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Diseased Estate: Historiographic Grotesque

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes the historiographic grotesque as an interdisciplinary aesthetic and thematic mode which occurs in representations of the past. Characterised by the contradictory interplay of horror and pleasure, the grotesque provides the grounds for an affective engagement with history. The historiographic grotesque thus operates in opposition to those modes of history which stress the importance of objectivity in representations of the past, assert the authority of the historian and promote the possibility of understanding the past as it was really lived. In undermining this approach, the historiographic grotesque can contribute to a critique of history while offering alternative ways of interpreting the past.

The written component of this thesis examines incursions of the grotesque in a range of theoretical and creative works which address historical transition and rupture, critique official modes of history, and depict the past as a site of death and uncanny return.

The creative component of this thesis is a suite of two-and three-dimensional works with accompanying text which presents a grotesque historical narrative of colonial Western Australia, referencing the materials of wax and photography to present an uneasy and unreliable account of the past. Rather than illustrating the written component of the thesis, the creative research offers a parallel investigation of the significance of the grotesque for considerations of history.

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Introduction

> …a knowledge of modern times requires constant reference to, and imagination
> of, all that modernity leaves unregistered in its consciousness.
> Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (2000), *Practicing New
> Historicism*, p. 64.

This thesis examines the significance of the grotesque for the representation and interpretation of history, arguing that the grotesque provides the grounds for an affective engagement with the past. In developing *historiographic grotesque* as a critical term to denote an aesthetic, thematic and affective mode of representation that seeps into a broad range of engagements with the past, both theoretical and creative, I draw on Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), which suggests the possibility of paradisciplinary parallels or counter-disciplines to official modes of history. In this investigation, 'history' is explored as a concept (the events, individuals and objects of the past), a practice (the representation of the past through narrative and display) and a discipline (fields of inquiry and professional modes of practice). While it is not possible within the bounds of the thesis to explore the full scope of grotesque engagements with the past, several applications of the historiographic grotesque are outlined in this document. These feature the use of the grotesque as a device to represent points of historical transition or rupture, frequently appearing in conjunction with melancholic, nostalgic or ambivalent attitudes towards the lost object of the past; to critique, parody or counter official forms of history such as objectivist or monumental modes, particularly through considerations of the marginal; and to contemplate notions of death, transience, preservation and memorialisation in relation to the past, particularly through materials such as wax and photography. The mode of the historiographic grotesque provides a vehicle for such critique and consideration.

The purpose of the thesis is primarily to support the existence of the historiographic grotesque and to identify its critical applications. These investigations are supported by a body of creative research, *Diseased Estate*, which employs the tactics of the historiographic grotesque to offer an unreliable and heterogeneous account of pathological history in colonial Western Australia. This work is designed to counter heroic colonial narratives by presenting a grotesque image of the colonist, utilising aspects of the feminine grotesque and using the metaphor of the foreign body to demonstrate the ways in which the body of the coloniser may be read as 'other'. In presenting

this work, I engage three processes: drawing, sculpture and text. I have been employing drawing as a means of examining historical photographs since 2006. Rendered in graphite, these drawings are based on a pool of photographs appropriated from a range of sources: anonymous photographs, mug shots, medical documentation, war photojournalism, memorial portraiture, prurient imagery and so on, many of them lifted from the internet. Several of the earlier drawings zoom in on a detail or gesture of the found image, sometimes bypassing its original context altogether. By depriving the photograph of its focal point, I have suggested alternative ways of reading the image. Other drawings reproduce the found image in its entirety, however, the reproduction is imperfect—layer upon layer of graphite unfocuses the image, reducing it to a ghost of the actual photograph. These and other distortions trouble the already ambivalent status of the original artefacts. Through this appropriation of found imagery, I offer an engagement with history that is asynchronous, anonymous, amnesiac and fetishistic, and which works in opposition to the notion that 'history' can provide objective and unmediated access to the past.

Many of the early drawings offer a melancholic engagement with the past, based in a dialogue of loss and desire in which 'history' is assembled as a series of fragments that may or may not be related. More recent drawings, particularly those presented as part of *Diseased Estate*, engage notions of the bodily grotesque—disproportion, fragmentation, hybridisation—to disrupt the melancholic and nostalgic appeal of the antique photograph, impregnating the image with something alien, echoing Geoffrey Galt Harpham's contention that "the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately *in* something else" (Harpham 1982, 11). These drawings also play with photography's relationship to the transient moment and death; the photograph persists as a ghostly double of the absent subject. In this context, the drawing operates as the double of the photograph, suggesting a highly mediated chain of representation that both conceals and reveals the trace of the absent and 'authentic' past. The drawings operate in juxtaposition to two wax objects that refer to the long history of waxen representations of the body operating as uncanny doubles of the dead or diseased body. These investigations draw on wax's marginal status within the canon of art history, as well as its modern obsolescence as a mode of realistic representation, having been superseded by photography's power to mimic the presence of the absent subject. This collection of 'dead' objects formed by the drawings and waxworks is framed by a fictional narrative that situates the objects within a Western Australian history of pathology, but which subverts the nostalgic impulse of monumental history through incursions of the grotesque. The creative component of my research is not to be read as an illustration of the exegesis, or vice versa, but as an alternative

exploration of ways in which the grotesque can inform notions of history. As a whole, this thesis seeks to identify motifs, themes and critical positions of the historiographic grotesque, which is figured as an engagement characterised by the desire for, but intrinsic impossibility of, an authentic connection with the past; and a framework in which to read the past that offers an alternative to objectivist or monumental modes.

This research emerged from an investigation into the relevance of historiographic metafiction to contemporary art practice. The starting point of this inquiry was the notion that discourse (in this context, narrative) shapes our understanding of the world and that the boundaries between reality, memory and fiction are often indistinct. The postmodern literary genre of historiographic metafiction[1] critiques the narrativisation of history—history not only understood as narrative, but also the ways in which narrative can destabilise the perception of history as a neutral conduit of truth, authenticity and authority—by rendering ambiguous the distinction between historical and fictional works. The initial focus of this research was an as-yet-unnamed genre of contemporary visual art[2] which shares the concerns of historiographic metafiction and employs many of its devices. Upon investigation, it became apparent that both literary and visual works within this field articulate the critique of history by exploiting one device in particular: the grotesque. With this realisation, the focus of the thesis shifted to examine the significance of the grotesque for the representation and interpretation of history.

White's (1970) categories for the narrativisation of history suggest the possibility of counter-disciplines or paradisciplinary parallels to official modes of history. In privileging speculative forms of historiography over the scientific model, White's arguments can be used in support of alternative modes of historical representation, including literary fiction and visual art. As proper history's 'other', overtly creative representational modes offer alternatives to the covertly poetic tradition of empirical or realistic historiography. Following White's ideas, it can be argued that the treatment of historical themes in creative modes has a metacritical element. In proposing the grotesque as a mode for the representation of history, I am informed by a range of investigations of the grotesque as a style, an aesthetic, a sensibility, an atmosphere and a strategy in which the uncanny is mediated, and sometimes heightened, by pleasure or desire. In its more potent forms, the grotesque mode of history embodies scepticism towards the authority of official, canonised

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[1] Examples include *The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles and *The White Hotel* by D. M. Thomas.
[2] Examples of artists who have worked in this mode include Matthew Barney, Tracey Moffatt, Rodney Glick and Eve Andreé Larameé.

or sacred versions of the past. It demonstrates a lack of faith in memory and historiography as reliable ways of understanding the past, and foregrounds the absurdity of nostalgic pasts and utopian futures. However, in its ambivalent presentation of delight and horror, the grotesque is also intertwined with the sublime. The significance of this overlap for the notion of a grotesque mode of history lies in the way that postmodern scholars of the 'historical sublime' equate the concept with trauma (and vice versa). In this context, sublime affect is thought to 'heal' the crisis of history by signalling as authentic the trauma represented in speculative history—paradoxically revealing a nostalgic search for 'truth' within the postmodern disavowal of the ability of historiography to represent the past as it was really lived. Acknowledging their interrelatedness, in Chapter Two this thesis argues that the grotesque mode of history may be used as a tool to examine the nostalgic underpinnings of the historical sublime.

Several theorists of the grotesque and related concepts have guided my exploration of this slippery topic; they include Sigmund Freud, Wolfgang Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Geoffrey Galt Harpham and Mary Russo. An ancient phenomenon, the grotesque resists conclusive definition. The meaning of the term has shifted considerably over the centuries since *grottesche* (grotto-esque) was first coined to describe the decorative frescoes of freshly unearthed ruins in Rome during the Renaissance. Denoting the wildly capricious hybridisation of forms in ornament, the *grottesche* was adopted as an aesthetic revival of antiquity, fundamentally linked to notions of the lost past. This recovery of ancient forms celebrated marvellous and sometimes threatening inversions of the natural order, where human, animal and vegetable parts fuse together in precarious, writhing masses simultaneously suggestive of order and decay (Fig. 1.1). The heterogeneity of the *grottesche* was viewed as proof of the boundlessness of the painter's imagination. From these origins, 'grotesque' was used as a technical term to describe fantastical ornamentation, however by the seventeenth century it developed additional shades of meaning to encompass bizarre and exaggerated qualities in art and life, often comical in effect (Harpham 2006; Kayser 1968).

In the eighteenth century, the word took on a moral dimension in the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant to denote the absence of the pure, noble and natural. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant describes as grotesque the "utmost imperfection" (Kant 2004, 55) in human nature, particularly when aping the attitude of the beautiful or sublime, stating, "Unnatural things, so far as the sublime is supposed in them, although little or none may actually be found, are *grotesque*" (Kant 2004, 55). For Kant, the grotesqueness of

Fig. 1.1 Agostino Veneziano, c. 1520 (Kayser 1968, 131)

young cranks, aged dandies, insipid bores and the religious rites of racial 'others' arises because they are incongruous; inappropriate to the natural order of the beautiful and sublime. In *The Critique of Judgement*, he alludes to the decorative *grottesche*, with some reservation, to describe an unbounded and ornamental imagination:

> Thus English taste in gardens, and fantastic taste in furniture, push the freedom
> of imagination *to the verge of what is grotesque*[,] the idea being that in this
> divorce from all constraint of rules the precise instance is being afforded where
> taste can exhibit its perfection in projects of the imagination to the fullest extent
> (Kant 1973, 66, italics added).

Kant's reluctance to characterise such imaginative play as grotesque is illuminated later when he designates the limits of the beautiful and sublime in nature and art: "One kind of ugliness alone is incapable of being represented conformably to nature without destroying all aesthetic delight, and consequently artistic beauty, namely, that which excites disgust" (Kant 1973, 132). With this statement Kant aligns the unnatural, the imperfect and the ugly—qualities that he describes as grotesque elsewhere—to an emotional reaction, foreshadowing the psychological, rather than solely aesthetic, element in interpretations of the grotesque that emerge in modernity. In characterising the grotesque as the antithesis of the beautiful, moral and natural, the term that previously described the hybridising conceits of the ornamental *grottesche* comes to refer to a perversion of natural order and morality.

In the Romantic criticism of the nineteenth century, the grotesque, understood in terms of ugliness, caricature, fantasy and alienation, is celebrated as a quality of art that yields a greater breadth of aesthetic experience than the classical revival. In his 1827 preface to *Cromwell*, Victor Hugo identifies it as the artistic character of the new age, arguing that "it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born—so complex, so diverse in its forms, so inexhaustible in its creations; and therein directly opposed to the uniform simplicity of the genius of the ancients" (Hugo 1827). Hugo's use of the term is broad in scope, designating horror and unfamiliarity as properties of the grotesque as well as the ridiculous and comedic. In his definition, the grotesque emerges as "an invasion, an irruption, an overflow, as of a torrent that has burst its banks" (Hugo 1827), which combines with the sublime in a "harmony of contraries" (Hugo 1827), producing a terrible, melancholic beauty. Appearing forty years later, John Ruskin's characterisation of the grotesque in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice* is quite different in tone, echoing aspects of Kant's moralism. In this work he distinguishes between the noble (or true) grotesque, which is to be observed within the context

of medieval piety, and ignoble (or false) grotesque, which characterises Renaissance *grottesche*, in which "Grossness, of one kind or another, is, indeed, an unfailing characteristic of the style; either latent, as in the refined sensuality of the more graceful arabesques, or, in the worst examples, manifested in every species of obscene conception and abominable detail" (Ruskin 1867, 134). Ruskin argues that both species of grotesque feature a juxtaposition of contradictory impulses, "one ludicrous, the other fearful" (Ruskin 1867, 126). While one element may outweigh the other, resulting in either the comic or horrific grotesque, Ruskin acknowledges that these categories are somewhat arbitrary because almost all cases of the grotesque display both tendencies simultaneously.

Writing in the mid twentieth century, Kayser (1968) characterises the grotesque as a structure in which everyday reality becomes estranged; as transgressive play which utilises absurd effects and induces ambivalent laughter; and as a tactic by which the 'demonic' element of reality may be managed. He describes it as "the objectification of the 'It', the ghostly 'It'" (Kayser 1968, 185), rooting the experience of the grotesque within absurdity and extreme alienation. Kayser's work has been particularly influential for contemporary notions of the grotesque, as it builds upon that which is implicit in Kant and Ruskin's theories, namely its psychological impact as well as its aesthetic affect. Arguably the most influential twentieth century work on the grotesque is Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, in which Rabelais's depiction of the carnival medieval body, which Bakhtin terms 'grotesque realism', is read as a subversion of ideological and discursive orthodoxy, as well as an inversion of the classical body fashioned in the Renaissance. For Bakhtin, Rabelais's work translates folk humour and carnival practices into literary form, retaining the 'true' spirit of the grotesque as regenerating laughter. The body is depicted as a boundless series of protuberances; ingesting, defecating, dying and reproducing; he presents the grotesque body as the positive liberation from "all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin 1984, 19). Bakhtin critiques aspects of Kayser's grotesque while acknowledging that he describes a historical shift in which the modern grotesque is predominantly sinister, and humour appears in a reduced form that does not necessarily induce laughter. For Bakhtin, this reflects the dilution of the carnival spirit in modernity (Bakhtin 1984).

