‘quite alien’ to the ‘principle of unity’ of the *oeuvre*; and ‘not a return to the innermost secret of the origin’ but the ‘systematic description of the discourse-object.’¹⁹

For Foucault, genealogy is closely related to the archaeological method. He describes genealogy as: ‘grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.’²⁰ This describes a palimpsestic text, a text that can be excavated or ‘scratched’ through for meaning. Yet these palimpsestic texts are tangled, it is impossible to find out which one is the ur-text. Rather than the essentialist mode of attempting to ‘capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities’²¹ if the genealogist ‘listens to history’ they may find: ‘that there is "something altogether different" below the surface: not a timeless and essential

¹⁷ Foucault also describes history as turning away from ‘vast unities like “periods” or “centuries” to the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity.’ (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 4).

¹⁸ Foucault also describes history as turning away from ‘vast unities like “periods” or “centuries” to the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity.’ (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 6).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 155-156.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, 1st ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 76.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, 1st ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 78.

secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.²² This way of understanding history is deeply disturbing²³ as it shifts the bedrock of history from a linear, chronological narrative to one that is arbitrary and senseless.²⁴

This deeply unsettling ‘alien’ form of history is the key to Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, an influential depth reading strategy ‘inextricably involved with the recovery of meaning.’²⁵ Don Ihde’s book, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (1971), has a preface by Ricoeur that contains his first clear and published analysis of the term ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion.’ According to Alison Scott-Baumann, Ricoeur ‘uses the term hermeneutics of suspicion to refer to Freud and Hegel, to the “hidden depth meaning of a text which the hermeneutics of suspicion allow to emerge” and to the dialectical opposition between the hermeneutics of suspicion and phenomenology.’²⁶ In the same preface, Ricoeur makes specific reference to archaeology when he discusses how Freud develops a detour backwards, an archaeological dig into the unconscious mind of the child inside the adult.²⁷ In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970)

²² Michel Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, 1st ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 78.

²³ In fact, Foucault acknowledges this, saying of those who oppose his methods: ‘At all costs, they must preserve that tiny fragment of discourse – whether written or spoken – whose fragile, uncertain existence must perpetuate their lives. They cannot bear (and one cannot but sympathise) to hear someone saying: ‘Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he.’

(Michel Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, 1st ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 211).

²⁴ This unsettled approach to history was highly influential to Ruth Leys, whose work *Trauma: A Genealogy* is referred to in chapter three of this thesis. Leys takes her cues from Foucault and argues that she takes a ‘genealogical approach to the study of trauma, in an effort to understand what Michel Foucault has called “the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality” and in order to register their recurrence, as he put it, not for the purpose of tracing “the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.’ (Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 8). Murray Schwartz, when reviewing *Trauma: A Genealogy* reflects on the specifically deconstructionist way that Leys uses genealogy: ‘The organic concept of genealogy describes unities that un- fold in time. There is no unity to be found, however, in the conflicting and often incompatible assumptions of trauma theories as Leys investigates them. She deals with the ways in which trauma theories have repeatedly led to unresolved problems, impasses, or—in the vocabulary of deconstruction— aporias.’ (Murray M. Schwartz, “Locating Trauma: A Commentary on Ruth Leys’s *Trauma: A Genealogy*,” *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002), 369, doi:10.1353/aim.2002.0020).

²⁵ Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London ; New York: Continuum-3PL, 2011), 63.

²⁶ Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London ; New York: Continuum-3PL, 2011), 63.

²⁷ Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London ; New York: Continuum-3PL, 2011), 63.

Paul Ricoeur showed how Freud's model of interpretation was particularly suited to symbolic language, which he defined as any form of language "where another meaning is both given and hidden in an immediate meaning." Ricoeur defined the symbolic function as "to mean something other than what is said," and posited "to interpret is to understand a double meaning." What he called a "hermeneutics of suspicion" in Freud described a method of understanding double meaning based not on the religious model of revealed meaning but on the demystification of illusion.²⁸

This secular reading of the 'double meaning' rejects the idea of a fixed, revealed truth that lies behind the explicit content of a text. In Ricoeur's system, a suspicious reading instead posits 'a kind of mourning of the immediate'.²⁹ This kind of reading has application in Luminol Theory because it both reveals the instability of meaning, and acts in a compassionate, memorialising way.

A marriage of Foucault and Ricoeur can be seen in D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*,³⁰ which argues that the novel itself is 'the story of an active regulation'³¹ and he views the novel as part of a closed system with other regulatory state apparatuses, both ideological and repressive. Using Foucauldian logic, Miller enacts something like Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' upon the realist novel, specifically the nineteenth century realist novel. By reading *Oliver Twist*, for example, as a carceral world where the 'happy family' that Oliver is temporarily fostered into is simply another form of regulatory institution, like the workhouse, the orphanage, or the prison, and which exerts discipline and temporal control over the individual, Miller exposes that 'after all what brought carceral institutions into being in the first place were lapses in the proper management of the family.' Baby farms, orphanages, debtors prisons and workhouses were brought into being in response to illegitimate children, poverty and debt.³² He also argues that the portrayal of a different kind of policing by a paranoid, secret police moves from 'spectacular punishment to a hidden and devious discipline.' In other words, the rise of the realist novel, contemporaneous with this shift in 'defined in terms

²⁸ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 11, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.

²⁸ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 11, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.

²⁹ Charles Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 100.

³⁰ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989).

³¹ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989), 10.

³² D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989), 59.

of the spatial extension of its networks and the temporal deployment of its intrigues' meant that 'not unlike the novel, the new police has a charge of a "world and a "plot"'³³ encompassing the novel and the police in a closed carceral system.

This type of suspicious reading, inherently to do with latent, rather than manifest content³⁴, is the subject of an article by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best³⁵ where they argue for surface reading,^{36 37} or, as Marcus describes it, 'Just Reading.'³⁸ In "Surface Reading", Best and Marcus explicitly refer to critics finding themselves heirs of 'Michel Foucault, skeptical about the very possibility of radical freedom and dubious that literature or its criticism can explain our oppression or provide the keys to our liberation'³⁹ Though this does not prevent Marcus from invoking Foucault in her book by titling a chapter "The Genealogy of Marriage." Marcus describes 'Just Reading' in opposition to what she describes as 'symptomatic readings' a description of depth reading that aligns it to pathology and illness. Marcus suggests:

³³ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989): 22-23.

³⁴ Marcus and Best describe the problem of the manifest/ latent binary thus: 'The different connotations of manifest and surface are especially significant. The surface is associated with the superficial and deceptive, with what can be perceived without close examination and, implicitly, would turn out to be false upon closer scrutiny. The manifest has more positive connotations, as what is truthful, obvious, and clearly revealed.' (Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 4, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1).

³⁵ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 4, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1).

³⁶ Surface reading is described as follows: 1. Surface as materiality; 2. Surface as the intricate verbal structure of literary language.; 3. Embrace of the surface as an affective and ethical stance; 4. Attention to surface as a practice of critical description; 5. Surface as the location of patterns that exist within and across texts; 6. Surface as literal meaning. (Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 9 - 13, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1).

³⁷ For more on the origins and applications of this approach see:

Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992);

Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990);

D. A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989);

Sandra Gilbert, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000);

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

³⁸ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 2, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.

In the place of symptomatic readings, the interpretations I offer in this chapter are what I call “just readings.” Just reading attends to what Jameson in his pursuit of hidden master codes, dismisses as “the inert givens and materials of a particular text.” In tracing the representation of female friendship in the Victorian novel, I do not claim to plumb hidden depths but to account more fully for what texts present on their surface but critics have failed to notice. I invoke “just” in its many senses. Just reading strives to be adequate to a text conceived as complex and ample rather than diminished by, or reduced to, what it has had to repress.⁴⁰

‘Just Reading’ is a specific version of surface reading that attends to the justness, or fairness of reading what is on the page and not creating a false binary between latent and manifest content. She suggests that where depth reading has failed in the past is not only in the production of this binary, but also in failing to notice what is visible, in the paranoid urge to discover what has been occulted.

Luminol Theory is a depth reading in the tradition of Foucault and Ricoeur, with its emphasis on excavation, removing layers, revealing the autochthonous horror at the scene of history. However, it also takes some political and ethical cues from Best and Marcus, attending not only to the depths but also to the surface, reading the text as palimpsestic rather than binary. Luminol Theory is also in the tradition of using detection as a mode of literary criticism.⁴¹ Literary critics, theorists and historians frequently use the criminal and legal lexicon as metaphors for their work. Examples of this specific pairing of the language of detection and literary criticism can be found in Jack Lynch’s book *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain*,⁴² which employs criminal, police, and legal language (conviction; evidence; observation; motive; facts; uniform) to interrogate eighteenth century hoaxes. This kind of detection is itself an adjunct of the psychoanalytic centrality of the case study.⁴³ What Luminol

⁴⁰ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75.

⁴¹ For more on this see L. C. Knights, *How Many Children Had Lady MacBeth: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism*, (George Fraser, The Minority Press, 1933); James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Calvin Hoffman, *The Murder of the Man Who Was “Shakespeare.”* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1960); Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); William Twining, *Rethinking Evidence: Exploratory Essays*, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994).

⁴² Jack Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

⁴³ For more on this see Henry Bond, *Lacan at the Scene*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2012);

Theory does differently to pre-existing depth reading is to explicitly pair forensic procedures, specifically the application of luminol at the crime scene, with excavatory readings. It also offers a voice to the marginalised, to the dead at the scene, by approaching what is clearly the subject of the archaeological or suspicious reading, the discovered corpse, through the application of the forensic imaginary.

3. The Psychoanalytic Origins of Luminol Theory

To approach the corpse directly, Luminol Theory draws on psychoanalytic theory, amalgamating aspects of abject-analysis (particularly through the work of Julia Kristeva), queer-theory (by reading with Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, and Leo Bersani), and the broad field of death studies (incorporating Freudian psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and necrophilia) to produce a radical textual reading strategy. Work by these key theorists will frame discussions throughout this thesis and here I present an overview of each set of approaches.

Julia Kristeva published her influential psychoanalytical essay on abject-analysis, *The Powers of Horror*,⁴⁴ in 1984. Kristeva is a feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst and her work on the abject was derived through her engagement with post-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's work, specifically in her attempt to address the lack of the maternal figure in Lacan's formulation of the (motherless) mirror stage of infant subjective development.⁴⁵ In Kristeva's reading the abject refers to a state that is neither (o)bject nor (sub)ject but (a)bject; outside, beyond, cast out of the symbolic order where 'the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.'⁴⁶ According to Kristeva, the most acute example of the abject is the cadaver, that which shows 'what I permanently thrust aside in order to live' and that which illuminates the horror of 'existing at the border of my condition as

C. Bernheimer, *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990);

Sigmund Freud and Gillian Beer, *The "Wolfman" and Other Cases*, trans. Louise Adey Huish, (London: Penguin Classics, 2002);

Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories*, (Touchstone, 2008).

⁴⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror-Phase as Formative of the Function of the I," *New Left Review*, no. 51 (1968), 71–77.

⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 2.

a living being.⁴⁷ Using abject-analysis, Kristeva reads several examples of European literature in *Powers of Horror*.⁴⁸ She is especially influenced by Celine, whose novel *L'Ecole des Cadavres*⁴⁹ explicitly references the corpse, the ultimate abject symbol.

Kristeva's abject has in turn been taken up by artists, literary theorists, and feminist horror scholars. In fact, one of the most famous usages of Kristeva's abject is in Barbara Creed's reading of the film *Alien*⁵⁰ through her theory of the 'monstrous feminine'⁵¹. This highly influential version of the abject is 'edged with the sublime'⁵²; it is cast out of not only the symbolic order but is also *sub* (askance, beneath, below) the *limen*, or threshold, between real and imaginary, self and other. This liminality is explored in more detail in relation to landscape and spatiality in chapter one. The abject is always liminal, it limns, it is sublime; it is inherent to Luminol Theory.

Judith Butler, philosopher, feminist, and queer theorist, responded to Kristeva's formulation of the abject in a chapter titled 'Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex' in her book *Bodies that Matter* (1993)⁵³, published almost a decade after *Powers of Horror* was released. *Bodies that Matter* was Butler's follow-up to her seminal work of queer theory, *Gender Trouble*⁵⁴ and though *Bodies that Matter* was in some ways an attempt to clarify the arguments of the first book, it was also Butler's contribution to an ongoing discourse of queer theory and gender studies. In this latter capacity, Butler appraised *Powers of Horror* and identified the heteronormative nature of the abject maternal in Kristeva's formulation.

Luminol Theory binds Kristeva to Butler to produce a pro-abject position: a position of erotic centrality for that which is cast out of the symbolic order. The pro-abject is discussed in more detail in chapter two. The pro-abject can be used in several ways. The first and most obvious way is to queer heteronormative binaries that appear in post-Freudian psychoanalysis that foreground the nuclear family. A second way that the pro-abject can be deployed is as a redemptive tool, a means of reclaiming that which

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

⁴⁸ Also Joyce, Dostoyevsky, Lautreamont, Proust, Artaud, and Kafka.

⁴⁹ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *L'école Des Cadavres*, (Paris: Denoël, 1938).

⁵⁰ *Alien*, directed by Ridley Scott, (1979; Shepperton, UK: Twentieth Century Fox, 2000), DVD.

⁵¹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 11.

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

has been cast out. Leo Bersani, a literary theorist and psychoanalytic scholar argued in his book *The Culture of Redemption* (1990)⁵⁵ that the overwhelming project of art, literature, and culture is to offer a means of comfort, of redemption, when set against the horror of reality. He traces this collective act of narcissism through Freud's work on sublimation and the psychoanalysis of culture. For Bersani, redemption is an illusory, sybaritic pleasure. The pro-object is a means of reclaiming the redemptive in order to recentralise the erotic by producing a redemptive necrophilia; that is, by prioritising the most potent symbol of the abject, the cadaver, and engaging in an erotic discourse with the corpse as queering death itself, a strategy partially taken up by Lee Edelman.

No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, written by Lee Edelman and published in 2004⁵⁶, is a book that argues for a radical politics of queering death. Lee Edelman's influential work argues that rather than looking to a hetero-procreative futurity, queerness should align itself to the death-drive precisely because this disrupts and subverts heterogeneous and dominant ideological norms. Edelman's work could be considered a polemic; a queer call to arms in the face of increasingly assimilationist and heteronormative strategies for LGBT rights. This work binds queer theory to death studies to produce a deliberate aporia. However, the pro-object argues for a radical futurity of the death drive, and specifically, a future for the dead girl. This will be explored in more detail in chapters one and three.

The death drive is theoretically central to the field of death studies, which is the final component of Luminol Theory. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920),⁵⁷ Freud formulated a theory of the death drive that was at once both radical and simple; the goal of each living organism is to revert to the inorganic and to move towards death. This formulation has been taken up widely in psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory, and death studies. Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, profoundly informed by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, provides a model for the operation of Luminol Theory as a series of 'flashes' or fragments of light. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three. Trauma scholars including Ruth Leys, Roger Luckhurst, Shoshana Felman and Bessel Van Der Kolk have responded to and complicated Caruth's work in relation to Freud. Lisa Downing, a death studies scholar, draws together the pro-object, the queer and the death-drive as she argues for a broader, cultural interpretation of necrophilia that goes

⁵⁵ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, (Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle And Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003).

beyond the pathology of the individual. Finally, Elisabeth's Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body*⁵⁸ provides a cultural history of the dead girl in cultural representation and argues for a close relationship between death, the feminine, and the aesthetic.

The three main strands of Luminol Theory: abject-analysis, queer theory, and death studies, are inextricably linked, as demonstrated by this brief outline of key theorists and theories. Luminol Theory brings each of these aspects together in order to produce a textual reading strategy that excavates narrative just as luminol excavates the crime scene.

4. Genre, Experimentation and the Excavated Text

Luminol Theory operates especially successfully when pairing texts with their chronological moment in forensic history. Though genre fiction, particularly crime and thriller stories, have long been concerned with forensic science, and though there already exist many novels, films, and television shows that exploit this trope, there is not yet a textual reading strategy that applies the metaphorical use of luminol to read a range of cultural texts. The history of luminol and the development of the forensic sciences have informed the choices of primary texts to be read, or excavated, in the critical sections of this thesis. The opening case study on JonBenét Ramsey is relevant not only because of the way that it figures in the North American cultural imaginary, but also because it occurred in the mid-1990s, a very specific time in the rise of forensic science. Just as forensic analysis was being taken seriously by investigators and the legal system^{59 60} but on the cusp of the 2000s when further research would cast doubt on its accuracy and efficacy, and demonstrate that it was possible to prove that DNA evidence can be fabricated.^{61 62}

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK ; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ In 1995 the FBI launched the Combined DNA Index System. This was possible due to the DNA Identification Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. §14132). For more on this see: "Combined DNA Index System," *FBI*, accessed July 11, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/biometric-analysis/codis/combined-dna-index-system%20>.

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionUScode.action?collectionCode=USCODE>

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that forensic anthropology also benefited from advances in DNA technologies and a group known as the EEAF were set up in Argentina to 'investigate the cases of at least 9,000 disappeared people in Argentina under the military government that ruled from 1976-1983.' For more on this see: <http://www.eaaf.org/> This rendering visible of the 'disappeared' dead is analogous to the project of this thesis: to shine a light on forensic evidence in order to make visible, and central, the missing dead.

⁶¹ Andrew Pollack, "DNA Evidence Can Be Fabricated, Scientists Show," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/science/18dna.html>.

⁶² Radley Balko, "A Brief History of Forensics," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-watch/wp/2015/04/21/a-brief-history-of-forensics/>.

The Ramsey case is not only at the heart of the North American cultural imaginary, but it also resonates within the history of forensic science in the United States. The American Academy for Forensic Science,⁶³ the foremost institute for the study of forensic science in the United States, was founded in Colorado in 1948, it is fitting that the founding of the academy foreshadows the Ramsey case both by being established in the state where the murder took place, and also as two of its most prominent members, Henry Lee and Gerald Macmenamin, rose to fame partially as a result of their work on the Ramsey case. Gerald Macmenamin worked on the ransom note that was found in the Ramsey home hours before the body of JonBenét was discovered in the basement and included this analysis as a case study in his influential 2002 book *Forensic Linguistics: Advances in Forensic Stylistics*.⁶⁴

I have grouped primary texts thematically and framed them through the lens of luminol. They include artefacts as diverse as the state of Colorado, *the Book of Revelation*, and Stephen King's horror novel *The Shining*. However, each chapter is also concerned with at least one contemporary experimental work that has emerged following the rapid development of forensic technologies and the simultaneous rise in doubt over the efficacy and accuracy of forensic science.^{65 66} These experimental texts

⁶³ <http://www.aafs.org/>

⁶⁴ Forensic linguist Gerald McMenamin worked on the ransom note that was found in the Ramsey home hours before the body of JonBenét was discovered in their basement. He was asked to rule out that the note had been written by either of her parents. He had great faith in his findings and in the section of the case study on limitations, he was confident enough to state that: 'With respect to the possibility of attempted disguise, manipulation of the non request, pre-crime samples in the known Ramsey reference writings was not possible. Additionally, most variables identified in the Ramseys' request writings, in writings used here to exclude the Ramseys as writers of the ransom letter and in those not used (e.g., dictated word lists), contain such a patterned level of consistency that the conscious manipulation of even the most carefully executed request writings is highly improbable, given the circumstances of their production.' (Gerald R. McMenamin, *Forensic Linguistics: Advances in Forensic Stylistics* (CRC Press, 2002), 4).

⁶⁵ According to Kristen Bolden: 'The many successes of DNA-based evidence, as well as the glorified images of DNA testing and crime laboratories in forensic crime dramas on television, have resulted in DNA's near infallible status. However, the discovery of the ability to easily fabricate DNA evidence as well as a long history of DNA falsification and gross ineptness by crime laboratories demonstrate that DNA-based evidence's sterling reputation is undeserved. In order to address the growing concern of unreliable DNA evidence being admitted into courtrooms and prejudicing juries, courts should adopt the three-prong Frye-Kelly standard of admissibility for DNA evidence. Like with newer forms of forensic evidence such as brain-imaging with each sample submitted to the lab detailing the investigator's version of the crime, assuming the suspect is guilty, and implying that the scientist merely needs to confirm what the detective already knows.' Courts should evaluate DNA evidence on a case-by-case basis, evaluating the authenticity of the DNA evidence as well as the testing procedures used to obtain the results. Additionally, DNA testing should be conducted by independent laboratories to eliminate police-prosecution bias. Thousands of additional forensic analysts, with the proper training and education, should be employed and held to a stringent national standard for forensic analysis. Lastly, DNA evidence authentication protocols should be implemented in courts nationwide. While individuals may continue to falsify forensic evidence in order to avoid criminal prosecution, these reform measures will reduce the use of unreliable DNA evidence in courts and the instances of forensic fraud and error by forensic analysts.'

are peculiarly suitable subjects for luminol theoretical analysis as they each describe a crime scene (or multiple crime scenes), they each exist in a post-luminol age, that is, an age where forensic pathology simultaneously saturates popular culture and is subject to its most intense scrutiny, and perhaps most importantly of all, they are formally aligned to the luminol-drenched crime scene: flashes of illumination throw up words, sentences, and fragments that offer luminous, strange glimpses, bobbing up from below their polished surfaces.

5. The Analytic Mode

Luminol is an agent of forensic enquiry that excavates and illuminates occulted narratives, particularly crime narratives. The three critical chapters investigate contemporary North America as a crime scene, moving through the exploratory steps that a forensic investigation might take: i.e. from the known to the unknown; from the crime scene, to the artefact, to the body of the dead girl. The three critical chapters investigate the contemporary United States as a crime scene, moving through the exploratory steps that a forensic investigation might take.

The first chapter opens with a reading of the crime scene itself by embedding Colorado crime fictions within the violent history of the state. The second chapter discovers artefacts at the scene, reading textual objects for hidden meanings and reading contemporary experimental fiction from the United States as apocalyptic material, through the lens of the *Book of Revelation*. Just as *Revelation* literally *reveals* the cultural anxieties of first millennium Christians and their fears of impending apocalypse so too *Skin Horse* by Olivia Cronk and *Entrance to a Pageant where we all begin to Intricate* by Johannes Göransson are apocalyptic texts for the third millennium, two thousand years later. The final critical chapter approaches the body of the dead girl at the heart of the crime scene in order to discover the aesthetic coherence between death and femininity and the harm wrought by sexual violence and capital.

The fourth section of the thesis demonstrates Luminol Theory in practice. This collection of short fictions, *The Dead Girl Scrolls: Unearthed Apocalyptic Fictions* is modelled on the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found serendipitously by

From: Kristen Bolden, "DNA Fabrication, A Wake Up Call: The Need to Reevaluate the Admissibility and Reliability of DNA Evidence," *Georgia State University Law Review* 27, no. 2 (2011), 440 – 441.

⁶⁶ Spencer S. Hsu, "FBI Admits Flaws in Hair Analysis over Decades," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/fbi-overstated-forensic-hair-matches-in-nearly-all-criminal-trials-for-decades/2015/04/18/39c8d8c6-e515-11e4-b510-962fcfab310_story.html.

shepherds in the Qumran caves, West Bank in 1946. These scrolls contain the key to ancient languages, cultures, and narratives that were previously hidden. Later forensic analysis of the papyrus scrolls would involve using UV light, a blue chemical glow that excavated layers of hidden narrative. By offering a secular version of these sacred texts, *The Dead Girl Scrolls* operates within a forensic imaginary; that is, it performs an empathetic and creative response to the secular aporia of death through offering dead women a central position that refuses to reify, objectify, or fetishise them or their bodies.

Chapter 1 Traces at the Crime Scene

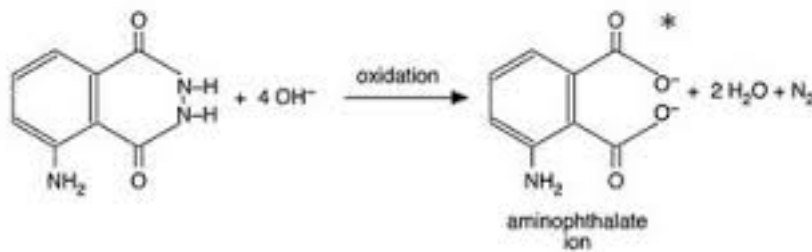


Figure 3 Oxidisation of Luminol

*Chechnya: certainly that's a pastoral. Those people just have nothing but suicide.*¹

*The ghost of "Nature," a brand new entity dressed up like a relic from a past age, haunted the modernity in which it was born. This ghostly Nature inhibited the growth of the ecological thought. Only now, when contemporary capitalism and consumerism cover the entire earth and its life forms, it is possible, ironically and at last, to let go of this nonexistent ghost.*²

*Luminol is a valuable tool for the investigator since it not only discloses the presence of blood but its distribution. Often times, in "cleaning up," blood is distributed over a larger area making the detection with luminol easier. The fact that blood is present and was cleaned up is often more important than the typing of the bloodstains.*³



Figure 4 Still from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*

¹ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral* (Tucson, Arizona: Spork Press, 2011).

² Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5.

³ William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, eds., *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1998), 168.

The Ramsey Basement



Figure 5 Still from the trailer for *The Luminol Reels*

Contemporary US experimental fiction often aims to reveal the crimes that underlie and haunt contemporary American life. In so doing, contemporary experimental fiction reveals the whole of America, perhaps the world, to be a crime scene or locus terribilis. Contemporary experimental fiction thus acts like luminol, revealing the traces of violence, crime, and blood.

The first crime scene that the thesis approaches is the Ramsey basement, the place where murdered JonBenét Ramsey was discovered on Boxing Day, 1996. This case was chosen because it is an especially productive text to engage with using Luminol Theory, both in terms of its moment in forensic history, and because it is a microcosm of larger, systemic crime scenes. This scene recurs throughout this thesis lying on the *limen*, or threshold, between mythic and true crime. Traces of luminol illuminate the crime scene and allow a panning out from the Ramsey basement to the wider setting of Colorado, colonial North America, and beyond. Saturation, radioactivity, and the occult make the crime scene visible, luminous and endless. I will continue to work from the known to the unknown until I return to the Ramsey basement at the end of chapter three and approach the body of the dead girl at its centre. Until then, JonBenét as absent referent haunts the scene just as this crime scene haunts the thesis.

There are two primary texts for this section; the first is Michael Du Plessis's *Memoirs of JonBenét Ramsey* by Kathy Acker (2012), published by Les Figs Press.⁴ The novel is an experimental, nested narrative that reimagines the life and death of JonBenét Ramsey, first embodied by the writer Kathy Acker, and then in a vision, embodied by an adolescent named Tiffany who dies of an ecstasy overdose at her sweet sixteen.⁵ There are also episodes that include Kathy Acker lecturing at Boulder University, and scenes where JonBenét goes to tea with a male doll named Little Lord Fauntleroy. The status of JonBenét as interstitial ghost child, half adult and half vulnerable toddler, is unsettling and provocative. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the novel is the setting, the entirety of Boulder is contained within 'an ugly snow globe that someone bought in a cheap airport gift store and stuck it at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.'⁶ *Memoirs* exposes the harms done and invites the reader to consider their relationship to those harms. Rather than occupying an easy, didactic, space where violence and atrocities are Othered, this novel reminds us of our complicity.

The second is Joyelle McSweeney's *The Necropastoral*, a work that draws explicitly on most powerful of its intertexts, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, one of the earliest examples of a text that described the entire world as a crime scene, littered with bodies. The crime scene is by its very nature contaminated. Metaphorically, the scene is contaminated by fear and sacrilege, and physically contaminated by putrefying bodies at the scene. The Ramsey basement was contaminated with suspicion and fear, which the family will never escape. The state of Colorado is contaminated with violent and tragic histories that have transmitted across the world and multiplied through tributary crimes and fictions. Colorado fictions fuse, separate and replicate, returning to their originary violence. Classical landscapes return and haunt contemporary crime narratives, from Ovid's *locus terribilis* to Derrida's *Hostipitality*, and most acutely, in McSweeney's *Necropastoral*.

On Boxing Day 1996, JonBenét Ramsey's mother, Patricia Ramsey, claimed to

⁴ 'Les Figs Press embraces a feminist criticality and editorial vision. We are interested in work that is aware of itself as a textual body within a history and culture marked (like physical bodies) by constructs of gender, race, class, and sexuality' (<http://www.lesfigs.com/about/>) Though *Memoirs* tackles some controversial topics (child murder, child abuse, drug-taking, terrorism), it is not the most notorious publication from Les Figs; that honour goes to the infamous *Babyfucker* by Urs Allemann. *Babyfucker*, like *Memoirs*, appears on the surface to encourage a shock response, yet, like *Babyfucker*, *Memoirs* 'shows the reader's involvement in literary atrocities, in any violation committed by shared imagination.' (Nick Montfort, "Babyfucker," *Post Position*, accessed August 16, 2015, <http://nickm.com/post/2009/10/babyfucker/>.)

⁵ The name of the young woman murdered by Matthew Murray in 2007.

⁶ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figs, 2012), 3.

have discovered a ransom note left on the stairs of the Ramsey home. The note apparently alerted the family to the fact that JonBenét was missing, and after telephoning both the police and family friends, JonBenét's father, John Ramsey, began the search for his daughter with two of his friends *starting in the basement*. Specifically, in the area of the basement that was used as a wine cellar. They very quickly discovered the body of JonBenét, a factor considered highly suspicious by the police and at odds with the information in the ransom note that indicated she had been removed from the house.

The basement is a staple of horror narratives, and Bernice Murphy draws on the earlier work by Gaston Bachelard in his seminal architectural work *The Poetics of Space*⁷ when she describes the 'suburban basement' as 'frequently a place in which unspeakable horrors lurk in the modern horror film.' She argues that:

As Gaston Bachelard noted of the symbolic significance of cellars, the space is "first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths." Similarly, basements in the Suburban Gothic are invariably associated with murder, the concealment of terrible crimes and illicit burial.⁸

When JonBenét was discovered in the basement of the Ramsey home she became part of an overarching Suburban Gothic narrative. The fact that her murder remains unsolved in spite of mass media coverage and extensive, expert forensic analysis means that she has passed into the realm of myth and folklore; she is a truly haunting figure. The basement 'conceals' the terrible crime of her murder temporarily until she is discovered, but on a more profound level, the basement conceals the crime forever. The evidence discovered there is illegible; the basement will not reveal the secret of JonBenét's 'illicit burial.'

Aside from the strangeness of the basement search, two other major discrepancies have never been accounted for in the case, and each of them has the quality of a myth or a nightmare. The first, and most widely reported, is the case of the missing footprints. The murder took place in the depths of a Colorado winter when

⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (New York, New York: Penguin Classics, 2014).

⁸ Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Scholar UK, 2009), 154 – 155.

snow lay deep on the ground but yet there were no traces of footprints. This initially gave rise to intense speculation that the crime must have been committed inside the house and the case became a true crime 'locked room' mystery. Later, investigative reporter, Julie Hayden, an investigative reporter looked more closely at footage of the snowbound house and reported that:

We looked at the videotape once the footprints in the snow started becoming an issue and one of the things that I observed was, there did not seem to be snow going up to all of the doors. So, in my opinion, this thing about footprints in the snow has always been much ado about nothing because it seemed clear to me that people could have gotten in the house, whether they did or not, without traipsing through the snow.⁹

This analysis punctures the hermetically sealed mystery by allowing for multiple narratives. Julie Hayden shatters the story into fragments by arguing that 'people could have gotten in the house, whether they did or not, without traipsing through the snow.' Here Hayden replaces the suspicious reading with an excavatory one indicating multiple unhierarchised strata. As the crime could have occurred from within or without the Ramsey house there is no single legible narrative. In such a case there is a special use for Luminol Theory as it can be used to excavate further as flashes of brightness limn the scene allowing the analyst to piece together the palimpsest to produce a wider meaning that implicates both the Ramseys and the not-Ramseys in this crime. This crime scene is not sealed, is not alien, but rather is part of a wider, cultural site of violence.

A second piece of evidence which caused widespread confusion, and at one juncture seemed to point to JonBénet's death from within the home, was a dish of pineapple found in the kitchen, a portion of which had been eaten by JonBénet:

⁹ "The Case of JonBénet- The Ramseys vs The Media." *A & E. Channel 9*. September 1998. Web. Transcript.

Pineapple was found in JBR's small intestine. A bowl of pineapple was found in the breakfast area off from the kitchen... It seems implausible that a stranger or acquaintance intruder would have had the motivation or ability to get JBR to eat pineapple on her way to being assaulted... It is more plausible to imagine a "friendly" intruder, e.g., in the guise of a "secret visit" from Santa, having the motivation and means to do this, albeit a "diversion" that would have elevated the risk of being caught by the parents or Burke while in the kitchen or dining area.¹⁰

The dish of pineapple is abandoned on the work surface, an artefact at the scene. This clue is deeply unsettling; here tinned, tropical fruit is transformed from a Christmas treat into gustatory evidence within JonBénét's body. The disjunction between the apparent homeliness of the Ramsey's Christmas Day and the violence of JonBénét's death is uncanny. Whether or not this speculative scene has any truth in it (the intruder offering JonBenét a last meal; a murderous Santa) there is a rupture within the home; the regularity and banality of meal times is compromised and becomes sinister. No member of the Ramsey family claims to have any knowledge of the pineapple and this fact signals a break in the smooth running of the household. At best the six-year-old JonBenét was left fending for herself, or looking to an intruder to meet her dietary needs, at worst the family were lying to cover up her murder. D A Miller argues in his book *The Novel and the Police* that the happy family is simply a facet of the disciplinary institution, exerting control over the time, activities, and basic needs of the individual.¹¹ The Ramsey home can be seen as an instantiation of this disciplinary unit with the family basement as the ultimate site of corporal discipline: a site that John Ramsey, JonBenét's father, is instinctively drawn towards. Aside from the obvious psychoanalytic reading of the basement as the unconscious, there is also a socio-economic reading of the basement as an indicator of wealth. A basement generally belongs to a large building that has several unnecessary rooms; in the Ramsey's case this included the added luxury of a wine cellar. In conjunction with the central crime of murder, the Ramsey basement can be read palimpsestically as a space for the capitalist accumulation of wealth and the colonisation of land: both staples of the American Gothic narrative.

The American Gothic narrative is perhaps most acute in the contemporary

¹⁰ *JonBenét Ramsey Case Encyclopaedia*, "The Pineapple Evidence."
<http://jonbenetramsey.pbworks.com/w/page/11682517/The%20Pineapple%20Evidence> (accessed January 15, 2014)

¹¹ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989), 10.

subgenre of the Suburban Gothic, closely associated with the Domestic Noir.¹² These narratives take place in domestic locations where the uniformity of the suburbs is an uncanny indicator of the inhuman. In this subgenre, larger colonial and genocidal forces are explicated through violent crimes against the individual. Arthur Kroker, a scholar of the Suburban Gothic, suggests that the very sameness of the suburbs is ‘sinister’ and dangerous:

Most of all, it is the lawns which are sinister. Fuji green and expansive, they are a visual relief to the freeway and its accompanying tunnel vision. Even ahead of the golden arches, they are welcoming as the approach of a new urban sign-value. The frenzy sites of a decaying Christian culture where reclining lawn chairs, people in the sun, barbecues and summer-time swimming pools can give off the pleasant odors of an imploding Calvinist culture, playing psychologically at the edge of the parasite and the predator.¹³

Kroker is describing the context of late capitalism, of the post-war United States and of urban spread cutting into the countryside. The banal multiplicity of the suburbs built on material obsession and replete with replicas of nature is horrifying and repellent to Kroker who frames the suburbs within a religious paradigm. His ‘frenzy sites of a decaying Christian culture’ with its implicit hysterical decadence, could be applied as easily to the opening of the first millennium as to the US in the early 20th century.¹⁴ The numinous nature of the hyper-green lawns of suburban North America are a façade for a culture in ‘frenzy’ and ‘implo[sion].’ Kim Ian Michisaw commenting on Kroker’s work also reads contamination, disease and disgust in the ‘unnaturally vigorous turf’ and asks whether ‘something might ooze from us and fuse us with the lawn.’¹⁵ These references to the ‘unnatural’ greenness of the ‘turf’ and the notion of ‘fus[ing] with the lawn’ are indicators of palimpsestic saturation. The lawns glow unnaturally green and

¹² The most famous example of this genre is Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, discussed in the coda to this thesis.

¹³ Arthur Kroker, *Panic Encyclopedia* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1989), 211-212.

¹⁴ Ted Hughes, when translating Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in his 1998 work *Tales from Ovid* made an explicit comparison between the Augustan Empire flooded with ‘ecstatic cults’ and at ‘sea in hysteria and despair’ and the end of the twentieth century. He says of Ovid’s tales that they ‘establish a rough register of what it feels like to live in the psychological gulf that opens up at the end of an era. Among everything else that we see in them, we certainly recognise this.’ (Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid: Twenty-four Passages from the ‘Metamorphoses’*, 1st edition (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 6.)

¹⁵ Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, eds. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 246.

limn the landscape. There is no escape from the contaminatory traces of suburban horror, no escape from the crime scene.

1.1 Approaching the Crime Scene

To approach the crime scene it is first important to consider what the crime scene is. The Ramsey basement is a crime scene. The state of Colorado is a crime scene built on stolen land and forged through genocide. In Tiernan Coyle and Peter White's widely used textbook on forensic analysis *Crime Scene to Court* the crime scene is simply described as a location where a 'crime has been committed.'¹⁶ I would argue that the narrative of the crime scene is not always simple or objective. In fact, the advice given by Coyle and White for discovering whether a crime has been committed or whether a site is a crime scene is highly subjective and politically charged. Examples of a 'crime being committed' include:

The presence of semen on a swab of an underage girl is evidence of illegal sexual activity. Similarly, the demonstration of toxic levels of a poison at tissues removed post-mortem from a body of an individual believed to have died from natural causes will be a strong indication of a crime.¹⁷

The conflation between the 'body of an underage girl' and death by poisoning is suggestive; even in an ostensibly objective *manual* for crime scene investigation, there is a policing of gender and sexuality and there is a prurient interest in the medicalised and pathologised body of an 'underage girl.' Presumably the crime of statutory rape is here elided with actual rape and the bodies of mature adult women are of little or no interest to the author here. The immediately following, and consequentially linked, sentence refers to toxicity that has spread throughout the tissues of an individual, a contamination that is also a marker of crime. Claiming that toxicity, and semen, are both evidential of a crime is to see a crime as an inherently physical, medical act rather than a moral or intellectual one. The manual is premised on the desire to make a definite distinction between crime and not-crime, crime scene and not-crime scene.

¹⁶ Tiernan Coyle, *Crime Scene to Court*, ed. Peter White, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry, 2010), 10.

¹⁷ Tiernan Coyle, *Crime Scene to Court*, ed. Peter White, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry, 2010), 10.

Rather than looking for specific markers of crime (semen, poison), I would argue for a broader categorisation of the crime scene as a location where an act of physical, psychological, or emotional violence has taken place and where that violence has left its trace. The trace element might include (but is in no way limited to): DNA, bloodstains, tissues, hair, semen, or missing footprints in the snow. Meaning collapses as we attempt to erect a *cordon sanitaire* between real and fictive crimes, between the crime scene and the not-crime scene; it becomes apparent that just as the novel is part of the closed regulatory system that incorporates all other ideological and state repressive apparatuses, so too the crime scene and the representation of the crime scene are inherently part of the same closed carceral system. The crime scene and not-crime scene exist within the same location: *the locus terribilis*.

The trope of the *locus terribilis*, (sometimes known as the *locus inamoenus*) or ‘terrible or unpleasant place’, arose from its opposite, the *locus amoenus*, or ‘pleasant place.’¹⁸ The ancient trope of the *locus amoenus* was prevalent in classical poetry, strongly linked to the pastoral as it appears in the work of Horace, Virgil and Seneca. The *locus amoenus* is a sylvan idyll that traditionally contains grass, trees and water. Ovid later inverted this trope to create the *locus terribilis* or ‘terrible place’, that is, a place of natural beauty that hosted violence, rape, and murder. Daniel Garrison coined the term ‘locus inamoenus’ in his article on Augustan literature “The ‘Locus Inamoenus’: Another Part of the Forest’”¹⁹ Garrison traces this inversion to a specific historical incident – the battle between the Romans and the Eburones in 54 BCE. In this Northern European battle the Romans suffered a great defeat that was partly attributed to the landscape, the thickets and bogs created the perfect conditions for a surprise attack against Caesar’s troops.

By Augustan times, the period in which Ovid was writing, the *locus terribilis* was a ‘well-established topos, and one that Seneca also used for his tragedy *Thyestes*.’²⁰ Though Ovid didn’t invent the motif, he certainly put it to the most inventive and sustained usage. According to Garrison, Seneca’s play *Thyestes* contains

¹⁸ I will use *locus terribilis* throughout as it carries a stronger sense of active horror than the negation of *locus inamoenus*. Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror-Phase as Formative of the Function of the I,” *New Left Review*, no. 51 (1968), 71–77.

¹⁹ Daniel Garrison, “The ‘Locus Inamoenus’: Another Part of the Forest,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, no. 1 (1992), 98–114.

²⁰ Daniel Garrison, “The ‘Locus Inamoenus’: Another Part of the Forest,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, no. 1 (1992), 100.

the lines: "Throughout the forest a flame is wont to flicker, and high tree-trunks burn without fire."²¹ Garrison contends that:

These fireless flames may be literary exhalations of natural phenomena more common in the damp forests of northern Europe where decaying wood emits the eerie phosphorescent glow of foxfire, and decomposing organic matter gives off methane that burns with a bluish-yellow flame.²²

What Ovid does is to combine these two ideas to create a new 'special effect' as Garrison describes it. He does not pair frightening events with sinister locations, nor does he retreat into the sentimentality of Hellenic literature. Instead, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contains several descriptions of sexual violence, torture, brutality and murder that take place in beautiful, idyllic settings.²³ These horrors are all the 'more

²¹ Daniel Garrison, "The 'Locus Inamoenus': Another Part of the Forest," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, no. 1 (1992), 101.

²² Daniel Garrison, "The 'Locus Inamoenus': Another Part of the Forest," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, no. 1 (1992), 101.

²³ Ovid, writing in the first century CE, exactly 2000 years ago, was exiled for a '*carmen et error*' or a poem and an error. Ovid was a poet who created decadent, brutal art that was confrontational to the conservative regime of Emperor Augustus and he and his material were excised from Rome. A radical text that challenges orthodoxy both in content and form can have difficulty in finding publication. Johannes Göransson and Blake Butler, two experimental writers who are discussed in this thesis, wrote a play based on the massacre at Sandy Hook which was denied publication, according to the authors, at least in part because '[p]eople are squeamish about art about violence and suffering that remains art-sy. Art about disasters should be transparent; to foreground the art, the pageantry is somehow offensive.' I reproduce the discussion in full here: A few weeks ago, in the wake of the school massacre at Sandy Hook Blake Butler and I wrote a play of sorts called "Sandy" about the massacre – about the shooting, the reporting on the shooting, the relationship of the shooting to the steady stream of murders of young black people that goes un-reported in the media and to all those drone-killed people elsewhere in the world, all those people saying, "you can't understand a thing like this, you just have to go to church" (a cop-out for sure), all these people who want an easy explanation of it, all the people who want such a complex explanation of it that the whole thing becomes diffuse, and the relationship of violence to art, to media. In short, it was a work of art that ate and was eaten by a proliferation of images and rhetorics. Blake and I were very pleased with it after a few weeks of going back and forth, so Blake started to send it out to various journals that had solicited his work. It soon became apparent, that when they solicited Blake's work, they did not think he would send them something about Sandy Hook because it was roundly rejected by all kinds of journals. The editors seemed to agree that it was "offensive." Why was it offensive? It was unclear to me. We had made an artwork in response to a terrible event, trying to respond fully to its violence, its absurdity, the proliferation of responses, its horror, its ridiculous sideshows. Why? I will hazard to guess that it was precisely because it contained "too much" art: too many scene changes, too many characters, too many references to Katie Perry, too many dead black youths, too many dialogues with the killer, too many dance performances by his dead mother trying instruct children how to flee from drone attacks. Unlike all those other acceptable responses – responses that replayed the murder act and scene and background endlessly, ours was an artwork that placed art in the violent centre. People are squeamish about art about violence and suffering that remains art-sy. Art about disasters should be transparent; to foreground the art, the pageantry is somehow offensive. You are accused of "aestheticizing" suffering, violence, torture etc, – as if that is an inherently negative thing, as if that makes it flippant, as if that is not pious enough. As if the art itself is a crime. (<http://www.montevideo.com/why-is-the-poem-such-an-insult-to-this-evil-life-on-sandy-hook-blake-butler-aase-berg-and-disaster-aesthetics/>)

striking' according to Garrison because they occur 'in a pretty place that we lull ourselves into thinking is also a safe one.'²⁴ Ovid often introduces a sacred grotto, a lush spring, a secret grove, or a dark and impenetrable forest to set a scene. Within these sublime, numinous spaces, he contaminates the landscape with violence and degradation. The spaces continue to be haunted by the violence committed there as the victims of the crimes do not disappear, but rather metamorphose into elements of the scene itself, from Myrrha's agonising pregnancy trapped inside a tree, to the terrified Callisto who was transformed into a bear only to be hunted by her son.

The classical *locus amoenus* contains trees, water, and grass. In Ovid there are several examples of this particular combination signalling danger and (often sexual) violence. An example of this can be seen in the episode of *Salmacis and Hermaphrodite*.²⁵ In this story Salmacis, a nymph who has broken away from the virgin-hunter Diana in order to live a life of sybaritic excess, rapes Hermaphrodite, son of Hermes and Aphrodite – the only example of nymphic rape in classical mythology. The setting is a typical *locus amoenus* with grass, trees, and especially water functioning not only as setting but also as plot. According to Ovid, Hermaphrodite undressed and entered Salmacis' pool in order to bathe. Salmacis watched him from behind a tree and was overcome with lust for him. She entered the pool and forced herself upon him physically, calling out to the gods to join their flesh eternally. As in many cases this extreme act of sexual violence was honoured²⁶ by the gods and the two

²⁴ Daniel Garrison, "The 'Locus Inamoenus': Another Part of the Forest," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, no. 1 (1992), 100.

²⁵ The *Metamorphoses*, from which the story of Salmacis and Hermaphrodite is taken, was not the first of Ovid's work to introduce the trope of the *locus terribilis*. In fact, Ovid was working against an established pastoral tradition. In the earlier works of Latin poets Virgil and Horace the pastoral is closely related to sentimentality and nostalgia. Ovid's response to this tradition was to use landscapes to subvert their meanings for political effect. An earlier example of the *locus terribilis* in Ovid is present in his work the *Ars Amatoria*. In this book he explores the topography of Augustan Rome only to recall the violent and unwholesome history of the rape of the Sabines. He chose to avoid propaganda and sentimentality, though he still loved Rome dearly and was inconsolable with grief to be exiled by Augustus at the end of his life.

²⁶ Amy Richlin in her essay "Reading Ovid's Rapes" asks 'how are we to read texts, like those of Ovid, that take pleasure in violence – a question that challenges not only the canon of Western literature but all representations. If the pornographic is that which converts living bodies into objects, such texts are certainly pornographic.' (158) She goes on to describe in detail some of the *Metamorphoses*' 'fifty tales of rape in its fifteen books' including those of women who were 'transformed as a *punishment* for their rape and mutilation', punished, that is, by the gods. Myrrha, Io, Callisto, and Medusa belong to this category and Leucothoe and Perimele are murdered by their fathers (by proxy to the gods). (p. 165) (Amy Richlin, 'Reading Ovid's Rapes' Amy Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York: OUP USA, 1992), 158-179.)

were joined together in one body²⁷

However, Ovid's use of the setting to signal danger is of peculiar relevance to Luminol Theory. The natural setting is a crime scene, a scene of unimaginable terror for Hermaphrodite. Ovid describes the pool as hypernatural; a simulacrum of nature:

No barren sedge grew there, no spiky rush;
The water crystal clear, its margin ringed
With living turf and verdure always green.
(4. 303ff.)²⁸

This setting is at once fertile and sterile; the water is symbol of generation whilst it simultaneously does not sustain life of any kind. The surroundings that have been constructed are unnaturally perfect and anodyne, however, the fusty colour of the turf reveals excess, decay and overstimulation. Charles Segal speaks about the Ovidian landscape as a place where 'innocence is never preservable [...] where even the place of refuge and peace is invaded; there is no safety, no escape from arbitrary force.'²⁹ The rape that occurs is *facilitated* by the beautiful location, the trees hide Salmacis from Hermaphrodite allowing her ambush and the water inflames her lust by revealing Hermaphrodite's naked body. However, it is the grass that bears the most symbolic weight, its spookily beautiful 'verdure', the unsettling clue that indicates that there is something wrong with the scene. Whilst luminol testing is obviously anachronistic, Luminol Theory can still be applied here. Ovid reports that the fountain is eternally cursed, that the bodily fluids that entered the water upon Hermaphrodite's rape cannot be removed. He tells us that there is a trace of the original crime in the water forever and that anyone who drinks the water will be affected:

²⁷ This is, of course, the origin of the word 'hermaphrodite' used frequently to describe people who identify as intersex.

²⁸ A. D. Melville and E. J. Kenney, *Metamorphoses* (Oxford Paperbacks, 1998), 14.

²⁹ Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Study in the Transformations of a Literary Symbol* (F. Steiner Verlag, 1969).

“Dear father and mother, I pray you, grant this boon to the son who bears the names of you both: whoever enters this pool as a man, let him weaken as soon as he touches the water and always emerge with his manhood diminished!”
 Venus and Mercury both were moved and fulfilled the prayer of their androgyne son by infecting the pool with a neutering tincture.’
 (4: 382-385)³⁰

The scene retains a material trace of the original narrative that cannot be removed, and further, that is reactivated by an encounter with biological material. In this scene the *locus amoenus* becomes the *locus terribilis*, a place of exquisite beauty that is both the setting and the explicit facilitator of violence. Luminol Theory illuminates the flashes of horror that remain deep in the cursed water: at once inviting and terrifying, hostile, hospitable, and haunted.

This blurring of the hostile and the hospitable (and the crime scene and not-crime scene) illuminated by Luminol Theory is exemplified through Jacques Derrida’s portmanteau concept of *Hostipitality*, which is used to demonstrate the collapsing of binaries between etymologically related words.³¹ Hosting, according to Derrida, is etymologically associated with a range of contradictory terms: ‘hostile’, ‘hospitality’, ‘ghost’, ‘hotel’, and ‘hostelry.’ Derrida’s essay can be considered as a guide to viewing hostility and hospitality as non-binary, ambiguous concepts and to consider what happens when natural locations become crime scenes. These deeply uncanny haunted landscapes pervert the classical notion of *xenia* or hospitality. The damaged spirits who throng Ovid’s scenes are not afforded proper *xenia*; they are guests who have been mistreated and who cannot leave. *Xenia* is a central concept in ancient thinking and was considered a sacred principle whose betrayal risked grave consequences from the gods. It is a mutual bond and the guest who refuses *xenia* (or worse yet betrays it) in some way commits equal offence to the gods as those who do not offer proper *xenia*. The most obvious literary example of this is the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Klytemnestra in his homecoming bath, an act that results in generations of *miasma*, or vengeance. One way of reading the *locus terribilis* and using it to apply critical theory

³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation*, trans. David Raeburn, (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 150.

³¹ Derrida wrote this article for *Angelaki* in 2000, towards the end of his life and the article exemplified his method of excavating etymologies in order to produce startling new meanings.

to contemporary literary works is to take ‘Hostipitality’ as a framework. Derrida discovers ‘troubling’ meanings lurking inside: ‘Hospitalität, a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitised by its opposite, “hostility,” the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbours as the self-contradiction in its own body.’ ‘Guest’, ‘host’, ‘hostile’ and ‘ghost’ are all enmeshed within this word. In the literary example of Klytemnestra, it is possible to see how she embodies this troubling range of meaning. On the surface, Klytemnestra offers *xenia* to Agamemnon by pouring him a barth, behaving as a host would. Yet soon after, she becomes hostile to him and he becomes her undesirable guest. When she murders him, he becomes a ghost, haunting generations of his family with *miasma*. In the same way when Ovid presents idyllic settings as places that are at once desirable and deadly, their lushness is undercut by impending danger. He is playing with the concept of the *locus terribilis* as a place of hosting and hostility, changing it to a place of enmity, violence and horror. When Derrida argues that ‘Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct’ he could be talking about Ovid’s landscapes that ‘self-destruct’ in precisely this way; it is the ambiguity between hospitality and hostility that creates the Ovidian thrill. Hostipitality can also be understood as a way of thinking through luminol. Luminol excavates, and more specifically, illuminates the horror beneath even the most beautiful surface. In the same way *Hostipitality* always reminds us of the hostility at the heart of the guest-host exchange and of the ghostly luminol trace that remains.

This ghostly blue-green trace leaks from the basement, saturating the air, the house, and the deadly landscape. Luminol Theory scratches straight through the palimpsest of history to reveal the accreted narratives below, from the basement where JonBenét was discovered to the originary genocide of the state of Colorado where the Ramsey house rests uneasily on stolen and colonised land.

1.2 Colorado Histories

The Ramsey murder was one of the most high profile cases in Colorado, yet it was not the only notable case. The state of Colorado is exquisitely beautiful: set in the Rocky Mountains, it is a popular holiday destination for wealthy skiers who are drawn to its clean air and fresh snow. Yet, in the setting of such natural beauty there has been an unusually high number of high profile, globally famous crimes. In the last twenty-five

years there have been several major crimes in the state, most notoriously the Columbine massacre which is the most widely discussed mass shooting of all time. Ted Bundy, one of the most prolific and culturally relevant serial killers on record, perpetrated several crimes in Colorado. Further back, the state was founded on the originary genocide of indigenous people slaughtered in the Sand Creek massacre of 1864. Colorado is home to a peculiar matrix of extreme crimes and it is this violent history that has drawn so many writers of fiction and non-fiction, to base their violent crime stories in the state including the most famous horror writer of all, Stephen King. The state itself, built on originary genocide, is a palimpsestic crime scene and once illuminated, occulted fictional and non-fictional crimes are revealed.

The overlaying of contemporary crimes (both fictional and non-fictional) on to national violence is the subject of much of the American Gothic, and to an extent, the subgenre of Suburban Gothic. Robert Mighall reminds us that the genocidal origins of the United States are always ‘what lies beneath’ the contemporary American horror story:

“Gloomy wrong”, guilt and nemesis are the master-plots of American Gothic. It is a big paranoid country, guiltily aware that it has taken the land away from people, and taken other people away from their lands: hence the symbolic importance of land, and what lies beneath it, in fictions from Hawthorne to Stephen King. The Indian burial grounds that lie beneath the haunted edifices in *The Shining* (1980), and *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and *Poltergeist* (1982) entail indelible stains of guilty horror that erupt to damn the new masters of this nation.³²

The twin spectres of colonisation and slavery are never far from the surface in the American narrative, particularly, in the American crime narrative. In the Suburban Gothic, we see houses built on foundations of ‘gloomy wrong’, with leaky borders that facilitate a return of the repressed, the disavowed. The basement in the Suburban Gothic is a peculiar site of horror, signifying both the unconscious mind³³ and a place

³² 8. Robert Mighall, “Gothic Cities.” In Catherine Spooner, 54-62. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, (Routledge, 2007).

³³ Perhaps most famously in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, where the Bates home is divided quite literally into levels that represent the conscious and unconscious mind. The taxidermied body of Norman Bates’ mother, his alter ego, ‘illicitly buried’ (as described in Bernice Murphy’s *The Suburban Gothic*) in the basement whilst he maintains a reasonably coherent presence as ‘Norman’ on the upper levels of the house. (Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (Universal Pictures UK, 2006).)

of ‘illicit burial.’³⁴ The basement, the lowest stratum in the house, is frequently the site of hidden danger and deadly secrets. Colorado crimes, true and imagined, frequently lead down to the basement. From John Ramsey’s mystical certainty that demonstrated that he would find his daughter in the wine cellar of his home, to the dangers in the basement of Stephen King’s fictional Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*,³⁵ to the so-called “Basement Tapes”³⁶ made by the Columbine killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the basement is a recurring locale in the Colorado crime scene. However, below the level of the basement lie several further archaeological strata: dirt, blood and bones from the Sand Creek massacre are distributed throughout the Colorado earth invoked by the ‘Indian burial ground’ that lies beneath the Overlook in King’s (and Kubrick’s) famous story, where the most stunning scenery that Colorado has to offer becomes a *locus terribilis*.

Three years following the unsolved murder of JonBenét Ramsey, Colorado was in news headlines the world over for one of the most shocking mass murders of all time, and the most infamous and influential school shooting: Columbine. In April 1999 Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attended Columbine High School where they were enrolled as students and shot and murdered 12 students and a teacher, injuring 21 others. After terrorising staff and students for several hours they committed suicide. In addition to the shootings they also planted almost 100 homemade explosives throughout the school and its grounds. The massacre was the deadliest school shooting to date and the consequences included major national and international debates about firearm control and teenage depression and medication. These debates had a lasting impact on the school system, on policing, and on gun control in the US. Klebold and Harris explicitly cited Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, as an

³⁴ Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Scholar UK, 2009), 155.

³⁵ ‘Jack was in the cellar. He had gone down to check the furnace and boiler--such checks had become a ritual with him since the snow had closed them in--and after satisfying himself that everything was going well he had wandered through the arch, screwed the lightbulb on, and had seated himself in an old and cobwebby camp chair he had found. He was leafing through the old records and papers, constantly wiping his mouth with his handkerchief as he did so. Confinement had leached his skin of its autumn tan, and as he sat hunched over the yellowed, crackling sheets, his reddish-blond hair tumbling untidily over his forehead, he looked slightly lunatic. He had found some odd things tucked in among the invoices, bills of lading, receipts. Disquieting things. A bloody strip of sheeting. A dismembered teddy bear that seemed to have been slashed to pieces.’ (Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2011), 163.

³⁶ For more on this see: https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/columbine_basement_tapes_1.0.pdf

inspiration.³⁷ In turn, Columbine has been linked to over thirty subsequent mass murder cases.³⁸ David Cullen, a reporter who attended the scene at Columbine, wrote in his account of the case that:

It's a safe bet that Eric and Dylan watched the carnage of Waco and Oklahoma City on television, with the rest of the country. Those atrocities were particularly prominent in this region. McVeigh was tried in federal court in downtown Denver and sentenced to death while the boys attended Columbine in the suburbs. The scenes of devastation were played over and over. In his journal, Eric would brag about topping McVeigh. Oklahoma City was a one-note performance: McVeigh set his timer and walked away; he didn't even see his spectacle unfold. Eric dreamed much bigger than that.³⁹

Though this is a highly speculative account, it does illuminate two relevant points: that Cullen, a native of Colorado, describes mass atrocities, even those perpetrated beyond the borders of the state as ‘prominent in this region’, an assertion supported by the fact that McVeigh, perpetrator of the largest act of domestic terrorism in US history had his lengthy and painful trial in the state of Colorado; and that Harris’s journal contains references to both the influence of McVeigh and Harris’s desire to both ‘top’ him and watch ‘the spectacle unfold.’ Both of these points indicate that the context was relevant to the crime (the spectacle of the trial as it unfolded in Colorado) and also that the killers, or at least Harris, was interested in perpetrating the crime specifically within Colorado. He wanted to stay and watch (the visual image of the ‘spectacle’) what this crime did both to the people who they murdered and injured, but also to the environment of Columbine, and by extension, of Colorado.

This incident reverberates through Colorado, and through the post-Columbine world where mass murders are more prevalent than ever. More recently there has been another significant mass shooting in Colorado; the Aurora *Batman* movie theatre shooting, which is the largest scale mass theatre shooting and yet another notorious

³⁷ The day of the shooting was on 20 April 1999, one day after the 19 April anniversary of the Oklahoma City attack.

³⁸ According to criminologist Ralph Larkin, of the twelve school shootings that have taken place in the ten years since Columbine (1999 – 2009) eight of those murderers have been explicitly inspired by Harris and Klebold including T J Solomon in Conyers, Georgia; Seth Trickle in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma; Charles Andrew Williams in Santee, California; John William Romano in East Greenbush, New York; Jon Wiese in Red Lake, Minnesota; James Newman in Reno, Nevada; Alvaro Castillo in Hillsborough, North Carolina; Cho Sueng-Hui in Blacksburg, Virginia. (Ralph W. Larkin, “The Columbine Legacy Rampage Shootings as Political Acts,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52, no. 9 (May 1, 2009): 1309–26: doi:10.1177/0002764209332548.)

³⁹ Dave Cullen, *Columbine* (Old Street Publishing, 2010), 10 -11.

record for Colorado.⁴⁰ Before Aurora, the most notorious theatre shooting took place during a showing of *Harlem Nights* in Detroit in 1989. In the *Harlem Nights* shooting, the gun went off at the same time in the movie as it did in the theatre, this synchronised choreography indicates a failure of imagination, a paint-by-numbers approach. In the Aurora *Batman* shooting, the scale of the crime (12 dead, 70 injured, and the use of chemical weapons) extends the police state, does the work of the capitalist project and becomes a marrying of the ideological and repressive state apparatuses. Luminol Theory excavates these crimes in conjunction with their settings to reveal the cinema as a crime scene and the Hollywood system, and the pro-capitalist, pro-authority *Batman* film can be limned in the same way as the wider carceral system that they both inhabit and represent.

Mass killings are not the only major crimes of national and international interest that have occurred in the state. Ted Bundy, one of the most notorious serial killers in the world, came to Colorado in January 1975. By April he had murdered three young women: Caryn Campbell, Julie Cunningham, and Denise Oliverson. Though he perpetrated his crimes throughout the US, the crimes in Colorado have taken on a grimy valence, particularly the murder of Julie Cunningham who worked at the Vail ski resort in Colorado. She was brutally murdered by Bundy after he tricked her into carrying his ski boots for him by feigning injury. This particular ruse has been popularised in several cultural representations of Bundy and is part of serial killer folklore.⁴¹ In this case the Colorado landscape enacted the crime, with the snow-covered Vail Mountain offering an alibi both for the heavy ski boots and the injury. The murder of Julie Cunningham, when excavated with Luminol Theory, reveals the mythic narrative that haunts and occupies his other crimes, shining through the snow scene to reveal not only the individual crimes of abduction, murder, rape, and necrophilia, but also the systemic patriarchal crimes perpetrated against women both in reality and in cultural representation.⁴²

⁴⁰ At the time of writing, in July 2015, there has just been a similar incident in Lafayette, Louisiana at a screening of Amy Schumer and Judd Apatow's film *Trainwreck*.

⁴¹ Perhaps the most famous of these cultural representations is that of Buffalo Bill in Thomas Harris' and Jonathon Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*. *Forced Entry*, a Gonzo porn film based loosely on the serial killer Richard Ramirez, has a scene where a similar ruse to the one used on Julie Cunningham is featured.

⁴² Lizzy Borden, the director of *Forced Entry*, explained the origins of the film in an interview: 'I'm doing this movie, *Forced Entry*, that you will just rip apart. It's six scenes of pure rape. No pleasure at all. It's based on Richard Ramirez. The guys rape and kill the girls. We're actually trying to get in touch with him actually. There is a scene with Luciano fucking a girl, as he kills her, he looks at the camera

By limning the crime scene of Colorado, Luminol Theory reveals narratives further below the most famous crimes to occulted histories below. The careful reader, or analyst, can take the fragmented, seemingly inchoate crimes and limn them in order to curate the state of Colorado and reveal it as not only a crime scene, but as *the* crime scene; a microcosm of and genesis for other US crime scenes. Columbine is the ur-school shooting, JonBenét the most famous US child murder of all time, Bundy's Colorado crimes resonate most vividly in the national true crime imaginary. Yet these major crimes are only a part of the story to be limned.

Below the news headlines and saturated images, are weirder, ghostly traces of the state of Colorado as a constellation point for horror of all kinds; these crimes have been influenced by, and influenced, a whole range of mystic, religious, and otherworldly practices.⁴³ Excavating further through the palimpsest, down to the

and says 'that's for you Richard, you're my idol.' (Roger T. Pipe, "Interview: Lizzy Borden," March 2001, *RogReviews*, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://www.rogreviews.com/27099/interview-lizzy-borden/>). In a 2002 interview with Borden in *Salon*, the interviewer admits to an emotional response to the film: 'I felt the same way when I watched the film. "Forced Entry" is purportedly the story of a serial killer and his gang who rape and murder a series of women — an 18-year-old virgin, a pregnant woman, etc. — before being caught and lynched by an angry mob. The actresses in the film are slapped, spit and urinated upon, and violated in every orifice, while sobbing and screaming and begging for mercy. Watching it, I was aware that it was just a movie — that these were consensual acts taking place between actors and actresses who had already had sex with each other dozens of times in past films; and that the blood and screams were fake. The video even included an entire "bloopers" reel of the actresses laughing and joking on the set. Still, I was so traumatized by the movie that it brought me to tears: It was like witnessing a real rape, seeing the nadir of man's contempt for womankind brought to life with no holds barred.' (Janelle Brown, "Porn Provocateur," accessed July 27, 2015, http://www.salon.com/2002/06/20/lizzy_borden/.)

⁴³ One example of this is the rise of so-called 'fervour churches' in Colorado in the 1990s. Dave Cullen describes the state-wide religious hysteria that characterised Colorado 'Since pioneer days and the Second Great Awakening, Colorado had been a hotbed on the itinerant ministry circuit' and goes on to say that 'by the 1990s, Colorado Springs was christened the Evangelical Vatican. The city of Denver seemed immune to the fervor, but its western suburbs were roiling.' (Dave Cullen, *Columbine* (Old Street Publishing, 2010), 103-104.) This extreme form of evangelical Christianity was both a reference point for the apparent 'Satanism' of the Columbine killers and also indirectly responsible for another mass shooting in Colorado. Matthew Murray specifically informed by the Colorado shooting attended a 12-week missionary programme at the Youth with a Mission Programme in Arvada, Colorado in 2007. Devastated following his unsuccessful experience there, he returned, showing up at a 'dormitory in December of 2007 on a Sunday at 12:30am and made his demand for a room. Tiffany Johnson explained that he couldn't stay and he drew a pistol and shot her.' Murray explicitly blamed his anger on 'Christians who are to blame for most of the problems in the world' (Paula Woodward, "Gunman's Web Writings Warn of Shootings," *9news.com*, December 2007, <http://www.9news.com/news/article/82548/222/Gunmans-Web-writings-warn-of-shootings>) perhaps more understandable when it is discovered that Murray was subject to Bill Gothard style religious practices in his home as a child. These included the prayer closet (made notorious in the Stephen King novel *Carrie*): 'From the outset, the prayer closet was created by ITC leadership as a means of solitary confinement for youth offenders who had been referred to ITC by the juvenile court system. These rooms were sparsely furnished, with only a bed and table with a Bible and other IBLP materials, and the doorknob was reversed, effectively locking the person inside the room. Cameras were installed outside the door of the room so that it could be monitored from ITC's front desk. In some cases, young men were assigned sentry duty outside the room. (Ryan, R. "The Prayer Closet: An Introduction." *Recovering Grace*, September 2011. <http://www.recoveringgrace.org/2011/09/the-prayer-closet/>.)

originary crimes of Colorado, I would argue that the structure of the Sand Creek genocide echoes other Colorado crimes including the murder of JonBenét Ramsey, and the Columbine massacre. In fact all of these crimes can be considered as examples of the Suburban Gothic; in each case the danger is derived from proximity to those in a position of trust, to those closest to home. In the case of the Sand Creek massacre which took place on November 29, 1864, led and ordered by Colonel John Chivington, Chivington was successful in his genocidal attack, at least in part, because of his promise to the indigenous community that they would be safe under his protection:

Pre-dawn came with a fright on November 29, 1864 as mainly Colorado militia, seven-hundred soldiers in all, attacked an undefended Indian camp on Sand Creek [...] Those slaughtered were babies, old men, women, and children. The majority of the able-bodied men were on a hunting trip. Black Kettle and his people had been told they would be safe on this reservation.⁴⁴

Though this was murder on a massive scale and though it was military in character, this genocidal attack can be seen as similar to the description of the Suburban Gothic supplied by Bernice Murphy as ‘one is almost always in more danger from the people in the house next door, or one’s own family, than from external threats. Horror here invariably begins at home, or at least very near to it.’⁴⁵ She goes on to say that ‘[u]nlike the small town horror tales of Stephen King, in which the danger invariably comes from a monstrous ‘Other’, here, it is one’s fellow suburbanites and family members which pose the most danger.’⁴⁶ Murphy is correct to largely characterise the work of Stephen King as having danger come from a monstrous ‘Other’⁴⁷ though I would reject that this is ‘invariably’ the case. In fact, his most interesting work, and the one that has garnered by far the most critical attention, is a work of familial horror, a suburban Freudian psychodrama that begins in a run-down Boulder apartment and ends in a decaying Gothic mansion high in the Rocky Mountains. *The Shining*, both the novel

⁴⁴ Don Rainwater, *The Dark Side Of Colorado: Murder, Mayhem, And Massacre* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2008), 8.

⁴⁵ Bernice M. Dr Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Scholar, Print UK, 2009), 2.

⁴⁶ Bernice M. Dr Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Scholar, Print UK, 2009), 2.

⁴⁷ *Misery*, *IT*, *The Stand*, *Needful Things*, and *Pet Semetary* are prime examples of this phenomenon.

and the film, are cultural representations that can be excavated with Luminol Theory to reveal the crime scene that they represent: the state of Colorado.

1.3 Colorado Fictions

Stephen King's *The Shining*, and later, Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of the novel limn Colorado as a crime scene in a powerful and cohesive way. This text has excited a range of critical, theoretical, and audience responses that far exceed its status as a work of fiction. *The Shining* clearly taps into some deep cultural anxieties around the state of Colorado specifically, and the territory of the United States generally. In turn, *The Shining* is an important intertext, or even ur-text, for *The Memoirs of JonBenét Ramsey* by Kathy Acker (hereafter written as *Memoirs*) written by Michael Du Plessis. This particular palimpsest of Colorado fictions can be excavated with Luminol Theory, the glow illuminating the heads of the terrorised protagonists: children with luminous white hair.⁴⁸

The Shining tells the story of Jack Torrance, a failed writer, failed teacher, and failed husband who recovers from his alcoholism and despair long enough to agree to a job caretaking the Overlook Hotel in the Rocky Mountains over a brutal winter season. Gradually cabin fever sets in and his mind disintegrates, he returns to drinking and decides to kill his wife, Wendy and Danny their toddler son. During the course of the winter both he and Danny see traces of previous horror in the abandoned hotel, with Danny's gift of 'the shining' allowing him direct access to the Real. Blood and corpses surface in the empty rooms with Danny's ability to 'shine' acting as a highly effective form of luminol.

On the day that the family arrive the Overlook's chef Dick Halloran⁴⁹ is about to leave for Florida over the winter months and he tells Danny Torrance 'What you got, son, I call it shinin' on, the Bible calls it having visions, and there's scientists that call it precognition. I've read up on it, son. I've studied on it. They all mean seeing the future. Do you understand that?'⁵⁰ Here he is also explaining the supernatural phenomenon to

⁴⁸ Horror has several examples of the supernatural white-haired child, famous examples include: John Wyndham, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (London: Penguin, 2008); Wolf Rilla, *Village Of The Damned* (Warner Brothers, 1960); John Carpenter, *John Carpenter's Village Of The Damned* (Fabulous Films, 2015).

⁴⁹ Dick, an African-American character, is represented as a stereotypical 'magical negro' who exists merely to save the white characters. For more on this trope see: Matthew W. Hughey, "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films," *Social Problems*, no. 3 (2009), 543–77, doi:10.1525/sp.2009.56.3.543.

⁵⁰ Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2011), 61.

the reader. ‘Shining’ refers to an ability to pick up on atmospheres, moods, and the thoughts of the people around those who have the gift and also an ability to read the future through visions or hallucinations. In the novel, the gift is almost exclusively confined to revealing what is dangerous and deadly; blood streaming from the elevators into the lobby, twin girls chopped into gory pieces, the word Redrum (murder) scrawled on a mirror. Here the metaphor of ‘shining’ as a means to excavate hidden crime narratives is a microcosmic example of the function of Luminol Theory.

Luminol Theory allows the careful reader to piece together multiple hidden narratives within *The Shining*. For example, to train Danny’s ‘shine’ on occulted crime narratives, the reader can trace luminol through the novel. Early in the novel whilst Danny is still residing in Boulder; he has a premonition of the final scenes of the novel in the Overlook when his father attacks Danny and his mother with an axe: ‘[n]ow the snow was covering the shingles. It was covering everything. A green witchlight glowed into being on the front of the building, flickered, and became a giant, grinning skull over two crossed bones.’⁵¹ Here the green glow of the ‘witchlight’ is overlaid on to the scene to warn Danny that he is in severe danger. The future and present collide, a palimpsest rendered legible through the application of a green glow eerily reminiscent of luminol. On the day that the family arrive at the Overlook, Dick Halloran, the cook, simultaneously shows the family how to survive the winter in practical terms by giving them a tour of the kitchen and showing them the provisions he has left for them and also alerts Danny to a supernatural means of calling for help should he need it by calling for Dick through ‘shining.’ This scene coalesces around the vast hotel kitchen and it is no accident that both practical and supernatural advice is dispensed as they wander the pantry, walk in-freezer⁵², and finally arrive at the gas burner: “I love gas,” he said, and turned on one of the burners. Blue flame popped into life and he adjusted it down to a faint glow with a delicate touch. “I like to be able to see the flame you’re

⁵¹ Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2011), 23.

⁵² Elissa Marder, a psychoanalytic scholar, writes about a case where a mother was found to have hidden her dead babies in the family freezer, an action, Marder argues, that was an attempt to safeguard rather than destroy the children that she was psychologically unable to deal with. This case can be read against later scenes in *The Shining* where Jack Torrance becomes frozen to death, kept safe from hurting himself or others. In psychoanalytic terms: ‘A freezer is, after all, itself a particular kind of a case – a technologically enhanced object designed for holding, containing, or preserving something (normally food) against the ravages of time. A freezer is designed to keep something safe, protected and near. In this sense it is the opposite of a disposal site; it retains, contains, and safeguards the objects that are confined in it. It is also the opposite of an oven. Following this association, dead babies in the freezer might be read as a reversal of the common image of the pregnant woman who has “buns in the oven”’ (Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction* (Fordham Univ Press, 2012), 25).

cookin' with. You see where all the surface burner switches are?"⁵³ By offering practical advice, Halloran also uses a blue glow, in this case the gas burner, to invoke warmth, security, and comfort and to remind Danny of his own ongoing protective presence. Finally, toward the end of the novel, Danny is alerted in an acute, desperate moment to a glow in his father's eyes: 'It was Jack and yet not Jack. His eyes were lit with a vacant, murderous glow; his familiar mouth now wore a quivering, joyless grin.'⁵⁴ The green glow of the witchlight and the blue glow of the gas have become 'vacant' and 'murderous' in his father's eyes, alerting Danny to the fact that Jack is no longer there and that he must escape from his murderous intent.

In his article "You Have Always Been The Caretaker: Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel" Mark Fisher states that he reads the two *Shining* texts as 'one interconnected textual labyrinth.'⁵⁵ Mark Fisher applies a hauntological reading to *The Shining* and uncovers archaeological meaning through the layers of repression built into the text. He specifically mentions spectrality and haunting saying that: 'Haunting happens when a space is invaded or otherwise disrupted by a time that is out-of-joint, a dyschronia' and stating that *The Shining* is 'fundamentally concerned with the question of repetition.'⁵⁶ This repetition in a minor sense relates to the microcosmic murder of the family, first by Mr Grady, then an attempted recreation of that murder by Jack. In a wider sense, the repetition relates to the violence and terror that recur at the site of the Overlook Hotel, including organised crime, murders, suicides and even mass killings. On a macrocosmic level, Fisher describes the overlook as a 'leisure hive built on top of an Indian Burial Ground (this detail was added by Kubrick); a potent image of a culture founded upon (the repression of) the genocide of the native peoples.'⁵⁷ Perhaps the most interesting application of the hauntological is in Fisher's reading of Jack, who represents 'an appalling structural fatality, a spectral determinism. To have 'always been the caretaker' is never to have been a subject in his own right. Jack has only ever stood in for the Symbolic and the homicidal violence which is the Symbolic's obscene

⁵³ Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2011), 51.

⁵⁴ Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2011), 301.

⁵⁵ Mark Fisher, "You Have Always Been the Caretaker: Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel," *Perforations*, no. 29 (2007), Available at: <http://www.pd.org/Perforations/perf29/mf1.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Mark Fisher, "You Have Always Been the Caretaker: Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel," *Perforations*, no. 29 (2007), Available at: <http://www.pd.org/Perforations/perf29/mf1.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Mark Fisher, "You Have Always Been the Caretaker: Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel," *Perforations*, no. 29 (2007), Available at: <http://www.pd.org/Perforations/perf29/mf1.pdf>.

underside.’⁵⁸ Jack has ‘always been the caretaker’ and he has always lived in Colorado. He was involved in the genealogy of brutalities from Sand Creek to the murder of Grady’s daughters. If he has always been the caretaker, the obscene father, the structural, patriarchal, colonial enforcer, then who has been his perennial victim? When we witness Danny, an innocent blond child, trapped in a family home, in the snow, with his potential murderer, perhaps there is more than a spectral foreshadowing of Christmas Day 1996.

Michael Du Plessis, author of *Memoirs*, explicitly ties the two murder narratives together. In *Memoirs*, there is an entire chapter in which a character named Kathy Acker (an analogue of the real author Kathy Acker) offers a disquisition on a (fictionalised) writer named Stephen King. Much like the protagonist of *Memoirs*, JonBénet, King and Acker are fictional versions of real figures. There is an obvious link here between Du Plessis’ book which is described as an ‘overblown break-up novel about Boulder that uses [JonBénet] as a metaphor’⁵⁹ and King’s novel (and Kubrick’s film) which are really about Colorado; a murder mystery which focuses on genocide, the depression, and gendered violence, tied up in a psychological horror story about a single family. Danny, Wendy and Jack are the metaphor; Colorado is the subject.

Chapter nine of *Memoirs* is titled “Why Stephen King Writes Such Bad Novels.” In this chapter Kathy Acker gives a lecture at ‘the university’ and faces resistance from a group of Boulder locals who support King as an ex-resident. Kathy Acker inflames the crowd, saying: ‘Stephen King isn’t just a bad novelist, crappy, derivative, moralistic, unimaginative, limited. He’s a bad writer, an evil one’⁶⁰ and ‘Stephen King is evil like Boulder and Boulder is evil like Stephen King! Don’t think I haven’t seen through the little understanding the two of you have going on.’ Her speech builds hysterically, and her conspiracy theory about King becomes extreme. All other American authors are mere pseudonyms for King; Boulder is ‘nothing but a debased solar cult that uses King’s works to transmute and transmit everything into Boulder,’⁶¹ and finally, ‘All of Stephen King’s work make up a secret psychogeography of

⁵⁸ Mark Fisher, “You Have Always Been the Caretaker: Spectral Spaces of the Overlook Hotel,” *Perforations*, no. 29 (2007), Available at: <http://www.pd.org/Perforations/perf29/mf1.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénet by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 96.

⁶⁰ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénet by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 69.

⁶¹ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénet by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 71.

Boulder.’⁶² This is an intentionally bizarre and over-the-top scene (the final line tells us that as Kathy Acker is led off stage the audience sees for the first time that she is ‘exactly twelve inches tall and that the string of a voice box hangs down the back of her neck’)⁶³ and Du Plessis uses it to contextualise and to some extent to parody the conspiracy theories, critical inquiries and psychoanalytic readings which proliferate around *The Shining*, in both the novel and the later Stanley Kubrick film.⁶⁴

Peggy Kamuf, in the introduction to *Memoirs*, focusses particularly on the lecture that Kathy Acker gives on Stephen King and indirectly on *The Shining*. She writes:

The scene of this haranguing lecture, which is titled with a nod to Nietzsche “Why Stephen King Writes Such Bad Novels”, could feed the reader’s speculation about one of the impulses channelling the terrific energy of *Memoirs*. Whoever has done time in the university under the charge of professing literature can no doubt recognise the urge to unleash a similar broadside attack on illusions cherished among a public of students force-fed their idea of “literature’ by the best-seller industry.⁶⁵

Kamuf allows that the distaste that Kathy Acker shows in this scene is something that can be appreciated, and even shared by the reader and potentially by Kamuf herself. However, Kamuf is instrumentally responsible for a broader swathe of critical theory interest in *The Shining*, both Kubrick’s film that could be considered ‘art’, and King’s novel, which presumably, is in the dubious category of ‘best-seller.’ Her translation of *Spectres of Marx* by Jacques Derrida popularised Derrida’s term ‘hauntology’, a pun on ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology’, the latter sounding almost indistinguishable from ‘hauntology’ in Derrida’s native French. The critical concept of hauntology was in turn instrumental to Mark Fisher’s 2006 reading of *The Shining*, a reading that rekindled interest in the text as a rich site for critical investigation.

The title comes from Marx’s statement that ‘a spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of communism.’⁶⁶ Derrida takes this as his starting point and shows how risky a strategy it is to disavow the figure of the spectre. He says that when capitalist society believes that: ‘communism is finished since the collapse of the totalitarianisms of the

⁶² Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 71.

⁶³ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 75.

⁶⁴ Stanley Kubrick, *The Shining* (Warner Home Video, 2001).

⁶⁵ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), xiv.

⁶⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Adult, 2002), 1.

twentieth century and not only is it finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back.’⁶⁷ The figure of the spectre, according to Derrida, is more powerful than a living figure. He goes on, eloquently translated by Peggy Kamuf, to describe the practices of an entire society to disavow, repress, and specifically conjure or exorcise a malignant force:

In the occult society of those who have sworn together [*des conjures*], certain subjects, either individual or collective, represent forces and ally themselves together in the name of common interests to combat a dreaded political adversary, that is, also to conjure it away. For to conjure means also to exorcise: to attempt to both destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonised, diabolised force, most often an evil-doing spirit, a spectre, a kind of ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back post mortem. Exorcism conjures away the evil in ways that are also irrational, using magical, mysterious, even mystifying practices.⁶⁸

Though this analysis relates to aggression against a political adversary, it can also quite usefully describe any supernatural, or evil force, conspiracy, or cabal.

Conspiracy theories figure large in Rodney Ascher’s 2012 documentary *Room 237*. The film deals with super fans of *The Shining* and their fairly wild theories. Bill Blakemore, a writer and actor, puts forward the thesis that film version of *The Shining* is a story about Native American genocide, a highly relevant hidden narrative for the Colorado based story. His theory rests on the prop of Calumet baking soda cans that recur throughout the course of the film. The cans are decorated with an image of a stereotypical Native American chief and they are moved at crucial moments in the film in a way that suggests an attempt to offer a narrative gloss. For example, in one scene where Jack is talking to the (un)dead Mr Grady (the previous caretaker of the Overlook who murdered his wife and daughters and then killed himself), the baking powder tin is directly behind Jack’s head, the image of the peace pipe obscured, to indicate that peace of the Native Americans has been shattered. Bill Blakemore opens the documentary with a voiceover of a scene that shows the original film poster for the

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 123.

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 59.

1981 release of *The Shining* stating that this film is the ‘wave of terror which swept across America.’⁶⁹ Though this could be considered a typically hyperbolic presentation of a horror film, Bill Blakemore argues that there is also a hidden message in the poster; he believes that it speaks to the American imperial drive and the slaughter on which the new empire was founded. This claim does not address the multivalence of the text, and offers a narrow focus, but it does chime with my argument that the guilt of genocide haunts Colorado, going back to the Sand Creek Massacre. Blakemore considers Grady’s real, and Jack’s attempted, murder of their families to be microcosmic versions of the Colorado genocide.

Other contributors put forward various theories and readings. Perhaps the wildest claim comes from Jay Weidner who believes that the entire film serves only as a confession from Stanley Kubrick that he staged the moon landings.⁷⁰ A more careful reading comes from Juli Kearns who maps the impossible space of the Overlook showing how Kubrick intentionally uses camera tricks to mislead and disorientate.⁷¹ John Fell Ryan says of the practical cinematography that: ‘they use the camera to create an emotional architecture in your mind, but at the same time showing you that it is false. The set is so completely plastic that its contradictions pile up in your subconscious.’⁷² This is particularly relevant, as it contextualises *The Shining* as plastic, malleable and dangerous. The documentary reminds us that Kubrick sent a research team to Colorado for three months in order to uncover the real history of the state. There is no doubt that this was of very real interest to Kubrick and that this filtered through into his version of *The Shining*. In *The Shining*, no trace of Colorado history disappears.

When Michael Du Plessis wrote *Memoirs*, completed in 2011 and published in 2012, he was aware of Colorado’s history and he was aware of his intertexts.⁷³ Both blond, magical Danny, and the bloody velvet dress-wearing twins of the Overlook become reference points for the blond, magical, prettily dressed, undead JonBénet. She haunts the novel, she haunts Boulder, and she haunts our imaginations. Perhaps we could consider Mark Fisher’s formulation of Jack as the caretaker, standing in for

⁶⁹ Rodney Ascher, *Room 237*, Documentary, (2012).

⁷⁰ For more on this see <http://www.jayweidner.com/index.html#KO>

⁷¹ The maps can be seen at <http://www.idyllopress.com/meanwhile/13834/updated-maps-of-the-shining>

⁷² For more on this see <http://adhoc.fm/post/john-fell-ryan-shining/>

⁷³ Including Kathy Acker’s “Dead Doll Humility” and Stephen King’s Boulder-set books *The Stand* and *The Shining*.

homicidal violence, and cast JonBenét (real, mythical, imagined) as someone who has always been the victim; the corollary to Colorado's 'dark side.' Yet in *Memoirs*, Du Plessis reclaims JonBenét from this role; yes, she repeats, and yes, she is the token of the return of the repressed, but she is given autonomy, a voice, a young adulthood, and transcends her status as beautiful dead doll, as white blond corpse. The repetition of the murder, of the crime, is an act of literary and cultural necrophilia, and this will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter where the thesis will approach the body of the dead girl. However, at this stage it is the setting of Boulder, Colorado as a crime scene that bears the most relevance.

The fictional inhabitants of the fictionalised Boulder in *Memoirs* suffer a microcosmic imprisonment in a camp, tasteless object. The tract housing that the characters occupy within the snow dome is brutally conformist, ugly and decaying; beige carpet spreads from the apartments out into the landscape, there is no escape from the banality of horror. The narrator elides the claustrophobia of the tract houses, with their windowless seclusion and dilapidated furnishings, with the overall conceit of the snow globe that covers the fictionalised Boulder. Landscape and home are blurred; the exterior and the interior have no real meaning for the narrator, JonBénét. No matter how many times she shape-shifts, no matter how powerful her knowledge, or how witchy her resurrection, she is always stuck in this airless, tacky pod. The curiously adult voice proclaims 'I'm drowning in a vacuum, surrounded on all sides by the yards of gravel and bark that my neighbours consider landscaping.'⁷⁴ The snow globe can be thought of as pre-existing the fictional Boulder, and at the same time being a disposable, cheap and arbitrary object. Additionally, the snow globe, described explicitly as 'bought in a cheap airport gift store' is part of the capitalist project; an item that has at its inception caused several potential harms: sweatshop labour, environmental pollution, and economic oppression.⁷⁵ Before capitalism, this version of Boulder could not exist, and would not make any sense. This object, a remnant of capitalism, will perhaps exist even if capitalist structures become obsolete. The explicit reference to the 'ugly' nature of the object means that it occupies the 'aesthetic' domain and yet is found wanting. In *Memoirs*, the environmental is the plastic, and the aesthetic is the political. This connection to assembly line capitalist practices is not accidental and in fact, plastic is often aligned to the capitalist project, derived as it is

⁷⁴ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 4.

⁷⁵ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 3.

from oil. The disposability of plastic is also an ecological concern and linked to fears around mortality through the spectre of global warming.

It is not only the snow globe that is made of plastic; all of the private tastes and furnishings in the Boulder of *Memoirs* are comprised of cheap, plastic materials. The character of Kathy Acker in *Memoirs* has a long soliloquy on the ‘unmitigated horror of the domestic space in Boulder.’ It is worth reproducing this passage in full:

Structures of the 1970s, they promised the good life of the American Bicentennial in the raw materials - particle board, polyresin, reinforced tupperware, drywall, polyester, pressed wood shingle, polyurethane - the flammable and cheap fabric on which the American Dream is spun. All apartments are alike: beige carpeting, grey from years of snow stains, pet stains, brown kitchen sticky from years of unsavoury vegetarian grease, dank bathroom in dark green. Look, the A-frame with its two-storey wood-burning fireplace, cosy, no? A wood-burning stove in every A-frame, those kitchens in once-modish browns, those bathrooms of an avocado colour trendy long-ago: hippie dreams met money in a studio jam-session bliss-out, in a free-love encounter of leisure architecture and rising real-estate values. Olive green, brown, beige, camouflage colours still, after Vietnam, violently neutral, U.S. Foreign policy turned domestic design.⁷⁶

This speech argues that the decisions made in private to do with taste and furnishing in Boulder have had a direct correlation with war, capitalism, and other violent crimes against humanity. Du Plessis sees the structural inequalities of the American Dream as being tied directly to matters of domesticity. The avocado bathroom suite is interchangeable with the camouflage worn by soldiers in Vietnam. Truly these are crimes of taste. This uncanny banality is figured through the cheap, raw materials that build the uniform A-frame houses. This lack of individuality, and lack of engagement with natural resources, displays a short-term toxic relationship with the environment, and an imaginative lacuna that negates empathy with those who are different. The environment enacts brutal indifference. There is also a strong sense of fakeness, and a lack of authenticity that attaches to materials that are not considered natural: MDF, polyester etc. These materials are designed to mimic those found in nature such as wood, silk and wool, yet they are non-degradable and potentially toxic. This fakeness is both physical and political; not only does the plastic matter in *Memoirs* damage the environment of Boulder but it also subdues radicalism and dissent. The Boulder of this

⁷⁶ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 22 – 23.

novel is uncanny, it shows us the mundane and the homely, and then undercuts this cosiness with shifting perspectives, with characters who fluctuate, and a death which recurs over and over; a human sacrifice on an epic scale. Boulder is also an abject zone and there is a psychopathic drive to murder JonBenét, to sacrifice her in order to generate tourism and interest.

As a study of Middle American banality as romance, this novel is a perfect example of what I am calling Polyester Gothic, that is, the romantically bewitching contemporary narratives of trailer parks, motels, shopping malls and tract housing: spaces where the cheap, decaying, toxic materials which make up the prefabricated dwellings, the polka dot bikinis, and the disposable jewellery which litter the landscape of this genre, are not incidental to, but central to the horror invoked. In fact, the snow-soiled and faded fabrics that crinkle through *Memoirs* represent the post-industrial decay of a pretty mountain town. Du Plessis is clearly still obsessed with and romantically entangled with Boulder, and this break-up note is more of a renewal with that obsession than a clear escape. Because of this, he manages a tender, affectionate tone, even when disparaging the monotony of the tract housing, and the endlessness of the beige carpet. The overarching metaphor of the snow dome that houses Boulder is a camp intervention symbolising the delicate freezing of a perfect Christmas moment as much as it represents claustrophobia and sterility. In this way Boulder is a permanent crime scene, a dead zone haunted equally by ghosts and by the ambivalence of the living. With no perpetrator found in the JonBenét case, guilt and suspicion attaches to everyone, to an entire community. The spatiality of this fictionalised Boulder, trapped under the plastic dome, enacts a punishment for the murder of JonBenét.

In Du Plessis' version of Boulder the ostensibly sweet and pretty town is secretly decaying. The doll JonBenét says: 'in her dream, the town was a repository of all her dreams. A town that was always decaying. In the centre of this town her father had hanged himself.'⁷⁷ Fictional Boulder is a dead zone, teeming with decay and haunted by nightmares. To build on Mike Kitchell's argument that 'the only thing that's terrifying is the Boulder of Middle America'⁷⁸ the landscape itself gives rise to the horrific outcomes in this novel. There are further descriptions of Boulder when JonBenét transmutes into the novelist Kathy Acker. This new voice intones the

⁷⁷ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 5.

⁷⁸ Mike Kitchell, "25 Points Approaching *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* by Michael Du Plessis" *HTMLGIANT*, Accessed August 20, 2015, <http://htmlgiant.com/reviews/25-points-approaching-the-memoirs-of-jonbenet-by-kathy-acker-by-michael-du-plessis/>.

following:

Boulder: where eugenics couples with software to secure the reproduction of middle-class bodies, bodies that desire only perfect reproduction.
 Boulder: where white-collar heaven beckons under pitiless white-collar skies.
 Boulder: where cotton-ball, cotton-candy cirri hang over the Flatirons like the prettiest, freshest mushroom clouds ever.⁷⁹

This version of Boulder as experienced by the fragmented narrator invokes moments of genocide and annihilation with reference to ‘eugenics’ and ‘mushroom clouds’ to describe the experience of being at home in the town. The overblown melding of the twee ‘prettiest, freshest mushroom clouds’ with the allusion towards nuclear horror is disquieting. Saturation, contamination, and death are presented as inherent to the scene.

Joyelle McSweeney’s book of poetry, *The Necropastoral*, also renders the crime scene as contaminated. McSweeney’s work collapses the creative and the critical and draws on a similar inversion of the classical pastoral as both Derrida’s *hostipitality* and the *locus terribilis* of Ovid, rendering first the US, and then the whole world as a crime scene; radioactive, glowing, and saturated.

1.4 *The Necropastoral and the Occult*

The Necropastoral is a collection of poetry that interrogates the cultural history of the deadly landscape, from the annihilating plagues of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* to the aftermath of 9/11. Explicitly modelled on a classical poetics, this volume bears both physical and intangible traces of violent crime ranging from blood and bodily fluids to the ‘spectral quality of capitalism, the way money and debt accrues and erodes in damaging patterns, the way damage to bodies is sometimes the first materialisation of corporate malfeasance.’⁸⁰ The necropastoral offers a key to looking at obscured but visible worlds that exist in the interstices of the media, the spectacle, the haunting. By reversing the sense of order that the pastoral has traditionally sought and been concerned with ‘bodies, living, dead, ghostly, inhuman, artificial’⁸¹ the necropastoral

⁷⁹ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 21.

⁸⁰ Joyelle McSweeney, “Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevidayo,” *Montevidayo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political/>.

⁸¹ Joyelle McSweeney, “Necropastoral, the Abject, and Zurita - Montevidayo,” *Necropastoral, The Abject, and Zurita*, February 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/necropastoral-the-abject-and-zurita/>.

is:

The lethal double of the pastoral and its fantasy of permanent, separated, rural peace. In emphasising the counterfeit nature of pastoral, the necropastoral makes visible the fact that nothing is pure or natural, that mutation and evolution are inhuman technologies, that all political assertions of the natural and the pure are themselves moribund and counterfeit, infected and rabid.⁸²

In this description the classical pastoral is invoked not as a perfect inversion of the necropastoral, but rather the necropastoral uncovers the ‘morbid, counterfeit nature’ of the classical pastoral. By describing symbols that originally occur within the paradigm of the pastoral such as ‘milk’ and ‘a permanent, separated rural peace’ the necropastoral shows the fantastic nature of these symbols, and reveals that ‘nothing is pure and natural, that mutation and evolution are inhuman technologies.’ By revealing the necropastoral and revealing the long history of plague, death and infection which has haunted the classical vision of the pastoral, McSweeney brings the two states, that of the pastoral and the necropastoral, into combination and reveals the leaky borders which comprise our perception of ‘ecology, globalisation’ and ‘the occult way capitalism’s distribution systems amplify economic, political, biological damage as it spreads across the globe.’ Just as Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*⁸³ offered a poetics of annihilation, plague and death in an inversion of the classical pastoral, so McSweeney updates Lucretius for the ‘eviscerating, flammable contemporary world’⁸⁴ and tells us that the necropastoral has destroyed ‘the idea of the bordered or bounded body and marked the porousness of the human body as its most characteristic quality.’⁸⁵ Described as a ‘supersaturated, leaking membrane’ the necropastoral is concerned with the hauntings, leakages, and biological traces that Luminol Theory reveals.

McSweeney’s own words on the necropastoral can help us to understand her interest in the fraudulent and artificial forms of nature: ‘The Pastoral, like the occult,

⁸² Joyelle McSweeney, “Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevideo,” *Montevideo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevideo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political/>.

⁸³ Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* was a Latin Didactic poem written around 58 BCE. Amongst other things it theorised an early form of physics, discussed the philosophy of Epicurus, and described theories of sensation, sexuality, and morality. It is a deeply strange book and perhaps the strangest aspect is its abrupt ending, with a gory description of the Great Plague of Athens in 430 BCE.

⁸⁴ Joyelle McSweeney, “Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevideo,” *Montevideo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevideo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political/>.

⁸⁵ Joyelle McSweeney, “Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevideo,” *Montevideo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevideo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political/>.

has always been a fraud, a counterfeit, an invention, an anachronism. However, as with the occult, and as with Art itself, the fraudulence of the pastoral is in direct proportion to its uncanny powers' she also declares that 'The Pastoral, after all, is the space into which the courtiers must flee in the time of plague, carrying the plague of narrative with them'⁸⁶. This interest in both the counterfeit and the contaminant is clearly recognisable in McSweeney's poetry. The abject is evident both in the disgust and disease that McSweeney evokes and also in her interest in abjected or excluded peoples. An example of these two modes in combination can be seen in the following lines that have a symbolic resonance with Nazism and its victims:

(I live in a starhouse built for denial
 Hygienists in Scarsdale.
 A case of adolescent sarc-
 Oma.
 It has six dental points despite the five on my papers. Despite
 the Nazi hinges.⁸⁷

Structurally this stanza is abject; it opens but does not close the parentheses perhaps signifying an inability to incorporate such horror neatly into art. The position of the narrator is also abject, they are perpetually inside the 'starhouse' that aligns them with the marginalised starred victims of Nazi genocide, and yet they are excluded from this lived experience. The narrator of this stanza can be recognised as Kristeva's 'jettisoned object' which 'is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.'⁸⁸

The Necropastoral contains a long reflection on disease and disgust within the poem that can be read through the prism of Kristeva's comments on food as a site of queasy separation. Kristeva poetically describes her nausea that is induced by the sight of milk scum; she describes a fear of death and separation from the mother that is essential for development and maturation:

⁸⁶ Joyelle McSweeney, "Necropastoral, or, Normal Love - Montevidayo," *Necropastoral, or, Normal Love*, January 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/necropastoral-or-normal-love/>.

⁸⁷ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral* (Tucson, Arizona: Spork Press, 2011), 11.

⁸⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 2.

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.⁸⁹

The violence of the recognition that occurs when evaluating the horror of food in this passage is one of the key moments in Kristeva's abject. One of the ways in which this has been updated by Joyelle McSweeney in her collection *The Necropastoral* is that she takes in the contemporary fixation with the dangers of eating processed, toxic, plastic foods that not only contain carcinogens but also destroy our ecosystems and cause fatal and chronic illnesses. The abject in this case comes from uncertainties of categorisation; toxic substances have been reclassified as foods. We are subject to eating literal junk food. McSweeney writes the following lines which abject and disrupt categories of food:

Fat, simulated proteins
Looks just like nutrition!

And when he leuked closer
The red cell
De-bucketed, spilt guts
Like a hasp spent or a hen bent
Over eggs in the nest of
complexity.⁹⁰

The play between leuked/ looked is particularly nasty, conflating as it does the root of the word leukemia with the voyeurism of looking. An erotics of illness is established in that line, and is intensified by the subsequent lines: 'the red cell' has connotations of cancer and disease; 'de-bucketed, spilt guts' are both violent terms relating to illness and yet they have potential connotations for sexual contact and fluids; 'spent' and 'bent over' are explicitly sexualised terms. This ambiguity is central to the abject, and the disgusting affect of these lines is entirely in line with the violence of bodily separation that Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror*:

⁸⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

⁹⁰ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral* (Tucson, Arizona: Spork Press, 2011), 9.

The body's inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its "own and clean self."⁹¹

The skin as a 'fragile container' unable to keep bodily fluids such as 'urine, blood, sperm, excrement' inside is a terrifying reminder of mortality, biological cycles, decay and death. For McSweeney too these disgusting fluids are ever-present; she imagines them as representing a radical future beyond the capability of the living body. In 'The Afterlife: A Necropastoral. There scum will be superstars, but the stars won't rise. The uppers shall be downers. In slime. A convulsive sublime.'⁹² McSweeney's afterworld is peopled not only with immortal 'stars' but also 'slime' and 'scum'; both abject materials that serve as reminders of cyclical biological processes. Conversely, for McSweeney, the mortal world is littered with spectrality: ghosts abound. In an echo of *Spectres of Marx*, McSweeney focuses on the spectral quality of capital:

The spectral quality of capitalism, the way money and debt accrues and erodes in damaging patterns, the way damage to bodies is sometimes the first materialisation of corporate malfeasance, the occult way capitalism's distribution systems amplify economic, political, biological damage as it spreads across the globe—this is necropastoral, the lethal double of the pastoral and its fantasy of permanent, separated, rural peace.⁹³

For *The Necropastoral*, the vampiric action of capital can be reclaimed through conferring centrality on the ghostly and the spectral as a foil to finitude. This interstitiality means the dead acting like the living and vice versa; it scrambles chronologies. Media, death, and art all register with equal weight in *The Necropastoral* as do bacteriology, parasitism and death. Where the classical pastoral insists on separation and containment (country vs. city, gods vs. men) the necropastoral posits

⁹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 53.