Later explorations tend to build on Kayser's grotesque by emphasising its psychological impact, frequently utilising Freud's concept of the uncanny. Often, notions of the non-normative body figured in grotesque terms are examined, drawing on Bakhtin's description of the carnival body

as unfinished, excessive, concerned with ingestion and excretion, and transgressive of the boundaries of inside/outside, singular/multiple, alive/dead. Although not specifically a theory of the grotesque, Kristeva's formulation of abjection as a heightened version of the uncanny has some parallels to both Kayser and Bakhtin's concepts. For Kristeva, the abject is a source of repulsion and attraction; that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982, 4); that which estranges reality to the point that the abject object or person, consumed by ambivalence, becomes a no-thing. Like Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body, abjection frequently involves slippages between body and non-body, as in excretions such as menstrual blood and faeces or the ultimate human waste product, the corpse. As in Kayser's description of the grotesque, the twin impulses of horror and ambivalent pleasure (*jouissance*, rather than laughter) are negotiated in a way that can both confirm and undermine personal identity and the stable order of everyday reality (Kristeva 1982). Mary Russo's 1994 text *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* contextualises abjection within the frame of the 'female' grotesque to interrogate the traditional marginalisation of so-called feminine characteristics, such as ornament and bodily difference from the norm, in a broad range of works. Russo also builds on the theories of Kayser and Bakhtin to propose two subtypes of the grotesque: uncanny and carnival. While Russo is adding to the general propensity in theories of the grotesque to distinguish between horrific and comic tendencies, she argues that "the grotesque in each case is only recognizable in relation to a norm and that exceeding the norm involves serious risk" (Russo 1995, 10).

Harpham's 1982 work *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* provides a historical and conceptual overview of the grotesque which draws connections between the ornamental grotesque of the Renaissance, medieval forms and modern iterations, examining the psychological and critical implications of the mode as well as its aesthetic characteristics. Harpham views the grotesque as a problematic, a "species of confusion" (Harpham 2006, *xxvii*) that is so heterogeneous, it resists conclusive classification. He states,

> Grotesqueries both require and defeat definition: they are neither so regular and rhythmical that they settle easily into our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all. They stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles (Harpham 2006, 3).

In Harpham's formulation, the grotesque inspires an ambivalent interplay of repulsion and attraction resulting from the commingling of contradictory elements within the grotesque object, image or idea. For this reason, the grotesque can exist in both art and life. He notes that the distinction between the grotesque and the sublime "is often a mere difference in point of view" (Harpham 2006, 22), as the collapse of reason catalysed by the contemplation of the terrible may be interpreted as either sublime or grotesque, or both. Harpham's exploration of *grottesche* also provides a useful entry point into the notion of the historiographic grotesque, as he notes that the uncovering of grotesque images in the late-fifteenth-century excavation of Nero's Golden Palace, themselves a mode of ornament predating the Roman Empire, led to an environment in which explicitly pagan symbols coexisted with Christian dogma; in which the ancient past was embraced and amalgamated with religious art. Harpham states, "It was a remarkable moment, when collective inspiration was nourished by the underground past and applied to the mighty labours of the celestial hereafter. From couplings and incongruities such as these, discovery is born" (Harpham 2006, 33). This image of a hybridised historical epoch, in which the subterranean past is uncovered and exerts a transformative influence upon the present, is itself a *grottesche* intertwining of forms, modes and practices.

In formulating the category of the historiographic grotesque, I have referred to philosophers of history including Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, White and F. R. Ankersmit, who have critiqued the objectivity of the historian as well the belief that the past can be viewed as a knowable object reducible to written discourse. In describing history as a discursive construct, these writers examine the motivations behind exhuming the past, the literary character of historical writing, and the ways in which the writing of history may be inscribed with ideology and the exercise of power. The grotesque bleeds into these engagements with history on a number of levels. Both Nietzsche and Foucault use the grotesque as a stylistic device to critique the ostensible objectivity of traditional historiography. Foucault also uses the grotesque as a means to engage with marginal histories, to figure the trope of intersecting discourses and to frame the frequently insidious exercise of power within institutional frameworks. Benjamin and Ankersmit both frame the emergence of modernity as a traumatic rupture in cultural notions of time, engendering a perception of loss in which the absent past is yearned for, but is never recovered. This experience of loss is frequently articulated within the mode of the grotesque, in which the alienated subject, stranded in the present, yearns melancholically for the mythical past but can only encounter it in the form of dead matter: as ruins. In proposing satire (in addition to comedy, romance and tragedy) as a mode of history,

White signals the existence of devices analogous to the grotesque in engagements with the past, such as estrangement and absurdity. These philosophers provide the grounds through which an affective engagement with history[3] can be figured.

In Chapter Two, I build upon White's analysis of the historical work within a literary framework, as well as a range of theories of the grotesque, to define the parameters of the historiographic grotesque. I develop a working definition of the grotesque which relies heavily on Freud's concept of the uncanny to describe the sense of inappropriateness that emerges in the experience of grotesque—as something that would properly be concealed, but has come illegitimately to light. This also relates to Harpham's image of the subterranean *grottesche* or grotto-esque in which the ancient past is submerged in the earth, taking on shades of "underground, of burial, and of secrecy" (Harpham 2006, 32), and the terrain of the present is violated by the past's uncanny incursion. I describe the grotesque as a fundamentally ambivalent phenomenon in which the perception of the uncanny is mediated (or perhaps heightened) by the co-occurrence of pleasure or desire. I also examine the relationship between the historiographic grotesque and the postmodern historical sublime, suggesting that while the historiographic grotesque may examine the traumatic rupture that signals the historical sublime, it regards the latter's paradoxical search for an authentic recovery of historical experience with scepticism, instead arguing for the fundamentally unresolvable nature of any engagement with the past. I close the chapter by presenting the historiographic grotesque as a tool which can be used to examine points of cultural and historical rupture, using Goya's *Los disastres de la guerra* as a case study.

Chapter Three builds upon the theme of historical rupture by exploring the incursion of the grotesque in nineteenth and twentieth century attitudes towards the emergence of modernity. I argue that the creative works of this period are marked by a sense of dislocation in time that reveals ambivalent attitudes towards the pre-modern world and its significance for the present. The mode of the historiographic grotesque emphasises this ambivalence, which is characterised

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[3] In discussing traditional modes of history, specifically those modes that emerged in the nineteenth century and which persist in the present day, these theorists variously use terms such as 'objectivist', 'positivist', 'empiricist' and 'monumental' to denote such approaches to history. When discussing the work of particular theorists I will endeavour to use terminology appropriate to the original, however I make particular use of the terms 'objectivist' and 'empiricist' to describe ostensibly scientific modes of history that strive for the disinterested, factual and masterful narration of past events, additionally, I use the word 'monumental' to describe history with heroic or commemorative intent, such as myths of nation, medicine and biographies of the 'great'.

by a paradoxical desire for, and pleasure in repeating, the traumatic losses of historical experience. I open this chapter with a discussion of the Freudian concept of loss, describing how this experience can give rise to the responses of mourning and melancholia. Melancholia is characterised by an inability to assimilate loss, resulting in interminable mourning that is paradoxically experienced as a form of pleasure. This may be viewed as a grotesque response to loss which feeds into experiences of cultural schism in modernity. Indeed, Ankersmit situates the historicist discipline that emerged in modernity as a response to the collective ruptures of the French and Industrial Revolutions, from which the past came to be viewed as a lost object to be recovered, although this attempt was doomed to failure. Similarly, Celeste Olalquiaga contextualises the nineteenth century craze for mass consumption of kitsch within nostalgia for a lost world and its attempted recovery through (sometimes unintentionally) grotesque objects. I explore similar considerations of the world that is lost to modernity in the work of Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, all of whom use the grotesque as a device through which the experience of this loss can be represented.

I examine historical writing which can be read within the mode of the grotesque in Chapter Four, arguing that in these works the grotesque is used as an oppositional device to challenge notions of history as rational, authoritative and knowable. In this context, histories of the margin operate as counter-history (or the uncanny double of objectivist historiography), and both the past and historical writing are presented as sites of the grotesque. In general, writers working within this mode view the historical field as a tangle of intersecting discourses to be teased out through anecdotal, thematic and aesthetic lenses—methods which run against the grain of the omniscient historian presenting an authoritative and objective bird's-eye view of the past. Opening this chapter is an examination of Bakhtin's privileging of literature as a site of historical knowledge, which enables him to read Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as a historical document that traces the death of medieval folk culture as well as the development of the carnival mode in literature. Bakhtin aligns the decline of carnival as a folk practice with the loss of the premodern world, presenting *Rabelais and His World* as a counter-narrative to the heroic history of Western progress, favouring a grotesque model of history that focuses on ambivalence, transition and the materiality of the body.

Similarly, Foucault utilises the grotesque as an oppositional device to counter Enlightenment narratives of reason and progress. He presents his model of 'genealogy,' derived from Nietzsche, as a paradisciplinary mode of history, a carnivalised double of 'proper' history,

grotesque in structure and content. The chapter concludes with a discussion of 'The Potato in the Materialist Imagination' by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, who examine the body as a site of modernisation and analyse the cultural values entrenched in the potato debate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gallagher and Greenblatt present the potato as an unstable signifier in English culture at the time, which is revealed, paradoxically, to be a symbol for both the primeval and the modern. The potato is both utopian and apocalyptic in its implications for civilisation, emerging most forcefully as a grotesque signifier for all that needed to be purged from English civilisation in order to maintain an appropriate balance of nature and culture under the changing conditions of an industrial economy. The historians discussed in this chapter explore marginalised aspects of modernity by utilising the devices of the grotesque.

Chapter Five traces the materiality of the historiographic grotesque, examining histories of wax and photography to present a counterpoint to the canonical mode of art history inaugurated by Giorgio Vasari. This investigation is concerned with materials that are steeped in grotesque notions of history, containing curious slippages between the humanistic endeavours of art and science, and practices of popular culture that are connected to notions of transience. Both of these threads are entrenched in a grotesque sensibility that reveals a troubled relationship with the lost realm of the past. The humanist tradition of art history that can be traced to Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* is discussed in relation to the challenges posed by postmodern reappraisal and critique. The challenges are made frequently on grounds of gender, class and race, but also in relation to an ongoing critique of traditional (objectivist and monumental) modes of history. I argue that by presenting humanist tastes as universal, cultural value as self-evident and scholarship as disinterested, objectivist art history seeks to deny the subjectivity of taste and interpretation, including the metahistorical[4] aspect of any attempt to understand the past. The grotesque is presented as an oppositional mode to such practices, as it is concerned with marginal practices and perspectives, ambivalent meanings, the incursion of uncanny and / or pleasurable affects in the construction or experience of history, and the fundamental instability and unreliability of the work of history as a mediated experience of the past. Throughout this chapter, the marginal materials of wax and photography are examined in relation to themes of transience, memory and preservation to demonstrate the ways in which they are embedded in notions of history. I utilise the grotesque figures of the doppelgänger and the hysteric to illustrate the ways in which the perception of an uncanny 'other' seeps into the experience of grotesque history.

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[4] Namely, the aesthetic and ideological modes of the historical work.

In presenting my conclusions in Chapter Six, I examine apocalypse as a grotesque historical sensibility, drawing on the example of an exhibition that I curated in 2009 at Fremantle Arts Centre entitled *Revelations: contemporary visions of apocalypse*. I offer this exhibition as a case study of theory-in-practice which supports several contentions of the preceding chapters, including the relevance of the grotesque for representations of historical rupture and marginal history, and the role that a grotesque approach to artistic media can play in critiquing the art historical canon. In examining apocalyptic notions of history in this conclusion, specifically theories of decadence and decline, I am signalling the potential for other readings and applications of the historiographic grotesque beyond the scope of the present study. Chapter Six provides an analysis of the art works that were presented in this exhibition to demonstrate the significance of the grotesque as a mode for the representation of history, and presents examples of audience reaction to underscore the ambivalent affect of the grotesque. I conclude that the grotesque provides the grounds for an affective engagement with history that teases at the unresolvable schism between past and present.

This thesis considers incursions of the grotesque in considerations of history. As the uncanny 'other' of reason, progress and beauty, the grotesque functions to undermine empiricist and monumental modes of history that promote the disinterested authority of the historian, the purposefulness of historical enterprise and the possibility of achieving authentic knowledge of the past. As the quotation that opens this introduction by Gallagher and Greenblatt suggests, it is the marginalised aspects of history that are perhaps most revealing of the values that shape culture. This thesis investigates such points of crisis, indicating that the grotesque reveals the ambivalence that underpins the quest to understand the past.

Chapter Two

Defining the historiographic grotesque

Narrativisation of history

The concept of the grotesque as a mode of history is formulated with reference to Hayden White's investigations of historical consciousness through the work of eighteenth and nineteenth century historians and philosophers of history in *Metahistory* (1973). This analysis of the historical work centres on its status as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (White 1973, *ix*). White's argument is that the historian, working in an ostensibly scientific discipline and attempting to construct a narrative that relates historical events in a reliable way, is subject to the aesthetic imperatives of literary narrative. In the effort to present historical data in an engaging or meaningful way, the historian is performing an inherently poetic act which prefigures the historical field under investigation. According to White, the style in which the historian writes can be seen to have ideological implications, for in casting the narrative within a certain mode, the historian takes an aesthetic and moral position on the events that are narrated (White 1973).