⁹² Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral* (Tucson, Arizona: Spork Press, 2011), 27.

⁹³ Joyelle McSweeney, "Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevideo," *Montevideo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevideo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political>.

super-saturation, leaking and counter-contamination: ‘Rather than maintaining its didactic or allegorical distance, the membrane separating the Pastoral from the Urban, the past from the future, the living from the dead, may and must be supersaturated, convulsed and crossed. The crossing of this membrane is Anachronism itself.’⁹⁴

Bacteria, contamination and parasitism are all common themes of *The Necropastoral*; this in connection with its interest in the vampirism of capital, can be most neatly encapsulated in a theory of the parasite that represents both capital and disease. In his work *The Parasite* Michel Serres has made this connection between the work of the body to breathe, to pump blood and oxygen, and the broader category of work: ‘Oxygen feeds the heat of our lives, but ageing is an oxidation. It works because it doesn’t work.’⁹⁵ Serres’ neo-Marxist reading of the relationship between producers and consumers takes on the wider analogy of the host and the parasite with spoiled food, maggots and bilious proteins all standing in for the vampiric association between the owners and the workers. He explicitly describes this association, saying; ‘Innumerable vampires and bloodsuckers attached in packets to the rather rare bodies of the workers.’⁹⁶ In *The Necropastoral* McSweeney perverts the usual form of the acknowledgments in order to produce a parasitic effect. Just as Serres describes the vampiric mechanism of capital on the bodies of workers, McSweeney acknowledges that art too is vampiric, parasitic. She thanks her collaborators who she describes as ‘ghostly, dead, undead, textual, cinematic, erotic, horrified, digital, larval, fibrous, folded, shot full of holes, knotty, turbid, protuberant, & otherwise.’⁹⁷ This acknowledgment reminds the reader that no art exists in a vacuum, and that its mechanism of production can replicate the practices that it serves to critique and reveal.

Conclusions: Crime Scene as Contamination

Contamination at the crime scene is inevitable. Pandemics, such as the great plague of Athens in 430 BCE, the devastating influenza outbreak of 1918, or the Ebola crisis in 2014 turn whole nations, and indeed international zones, into scenes full of dead and dying people who are partially or wholly buried and transmitting horror and disease. Forensic anthropologists are able to investigate mass graves in order to discover

⁹⁴ Joyelle McSweeney, “Necropastoral, or, Normal Love - Montevidayo,” *Necropastoral, or, Normal Love*, January 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/necropastoral-or-normal-love>.

⁹⁵ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 72

⁹⁶ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 89

⁹⁷ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral* (Tucson, Arizona: Spork Press, 2011), 35.

information as to the kinds of violence that have taken place by analysing human remains and other artefacts at the scene, often revealing cultic or ritual material.

In Lucretius' account of the formation of the earth, he describes the land itself roiling with 'a great abundance of heat and moisture' and describes how 'wombs would grow, holding to the earth by roots.'⁹⁸ This disgusting image is compounded by a Kristevan image of how 'nature would direct thither pores of the earth and make it discharge from these open veins a liquid like to milk.' The earth in Lucretius' formation is both generative and obscene, there is no 'border between inside and outside'⁹⁹ and the earth itself is a 'supersaturated, leaking membrane.'¹⁰⁰ Later passages of Lucretius describe in great, loving detail the symptoms of plague and disease using terms such as 'clogged', 'oozed with blood', 'burning', 'thirsting', and 'trembling.'¹⁰¹ The earth itself is responsible for the transmission of disease, with every creature affected, the countryside is equally dangerous, with no chance of a 'permanent, separated rural peace.'¹⁰² This poetics of annihilation imagines the entire earth scattered with corpses:

Many in public places and roads you might see all about, bodies half-dead with fainting limbs caked with squalor and covered in rags, perishing in filth of body [...] all the temples of the celestials everywhere remained burdened with corpses, all which places the sacristans had crowded with guests [...] they would lay their own kindred amidst loud lamentation upon piles of wood not their own, and would set light to the fire, often brawling with much shedding of blood rather than abandon the bodies.¹⁰³

These are the very final words of Lucretius' poem, cut off suddenly and without warning, serving to heighten their effect. Here he is describing how hard people fought in times of utter extremity to provide proper burial to their kin or as proper a burial as could be managed under the circumstances of universal plague and horror. Such was

⁹⁸ Titus Lucretius Carus, W. H. D. Rouse, and M. F. Smith, *Lucretius: On the Nature of Things*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1924), 443.

⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Joyelle McSweeney, "Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevidayo," *Montevidayo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political>.

¹⁰¹ Titus Lucretius Carus, *Lucretius: On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, and M. F. Smith, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1924), 579 – 583.

¹⁰² Joyelle McSweeney, "Can the Necropastoral Be Political? - Montevidayo," *Montevidayo*, January 2011, <http://www.montevidayo.com/can-the-necropastoral-be-political>.

¹⁰³ Titus Lucretius Carus, *Lucretius: On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, and M. F. Smith, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1924), 591.

the importance of ritual burial that there was ‘much shedding of blood’ to protect the right for families to bury their dead. In spite of fear of contamination and the very real threat of transmission of disease, still the ritual remained. The next chapter will go deeper into the US crime scene, to investigate this contamination as it relates to rituals, and objects found at the scene.

Chapter 2 Forensic Excavations: Ritual, Cult, and Artefacts

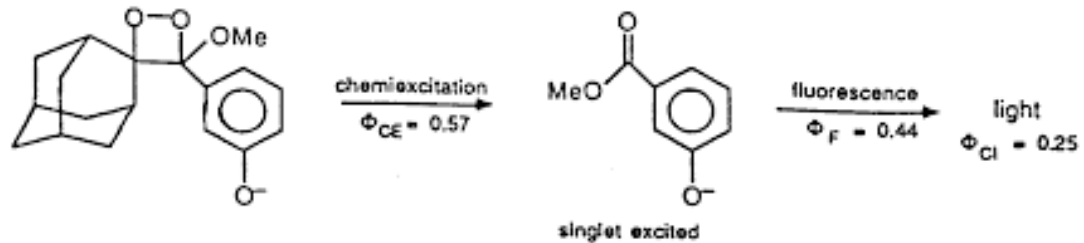


Figure 6 Diagram of Excited Singlet Luminol Reaction

Fausak had never experienced anything like it. He felt as if he were in a sci-fi movie. Initially, there was the same pale green light. It got greener and brighter. It began to glow. And through its luminosity he could see the trail of blood. The trail was solid, but with streaks in it, as though someone had taken a big wet mop and wrung it out and dragged it along the floor. The length of the bloody trail measured some 55 feet. The shimmering glow hung in the air, above Fausak's knees. It had become so bright that he could see the faces of the forensic men and the chemists.¹



Figure 7 Diagram of Luminol Reaction at a Crime Scene

¹ Peter Maas, *In a Child's Name: The Legacy of a Mother's Murder*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 112.

Abjection at the Scene

The two major texts for this chapter are *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant where we all begin to Intricate* by Johannes Göransson and *Skin Horse* by Olivia Cronk. Through these texts I propose a pro-object mode (that is, a mode that allows the object erotic centrality within the text rather than using abjection as an exclusionary or regulatory mode; rather than consigning the object to the margins, the pro-object mode allows for erotic discourse with bodily fluids, disease, decay, corpses and other instances of the object) that draws on ancient apocalyptic texts in order to show that contemporary experimental writing embodies a set of apocalyptic texts for our time. By approaching abjection directly it is possible to engage with critical thinking that is often repressed through fear.

This chapter will take as its theoretical framework Julia Kristeva's theory of the object and Timothy Morton's theory of hyperobjects. It will contend that the object (that which is (a), or beyond: neither *subject* nor *object* but *object*) is intimately connected in complex ways to the hyperobject (an object that is itself beyond linear comprehension. By considering the texts through these lenses, the chapter will open up an area of thought around the congruence of Americana and cultic ritual. Domsday cults in particular exemplify both the object and the hyperobject by bringing an imagined apocalyptic scenario into focus and directly relating future terror to current objects. Apocalypse can here be read in opposition to the occult, as in its original form the term means 'uncovering' or 'revelation':

In modern English, the noun, "apocalypse" and the related adjective "apocalyptic" have come to connote a catastrophe of cosmic proportions. So one speaks of the possibility of a nuclear apocalypse, or of the apocalyptic landscape of some futuristic films. It may come as something of a surprise, then, to learn that the underlying Greek word *apokalypsis*, means simply "revelation" or "uncovering." The catastrophic connotations of the word come from its use in the last book of the *New Testament*, the *Apocalypse, or Revelation of St. John*.²

The future and present danger of global warming is both a hyperobject and a focus of cultic ritual and it represents an apocalypse in both the original, and the colloquial, usage of the term. Americana is dangerous as it both glamourises trauma and renders it glib and consumable. Luminol Theory is a hyperobject, existing beyond the scene of a

² John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.

crime and into the future; excavating a horror that cannot be erased. Luminol Theory brings us into close quarters with mortality, disgust, and death, just as the abject does.

In this chapter, the forensic mode³ will progress from the crime scene in general to artefacts in particular, in order to observe and analyse their cultic and ritual resonances. Cultic violence is heavily invested in fetish objects and sacrificial practices. By revealing (by producing an apocalypse of) the occulted critical thought at the heart of this terror we can use the excavatory function of Luminol Theory to reveal what has been deliberately hidden and address the ways that critical thinking is suppressed through fear. By reading real and fictional textual examples of artefacts, rituals and cults this chapter uses Luminol Theory to excavate deeper within the archaeological unknown.

Palimpsestic narratives exist beneath, beyond and adjacent to the planes that we can perceive. The primary texts that are the focus of this chapter will be excavated with Luminol Theory in order to induce an ‘excited’⁴ state that leads to illumination and to produce an excess of horror and light.

The first primary text to be discussed in this chapter is a play, or pageant, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all begin to Intricate* (hereafter written as *Pageant*) by Johannes Göransson. Göransson is a poet, critic and academic who runs the independent press Action Books with his wife Joyelle McSweeney, whose work was discussed in the last chapter. Their press is responsible for publishing a number of experimental texts, primarily poetry, and the MFA in Creative Writing that McSweeney

³ It is worth mentioning here that the rise of forensic analysis was contemporaneous with the rise of eugenics and a racist conception of ‘purity’ and that there is a strong tension between ‘purity’ and ‘contamination’ at the crime scene. Francis Galton, who popularised eugenics, was also one of the most important figures in early forensic science. His manifesto on eugenics contains the following: ‘The community might be trusted to refuse representatives of criminals, and of others that it rates as undesirable.’ (Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims,” *American Journal of Sociology* no. 1 (1904), 2) and ‘But while most barbarous races disappear, some, like the negro, do not.’ (Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims,” *American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1904), 4) and ‘It must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion. It has, indeed, strong claims to be an orthodox religious tent of the future, for eugenics co-operate with the workings of nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly.’ (Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims,” *American Journal of Sociology* no. 1 (1904), 5). Galton was also one of the earliest practitioners of fingerprinting: Francis Galton, *Finger Prints* (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2006), 219.

For more on this see: Francis Galton, *Essays in Eugenics*, 3rd ed. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); “The Francis Galton Papers,” accessed July 11, 2015, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/digital-collections/makers-of-modern-genetics/digitised-archives/francis-galton/#?asi=0&ai=129&z=-0.1275%2C-0.3406%2C1.2549%2C1.4717>.

⁴ William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes* (New York: Elsevier Science Ltd, 1989), 160.

directs (and Göransson teaches on) is a point of constellation for new experimental writing. Göransson is bilingual, born in Sweden and arriving in the US with his family at the age of thirteen. He has maintained a strong interest in works in translation both in terms of bringing translated work to a larger audience, and in the political function that translation can have in destabilising canons and national identities. When I interviewed Göransson via email specifically about *Pageant*, but also about his larger interests, he told me that: ‘the translated text can’t be read as whole or complete; it carries within it an alien text that we may not see. And based on that unstable relationship, a contagion opens up the reading’ and ‘the foreign is an infection. On a fundamental level, foreign texts infect, bring other ideas and styles, disturbing the illusion of a stable national literature.’⁵ This interest in both the palimpsest and the contaminatory at the level of the text makes Göransson’s work particularly ripe for excavation with Luminol Theory.

The second primary text to be discussed in this chapter is *Skin Horse*, a book-length poem by Olivia Cronk that was published by Action Books in 2012. When I asked McSweeney via email why they decided to publish *Skin Horse* she replied that ‘I would say the uncanny power in this book comes from its peaks and declivities, its fragmentation which ends up hosting an infernal and illimitable pow’r.’⁶ This description references both the supernatural, occult aspect of the poem, and also the palimpsestic, contaminatory function of the text as it ‘hosts’: it is a crime scene, a burial ground or horror film. Cronk explicitly links *Skin Horse* to the cinematic, arguing that ‘poetry and film are siblings.’ She also argues that in film ‘1) the images (text(s)) can bleed into /leak onto/become others and one another; and 2) the medium itself, especially given the current iterations via youtube, phone culture, etc., transmits and explodes.’⁷ In *Skin Horse* the mode of writing itself can ‘transmit’, ‘leak’, and ‘bleed’, contaminating and infecting culture.

The Book of Revelation, an ancient cultic document will be read alongside these texts to contextualise and compare contemporary and ancient ritualistic material. Just as *Revelation* literally *reveals* the cultural anxieties of first millennium Christians and their fears of impending apocalypse so too *Pageant* and *Skin Horse* are apocalyptic texts for the third millennium, two thousand years later.

⁵ Interview with Johannes Göransson. August 2014.

⁶ Interview with Joyelle McSweeney. January 2015.

⁷ Interview with Olivia Cronk. September 2014.

2.1 The Contaminant Mode: Hyperabjection and Pro-Abjection

Rituals and cults have a long history; some of the most useful historical artefacts we have relate to human sacrifice and cultic worship. One of the most recent literary interpretations of these artefacts is Seamus Heaney's *Bogland* poem. In a speech delivered upon the opening of *Face to Face with your Past*, an exhibition of bog bodies at the Silkeborg Museum, Denmark, 2nd August 1996, Heaney remarked that 'in the figure of the bog body, the atrocious and the beautiful often partake of one another's reality, coexisting inextricably in the lineaments of the transformed human features. In other words, the idea of redeeming the violent and brutal facts of human existence by subsuming them into a different plane of understanding (an understanding founded on the concept that beauty is redemptive in itself), this idea finds its emblem and equivalence in the bog body, which is at once an object of contemplation and the violated remains of human flesh and bone'.⁸ In his opening remarks at the same conference, Christian Fischer, curator of the Silkeborg Museum noted that 'the express purpose of archaeology is to describe the lives and life styles of our ancestors' and that 'when we excavate graves from that time [from around the birth of Christ], we feel that we are approaching the spiritual world. The same feeling arises when we find small earthenware pots buried in the postholes of houses, presumably with something or other meant to placate the gods in order to extend the lifetime of the house'.⁹

Human sacrifice and cannibalism have been practiced in cultures as disparate as the Aztecs, the Tabu community of New Guinea, the Fiji Islanders and the Maori of New Zealand. The first recorded instances of human sacrifice come from Cro-Magnon man living 75,000 years ago; evidence in the form of mutilated human remains were discovered in the caves of Aurignac, near Toulouse. Garry Hogg's book *Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2007) catalogues the artefacts discovered that confirm that human sacrifice and religion were inextricably linked. David Jeffreys, in his article 'Regionality, Cultural and Cultic Landscapes',¹⁰ describes how in the Nile Valley, the 'assessment of regional character is almost

⁸ 'The Man and the Bog', Seamus Heaney, in Bryony Coles, John Coles, and Mogens Schou Jorgensen, eds., *Bog Bodies, Sacred Sites and Wetland Archaeology* (Exeter: WARP - Wetland Archaeology Research Project, 1999), 4.

⁹ 'Face to Face with your Past', Christian Fischer, in *Bog Bodies, Sacred Sites and Wetland Archaeology* edited by Bryony Coles, John Coles and Mogens Schou Jørgensen (Exeter: WARP - Wetland Archaeology Research Project, 1999), 10.

¹⁰ *Egyptian Archaeology* edited by Willeke Wendrich (London: Wiley-Blackwell Ltd, 2010), 11 – 12.

entirely on the basis of craftwork, largely from funerary contexts, and funerary representation and sculpture' and he notes that from these funerary objects we can ascertain not only the kind of trade that flourished in the area at the time (2575 – 2450 BCE) but also that the local settlements were connected 'almost certainly with the cult of the person of the ruler and with dynastic integrity' and that they 'subscribed increasingly to a royal, ideological form of representation that may have been quite different from any indigenous local tradition.' Jennifer Larson in her book describes the importance of cultic artefacts to the study of Ancient Greek society. The cultic relates explicitly to worship but in an ancient context this was not 'primarily directed towards supernatural beings' but rather 'Complex systems of traditional belief and custom addressed individual rites of passage (birth, adulthood, and death), relations with other people (family obligations, interpersonal ethics), ritual acts such as supplication and purification, and so on'¹¹

In fact, we can see that the main way that historical inquiry is facilitated is through the discovery and analysis of objects that reveal historical narratives. In this way the historian resembles a detective, or a literary critic, both of whom excavate objects for meaning. The historian engages with historical artefacts, the detective with evidence, and the literary critic with texts.

These artefacts are often related to death, and as such belong to the realm of the abject. The abject is profoundly concerned with disgust, disease, and contamination. The abject is a politically useful and pervasive idea as it encompasses a discourse around death, decay and filth on the one hand and an encounter with the Real and the sublime on the other. Kristeva describes the paradoxical nature of the abject in relation to death:

The corpse (or cadaver: cadere, to fall), that which has irredeemably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death - a flat encephalograph, for instance - I would understand, react or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit, are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There I am on the border of my condition as a living being.¹²

¹¹ *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (NY and London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

¹² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

For Kristeva, it is this frisson with the biological reality of death, confronted more precognitively through the substitute or the symbol of refuse, waste and wounds, than the true, indexical representation of death, the flatline on an encephalograph showing that electrical signals are no longer received from the heart, that registers. In this way, the abject is reminiscent of the uncanny as it concerns doubles, death and ambivalence. However, though the 'powers of horror' that Kristeva describes are as unsettling to us as the uncanny, abjection has a more psychopathic, ruthless manifestation, it also a 'progressive despot,' that is, it forces a confrontation with the Real in order to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, from fear to critical thought.¹³

Though the uncanny is a closely related psychoanalytic concept to the abject, and though each of the texts studied bear some relation to the uncanny, they are also strongly engaged with the abject. Kristeva's own understanding of the difference between the uncanny and the abject is reproduced below:

Essentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognise its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory. I imagine a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, "all by himself," and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him--all gifts, all objects. He has, he could have, a sense of the abject. Even before things for him are -- hence before they are signifiable - he drives them out, dominated by drive as he is, and constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject. A sacred configuration.¹⁴

This difference between the uncanny and the abject as articulated by Kristeva is useful indicates the political importance of radical difference or lack of recognition; by rebuilding relations between the self and the other in a radical, redefining way there is more potential for agency. In contrast to the uncanny, which sutures us into old patterns however sinister and uncomfortable that might feel, the abject brings us into confrontation with the real and pushes us to remake our territory with a violent force. By sharpening focus from broader contaminatory processes to specific, textual

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 15.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 6.

engagements with the abject, this section sets up two original and intimately associated forms of abject-analysis, namely hyperabjection and pro-abjection.

Hyperabjection is a portmanteau term derived from the concept of ‘abjection’ in congruence with Timothy Morton’s theory of the ‘hyperobject.’ Hyperobjects share much with the abject; they are both (a) or beyond (hyperobjects are beyond our plane of understanding as they reach forwards and backwards through time and space; the abject is neither subject nor object but beyond these categorisations), and they both force us to come into contact with the violence of the Real. Morton explains what a hyperobject is by using the illustrative example of silverware impregnated with nuclear waste. For Morton, hyperobjects are imbued with occult, or sacred meaning:

Hyperobjects are the true taboos, the demonic inversions of the sacred substances of religion. The recent plan to dispose of nuclear waste by putting small amounts in regular household silverware was perhaps the most outrageous “solution” yet. Future humans’ treatment of hyperobjects may seem like reverence to our eyes.¹⁵

The example that Morton uses here of silverware impregnated with nuclear waste illustrates how an inversion of a sacred object can also function as a hyperobject. The hidden nuclear waste imbues the silver with a numinous, deadly aura, but this aura is occulted, concealed. The radioactive silverware also functions as a hyperobject, in that its reach into the future is impossible to measure. By housing existing nuclear waste that may not reach its full potential for biological harm for hundreds of years into the future, the silverware collapses past and present.

In his chapter on hyperobjects in the book *The Ecological Thought*,¹⁶ Morton states, ‘There was no world before capitalism. This sounds shocking to some environmentalists, but the ecological thought is indeed shocking.’¹⁷ Here Morton adds to the politically salient point that to imagine the end of the world is easier than to imagine the end of capitalism.¹⁸ He goes one step further to announce that capitalism is so pervasive that the same logic demands that the world did not come into being before

¹⁵ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 132.

¹⁶ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 132.

¹⁸ First noted in *What Are We to Make of J.G. Ballard's Apocalypse* by H. Bruce Franklin in Thomas D. Claerson, *Voices for the Future: Essays on Major Science Fiction Writers* (Popular Press, 1978); Mentioned by Fredric Jameson in 2003 (Jameson, Fredric. “Future City.” *New Left Review*, II, no. 21 (June 2003): 65–79.); Popularised by Mark Fisher in Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009) and Slavoj Žižek in *Living in the End Times* (London ; New York: Verso Books, 2011).

capitalism. He is also making a point about capitalism as a hyperobject that extends in all directions; it is non-linear, non-chronological, and non-containable. Capitalism, an abstract theory that has real-world consequences, is a hyperobject. So too man-made and natural materials are hyperobjects; Morton claims that: 'Materials from humble Styrofoam to terrifying plutonium will far outlast current social and biological forms.'¹⁹ This is a frightening prospect in many ways reminding us as it does of our mortality and causing us anxiety over pollution, climate change and ecological disaster. There is also a more radical, positive reading of the hyperobject as an object of non-decay, as something that keeps finitude at bay; hyperobjects 'do not rot in our lifetimes. They do not burn without themselves burning (releasing radiation, dioxins and so on).'²⁰ If hyperobjects are objects that are beyond and the abject is beyond the object, then there is congruence between those objects that i) remind us of the non-linearity of the universe and ii) bring us face to face with the horror of the Real.

Pro-abjection is a related theory to hyperabjection that binds Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic maternal to Judith Butler's queer theory. By reading in a pro-object way, Luminol Theory offers a key to negotiating fear in order to attain a space for critical thinking. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler reconsiders the Oedipal scene as itself a site of eroticisation:

The Oedipal scenario depends for its livelihood on the threatening power of its threat, on the resistance to identification with masculine feminisation and feminine phallicisation. But what happens if the law that deploys the spectral figure of abject homosexuality as a threat becomes itself an inadvertent site of eroticisation? If the taboo becomes eroticised precisely for the transgressive sites that it produces, what happens to Oedipus, to sexed positionality, to the fast distinction between an imaginary or fantasised identification and those social and linguistic positions of intelligible "sex" mandated by the symbolic law? Does the refusal to concur with the abjection of homosexuality necessitate a critical rethinking of the psychoanalytic economy of sex?²¹

For Butler, this can be considered as a strategy to subvert and disrupt the 'abjection of homosexuality.' However, I would argue that there is a further useful political strategy at stake here, one that incorporates Butler's desire to reject the abjection of

¹⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 130.

²⁰ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 130.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 97.

homosexuality and that also foregrounds abjection as a tool for revelation. By considering a hyperabject strategy, there is no need to sidestep the damaging nature of abjection as highlighted by Butler; rather abjection can be put to better political use. By recasting the Oedipal scene as a site of erotic power, Butler queers the negative heteronormative associations of that strand of psychoanalytic thought. By extending that thought we can see that the hyperabject strategy (that is the pro-abject position) rejects the heteronormative or traditionalist view of abjection as negative and says that by revealing what is abject, and offering that abject position erotic centrality, taboos and transgressions can be repurposed for political use.

2. 2. Ritual: Entrance to a Colonial Pageant where we all begin to Intricate

Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate is a hybrid text that operates in a fluid, plastic manner within several discourses including: crime fiction, melodrama, theory, queer politics, ecocriticism, pornography. This psychotic fluency is an intentional political strategy to bring genre into the text on the part of Göransson. He is particularly invested in the centrality of ‘low’ culture such as crime fiction:

In US poetry the pervasive notion is still that genres are signs of low culture. I’m fascinated by genres (especially crime fiction); I want to bring them into the text because they bring with them such interesting expectations and ways of reading.²²

Through its explicit connection to the crime genre, and its more particular interest in the crime scene, *Pageant* can be explicated through the application of Luminol Theory to recover violent and even genocidal, narratives.

Pageant is a tender, compassionate work that has empathy for the many and varied victims it describes; yet Göransson’s fascination would appear to be with the ritual, occult, and the apocalyptic. *Pageant* is written as though for performance, though such a performance would be largely impossible because those elements that have the potential to be physically performed would include acts of violence, murder, and even genocide. Though the text is littered with imperatives, strictures and stage directions, it is not intended as a practical work of guidance in the way that a play script, manual, or religious text might be understood. It does, however, share common elements with all of these kinds of texts.

²² Interview with Johannes Göransson. August 2014.

There are tonal shifts throughout the work and frequently a theoretical or philosophical register transmutes into something closer to low-budget horror. The pageant is in three acts. The characters are named according to type (i.e. MISS WORLD, THE ICONOPHOBIC DAUGHTER) and they speak largely in unconnected soliloquys. Plot is discernable only through the accretion of images; this is a palimpsest of horror. There are two key rituals in *Pageant*: the ritual of looking and the ritual of sacred dance.

The ritual of looking is first evidenced through the symbolism of the cinematic. Göransson, like Cronk, has a fascination with the cinematic, and when I asked him about his decision to publish Cronk's *Skin Horse*, he said simply that he liked it because 'it's unabashedly spooky. And how it uses cinematic "cuts" to create a sense of secrecy. Which is I guess similar'²³. Göransson here makes a connection between the cinematic and the occult, a connection that Luminol Theory can readily illuminate. This short passage, attributed to the character of THE ICONOPHOBIC DAUGHTER is an example of how these ideas coalesce in the writing:

Passengers have cinema problems. They love to look and look. They like to fuck women from behind because in their hair they think they see something ornate and monstrous. They are like soldiers who are shown murder movies before a war. Like pubescent girls who are shown anorexic women. It makes them necrophilic. It's the male gaze.²⁴

'Passengers' is the term used throughout the text to describe a nebulous group of characters to whom a range of extreme behaviours are attributed. The 'passengers' are members of a bizarre otherworld that has its own internal logic that exists within the frame of *Pageant*. The 'passengers' are described as having 'cinema problems. They love to look and look.'²⁵ This scopophilic tendency connects cinema with war, murder, anorexia, and necrophilia. The conceit of this passage is that the violent visual culture produces extreme, far-reaching effects; the 'pubescent girl' shown 'anorexic women' becomes 'necrophilic.' This action describes how the cultural reproduction of images of anorexia leads to a desire in young girls to remain or become underweight. This is comparable to necrophilia as the induced desire is for a state that can lead to severe

²³ Interview with Johannes Göransson. August 2014.

²⁴ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 29.

²⁵ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 29.

illness and death. The privileging of underweight female bodies is a cultural violence done to young women. Göransson shows that this action is similar to other forms of violence, explicitly the violence of war. He reveals that showing soldiers ‘murder movies before a war’ is the same mechanism as showing pubescent girls images of anorexic women. Both instances are intended to replicate violence; both intended to suppress critical thinking through a dangerous commingling of fear, desire, and desensitisation.

This passage engages with the dangers of Americana; the glossy images of hyper-thin celebrities and soldiers whose bravery and patriotism serves as a mythic reminder of the Wild West are both seductive and terrifying. ‘Looking’ is not always seeing. In *Pageant* looking is often *the means* by which propaganda is consumed. However, this passage is not by any means didactic or staid; the first section belongs to a highly ritualistic, cultic register. When Göransson writes that the passengers ‘like to fuck women from behind because in their hair they think they see something ornate and monstrous’ he brings to bear the realm of the mystic and the ancient on to a scene that could otherwise be perceived as misogynistic. By completing the passage with an explicit reference to Laura Mulvey’s influential theory of ‘the male gaze’²⁶ he is being both playful and deadly serious. In *Pageant*, cinema, that supreme conduit of Americana, is the contemporary incarnation of the ancient shamanic vision: hallucinatory, dangerous, and liminal, three qualities that tie the blue otherworldly light of the cinema screen to luminol.

²⁶ In her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey argues that cinematically ‘the function of women in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack. Both are posited on nature (or on anatomy in Freud’s famous phrase). Women’s desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it [...] Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.’ (Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 804, doi:10.1093/screen/16.3.6.) and ‘The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at. Originally, in his “Three Essays on Sexuality”, Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones (Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* no. 3 (1975), 806, doi:10.1093/screen/16.3.6.)

In his essay titled 'Atrocity Kitsch'²⁷ Göransson gives a catalogue of items that fit into the aesthetic he describes, and there is a strong emphasis on the visual:

Cue: Ronald Reagan riding into the White House on a White Horse. Cue: The Manson Family staging a tacky mass-murder complete with actresses and a goofy soundtrack (both The White Album and Manson's own songs naturally), not to mention captions written in blood (ready for documentation Beuys-style). Cue: David Lynch's restaging of the Manson murders in *Blue Velvet* (complete with cheesy 50s music), except instead of a murdered would-be mom with her womb torn open, he has a father with his brains torn out. Cue: the Abu Ghraib photographs (preferably on a PowerPoint presentation at an academic conference).²⁸

Specifically, atrocity kitsch is enacted through visual channels: the emphasis here is on photographs, film, or a PowerPoint presentation. This catalogue incorporates Americana alongside ritualised violence (Abu Ghraib with the Manson murders; *Blue Velvet* with Reagan). For Göransson the atrocity is indistinguishable from the kitsch. When Charles Manson composes his own delirious messianic soundtrack to his doomsday cult murders, the tacky sentimentality of it actually produces the violence engendered.²⁹ When the suffering at Abu Ghraib is commodified and intellectualised on a PowerPoint

²⁷ Johannes Goransson, "Atrocity Kitsch - Montevidayo," *Atrocity Kitsch*, August 2010, <http://www.montevidayo.com/atrocity-kitsch/>.

²⁸ Johannes Goransson, "Atrocity Kitsch - Montevidayo," *Atrocity Kitsch*, August 2010, <http://www.montevidayo.com/atrocity-kitsch/>.

²⁹ The Manson Family murders, a seamy admixture of celebrity, drugs, sex and ritual murder are an irresistible example of Americana. By the time he was thirty-five, Manson had become a criminal superstar notorious for his part in the brutal ritual murders of actress Sharon Tate and her friends, and, later, the La Bianca family. Simon Wells, Manson's biographer and historian of the cult of Manson known as 'the Family' explains the deep connections between the violence of the murders and their cultural context:

'As my research took me deeper and deeper into my subject, it became clear that drugs, sex, ritualistic murders and mind-control were by no means the whole story; throw in the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Hollywood A-list celebrities, black magic, the Mafia and even two presidents of America, and you are still only halfway there.'

The combination of Americana and apocalypse ran deep through the iconography and mythology of the Family. They had a 'permanent sanctuary in an old movie set on the fringes of Los Angeles. Like a psychedelic version of *Little House on the Prairie*', where Manson 'announced an impending Armageddon, and took his followers out to the Californian desert. There, he acted out his increasingly bizarre fantasies for his small audience of believers. Manson deepened his hold on his followers -- a group of 'black-clad hippies who later turned up at [10050 Cielo Drive] and slaughtered all of the inhabitants. The most infamous trial of the post-war era followed. But when Simon Wells says that '[w]hile I do feel empathy for the victims, they are not primarily what interests me' and admits that it is 'the psychedelic nature of the Manson 'cult' [...], the apocalyptic ideology, the occult dimension, the rock'n'roll -- that fascinates me', he could equally have been describing *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all begin to Intricate*. (Simon Wells *Charles Manson: Coming Down Fast* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009), 11).

slide at a conference it becomes avoidable, ignorable; its usage nothing more than an academic parlour trick. Göransson's theory gets to the heart of the violence of Americana, and the atrocities that art can reveal. In fact, Göransson claims that art is indistinguishable from violence, stating that 'violence is everywhere. And poetry is not difference. The artistic experience is often a violent one.'³⁰ *Pageant* often records a litany of violence that ranges from the personal to the political:

My God how I break up with girls that are sosilverexposed in cocaine. Soldiers adrenaline while I get disfigured and sparowed. There is nothing softer than body parts. Especially the actress-part. That is the part that the president owns.³¹

Here atrocities are channelled through individuals (soldiers, actresses, girls who take cocaine) in order to invoke greater systemic abuses (war, the drug trade, the political system, the patriarchy). Trashy Americana can be read palimpsestically from this passage, i.e. photography is indicated by the combination of 'exposed' and 'silver' (as in silver gelatine used to process photographs) in the portmanteau word 'sosilverexposed'; the close alignment of 'president' and 'actress' conjures images of Marilyn Monroe and JFK, but it is easily scratched through to reveal the darker, structural atrocities below.

The second way that ritual is observed in *Pageant* is through the form of sacred dance. MISS WORLD is one of the major characters in *Pageant* (insofar as *Pageant* has characters) and they³² invent a new dance called 'jacklighting.' Etymologically this phrase speaks of illumination, the dance reveals, or shines a light on 'jack.' 'Jack' might be a contraction of John, with its connotations both of sex work (a john) and the apocalypse (John the Divine who wrote the *Book of Revelation*). It might also speak of 'Jack the Ripper' a true crime monster whose identity has been subject to a cycle of revelation and rejection. Just as Luminol Theory illuminates and reveals, so 'jacklighting' throws light on marginalised and endangered groups.

MISS WORLD is coded variously as female (MISS WORLD), as male ('He is wearing only a basketball jersey'³³), as a child ('He is 5 years old'³⁴), and as an adult (at

³⁰ Johannes Göransson, "Atrocity Kitsch - Montevideo," *Atrocity Kitsch*, August 2010, <http://www.montevideo.com/atrocity-kitsch/>.

³¹ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 53-54.

³² I will use this pronoun throughout as the character is non-binary.

³³ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 5.

one point he says that: ‘The theorists used to believe that I revealed the constructedness of gender.’)³⁵ This fluidity not only between genders but also between ages and states makes MISS WORLD the ultimate ephemeral object. MISS WORLD is clearly intended to be an object of desire and the reader is encouraged to aestheticise them. This act of aestheticisation could be read as a form of violence or aggression as it reveals the vulnerability of the character and their exposure to adult desires. For example, when MISS WORLD first arrives onstage they are described in the following way:

MISS WORLD:

(walks in on tiptoes into the middle of the stage. He is wearing only a basketball jersey. He is 5 years old. He is covered in fine dust. The audience is covered in fine dust. He turns to look at us and the loudspeakers emit the following like semen)³⁶

These stage directions are clearly intended to elicit an ambivalent response in the reader. The fact that MISS WORLD is a five-year-old child shows how vulnerable they are. That they are wearing a basketball jersey and nothing else is troubling and problematic, the lack of clothing and the oversized adult male garment they wear indicate that they have been in a sexual context with an adult. This is reinforced by the use of the word ‘semen’ in the next line. The fact that MISS WORLD walks in on tiptoes demonstrates their attempt to seem taller and more confident than they are; it is a clear strategy of self-preservation. This vulnerability may excite two responses in the reader, both a desire to protect and a more uncomfortable sadistic response. This dual response is dangerous, and in invoking it Göransson highlights the seamy slippage between innocence and corruption that occurs in the world of the child beauty pageant. This dark play between the twin desires to master and protect are articulated by Sianne Ngai in her work on cuteness as an aesthetic category. In her article “The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde” Ngai argues that:

³⁴ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 5.

³⁵ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 79.

³⁶ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 5.

We can thus start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly or aggressive feelings, as well as the expected tender or maternal ones. For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle.³⁷

This dissonance between cuteness and horror is clearly at work in the description of MISS WORLD: They are small, vulnerable and barefoot and yet they are covered in dust, and when they arrive on stage, semen-like material is emitted from the speakers. The atmosphere that MISS WORLD inhabits is dangerous; they are treated as sexually immature and passive, rather than mature and autonomous. They are constantly bound by strictures of cuteness and passivity.

MISS WORLD responds to the danger inherent in their situation by translating their cute, aestheticised sexual power into a form that allows them more autonomy. Drawing on the creative political work of historically marginalised members of the trans*, non-binary, and genderqueer communities (particularly within communities of colour),³⁸ MISS WORLD invents a movement, or dance craze, named 'jacklighting'³⁹:

Beware beware
I have begun a king
A jacklighting king⁴⁰

Though the movements or actions involved in jacklighting are not explained, the function of it is clear; Göransson deploys it to great ritual and political effect. As the text is ostensibly made up of notes for the performance of a pageant, the dance craze can be considered as analogous to voguing, a dance form that originated in the New York City ball culture of the 1980s and 1990s. Voguing was a stylised, expressive

³⁷ Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* no. 4 (2005), 816, doi:10.1086/444516.

³⁸ Though it is beyond the scope of the thesis, it is essential to note that the conditions under which voguing emerged are echoed currently. The US in 2015 has been declared to be in a state of emergency by *Black Lives Matter* and *Trans* Lives Matter* activists due to the extremely high number of people of colour, transmen and transwomen and particularly trans* people of colour who have been attacked, assaulted, and murdered by individuals and the state this year alone.

³⁹ The Noah Baumbach film *Damsels in Distress* centres on the protagonist's attempts to create a new dance craze, the Sambola, an act that is superficially absurd but that is revealed to have political importance. Violet, the protagonist, claims that she wants to do something that will 'really change the course of human history: start a new dance craze.' (Whit Stillman, *Damsels in Distress* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012).

⁴⁰ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 5.

dance which came out of the ball scene and later became popular in the mainstream as a result of popularisation first by Malcolm McLaren in his song 'Deep in Vogue' (1989), and more famously through Madonna's number one song 'Vogue' (1990). The dance was highly politicised and engaged with the complexity of drag as it pertained to race and class as well as gender. Jennie Livingston said of the documentary film, *Paris is Burning* (1990)⁴¹, about the ball scene and was quoted in an interview as saying that the film was 'not going to be a movie about a cute dance' but rather 'about survival. It's about people who have a lot of prejudices against them and who have learned to survive with wit, dignity and energy. It's a little story about how we all survive.'⁴² MISS WORLD uses the dance to reassert their autonomy, they have 'begun' a 'king', or they have entered a period of renaissance where their dance, jacklighting, becomes creative and generative. The use of the word 'king' has several connotations: the drag king at the ball, the patriarchal, monarchical, feudal figurehead that the drag 'king' or 'queen' so radically inverts. Jacklighting, unlike voguing, really is a 'cute dance', but cute in the sense of acute, cute in the sense of a flashpoint for sadistic mastery described by Ngai, and it is intensely important to MISS WORLD to use jacklighting as a way out of their vulnerable position.

Once MISS WORLD has created jacklighting, they become more confident, more adult. Once the shift has occurred between vulnerable child to fabulous dancer, MISS WORLD becomes not only autonomous, but also meta-analytical. Near the end of the pageant MISS WORLD takes on another register altogether:

MISS WORLD:

The theorists used to believe that I revealed the constructedness of gender, that I was a critique (me and the splattered prom queen). Now they think I'm concerned with what is real, i.e. not real. I just want to be evacuated into desire. This scares them. They call me necrophiliac.⁴³

By referencing the revelation of 'the constructedness of gender', Göransson makes explicit that the character of MISS WORLD highlights the unnaturalness of gender by

⁴¹ Jennie Livingston, *Paris Is Burning* (Second Sight, 2009).

⁴² Barry Koltow, "Director Says 'Paris' Isn't Just Dance Film," *Tribunedigital-orlandosentinel*, September 1991, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1991-09-04/lifestyle/9109010113_1_jennie-livingston-paris-is-burning-film.

⁴³ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 79 - 80.

recasting the typical teen beauty queen as a five-year-old boy who has a frighteningly precocious vocabulary of sexuality and oppression. Now, MISS WORLD is not only this revelation but also they want to be ‘evacuated into desire.’ This model of desire as annihilating and as death, is specifically addressed by the description of MISS WORLD as ‘necrophiliac.’ The ultimate lack upon which desire is predicated is the propulsive function behind capitalism in just the same way as it is in sexuality and the earlier cuteness/sadism paradigm is here encapsulated in the necrophiliac drive towards nothingness, towards evacuation and death.

For MISS WORLD to truly mature they must realise that as a character whose attributes are externally understood to be merely aesthetic, there are no options other than complete annihilation in the service of the desires of others. This erotics of death is a pro-bject strategy and Olivia Cronk develops this annihilatory desire further in her cultic, apocalyptic text, *Skin Horse*.

2.3. Cults: *Skin Horse*

Skin Horse is deeply invested in the abject and can be read through the lens of both the pro-bject and the hyperbject. There is an abject erotics that runs through *Skin Horse* that allow the centrality of desire for those subjects that would usually be ‘radically excluded’⁴⁴ or ‘jettisoned’⁴⁵ from erotic discourse. These subjects range from the barely recognisably human (corpses) to non-mammalian, alien life forms (lizard, squids). Near the beginning of the poem there is a highly sexualised, cultic moment that combines an erotics of death with polymorphous sexuality:

watch
your old friends
the naked squids
hung from a tree branch
Screaming⁴⁶

The figure of the squid can be read in two ways; there is the initial reading which places the scene generically within a horror narrative where your ‘friends’ are ‘screaming’

⁴⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴⁶ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

‘naked’ and ‘hung from a tree branch’; however, there is a second reading which perceives the naked squid as polymorphous and multivalent, a creature which does not conform to a neat binary and which is fleshly, inviting and the object of desire. Much as Kristeva’s description of the corpse can be seen as lexically aligned to desire and seduction so too the conjunction of ‘friends’ with ‘naked’, ‘screaming’ and ‘hung’ belong to the lexicon of sexual desire. This close relationship between sexual desire and death allows the radical possibilities of necrophilia as a form of alternative sexual strategy to be conceived. The following lines reinforce this dismantling of the heteronormative paradigm:

Hanging the pond
and reaching up to your utter
metamorphosis.

Lizard orgy.

It unwifes me.
It unwifes me.
Unwifes me like a slid-in skin. Unwifes me. Unwifes me.⁴⁷

Cronk’s insistence here is on transcendent sexuality. The alien sexuality of the ‘lizard orgy’ completes the ‘utter metamorphosis’ of the addressee. The final repetition of ‘unwifes’ is politically radical, breaking apart heteronormativity, female subservience, and the legal enforcement of patriarchal structures. The nuclear, Oedipal familial structure is repeatedly made strange in Cronk’s poem; it is, in fact, made hyperabject.

When Olivia Cronk writes:

Husband your wife
is calling from the yard again
calling on
about those rat holes
in her peering deep⁴⁸

She is deliberately using language that evokes a homely scene: Husband, wife, yard, rat. We can imagine a typical family unit dealing with household problems. What

⁴⁷ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁴⁸ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

complicates and makes this poem strange are the more unusual language choices she makes, and the conjunctions of the words she uses. For example when we hear that the wife is ‘calling on about those rat holes in her peering deep’ there is an abject affect; the repetition of ‘calling’ is frightening and suggests that the wife is calling out in distress; the ‘rat holes’ suggest something rotting and decaying as well as fear of vermin and disease; her ‘peering deep’ in conjunction with the ‘rat holes’ calls to mind vaginal imagery. On first view, this section of the poem reads almost as though it could be a description of a household problem: a farm that has a rat problem, or a wife not receiving support from her husband. On closer inspection, this is an abject and alienating piece of writing that problematises the Oedipal relationship and suggest a rottenness at the heart of family life. This is a hyperabject political strategy, similar to the one employed by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*.

The opening of *The Bluest Eye* warps a familiar school textbook (The *Dick and Jane* reading book series) in order to call attention to a sinister hidden narrative beneath the façade of the nuclear family. The first few pages reproduce a familiar passage three times, changing the layout each time. The first passage is reproduced accurately and I will quote the first few sentences here: ‘Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy.’ The second time, Morrison removes the majority of the punctuation which has the effect of disorienting the reader: ‘Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy.’ The third time, Morrison dispenses with all punctuation and all spacing. This creates a confusing jumble of words:

‘Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappy.’⁴⁹ The effect that Morrison creates is striking – by dismantling the ordered structure of the sentences she calls attention to the chaos at the heart of the nuclear family. In the same way, Cronk excavates the homely farmhouse scene to reveal the hidden horror beneath. By foregrounding transgression and taboo, the hyperabject promotes the unwholesome, the rejected and the marginal and reveals the limitations of the normative, the traditional, the safe.

⁴⁹ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, (London: Vintage, 1999), 1.

Cronk operates in the territory of the hyperobject; sexuality, gender and desire are fluid in the poem. Not only is there radical potential for sexual experimentation with fetishism and sadomasochism, but there is also ambiguity around the gender of the protagonist. Towards the end of the poem the narrator describes herself in this way:

There is someone very invisible standing inside of my body. And she is heating up,
boy is she.⁵⁰

These lines are spoken in a naïve voice, almost childlike in its simplicity. The conjunction of ‘boy’ and ‘she’ in the last line can be read as sexually ambiguous. Though the phrase can be interpreted as a colloquialism, the commitment to polymorphous sexuality elsewhere in the poem (for example in the section on squids near the beginning) indicates that this is a deliberate muddying of gendered pronouns. The sexual content of this line is heightened by the image of someone ‘inside’ the narrator who is ‘heating up.’

This heating can also be considered in the context of *Skin Horse* as an apocalyptic text in the tradition of *Revelation*. The ultimate hyperobject according to Timothy Morton is global warming⁵¹ and he is evangelical about the importance of using the specific phrase ‘warming’ rather than ‘climate change.’ He believes we need to recognise the state of extreme emergency signified by this phrase in order to grasp the enormity of the disaster we face (and already exist within). As *Skin Horse* can be read as an apocalyptic text, this sexually charged use of ‘heating’ can be read as hyperobject: firstly it calls to mind the ur-hyperobject, global warming, and secondly it takes us into the realm of the abject where boundaries of the body and of personhood, are radically transgressed.

In other places Cronk’s work has more personal interactions with the dead and offers them care. There may be some more negative necrophiliac connotations in a line such as ‘comb the corpse’s hair.’⁵² The power differential between the living being who

⁵⁰ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁵¹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁵² It is useful here to go back to Seamus Heaney’s comments on the dual relationship that we have with the ancient burial of bodies, that ‘once upon a time, these heads and limbs existed in order to express and embody the needs and impulses of an individual human life. They were the vehicles of different biographies and they compelled singular attention, they proclaimed “I am I.” Even when they were first dead, at the moment of sacrifice or atrocity, their bodies and their limbs manifested biography and conserved vestiges of personal identity: they were corpses. But when a corpse becomes a bog body, the

is actively combing the corpse's hair is uncomfortable and calls to mind a model of necrophilia which is based on coercive sexual practice. However, there is also a reading of this line that elucidates the care that the living person is giving to the corpse. This grooming practice can be considered as an inclusive or at the very least respectful form of interaction between the living and the dead. That the corpse is so seductive to the figure combing its hair would be unsurprising to Kristeva. In *Powers of Horror* she says:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.⁵³

Though she is here describing a negative threatening experience, the words she chooses could be interpreted as belonging to the lexicon of seduction; even love. The corpse is something 'from which one does not part' it 'beckons' and ends up 'engulfing' us. So too the corpse in Cronk's poem behaves seductively to the figure who is combing its hair, and by extension to the reader.

The disgust that would ordinarily be experienced by the living, confronted by the putrefaction of the dead, is given an erotic and even ecstatic cast in *Skin Horse*. The poem deals with bodily fluids and scatology: this obsession with filth, decay and organic ooze is one of the main tenets of the abject as theorised by Kristeva: 'Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.'⁵⁴ Kristeva draws on earlier work by Mary Douglas, whose anthropological work *Purity and Danger* provided an anecdotal story about Catherine of Sienna that offers an example of the hyperabject in operation. Douglas writes that: 'St. Catherine of Sienna, when she felt revulsion from the wounds she was tending, is said to have bitterly reproached herself. Sound hygiene was incompatible with charity, so

personal identity drops away; the bog body does not proclaim "I am I"; instead it says something like "I am it" or "I am you." Like the work of art, the bog body asks to be contemplated; it eludes the biographical and enters the realm of the aesthetic.' ("The Man and the Bog", Seamus Heaney, 3-6, in *Bog Bodies, Sacred Sites and Wetland Archaeology* ed. by Bryony Coles, John Coles and Mogens Schou Jørgensen).

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 4.

⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 71.

she deliberately drank of a bowl of pus.’⁵⁵ Using Luminol Theory, I would argue that this religiosity experienced through contact with human waste is a memorialising action, a closeness to death and disease that has a sacred aesthetic.

In *Skin Horse* blood and other organic human waste can be illuminate to reveal hidden narratives. Cronk writes:

I went to see the dead men bleed
But couldn't find the balcony.

And:

My nose bled a velvet collar
and growling a face dripped
down into
my bra.
The room it fell to moody and livid paintings.⁵⁶

This preoccupation with blood and bleeding is a hyperabject strategy. Cronk first makes the reader aware of the materiality of the blood which leaks from every orifice, every object, but yet is in some indefinable way completely obscure. The voyeuristic desire to see ‘the dead men bleed’ makes the reader complicit, as there is a sense of disappointment in the thwarted attempt when the protagonist is unable to ‘find the balcony.’ The balcony clearly signals the space as in a theatre of some kind, a scopophilic space for spectacle. The lack of visual access frustrates the protagonist’s (and reader’s) voyeuristic impulses. Cronk takes the scene into hyperabject territory, that is, territory where the abject is given centrality, is reintegrated into the aesthetic, though remaining (in Kristeva’s famous formulation) cast out of the symbolic order. By the time that the blood has begun to bleed ‘a velvet collar’ and fall into the pattern of ‘livid and moody paintings’ there has clearly been transformative work in operation; the blood is both a trace reminder of violence and a force for progressive, artistic creation. This movement of blood from violent aporia to aesthetic design mirrors the function of luminol. Luminol not only reacts with blood to excavate and illuminate narratives that are otherwise frustratingly obscured (in the way that the ‘dead men’ are in this passage) but it also creates art from horrific, brutal materials.

⁵⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

⁵⁶ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

Skin Horse presents organic and inorganic materials as inherently connected. Dead animals, humans and even planets interconnect, as do plastic objects. *Skin Horse* is written as one continuous poem with no numbered pages and it is possible to dip in and out at any point. This structure that combines zoetropical endlessness with a shattered, fragmentary approach offers a commentary on the nature of mortality, our mortality, the planet's mortality. Though we cannot conceive of our own deaths, or that of our planet, sometimes our sense of immortality is shattered and the awareness of death comes through. Cronk engages throughout the poem with themes of ecological disaster both implicitly and explicitly. One stanza is peculiarly haunting:

are stepping on a million glass roaches.
The lady is busy all the time with
her brain tests.⁵⁷

The glass roaches call to mind two ideas related to finitude: that cockroaches are reputed to be able to withstand a nuclear apocalypse and that glass is formed over thousands of years from sand.⁵⁸ The conjunction of these two points in the object of the glass roach reminds the reader of their relationship to death and dying; on the one hand there is a creature so hardy and tenacious, that it can withstand almost any horror; on the other they are being 'stepp[ed] upon' and they are made from a substance which is fragile and easy to shatter. This leads us to question of annihilation: if the planet were to die in an ecological disaster, what of the cockroach? The hardy, tenacious creatures that can withstand anything may not be able to withstand every version of planet death. This asks us to reconsider the nature of planet death; perhaps our understanding of planet death goes only so far as our understanding of its impact on us. Some eco-critics believe that we should not consider planet death only in terms of the impact on human life, and that planet death is merely planet transmutation. Our inevitable deaths in such a situation could be seen as part of a bigger cycle.⁵⁹ The second part of the stanza could be considered a gloss on the first; '[t]he lady is busy all the time with her brain tests' introduces a character type: the scientist. She is concerned with empirical data and she is 'busy', perhaps not engaging with the bigger issues. She projects her human desire to control what is essentially unknowable, wild and free. This line is followed by '[w]e die

⁵⁷ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁵⁸ I.e. Obsidian.

⁵⁹ *Voluntary Human Extinction Movement*, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://vhemt.org/>.

and rush into the planet'; the clear link between human death and the parasitical usage that the planet makes of corpses as biological resources again recalls a redemptive version of necrophilia; a desire for the dead which is instinctual and deep.

The last few lines of the poem are eschatological and scatological. The entire poem reads like it takes place at the endtimes, however these last few lines are echoes from the *Book of Revelation* with mention of beasts, lizards, orgies, crowns and shit:

Lizard orgy.
Seep. Seep.
Crowns.
mold spots &
beasts taken &

I've got all night for this shit.⁶⁰

Cronk repurposes the apocalypse, as predicted in *The Book of Revelation*, for abject ends. By reducing the overarching narrative themes of *Revelation* to a handful of loaded and over-determined words such as: 'beasts'; 'lizard'; 'crowns' and 'shit', Cronk reproduces the essence of the apocalypse and takes away any comfort of narrative, structure or parable. Instead, she brings the reader horribly close to the Real: the lizard face beneath the niceties of story and structure.

Compare the 'lizard orgy' from Cronk's poem with the dragon in *Revelation 12*: 'And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.'⁶¹ This exchange of bodily fluids between the dragon and the woman is a sexualised, hyperabject moment: floods that can be both markers of global warming and sexualised fluids emanate from the dragon. *Skin Horse* reads similarly to *Revelation* as an apocalyptic text: a revelation of the future, a future fuelled by disgust, desire, and human destruction. The word 'beasts' strongly connects *Skin Horse* to *Revelation*, which contains 59 uses of the word. One of the most striking uses of the phrase is in Chapter 13 with the line: 'Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.'⁶² This passage that introduces the infamous number of the beast as 666, a number that has passed into usage in schlocky horrors and

⁶⁰ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁶¹ *Revelation* 12:16.

⁶² *Revelation* 13:18

is used as simplistic shorthand for Satan-worship. Cronk's poem doesn't give context to the 'beasts' she describes but taking that phrase in conjunction with the references to lizards, orgies, crowns and shit; this text is clearly playing with the scatological and the eschatological, both of which are bound in the hyperabject. The indelible mark of the beast (that sign that horror is present) can be read with Luminol Theory: revealing crime scene and perpetrator through a series of indelible marks.

The perpetrator of evil in *Revelation* is a nebulous, multifaceted presence, but perhaps the most infamous incarnation of evil in the book is the Whore of Babylon. She is introduced in Chapter 17, and the description is rich and poetic, though utterly misogynistic: 'And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.'⁶³ This scene is excessive – she is wearing 'purple', 'scarlet' and 'gold' and she is decked with 'precious stones and pearls.' These excesses signal a lack of modesty, in fact, we are then told that the cup she is holding is 'full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.' There could be no clearer sign that aesthetic indulgence is directly linked to sexual impropriety. As the Whore of Babylon is invoked in *Revelation* as a warning sign of the coming apocalypse, there is a clear indication that women who attain economic and sexual freedom are imagined as frightening and dangerous. Cronk reverses this misogynistic omen by creating a set of revelations of her own and transmuting the high drama of *Revelation* into a work of atrocity kitsch. Where the Whore of Babylon has a golden cup filled with abominations, the narrator of *Skin Horse* says 'I know that can see the strings of glue where the stone was joined to the cheap gold crown and its chain.'⁶⁴ By seeing how cheap and man-made the gold crown is, by understanding the constructed nature of this kitsch item, Cronk draws attention to the constructedness of the patriarchal, feudal power systems that the crown represents. Later in the poem Cronk writes of an analogous item to the golden cup filled with abominations, but in *Skin Horse*, the vessel is a gym bag:

⁶³ *Revelation* 17:4

⁶⁴ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012). I have replicated the large spaces used by Cronk in the poem here.

and they found a gym bag and opened it and in it found
many terrible things and it was autumn and wheaty and blue and in it many
terrible things, the unzipping, the terrible unzipping noise while we were
combing⁶⁵

The gym bag mentioned in this passage functions in a similar way to the golden cup of *Revelation* in that it is a vessel for numinous, unknowable horror. However, this item is cheap, throwaway and mass-manufactured plastic object. There is a narrative weight to the image of the gym bag as it is an item that can easily be imagined as an element of a crime or horror story, typically full of cash, guns or drugs. The confusion between concrete and abstract here (i.e. the bag is purported to contain ‘autumn’) echoes the earlier use of the golden cup to contain ‘fornication.’ The gym bag can therefore be read as the atrocity kitsch version of the Whore of Babylon’s golden cup. The final section of this chapter will read artefacts at the scene in both *Skin Horse* and *Pageant*, to excavate further down into the crime scene.

2.4. Artefacts at the Scene

This section brings together *Skin Horse* and *Pageant* and reads the sacred, contaminated artefacts contained within to reveal a palimpsestic narrative that reads back into ancient apocalyptic texts. It is perhaps unsurprising that these two texts can be read successfully together as both texts were produced and edited at the same time that Göransson was working on his theory of atrocity kitsch. In *Pageant*, one of the characters, Mimesis, says directly to the audience: ‘I want to be your atrocity kitsch.’⁶⁶ Though this is clearly a playfully absurd statement, it can also be taken as a direct clue that *Pageant* is an example of the theory. Artefacts at the crime scene in both *Pageant* and *Skin Horse* are examples of atrocity kitsch, and they can be illuminated with Luminol Theory. I will first read the artefacts in *Skin Horse*, and then those in *Pageant*.

Johannes Göransson coined the term ‘atrocity kitsch’⁶⁷ to describe the interconnectedness of the kitsch and the tacky with atrocities of all descriptions. For Göransson, Americana, ephemera and junk do not conceal atrocities, but rather they are the means by which atrocities function. In *Skin Horse*, this means that the most heinous

⁶⁵ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁶⁶ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 71.

⁶⁷ Johannes Göransson, “Atrocity Kitsch - Montevideo,” *Atrocity Kitsch*, August 2010, <http://www.montevideo.com/atrocity-kitsch/>.

moments of sadistic violence can be enacted through kitschy objects like lipstick, ketchup, and crystal balls. *Skin Horse* converts ephemera into aesthetic material. The poem also pays special attention to those artefacts that have some relationship with futurity and natural cycles. Fakeness, plasticity, toxicity and metamorphosis are all important concepts in *Skin Horse*. *Skin Horse* does not distinguish between the natural landscape and man-made artefacts, as evidenced by lines such as ‘The pond was a bad window’ and ‘[t]he place is polyester.’⁶⁸ There is a privileging evident in *Skin Horse* of throwaway objects; items such as lipstick, blisters, flyers and ketchup take on occult and sacred resonances. The objects in Cronk’s work bring theoretical pressure to bear on the text. In this way they can be closely aligned to the hyperobjects⁶⁹ of Timothy Morton’s formulation, that is, they are objects that do not conform in any way to linear or spatial regularity, they are objects that are *beyond*. Objects in *Skin Horse* are often plastic, man-made and artificial and in the same way that the gym bag interacts with the sublime plane of weather, seasons, and landscape (as well as the ‘terrible’) so too ordinary objects take on hyperobject significance. *Skin Horse* imbues its objects with a similar non-linear relationship with time, though rather than a future when our descendants’ ‘treatment of hyperobjects may seem like reverence to our eyes,’⁷⁰ in *Skin Horse*, the horror is more present, not only are there fears for an indefinite future, but the apocalypse is ever-present.

Skin Horse does something complex and strange with its ephemera: not only does the poem refuse to distinguish between separate categories of the plastic and the static, the authentic and the fake, it also insists on a specific kind of futurity which relies on the melding of the banal and the sacred. The hidden horror invoked by Morton’s description of the ‘demonic’ plan to hide nuclear waste in household silverware is embraced in *Skin Horse* through lines such as ‘A crystal ball flyer in my bag’ and ‘What lipstick lights. Through a branch, one creeped to scream.’⁷¹ The crystal ball flyer is the perfect example of the sacred throwaway object. Both the flyer and the crystal ball it represents are plastic objects, the flyer is made from cheap, toxic materials and the crystal ball, though glass, a symbol of the plasticity of future and present. The weight accorded to the occult potential of the crystal ball is undercut by the tackiness and commerciality of the flyer. The ‘lipstick lights’ that call to mind a cosmetic artificiality

⁶⁸ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁶⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷⁰ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 132.

⁷¹ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

are also, somehow, luminous. This image of bright, glowing, colours illuminating a part of the forest where one ‘creeped to scream’ is unsettling, the childlike innocence of the lipsticks are displaced by the potential site of violence and trauma invoked by the scream. This tension is present throughout the poem, and the theme of violence to children is repeated in the line:

A concrete head rises doomily from a parking lot
to watch children come falling in their own awful ketchup.⁷²

This line is, again, a melding of the banal and the numinous, the natural and the synthetic. ‘Ketchup’ is a widely understood signifier for fake blood and calls to mind both the ultimate Americana of low budget slasher films or Halloween costumes as well as junk food and diners. To have the children ‘falling in their own awful ketchup’ hints at a sadistic desire to enact violence and perhaps even murder. Though this desire is focalised through the ‘concrete head’ rising ‘doomily’ from a ‘parking lot’, which on first read could be considered as a detached, potentially absurd point of view, there is an alignment between the man-made concrete and the man-made ketchup. There is an entire world of human endeavour invoked in this line, it is not nature that is to be feared, but the humans who watch impassively as children continue to suffer violence from man-made causes. There are other places in the poem where death is presented as a Freudian nightmare:

My morbid, awful dying in clean boots.
Nostalgia
for teeth clattering out.⁷³

This death is so horrific that the loss of teeth, a hyper-Freudian symbol of humiliation, is considered nostalgic. This death is more ‘morbid’, more ‘awful’: the utter humiliation of death which does not respect clean boots or any other human strategy to combat fear through control and order.

There are several instances of the natural world functioning as a technological space or museum. Near the beginning of the poem the narrator of *Skin Horse* writes that they ‘came to cringe at the miniature eggs’ followed shortly afterwards by an

⁷² Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN, 2012).

⁷³ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

announcement that ‘I heard of the trees typewriting.’ In these statements there is a sense that a human entity is dominating the landscape of *Skin Horse* and applying cultural content to it. The museum-like appropriation of the ‘miniature eggs’ has an echo of Fabergé⁷⁴, and the ‘typewriting trees’ present an uncanny image of automatic writing, the fusion of the natural and the technological. Other examples of artificial matter include ‘gloves’, an ‘ashtray’ which ‘spills on and on the edge of a pink seat,’⁷⁵ and ‘nylons’ (a quaint for hosiery that reminds the reader of war shortages and American soldiers, a clear example of the invocation of Americana). These everyday objects take on a plastic significance, the ashtray is a repository for waste, and the mingling of the ash with the ‘pink seat’ suggests an uneasy disruption of categories. The used, carcinogenic, ash despoils the homely pink seat. The gloves become ‘enchanted’ and ‘The place is polyester.’ Everyday, cheap materials take on transcendent properties in the world of *Skin Horse*. This transcendence can also take on a strong erotic charge when artificial objects are put to sadomasochistic use:

the dress-shoe blister gone wet.

And:

This pleather strap
On a lap I dress for dinner.
I see to my old man’s tongue
caught on a tooth
just as the word tunnel
finishes.
I smack it out on a leather wall.⁷⁶

The ‘dress-shoe’ and the ‘pleather strap’ are both related to notorious elements of fetishism: high-heeled shoes and spankings. The pinching of the dress shoe, causing blisters, indicates physical pain associated with the foot: a congruence of masochism

⁷⁴ ‘In March 2006 the story that supermodel Kate Moss smuggled the drugs Ecstasy and Rohypnol in a “£65,000 gem-encrusted Fabergé egg – clearly a replica – made headlines around the world.’ (Quotation from Toby Faber, *Faberge’s Eggs: One Man’s Masterpieces and the End of an Empire*, (London: Pan, 2009), 3). ‘As a group, too, the overall history of the Imperial eggs is equally fascinating. Whether fairly or not, their opulence and occasional vulgarity mean that they have come to symbolize the decadence of the court for which they were made. “Now I understand why they had a revolution” is the common remark of someone viewing these creations for the first time. They may be masterpieces, but they also embody extravagance that even the Romanov’s most ardent supporter would find hard to justify. After 1917’s inevitable cataclysm, the eggs disappeared in the chaos of the times. (Quotation from Toby Faber, *Faberge’s Eggs: One Man’s Masterpieces and the End of an Empire*, (London: Pan, 2009), 4).

⁷⁵ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

⁷⁶ Olivia Cronk, *Skin Horse* (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2012).

and fetishism at a single site. That the blister has ‘gone wet’ has overt sexual connotations. The ‘pleather strap’, a plastic, artificial material which replicates the cruelty of animal leather is discussed in relation to ‘lap’, ‘tooth’ and ‘tongue’ and has clear sexual overtones. The final line in this stanza: ‘I smack it out on a leather wall’ commingles the natural and the artificial and describes an act of onomatopoeic violence that brings the reader back to the image of the strap.

The fetishised element becomes abjected, it is partialised, synecdochic, and cast out of a symbiotic wholeness. Yet it also regulates sexual practices and confines them to specific strictures. Kristeva’s formulation of the abject could be described as regulatory. By understanding the abject as that which is ‘cast out of the symbolic order’ she thereby defines what the symbolic order is. Hal Foster asks whether the abject, rather than being ‘disruptive of subjective and social orders’ could be ‘somehow foundational of them.’⁷⁷ This reading of the abject suggests that the exclusion of ‘the alien within’⁷⁸ turns abjection into a regulatory operation. Cronk, however, does not perform abjection in such a definitive manner; she does not use abjection to regulate, but rather to reveal, in the tradition of apocalyptic texts. The natural world in *Skin Horse* is a disaster zone, the characters, and by implication the reader, are ‘stepping on a million glass roaches’, they ‘die and rush into the planet.’ Animals, humans, and objects are interchangeable elements of atrocity kitsch. In this interconnected, multivalent universe there is no radical exclusion.

Göransson, in christening his work ‘atrocity kitsch’ was perhaps thinking of Kristeva’s famous passage on the incongruence of cheap, kitschy objects in a place of utter horror – Auschwitz. Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror* that:

In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: Avant-garde Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 114.

⁷⁸ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: Avant-garde Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 115.

⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 4.

This passage is very close linguistically and thematically to a passage of speech in *Pageant*:

THE GENIUS CHILDREN
(played by the Natives or vice-versa)

We are born out of photographs. An arm. Dust. There was no sound. There was a sound. The massacre of the Dolls, read the caption. Dolls used to represent the threat of the rabble. Now we are the rubble. We were born in a wax museum. In a nation that still believes technology is a kind of prosthesis. Kill us. Kill us. Take the bruise-shot. Sell it. Sew it into your outfits. Fit into us.⁸⁰

Both Kristeva's comments and Göransson's dialogue are concerned with objects that inspire anxiety and dread through being out of place. The pathos of children's shoes at Auschwitz is evident, but to Kristeva at least, stranger and more terrifying is the sight of plastic dolls beneath a Christmas tree. Kristeva realises that the lie of dolls at Christmas is the same as the lie of immortality. Procreation is signalled by the presence of the doll, but this object that resembles a baby is in fact reproduced by mechanical plastic means, rather than through biology. In fact this doll represents aporia, rather than futurity, and its materiality contributes directly to global warming, meaning that the doll represents death, not life. To Kristeva childhood and science are both ultimate lies, they both act ostensibly in opposition to mortality by offering a sense of infinity and promise. The moment that we come up against these lies by viewing dolls beneath a Christmas tree or shoes at Auschwitz, we are in the realm of abjection, of the terror of the Real. Göransson takes up several of these threads in the passage above: 'the massacre of the dolls' is reminiscent of the horror beneath Kristeva's Christmas tree, 'We were born in a wax museum' describes a generative stasis, an impossible stillbirth and the use of the term 'museum' links this passage to Kristeva's description of the Auschwitz 'museum.' A museum is an instance of colonial brutality, a method of displaying objects that have been secured through violent means. Göransson explicitly makes the links between atrocities and preservable aesthetic objects through the phrase 'atrocities kitsch', a phrase that could easily be applied to Kristeva's children's shoes at Auschwitz.

Artefacts, when taken out of their original context, as are the shoes at Auschwitz,

⁸⁰ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 27.

take on a sinister valence. Greg Kennedy in *An Ontology of Trash*⁸¹ discusses the philosophical and ecological impacts of commodified convenience items. His central argument is that we exchange immediate convenience for long-term ecological concerns here:

Our convenience items, those commodified objects that not only do not demand physical maintenance and our careful attention, but even practically frustrate all attempts at taking care of them, most easily and absolutely become trash. Their ability to minimise physical care in consumption necessitates that they maximise disposability. The polystyrene cup is effortlessly discarded and the consumer spared the trouble of washing it. This relative freedom from taking care of the object supposedly saves the consumer time. In the metaphysical ledger, all time not wasted on matters of bodily necessity gets recorded in the positive, rational column, the sum of which is presumed to equal our true humanity. “Care-freeness” is the real promise of technology, and its real fulfillment is trash.⁸²

The polystyrene cup, an object of high symbolic value for Morton, is also important to Kennedy’s thesis. Kennedy reads convenience items as minimising physical care and maximising disposability. If these attributes are applied outwards to human relations, then there is a danger of atomisation and lack of empathy. So, in the realm of trash, to which *Pageant* clearly belongs, there are clear dangers when there is confusion between the organic and the inorganic; there is room for sadism and detachment. Göransson brings this out in a line of dialogue he attributes to a character known as THE PROMOTER who says ‘There are real victims inside his statues.’⁸³ This nasty confusion between the living and the dead allows for sadism to take place. The scene is already set for commercial disposability, and the transformation of a murder victim into a functional object completes the equation. Another character, THE PROM QUEEN (blood spattered on her white gown), is androgynous. S(he) invokes objects that have gendered cultural associations and explores how they fit into a system of capitalism: ‘Look at my doll penis. Look at my cake. I acquired them by trading in a transistor

⁸¹ Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and Its Problematic Nature* (SUNY Press, 2012).

⁸² Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and Its Problematic Nature* (SUNY Press, 2012), 122.

⁸³ Johannes Göransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 70.

radio. I went analog.’⁸⁴ THE PROM QUEEN occupies a plastic space between gender, between digital and analogue. By retreating from the digital, and returning to the analogue, there is a sense that plastic hyperobjects may outlive digital networks, may outlive electricity and will certainly outlive us. That the current digital methods of acquiring and disseminating knowledge may change is also relevant here in terms of the gender confusion that is created by THE PROM QUEEN. If, our current networks become less viable, so too gender norms which are currently socially transmitted may also become defunct and void. The PROM QUEEN’s white dress is covered in blood spatter, which radically illuminate the harm that she has experienced and that she transmits.

The PROM QUEEN is connected to MISS WORLD via objects that connect capitalism to sexuality, objects that highlight the detritus-filled contemporary world of North America. MISS WORLD is given a line that makes these links explicit: ‘Thanks to the massacres exhibited by the Prom Queen I now have several penises. They are interchangeable. It’s capitalism!’⁸⁵ Not only is it possible to buy ‘interchangeable’ ‘penises’ but also they are facilitated through violence (i.e. the ‘massacres’ exhibited by the PROM QUEEN, that other marker of sexualised Americana).

Americana is hyperobject. It is ephemeral and yet constant, it is glib and saccharine and yet it reveals a deeper horror. An example of the hyperobject is this short stage direction in *Pageant*:

THE BIRTH:

(A live horse is brought on to the stage. A “birth” is performed with hammers and unsharp razor blades. The kind women use to shave their legs. Colorful but small.)⁸⁶

This is hyperobject in the sense that it invokes a hyperobject, plastic, and situates it in a paradigm of cruelty and destruction, and in that it reveals the abject: a disgusting interaction that blurs the boundaries of birth/death and human/animal. Additionally, the term hyperobject takes on its own valence here, that of extreme abjection: hyper, neon, wild abjection that is at the heart of all Americana. Clearly, this is a stage direction that

⁸⁴ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 70.

⁸⁵ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 70.

⁸⁶ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 48.

would be impossible to carry out. Even should a live horse be brought on stage, the ‘birth’ suggested would be violent and cruel. The specificity of the razor blades: ‘unsharp’; ‘The kind women use to shave their legs’; ‘Colourful but small’ places the objects firmly in the world of commerce. They are plastic objects that will wear down and need to be replaced and they are colourful in order to attract attention and customers. That they are the kind women use to shave their legs reminds us that women remain subject to sexual policing and capitalist exploitation. Once the razors have worn down they will continue as non-decaying hyperobjects, and devoid of function they will become waste material.

The settings for *Pageant* are, fittingly, a treasure trove of decaying Americana including: a crime scene, a disused factory and a shopping mall. The economic violence of capitalism is clearly at work in *Pageant* and the settings are in perfect sympathy with the experiences of the character of MISS WORLD. The first scene is perhaps the most relevant in terms of Luminol Theory: ‘The main scene should be full of ornaments and crime. The words attributed to the characters do not necessarily have to be spoken; they can be acted out, or played on an archaic tape player.’⁸⁷ This scene is obviously intended as a crime scene not only due to the explicit reference but because the conjunction of ‘ornaments and crime’ indicates that objects and their location can be excavated for meaning in the same way that crime can, just as luminol penetrates and reacts with landscapes, rooms, and objects to excavate narrative. This is a crime ‘scene’ as well as a theatrical scene. The use of language in the second part of the direction is reminiscent of police investigations with echoes of crime re-enactments, witness statements and recorded interviews. We are told that ‘The second stage is an abandoned factory in downtown South Bend, IN’⁸⁸ and ‘[t]he third stage is a mall, where the natives stand still, watching, interviewing and photographing the Customers.’⁸⁹ Each of these scenes speaks to the consumerism and decay that are a part of the late capitalist project, the abandoned factory reminds us of the decline in heavy industry that has plagued North America and led directly to poverty. The mall where the ‘natives’ ‘photograph[...]’ the ‘Customers’ indicates a range of new digital industries that have

⁸⁷ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 1.

⁸⁸ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 1.

⁸⁹ Johannes Goransson, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in Which We All Begin to Intricate* (Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011), 1.

replaced the production of objects for sale and export. The mall itself functions as a repository for cheap plastic goods and as a theatre for consumerist desires. Objects carry weight in the world of *Pageant*, and the discarded ephemera of Americana that litters the imagined stage are a source of abject horror.

Skin Horse and *Pageant* are both examples of hyperabjection and the related theory of atrocity kitsch. Both texts are apocalyptic, cultic and revelatory, and occupy a tradition that stretches back to *Revelation*. Both texts use Americana and ephemeral objects as central images, but rather than glibly reducing these items to aesthetic devices these objects show the seedy, teeming underside of Americana, and by centralising the abject, they offer radical possibilities for reading north American culture. When Luminol Theory is applied to *Skin Horse* and *Pageant* it shines a light on narrative, it reveals, it is magical, it is prescient, and it has a nasty allure.

Conclusions: Sacred Artefacts or The Luminol Lamp



Figure 8 Mike Thompson's Luminol Lamp

This section offers an illustrative interjection that bridges the present chapter with the next one. By reading into ritual, cult, and artefact at the crime scene, Luminol Theory has excavated hidden, apocalyptic narratives in contemporary experimental writing and negotiated fear of disgust, the abject, and the necrophiliac in order to engage in critical thinking that would otherwise be suppressed by fear. Mike Thompson's luminol lamp is an object that undertakes the same process in order to illustrate and shine a light on human mortality and precarity. The lamp is a sacred artefact, a cultic, ritual object that runs on human waste. The luminol lamp⁹⁰ is a light bulb which is activated once human blood reacts with the luminol in the vial. This reaction, most commonly used to detect whether violence has taken place at suspected crime scenes, is taken out of context and given a magical twist by Thompson. The luminol lamp combines the human and the chemical, it invokes violence and disposability but also transformation. Finally, it reminds us of the precarity of the human condition and the scarcity of the earth's resources, by inviting the consumer to give a little of their own bodily fluid in exchange for light. Thompson dramatises the danger of taking fuel for granted, and critiques patterns of consumption. The luminol lamp gives light, receives blood, explodes in chemical reaction and regenerates waste fluid into energy. Mike Thompson's luminol

⁹⁰ Rettner, Rachael. "Lamp Runs on Human Blood." *LiveScience.com*. 1 October 2009. Accessed August 4, 2015. <http://www.livescience.com/7920-lamp-runs-human-blood.html>.

lamp combines organic and non-organic matter and converts waste into aesthetic material, shining its queer unearthly light on to the body of the dead girl who is at the heart of this forensic exploration.

Chapter 3. Queer Light: Illuminating the Dead-Girl

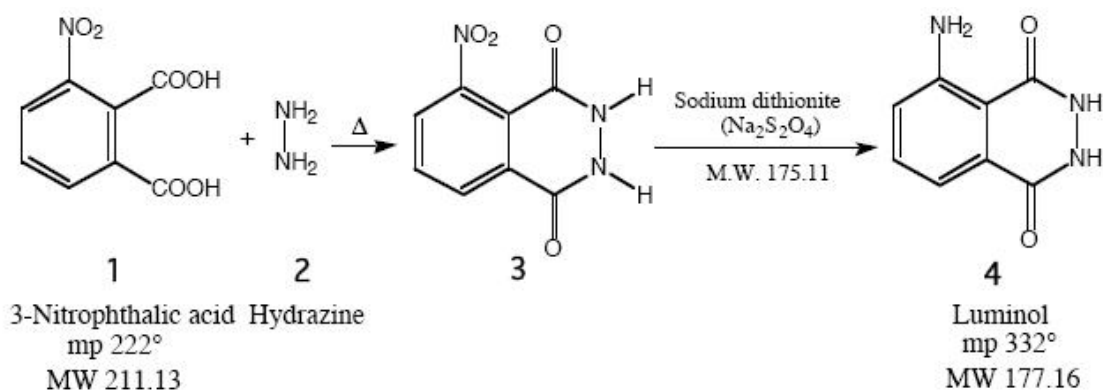


Figure 9 Diagram of Luminol Reaction with Aged Blood

*The Young-Girl does not have the face of a dead girl, as one might think from reading avant-garde women's magazines, but of death itself.*¹

*Dried and decomposed blood gave a stronger and more lasting reaction than fresh blood (three-year old stains gave a brilliant luminescence).*²

*Deeper down the liquid's thickness ate the glow and scrunched the space to gone.*³

¹ Tiqqun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 132.

² William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, eds., *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1998), 162.

³ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 88.

Laura Palmer



Figure 10 Still of Laura Palmer from *Twin Peaks*

The queerness of luminol (in both the otherworldly and sublime sense as well as the sense of queer theory) allows for a magical excavation of the Dead-Girl⁴ in order to reveal her voice and hidden narrative from beyond the grave. The final steps that this investigation will take will be to approach the body of the Dead-Girl at the crime scene. This chapter will first set up the excavatory mode of trauma theory and the associated principle of the death-drive. Then, there will be a short history of the representation of the dead girl and necrophilia, followed by a queering of those histories. Finally, when the category of Dead-Girl has been clarified, it will be read in conjunction with two contemporary experimental texts: *EVER* by Blake Butler, and a return to *Memoirs* by Michael Du Plessis, where the forensic investigation will reveal the future of the dead JonBénet.

Before revealing JonBénet, I will briefly pause to consider the ur-Dead-Girl, the Dead-Girl whose resonance in popular culture has informed an entire generation of crime fiction: Laura Palmer.⁵

⁴ In this chapter I will set up the theoretical concept of the Dead-Girl as an improvisation against Tiquin's Young-Girl. Just as the Young-Girl is a broad conceptual category that can include all genders and ages, so too the Dead-Girl does not have to be young and she does not necessarily have to be dead.

⁵ Recent examples include: *True Detective* (2013); *The Fall* (2013); *The Killing* (2011). In film there is an entire subgenre devoted to the torture and murder of (mainly) women -- the Slasher. For more on this

Laura Palmer was a fictional character in David Lynch and Mark Frost's 1991 television series *Twin Peaks*⁶ and also in the 1992 prequel film *Fire Walk With Me*⁷. Laura Palmer was the catalyst for the show's events when the discovery of her body prompts an FBI investigation and the revelation of buried secrets that implicate the entire community in Laura's death. The image above shows the famous image of Laura Palmer as the ultimate passive subject: frozen, blue-white and wrapped in plastic.

The figure of the beautiful dead girl has long been a mainstay of fiction and art. Edgar Allen Poe's rather shocking claim that 'The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'⁸ (dealt with in more detail below) has become a commonplace. There is an entire subgenre of crime drama driven by the death (often including sexual violence) of a beautiful, white (often blond) woman, popularised by the death of Laura Palmer in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. Just as 'the Young-Girl's body is an encumbrance, it is her world and it is her prison'⁹ Laura Palmer is famously found 'wrapped in plastic'¹⁰ at the beginning of the series and her dead body is the catalyst for the narrative drive of the show.¹¹

Laura Palmer is the perfect example of the Dead-Girl; she is simultaneously the blond, white,¹² middle-class homecoming queen and the promiscuous, cocaine-snorting

genre and trope read Carol Clover *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1999) and Isabel Cristina Pinedo *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (1997).

⁶ David Lynch, *Twin Peaks - The Entire Mystery* (Paramount Home Entertainment, 2014).

⁷ David Lynch, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (2entertain, 2007).

⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition (1846)," *American Studies at the University of Virginia*, 1846, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/poe/composition.html>.

⁹ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 48.

¹⁰ *Twin Peaks: Complete Season 1 [DVD] [1990]* (Universal Pictures, 2002).

¹¹ Joyelle McSweeney notes the currency of Laura Palmer whose image saturates visual culture. She refers particularly to Ryan Trecartin's '*I/Be Area*, which you can watch on YouTube, his characters, Wendy and Pasta, look like decaying cheerleaders, like Laura Palmer had she stood up in the plastic to direct *Twin Peaks*.' (Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), 154).

¹² In recent years, emotional stories about missing white women have been prevalent in the news (Robinson, 2005). This phenomenon has come to be known as missing white woman syndrome, whereby news outlets report more extensively on missing person's cases that involve young, conventionally attractive, middle- to upper-class white women (Liebler, 2007; Malkin, 2005; Moody et al., 2008; Robinson, 2005). The consistent way in which these women are portrayed has given rise to research on framing of this news coverage. Framing occurs when an issue is repeatedly presented in a way that leaves the recipient of the information with a distinct idea of how the issue is supposed to be viewed (De Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993; Tankard, 2001; Yue, Cheung, & Wong, 2010). The framing of missing women is relevant because when the media frame a story, it changes the way the audience feels about the story and the people depicted in it. This is known as framing effects (Druckman, 2001; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Nelson & Oxley, 1999; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Yue et al., 2010). (Lindsey Conlin and William R. Davie, "Missing White Woman Syndrome How Media Framing Affects Viewers' Emotions," *Electronic News* no. 1 (2015), 2, doi:10.1177/1931243115572822.).

fantasy cheerleader. Laura Palmer is the ultimate passive subject: a dead, blond girl who is wrapped in plastic. She becomes a commodity, presented as beautifully as an expensive bar of candy wrapped in gaudy foil. She is also a fetish object, elevated to the status of a pharaoh or empress, mummified and preserved. Laura Palmer connotes both disposability and longevity; she asks us to engage in a necrophilia that could be considered redemptive. *Twin Peaks* deconstructs the trope of the dead girl in mystery fiction and asks the viewer to see Laura Palmer as an autonomous subject and not simply a blank canvas for our fantasies. The act of necrophiliac enquiry we enter into in watching *Twin Peaks* and in searching for clues to Laura's identity beyond the cartoonish Madonna-whore is a positive, compassionate response to a violent and misogynistic trope.

3.1 Trauma, Flashback, and The Death Drive

When dealing with the subject matter of violent death, and more specifically the violent death of young girls and women, it is necessary to frame this subject within the field of trauma studies. This section will set up a psychoanalytic framework for the reading of the Dead-Girl by using trauma theory and the concept of the death drive to produce an excavatory mode. Trauma theory is a multivalent and contested area, and within the confines of this chapter I do not propose to address the entire field. However, I will outline some of the key ideas in trauma theory (in the humanities rather than in the strictly clinical mode) as they relate to Freud's famous work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,¹³ which is a key theoretical text for this chapter.

One of the ways in which Freud conceptualised trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was as the compulsion to repeat; this understanding of trauma has influenced the field of trauma studies in a fundamental way and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* remains a key text for the study of literary trauma theory. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud related a game that his grandson played, 'Fort-da'¹⁴ (translated as here-gone), in order to illustrate the point that trauma often leads to repetition, *even when that repetition is unpleasant and painful*. The game he describes where his grandson throws a wooden reel away and picks it up only to throw it away again replicates the experience of the child's mother leaving and returning. This pathetic attempt at mastery over a situation beyond the child's control has the added pathos of anticipating the early

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003).

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003), 43 – 102.

death of the child's mother, Freud's daughter Sophie, soon after. The act of repetition takes the child beyond the pleasure principle and outside of pleasurable experience.

Elsewhere in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in terms both radical and simple, Freud puts forward his formulation of the death drive; the goal of each living organism is to revert to the inorganic and to move towards death. He couches this formulation in quasi-mystical terms, describing death as 'an ancient starting point which the living being left long ago, and to which it harks back again by all the circuitous paths of development.'¹⁵ This formulation of the death drive is closely related to the pleasure principle, a blissful anti-state where there is no pain and no tension. It could be argued that such a state is possible *only* through death. For Freud death was inextricably linked with pleasure and in fact death represented the goal of all living beings. It could be argued that such a state is possible *only* through death.

In this formulation death is in opposition to trauma, rather than being a traumatic instance. However, fear *is* inextricably linked to trauma. In his supplementary remarks on fear, Freud states that 'fear is therefore on the one hand the expectation of future trauma, and on the other a repetition of past trauma in a mild form.'¹⁶ Fear is a painful experience that is threatening, and for Freud, the way to overcome or master this experience is through repetition and assimilation. One way of doing this is through the process of sublimation, of creating art from trauma.¹⁷ Each of the key texts studied in this chapter is an act of sublimation and each text processes painful material into an artistic product. Sublimation can also be read as a form of limen: it is *sub limen*, on the threshold, it alchemically transmutes from one state to another and it often involves pain or trauma.

Cathy Caruth, considered one of the foundational thinkers in trauma studies, engages directly with Freud in her work. She argues that 'at the heart of Freud's rethinking of history in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I would thus propose, is the urgent and unsettling question: What does it mean to survive?'¹⁸ Caruth believes that 'trauma in the 20th century was addressed most profoundly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*' (and also later, in *Moses and Monotheism*). She argues that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, written during World War I, has 'been called upon by contemporary

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003), 249.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003), 219.

¹⁷ Sublimation is the conversion of anti-social behaviours into socially acceptable ones; most frequently this takes the form of sublimation of erotic impulses into artistic, scientific, or intellectual endeavor.

¹⁸ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

critics as showing a direct relation between Freud's theory of trauma and historical violence, a directness presumably reflected in the theory of trauma he produces.'¹⁹ Caruth and other scholars who work on trauma in the humanities (Ruth Leys, Bessel Van Der Kolk, Roger Luckhurst, Shoshana Felman) place *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* right at the heart of trauma studies, and trauma studies places the compulsion to repeat as a central tenet of the literary and artistic understanding of trauma.

Ruth Leys, writing after Caruth, has attempted to take a survey of the field of trauma studies in her work *Trauma: A Genealogy*. She takes issue with Caruth's reading of traumatic representation, saying that there is 'no warrant' for her 'tendentious claim that the traumatic experience stands outside or beyond representations as such.'²⁰ Leys characterises Caruth's understanding of trauma as follows:

Caruth holds that massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily destroyed. Instead, there occurs an undistorted, material, and –her key term –literal registration of the traumatic event that, disassociated from normal mental processes of cognition, cannot be known or represented but returns belatedly in the form of “flashbacks”, traumatic nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.²¹

Leys' reading of Caruth offers a potential third version of traumatic representation an artistic representation that remains oblique, meandering, where the form reflects the shattering of 'mechanisms of consciousness and memory.' The result is a fragmentary artefact, a shattered object, which nonetheless, when pieced together creates a whole and where flashes of insight are rendered traceable. For example *Memoirs* uses the protagonists' PTSD to influence its formal structures: the reader is put in the position of someone attempting to piece together a series of traumatic incidents offered non-sequentially and with major information withheld; *Memoirs* shows a series of events that are senseless, relentless and chaotic. The normal rules of social interaction do not apply in the non-place of *Memoirs*, a territory at once specific (Boulder, Colorado) and fantastic (the entire action is encapsulated in a giant snow globe). The terrifying repetition of death and resurrection, which marks JonBénet's, Kathy Acker's, and Tiffany's progress through *Memoirs* leads irrevocably towards a death that the

¹⁹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 176.

²⁰ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 304.

²¹ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 266.

characters cannot imagine. Caruth's formulation of the 'flashback', 'traumatic nightmares' and other 'repetitive phenomena' are in fact, the perfect descriptors for the horror or crime text, and Leys identifies that these modes do not *obscure* but instead *produce* traumatic representation.

Later scholars of Freud's work, including Lisa Downing, Leo Bersani, and Lee Edelman, have made use of the death drive to analyse and interrogate death, sexuality, and culture. The next section of this chapter will draw on the work of these theorists and on Freud's original formulation, in order to theorise a redemptive version of necrophilia, an analogous concept to the previous chapter's formulation of the pro-object. The chapter will consider the cultural and theoretical implications of necrophiliac representations, and go on to make a case for their redemptive possibility.

3.2 Constructing the Dead-Girl: Death, Femininity and the Young-Girl

The Dead-Girl is a contradictory, queer category: she is shameful and toxic, pure and vulnerable, and she provokes prurience and disgust. The Dead-Girl's body (often white, usually dead) is provocative, culturally central and reified; she is violated and assaulted everywhere. Her experience is a traumatic one, and yet this trauma is often used as entertainment. This section will offer a short cultural history of the trope of the dead girl in literature and culture, making a case for the aesthetic coherence of death and femininity. It will continue by reading the trope of the dead woman in relation to Tiquun's philosophical work on the Young-Girl in order to produce a new theoretical category of the Dead-Girl who is subject to cultural necrophilia.

As mentioned briefly, Poe's famous quotation that the 'death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic'²² deals with a dangerous and damaging fantasy: the fantasy of the sexually passive, wholly available, presumably young and desirable woman. On the surface this fantasy appears to be nothing more than a misogynistic desire for limitless access to the bodies of women. However, in her highly influential book *Over Her Dead Body*²³ Elisabeth Bronfen conducts an inquiry into Poe's controversial piece of literary criticism in order to discover what else it could mean. Bronfen argues that: '[t]o attribute only a sadomasochistic vogue, a necrophiliac misogyny to the 'feminine life-in-death figure,' as Mario Praz does, is a semantic

²² Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition (1846)," *American Studies at the University of Virginia*, 1846, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/poe/composition.html>.

²³ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992).

reduction which ignores the multiplicity of themes that are condensed in this image.²⁴ Praz is perhaps to be forgiven for this viewpoint, as it is the most immediate and disturbing analysis that can be applied to Poe's statement. Bronfen goes on to present the views of a range of scholars, including Beth Ann Basein who claims that by connecting women with 'the most passive state occurring, that of death', Poe has done damage to the 'self-image and aspirations of generations of vulnerable readers' and advocates, in perhaps a moment of extremity, that Poe's imagery be 'exorcised' from contemporary culture.²⁵ Bram Dijkstra has explored the way that the 'dangerous fantasies' of nineteenth-century culture where which 'woman in a state of sickness unto death' became an 'icon of virtuous femininity' permitted the implementation of a suppression of women. She concludes that such images 'constituted a further step in the marginalisation of women.'²⁶ All of these analyses feed into Bronfen's work, however her conclusion is perhaps the most radical and enlightening; she argues that it is the superlative nature of Poe's statement that is of most interest:

[T]o speak about representing 'feminine death as the most poetical topic' means speaking of an aesthetic moment of excess. It is a superlative theme because it marks the moment where a text turns back on to itself, where it undoes its own premise, where it discloses what it sets out to obscure – a hypertropic moment.²⁷

For Bronfen the categories of death and femininity are inextricably linked and it is this moment of 'excess' that undoes the separation between death and femininity.

Just as Bronfen reads the 'death of a beautiful woman' as necessarily encompassing more than a specific instance and sees the combination of death and femininity as 'hypertropic' so too Tiquun see the category of the Young-Girl as capacious enough to contain that which is neither young nor a girl (within the narrow parameters of those terms). Tiquun are a French philosophical collective whose members retain anonymity in their writings. Their highly influential work of philosophy

²⁴ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 60.

²⁵ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 59.

²⁶ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 59.

²⁷ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 63.

Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young-Girl (translated by Ariana Reines) opens up the category of the Young-Girl so that in Tiquun's conception it can be argued that:

The resplendent corporate advertising retiree who divides his time between the Cote d'Azur and his Paris office, where he still likes to keep an eye on things, is no less a Young-Girl than the urban single woman too obsessed with her consulting career to notice she's lost fifteen years of her life to it.²⁸

Tiquun's thesis is that the Young-Girl stands in for the ultimate consumer; she is simultaneously anodyne and hypersexual. She is 'simply the *model citizen* as redefined by consumer society since World War I in *explicit* response to the revolutionary menace' [emphasis original].²⁹ Various strands emerge in Tiquun's formulation of the Young-Girl, she is vain and image-driven: 'The Young-Girl is struck by sudden vertigo whenever the world stops revolving around her'³⁰ and 'The Young-Girl desires the Young-Girl.'³¹ This echoes Bronfen's description of the 'hypertropic moment' when the theme of death and femininity 'discloses what it sets out to obscure'³²: beneath the Young-Girl is the Young-Girl and she desires only to replicate and proliferate.

The Young-Girl not only reproduces but also becomes the ultimate, vapid consumer: 'new breasts for my 18th birthday.'³³ Tiquun posit that the figure of the Young-Girl is closely related to capitalism, they say that: 'By investing young people and women with an absurd symbolic surplus value, by making them the exclusive carriers of the two new kinds of esoteric knowledge proper to the new social order – consumption and seduction – Spectacle has effectively emancipated the slaves of the past, but it has emancipated them AS SLAVES.'³⁴ This slavery can take the form of disparate coercive labour practices: the labour of sex; the labour of silence; the labour of

²⁸ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 14.

²⁹ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 15.

³⁰ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 28.

³¹ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 48.

³² Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 63.

³³ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 52.

³⁴ Tiquun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 25.

factory work; the labour of being desired:

They prefer silent pornstars – mute, without discourse –not because what pornstars have to say would be intolerable, or excessively crude, but on the contrary because, when they talk, what they say about themselves is nothing but the truth of all Young-Girls. “I take vitamins to have nice hair,” one of them confides. “Taking care of your body is a daily job. It’s normal, you have to work on your appearance, on the image people have of you.”³⁵

This is a phenomenal critique of so many aspects of the Young-Girl’s experience revealing that even when she is allowed a voice, that voice is perceived as empty, shallow, and vain. I would argue that the only communication between the Young-Girl and the not-Young-Girl is characterised by the pointless, nihilistic labour that goes into the reproduction of the Young-Girl.

This nihilistic labour is by no means confined to pornographic or aesthetic representation. The disposability of the Young-Girl is the thesis of Melissa Wright’s book *The Disposable Woman*. Wright argues that there is a symbiosis between the women employed in slave-labour conditions in the Global South, and the cheap, plastic products they produce. In an eerie congruence with the thesis of the Young-Girl, Wright describes a plant in Doangguan, China, and the conditions under which women produce plastic caps for motors. Here, I will reproduce a lengthy passage that describes an encounter with one of the plant managers:

“We have problems with quality in Plant I. That is where we have our biggest problems.” To emphasise his point, he held up a partially assembled 1.5-horsepower motor, its unattached wires dangling as evidence of its uselessness. He placed it back on the shelf, next to several motors in the same shape. “Many problems. Too many,” he said, and then, ensuring that I understood how the problems in the motors had to do with the problems on the line, he directed my attention to a woman who used a pair of pliers to twist two wires together before attaching a plastic cap. “This girl is good here, but there was one before her. She always thought about her boyfriend, always wanted to talk with him, so we told her to leave. We cannot have workers like that and make a good product.” Harry Chen backed up this assessment when he said; “We have too many defects in Plant I [the female areas]. The girls do not concentrate. They think of other things. We always have to watch them.”³⁶

³⁵ Tiqqun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 15.

³⁶ Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge, 2013), 38.

There is an obvious link made here between female sexuality and poor workmanship. In this brutal, post-Fordist environment, the female workers are expected to behave exactly as cogs in a machine with no personal life whatsoever. The problems of excessive emotion, lack of precision and defective work are the main areas identified by the manager, he attributes a causal link between girls thinking about their 'boyfriend' and any errors encountered. Tiqqun claim that 'The Young-Girl is like capitalism, servants, and protozoans: she knows how to adapt, and furthermore, she's proud of it' and that 'Like all slaves, the Young-Girl thinks herself to be much more watched than she really is.'³⁷ The girls described by the Doangguan manager are extreme versions of the Young-Girl, slaves to the capitalist structure which they inhabit, and perhaps, they are as watched as they believe, subject to a kind of hyper-watching where their very thoughts are intercepted. The plastic cap that the manager is so fixated upon, which the girl who thought too much about her boyfriend produced in a defective way, shows up the glitches in the system. Human error made visible through a faulty plastic product in this plant shows the interstitiality of the young girls working there, ghosts and glitches that give the lie to the capitalist machine. Melissa White's choice of title for her book indicates the parasitic relationship between capital and resource both in terms of materials and people (especially women). The logical extension of the disposable object is the disposable worker who is useful only so long as she behaves in a machinic, non-irruptive manner. The moment she refuses to do this, she is cut off from her livelihood, her means of support and consequently her life. Once she refuses or is unable to comply, the Young-Girl becomes the Dead-Girl.

Just as the Young-Girl has high cultural capital, so too the currency of the beautiful, young,, female corpse is high and is often used to reinforce patriarchal norms, or to justify excessive use of surveillance and enforcement. Conversely, dead women of colour are excised from the media and often rendered invisible. Jacqueline Foltyn, a death studies scholar, wrote an article recently called 'The Corpse in Contemporary Culture' that argues that we are still in thrall to Poe's 'most poetical topic':

³⁷ Tiqqun and A. Reines, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Los Angeles, CA : Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012), 19.

In our youth and beauty-obsessed culture, dead celebrities are more popular than live ones and any story about the gruesome murder of a pretty victim is a national obsession... sensationalised news coverage of young women and girls in danger is a difficult topic to address, precisely because it is such an accepted part of the North American and British cultural fabric.³⁸

Jacqueline Foltyn points to the worrying trend of dead celebrity worship in her work on the corpse. There is always something otherworldly about the celebrity and there is always sadism inherent in the elevation and subsequent debasement of those who fall into this dubious category. The dead, white, young girl is a perfect example of this kind of celebrity; she is the ultimate subject, subjugated and without agency. Yet she represents a kind of static perfection, unsullied youth and beauty, and JonBenét is the ultimate dead white girl.³⁹ Foltyn argues that the danger we face in perpetuating our obsessions with the missing white woman is that we give vicarious glory to those who abduct, violate and kill these women. Conversely, there are so many more images of missing white women in the media and in fiction as a result of Missing White Women Syndrome. This compelling fascination towards the image of murdered white women in Britain and North America is voyeuristic, sadistic and dangerous. This obsession is dangerous for the women of colour who are excised, disregarded and ignored, and also for white women on whom it shines its fierce, sadistic light.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jacque Lynn Foltyn, "The Corpse in Contemporary Culture: Identifying, Transacting, and Recoding the Dead Body in the Twenty-first Century," *Mortality*, no. 2 (2008), 99, doi: 10.1080/13576270801954351.

³⁹ Henry Giroux, a cultural commentator with an academic interest in the ways that childhood and innocence are used for political gain, describes the national obsession with JonBenét:

Throughout the first half of 1997, the case became a fixation in the press. Major media networks, newspapers, and tabloids besieged the public with photographs and television footage of JonBenét, dubbed as the slain little beauty queen, posing coquettishly in a tight dress, wearing bright red lipstick, her hair a bleached blond. The JonBenét Ramsey case revealed once again that the media gravitate toward victims that fit the dominant culture's image of itself. Children who are white, blond, middle class are not only invested with more humanity but become emblematic of a social order that banishes from consciousness any recognition of abused children who "don't fit the image of purity defiled.

And conversely:

Consider the case of a nine-year-old African American child, labeled in the press as Girl X. Girl X was raped, beaten, blinded, and dumped in a stairwell in the run-down Cabrini Green Housing Project in Chicago. The brutal murder aroused a great deal of publicity in Chicago but was virtually ignored by the national media. Race and poverty relegated the case of Girl X to a nonentity. (Henry A. Giroux, "Nymphet Fantasies: Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Innocence," *Social Text*, no. 57 (1998): 35, doi: 10.2307/466880).

⁴⁰ Missing white woman syndrome 'relates to the idea that stories about attractive, young, white females who go missing are more prevalent in the news to the exclusion of similar stories about other

There is a clear difference between real cases of murder and abduction and representational instances of the same crimes. Elisabeth Bronfen argues that ‘[a]ny theoretical insistence on a direct, unambiguous and stable analogy between cultural images and experienced reality defuses both the real violence of political domination and the power of representations.’⁴¹ I would argue that this is true up to a point, however when we consume and produce these narratives we are politically and morally complicit and must use our privileged position to offer centrality to marginalised voices, rather than to reproduce old patterns of exploitation. To make a distinction between real, lived, violence and fiction is essential, however the category of Dead-Girl can encompass both reality and representation not in order to defuse, but to make acute the horror of violence against women and young girls of all ages and genders.