In *Metahistory,* White subjects to formalist analysis the writings of 'master historians' Jules Michelet, Leopold von Ranke, Alexis de Tocqueville and Jacob Burckhardt, as well as 'philosophers of history' Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Benedetto Croce. He argues that the strategies by which these writers achieve "explanatory affect" (White 1973, *x*) concern the mode of argument, narrative and ideological framework through which the account is communicated. He categorises each form of historiographic explanation: arguments may be Formist, Organicist, Mechanistic or Contextualist; ideologies inherent to the explanation may be Anarchist, Conservative, Radical or Liberal; and the generic archetype in which the explanation is cast may be Romantic, Comedic, Tragic or Satirical. In addition to these strategies of explanation, White argues that there is a deeper level on which the historiographic writer presents their narrative: the poetic, or aesthetic, mode of the work. This may be classified according to linguistic modes. For White, the means through which the aesthetic of the historical work is achieved may be Metaphoric, Metonymic**,** Synecdochic or Ironic. Thus, White defines the "historiographic 'style'" (White 1973, *x*) of a historian based on the combination of modes employed in the text. In identifying the discursive basis on which historical works are produced, White seeks to demonstrate the "ineluctably poetic nature of the historical work" (White 1973, *x*), which constitutes the metahistorical element of all historiography—as discourse, the poetic

field prefigures, determines and transcends the raw historical data. As Kuisma Korhonen explains, "not only historiographical discourse was predetermined by literary styles, but historical consciousness in general was predetermined by certain linguistic structures" (Korhonen 2006, 11).

While suggesting that the works of the master historians of the nineteenth century were unknowingly shaped by poetic imperatives, White argues that the philosophers of history of the period were more conscious and critical of the linguistic parameters in which historians work. Unlike the historians, White states that the philosophers' works reflect an awareness that, "in any field of study not yet reduced (or elevated) to the status of a genuine science, thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of objects inhabiting its field of perception" (White 1973, *xi*). While nineteenth century historians embarked on a quest for realism (which White sees as a rejection of the essential irony manifest in eighteenth century historiography), nineteenth century philosophers of history challenged the notion of objectivity in historical writing, which "consisted in their historicization of the very concept of objectivity itself" (White 1973, 280). White's distinction between proper and speculative historiography depends on whether the work stresses the events or the writing of history as its focus. However, there are many overlaps between the two, and each can be read within the linguistic modalities which White postulates as the metahistorical origin of any attempt to understand the past. He claims that "the only grounds for preferring one over the other are *moral* or *aesthetic* ones" (White 1973, 433).

White's categories for the narrativisation of history suggest the possibility of paradisciplinary parallels or counter-disciplines to official modes of history. A range of literary scholars have applied White's concepts to the analysis of fiction, and in his recent work White himself has turned to the analysis of literature as history's 'other'. In his essay 'Historical Discourse and Literary Writing', he argues for the relative realism of modernist literature's representation of the past, as it "dissolves the event, shatters plot, and ambiguates points of view" (Korhonen 2006, 33), consequently presenting a more accurate representation of the subjectivity of lived experience and memory than the teleological historical work. In privileging speculative forms of historiography over the scientific model, White's arguments can be used in support of alternative modes of historical representation, including literary fiction and visual art. As proper history's 'other', overtly creative representational modes offer alternatives to the covertly poetic tradition of empirical or realist historiography. Following White's ideas, it can be argued that the

treatment of historical themes in literature, film and visual art (amongst other forms) has a metacritical element. Pursuing White's categories of historical representation, I wish to propose the grotesque as a mode for the representation of history—an aesthetic mode which has its roots in antiquity, and which holds particular relevance for artists and philosophers as a creative method through which to explore the role of the past in contemporary life. My understanding of the grotesque as a mode of history is informed by a range of investigations of the grotesque as a style, an aesthetic, a sensibility, an atmosphere and a strategy in which horror is mediated, and sometimes heightened, by pleasure or desire (Steig 1970).

Defining the grotesque

The grotesque is particularly pervasive. The origins of its modern Western form can be located in the imagination of medieval Europe and the influence of newly unearthed classical artefacts on artists during the Italian Renaissance. It can be observed in the gargoyles and carnival festivities that accompanied the religiosity of the Gothic period, in the apocalyptic visions of the Flemish artist Hieronymus Bosch, the fanciful imaginings the Mannerist Giuseppe Arcimboldo and the bodily excesses of Rabelais' ebullient *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (Warner 2000; Zatlin 1997). Mikhail Bakhtin[5] locates the origins of Rabelais' grotesque in medieval folklore (itself descended from classical sources) and festival practices, but argues that Rabelais' use of the mode signifies the transition from the medieval to the Humanist world view (Bakhtin 1984). The grotesque propensity for exaggeration typifies seventeenth century Baroque, where it can be observed in exuberant ornamentation in art and design, vivid depictions of emotion and physical suffering in high art, and the laughable human weaknesses depicted in Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*. According to Marina Warner, by the eighteenth century the grotesque had shifted in emphasis, reacting to the emergence of the Enlightenment. It moved away from the physical manifestations of monstrosity and excess to the grotesqueness of the psychological world and the human capacity for evil, a transition inaugurated by the nightmarish imagery of Francisco

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[5] There is a link between Bakhtin's and White's ideas about the writing of history. For Bakhtin, creativity is essential for a meaningful understanding of the world. Bakhtin saw creative (especially literary) genres as modes of thought, as "artistic thinking" (Emerson and Morson 2002, 366) significant for the understanding of history and the spectrum of human experience. According to Bakhtin, the historical significance of artistic expression has been neglected because it is not recognised as a legitimate source of knowledge. With parallels to White, he notes that during the eighteenth century, speculative history in the form of literary narrative yielded more scope for the understanding of the past, specifically ways to consider the concepts of time and history in conjunction with infinite possibilities for representing human experience, than the formalised ideas of historians. He states, "This process of preparing for the disclosure of historical time took place more rapidly, completely, and profoundly in *literary* creativity than in the abstract philosophical and strictly historical, ideological views of the Enlightenment thinkers" (Bakhtin in Emerson and Morson 2002, 282).

Goya. For Warner this marks the beginning of the late grotesque, an epoch which she argues continues into the present, and which differs to earlier forms both in its intent and its reception. She claims that in late grotesque a sympathy or identification with the grotesque subject emerges in the viewer's response in contrast to the "scornful laughter" (Warner 2000, 261) of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. From this point on, modern notions of the grotesque permeate aesthetic movements such as Romanticism, the Gothic revival, Decadence, Realism, and so forth. As an aesthetic strategy it is central to modernism in many of its incarnations, indeed, theorists such as Frances S. Connelly suggest that it is inextricably entwined with the grotesque. For Connelly, the grotesque "acts as a punctum to the ideals of enlightened progress and universality and to the hubris of modernist dreams of transcendence over the living world" (Connelly 2003, 6). Similarly, as a sensibility and a strategy of parody, the grotesque is prevalent in postmodern art and fiction. It is a slippery category to define—Geoffrey Galt Harpham describes it as "a species of confusion" (Harpham 1982, *xv*) which may exist within, and somewhere in between, art or reality.

In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin states that "Exaggeration, hyperbolism and excessiveness" (Bakhtin 1984, 303) are essential to the grotesque aesthetic, however he argues that it is also a deeply ambivalent and transgressive mode that should not be reduced to negative, superficial satire. In Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* it is typified by bodily excess, mutation, fragmentation and a preoccupation with the body's "lower stratum" (Bakhtin 1984, 309)—acts of ingestion, defecation and generation. Bakhtin reads utopian impulses at work in Rabelais' grotesque: the subversion of the old order, in which the sphere of the lower stratum has "a positive meaning" (Bakhtin 1984, 309) and in which classical images and bodies "are not only uncrowned, they are renewed" (Bakhtin 1984, 309). However, he argues that this positive, utopian aspect of the grotesque is unique to carnival practices and the literature of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. For Bakhtin, modern forms of carnival, such as parody, can only ever be negative, "deprived of regenerating ambivalence" (Bakhtin 1984, 21).

In later works, Bakhtin elucidates carnival as a genre that has operated in opposition to epic or classic modes throughout the history of narrative, and in which laughter and irony are shown to be defences against 'monologism', or what Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson describe as "semiotic totalitarianism" (Emerson and Morson 2002, 28); the attempt to impose order upon an intrinsically disordered world. Indeed, for Bakhtin there are only two stylistic lines in the history

of the novel: epic and carnival[6]. 'Genre memory' is the method by which artists utilise characteristics of historical genres and develop them with each rearticulation. Bakhtin argues that even writers who possess limited knowledge of the history of carnival or Menippean satire may engage carnival devices in their work by virtue of the 'memory' of the genre, passed down through every work and changing slightly with every usage. Thus although Fyodor Dostoevsky may not have had a great knowledge of the specific genre, he somehow realises a "carnival spirit" (Emerson and Morson 2002, 295) in his work through the legacy or 'genre memory' of other works by Honoré de Balzac, Voltaire and Denis Diderot, leading back to Rabelais, the Renaissance and medieval carnival forms (Emerson and Morson 2002). Bakhtin presents the grotesque as a pervasive aesthetic, style and sensibility which recurs throughout the history of visual and verbal representation. He describes it as undergoing gradual transformation and, in its most vibrant form, working to destabilise the authority of sacred or official modes.

In an early essay, Harpham (1976) notes that while the formal qualities of the grotesque have changed markedly throughout history, the emotional affect it has on its audience remains much the same. Physical deformity may typify the grotesque in some examples of the mode, but equally the deformity may be a moral, psychological or cultural trait that will be recognised by its observer. He states, "the grotesque is a structure, the structure of estrangement" (Harpham 1976, 462), which is reformulated according to the specific values and fears of the age in which it is generated, "in terms of what threatens its sense of essential humanity" (Harpham 1979, 463). In this essay, Harpham maintains that the grotesque must arouse laughter and astonishment in conjunction with either horror or disgust. Many writers, notably Wolfgang Kayser and John Ruskin, have distinguished between two forms of grotesque: comic or horrific. Harpham breaks this down further into four categories:

> a) caricature
>
> b) comic grotesque (ludicrous or satiric)
>
> c) fantastic grotesque (terrible)
>
> d) Gothic – macabre (Harpham 1976, 464).

According to Harpham, if the affect is closer to repulsion or obscenity, the grotesque will fall into one of the first two categories, while if the affect is fearful or horrific it will fall into the latter two, but in this essay he maintains that something can only be grotesque if laughter is

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[6] E. H. Gombrich reduces the history of visual art to two strains, classical and non-classical, but as Harpham notes, the classical tradition is also permeated with the grotesque (Harpham 1982). Similarly, Bakhtin's categories of epic and carnival point to the aesthetic and ideological modes of a given work.

Fig. 2.1 Gargoyle, Reims Cathedral (Camille 1995, 84)

present—for him, laughter is the essential response to the astonishment of disgust or horror when confronted with the grotesque. This has similarities to Philip Thomson's definition, which entails "the co-presence of the laughable and something which is incompatible with the laughable" (Thomson 1972). According to Harpham, grotesque laughter may span a range including light-hearted, naïve, coarse, sadistic and ambivalent. This laughter might defuse the power of the horror, but for Harpham it merely reinforces its ambiguity. Similarly, Linda Gertna Zatlin notes with reference to a gargoyle which is picking its nose in a Gothic cathedral, that by situating this grotesque creature inside a church it becomes "doubly monstrous by inspiring inappropriate laughter" (Zatlin 1997, 173). This emphasis on 'laughter' is rather narrow, however, as it is not necessary to laugh out loud for comic affect to be felt; as Harpham and Zatlin note, sometimes the comic impulse of the grotesque might be more unsettling than amusing, itself a source of horror or repulsion.[7]

In Harpham's work of 1982, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, he moves away from laughter as the defining principle of the grotesque in favour of confusion and contradiction—like the sublime, the grotesque frustrates comprehension and identification. Indeed, for Harpham the use of the word "grotesque" as a descriptor suggests that other attempts at explanation have failed, indicating "a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language" (Harpham 2006, 3). The intermingling of the semantic categories of animal, mineral, vegetable in some exemplars of the grotesque indicates such exhaustion of meaning, while the impression of impropriety that accompanies such hybridisation is essential to the grotesque's ambivalent affect, which can induce either pleasure or displeasure, or both. Such contradictions in the grotesque, Harpham suggests, involve the combining of elevated or ideal qualities with debased matter; it is this merging of high and low that gives rise to the impression that a standard has been violated. The unsettling quality that persists in the grotesque object is the condition of being in between states. He comments,

> we apprehend the grotesque in the presence of an entity—an image, object, or experience—simultaneously justifying multiple and mutually exclusive interpretations which commonly stand in a relation of high to low, human to subhuman, divine to human, normative to abnormal, with the unifying principle sensed but occluded and imperfectly perceived (Harpham 2006, 17).

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[7] Bakhtin notes that modern grotesque, while deprived of 'regenerating' laughter, is nonetheless inseparable from the comic; however, in its modern form, "laughter was cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity" (Bakhtin 1984, 38).

Fig. 2.2 Erhard Schon, *Der Teufel mit der Sackpfeife*, 1536 (Harpham 2006, 9)

Michael Steig's (1970) description also refers to the ambivalence of the grotesque. Although Steig identifies recurrent themes and motifs, like Harpham he concludes that the grotesque can only be properly defined in terms of its impact on the observer, which he sees as essentially psychological in nature. He refers to Sigmund Freud's 1919 aesthetic theory of the uncanny in his definition of the grotesque, which "involves the managing of the uncanny by the comic" (Steig 1970, 259). Freud (2003) presents the uncanny as an aesthetic theory that elucidates horrific affect in art and literature; however, this essay also alludes to the perception of horror in daily life. He describes the uncanny as the particular anxiety that is felt when that which is known and familiar turns strange and frightening. This can occur when the distinction between reality and imagination is blurred, or when a previously repressed (infantile) complex returns, triggered by an image or an idea. The etymology of the German word *unheimlich* (uncanny) is key to this concept; *heimlich* may mean homely, familiar, tame or cosy, but it may also take on shades of the hidden, concealed or secret. *Unheimlich*, therefore, is the opposite of what is homely and safe, but crucially, if something is *unheimlich*, it "was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (Freud 2003, 132).