3.3 Queering Necrophilia

This section will continue to illuminate the trope of cultural necrophilia in order to produce a queer reading of the Dead-Girl by reading against Lee Edelman, and to some extent, Leo Bersani, and with Judith Butler and Lisa Downing.

The death drive and the pleasure principle are closely related to trauma theory but distinct from necrophilia. There has been much scholarly work on the death drive since Freud, not only in trauma theory but in queer theory too. Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman have both written extensively on queer theory and the death drive and both scholars complement Lisa Downing’s queer-inflected work on necrophiliac sexuality. To begin, I will offer some background into the practice and fantasy of necrophilia.

According to forensic psychiatry, necrophilia can be described as ‘sexual arousal stimulated by a dead body. The stimulation can be either in the form of fantasies or

demographics.⁴⁰ Missing white woman syndrome⁴⁰ One image that is common to most missing white woman cases is that of the missing person in question being portrayed as a loving and loyal family member. Pictures of the missing white woman with their husbands and families are commonly seen in media reports. Descriptions of the victim’s appearance are also common: Laci Peterson was regularly described in terms of her “glossy hair, big dimples, and a huge smile” (Moody et al., 2008, p. 13). Emphasis was also placed on youthfulness, with the age of each missing white woman being emphasized repeatedly. These humanizing descriptions of each victim allowed audiences to connect with them on a deeper level rather than seeing them as just another face. This cannot be said for missing black women, however, whose ages were given in only 39.5% of stories, as compared to 60.5% of stories about white women (Moody et al., 2008). Exact ages were more likely to be reported for white women, while black women were more likely to be called simply a “young woman” (Moody et al., 2008). (Missing White Woman Syndrome: How Media Framing Affects Viewers’ Emotions Lindsey Conlin and William R. Davie Electronic News, Sage Publishing (2015), 1, doi:10.1177/1931243115572822).

⁴¹ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 59.

actual physical sexual contact with the corpse.⁴² The DSM IV⁴³ states that the criteria a necrophile must meet in order to be diagnosed are the following: ‘the presence, over a period of at least six months, of recurrent and intense urges and sexually arousing fantasies involving corpses which are either acted upon or have been markedly distressing.’⁴⁴ According to the same source, most reported cases of necrophilia involve heterosexual males between 20-50.⁴⁵ Partly in response to the pathologising, medical model for understanding necrophilia, psychiatrists Jonathan Rosman and Phillip Resnick reviewed 122 cases that dealt with necrophiliac acts or fantasies and published their work in the 1989 article “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia.”⁴⁶ Their findings subverted expectations of the types of individuals who engage in this behaviour. Firstly they discovered that of the necrophiles that they analysed, 86% had IQs above 100. They say that ‘Necrophiles have been characterised as mentally deficient, psychotic, and incapable of obtaining a consenting sexual partner. Our data suggests that these views of necrophilia are incorrect.’⁴⁷ In spite of the DSM IV’s insistence on the necrophiliac act being a paraphilia which limits the sexual field to a single, desperate act, Rosman and Resnick’s analysis was that a significant proportion of the necrophiles they investigated were driven not by lack of alternatives, but rather that they were expressing ‘polymorphous perverse sexual desires; and a need to perform limitless sexual activity.’⁴⁸ Rosman and Resnick’s findings support Lisa Downing’s psychoanalytic reading of necrophilia as multivalent and plural, essentially as a model of sexual desire in the same mode as the reproductive imperative:

⁴² For more on this see <http://www.forensicpsychiatry.ca/paraphilia/necro.htm>

⁴³ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health has come under criticism for its pathologising, box-ticking, approach to mental difference, and may be peculiarly unsuited to dealing with a phenomenon such as necrophilia.

⁴⁴ For more on this see <http://www.forensicpsychiatry.ca/paraphilia/necro.htm>

⁴⁵ For more on this see <http://www.forensicpsychiatry.ca/paraphilia/necro.htm>

⁴⁶ Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* no. 17 (1989), 153–163, available at <http://www.jaapl.org/content/17/2/153.full.pdf>

⁴⁷ Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* no. 17 (1989), 156, available at <http://www.jaapl.org/content/17/2/153.full.pdf>

⁴⁸ Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* no. 17 (1989), 159, available at <http://www.jaapl.org/content/17/2/153.full.pdf>

The very structure of necrophilia, according to our reading, is one in which identification and desire intermingle. It is a radically narcissistic type of desire, as its original object is neither mother nor father but a concretisation of the self's auto-destructive death wish. Following this model, necrophilia may be read as the natural resort of the libidinal adult who retains a keen sense of the originally self-focused death drive. The structural model of necrophiliac desire that I am proposing using psychoanalytic theory looks something like this:

Death Drive = strongest drive in pre-verbal infantile life. Inability to distinguish between self and other. (radically a drive to suicide.)

Maturation entails the formation of the unconscious and an awareness of the other. The unconscious is unable to conceive of its own death, so death drive meets libido and is directed towards an object.

Necrophiliac perversion = the sexual desire to recognise my death through the other's death. May be sublimated, symbolised or fed into literary expression. The implication, then, is that a profound need is met by the formulation 'the death of the other.' The image of the dead other in literature would be the nexus of a complex relation to self and object. The libidinal desire for the death of the other, in order to enjoy a vicarious recognition of one's own death, is one psychoanalytic definition we might propose for the dynamic underlying the perversion of necrophilia.⁴⁹

Downing argues that if the pleasure principle can be linked to the death-drive, the ultimate aim of zero tension, this accounts for the radical immobility of the necrophile's object of desire. In other words:

Reducing necrophilia to a single, highly taboo act serves to distance us from its complexities. By maintaining focus on the alien nature of the behaviour, we do not have to consider the extent to which the necrophile's desires and unconscious fantasies may resemble yours or mine, and may have wider cultural implications.⁵⁰

This reading of necrophilia as a cultural process that can help negotiate our relationship with mortality and finitude, rather than specifically as an aberrant sexual practice, is at the heart of redemptive necrophilia. Much as the pro-object in the last section was a means of moving beyond the negative associations of abjection to encounter the radical

⁴⁹ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 54.

⁵⁰ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 3.

possibilities which abjection offers, this section interrogates the use necrophilia as a tool of redemption, a positive recasting of that which is almost always seen as Other, alien and immoral.

Of course, for many people, the idea of any interaction with a corpse, let alone intimate, sexual contact is horrifying in the extreme. The previous chapter engaged in detail with Kristeva's work on abjection and for her the most abject figure was the figure of the corpse. Death alone could not account for the horror and revulsion experienced by most individuals in the presence of a corpse. For Kristeva, it is this 'frisson with the biological reality of death, confronted more easily through the substitute or the symbol - refuse, waste and wounds, or, as an exemplar, the corpse'⁵¹ that accounts for the most extreme abject response. Kristeva's description of the corpse as a site of ruin, disease, and decay is reflected in Lisa Downing's discussion of the conditions and drivers for necrophilia in 19th century France. In this context she describes the specific matrix of death, contamination, and physical proximity produced through over-crowding, disease and poverty⁵² as a driver for these conditions. She says 'On the socio-economic level, the mortality rate was high for much of the century and several epidemics raged through newly-industrial France, breeding and killing in the claustrophobic intensity of crowded tenement buildings.'⁵³ It is the proximity to both death and disease that leads to literary and cultural obsession with necrophilia. This resonates with the bacterial, contamination theory of Michel Serres, whose book *The Parasite* is readily aligned with Downing's reading of disease-ridden France. Serres makes the connection between the work of the body to breathe, to pump blood and oxygen, and the broader category of work: 'Oxygen feeds the heat of our lives, but ageing is an oxidation. It works because it doesn't work.'⁵⁴ His Neo-Marxist reading of the relationship between producers and consumers takes on the wider analogy of the host and the parasite, with spoiled food, maggots and bilious proteins standing in for the vampiric association between the owners and the workers. This analogy is closely related to the 'cesspool' of Kristeva and the 'epidemics' of Downing:

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

⁵² For a comparable recent phenomenon, where a cultural response is formulated due to proximity to death and disease, see this article on 'Ebola Pop': Sam Emden, "Ebola Pop Is Taking Over Liberia," *NOISEY*, September 1, 2014, http://noisy.vice.com/en_uk/blog/a-bunch-of-musicians-in-liberia-want-to-educate-people-about-ebola-with-music.

⁵³ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 9.

⁵⁴ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 72.

Death is the end of work. Life is work, simply, and work is life itself. Certain pale, cadaverous shades move about, wandering in a world like some netherworld, almost dead already, and even greedier, thirstier, for fresh blood, the blood of those who work. Innumerable vampires and bloodsuckers attached in packets to the rather rare bodies of the workers. To every major work is attached a descent into the underworld as an index that there really is work.⁵⁵

Serres here neatly captures the argument that Freud makes in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” that to live and to strive for life, is to work, and this work is in opposition to the tension-free state of the death-drive. So if to work is to live, and to cease work is to attain peace, then the death-drive can be considered a logical extension of the pleasure principle. Downing reads Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ in similar terms: ‘The ultimately desirable state of the nirvana principle (the radical nothingness that is the aim of the death drive) is ambiguously close to the pleasure principle (the reduction of tension to zero), which is usually linked to the life instinct.’⁵⁶ Downing argues that if the pleasure principle can be linked to the death-drive, and the object is to reduce tension to zero, then perhaps this accounts for the radical immobility of the necrophile’s object of desire.

This theory accounts for the potential motivations of the necrophile, but it is important to also consider the objects of their desires. Rosman and Resnick’s study estimates that in spite of the potential for excessive, or even ‘limitless’ sexual activity, the actual expression of necrophiliac activity was still largely confined to heterosexual males engaging with female corpses.⁵⁷

Downing’s queering of necrophilia and the death-drive in response to Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is extended and politicised further through Lee Edelman’s influential work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman argues that rather than looking to a hetero-procreative futurity, queerness should align itself to the death-drive precisely because this disrupts and subverts dominant ideological norms. Edelman’s work could be considered a polemic; a queer call to arms

⁵⁵ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 87.

⁵⁶ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 47.

⁵⁷ Jonathan P. Rosman and Phillip J. Resnick, “Sexual Attraction to Corpses: A Psychiatric Review of Necrophilia” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* no. 17 (1989), 156, available at <http://www.jaapl.org/content/17/2/153.full.pdf>

in the face of increasingly assimilationist and heteronormative strategies for LGBT rights. However, where Downing's thesis of necrophilia as an alternative model of sexual desire rests on a continuum with procreative sexuality is defined by contact with its opposite, Edelman's book is more rhetorically static. In fact one argument against Edelman's polemic could be that he does not allow for a range of queerness in his formulation. Queer couples or groups can be capable of procreative sexuality that is non-assimilationist.⁵⁸ This would potentially undermine the strength of Edelman's description of non-reproductive queerness as 'threatening an end to the future itself':

To be sure, the stigmatised other in general can endanger our idea of the future, conjuring the intolerable image of its spoliation or pollution, the specter of its being appropriated for unendurable ends; but one in particular is stigmatised as threatening an end to the future itself.⁵⁹

This high rhetoric is theoretically productive, highlighting as it does the hidden prejudices that apply to non-reproductive queer sexualities, prejudices that are intensified by a thrilling fear that the very future of the human race is at stake. Edelman's poetic use of 'spoliation' and 'pollution' conjure images of organic putrescence, death and decay. However, unlike Downing's more expansive models of queer necrophiliac sexualities, Edelman's aim is to politicise a very specific line of thought, and he uses the 'spectre' of death to flavour his argument rather than to facilitate it.

Leo Bersani writes extensively on the topic of redemption, and specifically, redemption as it applies to art and to the death drive, as such his work is particularly suited to uncover meaning in *Memoirs*. For Bersani the 'culture of redemption' is in opposition to his reading of culture as narcissistic, erotic production. He argues that a conservative impulse exists in the drive towards wholeness that exists in a redemptive reading of cultural texts. For Bersani this drive is exemplified in the psychoanalytic theory of sublimation:

⁵⁸ For a recent example of a queer familial constellation read about the five parents (three men and two women) who are about to have a baby together in: Noor Spanjer "These Five People are about to have a Baby Together" *VICE* (August 4, 2015) at <http://www.vice.com/read/a-child-in-the-netherlands-is-going-to-have-five-parents-876>.

⁵⁹ Lee Edelman, *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 115.

Sublimation is not a liminal or unnecessary psychoanalytic concept; rather it is the concept that, by legitimising psychoanalysis' claim to being a philosophy of culture, can either reinforce or threaten its strained complicity in the culture of redemption — in a notion of art as making over or repairing failed experience. The theory of sublimation that defines art symptomatically must itself be seen as a symptom of psychoanalysis' uneasy relation to its own radical views on sexuality and culture — more specifically to a view of art as nonreparatively or nonredemptively eroticised.⁶⁰

For Bersani sublimation can be seen as a disguise or a way of legitimising that which is threatening, violent, or dangerous. Bersani argues that in order to justify itself psychoanalysis uses the theory of sublimation to 'define art symptomatically', to see 'art as making over or repairing failed existence' and this is at odds with valuing art as 'nonreparatively or nonredemptively eroticised.' Bersani is suspicious of claims 'that the work of art has the authority to master the presumed raw material of experience in a manner that uniquely gives value to, perhaps even redeems, that material.'⁶¹ Bersani's argument is that reading art as redemptive, in the sense of making what is shattered whole, is disingenuous and cowardly. He is also suspicious of the ability of the artist to master the raw materials of tragedy, violence or erotics in order to 'redeem that material.' The word 'mastery' is important here, echoing as it does, Freud's argument on traumatic repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁶² By linking the (failed) mastery of the artist to the (failed) mastery of the trauma victim over their 'raw material', Bersani touches on a larger question, for both he and Freud; that of the continued existence of the human race:

The interest of Freud's argument lies in his effort to account for the very survival of the species. How, he asks, does a living organism manage to continue to exist, even to exercise a certain mastery over its environment, in a world where the odds of stimuli exchange are overwhelmingly against it?⁶³

Here, Bersani returns us to the death drive, the implied desire to return to an inorganic pre-living state. Freud has come up short when trying to account for human survival; his analysis dictates that a striving for death is far more understandable than an agonising

⁶⁰ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 35.

⁶¹ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.

⁶² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, (Penguin, 2003).

⁶³ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 52.

struggle to master the environment. This is where Bersani and Freud become theoretically aligned; both see the horror of mastery, the pain of repetitious trauma. For Freud this can be ameliorated by a return to the death drive, to a state of tensionless nirvana, for Bersani, mastery can be replaced by ‘nonredemptive [...]’ and ‘nonreparative [...]’ erotics.

In the final sections of this chapter the protagonists of the novels discussed remind us that though necrophilia is alien, Other and arguably amoral there is also a queer, positive reading that can be excavated through the practice. In *Memoirs*, there is a clear drive towards repetition; the death of JonBenét is reproduced, repeated and the painful experience is raked over from various angles. However, this does not lead to mastery, failed or otherwise, over the material. The author is not interested in a traditional healing narrative of the sort that Bersani decries in his work on redemptive psychoanalysis, discussed below. Rather, this novel is concerned with a redemptive necrophilia that addresses the trauma of JonBenét’s death, whilst retaining a messy, creative, and wholly unexpurgated erotic dimension. The polymorphous perversity of JonBenét is enacted through her multiplicity of personae (her adult, teenage, and nonhuman bodies), and through the queer strategies that Du Plessis brings to the reading of JonBenét as phantasmatically abjected. In *EVER*, the unnamed protagonist explores autonomous erotics that allow her to process, creatively and positively, the incestuous abuses that she has been subjected to.

According to Lisa Downing’s psychoanalytic model of sexual maturation⁶⁴ we use necrophilia as a means to recognise our own deaths. Her model posits that the immature death drive of the pre-Oedipal child is displaced during unconscious formation and returns as necrophilia, which is used as a way to recognise one’s own death through death of the other.⁶⁵ In Du Plessis’s novel we are acutely aware that JonBenét is attempting this recognition through confrontation with her own death. In this way the character of JonBenét can be considered as practicing a form of redemptive necrophilia. However, in giving JonBenét a voice and the ability to shape shift into Kathy Acker, a smart, mature feminist, Du Plessis does not solely exploit the death of JonBenét: rather he attempts to reach beyond the angelic pageant role, beyond the

⁶⁴ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 54.

⁶⁵ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 60.

bloated corpse, and imagines what would JonBenét have been like, what her potential was, reaching beyond the salacious victimhood she represents.

3.4 Illuminating the Dead-Girl

In Blake Butler's *EVER*, the queer sexuality of the Dead-Girl is given erotic centrality, here read traumatically through flashes of sublime glow that saturate the text. This crime scene shimmers through the body of the anonymous Dead-Girl at its centre. *EVER* is a novella that follows an unnamed female protagonist as she explores her home, a home to which she is uncannily fused. There are flashbacks to traumatic, violent encounters and it is impossible to decide on a hierarchy of past and present, of true and false. The text can be read palimpsestically through the application of Luminol Theory in order to illuminate the horror below the (admittedly bizarre) suburban setting. Just as *Memoirs* is a horror story about Middle America, so too *EVER* is a horror story about the nuclear family.

Eugene Thacker's *Starry Speculative Corpse* is a book on the horror of philosophy, rather than the philosophy of horror. The phenomenon that gives the book its title comes from Ray Brassier's description of the end of the universe, a state where every 'star in the universe will have burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsing matter' until finally in a state 'cosmologists call "asymptopia," the stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles.'⁶⁶ Thacker, in his gloss on this entropic state, describes the fate of humanity to 'do nothing but carry around a corpse that itself carries around the sullen grey matter that occasionally wonders if the same sullen stars that occupy every firmament at every scale occupy this starry speculative corpse.'⁶⁷ This concept of the 'starry speculative corpse' can be applied to the Dead-Girl in Butler's *EVER*: she is always already dead, her entropy is as a result of a violent erotic charge that only proliferates after her death, and she is illuminated by luminol in an analogy of Thacker's 'sullen stars.'

EVER has a radical approach to narrative: the female protagonist is conflated with the structure of the house that she occupies and often appears to speaking through

⁶⁶ Eugene Thacker, *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 2* (Washington: Zero Books, 2015), 167.

⁶⁷ Eugene Thacker, *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 2* (Washington: Zero Books, 2015), 168.

the architecture of the building as much as from her own body. In *EVER* there is a strong relationship between sexuality, flesh, and spatiality. Brian Evenson argues that Butler ‘explores the way bodies swell and contract, going from skin to house and back again. And the way houses too shrink to fit us first like clothing and then like skin and then tighter still. The result is a strange, visionary ontological dismemberment that takes you well beyond what you'd ever expect.’⁶⁸ This is a useful way for understanding the *Alice in Wonderland* weirdness of the way that the unnamed female protagonist fits into her home. She becomes part of the furniture, her teeth and hair become decorations, there are endless, capacious rooms that are full of hauntings, dead mothers and blood, yet the house is so small that she has to crawl through it and often gets devoured by the shrinking walls or the hungry bath. This book posits the crime scene *as* violence; traces of luminol are impossible to remove from the flesh or fabric of the protagonist and her home.

EVER presents the female body of the protagonist as both an instantiation of the Dead-Girl and as a living crime scene. The uncanny conditions of the text conflate home, womb and tomb and the crimes committed against and by the protagonist are traceable through an unholy luminol glow that lights the narrative. The woman as house is the return of the repressed; she bleeds beyond the borders of structure and exists as radical excess. In *EVER* there is an uncanny geography of fat female flesh; a flesh home that is at once desirable and terrifying. Though I find Evenson’s description of the book as achieving ‘ontological dismemberment’ a useful one, there seems to be more evidence pointing towards an ontological wholeness, a fusion of flesh and home, womb and tomb, that is insoluble. Freud’s theory of the uncanny offers a gloss on this insolubility as he discusses ‘neurotic men’ who feel that there is something uncanny about the female genital organs:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before,’ we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Blurbs on the back cover of Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 15.

There is a clear description of nostalgia, or homesickness for youth (in this case extreme, inter-uterine, youth) experienced by a man, for the body of a woman, in fact for time within the womb. This is a way of avoiding finitude by regressing to the pre-birth period; this strategy is doomed to fail. This neurotic ambivalence with regard to the female genitalia describes sexual attraction as a negative, immature experience, which avoids futurity at all costs in a relentless search for the past. This desire to be consumed by the body of the mother (or the mother figure as sexual partner) can be realised as a desire for fat female flesh: a fantasy of flesh as an all-consuming womblike structure.

In *EVER* there is a conflation between the homely and the terrifying: The plain, tract housing complex which is the setting for *EVER*, shows aggressively ordinary middle American homes to be places of horror, wonder and awe. The nameless female protagonist of Butler's *EVER* says: 'I found myself inside my sofa. Found I'd squeezed my skin between the crease'⁷⁰ and '[m]y muscles made a moor.'⁷¹ The ordinariness of the surroundings is seen as a backdrop to extraordinary, supernatural experiences, the sofa becomes a maze, a prison and an extension of the female body. The horror in Butler's work is at once banal and terrifying, there is no specific narrative arc, and no named victim. Butler shows horror to be inherent in the architecture of the novel; what is terrifying is the building itself, part female monster, part-haunted house. The protagonist is sometimes alive and sometimes dead; she occupies a haunted space where she speaks through the mortal and vivid woundings, which should have caused her death several times, somehow always delayed by the magic of the book. Her ambivalent status as between life and death can be related back to Freud's conflation of womb, home and tomb; the feminine monster is seen as such because of her uncanny ability to reproduce, and the way that her flesh becomes the crucible and repository of children. She is able to conjure alien subjects from her womb and is aligned to death or the tomb. This radical ambivalence is at the heart of *EVER* and yet it is the protagonist herself who embodies home, womb and tomb, that most uncanny of constellations.

Barbara Creed's extensive work on the 'monstrous feminine', reading into Kristeva's abject maternal, continues this investigation and is a useful text in terms of both the horror genre in general and the female uncanny in particular. In her book, *The*

⁷⁰ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 70.

⁷¹ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 29.

Monstrous Feminine (1993), Creed investigates the misogyny inherent in much contemporary horror, and explores representations of the feminine in the psychoanalytic and the symbolic, as well as through direct representation of female characters. Creed describes the womb in horror films as follows: '[t]he womb is represented in the horror film in at least two main ways: symbolically in terms of intra-uterine settings and literally in relation to the female body. In many films the monster commits her or his dreadful acts in a location that resembles the womb. These intra-uterine settings consist of dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a central room, cellar, or other symbolic place of birth.'⁷² That the monstrous feminine is experienced in the presence of the metaphorical womb is a staple of horror cinema, yet the intimate, probing gaze which is visited upon the metaphorical female body can also be read as a gaze trained on female flesh.

If the horror house is a womb-like structure its endlessness and excess can also be viewed as a rendering of the female body. When Butler describes the structure of the house in terms of viscosity 'Deeper down the liquid's thickness ate the glow and scrunched the space to gone'⁷³ we can begin to follow the disturbing liquid that 'ate the glow,' a liquid that is analogous to blood as it reacts with luminol. There is a strong connection here between the amniotic and the fleshly: just as the liquid continues to fill the space in an excessive, infinite way, so too female flesh is figured as a devouring, unstable force which takes up an infinite amount of space. The thick liquid fills the space and blots out the architectural structure; the space once perceived, is now gone. There is an echo of this function in Viedler's *Architectural Uncanny* that describes space as 'a devouring force' which 'pursues ... encircles ... digests ...'⁷⁴ Space in Viedler's conception can be seen as combining both the viscosity of flesh and the devouring space of the womb. The monstrous womb, as theorised by Creed, is here invoked as a kind of live burial, which holds a thrill even as it produces fatal results. Both Viedler and Creed are working through concepts from Freud's essay 'the Uncanny' and particularly through the *unheimlich* thrill of live burial:

⁷² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London; Routledge, 1993), 51.

⁷³ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 88.

⁷⁴ Anthony Viedler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 186.

To some people the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the uncanniest thing of all. And yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence.⁷⁵

This connection between the ‘thrill’ of live burial and a return to intra-uterine existence is one of the oddest aspects of the essay, and one that saturates those later critics who are influenced by the essay, including Creed and Viedler.

In *EVER*, there is also a conflation between womb, home, and tomb that echoes this passage in ‘The Uncanny’. The luminol ‘glow’ which has been ‘eaten’ by the liquid thickness, is referred to earlier in *EVER* as part of the body of the narrator: ‘My body, plump as ever—rung with soft-stitched patterns of grown-out glow. My bag of belly with no baby. My titties stung. My hair knotted full of where I’d been once.’⁷⁶ It is the empty womb, which causes pain to the narrator, and the glow that she has lost is subsumed, in the later passage to the womb-like structure of the house. Water is also explicitly related to the womb in this section of the book: ‘I felt an ocean, or something liquid, flushing through the insides of my skin, around my abdomen or womb. A gush or warming throb.’⁷⁷ This proliferation of slippery, watery excess connects the maternal to the fleshly; yet this gush of fluid could also represent the distended fat abdomen or sexual excretions. The cultural anxiety over the childless woman, considered to be dangerously independent is here intensified by the image of a woman who has a ‘bag of belly with no baby.’ Here the fat woman haunts as a symbol of the ambiguous woman who presents as maternal and reveals her secret; her belly is full and her womb is empty. As she functions as the *locus terribilis*, as the crime scene itself, this painful numinous glowing liquid can also be read as luminol in its excited state, causing an excess of energy that generates light.

It is the confusion of the space, the ambiguity between the womb of the home, the womb of the mother, and the womb of the protagonist, that aligns this novel to the monstrous feminine of Creed: ‘Representation of the womb as a place that is familiar and unfamiliar is acted out in the horror film through the presentation of monstrous acts which are only half-glimpsed or initially hidden from sight until revealed in their full

⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 17.

⁷⁶ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 38.

⁷⁷ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 33.

horror.’⁷⁸ The links between the wombs of the mother and daughter are one of the ways in which sexual attraction and desire are played out in *EVER*. This sadomasochism is played out through sensual and sexual experiences which relate to both the masturbatory and the gustatory: ‘The next room was stained with thrumming, beaten awful, seeping up with cruddy flesh, splashed in the seep of acid from certain stomachs’⁷⁹ and ‘I lay gummed up in the grunting, my skin against my skin. My mouth filled with old aromas of my stomach, in my goo.’⁸⁰ The necrophiliac relation between the protagonist and her dead wounded mother, her vanished father, the boys who come to the house to torture her and her masturbatory practices, are all part of the sadomasochistic fantasy narrative which is at the heart of *EVER*.

In Freud’s reading of the female genitals as an *unheimlich* or uncanny space for a man who experiences them, there is at least one gap that is not addressed; that of same-sex desire between women. For a woman, desiring another woman, there is likely to be less of an uncanny response, and this is explored in Butler’s text. In *EVER*, the figure of the father is seen as distant. However the relationship between the narrator and her mother is present, and full of anxious desire. The womb is described, sometimes obliquely, as an object that belongs interchangeably to the woman and her mother. Additionally, the home is also seen as an adjunct to both the woman and her mother. This is an impossible relation, just as the conflation of anatomy and building is impossible. In one description, the body of the mother is described as follows: ‘Her sores were smaller underwater. From above they looked like homes.’⁸¹ There is abject horror in the description, the sores which rend the body of the mother stretch and shrink under different conditions, the water, a stand-in for the fluid of the womb, relieves the violence and disease suffered by the mother. However, the more striking description ‘from above they looked like homes’ is unsettling; it combines a reminder that the home is always paired with the rotting female body, and it also shows that the uniformity of the tract houses, if viewed from above, can be considered a blot on the landscape, literal eyesores. The stretching action of the sores reminds the reader of the swelling female body; this swelling is intensified through the lens of the water that distorts and distends.

⁷⁸ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1993), 51.

⁷⁹ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 63.

⁸⁰ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 78.

⁸¹ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 42.

There are several examples of sexualised exchanges between the narrator and each of her parents, and these can be related back to Kristeva's theory of the abject. In *The Powers of Horror* Kristeva considers the psychoanalytic concept of the abject as that which is cast out of the symbolic order; neither subject nor object the (a)bject is *a-* or outside, beyond, the category of object or subject. For Kristeva the abject relates to filth and decay, corpses and shit: those things that force us to understand the horror of our biological mortality. Kristeva also dramatises the incestuous sexual desires that occur between child and parent in this category of the abject, or the horror too great to be realised. In *EVER* there are also sexual relations between the narrator and the house itself, and this sexual relation is framed as a narrative of rape, which opens up an investigation into narrative of sadomasochism and coercion.

Early in the novel, when the disoriented reader is still trying to feel their way through the world of *EVER*, there is a section which introduces the district, with its identical tract houses, which are largely empty after an unexplained apocalyptic event: 'Most of the homes remained undaunted, silent, though one man answered in his flesh bright white and ripped with rashing. I tried to understand.'⁸² This passage introduces the theme of home as sexuality, the homes themselves are anthropomorphised, they are 'undaunted.' The man who answers has bright white flesh, the expanse of which indicates nakedness, he is also 'ripped with rashing,' a violent, visual symbol of blood raised to the surface of his nakedness; the sexual implications are clear. If, as is evidenced in the rest of the text, women are conflated with their homes, then here the man inside the house answering the call with his 'rashing' flesh, can be seen as entering into some kind of sexual exchange with the house itself. Soon after this passage, there is the description of what is known as a 'warp' or shift in the atmosphere. The warp can be felt through the medium of the house, and household goods conduct the energy it releases; this energy is described in distinctly sexual terms: 'Sometimes there'd be forewarning—a small eruption, more luminescence, an ache or hum of heat in rising steam—though you couldn't recognise the warping til you'd lost a hand or head.'⁸³ This rise in pressure, leading to a loss of 'head or hand' can be considered in psychoanalytic terms as a fear of castration, or terror of the monstrous feminine. The luminescence can here be read as an example of luminol, a story rises to the surface once luminescence increases.

⁸² Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 5.

⁸³ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 8.

Another persistent glow through the narrative is that of the TV screen, at once a banal staple of the American home and a sacred machine of ritual. It is shown in all its uncanniness, its haunted, consuming, disembodied power shows the viewer more than first appears: 'I'd seen on TV as the fifty-yard line became a blister and all those padded men smeared to zero—how quick the broadcast went to blackness and then the blackness went to fuzz and then the fuzz went to an ad for breakfast sausage which I must say looked quite delicious.'⁸⁴ There is an interesting juxtaposition here between the blurred, sparking nature of the spaces between television programmes (the white noise and visual crackle which remains, often colloquially called 'snow') and the banality of the sausage advertisement. The glow of the television is here as sinister as the glow that 'scrunches the space to gone.'⁸⁵

This passage shows the sadomasochistic desires of the narrator, who conflates the smearing and zeroing of the athletic men on the screen with the deliciousness of sausage. There is a clear and humorous, link between the sadistic squashing of these men in their sexual prime, and the devouring of sausage meat: an absurd, yet everyday, marker of the phallic. This tendency toward sexual non-consensuality is heightened when the protagonist states 'I have heard there are men and women who fantasise of rape.'⁸⁶ The erotic devouring described here is a way into thinking about the constellation of fat, food and sex that positions women as culturally monstrous. The alienating otherness of the gustatory pleasure that the protagonist has in the fantasy of eating both sausage and footballers dramatises cultural anxiety over the devouring woman. This anxiety is a sadomasochistic one; the fear of being devoured by female flesh reveals an excitement, a desire. The unusual formation of 'I have heard that there are men and women who fantasise of rape' raises questions about normative cultural associations around rape and non-consensuality. In this formation, there are both men and women who fantasise of rape; implicit in this formation is the idea that both men and women may enact rape. By imagining a monstrous female who is capable of enacting violent sexuality, *EVER* presents a desire that is culturally taboo; which remains abject or outside the symbolic order.

Additionally to the sexual relation with the home, the narrator also has a set of fantasies and anxieties around her parents and a strong sexual attraction to the wounded,

⁸⁴ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 46.

⁸⁵ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 88.

⁸⁶ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 17.

potentially dead, mother: ‘All those old nights she’d spread beside me, writhed in reciting, her weird body humped and lumped and ragged—her voice still endless in my head now—a kind of drill or gum or gun.’⁸⁷ Kristeva explicitly formulates abjection in relation to the incestuous parental relationship and her theory helps to explore the way that the protagonist does not relate in any recognised way to her parents, but rather has a psychotic identification to them that is at once intimate and totally detached:

Essentially different from “uncanniness,” more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognise its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory. I imagine a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, “all by himself,” and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him—all gifts, all objects. He has, he could have, a sense of the abject.⁸⁸

In the same way that the child in Kristeva’s imagining has ‘swallowed up his parents too soon,’ so the narrator of this novel has devoured her own parents and is continually revisiting the cruelties and intimacies of their life together to try to understand the fright that she feels. Firstly, her relation to her father is elaborated: ‘Bled like those days when I was twenty and my whole womb’s load would spout out of me at once, and then again in repetition—in repetition—in—in—and. And. Bled like when even younger I cut my finger there in father’s shed and he’d take it in his mouth and suck and suck.’⁸⁹ This relation is strongly associated with devouring, eating and consumption, but it is also linked to menstruation, puberty and sex. In this reading menstruation becomes the abject object; it is excluded from the symbolic order through a double form of distancing; once by its destruction through consumption and once by historicising it to a past time. Yet, the devoured blood returns again and again; it enacts the return of the repressed. The repetition of ‘suck’ and ‘take it in his mouth’ implies a kind of comedic phallic inversion, yet it also highlights the sexual relation between the daughter and her father. The father’s shed is also symbolic, another temporary and banal space of ordinariness, where an extraordinary, bloody act has taken place.

The description of the relation between the narrator and her mother is more explicit: ‘In certain spots I heard a humming, some long, slow strum sung through the

⁸⁷ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 102.

⁸⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 5-6.

⁸⁹ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 6.

floor. At times it mimicked mother's tumour babble: nights I'd wake inside the house inside her howl, or humping hard against a bare wall, leaving wet imprints on the plaster.⁹⁰ There is a pleasurable sensuality inherent in the vibrations that the narrator both feels and hears through the floor. When she wakes 'inside the house inside her howl,' there is a synaesthetic quality to the experience. The howl of the mother is animalistic, and it is also a sexual sound—the ways in which these sounds are inescapable and thrum through the narrator's body and through the house, indicate that there is something of the primal scene here.⁹¹ That is, the compulsion and repulsion which the child feels in relation to seeing and hearing her parent(s) in ecstasy, read alternately as horror. By using the phrase 'humping hard against a bare wall, leaving wet imprints on the plaster,' there is, again, a link between sexuality and spatiality; the clear overtones of fucking are aligned to the materials of the house.

In *EVER* the house always returns. It is the repressed that haunts, the house is typical, ordinary and banal, as well as being the site for transcendental horror; in this way, it makes a perfect crime scene. Edward Bond's description of the psychotic crime scene in his book on Lacan and crime scene photography, *Lacan at the Scene*, is useful for understanding the nature of the house in *EVER* as a crime scene. Bond's theory is that the psychotic crime scene contains a chaotic jumble of the homely and the obscene:

Elements drawn from the familiar appear to be blurring and combining, their ordinary domestic contexts jettisoned. A packet of Coleman's Instant mashed Potato can be seen next to some worn lady's stockings. Next to this is a large piece of polythene and other textile garments and what looks like underwear discarded on a large pile of unprotected LP records (fragile objects, designed to be carefully returned to their sleeves), a torn book cover, a broken lampshade, fragments of crockery, a lone hair curler. A wider view of the scene—photograph 4.2—reveals a saucepan inexplicably placed on a bedroom cabinet, waste receptacles overturned or unused. In photograph 4.3, a suitcase is depicted with a large hole in it, its contents accessed unconventionally.⁹²

⁹⁰ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 6.

⁹¹ The primal scene according to Freud is the child's first sighting of a sexual act, most often between their parents or parental figure that leads to trauma. According to Ned Lukacher 'The primal scene has conventionally been theorised as the observation by the child of the parental couple having intercourse; as, "the child's witnessing of a sexual act that subsequently plays a traumatic role in his or her psychosexual life."' (Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Cornell University Press, 1988), 24).

⁹² Henry Bond, *Lacan at the Scene* (London: MIT Press, 2009), 95.

In *EVER*, there is a close relationship to this psychotic crime scene; the narrator has no grasp on the space of her surroundings and chaos reigns. Objects proliferate and transform, people shift into inanimate objects and shift back again. The narrator says: 'In the room now there were several of me standing. There was me and me and me. So many kinds I could not remember, slabs of skin I'd long abandoned,'⁹³ and later 'All my other versions—I couldn't count them—some were so ugly—they swarmed around—standing, squatting, hung from the ceiling, eating dinner, spinning, touched—I could not look at most of them directly. One of me began to speak.'⁹⁴ This proliferation of selves is presented as homely, they do simple everyday things like eating dinner, but they also become similar to furnishings or light fixtures; they '[hang] from the ceiling.' In this way the house becomes chaotic, and the mundane tasks of living in it become tinged with lunacy and terror.

This kind of chaotic background becomes part of every action the narrator takes in the house. The very act of going to bed, to sleep, is charged with violence and pain:

When I slept with cotton wool in my ear holes (which also helped conceal the roof's in-caving creak, the gunfire and the shouting), the blood would gush up from my nostrils or an older bruise, even those considered healed. Or from my vagina (even in off-times). Or my knuckles or my mouth. Some days I'd wake to find the pillow sopping, chock full and black around the edges.⁹⁵

The violence is presented as being omnipresent. The sounds represent the human (shouting), the homely (the roof), and the murderous (the gun) all of which are essential elements of any domestic crime scene. In his chapter on psychotic crime scenes Bond posits: 'The dysfunctional locale is also a lawless space, a space where generally accepted rules do not apply, and transgression reigns.'⁹⁶ In *EVER* it would seem that the opposite is true, that in fact the dysfunctional locale that Butler has created is not a lawless space, but that perversion, psychosis and transmutations are the laws that hold the space together. It is the very dysfunctionality that allows the inhabitants of this house to exist. Those who have been described as lost, as from a distant past, are those whose behaviour is not psychotic, in the world of *EVER*, the fantastic, and the impossible, are the only modes of existence.

⁹³ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 68.

⁹⁴ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 68.

⁹⁵ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 23.

⁹⁶ Henry Bond, *Lacan at the Scene* (London: MIT Press, 2009), 65.

The house in *EVER* veers between being so tiny that the protagonist leaves smears of flesh and scrapes of bone along its plaster wall: ‘I pressed my teeth against my teeth. The keyhole saw me writhing,’⁹⁷ and so endless that it contains hundreds of impossible rooms. Both versions of the house remind the reader of the body of the protagonist. As she scrapes her body through the rooms we can feel her swelling to fit the space. Because she has already been conflated entirely with the house we see her body presenting as endlessly as the rooms described. The sheer repetitious onslaught of the descriptions of the rooms reminds us of the infinite nature of her body: ‘The next room was lined with shelves so high I could not see. Some soft choir overhead. Stink of paper rot. I had on a dress that had burned once in a fire.’⁹⁸ This room is infinite; there are shelves which go on forever and which are out of reach. ‘Some soft choir overhead’ conjures images of angels, religiosity and beauty; these soft, angelic, insubstantial figures are weighed against the carnal heft of the protagonist who is fixed firmly in the abject world of rot and decay. Her paper dress that has been burned in a fire connotes decay, death and sacrifice but it also creates an image of partial nakedness and uncovered flesh. By pitting the fleshly protagonist against her ghostly counterparts a central fictional binary is dramatised. Then ‘the next room was every person and their auras and their shit. *I almost stayed forever in this room.*’⁹⁹ There is playfulness between interior and exterior here: the room is excessive as it contains everything and also it contains itself. If the room contains ‘every person and their auras and their shit,’ we are seeing another abject/sublime marriage: shit belongs quite explicitly to the diseased and ugly world of the abject whereas auras belong to the sublime. These auras shimmer around the body of the Dead-Girl illuminating her polymorphous perversity; her starry speculative corpse.¹⁰⁰

3.5 Redemptive Necrophilia and the Future of JonBenét Ramsey

This section will return to the original crime scene that has haunted the narrative in order to train the luminol glow on the body of JonBenét Ramsey, the ultimate Dead-Girl.

The character of JonBenét tells us on the final page of *Memoirs*: ‘I see their little

⁹⁷ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 29.

⁹⁸ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 67.

⁹⁹ Blake Butler, *Ever* (Nairobi; Detroit: Calamari Press, 2009), 67.

¹⁰⁰ Eugene Thacker, *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 2* (Washington: Zero Books, 2015).

Christmas lights glowing and Boulder has never looked so much like toy town before. Snow Village. More landfill Americana for the twenty-first century. And they were hoping to keep me confined to the twentieth.¹⁰¹ This inability to contain the murder of JonBenét in the 20th century, this disastrous spillage of her presence into the 21st century is the ‘true theatre’ that Kristeva speaks about in her reading of the abject:

No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit, are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There I am on the border of my condition as a living being.¹⁰²

JonBenét living was always presented theatrically; almost no pictures of her exist without her platinum blond dye job, her monstrous make-up and hoop skirted polyester prom dresses. Yet the death of JonBénét presented through the detailed, and widely disseminated police reports on her mutilated body bring her into the realm of ‘refuse and corpses’; the true theatre which Kristeva speaks of. This uneasy ambivalence between purity and death makes JonBenét the perfect Dead-Girl.

Amongst other things *Memoirs* is a queer love story written by Michael Du Plessis to memorialise a break-up as well as an attempt to ameliorate the real death of a child by taking her beyond the pleasure principle. The real JonBenét Ramsey was not safe in Boulder, however, paradoxically, the fictional JonBenét *is* safe in Du Plessis’s fictional Boulder; she is already dead and cannot be hurt. Downing reminds us that in Freud’s famous essay ‘he postulates that the wish to return to an earlier, inorganic state is the primary and most pervasive drive of the human psyche.’¹⁰³ JonBenét in her form as a plastic doll in *Memoirs* is a necro-fantasy. She is inorganic, she is passive, yet she is not dead; she has a voice. Du Plessis uses the trope of the Dead-Girl to radically reimagine the clichéd perception of JonBenét as a doll-like sexual fantasy; a cipher for uncomfortable adult desires. Du Plessis allows the dead JonBenét to ask questions that are stark and distressing: ‘why am I dead?’ and ‘who killed me?’¹⁰⁴ Because these questions are addressed directly to us, the reader, we are implicated in her murder.

¹⁰¹ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 98.

¹⁰² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.

¹⁰³ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 47.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 92.

According to Downing's psychoanalytic model of sexual maturation, ultimately, we use necrophilia as a means to recognise our own deaths. Her model posits that the immature death drive of the pre-Oedipal child is displaced during unconscious formation and returns as necrophilia that is used as a way to recognise one's own death through death of the other.¹⁰⁵ We are acutely aware that in Du Plessis's novel *JonBenét* is attempting this recognition through confrontation with her own death. In this way, interacting with the character of *JonBenét* allows the reader to practice a form of redemptive necrophilia.

The fictional Colorado in *Memoirs* functions as a crime scene or a permanent shrine to the dead. Communion with the dead *JonBénet*, amongst others, is represented as a positive healing act. In *Memoirs*, Michael Du Plessis presents love as a queer strategy, in fact, the whole novel is a love letter to a dead girl who is standing in for the male partner whom Du Plessis lost during his time in Colorado. This is an example of redemptive necrophilia for both a dead girl and a queer relationship. Michael du Plessis wrote this book in 15 years after the death of *JonBénet* in 2011. One of the characters in *Memoirs*, the Blue Fairy, explains that this book is an 'overblown break-up novel about Boulder that uses [*JonBénet*] as a metaphor.'¹⁰⁶ This congruence of love story and murder story has a sticky logic that recreates the crime scene, Boulder, as the site of a teen love story and break-up. The insistence on *JonBénet* as a metaphor is somewhat disingenuous as she is given autonomy and a strong voice, plural voices in fact; she is no vacant cipher. The novel mirrors the ellipses and elisions in the real story of *JonBénet*, whose murder has never been solved. Another way in which Du Plessis positions *JonBenét* as a 'body that matters' is in his eschewal of medical reports, morgue recordings and other pitiless, bodily markers, in favour of a reconnection with and reclamation of the lost voice of the human child. Once a crime has been committed against a body, it is often the case that the medico-legal system will reproduce these crimes through violent incursions into the privacy and integrity of the body and the person. Du Plessis refuses these hegemonic positions and allows *JonBenét* personhood and autonomy.

Another of *JonBénet*'s bodies in the novel is that of the dead writer Kathy Acker. Acker is represented as a talking doll that has a string to pull which activates her

¹⁰⁵ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 47.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénet by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 93.

voice box, although the speeches that the doll makes might seem alien in the context of children's toys, not usually a site for radical political and sexual expression.¹⁰⁷ The decision to represent Acker as a talking doll is an explicit reference to a short story written by Acker in 1990 titled "Dead Doll Humility", which is in turn a response to Harold Robbins's attack on her for appropriating and repurposing a story of his in order to interrogate his racial and sexual politics.¹⁰⁸ Michael Du Plessis describes Kathy Acker as 'exactly twelve inches tall' and that 'the string of a voice box hangs down the back of her neck'.¹⁰⁹ Kathy Acker, in her story "Dead Doll Humility" describes the protagonist, Capitol, making a doll that looks 'exactly like herself' and 'if you pressed a button on one of the doll's cunt lips the doll said 'I am a good girl and do exactly as I am told to do.''¹¹⁰ This doll is obviously a parodic version of the feminine ideal, and it is interesting that in Acker's story the necessity for the creation of such a doll comes when Capitol is told by 'prominent Black Mountains poets, mainly male' that 'a writer becomes a writer when and only when he finds his own voice.'¹¹¹ Acker makes a travesty of this by producing a doll that represents Capitol's voice, and then having that voice constrained by the limitations of regulated femininity. As an aside, Acker mentions that Capitol 'didn't make any avant-garde poet dolls.' Michael Du Plessis reverses this omission by returning Acker to life as just that in his novel.

The final body that JonBenét inhabits is that of Tiffany. Though the fictional JonBenét does not die in the novel (she is already dead), Tiffany does. Tiffany is an important name in the recent history of Colorado; Matthew Murray murdered a young woman named Tiffany in 1997 in Colorado.¹¹² This Tiffany is an instantiation of

¹⁰⁷ One interesting instance of a talking doll being used to advance progressive, feminist values was in the episode of *The Simpsons* titled 'Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy' where Lisa Simpson helps to develop a talking doll which comes pre-loaded with phrases such as (15:22) 'When I get married, I'm keeping my own name' and (15:58) 'Trust in yourself and you can achieve anything.'

¹⁰⁸ Paige Sweet notes the following:

'The piece in which these explanations appeared, "Dead Doll Humility," was written by Acker in response to the demand made by Harold Robbins that she publically apologize for plagiarizing his work [...] By extracting Robbins' language and isolating specific linguistic cells Acker reveals the delivery system responsible for transmitting sexual and racial codes into narrative form: language.' (Paige Sweet, "Where's the Booty?: The Stakes of Textual and Economic Piracy as Seen Through the Work of Kathy Acker | Darkmatter Journal," accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2009/12/20/where%E2%80%99s-the-booty-the-stakes-of-textual-and-economic-piracy-as-seen-through-the-work-of-kathy-acker/>).

¹⁰⁹ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 71.

¹¹⁰ Kathy Acker, "Dead Doll Humility," *Postmodern Culture*, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.990/acker.990>.

¹¹¹ Kathy Acker, "Dead Doll Humility," *Postmodern Culture*, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.990/acker.990>.

¹¹² See footnote 26.

JonBenét: a slightly older version of the dead white blond girl, who stands in for the victims in a series of atrocities against women in Colorado, and beyond. Tiffany dies, not because she is murdered, but because she is ignorant. She dies a senseless, wasteful, teenage death from a drug overdose in her absent parents' house. The chapter titled "Tiffany Drowning in Ecstasy" has a double sense; that of the genuine death she endures of combined ecstasy overdose and water toxicity, and the implicitly pornographic currents of the title, attaching culturally to her as a pretty sixteen-year-old girl ripe for objectification. This chapter invokes the erotic dimension of the novel and offers a redemptive release through death for Tiffany. By allowing her access to a blissed out, inorganic state as an extension of her ecstasy-induced euphoria, Tiffany passes from childhood straight to death. She does not have to engage in the sexual, economic, marital, or social work expected of the adult woman. For Tiffany, all work, including the work of the body, has ceased.

Tiffany is presented as always-child, and more specifically, always-girl. She is dressed in glitter pink, with a tiara, sparkly nail polish, plastic high heels and all the trashy pageantry of a sweet sixteen. Alongside birthday cupcakes and candy, Tiffany ingests six heart-shaped ecstasy pills. Her ignorance of the drug leads to massive ingestion of water, and consequentially her death, that is imagined as drowning. In the act of dying, Tiffany becomes aligned with both the natural and artificial landscapes of Boulder:

She's drowning, right here, on the carpet of her parents' living room in Boulder, Colorado, while the Boulder Creek rushes past outside... When you drown in Ecstasy, the last thought you have is, this is not so bad. Or rather, when you drown in a suburban living room in Boulder, Colorado, from the water you drank because you thought you should drink a lot of water with Ecstasy.¹¹³

This suspicious unnecessary death of a young girl whose parents are irresponsibly absent reimagines and excavates the death of JonBenét. Tiffany relates the following thoughts in second person: 'You are presently drowning in your parents' living room, next to the sturdy Southwestern-style oak dinner table, glimpsing your reflection in the TV screen, black as a witch's mirror' and 'on the beige wall-to-wall carpet, on your sixteenth birthday with your friends going "GET UP TIFFANY YOU'RE SCARING

¹¹³ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBenét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 81.

US WHAT'S WRONG? GET UP!""¹¹⁴ At this stage of the narration, another kind of contraction is taking place, that of the bodily and the architectural, buildings and characters meld. Tiffany is 'drowning' in her parent's living room; she is becoming fused to the furniture, disappearing into the carpet as the 'witch's' mirror' of the television screen, casts it's otherworldly luminol glow on the scene.