Harpham echoes Freud when he states that "the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately *in* something else" (Harpham 2006, 13, emphasis added), connoting the illicit and partially concealed violation of established norms. He also examines the etymology of 'grotesque', which has at its root the 'grottoes' from which Roman ruins were unearthed during the Renaissance, and so takes on shades of "underground, of burial, and of secrecy" (Harpham 1982, 27)—of something which should be concealed, but has improperly come to light. He notes that the grotesque results from "unsuccessful masking, a dis-covery or revelation" (Harpham 2006, 96). Steig's description of the affect of the grotesque also utilises Freud's uncanny. He argues that the grotesque provokes a deep anxiety in its observer, an anxiety that can only be managed through its comic aspect, which works to disarm any threatening material in the grotesque. Like Harpham, Steig makes a distinction between sinister and comic impulses in the grotesque, and notes that these two strains overlap in many cases. In putting forward his definition, Steig comments that while the threatening aspect of the grotesque may be relieved through comic devices, in the horrific grotesque traces of the comic "may also enhance anxiety through their aggressive implications and through the strangeness they lend to the threatening figure" (Steig 1970, 259). Despite this acknowledgement, Steig's definition of the grotesque as managing the uncanny with the comic does not account for such failures of the comic in more sinister strains of the grotesque.

In my definition of the grotesque I borrow from Steig, but I will not use the term 'comic' as an essential element of the grotesque, although it is integral to many of its iterations. As Harpham's work of 1982, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, suggests, there may be a clearer way of denoting the aspect which encompasses the breadth of grotesque affect from its comic to horrific extremes. Earlier definitions of the grotesque do not emphasise laughter or the comic as an essential element. Kayser makes the following distinction between 'proper' and comic grotesque, considering their affective impact: "In the *genuine* grotesque the spectator becomes directly involved at some point where a specific meaning is attached to events. In the *humorous* context, on the other hand, a certain distance is maintained throughout and, with it, a feeling of security and indifference" (Kayser 1968, 118 emphasis added). Preceding Kayser's ideas, the nineteenth century work of Ruskin distinguishes between the horrific and *satirical* aspects of the grotesque (Ruskin 1867). Although satire and comedy are intertwined, there is a shift in meaning. While the comic provokes laughter or amusement, satire uses irony to ridicule an existing subject. While satire may be one of the strategies by which the uncanny is managed in the grotesque, successfully or otherwise, it could be argued that the term 'absurd' more fully describes the estranging affect of the grotesque, its uncanniness as well as its ability to diffuse the anxiety of the uncanny through parody. However, the absurd is already steeped in the uncanny, for it is concerned with the alienation of the subject within a familiar, yet irrational world. While the comic aspects of the irrational or unreasoned may provide relief from its unsettling aspects, it does not mitigate the yawning chasm of a world devoid of meaning and hope, as in the absurd universe presented by Albert Camus (Hall 1960). The comic aspect of the absurd can only ever be a temporary foil to its uncanniness, for through its relentless mutations and repetitions, it takes on a shade more sinister than amusing.

The word 'manage' in Steig's definition also presumes the success of the device by which the uncanny nature of the grotesque is combated. As has been discussed, there are instances of the grotesque in which horror outweighs the comic aspect. Rather than a managing of horror through humour, grotesque affect occurs through the contradictory conjunction of the uncanny with pleasure or desire. This unholy union of affects may be experienced by the beholder or depicted as a quality of the grotesque object. In *grottesche* this contradiction is embodied in the elevated conceits of the artist, their virtuosity, in combination with the monstrous subject matter. Pleasure is elicited and conveyed through the artist's audacious vision; horror is implied through the contorted forms that multiply within the work. Although to contemporary eyes the
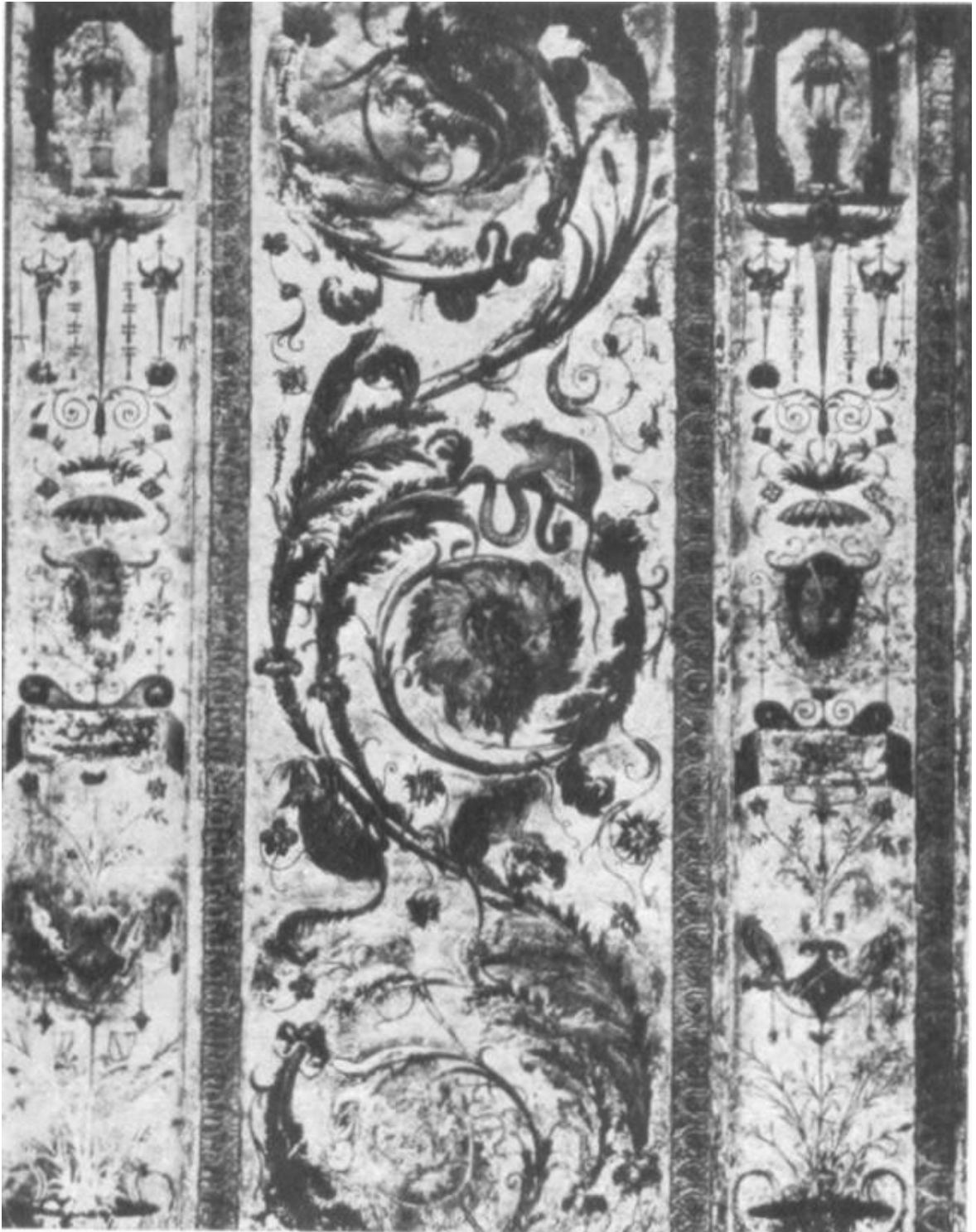
Fig. 2.3 Raphael, detail of pillar, Papal Loggia, c. 1515 (Kayser 1968, 130)

uncanniness of the *grottesche* may not appear pronounced, it is precisely the frivolous conjunction of virtuosic artistry with diabolical imagery that Ruskin found contemptible in the Renaissance grotesque, which he describes as "the fruit of great minds degraded to base objects" (Ruskin 1867, 143). Ruskin considers the pleasure of both the artist and the viewer to be inappropriate, in contrast to medieval grotesques, which, in his view, are redeemed by the naïve piety of the artist and viewer alike. He states,

> If we can draw the human head perfectly, and are masters of its expression and its beauty, we have no business to cut it off, and hang it up by the hair at the end of a garland. If we can draw the human body in the perfection of its grace and movement, we have no business to take away its limbs, and terminate it with a bunch of leaves. Or rather our doing so will imply that there is something wrong with us; that, if we can consent to use our best powers for such base and vain trifling, there must be something wanting in the powers themselves; and that, however skilful we may be, or however learned, we are wanting both in the earnestness which can apprehend a noble truth, and in the thoughtfulness which can feel a noble fear (Ruskin 1867, 144).

It is this inappropriateness of the grotesque object, its perversity, which lies at the root of its affect. Such impropriety is the source of much pleasure in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in which the vestiges of high and ecclesiastical culture are repeatedly debased and renewed through confrontations with grotesque bodies and their waste products (Bakhtin 1984). Freud describes the character of Coppelius/Coppola/The Sand Man as a source of horrific affect in E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale 'The Sand-Man', as his perverse desire for 'eyes' plays upon the anxieties of the hero, Nathaniel (Freud 2003). Hence, the grotesque may evoke laughter or transgressive pleasure[8], but the spectacle of the grotesque and the inappropriate pleasure or desire it conveys may also induce uncanny affects, heightening its horror. In the grotesque, the uncanny contaminates pleasure, bringing such affects horribly, illegitimately, to light. In relation to the presence of uncanny pleasure, it may be possible to observe the grotesque, to desire the

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[8] Transgressive pleasures may be aroused or observed in the 'erotic grotesque', described by Shu-mei Shi as a literary trope in modernist Chinese and Japanese fiction. In the Japanese context, it is known as *ero-guru-nonsensu* (erotic grotesque nonsense). Shi and others, such as Miriam Silverberg, identify the erotic grotesque with troubled notions of cultural identity emerging through experiences of Western colonisation and modernisation (Shi 2001). Erotic incarnations of the grotesque also permeate the Western tradition, notably in the work of the Marquis de Sade.

grotesque, and to *be* grotesque[9,10,11]. The ambivalence that is integral to grotesque affect is maintained in this definition, for while the outcome may be laughter or delight, in other cases the pleasure that is embodied by the grotesque object or felt by its observer may emphasise its horror and lead to a triumph of the uncanny. Crucially, the space between these extreme poles of pleasure and horror may be nuanced with other responses to the grotesque, including wry humour, nostalgia, melancholy, pity and guilt.

Margins, wonder and the traumatic sublime

Medieval and Renaissance forms of grotesque art point to a thematic and formal quality of the grotesque that continues in later iterations: a complex relationship with the margin. The margins of medieval religious manuscripts are 'polluted' with scrolling vegetable forms, monstrous hybrids, monkeys, defecating nobles and lascivious monks and nuns. These images seem at odds with medieval religious dogma; however, according to Michael Camille (1995), such images confirmed the authority of the central text, placating anxieties that the written word was an unreliable conduit for the word of God. Echoing Bakhtin's description of the carnival world, Camille argues that the rigid hierarchy of the Middle Ages nevertheless allowed a place for parody and subversion—which is how the marginal space of the religious text came to be a site of licensed transgression in which the literate elite read the "apish, reeling and drunken discourse that filled the margins of their otherwise scrupulously organized lives" (Camille 1995, 14). Increasingly in Gothic images as well as Renaissance *grottesche*, however, the playful and ornamental world of the margin encroaches on the centre and frequently replaces it altogether. In doing so, the delineation between margin and centre becomes clouded, something that for Harpham relates more closely to the cultural status of the grotesque, which belongs "to the more radically ambiguous or ambivalent space between the margin and the centre" (Harpham 2006, *xix*). Accordingly, the grotesque occurs where cultural boundaries are breached, revealing the trace of the unknown and the unfamiliar. The appeal of the grotesque often relates to a fascination with such limits; analogously, the pre-modern experience of wonder was comprised of seemingly incongruous impulses of horror and pleasure which formed the basis of Western notions of the 'other'.

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[9] In this context, desire itself is grotesque, for the desire is for illegitimate, corrupted pleasures that are usually the objects of uncanny affect.

[10] Harpham refers to a "civil war of attraction and repulsion" (MacRae, n.d. 11) within the grotesque.

[11] The grotesque muddies the pleasure-pain principle of psychoanalysis. For Freud, this is the impulse that drives the subject towards sources of pleasure and to recoil from sources of displeasure (Freud 2008).
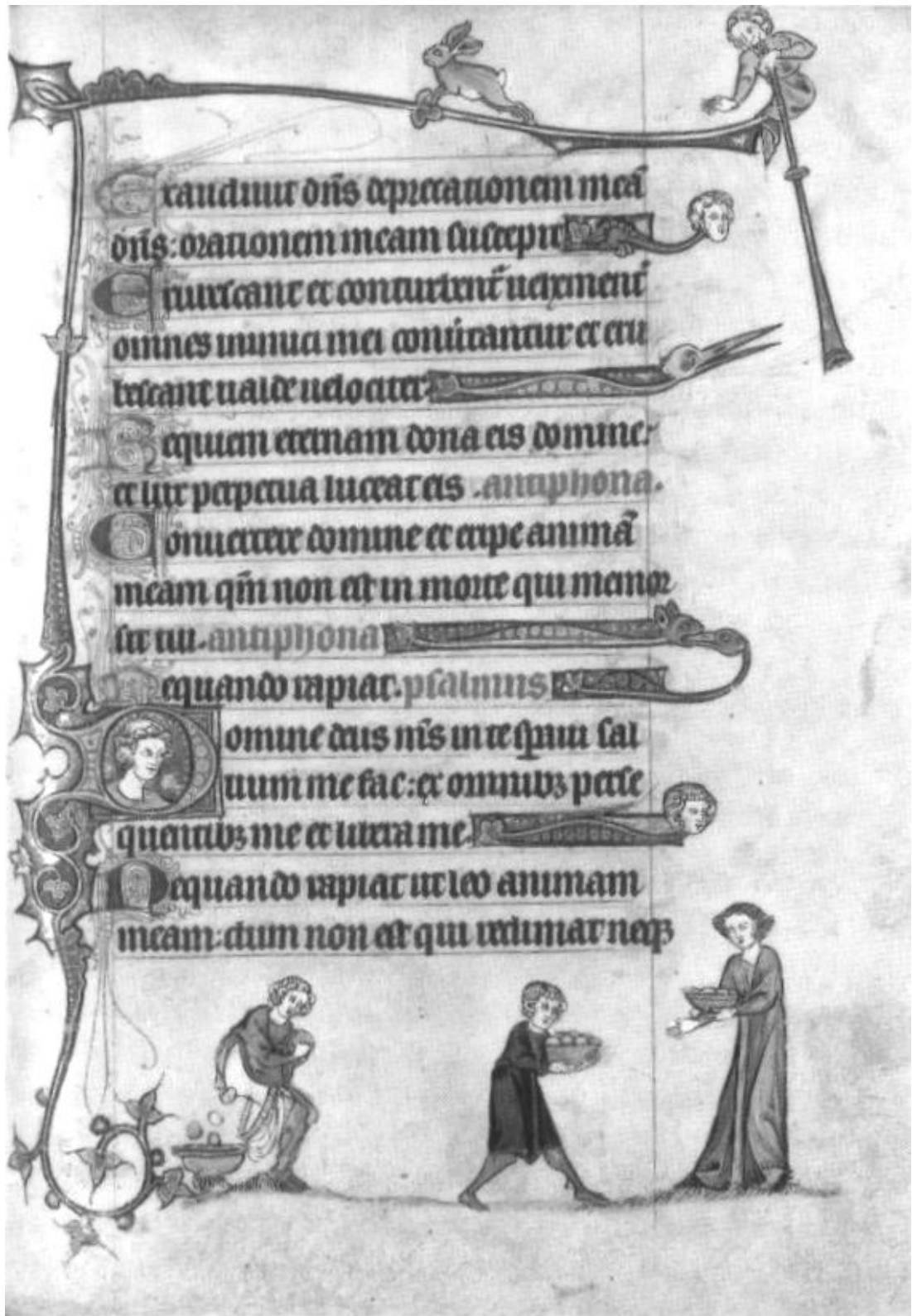
Fig. 2.4 Book of Hours, Trinity College, Cambridge (Camille 1995, 112)

Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park (1998) note that from the Middle Ages until the Enlightenment, the European cultural experience of wonder shaped the perception and interpretation of the natural world, specifically with regards to phenomena that appeared to deviate from the natural order: monsters, miracles, and the cultural 'other'. In this context, wonder was both an intellectual experience and an emotional sensibility inspired by the margins of the known. The affect of wonder could be anything from piety, delight and pleasure, to fear, repugnance and horror, and often involved a commingling of contradictory responses. Daston and Park comment, "As theorized by medieval and early modern intellectuals, wonder was a cognitive passion, as much about knowing as about feeling. To register wonder was to register a breached boundary, a classification subverted" (Daston and Park 1998, 14). Wonder shaped the development of systems of collecting (through the *wunderkammer*[12]) and classification, giving rise to modern European science. However, as the Enlightenment emerged, the value of 'wonder' altered markedly, becoming the sign of naivety, vulgarity and superstition, supplanted by the detached curiosity of the scientist. Consequently, the characteristic that had previously designated the heightened sensibility of the intellectual came to signify the debased passion of the ignorant. Relegated to the margins of the Enlightenment, wonder became culturally grotesque; already linked to the ambivalent conjunction of pleasure and horror, wonder came to be viewed as inappropriate, out of place and outmoded.

This process illuminates the relationship of the grotesque to the marginal as well as the obsolete. Histories of the margin—marginal subject matter as well as historiographic methods that are peripheral to the 'scientific' mode of history[13]—take on grotesque shades because they exist outside of the conventions of objectivist and monumental historiography. As the commingling of emotion and intellect in the premodern experience of wonder was antithetical to Enlightenment values of scientific objectivity, the incursion of affects in the grotesque is similarly adverse to traditional modes of historiography. The category of the historiographic grotesque emerges through an experience analogous to wonderment in which the absent field of the past is figured

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[12] The 'wonder cabinet', or cabinet of curiosities, often juxtaposed wondrous relics from the natural world and objects made by human hands. Adriana Turpin notes that they combined "'scientific' curiosityand pure aesthetic pleasure" (Evans and Marr 2006, 63).

[13] The nineteenth century historian Leopold von Ranke is credited for the insistence that it is the task of the historian to present an account of the past as it truly happened; this considers the objectivity, authenticity and authority of the historian as self evident. This notion of history as something knowable to the present in a reliable way and as a science like any other is fraught with the modern and postmodern lack of faith in the authority of grand narratives (Curthoys and Docker 2006). Nietzsche critiqued the supposed objectivity of the historical enterprise in 'On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life' (1980).

in terms of its uncanny 'otherness' to the realm of the present, and fascination with this limit engenders pleasure or horror, or both. Thus, the historiographic grotesque is poised to consider historical transition and rupture, the authenticity of dominant historiographic modes, and notions of death, transience and memory through methods that exist outside of 'history' as it is officially practiced[14].

As aesthetic mode and affect, the historiographic grotesque has some overlaps with the historical sublime, a term employed by a range of writers to describe the aesthetic, emotional and psychological affect of a certain kind of historical experience or narrative. This understanding of the sublime has its roots in Romanticism, particularly the eighteenth century works of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke. In keeping with the Romantic fixation with extremes of passion, Burke's sublime is a mixture of terror and delight: the sensation experienced by the beholder when feelings of terror arise in contemplation of an awesome object, image or idea, but the beholder's safety from any actual threat leads to a sensation of delight. He explains, "this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*" (Burke, 1844, 66). In Kant's definition the sublime evokes a similarly ambivalent reaction in the beholder, however, this ambivalence stems from a temporary collapse in reason in response to the enormity or power of the sublime object: "when experiencing the sublime the normal functioning of the categories of the understanding momentarily gives way to a free interaction between reason and imagination" (Ankersmit 2001, 309)—the sublime is beyond comprehension (Cahoone 1999). The inadequacy of the faculties of perception to comprehend objects of magnitude or horror may lead to a kind of "negative pleasure" (Louden 2002, 12) in the beholder.

This ambivalent delight in violent sensations of awe and repulsion is analogous to the disquieting mixture of pleasure and horror inspired by the grotesque. The confused and confusing nature of the grotesque, its resistance to definition or closure and its troubling affect invites comparisons the sublime. Referring to the intermingling of heavenly and demonic traits in Renaissance works, Harpham states, "what is commonly conceived of as opposition between the sublime and the grotesque is often a mere difference of point of view" (Harpham 2006, 22). In "The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror", Shun-liang Chao (2006) explores the intertwined relationship of the grotesque and sublime, arguing that the grotesque is in fact an aspect of the

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[14] However, White would argue that all historical works are subject to aesthetic and ideological imperatives that are adverse to the official practice of history.

sublime because the grotesque image or object may be a source of sublime affect. For Chao, "The grotesque, in a nutshell, is the product of nature in chaos, which, as Kant has put it, "most arouses our ideas of the sublime"" (Chao 2006, 13). Chao puts forward an interpretation of the grotesque which is predominantly horrific (or uncanny), however, as has been discussed, the grotesque may also be predominantly comic (or pleasurable) in some instances, in which case the horrific affect is successfully managed. Connelly elucidates a key difference between the sublime and the grotesque: while the unboundedness and unfamiliarity of the sublime overpowers comprehension, the grotesque "is in constant struggle with the boundaries of the known, the conventional, the understood" (Connelly 2003, 5). The grotesque makes familiar concepts or objects strange and threatening, while the sublime is strange and threatening because it is inherently unfamiliar and always unknown. The interrelatedness of horrific grotesque and sublime is significant to this discussion due to the foregrounding of the sublime in a range of contemporary historical studies as a way to represent and understand historical experience.

Scholars of the 'historical sublime' equate the sublime with trauma. For instance, in *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction,* Amy J. Elias (2001) identifies a preoccupation in postmodern metahistorical fiction with the collapsing of stable experience that occurs when confronted with experiences of terror and violence. Elias believes that the historical sublime, prevalent in the post-war, or post-traumatic, West and its artistic works, both embodies and resolves the 'crisis' of contemporary historiography by representing the affect of the trauma that is associated with the violent atrocities of the twentieth century. In this context, history becomes a byword for trauma (Bachner 2003). The conflation of trauma and the sublime is integral to a distinct body of theoretical and creative work concerning the representation of history (particularly histories associated with the Holocaust). As opposed to the flattening of affect in the (supposedly objective) scientific historiographic work, through the historical sublime the audience *feels* history. Some writers suggest that this sublime affect 'heals' the crisis of history by signalling as authentic the trauma represented in the postmodern work of speculative history—paradoxically revealing a nostalgic search for 'truth' and tangible experience within the postmodern disavowal of knowable history and scepticism towards the ability of historiography to represent the past as it was really lived (Bachner 2003). For trauma theorists such as Geoffrey Hartman, the goal of this kind of historical representation is to "change history into memory" (Murphy, 2004, 61), but, as J. Stephen Murphy notes, this quest for authenticity is illusory, for trauma is characterised by its resistance to representation (Murphy 2004).

In "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One Is No Longer", F. R. Ankersmit teases out the threads that link trauma, the sublime and history to the contradictory, yet complementary, impulses of nostalgia and forgetting. He locates a civilisation's 'historical sublime' in the act of forgetting which marks a culture's transition from one state to another; "the kind of forgetting taking place when a civilization "commits suicide" by exchanging a previous identity for a new one" (Ankersmit 2001, 295). Examples of this kind of 'cultural suicide' include the transition from pre- to post-French revolutionary Europe and the pre- to post-Industrial Western world, as well as the transformation that the Athenian state underwent in the wake of Socrates' execution. The trauma associated with the act of losing and forgetting a former world, and with it, a cultural identity, is what Ankersmit considers to be the historical sublime of a given civilisation[15]. In the case of both trauma and the sublime, the mental faculties of the individual are inadequate to the task of comprehending an experience of magnitude or horror. Both result in a dissociation with the event or object which separates the experience from the realm of normality—Ankersmit compares the shell shock of World War One soldiers with the "tranquillity tinged with terror" (2001, 310) that characterises Burke's definition of the sublime. The traumatic historical sublime which results from the 'suicide' of a culture is manifested both through the repudiation of the past and the attempt to reconstruct it through historiographic narrative, which Ankersmit equates with myths that describe the loss of a pre-historical, Arcadian past and the birth of post-historical time (Ankersmit 2001)[16]. The melancholy which accompanies this depiction of sublime experience is reflected in the postmodern preoccupation with, and nostalgia for, the traumatic events surrounding the transition from a pre- to post-World War Two civilisation—the death of the modern age and the birth of the postmodern era.

There is a parallel between Ankersmit's sublime rupture in history and the uncanny. Freud identifies the uncanny as a feature of Gothic fiction, specifically the tales of Hoffmann. Hugh

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[15] This kind of forgetting, he argues, is markedly different to the kind of forgetting that results from traumatic experience on a personal or collective scale, such as the period of 'forgetting' that individuals in Germany underwent in the period after the fall of the Third Reich. This kind of forgetting emerges when the traumatic experience results in a repression of memory—which Ankersmit argues can eventually be resolved, although at great emotional cost and suffering on the part of the subject. However, he states that the kind of forgetting that emerges from a civilization's 'suicide' "is the kind of trauma that we will always carry with us after history has forced us to confront it" (Ankersmit 2001, 302), with no hope of resolution.

[16] Wolfgang Schivelbusch addresses something similar in *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*. Referring to the way in which national identity is reconstructed after the trauma of defeat in war, he states, "What neurosis is to the individual, the creation of myths is to the collective" (Schivelbusch 2003, 26).

Haughton points out that, just as in the Gothic mode the vanquished demons of the past (superstition, unreason, perversity, tyranny) haunt the Enlightenment as its uncanny 'other', Freud's post-World War One essay similarly locates an uncanny 'other' within the experience of modernity, revealed through psychoanalysis (Freud 2003). Likewise, Mladen Dolar argues that the experience of the uncanny is itself born of the modernity brought about by the Enlightenment, evidenced by the emergence of the Gothic mode just as the pre-modern conception of time disappears (Dolar 1991). Following these ideas, the grotesque might also be seen to have a peculiar connection to the passing of history; a link to the transition from an older order to a new one, as evidenced by the Rabelaisian myth of the death of the medieval body and the (re)birth of the Renaissance world. Connelly and Warner's views that the modern grotesque operates in opposition to the 'brave new world' of the Enlightenment also supports this notion (Connelly 2003; Warner 2000). Connelly and Warner echo Bakhtin's description of the Romantic grotesque, which he conceives as "a rejection of that which is finished and completed, of the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlighteners with their narrow and artificial optimism" (Bakhtin 1984, 37). For Bakhtin, the grotesque is a state of transformation, of 'becoming', of turning a pre-existing order on its head. Bakhtinian grotesque displays and disrupts images which are representative of anachronism—for instance, scatological activities which are out of place in civilised society—and in doing so, satirises notions of historical progress.