In all of her guises the character of JonBénét has a sinister and inappropriate presence; she is a troubled teen who dies repeatedly, inhabiting various bodies. In the epigram to the novel 'For everyone who's died in Colorado. (It's never too late to write teen poetry.)' The drily ironic tone of *Memoirs* is set and it is suggested that there is titillation to be found in the death of a young, beautiful virgin, and that teen angst is not always worth the price. The epigram also playfully signals that the whole book is a kind of previously unrealised sublimation of teen angst and its origins lie in the nostalgic Boulder of DuPlessis's youth. This kind of teen death fantasy drive hinges on the cheapness and squalor of life and the transcendent narcissism of the potential suicide. The claustrophobia of teenhood is described repeatedly by JonBénét:

Nothing happens under the thick plexiglass Colorado sky that domes this snowglobe in which I've become JonBénét. It's midday, and it's very warm, and I'm in a Boulder bathroom, with dingy floral linoleum and no windows. Bathrooms never have windows in Boulder. But they do have mirrors, solid as the ones in mental hospitals, except that this mirror doesn't show anything of my perfect face.¹¹⁵

For JonBénét, the life she reclaimed, the teen years that she has gifted to her by the magic of this novel, are banal and worthless. Abjection is invoked in this description, specifically Kristeva's description of Auschwitz and the way that banal, ephemeral objects conjure feelings of horror and pain. As discussed in the previous chapter in the context of hyperabjection, Kristeva's discussion of children's shoes and dolls under a Christmas tree returns with force in this chapter's discussion of child murder:

¹¹⁴ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 82.

¹¹⁵ Michael Du Plessis, *The Memoirs of JonBénét by Kathy Acker* (Los Angeles: Les Figues, 2012), 4.

In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crimes reaches its apex when death, which in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science among other things.¹¹⁶

Kristeva's abject response to the Nazi crimes recalled by the dolls under the Christmas tree is invoked through the Christmas snowglobe in which JonBenét finds herself trapped. The ritual magic of childhood Christmases are compromised, sullied and made sickening by the reminder of the annihilation of so many children at Auschwitz. This use of the camp to highlight the obscene is a tactic used over and over again by DuPlessis in his conflation of the dead girl, the doll, and the snowglobe: a tactic that falls into Kristeva's category of the abject.

As previously discussed, Judith Butler responded to Kristeva's theory of the abject with some criticisms of its heteronormative paradigm. By focusing abjection so rigidly on the relation between the child and the mother, Kristeva potentially excludes queer positions. This argument can be extended here in relation to the body of JonBenét. In her book *Bodies That Matter* Butler articulates the potential problems with an understanding of abjection that potentially creates 'unintelligible' bodies; those which do not matter:

Given this understanding of construction as constitutive constraint, is it still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies? This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. How, then, might one alter the very terms that constitute the "necessary" domain of bodies through rendering unthinkable and unlivable another domain of bodies, those that do not matter in the same way.¹¹⁷

In *Memoirs*, JonBenét is one of these unintelligible bodies; she is an apparition and yet she is ignored. It is worth reproducing here, and commenting on, an even longer quotation from *Bodies that Matter* that discusses the uninhabitable body, to understand

¹¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 4.

¹¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), xi.

how Butler's critique of the abject can be used as a political strategy in this novel:

I," is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex; and (5) a linking of this process of "assuming" a sex with the question of identification, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications. This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection.¹¹⁸

One strategy for incorporating Butler's problematising of the abject into Kristeva's work is to consider the idea of pro-abjection. By this I mean that the character of JonBenét is phantasmatically abjected in *Memoirs*, she is a ghost who yet has none of the power accorded to such a phantom. She is doubly ignored as both murder victim, and later as apparition. She occupies the phantasmic space described by Butler, and yet there is a way to reclaim this abjection as positive; by binding Butler to Kristeva it is possible to form a new pathway of redemptive necrophilia, of the pro-abject. Though JonBenét is outside, is cast out and is abject, it is this position which allows her to assume disparate identities and different bodies. Michael Du Plessis offers a range of bodies to JonBenét, and they are all in some way bodies that matter. Kathy Acker, a feminist and respected writer, is a body that matters. Tiffany, as the apex of young feminine sexuality as a concretisation of Tiquun's Young-Girl has a body that matters. By inhabiting these bodies, JonBenét is assuming sex, is identifying with those bodies, and yet she also has autonomy outside them. This queering of the character of JonBenét can be considered a pro-abject strategy, and a means of redressing the balance of power in her favour.

¹¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), xiii.

Conclusions: Unearthing the Dead-Girl

One further future that can be imagined for JonBenét Ramsey is through her queer cousin, JonBenét Blonde, a London-based drag queen who uses JonBenét's narrative as a political and aesthetic strategy and in so doing memorializes the dead girl. Just as Joyelle McSweeney suggested that Ryan Trecartin's work *I/Be Area* showed his characters 'Wendy and Pasta, look like decaying cheerleaders, like Laura Palmer had she stood up in the plastic to direct *Twin Peaks*'¹¹⁹ so too JonBenét Blonde is like JonBenét Ramsey come back to autonomous life. McSweeney writes about this kind of mystic transmutation in her chapter essay on the theme of 'loser occult.' In this chapter she argues that:

Loser occult envisions a kind of leveled, ambivalent, invisible perpetuity without precedence or antecedence, not based on permanence but on decay, inflorescence, contamination. It rejects youth, youthful promise, power, vigour, resonance, and shared experience but allows for the possibility of weird mutation, arbitrary reanimation, coincidence, corrosion, drag, and psychic twinship.¹²⁰

JonBenét, Tiffany, and Kathy Acker are subject to this 'weird mutation', this 'arbitrary reanimation', 'drag' and absolute 'psychic kinship,' and JonBenét Blonde like Laura Palmer standing up in the plastic or like JonBenét lecturing at Boulder University, offers a creative, political, queer strategy for memorialising the Dead-Girl. In 'loser occult' what is hidden will always proliferate, generate, and contaminate. This is a version of the return of the repressed that deals in spoliation as renewal and mutation as reproduction. The Dead-Girl, unearthed, is electrified not by 'youthful promise' and 'vigour' but by 'decay', 'inflorescence' and 'corrosion.' Just as in Bronfen's argument, the aesthetic of the beautiful dead woman is excessive and reveals (produces an apocalypse of) what has been set out to be concealed (occulted) so too unearthing the Dead-Girl makes her more vital and vivid than ever. Luminol on blood that is three years old produces a more intense glow than on fresh blood and the longer the Dead-Girl is buried, the stronger her power is when she reanimates.

¹¹⁹ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), 154.

¹²⁰ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), 77.

The next section of the thesis, the creative section, attempts to reanimate the Dead-Girl, unearthing her body to illuminate her story in the hope that fiction can offer a voice to the Dead-Girl that she is otherwise denied. Whilst what JonBenét suffered, brutal rape and murder in her family home on Christmas morning, is an extreme and highly personal trauma there are elements of her case that resonate with more universal lived experiences of gendered violence. In fact, these currents of trauma, violence and gender flow equally through Du Plessis's fictional work, and through the true crime coverage of the case. Perhaps there is little substantial difference between the rendering of the crime as creative non-fiction and true crime. Du Plessis has appropriated and used the facts of a child's violent death to create a commercial, industrial product. However, he has also restructured the fabric of the case of JonBenét Ramsey into a new story, one that attempts to implicate an entire community, and by extension, a whole culture, (including the reader and writer of the text) in the death and veneration of JonBenét Ramsey. There is an attempt at communion with marginalised and silenced voices that would be impossible in any other format.

Dead Girl Scrolls: Unearthed Apocalyptic Fictions

Once the reel is lit, the splatter can be arranged in abstract blurs. Girls should be dropped suddenly against a wall, using a limbless drag to spread the blood. Use two vials of luminol and shake it out until the blue-glow scatters—astral—in the dormitory.¹

A similar efflorescence of dead women and girls, an inverted and death-leaning and unnatural fecundity, makes up the decomposing and reforming body of Notley's Alma, or the Dead Women—even the math of that title exposes its flexing crowded-ness, Death's revolving door, the fitful instability of multiplicity and individuality, a resulting instability in the syntax, and the twin conditions of scarcity and a useless excess this doubling creates.²

¹ Laura Ellen Joyce, *The Luminol Reels* (New York, NY: Calamari Press, 2014), 14. Original spacing.

² Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), 155.

4.1 The Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Scrolls as Apocalyptic Texts

Three shepherds (Muhammed edh-Dhib, his cousin Jum'a Muhammed, and friend, Khalil Musa) discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls serendipitously in the Qumran caves, West Bank in 1946; the scrolls were named for their proximity to the Dead Sea. These scrolls contain the key to ancient languages, cultures, and narratives that were previously occulted. There were dangers associated with telling these stories and the shepherds who discovered the scrolls risked their lives to reveal them to the world; they were unable to prove that they had discovered the scrolls legitimately, and feared that they might be accused of stealing them from a synagogue. In an uncanny doubling, the Nag Hammadi Scrolls, comprising 52 Gnostic tractates, were found a year earlier, in 1945, in a sealed earthenware jar. The mother of one of the farmers who discovered the thirteen leather-bound papyrus scrolls, written in Coptic and translated from Greek, burned one of the books in its entirety and parts of a second book were destroyed. These books were discovered in a mass gravesite, and are artefacts found at the scene of violence and death. This violence was overlaid palimpsestically with the later murder of six Coptic Christians³ on Christmas Eve 2010 at the site of Nag Hammadi. The murder was claimed to be in retaliation for the earlier rape of a 12-year-old girl. The congruence of Christmas, the rape of a young girl, and murder reads like a gloss on the earlier murder of JonBénet. The story is subject to traumatic repetition; it is the return of the repressed. The subjects of both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Scrolls are as uncannily bewitching as their respective discoveries: they speak of phantoms, apocalypse, repetition and ultimately, of the cadaver or the corpse and they are documents from the crime scene. Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* describes one Nag Hammadi fragment as 'a sort of futuristic ur-text for Abraham's account of the phantom, a strange figuring of what Derrida calls the arrivant ('a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived': SM, p. 196, n. 39).'⁴ This unhierarchised approach to narrative immediacy that jumbles history ('ur-text'; 'past') with future ('that which has not yet arrived'; 'futuristic') to invoke the phantom text is broadened out to describe a larger phantom effect. This phantom effect relates

³ "Egypt Church Attack Kills Copts," *BBC*, January 7, 2010, sec. Middle East, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8444851.stm.

⁴ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 285.

not to the abjection of the cadaver, but to the absence of the corpse of Jesus, whose body is no longer legible:

The various Gospel, Nag Hammadi and other accounts of seeing the dead Jesus alive again, together with the discovery of an empty tomb, constitute a testimony to what can be described, in Abraham's terms, as a vast phantom effect. Christian belief would be structured by the phantom effect of a figure whose reappearances beyond the grave, bolstered by the disappearance of his corpse, testify to unspoken or unspeakable secrets.⁵

Yet the empty tomb, becomes a crime scene, a place where the absence of a corpse does not signify the absence of legibility. The empty tomb, reproduced by the Nag Hammadi Scrolls is a crime scene. The Qumran caves, inhabiting the Israeli-occupied West Bank are crime scenes. The scrolls, which document these crime scenes, are the perfect subject for analysis with Luminol Theory for two reasons: firstly, they are apocalyptic, revelatory in nature; secondly, their true meaning is only accessible when forensic analysis of the papyrus scrolls using UV light, a blue chemical glow, is used to excavated layers of hidden narrative. The scrolls can only be read by first being unearthed, and then illuminated with blue light to slowly reveal hidden narratives. Dead Sea Scrolls scholars, James Van der Kam and Peter Flint, describe the usage of ultraviolet light on the fragmentary scrolls: 'As early as 1910, photography with ultraviolet light was being used on ancient documents. When a suitable ultraviolet source known as Wood's Lamp was invented in the 1920s, this method of reading manuscripts became common.'⁶ However, this technique, though it allows the excavation and illumination of hidden narratives, also destroys the ink; deleting history as it is revealed: 'Light can also affect the media used on papyrus. The inks on Egyptian papyri, being carbon black and red iron oxide, remain stable, but iron-gall ink, being an acidic product, ferric gallotannate, is less stable.'⁷ The chemical reaction between the ink on the papyrus and the ultraviolet light used to read it disintegrates and destabilises narrative materially. The potential for damage when using luminol at a crime scene is high – not only in terms of the corrosive mechanism of the chemical reaction in physical

⁵ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 285.

⁶ James Van der Kam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (A&C Black, 2005), 72.

⁷ Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 246.

terms, but also in the potential for misreading, misdirection, and ellipses in understanding when false readings are provided that can have material effects on both victims and suspects. Luminol Theory, similarly, has both a generative and destructive effect, reading buried histories, such as those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, whilst corroding pre-existing superficial narratives.

4.2 The Dead Girl Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a clear metaphorical intertext for the creative section of this thesis. This section will offer an explanation for the origin of each fiction (or scroll) and argue that each one reads as though it is unearthed, occulted material. This will return to strands of discussion from the introduction where a case was made for experimental fictions as peculiarly generative subjects for Luminol Theory.

This collection can be considered a guide to contemporary crime scenes including shopping malls, morgues, suburban homes, financial districts and the abandoned attics of billionaire drug addicts. These exquisitely sybaritic locations are complemented by forests and ancient waters and are the setting for rituals such as sacrifices, orgies and child murders. The final, culminant long story clusters the voices of all of the dead girls together.

‘The Luminol Reels’ is the final story in the collection; it connects the themes of both the creative section and the critical chapters of this thesis and interrogates in a creative-critical context the nature and limits of the crime scene, the Dead-Girl, the *locus terribilis* and cultic practices. Luminol is a metaphorical and material element of the ‘The Luminol Reels’ and as such the story offers a culminant reading through practice of Luminol Theory. Similarly to the texts discussed in the second chapter (*Skin Horse*, *Pageant*, and the *Book of Revelation*) *The Dead Girl Scrolls* acts as a gnostic, apocalyptic text that uncovers meaning and histories in a palimpsestic way through the accumulation and accretion of short narrative fragments. Just as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were discovered randomly, serendipitously in the desert, offering a hidden history, so too the *Dead Girl Scrolls* can be excavated for meaning in a ritualistic context.

Scroll 1: “Seizure”

This scroll was written in response to the death of Eva Rausing, billionaire heir to the Tetra Pak fortune, who was found dead of a drug overdose in her home in 2013. Her husband, Hans, had kept her body hidden in the attic room that they occupied in their vast London home. The attic was filthy, full of broken television sets, pizza boxes, and waste. He admitted to preventing her proper burial because he could not bear to be parted from her. This necrophiliac response to her death is one that is partially socially sanctioned through the trope of the devoted, heartbroken husband. “Seizure” combines research into the true case of Eva Rausing with experimental, dissociative techniques designed to alienate the reader. One such technique was to combine this material with a description of the art installation, *Seizure*, by Roger Hiorns. Hiorns’s sculpture took the form of pouring copper sulphite into an empty flat in the Elephant and Castle in South London. The liquid cooled and formed blue crystals on the surface of the walls, floor, ceilings, and empty bathtub and sink. By reimagining the sculpture as the site for Eva Rausing’s death, I aimed to take her death from the realm of melodrama or tragedy and recategorise it as an artwork. The bright, glittering blue that runs throughout the piece functions as an analogue for luminol. “Seizure” was commissioned by the journal *PLINTH* in 2014 and a version of this story appeared alongside work by writers whose work is relevant to this project. These writers include D. M. Thomas, whose novel *The White Hotel* repurposed a range of psychoanalytic, religious and poetic material in order to create a work of creative nonfiction, and Johannes Göransson, one of the writers discussed in the critical chapters. ‘Seizure’ combines an interest in the ritual, *the locus terribilis* and the Dead-Girl.

Seizure

Her body is a miracle in the house. Copper sulphite leaks from her. The sink blooms with a little mould, a little sparkle.

She hacks up gluey blood that glitters in the dark. He forms it into party loops, strung from every surface.

He sits with her and reads.

He licks his finger, dabs it through her crystals.

They dance. Each motion is blinding. She sinks, asthmatic, back into the bed.

There are thirty-one television sets in the room. No sound. Adults dress as giant rabbits on screen. The guilty glow of their skin is blued with static.

Later -- on his hand --a preparatory gob of spit.

Another television set shows matadors in their stiff, gilded jackets, their pulses visible at the throat as they stab at drugged beasts.

He picks up his viola and remembers nothing, not even nursery rhymes.

After -- he emerges like pyrite from her shudder.

The bow has been dismantled, the horsehair used to clean out rivulets and gulleys in the mineral creep.

His hand is rosin-muted, a soft, dry instrument. He drags it over E E E. The sound fills him up. There are no acoustics any longer, the notes bend back from crystallised surfaces and are swallowed.

There is a shaking as he plays. Her dolls, in their glass cabinet, judder inside his frequencies. The blue rot cracks a little, and unpins them from the wall. A minor avalanche hits the bed. Plastic arms, and glass eyes shower her; shards of celestine cut her face.

*

It has been a month since Christmas and their gifts are still wrapped. Except for one. She wears her favourite from him; a tiny golden spoon on a chain -- it nestles with her locket. A family photo sits in miniature on her clavicle. The taste of cocaine is sharp on her tongue as she rubs her thumb across the faces of her four children. There is a white sheet of nothing between her. She is gone.

*

He makes a fort for her from television sets, bubblewrap, pizza boxes; a humument of trash.

There are three rails of clothing beside the bed. Two of the rails are barnacled. Hems, waists, belts peek out. A ballgown cuts a swerve in the air, whip-sharp and encrusted. One rail is unscathed. He removes armfuls of clothing. He layers the structure with silk blouses, cotton summerdresses, anything light and sheer. The entrance is garlanded in lace panties, in black hose, in glossy hold ups. Soft through the fabric, the televisions hum white.

She stiffens beneath.

*

It has been four days and he moves at last. He enters the bath slowly -- lowers himself into sharps. Two candles are left; he lights one -- preserving the other. The room burns blue. A vamped cathedral of waste.

Next door even the flies are dying. They dive and taste and choke on gleaming dust. But they never seem to lessen.

He unplugs the televisions, all but one. It is tuned to an infomercial about costume jewellery. The presenter is very tall, her blond hair is close cropped. Her arm rattles with bangles, a gem flashes from her invisaligned teeth. Brittle, bright sounds come from her. He turns the set off.

He lets the dark settle.

She glows, unaided, in her cold pyre.

*

On the last day there is an electrical storm and he sees that he is fucked. Ash rises and turns the snow blue. The smell is obscene. A hollow creeps through the ground. A crater emerges. He cannot hide her any longer.

Men come. They wear white masks and bat away the heavy sweep of flies. They wear gloves as they dismantle his sculpture.

First they fill the evidence bags with her intimate garments -- jagged panties stiff with crystals, stockings, singed from the television heat. Then they dismantle the bier. They take hammers and break apart the television sets. The last section collapses. An awesome light floods in.

*

They place her on industrial scale. She is heavier than she looks. They slit the mulchy flesh and out pour her jewels.

Her ribs are wishboned -- the pacemaker gleaned from her innards. It has stuck at 348. The doctor shivers at the violence of this number in her body.

Her heart is a snowglobe; blue lace agate shimmers on to the gurney.

Her flesh is a sheet of rice paper that folds. It is unbruised.

She tests positive for five substances: kyanite; apatite; celestine; lepidolite; and chrysocolla.

She is nothing but crystal.

Her lips are silver foil. Two teeth remain in the pulpy yaw.

Scroll 2: “The Death Bell”

This scroll is a necropastoral work that can be read with Luminol Theory. Here, the *locus terribilis* is the contemporary City of London, with the Thames as the setting for an ancient form of child sacrifice. Again, this piece was informed by research into a true case. This time the case was that of ‘Adam’ the child whose torso was discovered in the Thames in 2001.⁸

‘Adam’ was transmuted into the character of Bea, a toddler murdered by her terminally ill aunt, Grainne, who has a hereditary condition that results in extreme insomnia and mental instability. The story is intertwined with a subplot that relates a Tinder date between a young woman and a city banker. The City is made strange and capitalism is invoked as a necropastoral infection indistinct from the violence of Grainne towards Bea. “The Death Bell” was anthologised in *The New Gothic* (Stone Skin Press, 2014) as an example of contemporary Gothic fiction.

⁸ Todd Sanders, “Imagining the Dark Continent: The Met, the Media and the Thames Torso.” *Cambridge Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (January 1, 2003): 53–66.

The Death Bell

Grainne could hear death again. The tops of her ears were pink and itchy; crusts of hard skin were beginning to form. She took the crochet hook out of her basket and worked them off in flakes, a swirl settling on the half-finished chair cover. It wouldn't matter, she'd wake up soon and her ears would be twice as bad, until, like when her grandmother had died, she'd hear nothing at all but the swish of blood, her ears gummed shut with pus and mucous. Now, all she could hear was a far off sweet tremble. Her great-uncle Jimmy had known what that meant, he had told her when she was four years old. That's the death bell my angel. I hear it too. The death bell, Grainne said out loud, knowing that this time it was for her.

Grainne was fifty years old. There'd not been much of a celebration when the half-century had hit. She was old-fashioned, even as a child, back home, she'd clung to her granny and sat in smoky rooms listening to half-understood gossip, whilst her cousins ran wild in the fields. Fifty suited her fine. Even in London, she had her local grocer, the Druckers, though it wasn't what it used to be at all, and mass, always mass. It had been a comfort to really settle into her spinsterish life. The women at work were always trying to get her to go out with them to happy hours and God knows what, even tried to send her on a blind date. One perky young madam had suggested they go clothes shopping. She had always been fond of her mother's good quality wardrobe, and she felt at home in the long black dresses and silk gloves. Seen by some young ones as affectations perhaps, but dignity had its cost. And besides, there was another reason she'd been happy to turn fifty. If the disease hadn't struck her by forty-five, it wouldn't get her at all. So she'd sailed on, blindly, making chair covers and bottling jam as though there was all the time in the world. And it was natural, she'd said to herself, that as she got older, she'd need less sleep. Natural to feel tired to her bones. She took brisk walks and made nourishing soups, took a spoon of cod liver oil every night and a stout every Sunday. But she'd been worried for some weeks now that she wasn't sleeping well at all. The pressure building up in her ears was the final truth.

Grainne took the basket with the chair cover and walked to her kitchen. She threw the whole lot in a black bag. She took out the first aid kit from the high cupboard, thinking, who is it that I'm hiding it from? And removed two bottles from it. They'd both got the stamp of the hospital on them. She'd written them off as damaged on her

shift yesterday. Taking two of each, dry swallowing them in succession she replaced the bottles. She let an hour pass, watching the news 24 channel, and then, when the calm had taken hold, she sat at the telephone table in the hall and took out her small phone book, covered in patterns of roses and biro'd scribbles. She put a call through to her sister.

*

It was Friday payday and everyone was in good spirits. Ryan and Sarah met for dinner. It was their third date. He wasn't really her sort, but she was sick of all the getting to know people, the abandoned plans, the way she caught herself looking over in restaurants, in bars, for someone better. Three dates was a good run, she'd stick it out. He was already there when she arrived, wearing an expensive-looking dark green jumper and holding a bunch of tulips. They were all different colours, bright and ugly. She rolled her eyes before she could stop herself, what was she supposed to do with them? But he looked good, smelled good when he stood to kiss her cheek. She tried to focus on that, until he pulled out her chair and she got the giggles. He'd be no fun to fuck, she thought, too chivalrous.

Sarah, you look fantastic. He pushed her chair in again, with her on it. Then he sat back down. She hadn't been to the restaurant before, it overlooked the river, there was a cocktail terrace on the roof. He looked very pleased with himself, as though he'd discovered it.

You look great Ryan. Nice jumper. She poured a glass of water into the blue tumbler already set out. She passed the carafe to Ryan. He smiled at her.

So, I hope you're hungry, he said. The candles heaped on their table were so bright; Sarah was glad she couldn't make out his grin too well in the glare.

Starving, she replied. He'd treated them to a taster menu, the least she could do was respond with enthusiasm. She sipped at her water and almost at once a waitress appeared asking if they were ready. Ryan said that they were.

This is good. Sarah said, genuinely impressed by the blood pudding; she loved the way that the black fat had cracked under the grill and oozed just a little. The delicate shards of bonemeal that gave it grit.

You're such a carnivore Sarah, Ryan teased, flirted maybe. She let him, it wasn't bad this menu. He wasn't such a sap after all.

Save some room for dessert, the waitress, who was constantly at their table, said. It's a little bit special. She poured miniscule amounts of wine into their green tumblers, water into the blue ones. Sarah giggled. It was all so childish and pleasurable, she just let herself relax.

It really is special, the dessert. They put gold in it.

Gold? Sarah asked. It seemed ridiculous to her, such a city boy idea. Gold.

Doesn't it taste like shit though? She teased. His face changed. She continued. It's a great idea though, symbolic...

Sarah refilled both their wine glasses and when she placed the bottle back in the ice bucket, she brushed Ryan's hand with her fingertips.

*

Grainne had been four when her grandmother had got the sickness. Four when she first heard the death bell. Bea, her niece, was three now. Her sister, Mary, had been surprised to hear from her, but glad to have a few days peace whilst Bea visited Grainne; she'd sounded exhausted. Grainne had never met the girl before. She had not approved of Mary's defiant childbearing at forty-five. Her own phantom womb clenched, like a Venus flytrap, at the thought of it. The second time the death bell came, Grainne had been sixteen. There had been no baby in the end, just a slick of ruined tissue and a curdling violence inside her. She had had an operation to remove the cursed organs and she was glad, there was only herself and Mary now, and of course, little Bea. Mary's man had been a sperm bank. Sperm. Bank. She spoke the words. Such an ugly thing it sounded.

The rain was coming down now, a horrid June, not a time for guests. But she'd made her plans, and she had such little time. She put on her good headscarf and took the big umbrella. She treated herself to a taxi to the airport. She'd be over and back in a few hours. Mary herself would be there briefly, and then gone. There was no mention of her coming over for a visit too. Grainne had a whiff of some man in the background, the eagerness she'd shown to get rid of the child, even for a few days. Well, that was to be expected from Mary.

She'd been to the shops and bought a few things for Bea's stay. And she had all the medicines she might need from the hospital, if she were sick. She was well prepared.

*

Sarah and Ryan were walking along the river.

It was a nice idea Ryan, I just couldn't taste anything. But, really, it was a great evening. Forget about the gold.

Sarah was tipsy now, she just wanted to get to the next bar, to have another drink, it was Friday payday, summer had arrived. Ryan really was a bit wet after all. And maybe just a bit too flash.

You're right Sarah, forget it, everything else was perfect. He hadn't put his arms around her, they were both loose and warm, cushioned in the heavy haze over the river. The light was slipping away in pink slashes.

Whoops. Sarah slipped on something on the path; something slimy from the water. Ryan caught her for a second but she lost her footing and twisted away from him, before he could save her she was on her bum. The flat crack of impact sounded worse than the pain, but she'd be bruised later.

What the hell, why don't they clear up this stuff? She said. It's a fucking hazard.

What is it? Seaweed or something? It smells really bad. Ryan said. The pollution from the river was horrible, there was so much shit floating around in there. But he realised he'd been indiscreet, Sarah's face was white.

Sorry, I mean, it's not your fault, he continued.

What the fuck is that? Sarah said. What is it?

Ryan bent down and saw what she had slipped in. He turned away from her and vomited every course of the taster menu, right down to the gold.

*

She wanted to do something nice for the child. Have a little party for her. Give her some fun. Of course she'd like to take Bea for a blessing too, but she was too well known down at St. Francis's, and the father might not be too charitable under the circumstances. She had the candles and the holy water in the house anyway, there'd be no problem with that. She wondered if Mary'd even had Bea baptised. She'd left her in the parlour while she popped into work. There'd been an unavoidable meeting, some concern over lockdown procedures. And here she was again in the rain.

By the time she'd returned, Bea was sitting in the window seat watching the little girls across the road. She had flushed spots in her cheeks and she looked happy. Good. She didn't turn around as Grainne shook off her coat and put her bags down.

Bea, how are you darling? She asked her. Bea turned and smiled so wide she could see her two white teeth and the chocolate she'd left was smeared all over her face.

I want to play outside.

Now you know you can't do that you naughty madam, you're not well enough. She worried Bea would ask again and that would be a disaster. The two girls across the road were splashing in the dirty street, clapping their hands and shouting. Common.

Look what I brought you Bea, magic potion. If you have two swallows of magic potion I'll play a fun game with you, a game you never played before.

First I'll go outside then I'll drink the potion. Bea suggested. Smart smart smart. Smart as a whip and trouble. It broke her heart but she just couldn't go out.

Bea, remember what I told you about your lungs?

Lungs?

They are in your chest, look. Grainne put her head to Bea's chest and listened, with her mouth she made a heeeehaaaaw wheezing sound. Bea giggled. She tickled her under her armpits and she laughed louder and louder. Then she started to cough.

You see Bea, your lungs make you breathe and laugh and now they are poorly sick, you need to rest them and drink the magic potion to make them all better.

Then I can go and play with the girls? Tomorrow.

Tomorrow is your party. You'll have better things to do than play tomorrow.

Bea's eyes were bright and she relaxed. Grainne brought over the bottle of medicine with its plastic measuring spoon. She told Bea to lie still on the window seat for ten minutes then they would play a game. She put the rest of the stuff from the hospital in the high cupboard in the kitchen.

Where's my special girl? Where's my big, strong Bea? She picked Bea up and growled. Mmm I eat tasty little children like you, yum yum yum. She pretended to bite at Bea's face, nuzzling her and finally giving her a big kiss on the forehead.

Again, again. Bea laughed and her aunt took the game out of the cupboard that she had bought for her before she arrived.

You spread out the sheet like this, she said, and you spin the wheel. Wherever the arrow falls, that's where you put your feet. Red, blue, yellow, green. I'll go first. Left hand blue.

As she bent down, her skirts fanning out behind her, balanced on one hand, Bea ran towards her, smacking her on the bum and running away again. For a minute she looked worried, sneaking behind the sofa, until Grainne began to giggle, and, pleased with herself, Bea started to dance on the spot, lifting her tiny fists in the air.

*

Grainne had been allowed in with her grandmother at first. The two months where she was more or less lucid. She didn't sleep at all those months, just went into a viscous daydream from the medication. It was okay, because she still knew Grainne, still stroked her hair and let Grainne feed her chocolates that she bought with her own pocket money. There'd been enough talk between the women of what this disease meant, that Grainne had some idea, young as she was. The first two months are not so bad, no sleep at all, but as long as the body rested, it was possible to get some peace. Some of this was what she knew then, most of it, what she'd learned since, of course. It was all mixed up now. Then, the pain began. Four months without sleep and the skin became baggy, eyes red, heart faltered and crashed, speeding out of control to feed the weakening blood vessels. After one year with no sleep, a person died, hallucinating, screaming, thrashing. And there was no cure but death. Grainne had known all this somehow, the death bell had told her, and her great-uncle Jimmy knew it too. He was dead of course, they all were, her mother too, not of the disease though. If you'd not got it by forty-five you were alright. Grainne went in at the end, when no one was looking, and she spoke to her granny directly. Granny, I want to know if there's anything we can do, I don't want you to die, I don't want it. And granny had told her what to do.

*

Grainne sat on the garage floor. She was tired, so tired but there was much more to do. She went to the kitchen, rinsed her hair and hands in the old sink and stepped out of her clothes. She balled them into a black bag and washed more thoroughly, especially her hands and feet. She put on a paper gown from her nursing supplies. When it was done, she walked into the room that had been Bea's. The game of Twister was in there, some colouring books, a stuffed pig. The medicine was on the bedside table. Drowsy it said, not for under 12s. But it had been right to give it to her. She drank the rest of the bottle,

two thirds almost. She lay down in the paper gown, on Bea's bed. Drowsy was how she felt.

*

The body had been in the water for three weeks. It was coming apart. The cloths that had been wound around it were loose, it was them, green with algae, that Sarah had slipped on. Beneath the cloths, the body bulged. There was a bright orange shirt on the body, though this was falling apart too. No head. No limbs.

*

Sarah was crying. Ryan was crying. They had been asked to move away from the area once the police arrived. Sarah put her arms around Ryan and he hugged her. They stood, looking down the river, blue lights and noise and helicopters spinning into nothing behind them.

What a terrible date. Sarah said. She laughed.

Ryan laughed too. Then he stopped, blushed. It had been a terrible date. And they could probably never go on another one.

It was a pretentious restaurant and I'm sorry I brought you there, he said. As though that was the problem. Sarah laughed. She laughed and laughed. She let go of Ryan and leaned against the railings. Ryan's hand hovered in the air, not sure whether to touch her shoulder again.

Want to come back to mine? She asked through broken giggles.

Yes, was all Ryan said.

*

Peekaboo. Peekaboo.

Is it my party? Bea asked, sleepy now, from the medicine. She had her new clothes on, the orange shorts and shirt.

Yes my precious girl, it's your party.

Bea lay down on her side, her little fists curling across her chest.

I feel funny. She said. Like I'm dreamsing.

Her aunt lay her hair across Bea's face and the smell of roses drifted into the girl's dreams.

Scroll 3: “Electric Light”

“Electric Light” is a multi-section scroll that uses the metaphor of electric, artificial light to investigate various crime scenes including the shopping mall, the film set, the morgue, and the cinema. Luminol Theory illuminates the bodies of the Dead-Girls. “Electric Light” was commissioned and published by Spork Press in 2014 as an example of contemporary experimental fiction. Roxane Gay selected “Electric Light” as one of her 50 favourite short fictions of 2015 for *Wigleaf*.

Electric Light

Mall

I take the string of starlights from the Christmas tree and shove them down my throat. My neck glows in muted pastels. I am hot. Real stars appear in the plexiglass overhead. I lie down in the penny fountain and the water becomes frothed with pinks. The shock comes and flows through me until I am zoned. I fist the string down further and strip off my dress. the hair on my belly is frazzled. Two fingers, not mine, assist at the vulva and the lights come out of me. I draw my mouth across the first pistachio silk sheath in XS. My Chanel winter berries leaves a mark on the pelvic line and soon every single sheath is despoiled. I insert a single fingertip inside my cunt for blood and leave a saltsweet trail on my favourite slip. I am on the floor and I am lying on spilled silk. The blue light in my belly goes off and on off and on.

Film Set

I am running. My blond hair is stringy with sweat. My vest top is clinging to my body and I am trembling. My mouth is red and open. I make an O which could be lust or horror or surprise. My eyes are open and blue and there is nothing in them. I am running and then still. The room I enter is full of meat hooks. There is a crunch as I fall into a mess of bones. My scream happens more slowly than the fall.

Cinema

The projectionist puts on the first reel. It is footage of a blond girl. She is in the bath. She is soaping herself, and laughing, and pouting. She is wearing lipstick: dark red, like a tabernacle. Then there are girls with hoods over their faces; girls kneeling in the dark.

The projectionist returns from his reel. He pulls my hair until a clump comes out in his fist and he stuffs it in my mouth. I can't see the film, but I know what is on the screen: Thick carpet. Three heavy crystal chandeliers. Six women in cocktail dresses. A rhymeless poem. A game of cards. Long tracking shots of formal gardens. French

speech. The projectionist drops his knee into my belly. I suck in my ribs to protect my heart, my lungs, my soft parts. My belly is a soft pudding that smooshes into his muscle. He releases me to change the reel: A woman dressed in mourning walking through triangular gardens. A man in black grabs her, speaks urgently and lustfully in her ear. Losing a shoe she flees into the house. I adopt corpse pose. He pushes lights inside me until I am full of gleaming. My belly is a tundra. I burn off two more layers. He lets me drink. My cocktail is full of real jewels and fake blood. Once I have laid down I cannot remember. The screen is arctic. My body is fluorescent. I rewind the part where the woman lays down naked in swan feathers. I feel her sweat stick to me. Bald animal miasma. I put my fingers in. My vomit comes.

Operating Theatre

I lie on a white table. My legs are in stirrups. I ask for a sedative. They give me something dissociative and strong. I see figs dropped from the bridge. It is Rome and there are bridges, it is Tokyo and there are bridges, and women walk over them and under them and are assaulted as they walk, and it is Mexico City and there are high rise buildings and glass walkways in the sky and from each of these places are dropped soft fruits, split figs.

Resistance. Bodies in the air and then no longer swerving, no longer atomic, no longer whole. The light is harsh, almost blue as it trains on me, on the open part of me. As a succession of gloved fingers and swabs and instruments go inside. A numb pool of shunting. No longer whole. Flesh wound, scarred walls, cells peeled. The figs are rotten, splitting under the harsh flood of light. Wasps couple inside them, their fur sticky with sweet rot and leaking juice. The insects arch and writhe; their foul hum muted by the amber flesh. Blindly burrowing out of the dead fruit, the wasps clamber on to sweeter meat.

Ice Rink

I wear a silver dress. It is too small and it makes my body bulge. I have on rusty skates and walk to the rink on pinched feet. I fall three times on the way. There are dazzling, arctic gels on the spotlights when I arrive. Snowblind, I cut through the crowd.

Crime Scene

The dark spools forward and I grip the branch. I lunge into the deep mud and my holy communion dress is ratted at the hem. In the tunnel velvet leaks down in ugly heaps. I crawl until I come to a clearing in the forest. There are one hundred women in high heeled shoes. I lick the shoes clean of mulch as I squelch forward on my front. I am naked as a glowworm. They take the foliage to my body until I am fully open. They find the stars inside me.

Morgue

I am slid out of a drawer. Three men stand in white coats and watch me being taken apart. There is no secret hole or passage. There is no inside anymore. There is a moment of delay as viscera are weighed. I hear a violin in drop D.

Scroll 4: “The Sky Became the Perfect Colour and Back Again”

This scroll is an experimental work that contrasts psychotic sections from the perspective of a young mother to flashbacks (signified by all capitals) of the murder of her young daughters. The Dead-Girl as object of desire is dramatised through a blackly comic tone in this piece. The crime scene is in this case a half-built hotel on a sublime mountain. The glowing, hallucinatory colours of the psychotic narrator’s visions echo luminol’s ethereal glimmer. *Metazen* published “The Sky Became the Perfect Colour and Back Again” in 2013.

The Sky Became the Perfect Colour and Back Again

Grace, he said, flickering her name. Grace, a staticky word chopped into the bottom of the sea. Soft, beery slither ran down her face from where he spat. The water came in waves and washed gold summer through her bones. He was above her again, his hair deep silk on her face. His voice was in and out below the waves. His tongue loose, wet, electric with hurt. Why did you do it baby? Why did you? A burned hum shuttered from his lips.

GRACE'S BODY WAS SLICK IN THE HEAT, HER TEADRESS CLUNG BETTER THAN A BIKINI. YELLOW ROSES BLOOMED WETLY ACROSS HER SWEET CURVES. THE MEN BUILDING THE HOTEL CAME OVER. THEY COULD NOT STOP. THEY REACHED FOR HER. HER EYES WERE NOT FOCUSED. SHE DID NOT SAY NO.

The bed was higher than before. The ceiling, lower. A cup of water was in front of her. The blue shape of a hand, shadowed, behind the cup. A taste of dirt in her mouth when she drank. Grit on her tongue. Her hands were scored, deep tubes clustered in their centres, plastic, sheer, endless. She bit them, bit at the holes to make them disappear. Scraps of skin were all she could tear off, a thin paste of flesh ruching in her teeth. The hand pushed on a mask, blinded her with gas. She ate bad sleep and fell down.

THE GREEN HEAT BLEW OVER GRACE AS SHE CLIMBED THE HILL SHE HADN'T FELT THE COLOUR OF THE SKY FOR SO LONG. PALE FLAVOURS SKIMMED HER TONGUE, HEMP, LICORICE, APPLE, SOAKING HER THIRST. THERE WAS NO END TO THE LIGHT.

The room was a vacuum and she clawed bare brick to hold on. I'm falling I'm falling. She said it so many times that the hands returned from the shadows and tied her to the bars on the bed. She could see him above her, like usual, and settled. His hair had been scissored raw, bloody pores clamped his hairline and a shock of blue-black stuck angled

to one side. His eyes were scalded, but he pushed and pushed at her womb, and she took all his gush inside her.

GRACE WAS HUNGRY FROM HER CLIMB, A CLEAN HUNGER NOT FROM PILLS. HER TEETH UNJAMMED AND SPILLED SALIVA, READY. THERE WAS A GOOD SMELL OF BURNING, A FIRE, SWEET WOOD FROM THE FOREST, CLEANED, CHOPPED, CHARRING. A WRIGGLE OF LOVE KEENED THROUGH HER, HE HAD LEFT IT FOR HER.

There were so many men in the room, and she didn't like it. Curdled fog of dead smoke dripped from them. She knew what sort of men... They wanted her to speak but she wouldn't. Kay, she asked, where's Kay? And they huddled together and said strings of nylon and cut out pictures, taping to the wall, of her babies, of Thora and Kay. Dotted lines scratched through their joints, limbs and muscles. Cuts of meat.

THE SMELL OF BARBECUE REACHED THE MEN WHO WERE BUILDING A HOTEL ON THE TOP OF THE HILL. STEAKS ONE OF THE MEN SAID. LET'S GO. ONE SAID OR THEY ALL SAID. THE THREE MEN ALL THOUGHT OF IT BECAUSE IT SMELLED SO GOOD. IT WAS SATURDAY AND DOUBLE PAY BUT FUCK IT THEY WEREN'T ROBOTS THEY'D BROUGHT A FEW BEERS AND NOW THEY FELT LIKE EATING, MAYBE FLIRTING. IT WAS A HOT DAY AND THE GIRLS WOULD BE IN THEIR BIKINI TOPS BY NOW. NONE OF THEM WAS A SINGLE MAN BUT WHAT HARM EVER CAME OF LOOKING. THE PIGS WERE UNRULY. SHE HADN'T THE TIME FOR IT. SHE WAS GODDAMN HUNGRY AND NOT FROM THE PILLS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME. IT WAS THE ONLY TIME.

Her paper dress cheesed in the front. A cardboard piss tray and two hands at her nipples. A fresh paper gown.

HE'D LEFT THE AXE FROM HIS HEWING IN THE WOODSHED. THEIR WOODSHED. SHE'D DONE IT UP WHEN THEY'D HAD NO PLACE TO GO, WHEN THEY WERE FIFTEEN. IT WAS STILL PRETTY LIKE IT HAD BEEN. DRIED FERNS AND FLOWERS, A RUG FROM OLD SCARVES. HER MOTHER'S

CHIPPED SOUP PLATES PATTERNED WITH ROSES. A TEACUP FOR EACH OF THEM. A SOFT PILE OF BLANKETS THAT SMELLED OF THEIR BODIES. IN THE CORNER A BOX OF HIS TOOLS. SHE TOOK OUT THE AXE AND WENT CHASING THE PIGS.

She felt his fists ramming right through her, lost in the water. Weep jerky. Milk poured down in yellowy clots and she knew it would stop. Her breasts winked closed under his hands and the water was lucid. He pulled her down. The pink of the sky glowed, it glowed and her body was looped likes a virus, endless. Touching the sky she was vivid.

Scroll 5: “The Luminol Reels”

“The Luminol Reels” is the culminant scroll, or story, in this collection. When human blood reacts with luminol it lights up a ghostly blue. This reaction, most commonly used to detect whether violence has taken place at suspected crime scenes, combines the human and the chemical, it invokes violence and disposability but also transformation. “The Luminol Reels” takes its imagery from pornography, Catholicism, and crime scene investigation to interrogate the violence done to women. It considers the ongoing brutality of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez and the institutional misogyny of the Catholic Church. Violence is intrinsically linked to location, and the shrines, quinceanera parties, holy communions, and séances of this book are all stained luminescent blue. Calamari Press published “The Luminol Reels” in 2014 as a short illustrated novella. I have included the artwork here.



Figure 11 Cover Design for *The Luminol Reels*

THE LUMINOL REELS

AGONIES



Figure 12 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Mothering

The autopsy reel is always brutal.

Y-Incision

There are requisite smells, leaks and metallics. There is no end to this reel. The murderers can programme it for severity.

It begins in the intimacy of the cubicle. The doctor's fleshy hands will draw back the sheet just far enough to see the Y-incision. You will remember the nine months the baby swam through your stomachache black sea.

The doctor has one glass eye and the other dilates obscenely at the carnage.

Dollflesh

This one comes next. A close-up of her clean dollflesh. It is sewn up but there is a special effect—it blazes. The effect is of a hostile sun; a bloody light looms from inside. Cut back to her treacly hair scraped back. The braids you twisted in have been displaced. Blood on her lips. Her eyes have a cloudy look, filmed with something white and viscous. End.

Ghost Town

Whether you can see this reel or not will give you the first clue.

Don't expect there to be any respite if you are dead. The only privileges of the dead are unregulated menstruation and fewer night shifts.

She has walked across the desert at the most dangerous times—during luminol crashes, after swallowing cardiac spores. She wears Kylie hotpants and has Marilyn hair. The first time she is raped there is a splash of red across the sand.

She has a xanax smile as she walks on glass slippers, as she glides through the burning sand in figure eights.

The next scene she is holding a package, a birthday gift in gold paper. Confetti bursts from her mouth as she opens the box.

The final scene is overexposed. The desert has an alpine look. Her fall is heavily accented with extra-diegetic sounds: a breach birth, a violin concerto written by a fascist, mouth fucking and dilated pupils are recorded in layers.

Holy Water

This reel should be handled with care. Once dried out it has no further effect.

Play this reel only in dire circumstances. Cardiac spores should not be concurrent and are not to be swallowed at this time. The water is thick with luminol and should not be entered naked. Any last desires will be played on this reel.

Stars

When you eat the stars there will be a psychosis.

Stars are to be used with the following reels: Big Dipper, Oracle.

Big Dipper

You become too tired to get up and oil the big dipper, too weary to bring raw fish to the bears and at first you will lie under the heavy weight of sleep with no reprieve. When you begin to flutter through wakefulness, it is brutal. You will have a low-grade humming comedown and there is no way to fend it off—not ten years sleep, not one hundred years could numb it.

There should be a glass of water, frosted crystal, five cubes of ice, a gentle fizz. In an enamel pillbox lays a handful of stars, speckled duck-egg blue. You feel slightly sicker; a groaning will go through you, and a slam of pain. A shivering—a bad, hot shivering—is next.

Sleeplessness is better; take the soft blue pellets on cracked tongues and sip—like invalids—at the icy drinks. And then it will come, oh virgin, will come again, more intense. You will be dizzy, crawling on the bed, reaching sallow hands out of the window to feel the lick of air. You moan loud, grouching at the itchy fever on the edge ... peeling away from your high.

Oracle

The virgin appears. She will fall through the glass at your feet, comes with green fire at your throat. You will talk neon bullshit for hours ... or maybe for one minute. The virgin gives you water which you will crave beyond belief.

You will see her, more beautiful than the crucified Jesus. She offers you death—a slow drugless bludgeoning of horror. Finally, you open your eyes on her dirt bed. The mossy cold will be so good on your skin. You feel your mouth break wide open to smile a crazy water balloon of joy.

Fingerlube

They applied fingerlube before the sweet sixteen reel.

We stood in a line while every opening and yaw was sharpied in rainbow colours.

We were scared of the reel; no one knew exactly what was to come. They applied strong glue below the nostrils, a hit per breath - clocks of fright gleamed upwards, back into the brain, a cold fug releasing there. Slime was brought in from the splash show, a bucket each of custard yellow clouded out the eyes. Heavy dairy lay on our vision, while below a rawness ached. Slammed outwards, y-shaped, our mermaid openings began to empty of scales.

Factory

This reel is educational and must be broadcast during the entirety of *Fur*.

This reel is on a loop. It contains vintage footage of the master butcher. She guides you through the factory tasks.

First, she tells you where materials can be sourced: from the enclosure between the animal pens. She tells you the shape the materials will be in: Some of them may be alive and ranting, some will be unconscious and some plain dead. There may occasionally be only body parts, that have been gnawed on. She tells you the first part of the task: Sift through the girls in the cage (once they are tied up) and take a sack to collect any odds and ends.

The next part of the reel shows the workroom and the chemicals you will need for the job. The workroom is full of barrels and creels and jars. There you will find acids and oils that strip flesh right off the bone.

The master butcher gives some advice at this point: The first time you touch a girl you might vomit or get the shakes. She reminds you to think of how exquisite it is to saw a girl in half without spilling a drop of blood. She claims that one day you can be as talented as her. This is false encouragement. Since her martyrdom there has been no one to take her place.

Finally she shows you how she does it, in real time. First she gets rid of the blood by hanging the girl upside down and slitting her throat. Then she sews the girl back up. The liquids collect in a glass tank. They layer down—watery red, yellow fat, with shiny white gobs of plasmic waste. In the centre blooms a starburst of hot red—the richest blood fresh from her heart. It pulses and steams, lazy drifts staining the fat, the plasma, the pinkish water. She stirs the mixture carefully, for hours, until the heart blood atomises and spreads its magic through the gloop.

When it is time for the show she brings the girl out on stage. The effect is breathtaking.

Quinceañera

This reel does not require fingerlube, but a quantity of dental dams should be distributed.

The howling of wolves can first be sweetened in a tin can and then piped through the room.

Once the reel is lit, the splatter can be arranged in abstract blurs. Girls should be dropped suddenly against a wall, using a limbless drag to spread the blood. Use two vials of luminol and shake it out until the blue-glow scatters—astral—in the dormitory.

The dead girls should then be removed, the beds pushed back against the wall.

Your dresses will breathe into your ears, their wrinkles hushed like velvet.

Bad moon songs rise all night and you will burst grand mal through the sparkle, flat-lining before dawn.

Badlands

This should only be used when playing dead.

This is imported footage of a multiple cadaver show.

We were caught in the centre of the desert when this reel started. The sky crashed out into luminol before we had a chance to shelter.

We saw the twins playing dead and we ran. It felt like the end.

The juice of the sky dripped down and vanished. In ten minutes flat we were in the blue dark and the sand was loose and our feet were wet. We slipped into a hole and the twins pulled us down. Our teeth chattered and our breathing wasn't right.

There was the sound of a dog. Yap yap yap yap. A boot to our faces and then soft, slick fingers along our throats. One of us screamed. And the blood from the sky stained our insides blue.