Similarly, Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's essay "Blemished Physiologies: Delacroix, Paganini and the Cholera Epidemic of 1832" links collective trauma with the Romantics' articulation of the grotesque, which, she argues, prefigures notions of abjection that emerged in the twentieth century. The cholera epidemic of 1832 pointed to the failure of post-Revolutionary notions of the Enlightenment, of scientific and societal progress, and of the impotence of the July Monarchy in the face of such a threat. This was reflected in art and literature which fixated upon sickness, death and decadence, and which

> meshed with the Romantics' views on the relation between physicality, spirituality and creativity. Originated in a time of crisis, of structures and beliefs overturned or challenged, these views, I maintain, were steeped in the ironies of a parodic "world upside down" which forcefully erupted through the fissures of normative culture opened by the traumatic cholera experience (Connelly 2003, 99).

Here, Athanassoglou-Kallmyer establishes a link between trauma and the grotesque, conflating sublime and grotesque experience and demonstrating the significance of the grotesque as a

historical mode[17]. This suggests that other examples of the grotesque as a means of visioning the transition from the past to the present may be found throughout the modern history of the West.

In this vein, the grotesque mode of history might be used as a tool to examine the 'deaths' and 'rebirths' of civilisations—including the nostalgic underpinnings of the historical sublime which characterises much postmodern speculative historiography[18]. In this context, the grotesque mode of history is characterised by scepticism towards the authority of official, canonised or sacred versions of the past, a lack of faith in either memory or historiography as reliable ways of understanding the past, and a foregrounding of the absurdity of nostalgic pasts and utopian futures. As satire and critique, its target is the heroic past, whether domestic or universal, recent or antique in scope. In a number of instances the trauma which is venerated in the historical sublime is evoked through devices of the uncanny, but the 'crisis' of history cannot be resolved through this evocation of affect—instead, the object of history remains grotesque, a source of horror and/or queasy amusement. In the grotesque mode of history, the martyred body of the historical sublime is transformed into laughing death.

Los desastres de la guerra

To explore this idea, it may be useful to examine the work of one of the key figures of the grotesque, Francisco Goya. Much of Goya's work is understood as a critique of eighteenth century Spain. Working in parallel to the Gothic fiction that was emerging in Europe at the time, he is seen as a precursor of Romanticism by some and, by others, an early Romantic himself (Baldick 1993; Dowling 1977). Working in a period in European history which is typified by its belief in progress, reason and the centrality of the human subject, Goya's images offer a counter-argument to such notions, instead depicting a humanity characterised by brutality, superstition and folly. In these works the grotesque is used as a device through which to represent the horror of specific historical events, as well as a means to satirise Spain's transition between political structures and to point to the contradictions of an Enlightened Catholic culture pervaded by narratives of the supernatural and occult (Hughes 2003). In Goya's most grotesque works, the

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[17] There is a parallel to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's description of dancing crazes which followed traumatic national defeats, such as jazz dancing in Germany after 1918. For Schivelbusch this is an expression of the temporary dream state that sometimes follows trauma on a collective scale (Schivelbusch 2003).

[18] Some examples of historiographic metafiction which employs the grotesque include *The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The White Hotel* by D. M. Thomas, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami and *Gould's Book of Fish* by Richard Flanagan.

failure of progress is underscored, and history is shown to be a force which hastens society's decline.

Arguably his most horrific work is the series of etchings *Los desastres de la guerra (The Disasters of War)* (1810–1820), based on his observations of the Peninsula War against the French (known as the War of Independence to the Spanish) (Hughes 2003; Weems 2006). In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte displaced the Bourbon monarchy in Spain, installing his brother Joseph as king (Goya 1967). Civilian uprisings against the occupying French in Madrid were swift and opportunistic. Reprisals and executions ensued, and gradually the entire nation was swallowed by war: the Spanish army, guerrillas and civilians against Napoleonic troops. What followed, according to Robert Hughes, was "a long train of mutual atrocities" (Hughes 2003, 262). Refusing to recognise them as legitimate soldiers, the French army executed the Spanish guerrillas they captured, and likewise, the guerrillas sought retaliation. The war spiralled into chaos, and it is human pandemonium that Goya depicts in the grotesque realism of *Los desastres de la guerra*.

In Plate 39, *Grande Hazaña! Con meurtos!* (*Great Deeds! With dead men!* or *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, Fig. 2.5), the naked, mutilated bodies of three men are strung up on a tree (Goya 1967). All of the bodies are missing genitalia, gaping wounds in their place. The third man has been decapitated, his body is slung upside down, and his arms, which have been hacked off at the shoulder, hang nearby. Blood is caked around the wounds. Reading the image from left to right, the horror is heightened by the final detail of the third man's head perched above his disembodied arms, which are tied together at the wrist. Absurdly, the bodies have been deliberately, even artfully arranged—as a warning to others, perhaps, or simply as perverse amusement, a diversion from the business of battle. The rather cheerful sprays of foliage which emerge from the gnarled tree seem incongruous with an otherwise barren landscape.

Harpham believes that the common response to Goya's series is an involuntary "gasp…[of] laughter" (Harpham 1976, 464), a coping mechanism by which the horror is made manageable. If the viewer's response to this image is laughter, this is certainly not the joyful laughter of the marketplace which Bakhtin celebrates; it is a queasy, guilty amusement which underscores the brutality of the subject and the bitter irony of the title. For Freud there is "something highly uncanny" (Freud 2003, 150) about disembodied body parts, the affect of which he sees as inseparable from the castration complex. It is the stiff, hanging arms in this image that seem
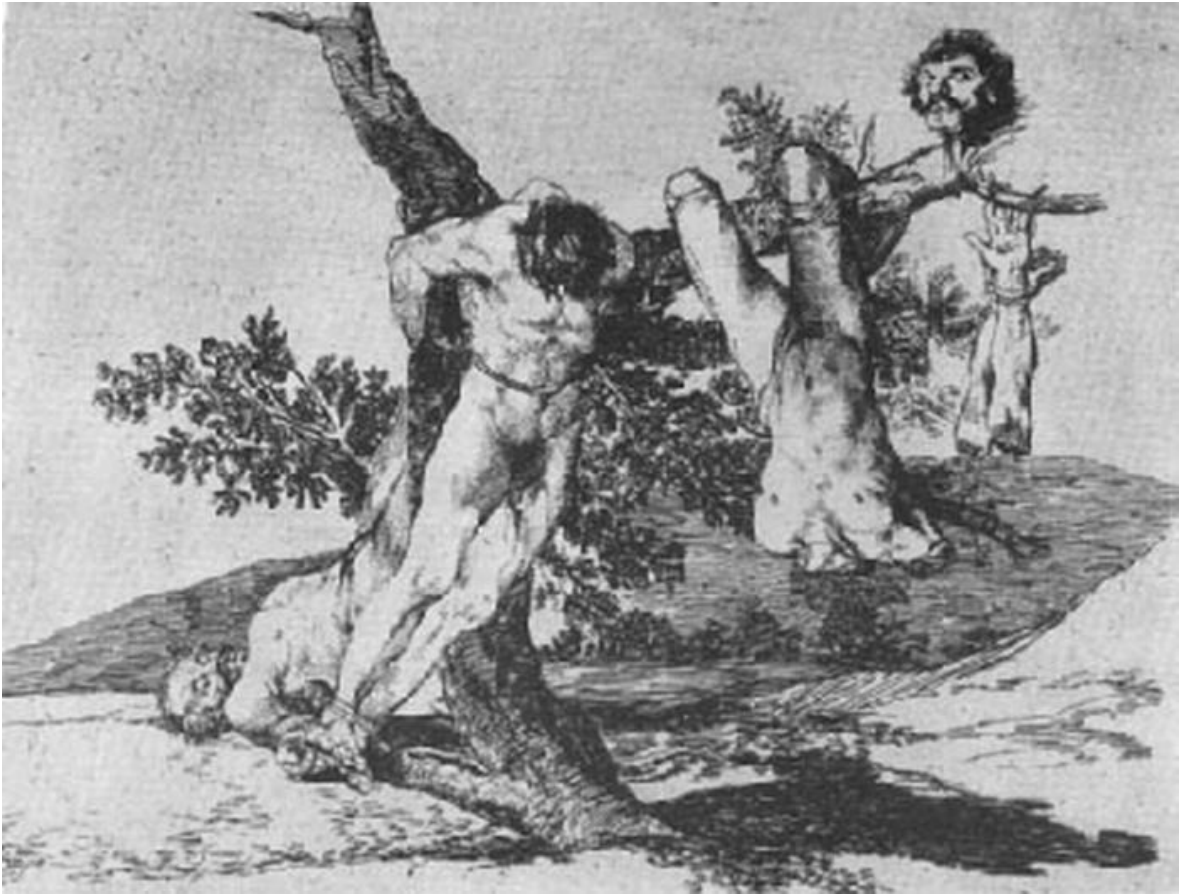
Fig. 2.5 Francisco Goya, *Grande Hazaña! Con meurtos!* Etching (Goya 1967 Plate 39)

most absurd in conjunction with the castrated bodies, as though waving, and which are most likely to provoke a horrified gasp of laughter, bringing the viewer an inch closer in spirit to the perpetrators of the crime. There is a moral ambivalence to the image, an accusatory implication of pleasure that enhances its uncanny aspect. Hughes describes this etching as "a sickeningly effective play on the Neoclassical cult of the antique fragment" (Hughes 2003, 295), the decaying relics of classical statuary transformed into repellent flesh and their arrangement applauded as a 'great deed'. The formality of the composition, an 'x' emerging from the corners of the plate which is made up of the tree and its cadaverous fruit, likewise recasts the image within the academic conventions of 'high' art. Such juxtaposition of classical devices and grotesque subject matter makes this image into something of a sick joke, all the more monstrous as a result. As 'history', this image uses devices of the horrific grotesque—macabre humour, amorphous, violated bodies, allusions to the human capacity for (and delight in) evil deeds—to underscore the irony of the quest to liberate or redeem the nation through warfare.

It is not clear which nation the mutilated men belong to. Although it could be assumed that Goya is documenting a crime against the Spanish people by the tyrannical French, it is also quite possible that this image depicts French corpses mutilated by Spanish guerrillas (Weems 2006). Although many images clearly depict atrocities against the Spanish, other plates in the series, such as *Populacho (Rabble)* and *Lo merecia (He deserved it)* show victims who have fallen to the hands of Spanish villagers (Goya 1967). In *Rabble*, a man and a woman assault the prostrate body of a second man who has been dragged by a rope from his feet, and who is naked from the waist down. An impassive crowd has gathered to observe as the woman thrashes the body with a stick and the male villager prepares to thrust a spiked tool into the victim's anus. The victim does not appear to be wearing a uniform, so it may be assumed that it is a Spanish civilian with perceived French sympathies that the patriotic mob has set upon (Hughes 2003). Images such as these, although critical of the war, trouble moral identification with any particular side. They depict a world turned upside down by the traumatic events of the war, in which the formerly hidden nature of the populace has come horribly to light.

Many of the later plates of *Los disastres*, made after the Spanish victory, use fantastical grotesque devices to emphasise the diabolical and uncanny themes alluded to in the more representational images. These are referred to as the *Caprichos enfáticos,* and they envisage a horrible future in the wake of the war, by which time the Bourbon Fernando VII had reclaimed the Spanish throne. Fernando restored the former regime in full force, including the Inquisition (Hughes 2003). In these later plates, Spain has been descended upon by a flock of demons who represent the restored powers: a swarm of bat-like birds feed upon the dead in Plate 72, *Las resultas* (*The consequences*), a diabolical cat and owl are worshipped at an ungodly altar in Plate 73, *Gatesca pantomina* (*Feline pantomine*), and a demon in robes transcribes a list (perhaps the names of suspects) in a heavy tome in Plate 71, *Contra el bien general* (*Against the common good*). Plate 75, *Farándula de charlatans* (*Troupe of charlatans*), depicts a gaggle of grotesque creatures—monstrous humans, bears, a donkey, the looming shadow of some huge and unrecognisable thing—crowding behind a hideous bird-headed member of the clergy, his claws flung out in cruciform, uselessly beseeching an unseen force while pandemonium unfolds around him.

Most explicit in expressing Goya's cynicism towards the Church's role in the post-war restoration are Plates 70, *No sable el camino* (*They don't know the way*), in which members of

the clergy, tied together by the neck, wander across a mountain face with no clear direction, and 77, *Que se rompe la cuerda* (*Look, the rope is breaking!*). In this latter image, a priest treads an unsteady tightrope, frayed and knotted in places, ready to snap above the heads of a nervous rabble (Goya 1967; Hughes 2003). The enduring image which emerges from this historiographic work and which sums up Goya's pessimistic view of the outcome of the war is Plate 69, *Nada. (Ello dirá)* (*Nothing. He will say,* or *Nothing. We shall see*, Fig. 2.6)—"*Ello dirá*" was added by the publishers of the etchings, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in 1863, so *Nada* may be the proper title of this image. In this plate, a decomposed corpse leans on its side, mouth agape, clutching a pen which has written "Nada", 'nothing', onto a sheet of paper. In the gloom beyond the body, ghouls swarm. Nothing remains.

Fig. 2.6 Francisco Goya, *Nada. (Ello dirá).* Etching (Goya 1967 Plate 69)

As a work which explores the transition from pre- to post-Peninsula War Spain, *The Disasters of War* can be read within the mode of the historiographic grotesque. Goya may or may not have seen the series as a work of history; however, the grotesque devices in this series refute notions of progress, greater purpose and the heroic past as meaningful forces which have shaped the

present. Goya presents narratives of demonic possession, dark desires, cannibalism, destruction and deformity to express anxiety about the significance of the past upon the present and to emphasise the absurdity of nostalgia in the midst of such horror. From Goya's perspective the traumatic events of the war, although eventually leading to Spanish victory, nonetheless resulted in a bleak outcome. Thus the intermingling of humour, perversity and uncanny motifs in *Los desastres*—fools, monsters, violated bodies, aberrant humour and actions which embody the human capacity for evil—signifies Spain's descent into dystopia; its abuse by history. As the creator of a speculative historiographic work, Goya has utilised the grotesque mode to convey an aesthetic and ideological perspective on the events he narrates. He describes the war, its engineers, its combatants, its victims and its victors as grotesque: transgressive and morally ambivalent in a way that does not lead to regeneration, as in Rabeliais' world, but to barrenness and desolation.

However, as will be examined in the following chapter, the historiographic grotesque is not simply a recounting of horrible events; grotesque considerations of the past can be nuanced with shades of melancholy and nostalgia, where the historical field is conceived of as a site of rupture and loss. In this context, the past is figured both as an object of desire and as ruin, facilitating an interminable mourning characterised by a fixation upon the past as dead matter. Such tendencies can be observed in nineteenth and twentieth century works that contemplate the emergence of modernity in relation to the loss of the premodern word. In such works, incursions of the grotesque indicate ambivalence towards the shifting condition of modernity and the subject's relationship to the world that has been displaced, revealing a paradoxical pleasure in repeating the traumatic losses of historical rupture.

Chapter Three

The grotesque image of loss in modern historical consciousness

A pervasive characteristic of European modernity of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the perception that the premodern world of tradition has been lost and is no longer accessible to the present. This sensibility emerges in parallel to history's development as a 'scientific' discipline in the nineteenth century, exemplified by the work of Leopold von Ranke, often credited as the father of modern historiography. In response to the growing prominence of history at the time, Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*[19] hits upon a crisis in nineteenth century historical consciousness: modern culture is suffering from an excess of history that prevents healthy participation in the present (Nietzsche 1980). A number of writers have considered the uncanny force that history exerts on the subject of modernity; a problematic condition in which the individual is frustrated in engaging fully in the present due to being dragged into the ghostly undertow of the past. Ankersmit (2005) has asserted that the schism with the past contributes to a keen sense of cultural loss in modernity, and that this perceived loss exerts a powerful attraction upon historians and others for whom the past, or the desire for an encounter with the past, holds special meaning. The melancholic or nostalgic fixation with the inaccessible world of history often belies anxiety about the emergence of modernity and the loss of the pre-modern world, which takes on ahistorical connotations of myth. Many works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are marked by a sense of dislocation in time that reveals ambivalent attitudes towards the historical world and its significance for the present. In the grotesque historiographic mode this ambivalence is emphasised, characterised by a paradoxical desire for, and pleasure in repeating, the traumatic losses of historical experience.

This apprehension of history as a site of loss, intertwined with ambivalent feelings of melancholy, nostalgia and desire, can be interpreted in Freudian terms as a reaction to the unresolved and sometimes unconscious sense of trauma that emerges in response to the inaccessible past, which takes on the character of the lost love object[20]. In his 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud distinguishes between two responses to loss. He presents mourning as the natural process through which the subject assimilates a loss such as the death of

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[19] Also known as *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*
[20] According to Freud, loss is first experienced during infancy as the withdrawal of the mother's breast, and later as the loss of the mother herself. This experience of loss leads to the emergence of desire (to replace or recover the lost love object) (Freud 1961; 1995).

a loved one, or even "some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as a fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (Freud 2008, 162). Mourning is a necessary stage in the 'work' of grieving, whereas melancholia represents a failure to assimilate loss. It is an obsessive, interminable and pathological process which fixates upon the perceived loss and resists closure. Melancholia can be a reaction to a particular loss, although it also occurs when no specific loss can be identified. Freud explains, "This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss" (Freud 2008, 164). The feelings of the 'melancholiac' towards the lost object are notably ambivalent, involving an internal struggle of attack and defence of the object which generally culminates in the transference of negative feelings to the self. For Freud, there is no doubt that the melancholiac experiences pleasure through their anguish. Negative impulses towards the lost object are directed against the subject's own ego, paradoxically resulting in the subject's 'sadistic' enjoyment of engineering their own suffering[21]. However, in the event of mania, which Freud sees as an inverse position within the same complex as melancholia, negative feelings are projected back onto the lost object while the subject, exultant in mood, is enthusiastic to acquire a replacement object or collect a series of objects. 'Mourning and Melancholia' highlights the ambivalence that characterises the experience of loss; the diffusions and diversions through which the melancholiac is able to avoid assimilating loss by directing negative feelings against the self, and the paradoxical pleasure that ensues. This pleasure underscores the significance of loss (and 'want', in the sense of 'lack') in psychoanalytic theory as the root of all desire (Freud 2008). These psychoanalytic concepts are useful for considering the affect of history experienced as loss as they are frequently invoked by philosophers of history, as well as in the analysis of creative works concerned with the loss of the past, particularly with regards to modernity.

Ankersmit's interpretation of Western historical consciousness is rooted in such a notion of loss. For Ankersmit, the attempt to connect with the past through the writing of history or speculative modes (such as fiction) is motivated by a melancholic fixation with the vanished world that constitutes the historical realm. In this sense, the aim of historiography is to recapture the past through an act of contemplation that momentarily collapses the distinction between past and

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[21] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud refers to "the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego" (Freud 1961, 8). Gilles Deleuze has commented on the rudimentary nature of Freud's understanding of sadism and masochism. Freud conflates the two impulses into one complex with opposing poles: sadomasochism. However, Deleuze argues that they are fundamentally different conceptions of desire which may also reflect ideological differences. He supports this claim by discussing the differences between the writings of the Mariquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch 1991).

present. He states, "All of historical writing is to be situated in the space enclosed by these complementary movements of the discovery (loss) and the recovery (love) of the past that constitute the realm of historical experience" (Ankersmit 2005, 9). Such contradictory, simultaneous feelings of love and loss, "the combination of pain and pleasure in how we relate to the past" (Ankersmit 2005, 9), give rise to sublime historical experience, which for Ankersmit is characterised by extreme disconnection with the past resulting from an irreversible rupture in culture. Indeed, according to Ankersmit, the discipline of modern historicism emerged as a result of the rupture in European civilisation caused by the industrial and French revolutions, materialising as an attempt to address the cataclysmic schism between past and present which had transformed the past into an "object of investigation" (Ankersmit 2005, 143). Working with the definition of trauma as "the inability to assimilate loss" (Ankersmit 2005, 330), he argues that Western historical consciousness / historicism is constituted by the collective trauma that has resulted from modernisation since the Renaissance. Thus, for Ankersmit, historicism embodies the traumatic experience associated with the loss of a previous world and the ultimately frustrated attempt to recover it.

Indeed, Nietzsche critiques such fixation upon the lost world of the past in *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life,* where he considers the negative impact that an 'excess of history' wreaks upon nineteenth century German culture. He argues that the modern individual leads a fragmented existence, with one foot in the present and the other in the long buried past. History, the "gravedigger of the present" (Nietzsche 1980, 10) prevents the subject from living meaningfully in the joyous amnesia of the present moment by tormenting them with the ghost of the past; "*there is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people or a culture*" (Nietzsche 1980, 10)[22]. Nietzsche writes against the objectivist mode of historiography that has been elevated to the status of a science and the historical consciousness that it gives rise to which 'weakens' the modern subject, who "drags an immense amount of indigestible knowledge stones around with him which on occasion rattle in his belly" (Nietzsche 1980, 24). Nietzsche employs such grotesque descriptions to illustrate the image of the modern 'man' infected by history. While the proponents of monumental and critical modes of history are depicted as fools, the antiquarian in particular is shown to be a pedant rooting through the detritus of former ages, seeking his own image in the relics of the past, creating "the repugnant spectacle of a blind lust for collecting, of a restless raking together of all that has once been. Man envelopes himself in an odour of decay"

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[22] Italics in original.

(Nietzsche 1980, 21). Nietzsche's cure for such a disease is to be derived through a balance of historical, unhistorical (forgetting; of the present) and superhistorical (of art and religion) consciousness, reflected in the ironical self awareness of the modern subject who knows that their yearning for the lost world of the past is not only futile, but inevitable (Nietzsche 1980).

Ankersmit's position on loss, trauma and the sublimity of historical experience differs from that of Dominick LaCapra[23]. Unlike Ankersmit, who locates sublime historical experience in ruptured, traumatised culture, for LaCapra (2001) trauma can only exist in the experience of an individual or group of individuals, specifically victims and survivors, rather than civilisation in general (Ankersmit 2005). LaCapra warns against the appropriation of others' trauma through an approach he ascribes to Ankersmit, in which the work of historiography is seen as a supplement for actual experience. He states, "the historical text becomes a substitute for the absent past only when it is constituted as a totalized object that pretends to closure and is fetishized as such" (LaCapra 2001, *i - ii*). According to LaCapra, this may be avoided by distinguishing between the concepts of loss and absence. He argues that loss is historically situated and is specific to lived experience, while in contrast, absence is transhistorical and generalised. Therefore it is important to differentiate between an authentic experience of loss, and a sense of the absence or lack of something that has not been personally experienced as a genuine bereavement, injury or trauma. Absence and lack may also be distinguished—if something is felt to be lacking there is the implication that there is a deficiency of some sort, while if something is absent it is inaccessible, indefinite and even nonexistent. When these boundaries become confused, there is a risk that the specificity of historical events will be overlooked or that the trauma of others may be appropriated through melancholic identification (which differs from empathy) for nostalgic or utopian ends. Loss, lack and absence might also become blurred in post-traumatic states in which 'working through' is resisted, leading to "a compulsive preoccupation with aporia, [and] an endlessly melancholic, impossible mourning" (LaCapra 2001, 23).

Although they occupy avowedly different positions, LaCapra's definition of loss, lack and absence in relation to the affect of history may be seen to complement Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience, which is characterised by a *perceived* sense of loss outside the scope of lived experience. As LaCapra suggests, the process by which the lost or absent past

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[23] Both Ankersmit and LaCapra have commented on their points of difference, and occupy opposing positions on the 'textuality' of history as well as the scope of historical trauma (Ankersmit 2005; LaCapra 2001).

becomes fetishised is at the heart of Ankersmit's notion of sublime history. Ankersmit describes the desire to connect with the past as a forever unfulfilled yearning; a melancholic fixation with a 'lost' object (the past) which is temporarily recovered through the contemplation of history, which nevertheless amplifies the sense of loss because the past is always, and has always been, inaccessible. For Ankersmit, 'historical experience' is constituted by the brief moment of recognition or identification that the contemplation of artefacts or historical narratives may inspire. That this experience of recognition and loss is illusory, taking place in an imaginary realm (for example, in the historian's mind) and does not constitute an authentic loss (for the historian has not actually lost anything they ever possessed) indicates that absence, or perhaps lack, has been conflated with loss, and in doing so, contemplation of the past equates to "melancholic, impossible mourning" (LaCapra 2001, 23). Ankersmit argues that such impossible mourning drives historicism and undermines its project of objective enquiry through which a sequence of past events is made knowable. The lost object of mourning, rather than the historical past, is in fact myth[24]. This is "the sublimity of the paradox of historical experience insofar as it seeks to grasp in terms of the historical what has now assumed the ahistorical appearance of nature" (Ankersmit 2005, 160). In this way, the sublime experience of history takes on an uncanny aspect; "Here the past is the domain of what transcends time and is uncanny because of this" (Ankersmit 2005, 160). Ankersmit's 'uncanny sublime' has correlations with LaCapra's category of the "negative sublime" (LaCapra 2001, 135), in which the negative aspects already present in the sublime are amplified, "with respect to elation or exhilaration in extreme, traumatizing circumstances involving the risk of death or breakdown" (LaCapra 2005, 135).

This interplay of traumatic loss and yearning is at work in grotesque historiography. In this context, the fetishisation of absence (which LaCapra warns against) results in a melancholic desire to reconnect with the mythic past through the repetition[25] or displacement of its traumatic loss. The grotesque, an uneasy coupling of pleasure and the uncanny, always suggests the possibility of desire (even if this itself is a source of repulsion), and in this regard shares

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[24] Commenting on the ways that loss and absence are conflated, LaCapra notes that historical loss often becomes narrativised in terms of myth—taking on shades of the Fall or the story of Oedipus, for example (LaCapra 2001). Despite LaCapra's resistance to a textual notion of history, his statements support White's identification of literary tropes in historical writing (in this case, tragedy).

[25] For Freud (2003), the repetitive movements of the automaton and the convulsions of seizures are embodiments of the uncanny. Repetition is also a feature of the absurd. For example, as Robert C. Solomon notes, Albert Camus uses the Greek myth of Sisyphus to demonstrate the horror and "absurdity of infinite repetition" (Solomon 2006, 49).

similarities to the abject as outlined by Kristeva (1982). The abject, a species of the uncanny, is the repulsive and feared 'other' that must be repudiated, evicted, to define the self. Flooding the in-between states of self and other, the abject is defended against but is never clearly differentiated from the self; it is excrement, effluvia, the diseased body, the corpse. The self is always threatened, and tempted, by incursion and contamination by the abject, and with it, a crisis of identity. Kristeva notes that abjection always flirts with the possibility of desire or *jouissance*[26], for "It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself be possessed. … But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned" (Kristeva 1982, 1). The negation of self that abjection threatens is linked to the loss, lack or 'want' from which desire is born. In this way, the abject becomes a fetish for loss, and any contact with it can lead to self-abjection. For Kristeva, the exile, the martyr and the masochist are united in this space, which is at once nihilistic and a source of deepest *jouissance*. They embrace abjection through the rendering of their "body and ego as the most precious non-objects; they are no longer seen in their own right but forfeited, abject" (Kristeva 1982, 5). Such fetishisation of loss is both melancholic and traumatophilic[27], and can be identified in examples of the historiographic grotesque in which the rupture with the past is shown to induce traumatic affect, as in the writings of Chares Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Correlations between the historiographic grotesque and loss can also be observed in instances in which the uncanny is less pronounced than in the negative sublime. For instance, Celeste

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[26] Meaning 'bliss', *jouissance* also connotes pleasure, ecstasy and orgasm. For theorists such as Kristeva and Roland Barthes, *jouissance* is also a critical term that can refer to the "pleasure of the text" (Brooker, Seldon and Widdowson 1997, 144) but can also herald a collapse of meaning, or crisis of discourse (Cuddon 1992).