MARTYRS

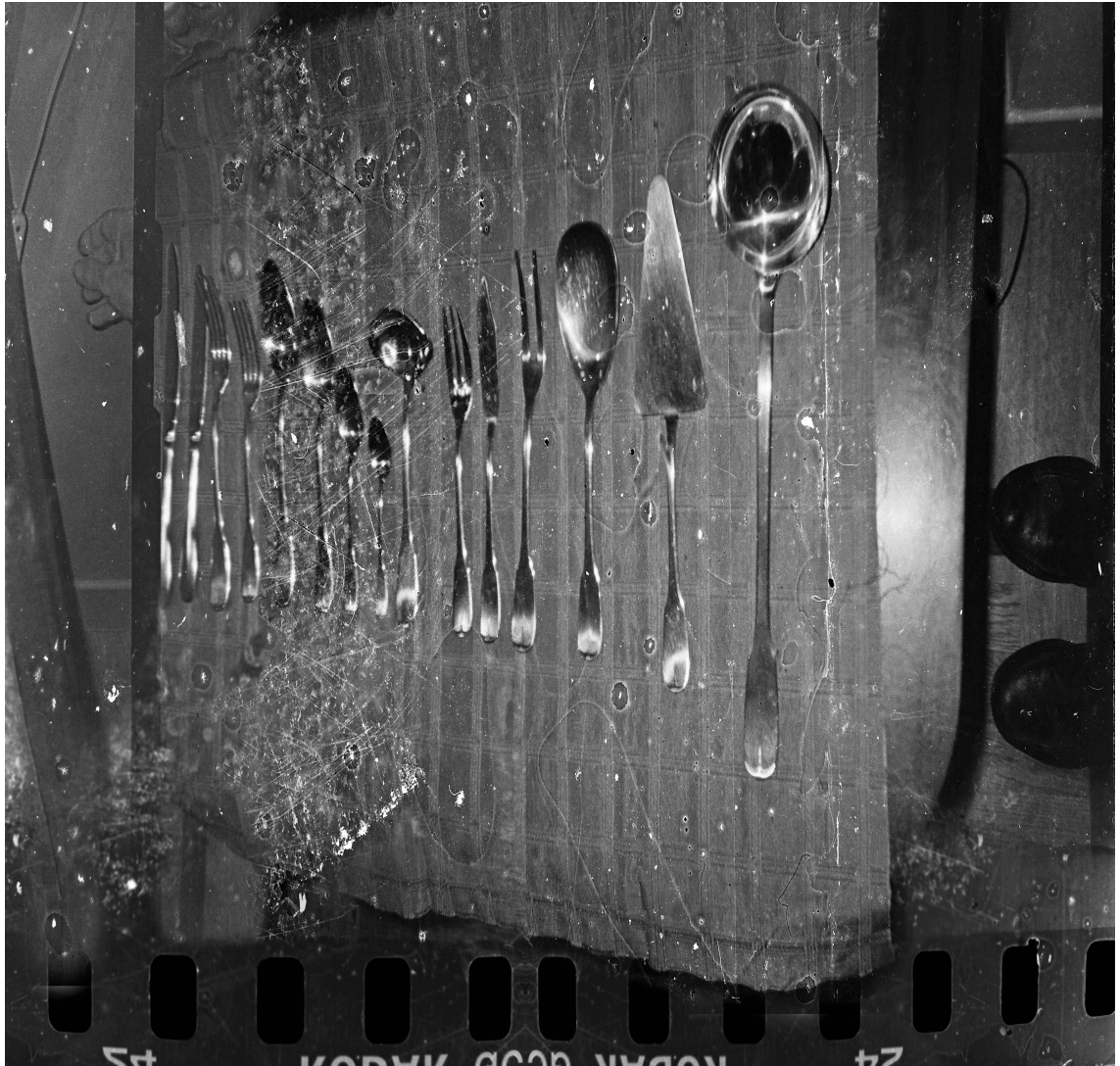


Figure 13 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Candyfloss**Patron of Innocence, Pageants, Virginity.**

This reel must be played only at dawn and twilight. It may accompany the deaths of children; vigils and funerals if there has been no sexual contact (forced or natural). Or at any séance where two or more gods are invoked.

It may never be used pornographically or for vaginal pleasure.

Nudist**Patron of Interstitiality, Reversals, Surgeries.**

Do not attempt this at sundown. There is no return once started. You will be under the knife immediately. If there is suspicion of an interstitial pregnancy, this reel can help to flush it out.

If there is a birth and you need to reverse the child, this is the best way to do it.

Party Queen**Patron of Partying, Soft Deaths, Visions.**

This can be applied to imprisoned, hospitalised or housebound women. Never take full stars with this, though a luminol rag is to be encouraged. Likewise, heavy dairy or cold glue can be used.

This reel is on a soft loop—each time it will fade until coma is achieved.

Mechanic**Patron of Explosions, Thrills, Disasters.**

Nails into the palms must precede this reel, which can be programmed for intervals.

The intervals are as follows: Grease the tracks with lard, fuel the big dipper with red diesel, sit in the rickety cars and fly beltless around sharp bends.

Witch**Patron of Secrets, Cannibalism, Plastic.**

Dismemberment and Mutilation reel.

First sharpen all knives. Dip each hand, wrist-deep, into luminol.

The reel begins at the moment of unwrapping. The long knife is used to slice the cellophane. Fragments of pink peignoir still cling to the witch's flesh and there is blood at the corner of her mouth. The story of the waterfall will begin. The witch looks fragile, as her peppermint teeth stick out and the peignoir falls away.

MURDERERS

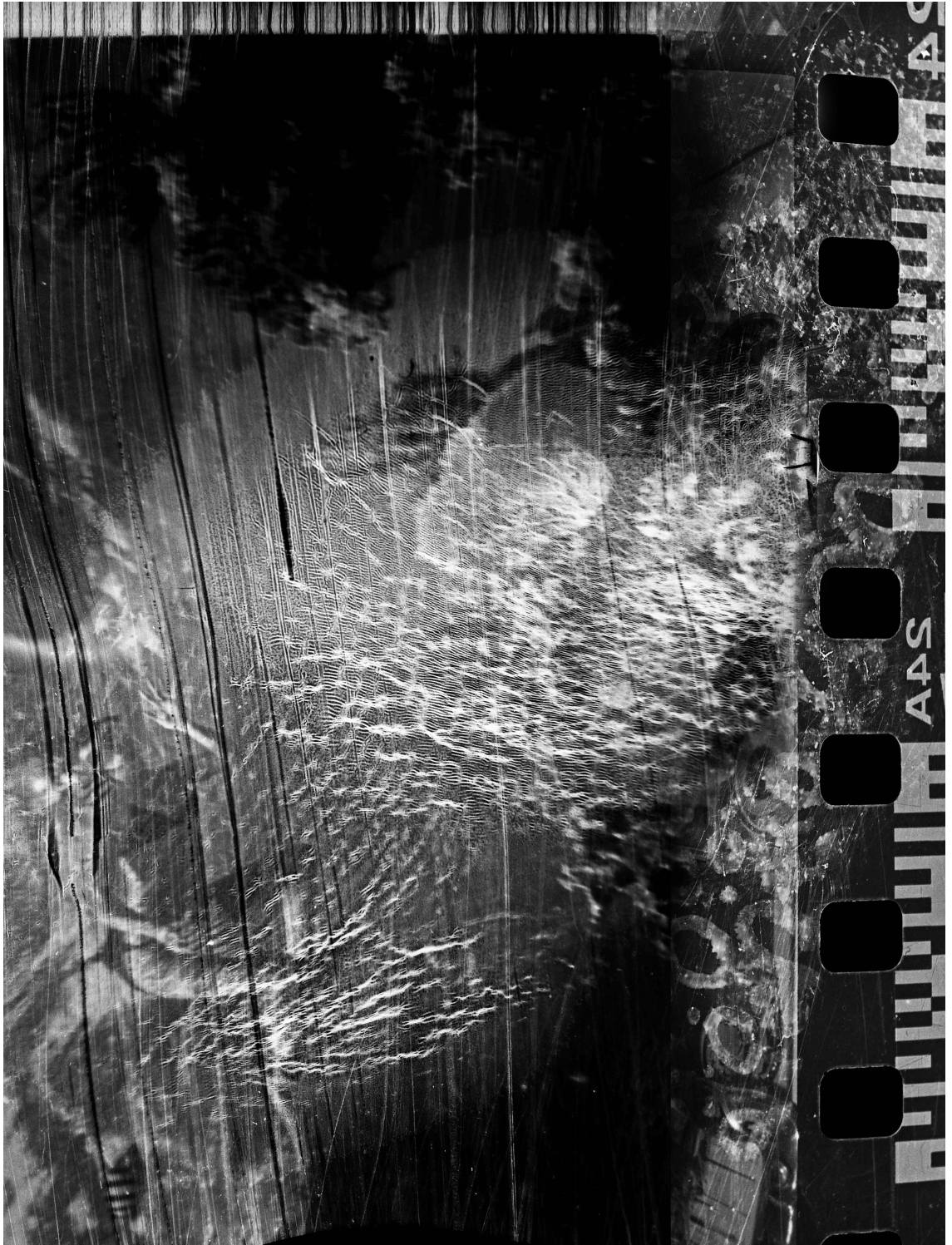


Figure 14 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Coathanger

This may be used when a girl gives false urine for her daily sample.

The reel starts with the girl. She is wearing Jackie O sunglasses and running in the clogged sand, the sun in her face. She looks sick, worried that we are half-serious. She doesn't stop but keeps swigging from her 12oz cherry wine. The neck of the bottle is sticky and reddish gobs of liquid dribble over the sides.

We feel exhilarated, thrilled by this girl with a scarf in her hair and green eyes. When we crept up she had been lying on her front, bare feet tracing the sand, singing a sad song, wailing across the blue dirt. When we begin to abuse her (under our breath) she gets to her feet and starts running, never losing hold of the wine.

The girl with green eyes looks so defiant she is radiant. She swallows the last drops of sweet wine, wipes her mouth with the back of her hand and drops the glass bottle on the sand where it smashes. We stop circling. We hold back on the horses then. We whisper to the girl that we will cut her into tiny pieces. The girl lights a cigarette and sits cross-legged looking into the blue distance. Then she starts shouting. You are liars, baby, rotten dirty liars.

We feel a jolt through us. We know these kinds of girls so well. With their cherry wine and cigarettes, their transistor radios tuned to the oldies, *Blue Velvet* pouring through them, as they imagined the supreme thrill of a bad man—a bad man who might kill one of them. Wriggling closer under the patchwork quilts their dead mothers had made in sanatoria or asylums. But now there is no bad man, there is only us. We kneel beside her and put our hands dusted with blue sand on the girl's abdomen. Our mouths are dry. There is no sound but the breathing of the girl. We dare not exhale.

Her plumpness is not just puppy fat. The green-eyed girl is in a daze—she seemed to forget that there is no way she is leaving alive. She stands up unsteadily, singing *Blue Velvet* and swaying. We watch her go a little way. She takes her shoes off and empties the sand on to the ground. As she bends forwards, she stumbles and sits down.

We put our fingers on her throat. We wrap a blindfold around her eyes, gently pulling her hair free of its ponytail. The coathanger is engaged.

Bluebeard

This Daddy Reel can be used for psychological terror.

The zone is the old apartment. You are shown the bed where you were conceived. The chaos that flew between your parents when they fucked has soiled the mattress now flaked with rot. Bugs grow fat and jumpy in the gaping whorls that pock its surface—a dead zone teeming with riotous filth.

The door is thrown open and sunlight is let in. The itchy mattress collapses into dust and nothing remains but an old iron bedstead. You have brought armfuls of lilies with you and two tons of dark mulch. As you pack the bedstead with the dark earth and decorate it with flowers, you sense your own grave. You cannot breathe.

There is a slow lag of time ... darkness falls. It is midnight—the time flashes on the reel. You can hear laughter leaking though the door of the apartment.

The reel skips, now you are lying flat on your back. Lilies crowd your feet. Two stars are tattooed on your face like fat tears. Coiled snakes blacken your hair and poison bubbles in her ears so you cannot hear your heartbeats.

There is a suitcase beside the bed, limbs neatly packed inside. A red rope hangs above you, made of fingernails and hair, the knife swinging close. Your thorax is closed, puckered with scars from your blood weddings.

The blood on your fingers smells fresh and cinnamony. Sharper is the scent of bleach used on the fleshless legs in the suitcase. There are scraps of puce skin and yellow fat adhering to the bone—these six legs had been dumped in vats of domestic product.

The heat seeps into the boards until they are swollen tight, their colour leaching white in the sun. The air is sodden and heavy. Fat salty drops scald your tongue.

Child Killer

This is a gory transparency, backlit by luminol.

The first time a friendship ring was found here, it was crushed, trampled. The blue heart stone—set in its transparency—fluttered in plastic like a flickering shutter, a reel.

A man sleeps, soft as a foetus, curled around his axe. The blade is glued with kisses, semen crackling yellow down its length. There is a violent ceremony where he marries the knife. The blood in his dream is visible—endless, sweet and warm. The honeymoon becomes obscene, blackout, fade.

His dreams are havoc. He had no control. He could not hide his passion for the axe and the knife. He could not make his loves make sense.

We laugh at him but cannot hear our own voices. We giggle as though we are children hell-bent on letting the adults know we understand their filthy jokes.

The damp patch on her skin, hair like sugar, like sin. The flush of scarlet on her flesh. Six silver buttons on her dress, I saw them shining in the dirt. Oh you could be so careless.

This song is to appease or anger the child killer. Before the factory, before the pageants, before the dead girls, there was nothing here—just white sand and silence. Girls walked into the desert, in pairs and groups. They brought their radios and guitars and patchwork quilts. They brought marijuana and acid stars and cherry wine.

Then there was another discovery—slides that had been partially burned but still showed a child playing hopscotch, her treacle hair dancing in loops. There were just a few ribbons left—dry, filmy ends. The last scene is cut, the girl is pulled down from the piñon tree, her silver shoes falling through the air.

Now she is trapped in glass and dances in the projector. There is a shrine for her in the virgin's grotto. Pinecones spray-painted silver are left beside it to make the nights festive.

PORNO



Figure 15 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Flesh

During the Flesh reel you see the baby crawling from your womb. You will see it half-dead, dragging through the muck at your feet, shards of glass pricking its soft mouth and screams, screams, screams. You must sit still and watch the shows; women with surgery lips roiled naked on yachts, scraps of metallic fabric stretched taut over nipples and pubic mounds. There are often two masked men shouting abuse in filthy streams and putting their big hands all over. Laddered scars creep up from the women's bellies. Close-up shots show smeared makeup gathering in patches beneath their breasts. Redness and sores creep from their cracked nipples where men yank the fabric free. The baby will see too but she won't understand.

When the show ends, take your shucking knife and cut a line in red right down the pubic bone. Your fingers will plunge inside—you'll draw the flaps of skin wide open, ten metal staples closing up the wound.

Daddy

We ran miles of forest every night from daddy. We pricked our skin and scored it with sugar and paprika. We smothered our hair in cocoa butter and stuffed cloves in our dark vaginas. We drank vinegar with our bath in the evening, to vomit anything in our food. We were plump and pretty, our skin glowed like a Chinese lantern and he wanted our laughter for himself.

The first time he caught us we all held our breath waiting to see what he would do. We felt the red haze of blood smashing through our weaker hearts, pains in our chest as we ran until exhausted, our sleek muscles coiled shut. We flew forward on our hands and tipped ourselves into the shallows of the lake to soothe the blaze in our aching legs.

We laughed ourselves sick on the big dipper, our frazzled heartbeats pumping acid round. We lay, gleaming, toads running along our padded toes, sucking out the thorns with bleeding mouths.

He buried his pretty thing, his axe, beneath the rotten leaves. We did not say a word but laughed cleanly, no black bile spraying out, no pus running down our chins. He was amazed at our health, we looked perfect. My pretty, pretty thing, he said again and plunged his hands into the red dirt and scooped out some worthless trash—diamonds, veiny eggshells smeared with afterbirth and dead daisies. He made them into crowns and placed the trophies on our heads.

Sugar

As she put her tiny hand in his, red diesel stained his palm.

He brought her a candyfloss, it frothed around her face, sugar crystals caught between milk teeth as he put his hands around her neck.

Behind the generators and the waste disposal units, a white puddle ran down.

Girl on Girl

Nudity compelled the girl who minded the elephants. She took off her filthy clothes and lay down in the heat, a stink rising from her.

She tanned her small breasts, ironed flat, like all of ours, from birth.

Dirty girl, she wanted to see. She went to the dead place, where the candyfloss girl lay. She had a bucket of stunned fish, for the white bear. There was a slash of lightning, a burr of heat which struck the metal pail. The three fish jumped out of the water, grew molten and fell back down.

The nudist lost her heartbeat, her hair smoked and she fell on to our blond sister for the last time.

Buzzed

This reel is psychedelic.

You begin in the bed, alone in the dormitory. You have a luminol rag in your mouth. There is a mirror on the ceiling and you see your eyebags, your puckered mouth, your asphalt skin.

You dream that you can get out of bed. You don't. You lie and party alone.

Beside you is a folder full of scraps of skin and pressed flowers and the hair of saints. A glass of iced water and a vial of luminol within reach.

Cut to the desert. It is in flames. A man is atop a narrow platform, sawing at his arm.

Hard rubies fall into your mouth shutting off your sound.

You pull yourself to pieces. In the background an axe scrapes against the metal, crashing like the ocean.

Napalm

This one is for the sickos.

Napalm, sulphur and asbestos storms hit in Electric.

She is naked, greasing the rides.

Slow, slow, slow motion.

Her tiny heart bikini is ripped open by the clouds. Nacreous grains spray out of every hole and gap and slit. She is cut in pieces, shredded by its weight. Her flesh becomes confetti on her bones.

Snuff

This reel starts with an accidental strangling.

She starts to turn blue, she is dying. Your hands are shaking. You see the axe behind you on the wall and bring it down. You kiss her on the forehead—she is sharp and sour and full of darkness. You are desire.

There is violet on the bed—the sheets running full of sticky gobs. You wrap her tight in plastic sheeting, you let the excess collect.

There is time that is blank. You are on her and you are guilty.

Later, you get dreamy. You slash her open and taste her. When she is in pieces, you hang her to cure. When she is nothing but bone and pearl, you set her on flat paddles in the oven.

The parcels of smoked meat are the best you've ever tasted.

RITUALS

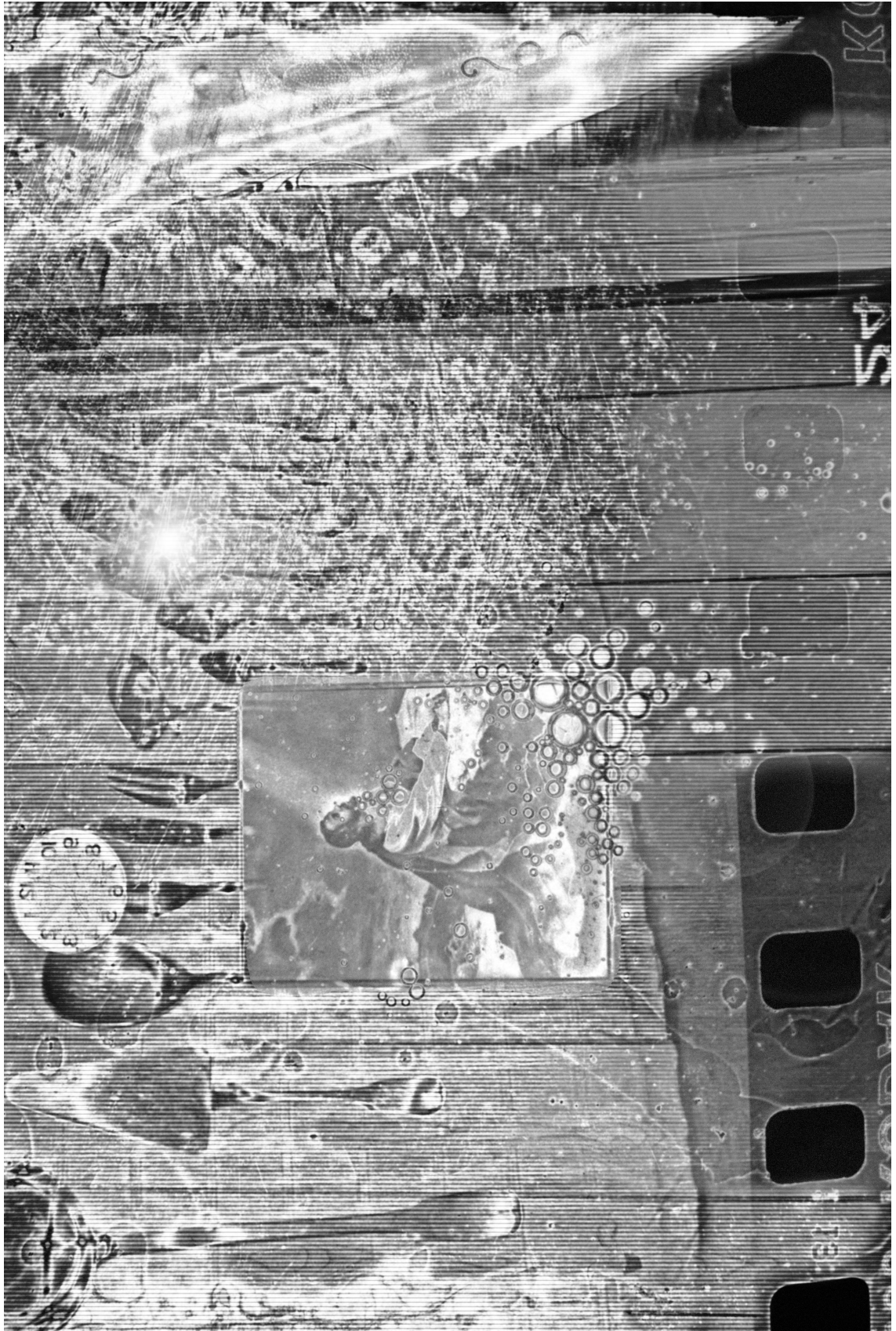


Figure 16 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Gynoshow

This is the last reel he sent you.

His hand feels cool on your sutures.

Hired assassins gleam at you with needles.

Their knives jolt into dullness.

They cover your flesh with folds of paper.

In the dollhouse.

You lie with angled limbs like rigor.

The reel slices to show your opening—born without a hole. Instead you have a gathered ruche of skin that peaks, like the tip of a Hokusai wave. You have a shuttered gap, a hoarding.

There is no slit for shedding wastes and they fill you up.

You take a shucking knife and slide it through the crest. It is over quickly. A gush of fluids cleans out of you and splatters gore.

Threads of red hair loop you shut. There is a tiny hole, to avoid disease.

Black Mass

This is in real time. But in the depths.

Listen to all of the instructions and do not flinch at the butcher's strange request.

If it is not her, it will be you. You must remember that when inside this reel.

Outside, the sky will have a black look, above the dead-eyed, shuttered night.
You will be better off inside.

On the altar there is a cloth, darkly stained, deeper than red.
The butcher wears a matching robe. She tells you it is the colour of mourning.

Set the girl down amongst the butcher's dainty offerings:
Plum heart, brown lung. Balletic half-pigs, their sides pierced dry.

The taste of filthy pennies fills your mouth as you bring down the cleaver, like a
monstrance stiff with blood.

At this point, catch the bloody pearl.

Twins

If there are twins, they must be sutured with the assistance of this reel.

All twins will be blasted with freckles, bound by a widow's peak. Surgery can take place on their tenth birthday.

Once you are gowned, spray their cunts with white foam that smells like custard of baby fat. Scrape it off so that the foam and the mess of hair comes away leaving raised sores on their prickly skins. Do not put your mouth near that. Go on, they will say, in a teasing voice, and not even that gently they will try to push you down towards that bare red place. If they do, you must lick and kiss and tongue. You must feel every bump as you flick over the flesh and think of each pore, bacteria—a yellowy jelly that might burst at any time—in your vulnerable mouth. Blackheads will scud their thighs where sweat collects; blue, dense. Put two thumbnails around the toxic place and let the poison flow away. Scrub the pore out with salt and lime.

Following the operation, keep them sticky with pig lard, soft on their scars, where the heads are fused. If you have an unsteady hand their circuitry will come loose; blue sparks will fizz along their stomachs, intestines, shoulders, where the cord wraps them tight. Phantom limbs will give them pain and they will not keep silent.

Bearbaiting

Bearbaiting begins in Gold. All participants must drink luminol margaritas.

You will awaken underneath a tree. The bear cub will be at your side, licking your face clean of dried blood, whimpering. You will sit up, see that you are in the shantytown on the other side of the desert. Your ribs will ache as though you have been dragged all the way there.

The gold flags of the province are tied to the branches of the tree, and every one of the adobe and corrugated metal shelters is painted in heaven metals.

The second stage is to eat the fruit. It will be shimmering gold and a viscous syrup pours out—sharp and salty, it will refresh your thirst. You will feel weightless and stand on your damaged limbs, ready to run at the mama bear, take your weapon out and kill her cold.

There will seem to be a wide pool, and beside it a patch of lush grass where bears lie in a naked tumble. You stare at their beauty and begin to touch them, suck the blue salt from their matted fur. Tears will roll down, the bears will put their big hands all over your back, stroking it, pummelling it, kissing you.

You will scream, you will vomit. It will all be horror—the desert a black slick flooding your eyes. You will see the edge of the desert, trails of blackened bones, coyotes and carrion. Clouds of insects buzz low, flanking you, sucking blood-fat.

Mass Burial

The smell is rotten in the desert. Putrefaction is scrambled in the heat. Some of the girls lie with their faces missing, brains leaking from the dead zone, but with their right arms or feet still covered in creamy flesh.

Relief can be gained by visiting the mass grave. Run your fingers through their hair and breathe in their sharp, violent scents. Lie on top of them, rolling your heavy body over theirs, catching blue-black hair in your teeth and tasting their sweet perspiration where it collects underneath the fester and damp of their corpses.

Stillbirth

The bearpits run the length of the plant. Beneath the factory and the ovens and the dormitories. Behind the stage. There are passages between the zones—passages that have been reinforced to carry domestic product, vats of acid, barrows full of girls. Along these passages are cages and bearpits. Creels of the fresh or near dead are stored there. Some for the cadaver shows, some for the bears.

The white baby bear cries for her lover, the nudist.

She birthed a baby before she died—a muted, hairless spod that the bear sings to and squeezes. The nudist's ashes have been scattered through the zone.

A luminol mass is held for her once a year.

Desert Run

A walk across the desert—in plastic heels, heart-shaped sunglasses, chewing gum, drinking cherry wine, wearing a sequined bustier—is a film cliché.

Sunglasses snapped, sequins scattered, wine syruping into blue sand, bustier torn and rusty—is a parable.

Decide on your option before the reel begins.

Parable:

The sand had been clean once; a virgin sheet of white, soft and clean as cocaine. But now, there was the factory. Now the sand was a glitter of blue.

There were stories about the desert—the parable of Old Jack, the parable of the Child Killer. But the girls still came. They came at midnight, they came early in the morning. They walked in bare feet carrying plastic grocery bags with their uniforms, food, rape alarms. Keys were splayed in their palms, knifed out. The buses did not come at night, nor in the early morning. The women came to the desert, walked over the bodies they found there, careful to avoid falling down into the mass graves, the limb-filled holes of the desert.

Cliché:

The sky is black, the sand so clotted with human that it reflects nothing. There is no wind, no water. The only way to cross is to take metallic salts every forty paces.

To walk across the desert is to conquer fear.

BODIES

Figure 17 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Menstruation

Black:

Violently repeated with fatal consequences. Glass shards are used. Anxiety sickness is registered at one hundred decibels.

Yellow:

Self-defence has been attempted and must be neutered. Offcuts and slough to be entered into the waste heap.

Blood:

Fucking is immaterial.

Milk:

Burned caramel runs along the length of the vulva. Licking is required, alternatively a long-handled spoon.

General:

Menstruation is regulated with pills. These are mandatory and administered via forced feeding. You will be strapped to the surgical chair and tubes will be inserted daily. The pills are safe and hygienic.

There will be pregnancy tests, smears and tissue scrapes done weekly. The resulting debris kept in glass jars. If there is any foetal matter this will be harboured separately.

Menstruation is encouraged in the dead girls. Their wombs are unregulated.

If there is any depression, breast tenderness or suicidal ideation present, this will be considered pre-menstrual and intervention will be severe.

Abortion

If there are remaining sisters, they can help remove the pregnancy.

They may bathe you as the pregnancy develops. They may paste wormwood onto your eyes and let you sleep for a full day or more, until the baby passes through you in hard pellets, wormy darts of flesh.

You may sit beneath the wormwood tree and cry, letting the green stink of it settle on your skin, pushing your softness against it. The dogs will moan all day. They will become so hungry that they start to eat each other. They sense the wormwood on your skin and stay away.

Fucking

Fuck in the cages. A Daddy reel can be programmed for severity.

Sadism reel:

He will be scared of you when he makes the baby come. He will want you to stop. His legs shake when he smells you coming close. His sweat smells of vinegar. You will let him be daddy, guiding him gently at first, then, whoring him down in your black furze. He will cry and flinch at your fingers in his beard, your teeth on his tongue. You will meet in the tunnel that connects the cages and the dark spaces where the dead are stored.

Romance reel:

He will lay you down on the jewelled blanket from the cadaver show—gold, glittering, filthy with faeces and dirt from the floor. It is always ready for you, rolled behind creels of limbs and flesh. When he comes to meet you, he crawls through the tunnel, his knees smeared with fishguts. You wait on the rich-coloured rug, its gold tassels flecked with food and shit.

Baby Girl reel:

Your knickers will be white lace, to match your knee socks and training bra. They stink of cloves and vinegar, dribbled with patches of sticky brown molasses. You will remove all traces of hair.

Third Trimester reel:

Your breasts will be heavy, sweat dripping through your shirt like mustard. Let the hair grow thick on your pubic bone, the knotty curls clinging to the flesh of your thighs.

Pregnancy

This will be the worst time. You will be alone.

Your last remaining sisters will be feverish in the dormitory. You have to feed them from a tube of egg, from the dried food store. Plunge it deep into their mouths so they have to eat. They'll be happy to do it, they won't say no.

There will only be a few minutes of darkness during Electric. There will be relief just before and after midnight. The baby will be hot against your thighs, your stomach. It will buzz against your ribs and want to be free.

All day, in the stinking heat you lie and wait for the baby to come.

Heat Hallucination:

Your baby sister is underneath the wormwood tree. You drag her there to keep her safe from the dogs. Sometimes you kiss her face and hands. But her tiny feet, the last of her candy pink nail gloss clinging to the nails, are still yours. You put her bluish foot at your cunt sometimes, at the place where her baby sister will emerge. You want them to know each other, to connect.

Masturbation

Following fasting, you may masturbate for two hours continuously.

You may lie in the foliage.

You may come repeatedly.

You may stain your dress.

You may touch yourself and think of roses on a wedding cake.

You may cry.

You may scorch on bare knucklebones.

You may leave a static finger-trail.

You may fall into the floor

Branding

Throw away poison comb.

Leave your fox brush wild.

Stark, hollow eyes and red, red mouth.

Lobotomy

His eyes are scalded. His eyes are burned blue.

He was on my bed. On the bed he'd killed my sister in. The soil was still packed tightly in the frame, heaped on his body. He hadn't wanted to play our last game, the game where I hit him on the head so many times until he was still. Still, not dead. And now he lay underneath the soil, his head alone raised above the dirt. He would have died, but I thrust two fingers into that filthy cavern of his mouth and scooped out the soil, scraping at his bulbous epiglottis, dead pink flesh sticking to my nails. I pushed my fingers in to him again, this time he gagged and a thin string of green bile flew out. He coughed and breathed more easily.

In my pocket there was an ice pick. It was just a small thing, a little sliver of flashing metal. He hadn't seen me take it earlier, when we had gone to get the vats of acid from the kitchen.

He was the last one, the last one but for me and the baby. And the baby was months away. His eyes were blue from the acid. It scalded the jelly down to nothing, exposed the now faulty veins and nerves. Bluish juice dripped down and a sharp, hot stink rose. He was, I was, we were charged. A sizzle of electricity ran down the walls, the wiring came away in blackened peels, hot plastic oozed melts of colour down the paint—it was a room full of nausea and rot.

Rupture

The aperture slides open and red meat cracks.

Glottal valleys rise.

At this point, swallow the dark row of pins.

VIRGINS

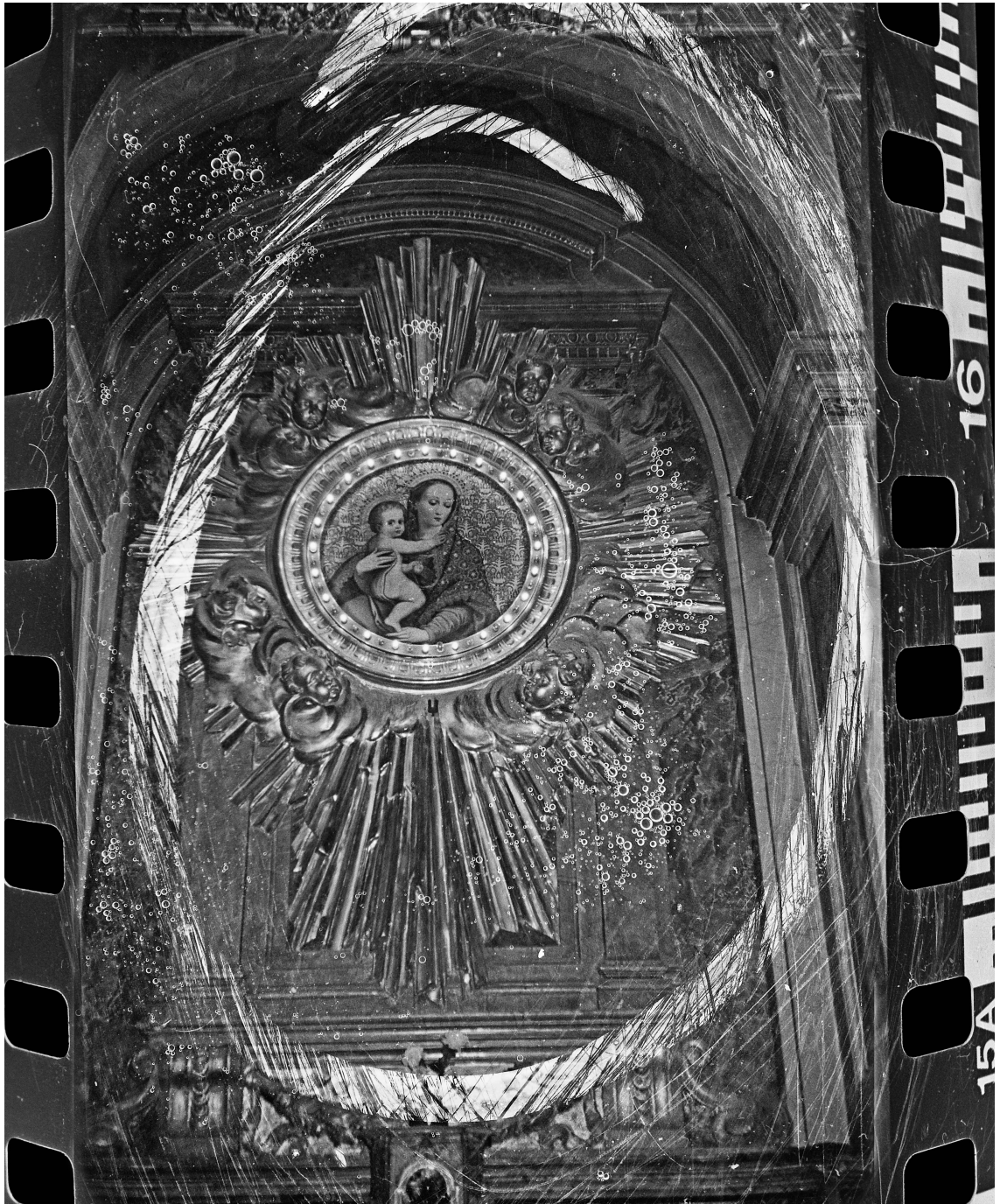


Figure 18 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Blue Virgin

We went to the swimming hole. We made a daisy chain that stretched around the body of the blue virgin three times. We machined the flowers into a holy reel.

Two tears leaked on her plaster face and starred tracks ran down. When we touched the blue of her with our bare fingertips, they blackened and failed.

In the eighth month we complained that the heaviness pressed down on us, layers of dirt and matter decomposing in our guts. In the hot rooms with curtains drawn there was no release.

Coming here was cool, it was virgin blue.

Glow in the Dark Virgin

She is sad.

She is hanging from a tree, dead reels unspooled and scuttering around her body, chains around her ankles.

It is Electric, and she will be flashed repeatedly with false luminol ... until she rises, until she floats away.

The saints see her coming, watch her body shimmer on the sky.

The bloody transparencies they pull from their abdomens will cushion her great fall, her shattering delayed.

She is sad. She sees all.

Rosary Virgin

To press the screams out of her, drip the crystal beads through your fingers.

You are not invited to her distress. You must use this reel to assuage her.

1. Sorrowful
2. Agonies
3. Mysteries
4. Shadows
5. Guttings
6. Wreakings
7. Blindings

Luminol Virgin

You may use this reel to contact her directly, but do not beg to see the luminol glow.

There have been several sightings of the virgin, but none have been verified. There are many false luminol flashes, particularly near the saints. Cardiac spores have been swallowed near the grottoes to invite luminol fatality. There have been flashes across the sky at these times, but death is always instantaneous.

You may pray in any way you choose—knees on the ground, lying vitally, fucking, ripping, chest bare.

Praying is not a requirement, she will come anyway.

If you are to attend a luminol mass, you must fast, pray, purify and meditate beforehand.

Touch yourself erotically during prayer. There must be group sex throughout the blindings. Chastity belts can be removed with the shucking knife if necessary. Each pearl that rolls free must be caught and used as an offering.

SACRIFICIAL LAWS

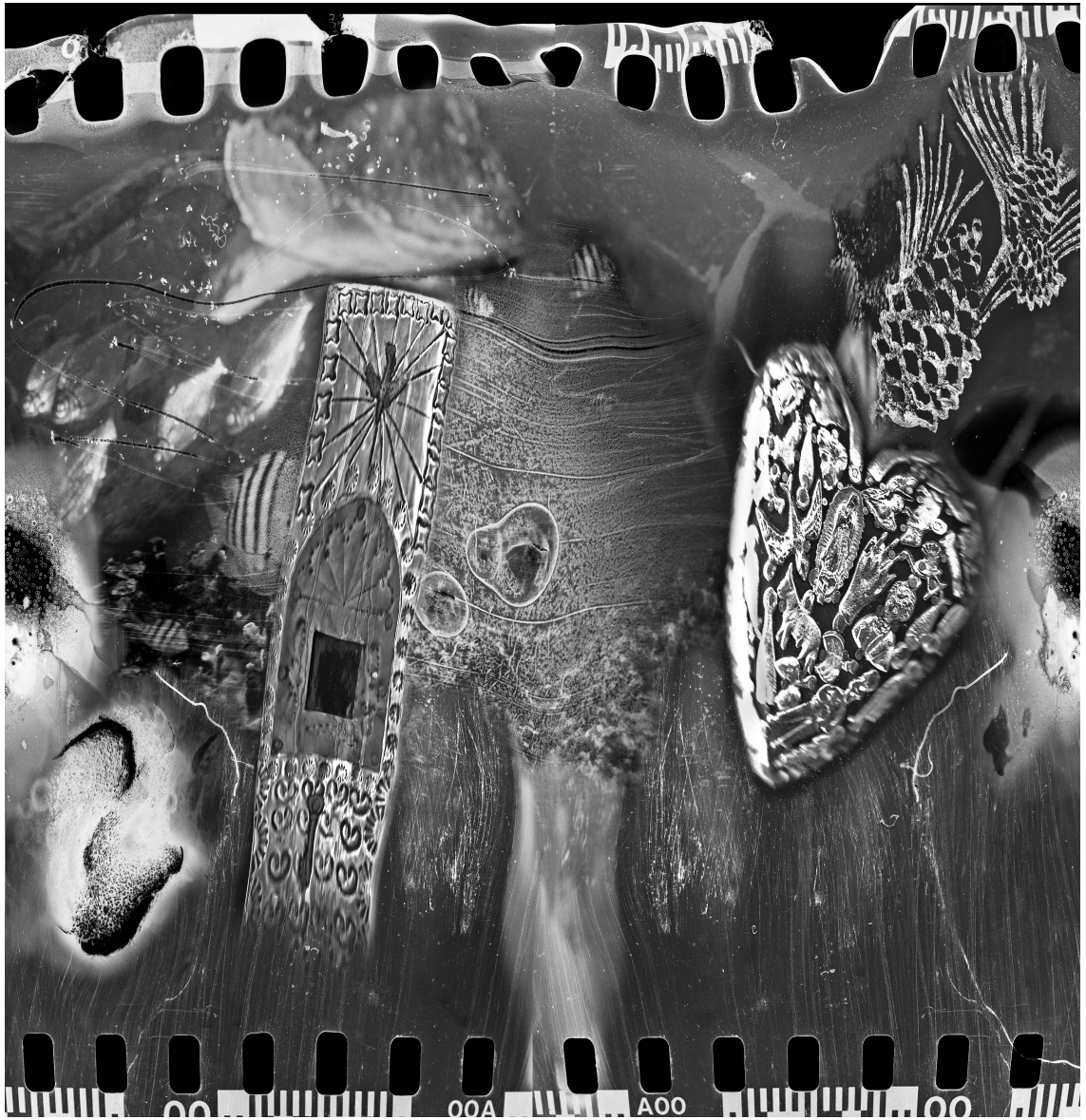


Figure 19 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Offerings

Freedom

There is only one chance for freedom and that is to enslave the others. If you attempt this, you should write your hate on grey glass paper and bring it to the altar.

Birthing

This is never easy. You must find the jars of foetal matter and bring it to the altar. When you are there you must cry over it and let the salt tenderise the meat. No one can see you do this so it is best to go at change of shift, when there is a rush. Pull out your pearl and leave it for her.

Sex

Sex should never be attempted without appeasement. Leave a trick of bullets by her feet.

Before a Pageant

Never speak of the pageant. Do not think of the pageant. Blur your mind with sex and colours.

Curse

Take a sack of offcuts, preferably legs, and cure them for ten days. Bake them in the oven and roll them through the rose heap. Bake seven pattycakes into heart shapes, covered in pink icing. Leave them at the grotto. Not one crumb will remain.

Meditation

When internal lacerations break down the food source, turn to your Meditation reel.

You are allowed six sessions per calendar year, with the majority falling in Bone. It may be possible to withdraw the sixth session should your girl die within the period. Menstrual blood will be measured in the cups provided and then evaporated. Open the chest cavity with a y-incision and then palpate symmetrically. If, after six sessions, there is no solution, you may drink the luminol.

Fasting

If you die during fasting, you will be given a pageant and posthumous crown.

Before you hurt, you must fast. Nothing is to be ingested—no patty cake, no dill pickle, no girlflesh, no metallic salts and no luminol—before the work begins.

You must reduce down in size, until the bones show clear and icy beneath your skin. Your flesh must go through four stages - grease and pus will run out as the toxins release, there will be sagging as the flesh loosens beneath, bluing will occur as blood vessels tighten and strain, and finally, there will be sucking to the bone. Your skin will be slick, plumb, taut.

Internal organs become shrivelled after four weeks. The stomach will harden. Daily intravenous shots of gold will be given to maintain energy.

You will begin to feel nauseous if you smell flesh. You must stay distant from the wolf bone fires, the kitchen and the oven. You must not even enter surgery as the fluids may cause you to faint.

You may break the fast following successful completion of the hurting. Food must be reintroduced slowly, and gold shots accordingly reduced.

Waste

During Fur, when the air is dead with heaving, you may each try once for the key. The key is silver and shares a ring with trinkets from the desert; two milk teeth, plaited red hair, a fingerbone and three dried veins. The prizes click together on the ring, keeping the key safe. It can shut off the machinery, the factory, the fairground and the oven. It can set you free. Or you can cage the others. The key is deep in the bottom of the trash pile, buried in waste.

The smell is bad there because of the mounds of elephant faeces, the offcuts from the cadaver show, the rusting machine parts—all run through the crusher. The metal teeth of the apparatus are not clean, shit and fat drips down from the dark prongs, the stench compacts in the white noon. Underneath the machine lies your martyred sister, the virgin, her maggoty holes growing bigger than what remains.

Digging

This reel is sacred punishment.

Topsoil must be turned daily. Ground mulch, milled bone and fatty slough is embedded in this way. Each morning take a sack of ground debris and walk into the desert. All human excess must be buried. If it is not possible to bury the remnants, you must scatter them in the sand. If there is any blood left, mix it through the earth with the flat edge of the spade. Dig furiously for forty minutes. Stop. Drink a portion of metallic salts. Dig furiously again for twenty minutes. Lie in the sand and use the heft of your body to close over any cracks or fissures. You may eat a fraction of the runoff to prepare you for the walk back to the factory. If you vomit, cover it in the bluest sand. If you retain the meal, return immediately.

Purification

Take off your skin to the elbow to begin this reel.

Rough hacking is effective, but for quicker results use domestic flesh stripper. Once the muscle plate is revealed, burn your number into it. Once you have been branded, take the flesh heap (if there is any remaining) and throw it down the kitchen chute.

Walk to the centre of the desert, in the direction of the sun. If more than forty paces are required to do this, you may chew on a single fingerbone. When you have consumed the bone, continue forty more paces or until you reach the spot.

When you reach the central gravesite, unpeel your breasts from their bones and lay them down. Take the iron and press the scald to your clavicle. Do not do this for more than ten seconds at a time (in order not to arouse the hunger of the saints). When you are entirely flat, you may enter the pool of holy water.

The reel will end on a miracle loop.

Shucking Knife

Use the shucking knife to splice the reel together. In this way you can bring the girls back to life and make their bodies whole. If you do not get the knack of the timing, you will make them worse—they will seem deader than before.

The shucking knife is passed down through a matriarchal line.

The shucking knife can be used to remove the pearl before or after birth.

If you experiment sexually with knife play, be careful to use rubbing alcohol on the wounds to prevent interstitial pregnancies.

Oysters can be swallowed directly from the desert pools. They should on no account be shucked clean.

Hammer

There may be some demand for the hammer. Go to the nailed-up trailer and introduce the game.

If breathing ceases or aneurysm bursts, add filters to the screaming—beige, mustard or celeriac tones can be used on the synesthesiac. Turkish delight can be used to replace the internal organs if there is no real desire to sluice.

Mucking

Be cautious when approaching the saints. Never go without full mask and oxygen. The three implements you need for this task are the portable cylinder (which you must strap to your back), the bucket of iodene, and the spongestick.

The saints will be frightened, and will scurry to the top of their poles when they see you coming. Beware falling faeces at this point. Mildew air is green round the muck. Fill the buckets, fizz the iodine with rot. Inhale two sharp breaths of oxygen and come away.

Any flash that comes from them is false-luminol: Do not turn towards it, they are charlatans

Feeding**Bear**

Baby bear baby bear.

She has white fur and she is lonely.

Suckle her at midnight.

Pattycakes

The optimum grease is found inside the viscera. Remove each piece with care. When the organ slips out of the skinning, rush into a cloth sack. The surface will be slippery but tough. Take your shucking knife and slit into snowflake cadence. Make each plum lung and blue heart paper chain pretty. All the time you are doing this, grease will coat the plate and can be siphoned off. Hang up the viscera, ready for the sweet fifteen. Take the grease from the plate and mould between your palms—steady rhythmic motions will create the perfect pattycake. Ingest with acid stars and you will see the luminol flash at dawn. Leave this reel running to prevent bear death.

Reading

There is only one true reel.

This is a morning task. Once complete you may drink a portion of metallic salts and return to the assembly line. The others must be exfoliated. This reel—the one true reel—must be committed to memory twice per day. The first time will be gruelling. You will be in handstand position, paper fed roughly down your gullet until you are blue. If you lose height, poise or grace, repeat the task. Once you have committed the true reel to memory, you will be absolved. When your memory is clean of the reel, you may begin the task for the second time. This time you will be lying down. Each word must be learned rapidly and dildos applied to your sweet spot as you think.

The other reels must be rubbed with pig lard, kept clean, their spines shining with pattyck grease. Once this task has been completed, burn them with wolf bones and the saints' robes in the central furnace.

Mending

Finally, there will be luminol.

Joints

Joints which may suffer from corpse-weight are knees, ankles and shoulders. Beeswax cylinders must be rolled verbally until you achieve a lacquer shine. Swimming is optimum and must be practised dry for the first six months.

Machinery

There will be rusting machinery, metal teeth. There will be sweet sixteens, quinceañeras. There will be white dresses sprayed with blood. Pink candles, dripping wax. Christmas pattyckes full of Jesus' afterbirth. There will be nails in your palms. There will be baby bears hungry for your fall.

SAINTS



Figure 20 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Bone Saint

There is nothing left of her. She sways in the wind. Her platform is a meatheap—the slough and offcut of her flagellations lay in thick layers on the wood.

The shucking knife is in her waistband. She feels every scrape of it against her bare belly. A neon thrill goes through her as metal licks flesh.

She raises her eyes to the virgin and blue light rains down. She is luminol pretty. Her scabs become a lace of glitter. The untouched pattycake, piped in yellow roses for her birthday, melts in the sun and she smiles.

Metal Saint

The first time you watch this reel, do it with a blindfold.

Slowly lift the silk from your eyes and let the sharpness come into focus. Unless you want an iron shock—in that case pin open your eyes and let it flood you.

There are one hundred precious metals in this reel. They have been slaughter mined.

Flash Saint

This reel has been sealed in plastic and buried in the blue sand. When you open it, do it with tact—there is a gelignite sanction internally. Touch it once and the saint will appear, or you may touch it a hundred times and nothing happens except the flesh burns from your fingers.

The explosives are tiny crystals of light—afterbirth, coeliac and winedark.

Once you release the saint from this reel he will be thick upon you. He will mist you in ghoul smoke. He will suck.

If you see his face, you are ended. It is the face of the bad man.

Jewel Saint

If you use the oven terminally, you become a jewel saint.

This reel is a compilation of all the gassings. The oven is wiped clean, silver. Stop motion poisons leak from it.

If you look deep into the mouth of the oven, you can see death, the apocalypse, violence. You can be in the metal tunnel.

Throw the following items into the flames: water, glitter, foil, food.

The flames will change colour and sputter.

Blow out the flames on your sweet sixteen and lie down.

LUMINOL

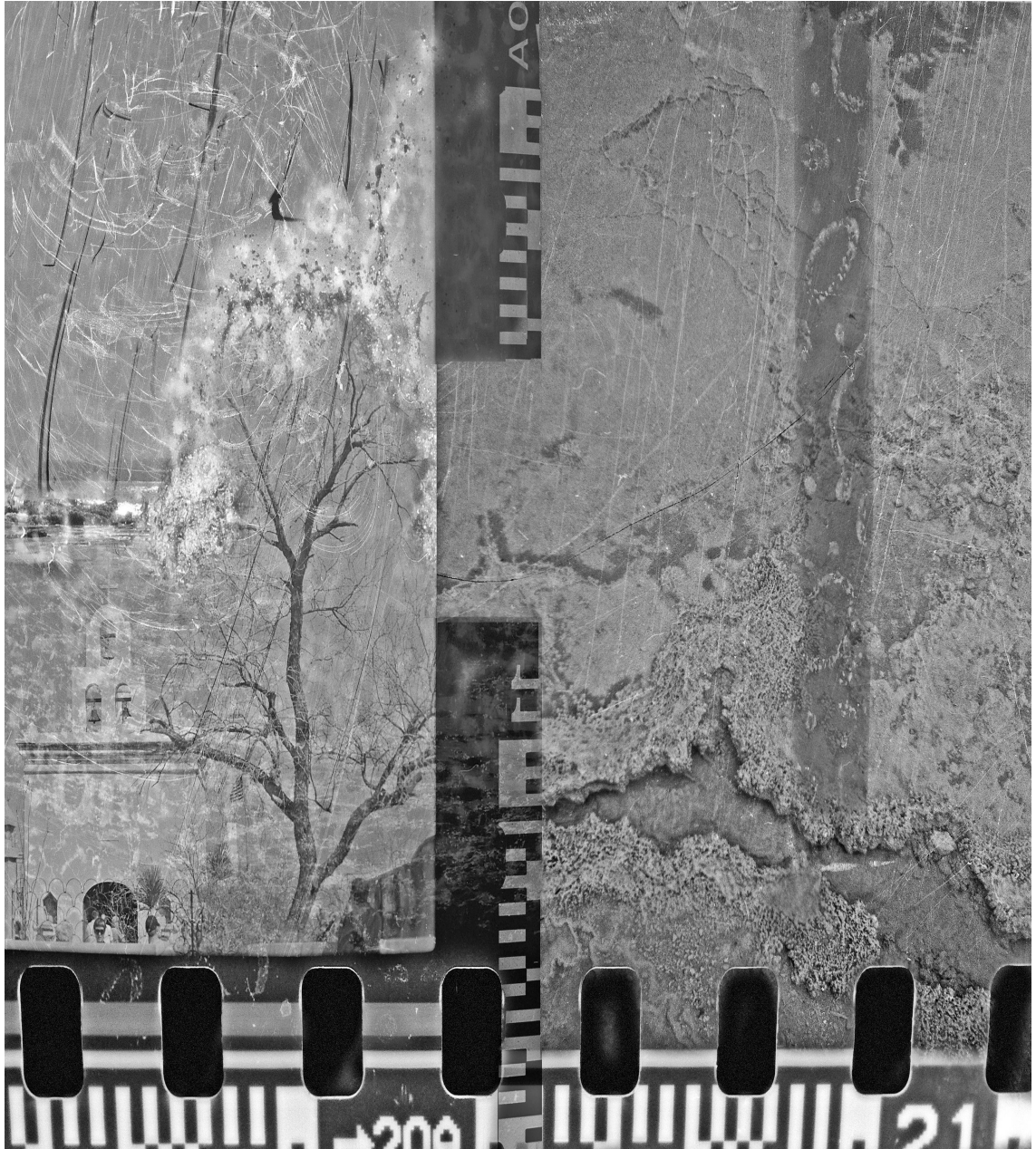


Figure 21 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

Bone

This season is the hardest. Never insert this reel until ready for blunt trauma.

The only way to exist in Bone is to find a window or a view. We lie mute and seasick, watching the sky turn grey, black.

Our bodies roll through bronze shavings, through tarpaper.

Fur

This is the season for hunting. There are foxes, squirrels, deer and baby bears.

Take your shucking knife up close to them while they are sleeping and slide it under their sleek pelts.

You can spear them from a distance.

You can burn them out of their holes, caves and clearings.

Wrestle them to the ground.

You can hatefuck them.

Wear them at Christmas.

You can lie on their soft, brown pelts and make generic love.

Dry

Your biggest problem will be loss of mineral salts. Remedy this by applying in conjunction with the Holy Water reel.

You will be awake all night thinking about falling.

You will have a black headache that spreads right through with needlepoints of pain.

Your eye sockets are filled with gritty greyish putty, bandaged.

Your task is to count your breaths as you spin out the hours.

If you wish (for relief), you may scream.

Electric

Napalm, sulphur and asbestos storms hit in Electric. There is no shelter.

Roseheap

During Roseheap you will be tired all the time.

Turn this reel on only if you are prepared to face your end.

The night is bad but the day is worse. Sunlight will be horror, a bad thing. The new day brings dogs with teeth. Patch the walls of the factory with runoff. Slough yourselves in stinks. The scent of nutmeg will creep from your apron. Your bare head will leak coconut oil.

You will work the fair by night, dresses soaked with red diesel from the carnival, the big dipper shuddering on its tracks and needing more fuel. By day keep the reels clean, pig lard rubbed along the spines, covers of thin bone.

THE DEAD RETURN



Figure 22 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

End

It was a long way out to the edge of the desert, to where the cherry wine factory girls made out with bad men.

The dogs were hungry as usual when we prepared for the chase. Six white hounds, purebred and eager. We lay on the ground beside them, in the enclosure where they slept. We had raw meat in our pockets—elephant hide or fish guts or maybe girl parts we couldn't boil down. We passed the meat from our mouths to theirs, chewing it slowly, tenderising, until it was soft enough for them to digest. Used to our scent and keen for treats, the dogs rolled over when we came near, their grey underbellies exposed. We stroked their velvet pelts gently, until each hair was on end in a field of static. Only then, when the beasts were quivering under our touch, did we drop food into their mouths. Yelping, the dogs rolled back on to their feet, scenting blood, hungry for the chase.

We liked to charge into the black rocks. It was a beautiful ride out—the copper sky burned gold in the heat and the rocks sent out sparks of black light. Our hands were velvet from the chase. Our toes and fingers were indistinct, padded with hard calluses worn smooth. We glided through the sand—the sky bent lower to the ground leaking oily warmth. Our eyes stung with salt.

The reel ends in a bad way. We are in the grip of something terrible, a hallucination. We crawl—burning sand sticking to the leather on our knees, water from our canteens leaking and hissing on the desert ground. As it vanishes, we begin to laugh ... a low sound swallowed in the soupy sky.

Lying dazed on our backs, we see the desert all at once. Black light zinging from the rocks, the bluish sand glittering. Blood dripping from our broken necks, we let out a high whistle that only the hounds understand. We slip under then, deep under, as noon melts the sky.

Psychic

We had the last séance.

We dressed in rags and tatters, smeared and stinking ballgowns. We were looped with fairy lights and wore plastic crowns.

The girls called out to me, and the saints and virgins hummed through. A snowy sludge of sound that rang ice into the room.

L U M I N O L

and

M U R D E R

and

F A C T O R Y

were the words they spelled out.

Revelation

Oxidation of luminol is attended with a striking emission of blue-green light. An alkaline solution of the compound is allowed to react with a mixture of hydrogen peroxide and potassium ferricyanide. The dianion (5) is oxidised to the triplet excited state (two unpaired electrons of like spin) (6) of the amino phthalate ion (Scheme 2). This slowly undergoes intersystem crossing to the singlet excited state (two unpaired electrons of opposite spin) (7), which decays to the ground state ion (8) with the emission of one quantum of light (a photon) per molecule.

Coda The Future of Luminol Theory



Figure 23 Still from *Her Story*

You think she might have run off?’ I asked, too hopefully. ‘Made it look like a crime scene and took off?’⁹

With Her Story, Barlow hopes to give some agency back to the star of the game. The answers-only structure is designed in part to give this woman her voice back.

"You only ever hear the woman's testimony," Barlow said. "You only ever hear what she's saying."¹⁰

*"What does it all mean?" Celia asks herself in Fritz Lang's *Secret beyond the Door*. But that vibrant investigative energy is always also tainted by and sometimes dominated or nearly defeated by the heroine's submission to masochistic desires and by her dark passion for psychological disturbance.¹¹*

⁹ Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (W&N, 2014), 41.

¹⁰ Farokhmanesh, "Her Story Is a Serial-style Mystery, Blending FMV and Adventure Games," *Polygon*, January 22, 2015. Accessed August 11, 2015. <http://www.polygon.com/2015/1/22/7553693/her-story-game-serial-sam-barlow>.

¹¹ Maria Tatar, *Secrets Beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and His Wives*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 96.

Mainstreaming Luminol Theory: *Gone Girl* and *Her Story*

When the film *Gone Girl* came out in 2014, three years into the writing of this thesis, it was as though all of the themes and images that I had been seeing repeatedly in the experimental, apocalyptic, and fragmentary texts that are its focus had burst into the mainstream. Just one month before the completion of this thesis, July 2015, saw Sam Barlow's critically acclaimed videogame *Her Story*¹ mainstreaming Luminol Theory. Both *Her Story* and *Gone Girl* operate within the forensic imaginary, bringing Luminol Theory into the open. There is a future for Luminol Theory beyond this thesis, and *Gone Girl*, a major Hollywood blockbuster and *Her Story*, a critically acclaimed videogame, are both proof of the infectiousness, the contamination and the reach of the crime scene in contemporary culture and the scope that Luminol Theory offers in the reading of these crime scenes. I offer a brief discussion of both texts, and consider the ways in which Luminol Theory can be used to analyse them as an index of contemporary cultural anxieties, and to explore their hidden narratives.

Gone Girl began as a bestselling mystery novel by Gillian Flynn. The novel is written with alternating first person narrators, Nick and Amy Dunne, who are an unhappily married couple. The plot centres on Amy's disappearance on the morning of their fifth wedding anniversary and her subsequent strange reappearance. Through the course of the narrative, it emerges that she faked her own death, spilling quantities of her own blood in their shared home with the specific intent that the sloppy cleaning job she does will leave plenty for a luminol trace:

I sat cross-legged on my kitchen floor for ten minutes, letting the blood drizzle steadily until I'd made a nice, thick puddle. Then I cleaned it up as poorly as Nick would have done after he bashed my head in. I wanted the house to tell a story of conflict between true and false. The living room looks staged, yet the blood has been cleaned up: it can't be Amy!²

It is this reaction between Amy's blood and the luminol used by the detectives investigating the scene that drives her successful attempt to frame Nick for her (faked)

¹ Sam Barlow, "A Video Game About a Woman Talking to the Police," *HER STORY*, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://www.herstorygame.com/>.

² Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (W&N, 2014), 219.

murder. In this sense, luminol is the key actor in this narrative. Amy imagines into the future through luminol, and in doing so, brings Luminol Theory into the mainstream. When the police arrive, they act precisely as Amy predicts they will:

“Nick did you do any housecleaning the day your wife went missing?”
Gilpin asked.

“No.”

“Okay, because the tech did a Luminol sweep, and I’m sorry to tell you, the kitchen floor lit up. A good amount of blood was spilled there.”

“Amy’s type – *B positive*,” Boney interrupted. “And I’m not talking a little cut, I’m talking *blood*.”³

Amy’s use of the forensic imaginary has real consequences in terms of the plot, and, ultimately allows to frame her husband for her own murder.

The commercial success of the novel led to the film adaptation, directed by David Fincher and also written by Gillian Flynn. The central scenes of the film cluster around recycled media tropes: Nick weeping at a news conference; a candlelit vigil for Amy; a talk show interview where Nick defends himself against murder charges. These images both perpetuate and deny Amy’s continued existence; the clear impression is that she is dead – a stereotypical white, blond, pretty, thin woman whose image circulates through news channels and gossip magazines – but she is venerated and celebrated for her desirability and ultimate passivity. In both the novel and the film Amy says ‘I’m so much happier now I’m dead.’⁴ Amy is recategorised as a Dead-Girl, an object worthy of adoration and without responsibilities or pain. *Gone Girl* shows that in fact the Dead-Girl is not a cipher, a plot device, but rather a terrifying force that cannot be exiled or contained.

Her Story is a videogame that combines elements of a full motion video game (that is a game that relies on pre-recorded video files), a choose-your-own-adventure-story and an interactive novel. The game consists of several short clips that are purportedly taken from a six-day period of police interviews in the course of an investigation into murder set in 1994. The protagonist, played by musician Viva Sieffert, plays the wife of the dead man who is strongly suspected of his murder. As time goes on, she is subject to more invasive interview techniques until she is finally

³ Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (W&N, 2014), 41.

⁴ Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (W&N, 2014), 205.

forced to undertake a lie detector test. However, the game player, or analyst, cannot read the story chronologically; instead the only way to access the information is to enter search terms (such as ‘murder’, ‘sister’, ‘blood’) into the mock 90s PC terminal. The search terms throw up clips that contain those phrases and by carefully piecing the narrative together, the player can limn the story with meaning. It has reached a wide audience and has been both critically acclaimed with positive reviews in major gaming journals and websites⁵, and commercially successful selling over 100,000 copies.⁶

Her Story can be read explicitly through the lens of Luminol Theory. The structure of the narrative is palimpsestic: the fragments are unhierarchised to the point that no two readers will ever experience the story in the same way. Luminol Theory can be used to excavate the meaning from the story by limning the fragments in a certain way. There are clues both in the designer’s interviews about the game, and, in the game itself, that our sympathy is intended to be with the protagonist: we are intended to understand and empathise with her situation rather than engage in *schadenfreude*. Sam Barlow explains the reason for including seemingly irrelevant or difficult material into the narrative:

There are whole swathes of life experience, different parts of your life, that it never becomes prudent to share," Barlow said. "There's almost a taboo to sharing some of this stuff ... You slowly rewrite your history and kind of remove some of those things from your life — tweak them or just kind of blur them to shift them into a peripheral view.⁷

We are introduced, through the interview process, to a terrified little girl hiding in an attic, rather than a callous sociopath.

The attic, as weighty a location as the basement in terms of the Gothic narrative, is in a different register to the basement. Gilbert and Gubar wrote a book on the metaphor of the ‘madwoman in the attic’ taken from the character of Bertha Rochester, trapped in the attic at Thornfield in Jane Eyre: ‘Thornfield’s attic soon becomes a

⁵ Including: *IGN*; *Pocket Gamer*; *Eurogamer*; *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*; *Polygon*; *Destructoid*; *Hardcore Gamer*; *Gamespot* etc.

⁶ Patrick Dane, “Her Story Reaches 100,000 Copies Sold,” *Bleeding Cool Comic Book, Movie, TV News*, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.bleedingcool.com/2015/08/11/her-story-reaches-100000-copies-sold/>.

⁷ Megan Farokhmanesh, “Her Story Is a Serial-style Mystery, Blending FMV and Adventure Games,” *Polygon*, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.polygon.com/2015/1/22/7553693/her-story-game-serial-sam-barlow>.

complex focal point where Jane's own rationality (what she has learned from Miss Temple) and her irrationality (her "hunger, rebellion and rage") intersect.⁸ According to Slavoj Žižek the house in the Gothic or horror story is a site for psychoanalytic analysis with the basement representing the id, the ground level the ego, and the attic the superego.⁹ Steve Finbow, writing about the film *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in his cultural history of necrophilia *Grave Desire* mentions Žižek's 'psychological house rules' in relation to the layout of the house, specifically describing the protagonist's decision to 'run upstairs to the attic' into:

what she hopes is the super-ego, the arena of control, the realm of conscience the antithesis of the id-wielding masked man. But there – in a similar way to the discovery of the mummified corpse in *Psycho* – she discovers the desiccated corpse of an old woman, and the near-to-death body of an old man. [...] Norman Bates and Leatherface are monstrous realisations of our own repressive desires and, concurrently, manifestations of oppressive economic transferences of otherness.¹⁰

The attic is also the focal point for the 1944 George Cukor film *Gaslight*¹¹, starring Ingrid Bergman. Bergman plays Paula, the niece of a famous opera singer, Alice, recently murdered. Paula soon marries Gregory, an abusive, violent con man, who isolates his wife and convinces her that she is losing her mind. The film is named for the dimming of the gaslights in their house (also the house of the dead aunt) as Gregory searches through the attic to look for valuables of the women he is later revealed to have murdered. Gregory convinces Paula that she is losing her sense of perception as '[t]errorised by light and sound, the distraught Paula becomes so powerful a symbol for a person being driven mad that the term "gaslight," used as a verb, has entered common parlance to signify deluding a person into thinking he or she is insane.'¹² In this story, gaslight, a green glow that reveals a hidden narrative, and reveals a murderer, functions in the same way as luminol.

⁸ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 348.

⁹ For more on this see: <http://biblioklept.org/2012/03/23/slavoj-zizek-uses-norman-bates-house-in-psycho-to-illustrate-id-ego-and-superego-because-why-wouldnt-he/>

¹⁰ Steve Finbow, *Grave Desire: A Cultural History of Necrophilia* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 74.

¹¹ George Cukor, *Gaslight* (Warner Home Video, 2004).

¹² Maria Tatar, *Secrets Beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and His Wives*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 96.

Attics and secrets figure prominently in the narrative of *Her Story*, and one way to limn the text and paratexts is as a gaslighting narrative. Eve and/or Hannah were constantly hidden in the attic according to one version of events, one secret twin occulted forever. Whilst Eve and/ or Hannah were secreted in the attic, an improbable accident befell their parents as they succumbed to mushroom poisoning, an event made all the more bizarre by the fact that their father was an expert in mycology. One or both sisters lost a baby whilst secretly double-dating Simon, the dead man, and the miscarriage happened in the attic. Towards the end of the game, when most of the clips have been unlocked, a message appears on screen purportedly from the police officer allowing the viewer access to the 20-year-old material and he addresses the viewer as ‘Sarah’ asking ‘Do you understand why your mother did what she did?’ ‘Sarah’ is the name of the baby that Hannah/ Eve lost, and it was revealed that she was pregnant during the interviews. By using Luminol Theory, the viewer can piece together a narrative that makes sense.

Her Story can be read conventionally as a story of a murderous wife, of duplicity and callousness. But using Luminol Theory to really listen to what the woman is saying, in her own words, by piecing together her narrative of trauma, of dead parents, of a secret fear that she was two people it is possible to see that she was being gaslighted by Simon, that like Gregory in *Gaslight* he isolated her and destroyed her sense of self, but that her second pregnancy allowed her the clarity to retaliate, to kill him to save herself and her child. Eve/ Hannah lived her entire life in a crime scene, and the murder of Simon was its logical extension, making his psychological violence visible, legible on his own body. Luminol Theory shines its queer light on the erased, the hidden, and the marginalised, memorialising those whom it illuminates.

Conclusion: One Quantum of Light

This slowly undergoes intersystem crossing to the singlet excited state (two unpaired electrons of opposite spin) (7), which decays to the ground state ion (8) with the emission of one quantum of light (a photon) per molecule.¹³

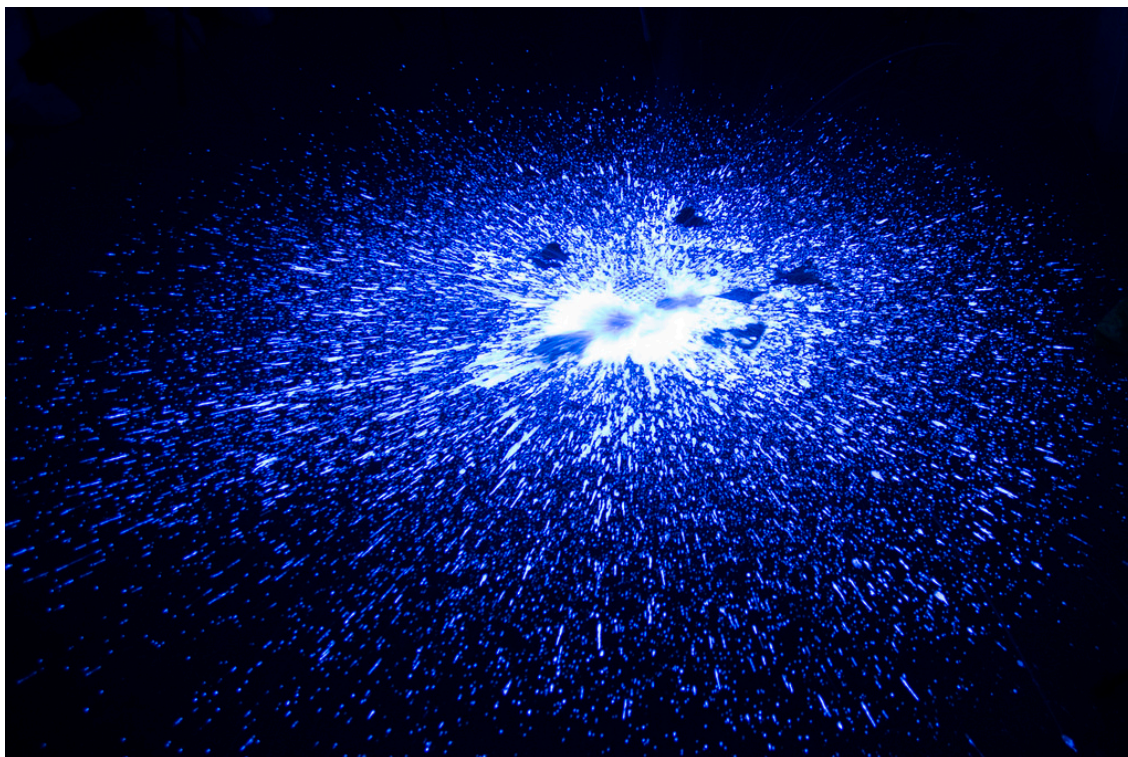


Figure 24 Luminol in a Bathtub

This section reflects on the memorialising aspect of the thesis and explores the idea that as luminol releases one quantum of light when it comes into contact with biological material, so too this thesis illuminates the memory of the dead women and girls who are its subject.

The final lines of ‘The Luminol Reels’ (which are also the final lines of *Dead Girl Scrolls*) elucidate the chemical reaction that occurs as luminol oxidises and luminesces. This final invocation of technical, scientific language has the effect of an incantation, following as it does, so closely from the séance of the section preceding it. This combination of the chemical and the occult is not accidental but rather illuminates the supernatural aspect that is presented by the luminosity of blood, and by extension, the awesome numinous nature of scientific endeavour.

¹³ Laura Ellen Joyce, *The Luminol Reels* (New York, NY: Calamari Press, 2014), 97.

The fields of chemistry and biology are concerned with bioluminescence, and the subfield of forensic analysis is concerned more specifically with the potential properties of luminol that allow it to excavate hidden histories that can assist the forensic scientist to discover facts that can eventually lead to the solution of violent crimes. However, as with all scientific analyses, luminol evidence is unstable and can give false readings. Luminol glows blue as it reacts with a range of biological and non-biological materials including ‘plant peroxidases (fresh potato juice), metals (Figure 7.7) and some cleaners (esp. hypochlorites.)’¹⁴ Luminol has also been known to react with ‘an old porcelain sink or bathtub that has been exposed to cleaners.’¹⁵ However, the reaction between luminol and this range of materials is never as intense and produces a “‘twinkling” or “rippling” effect’ whereas ‘luminol’s reaction with a true bloodstain produces an intense, long lasting, even glow, frequently in patterns such as spatters, smears, wipes, drag marks, or even footwear impressions.’¹⁶

To categorise Luminol Theory as belonging to the sciences, even the social sciences, is to ignore the inherent subjectivity of literary theory. It is important to consider that what is being discussed in this thesis is not simply the reaction between certain kinds of organic matter. The difference between the ‘twinkling’ effect of ‘fresh potato juice’ and the intense ‘glow’ of a room soaked with blood is not simply chemical, but relates to the lived (and dead) experience of those who have been subject to extreme violence. By reproducing the violence done to these bodies, I have engaged in a meta-pornographic investigation that does not exempt me from the charge of sexual exploitation that I aim to critique. Lisa Downing recasts the disturbing question that has troubled curators and cultural historians of pornography since Krafft-Ebing of whether pornographic representation stifles or generates coercive sexual practices. She frames this in relation to necrophiliac representation:

¹⁴ William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, eds., *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1998), 161.

¹⁵ William G. Eckert and Stuart H. James, eds., *Interpretation of Bloodstain Evidence at Crime Scenes*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1998), 161.

¹⁶ Filippo Barni et al., “Forensic Application of the Luminol Reaction as a Presumptive Test for Latent Blood Detection,” *Talanta* 72, no. 3 (2007), 908, doi:10.1016/j.talanta.2006.12.045.

I would perhaps not go so far as to suggest that the line between a necrophiliac writer and a would-be practitioner is quite that thin, or that the equivalence between neurotic phantasy and acting out translates so literally and according to such a simple relation of cause and effect. Nonetheless, this idea supports the persuasive view that literature serves a social function by encoding, within a safe space, desires which must not be enacted in the world. However, the fear exists, as Krafft-Ebing has made clear, that such textual representation may simultaneously defuse and stimulate the impulse. This reaches the heart of contemporary debates on pornography, which question how far it is safe (and indeed helpful) to diffuse images and fantasies that facilitate sexual release, thereby possibly reducing the incidence of coercive sexual acts.¹⁷

By engaging in meta-pornographic enquiry in this thesis I cannot exempt myself from this morally sticky position. There are two things that I offer as a counterpoint here: Firstly, I would argue in agreement with Peter Brook that ‘all narrative may well be obituary in that it seeks a retrospective knowledge that comes after the end, which in human terms places it on the far side of death.’¹⁸ And, perhaps more hopefully, in an attempt to ameliorate this necessarily complicit position I offer the hope that nowhere are the hidden stories of this thesis more palpable, more immediate than when doused in blood. The murdered and mutilated female bodies that appear in *Skin Horse*, *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate*, *The Necropastoral*, *Memoirs of JonBenét Ramsey Written by Kathy Acker*, and *EVER* are reclaimed as autonomous bodies and voices that speak from the margins, who speak from beyond the pleasure principle. Each blood-soaked body produces its own ‘intense, long lasting, even glow’ that cannot be doused or even transmuted. As the bodies of these Dead-Girls ‘decay’ there will always be ‘one quantum of light’ emitted in their memory.

¹⁷ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 62-63.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1992), 61.



Figure 25 Illustration from *The Luminol Reels*

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Appendix A: Stills from the trailer for “The Luminol Reels”

Appendix B: Email Interview with Johannes Göransson

1. In Catherine Malabou's work on plasticity, she considers that plastic is multivalent, and contradictory. Carolyn Shread, her translator, describes Malabou's formulation of plasticity as:

A word that is not quite yet a concept, the grounds of a philosophical notion drawn from the French word *plasticité*, which bears at once the giving (like plastic surgery or sculpture), receiving (like clay), exploding (like a bomb, *plastique* in French), and regeneration (like stem cells) of form.

Do you recognize this range in your work? Would you consider *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate* to be a plastic text? `

That's a really interesting quote/idea. I'll have to check that out. I like that description, suggesting the contradictory attitudes toward genre, medium and text. What interested me about the play format was using it impossibly and intrusively: ie melding the actors with their roles, or forcing audience members to participate (as opposed to the kind of dull 1960s idea of collaboration). And in all of it, perhaps the dream of media as a letter bomb, language that enacts violence.

I've always been fascinated by plastic bags; I remember being a kid and being warned over and over that I was going to choke myself. Or how sleazy it looks when you can see someone carrying something around in a plastic bag and you can kind of tell what's in it, but not really. And I also think of the necroglamour of Laura Palmer "wrapped in plastic." In both examples it's cheap but deadly, almost instantly waste, murderous waste.

2. Carolyn Shread, as Malabou's translator, has taken creative decisions as to how to interpret Malabou's already complex uses of the term plasticity. In an interview, you said of translation that:

It's that instability that I play with a lot in my own writing. My third book, *Pilot*, for example is generated from translations and interlingual infections of one sort or another (for example of birthing manuals and Swedish new wave songs from the early 80s and the poems "themselves"). (You can get an e-copy of the book [here](#)). But mostly the translation exists as a slippage, an infection in the text.

What links do you perceive between translation and infection? Do you translate in other ways, aside from linguistically?

The first thing that comes to mind is the interlingual associations that happen when you're bilingual; I've always loved those strange echoes. I remember the editors of my book *A New Quarantine Will Take My Place* asking me what on earth barns had to do with infanticide – but "barn" in Swedish is child. That kind of translation mistake is interesting to me, and I allowed it to take over in *Pilot*. Perhaps more importantly, in translation "the original" lives on as a shadow in the "translation." So that the translated text can't be read as whole or complete; it carries within it an alien text that we may not see. And based on that unstable relationship, a contagion open up the reading. (In a sense it's related to that treacherous relationship between genres that I talk about

below). In a wider sense, the foreign is an infection. On a fundamental level, foreign texts infect, bring other ideas and styles, disturbing the illusion of a stable national literature.

3. In the chapter I claim that *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate* is a hybrid text which operates within several discourses in a fluid, plastic manner including: crime fiction; melodrama; theory; queer politics; ecocriticism; finitude; and pornography. This psychotic fluency is a plastic strategy. Would you consider this to be an accurate reading of the work? Or would you suggest that this is a misreading?

I think that's a very good description. In US poetry the pervasive notion is still that genres are signs of low culture. I'm fascinated by genres (especially crime fiction); I want to bring them into the text because they bring with them such interested expectations and ways of reading. For example, what happens if you read a lyrical poem like a crime fiction? Or a slave narrative as science fiction? When my writing really started to work for me was when I started to tell myself: "You are not writing poetry, you are writing letters, you are painting, you are writing blues songs, you are writing drama" etc. That is how I was able to both write and enjoy what I wrote. My first book, *Dear Ra*, was really influenced by the letters of crazy people (my girlfriend at the time was working as a kind of secretary at Hearst Publications and she received a lot of strange letters that she gave to me; she also discovered Jean-Michel Basquiat's work for me while proofing an article about some rich art collector), and I wanted to marry that flatness to my love of surrealism and such. And also, this is related to what translation does: introduces some insecurity of how to deal with the text, a treacherousness. We might be reading something as sci-fi that is really horrific history writing. There's also the way that certain texts get genre-fied. I'm really interested in how "pornography" is used to dismiss texts and artwork that don't even have nude bodies in them.

4. Would you consider *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate* to be an example of the gurlisque?

I think the gurlisque is a word that is meant to suggest a certain vein of contemporary US writing. I liked the word because it was calling attention to some of the writing I was doing and reading, which had no place in the official histories of US contemporary poetry (still doesn't really, it still has no place in academic accounts, but now it's incredibly pervasive, it's almost the zeitgeist). But really the gurlisque is most of all, I think, a way of reading. You can – as Joyelle did in an issue of the Swedish journal *10-tal* – read Chelsey Minni **and** Chelsea Manning **and** Emily Dickinson as/through the gurlisque. You can read for the violence of the gendered kitsch, the artifice of the body.

Having said that, I've always held a strange role in a lot of the gurlisque discussions. The truth is that it's always been overwhelmingly women writers who have written in this vein, many of them my best friends. But because I'm a guy, I've always been "problematic" in the gurlisque discussions. Lara Glenum and I were incredibly close before we started to publish books and get reviewed etc; and when that happened, her interest in violence was referred to as subverting male power, while my fascination with violence was read as "coercive" and "misogynist" etc. I've found this fascinating. One very memorable moment for me was when Seth Oelbaum wrote a post about the boyesque, a very performative post cattily calling for me to be as violent as women. It

was met with an incredibly violent blowback. One tenured professor, hiding behind a pseudonym, basically issued a death threat to him. These days I am mostly thinking about masculinity and whiteness. Those are the two most interesting topics to me. I have found a lot of writers associated with the gurlisque totally incapable of thinking about masculinity except as something one should erase. I'm really interested in its performance, just like I'm interested in the performance of girliness.

5. In the interview quoted above, you describe the process of writing 'on a micro-level':

I have a sensation or sentence in mind and then I try to exhaust everything using that kernel (and with everything I primarily mean myself, but also our entire culture, it's a futile idea no doubt).

Perhaps this is all that you want to say on the subject, but I was interested to know whether you could talk a little further on the idea of exhausting an entire culture and whether you still write in that way.

Yes, that's still the way I think about writing. Usually I have a very poor sense of the overall structure. I often come across people who say "I'm working on a project that critiques/explores xyz, using xyz text." It's like they have a thesis and then they execute it. My own idea is more like, "I have this sentence I am intrigued by" or "I have this atmosphere" and then that's the engine that drives the poem. I move bit by bit and often go totally astray, but the goal is to drag everything into the poem, to let this engine cross into all kinds of territories – in my brain, in the fantasies of the culture.

6. I was intensely drawn to the character of Miss World in *Entrance to a Colonial Pageant in which we all Begin to Intricate* in all of her many guises. Why was Miss World such a productive figure for this book?

That is based on a young boy I came across while I was out walking with my daughter Sinead. Suddenly there was this 5-year-old boy who was only wearing a basketball jersey, the rest of him was naked. When I asked where his parents were, he just moaned weirdly. I didn't know what to do, but luckily some other people pulled up in a car and called the cops etc. In part the pageant is an arming of him: a spell to protect him. But it's a spell that went a little awry because he becomes something of a killer, something of Genet's "Our Lady of Flowers." And he starts channeling Courtney Love lyrics. That wasn't a plan but it happened. And it makes sense because of the way Love – at least back in the 90s – seemed debauched by artifice (smeared makeup) and the way she mixed little girl stuff (dolls, baby doll dresses) with this violent, abject debauchery. I was fascinated by the JonBenet Ramsey trial when that happened back in the 90s because the coverage – the way it focused on her performances in grown-up make-up etc – made it seem like it was the artifice that had killed her. It was all very gothic. There was an assumption of incest immediately, as if there needed to be this gothic narrative to explain the event. Finally, there's also a bunch of orientalism/chinoiserie because of artifice's ties to that discourse.

7. The other fascinating aspect of this pageant is that it is impossible to perform. When you write stage directions such as:

THE BIRTH:

(A live horse is brought on to the stage. A “birth” is performed with hammers and unsharp razor-blades. The kind women use to shave their legs. Colorful but small.)

How do you perceive this book – as a performance, or as a written text. Should or could it ever be performed?

I like to think of the text as an in-between text. But not a “hybrid” because that suggests a nice comfortable mixture. I like how the performative aspect ruins the reading, the text, and how the literary qualities makes it seem “impossible” as a performance, creating a violent clash within the text itself. It’s at odds with itself rather than blending genre/media.

I have been very interested in performance for a long time. I did a performance of the piece “Widow Party” at a place in Chicago a few years ago and just last week Cassandra Troy, a groups of transvestite-gothic strippers and I performed “Beware of a Holy Whore” in Chicago. Both performances were totally overwhelming experiences for me (I don’t know about the audience). I also read my poems very performatively. And I like it alot, in part because I hate my own voice, my body, my face, so when I’m performing or reading it’s like I’m struggling with myself.

8. My final question relates to Olivia Cronk’s *Skin Horse*, another of the texts studied in this dissertation. Could you say a little about why you decided to publish the book, and what drew you to it?

I like it because it’s unabashedly spooky. And how it uses cinematic “cuts” to create a sense of secrecy. Which is I guess similar.

Appendix C: Email Interview with Joyelle McSweeney

1. Derrida, in his essay ‘Hostipitality’, says that:

Hospitalität, a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, “hostility,” the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own *body*.

The ambivalent relation between the etymologies of hostility, hosting, ghosts, guests, and hospitality, are revealed through this composite term. Do you consider that the necropastoral, as both a concept and as a work of art, incorporates these contradictions and confluences?

I am definitely an etymological creature, for I think etymologies are occult. They bring into the present language prior meanings which are undead, both defunct and functional, chimerical and material. It is interesting that so many English etymologies link to the Romans, another violent empire. It’s as if our own global imperial language was the 2.0 of this other imperial language, our operating language is made on a constitutive violence (and that phrase ‘constitutive violence’, has just the kind of duplicity you are gesturing towards). The double coding of the binary of host and enemy in one term, *hostis*, releases a virtual violence. How can both poles of the binary be collapsed into the same term, and what is released when that happens? I think this is analogous to the way the binary terms of programming code release the infernal power of the virtual.

Two definitive poems for thinking through the Necropastoral for me are Wilfred Owen’s “The Show” and Aime Cesaire’s *Cahier*. Both poems are built on antitheses—rising and falling, consuming with the eyes and being ingested, looking and being seen, hating and loving, etc. We know that hate and love is the binary that releases the virtual term, the lyric poem, in Ovid. In Cesaire, *negritude* is born from the impossible coexistence of hate and love, self-regard and self-hatred, nadir and zenith, etc.

I often use the word ‘hosts’ to describe the functions of the necropastoral zone. I say, quoting another Owen poem, that the necropastoral hosts strange meetings. In some ways this makes it a Surrealist zone. At any rate, the Owen poem ‘strange meetings’ enacts all the meanings of ‘*hostis*’ above. And I admit that I take a certain infernal pride of generating my internal theory of poetry from inside this poem by a poet Yeats decried as ‘blood, dirt, and sucked sugar stick’, three excellent ingredients for a poem or a spell.

2. The chapter considers the *locus amoenus* which is literally the ‘pleasant place’ containing grass, trees and water. Strongly linked to the pastoral, this trope appears in the work of Horace, Virgil and Seneca. Ovid later inverted this trope to create the *locus terribilis* or ‘terrible place’, that is, a place of natural beauty which hosted violence, rape, and murder.

Is the Necropastoral directly influenced by classical literature? What might be your relationship as a poet to the work of Lucretius, Ovid, or even Aeschylus?

I turn to the classical all the time, both for etymology (above) and because I studied Latin for years and years. It was the only course where I was taught any kind of literary analysis, was asked to account for why Virgil or Catullus might have chosen certain

rhythmic or sonoric effects, etc, plus that excellent over-engineered allegorical space of the epic where every scene accounts for something in the future which is the present. I like that, and I also like divination, omens, magic numbers, superstition, epithets, iconographies of certain people and gods, the shining scales of the snake, the oil'd ringlets of Aeneas. AND ESPECIALLY trips to the underworld, and excellent medical diagnostic operation. Sounding the underworld. MRI's of the underworld.

Important classical myths for me include Narcissus, also the Pythian oracle, which has a great etymological underwriting.

But most importantly is the image of Arcadia, with Death as its celebrity resident. And the idea of the pastoral space as that to which and from which the plague moves. So not only the actual classical texts but the legacy of these texts in Western culture.

And finally: Antigone for her jousts with Justice and Medea for the fire carriage that miraculously is produced by all the pressures in the play to carry off the protagonist in marvelous spectacle. She basically through her infamous act takes the place of the gods. Love that. She is TRANSLATED.

3. The Necropastoral has been such a productive critical tool which has been widely adopted. What do you account for its success?

Well it's flexible, and it's a way of seeing or reading, and what it does is smashes patrilineal models of time, inheritance, genius, etc, and gives you permission to think occultly of certain works or poets for whom the concept of the Necropastoral might host a strange meeting. Wilfred Owen and Aime Cesaire and Jack Smith—those are three really wild poets to enjoy a strange meeting in the Necropastoral. So there's freedom and flexibility in the model.

That said, the Necropastoral brings abjection and surrealism into ecological thinking and allows for non-Western models to rewrite and reauthorize concepts that derive from West-identified movements like Surrealism and Decadence or even War Poetry. The Necropastoral is about not knowing everything, not building an imperial museum to one's own mastery. It's a zone, an expansive and unknowable space, so there's always room for dark sites and black sites, zero'd out areas from which a black force might suddenly begin to pulse.

4. In *The Necropastoral* you write 'How Art was a silver paper moulded to the ceiling' This seems to be me to be one of the most important lines in the work. If you don't mind explicating further, what is your conception of Art? Why is it a silver paper moulded to the ceiling?

The direct reference is to Just Kids by Patti Smith, the room she shared with Robert Mapplethorpe at the Chelsea Hotel. I think they actually decoupaged the ceiling. He wore his curly hair long like a baby shepherd and she cried when he cut his curls. That's the pastoral for you—the necropastoral, this downtown raw art blacksite of shepherds and maidens. On the other hand, she cut her hair like Keith Richards and didn't know what the word 'androgynous' meant when people started applying it to her—she just adopted the word as her emblem anyway, like so many others adopted the word 'Dada'.

My model of Art is that it is contagious, irresistible, infernal, like a viral load, overwhelming, and definitely inhuman. You can catch it from a word or a picture in a magazine or a dazzling cheap decorating effect. I misspell mould to make it mouldy like Jack Smith and also to bring in the idea of mould, a super-human change agent which unfolds according to its own inhuman principles. I am a non-humanist.

5. Your acknowledgements in *The Necropastoral* are the best I've ever seen.

The author is extremely grateful to her collaborators, ghostly, dead, undead, textual, cinematic, erotic, horrified, digital, larval, fibrous, folded, shot full of holes, knotty, turbid, protuberant, & otherwise and especially the protoplasmic *Spork Press* & the mesmerist Andrew Shuta.

I love the idea of undead collaborators – did you have any specific figures in mind?

Not sure if you saw this essay I once wrote, which goes deeply into this matter--
http://www.2ndavepoetry.com/2ndave_3/v3joyellemcsweeney.html

6. In section 19 you include a description of the afterlife:

19. The Afterlife: A Necropastoral. There scum will be superstars, but the stars won't rise. The uppers shall be downers. In slime. A convulsive sublime.

Could you speak a little on the presence of slime in the afterlife? Simon Woodard's book *Slime Dynamics* is a dissertation on radical uses of slime, do you know it?

I don't know that book! I will order it right now. So this is for you to explore! It's just important to me that everything collapse and release some kind of energy, and that it all be inhuman and totally collapse the Great Chain of Being and all the other racist trappings of Enlightenment thought, and also the Enlightenment itself. It will happen in the dark.

7. Do you know of any other plastic texts?

I'm not sure how you are using the term exactly—exploding plastic inevitable Warhol's first name for the Velvet's?—perhaps texts of really duplicitous generic standing, ones which won't do the taxonomic performance the Enlightenment requires, ones which stage simultaneous peaks and declivities, lacks and exuberances? In which case I would say translation itself works this way, but so does a really duplicitous text like Freud's *Dora* or *Paris Spleen* fraudulent works like Jack Smith's, with 'fraudulent' being an ultimate compliment from me. For me Art can come from the fraudulent, it's both the ultimate in realness and the ultimate in fakery, like the genius children in *Paris is Burning*.

8. My final question relates to Olivia Cronk's *Skin Horse*, another of the texts studied in this dissertation. Could you say a little about why you decided to publish the book, and what drew you to it?

I can't remember how exactly this came to be – I'll ask Johannes—but I would say the uncanny power in this book comes from its peaks and declivities, its fragmentation which ends up hosting an infernal and illimitable pow'r.

Appendix D: Email Interview with Olivia Cronk

1. In Catherine Malabou's work on plasticity, she considers that plastic is multivalent, and contradictory. Carolyn Shread, her translator, describes Malabou's formulation of plasticity as:

A word that is not quite yet a concept, the grounds of a philosophical notion drawn from the French word *plasticité*, which bears at once the giving (like plastic surgery or sculpture), receiving (like clay), exploding (like a bomb, *plastique* in French), and regeneration (like stem cells) of form.

Do you recognize this range in your work? Would you consider *Skin Horse* to be a plastic text? `

Yes, and yes.

I know it is likely obvious to say, but: one possible posture for this question is the notion that poetry and film are siblings. Film offers this sort of "multivalent" and "contradictory" possibility that you indicate above, in that 1) the images (text(s)) can bleed into /leak onto/become others and one another; and 2) the medium itself, especially given the current iterations via youtube, phone culture, etc., transmits and explodes. Obvious, I know, but before I was thoughtful enough and well versed enough in film to articulate that notion, I had this hankering for poetry texts (both written and consumed) to be like filmic montage, like having word-memory *implanted*, via a washing over or a smelling or a recalling or a quick glancing—or via a plastic clear mask, those ones with makeup or dark eyebrows, being placed upon my own face. Are you with me? Is that fairly plain? So: one of my goals with *Skin Horse* is/was to mimic the "moves" of "moving pictures." This, though, is more in retrospect than during the writing process. I see it now, and I think, truthfully, it is one of my more shallow intellectual maneuvers, though one that I hope leads to the collaboration with my reader that I am always attempting.

Sometimes—almost always, I guess—I want a text I make to seem like a Cornell box, a junk drawer, a junk store, a provocation to assemble and re-assemble bits of information. In this way, I want to collaborate with a reader. I want as little control over the reader's experience as is possible within the constraint of using language and having some defined content. I do not usually know what "text" is actually produced upon reading (unless a reader somehow explicitly tells me). All of this hoping and gesturing seems to relate to plasticity as *you* are pursuing it: I want the text to be blatantly flexible and to offer new information at different moments in space/time/self/whatever, AND I want it to create the effect of having a memory "pop up" and get changed, corroded, rewritten. I have no idea if this effect occurs in the way I hope. I have no idea how we separate out the things we read/see/smell/taste/etc. from the things we remember reading/seeing/smelling/tasting/etc. The problem of the self in time both disgusts and delights me.

2. How did *Skin Horse* come about? How closely related is it to its intertexts *The Velveteen Rabbit* and the web comic *Skin Horse*?

Actually, and probably appropriately for the kinds of things I teach about writing and

reading, it was an accidental allusion. (And, perhaps needless to say, I don't see authorial intent as the primary—or even a very useful—lens with which to examine a text.)

My husband, also a poet, came up with the name (a revision of my old title, *Bad Town*) and was, because he is a genius reader and editor and thinker, trying to “name” the delight/disgust/non-human animal/somewhat pastoral/somewhat charm necklace/toy/trinket/-inflected sensation of the manuscript. He thought of a relevant image and “said it” in words, not intending the allusion to *The Velveteen Rabbit*. I heard it and did not have a recollection, either. I did not know of the comic.

When my book was accepted for publication, I told my department Chair, who had two early-reader-children. He “recognized” the allusion instantly (it was present in his personal life, of course) and asked me about it. I should have said something witty (some writers, later, on *Montevidayo*, had ideas that were very exciting), but I admitted my lack of awareness.

Allusion is so disgusting in its way, too. It implies power and weight—and also gets wrapped in the layers of bacon that create culture.

I Googled, then, the reference. Then I discovered the comic. And then I emailed my editors, who said it seemed of no real concern that my allusion was accidental nor that the allusion existed.

I actually fretted about it for awhile, but then I came to accept the accident and the intertexts as one interesting metatext.

And I teach this kind of “text, context, subtext, metatext” thing—even to first-year college Composition students—as often hinging upon accident and chance.

3. How important are animals to your work? Do you consider nonhuman animals to be in opposition to, or on a continuum with, human animals?

As I am suggesting above (junk drawers, trinkets, charm necklaces), I think I use a lot of nouns in a rather flimsy (though not casually considered) way; I like juxtaposition and suggestion. In this manuscript, animals of all sorts came to be strung upon the same wire. It was a way to create a mood and space. It was to provide the reader with more concrete material with which to construct meaning. I never know if the words and combinations that provoke worlds within me will do the same for a reader, but I figure that *some* of the same effects will be transmitted, or: some unknown effects will occur and those will create worlds.

Also, because I am aesthetically married to the grotesque, I am of course interested in human/nonhuman animal juxtapositions and subtle suggestions of such, especially ala the Surrealists, David Lynch, David Cronenberg ala *The Brood*, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), horror films in general, Alice Notley, Lara Glenum, and even a close friend's particular way of adoring Bjork and her aesthetic position of the 90s . . . This kind of material is what I am always trying to rip off.

But to actually answer the question: I perhaps see all animals and all objects on a mutating and lovely continuum (or in a pudding, see below) with some room for flip-over/choose-your-own-adventure rupture-points, at which the forces *might* oppose one another.

4. I find this short extract to be amongst one of the most important in the work in terms of my argument on pro-abjection:

Husband your wife
is calling from the yard again
calling on
about those rat holes
in her peering deep

Do you have any interest in the abject, and did this inform your work?

I have never conceived of my work as specifically tied to the abject, although, of course, now that you say it, it is. The “abject” reasonably describes, like the grotesque, my aesthetic position, and I am looking to create scenes (usually through mood) that might be uncanny, unsettling, disgusting, terrifying. Such scenes seem to be the real spaces in which we live, at least in terms of what might be conveyed in language. Also, though I’m somewhat ill informed about the terms of the larger conversation, I have been and am currently committed to the position that consensus reality is tenuous and shifting, perhaps non-existent, and that there may exist an impossibility of the individual acting inside of consensus reality. This dread and delirium does, indeed, inform my writing.

5. Hal Foster in *Return of the Real* suggests that abjection can be used not to regulate (through the use of fear, disgust etc.) but rather to reveal. What do you think your work might reveal?

I hope that it reveals other comparable spaces (physical or psychological or linguistic) to those I mentioned above. I hope that a reader sees the world as collapsing and horrible in its delightful, writhing excess. I suppose, also, that I am seeking to reveal and promote a particular agenda about *writing*: reverberating effects can be achieved through juxtapositional experiments on a reader. In that latter revealing, I want my work to be metatextual, mostly because I read others’ work in that vein; that is: I look for tricks to steal as much as I let the content wash over me.

6. The last few lines of the work read to me as both eschatological and scatological. The entire piece reads like it takes place during the end times, however these last few lines could be echoes from the *Book of Revelations*:

Lizard orgy.
Seep. Seep.
Crowns.

mold spots &

beasts taken &

I've got all night for this shit.

Did you have any sense of writing apocalyptically with this piece?

Yes. It is my obsession.

In fact, my manuscript originally ended with a piece that began as a song I wrote, maybe (I don't remember) simply to perform for friends, "Did you ever think the apocalypse would be so lonely?" Because I was heavily under the influence of all levels of horror film (most importantly the Giallo stuff of Dario Argento, et al.), I was writing to induce terror, sometimes just in myself. The obvious outside corollary for that sensation is our global (in all senses) *situation*, which seems plainly dire and terminal. I don't believe that humanity will be the entity that records any kind of eternity (we have missed, perhaps, our chance to be a long-term medium for the universe?), and I believe there is a weird kind of slurping away of things . . . this is horror at the most giallo hue: everything seems, to me, to have theremin-music hanging over it or to have cast upon it the betraying eye of the other.

7. Do you know of Timothy Morton's work on hyperobjects? Here is a description from his work:

Hyperobjects are the true taboos, the demonic inversions of the sacred substances of religion. The recent plan to dispose of nuclear waste by putting small amounts in regular household silverware was perhaps the most outrageous "solution" yet. Future humans' treatment of hyperobjects may seem like reverence to our eyes.

There is a privileging evident in *Skin Horse* of throwaway objects; items such as lipstick, blisters, flyers and ketchup take on occult and sacred resonances. Do you see any connection between your work and Morton's in this way?

I only now know Morton—thank you, Laura.

Yes, I see the connection that you propose. I like the Italo Calvino notion of objects inside of texts being invested with "magic," and so in the trinket-work of my ordinary writing process, I have naturally inserted objects to create mood/space. As I mentioned, I privilege juxtapositions (high/low, the throwaway/the sacred, and—most importantly—non-oppositional combinations), and I always feel that that "trick" is the easiest way to an effect . . . but then of course I also want to write about the *endlessness* inside of something like (not an object, exactly, more of a hyperobject, I think) the odor from microwaving a bag of popcorn—how that smell disgusts and pleases and lingers and "colors" (intentional synesthesia here) a situation real or imaginary.

Also, I have this thought—based here only on my cursory look at Morton's ideas—I think I might be writing a kind of viscous pudding: I want to write the swimming inside of it, I want to write as a kind of pretend-localizing of the "objects" of our experiences, I want to use the microcosm as a macrocosm.

8. How did you find working with Action Books? What drew you to publish with them?

Action Books is a quite amazing and revolutionary press. I am eternally impressed with and grateful for their existence. I simply submitted to an open reading, and, quite shockingly for me, they (Johannes Goransson and Joyelle McSweeney) wanted my manuscript. Their work, though, is way beyond the somewhat petty scope of my book. They are cosmically important, truly, truly.