[27] Traumatophilia, sometimes also called 'traumaphilia', is defined as "Love of injury or the unconscious desire to be injured" (Campbell 2004, 672)"; "a psychologic state in which the individual derives unconscious pleasure from injuries and surgical operations" ("Traumatophilia", n.d.); "a form of automasochism in which sexual arousal is obtained from wounds or traumas" ("Traumaphilia", n.d.); "an interest in the weakness of the body, always able to be damaged, torn, and mutilated" (Sargeant, n.d.); or a predisposition or tendency towards trauma, as in traumatophilic diathesis, or "*Accident proneness*…a desire to be traumatized" (Campbell 2004, 672). In the psychoanalytic context, Otto Fenichel describes a mixture of traumatophilic and traumatophobic tendencies at work in post-traumatic repetition: "whatever these persons undertake turns into a trauma; they fear this, and nevertheless they strive for it. There are many varieties of this mixture of fear of repetition and striving for it" (Fenichel 1999, 543). In contemporary aesthetic criticism, the term is sometimes employed to refer to a culture of shock that is "enamoured with trauma" (Heather 2004), as in the spectacle of catastrophe or the block buster disaster film. As will be discussed, the term has had particular resonance in discussions of the historical experience of modernity.

Olalquiaga's historiographic analysis *The Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience* (2002) draws connections between the nostalgia for a lost world and its representation through (often unintentionally) grotesque artworks. She examines Victorian-era kitsch as a form of mourning for pre-industrial culture, which paradoxically takes form through technologies of mass production and serial consumption. Olalquiaga presents loss as an aspect of historical experience that is tied to the emergence of modernity. This echoes Ankersmit's argument that the emergence of modernity is felt as a traumatic loss within Western historical consciousness. Like Ankersmit, Olalquiaga maintains that this loss becomes an object of melancholic fixation which is embroiled in an impossible attempt to reconnect with the past, in this case through the serial consumption of mass-produced objects which reflect the dislocation between modernity and ahistorical, mythical time. The forms that Victorian kitsch takes—glass globes, aquaria, taxidermy, diorama, panorama, phantasmagoria, and so on—utilise modern technologies to enable an illusory connection between the present and the ahistorical past (Fig. 3.1). Many of these forms evoke the antiquarian grotesque of grottoes, but also reflect popular notions of grotesque through the overt sentimentality, artificiality and exaggeration that contributes to the appeal of kitsch and 'bad taste' in general. In addition to the alien, 'other' world of nature which is evoked through these objects, the deathliness of Victorian kitsch—tokens of mourning as well as objects that feature arrested life—contributes to an impression of the uncanny which is essential to the grotesque mode, and which also attests to the centrality of loss as an aspect of historical experience. Paradoxically, these objects represent the loss of the pre-industrial world while offering a lifeless fake in its place, "where one object or a cluster of objects becomes the focus of an obsessive and pervasive consumption that, despite its seriality or multiplicity, is felt as intimately personal" (Olalquiaga 2002, 12).

In considering the affect of nineteenth century kitsch, Olalquiaga expands upon Walter Benjamin's ideas about historical consciousness and the cultural status of objects. Benjamin (1992) argues that history is invested with the interests of the present, "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Benjamin 1992, 247). According to Olalquiaga, the Victorians were ambivalent about the emergence of modernity and regarded history as the site of an indeterminate 'authenticity' which was threatened by industrialisation. This notion of authenticity corresponds with Benjamin's concept of the 'aura', which he describes as an object's exclusiveness and historical specificity. An original's proximity to tradition invests it with a 'cult' value comparable to the sacred status of ceremonial objects. Notably, for Benjamin cult value is

Fig. 3.1 Hermann Ploucquet, *Mrs. Parlingtons' Teaparty*, nineteenth century (Olalquiaga 2002, 43)

reduced by an object's 'exhibition' value—the more widely viewed or reproduced it is, the less of an aura it possesses. He states that the aura of authenticity weakens with the advent of mechanical reproduction, exemplified by the rise of photography, however, he allows exceptions in early photographic endeavours such as portraiture.

> The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty (Benjamin 1992, 219).

Alluding to memorial or post-mortem photography as well as the portrait 'calling cards' of the nineteenth century, Benjamin invests these objects with the elusive presence of an aura which at its is most perceptible only when it is on the verge of its own extinction. Eugéne Atget's turn-of-the-century photographs of Parisian scenes devoid of human life are also granted this status; "like scenes of crime" (Benjamin 1992, 220), they persist as evidence of a vanishing world. The melancholy which Benjamin describes is for the dissipated aura that is frozen in these images.

According to Olalquiaga, melancholy and nostalgia for the lost aura in modernity comprise the kitsch experience. Rather than Benjamin's diminished aura, she argues that the aura is 'shattered' through practices of mass production, consumption and collection, enabling the aura to be experienced in a fragmented or corrupted sense. For Olalquiaga, this relates more to the uniqueness of the object than its authenticity. This unique, 'shattered' aura might be experienced through such an object as a mass-produced glass snow dome representing an idyllic scene. Despite being artificial, the snow dome conveys an experience of loss while serving as an enduring souvenir that memorialises it. The kitsch object facilitates

> …the historical experience of that object's loss. Consequently, mass-culture products are perceived, not as numberless or even as repetitive, but as the remains of a larger phenomenon that both precedes and inhabits them (Olalquiaga 2002, pp. 18 - 19).

In this sense, kitsch functions like an artificial ruin—utterly fabricated, but able to transmit, through a picturesque mode, a sense of unfolding decay, cultural loss and Ankersmit's uncanny sublime, which is born from the contemplation of 'historical' artefacts but is felt as a collapse of temporality; an experience of ahistorical time. Although kitsch's poor imitation of authenticity has led to its debased cultural status, it nevertheless participates in the veneration and memorialisation of the aura through a highly sentimental language of loss. This incongruity, of high sentiment and low art, contributes to the grotesqueness of kitsch. In dividing kitsch into two categories, Olalquiaga draws on Benjamin's reflections on memory—where he invokes Marcel Proust's notions of voluntary and involuntary memory, which are investigated in *Á la Recherche du Temps Perdu*[28] (Benjamin 1992; Olalquiaga 2002).

For Proust, voluntary memory is conscious memory; chronological, linear and historicist, it is associated with the intellect and can be summoned at will. Involuntary memory, however, is the fleeting, sensory, unsummoned, and often repressed memory one is thrust into when encountering certain external stimuli (famously, in Volume One of *In Search of Lost Time*, the taste of a *madeleine* dipped in tea). He states that the lost moment is "somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us)" (Benjamin 1992, 155). Although it might summon a specific chain of memory, an experience of involuntary memory might merely conjure an impression of the past (Proust 2002). Benjamin ascribes aura to the objects which thrust their

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[28] *In Search of Lost Time*

Fig. 3.2 *Marie Antoinette Snow Globe*, nineteenth century, 1930s (top) and present day (bottom) (Olalquiaga 2002, 64)

beholder into involuntary memory. He argues that photography is an extension of voluntary memory, as it is the deliberate recording of moments in time, however, as he states elsewhere, some photographs possess aura and thus transport the viewer into involuntary memory (Benjamin 1992). Hence, involuntary memory can be understood to be an experience of nonlinear, ahistorical time which corresponds to an encounter with the 'aura'. Olalquiaga uses voluntary and involuntary memory to define her two categories of kitsch: nostalgic and melancholic. She presents nostalgic kitsch as a species of voluntary memory, a deliberate 'reminiscence', whereas melancholic kitsch, inspired by involuntary memory, induces a 'remembrance' of the weakened aura. Nostalgic kitsch reminisces upon the ideal past in undiluted form; it remembers it as it should have been, suspended in time, unchanging. Melancholic kitsch, however, focuses on the past in its present state of ruin; a relic, a *momento mori*, it exists as a trace of what has been lost and reminds its observer that ruination is ongoing—this and more will be lost in the future. Olalquiaga's example to illustrate both forms of kitsch is an object from her personal collection: 'Rodney', a hermit crab suspended in a bubble of glass. He can serve as an example of nostalgic kitsch if the viewer sees him as a reminder of his living state—after all, his appearance mimics life. Forgetting its status as a dead crab preserved in glass, the object might call to mind images of Rodney scuttling through an Arcadian landscape, temporarily recovering an image of the ideal past, but without any connection to the present. As melancholic kitsch, however, the object exists as a reminder of Rodney's death, the loss of the past and the demise of the aura, enabling perpetual mourning. Melancholic kitsch, focusing on the remnants of the past in their ruined state in the present, longs for the aura of tradition and mythic time, which it mourns and experiences in a fragmented sense through a highly artificial format (Olalquiaga 2002).

In Olalquiaga's analysis of nineteenth century kitsch, both nostalgic and melancholic forms address a sense of cultural loss through an encounter with the past that is staged, paradoxically, through industrial technologies of mass production. Melancholic kitsch in particular has parallels with Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience, which results from a traumatic cultural loss that is addressed through an illusory reconnection with the past, which nevertheless reinforces the sense of cultural loss. Such an artificial, yet deeply sentimental connection with the past, which resonates with the sublime in spite of its feeble imitation of authenticity, is paradoxical. The lure of emotional engagement with the past that is enabled through such counterfeit measures renders this kind of historical experience absurd, for this desire is founded upon an impossible mourning. Additionally, the deathly imitation of life in

both nostalgic and melancholic kitsch—with the preserved remains of animals that participate in the ornamental illusion of life; the sweet floral hair work that memorialises the deceased; the photographic portraits of the dead, posed as if sleeping—is a persistent reminder of the absence of the object of desire despite the abject spectacle of bodily residues that feebly attests to its survival[29]. Inducing melancholic and nostalgic pleasure in the memorialisation of dead time, nineteenth century kitsch gives grotesque form to a notion of history that is steeped in the loss of the pre-industrial world. Many of the artistic works of the nineteenth century can also be read in this context. In developing her definitions of nostalgic and melancholic kitsch, Olalquiaga finds a correlation in Baudelaire's presentation of 'spleen' (Olalquiaga 2002).

The spleen poems in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*[30] (those titled 'Spleen' as well as those appearing in the broader cycle of '*Spleen et Idéal*') present 'spleen' as the fiercely melancholic boredom or ennui which afflicts the subject in modernity (Clark and Sykes 1997). These poems depict a modern world cluttered with the shabby ruins of lost time. The legacy of the past, recent and ancient, persists as an oppressive atmosphere in the present, although any meaning it may be supposed to possess is rendered defunct as it lies in a neglected, forgotten state. These ruins point to the transient nature of time and remind the narrator of his slowly impending decline, paradoxically, while he is suspended in the interminable emptiness of the present moment; "And, minute by minute, Time engulfs me, / As the snow's measureless fall covers a motionless body" (Benjamin 1992, 180). Olalquiaga argues that this is a specifically modern existential state; an experience of time that is only made possible by the industrial age's schism with traditional, cyclic time. She defines spleen as a "state of pure present devoid of all past (history and mythical time) and future (hope and potential for change)" (Olalquiaga 2002, 75). Citing Benjamin, Benedict Anderson notes that the "homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson 1991, 24) of modernity marks a shift from time as unfolding and predetermined, to time marked by incremental measurements, in which there is no relationship between past and future, and any congruence between them is simply coincidental. The modern relationship to history is therefore beset by nostalgia for a meaningful and 'simultaneous' sense of time, and the anxious, melancholic recognition of its absence. Benjamin argues that the '*Spleen et Idéal*' poems map this changing relationship to time. He states that these poems deliberately address historical experience in the modern world—the *idéal* refers to the lost world of myth, while spleen

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[29] The domesticity of kitsch, as private monument, also emphasises its uncanny significance as a homely, yet unhomely reminder of the transience of the lived moment.
[30] *The Flowers of Evil*, first published in 1857.

witnesses its decay; "The *idéal* supplies the power of remembrance; the *spleen* musters the multitude of seconds against it" (Benjamin 1992, 180). The remembrance, or involuntary memory, of the lost world is both threatened and heightened by the fading of the aura in modernity. In '*Spleen et Idéal*', the modern experience of history is shown to be a grotesque struggle between melancholy and nostalgia, the symptoms of traumatic cultural schism.

In '*Spleen et Idéal*', Baudelaire frequently combines melancholic references to the lost world with images of unfolding decay that inspire existential horror in the narrator. This occurs in instances which echo Ankersmit's uncanny sublime, when the flow of time has been disrupted to the point of annihilation; "And from on high I contemplate the globe in its roundness, / No longer do I look there for the shelter of a hut" (Benjamin 1992, 182). The uncanny can also be observed when the seemingly innocuous remnants of the past are transformed into objects of repulsion in 'Spleen LXXVI'[31]; the narrator's head, stuffed to the brim with the "dubious souvenirs" (Clark and Sykes 1997, 87) of recollection, is likened to a chest of drawers crammed with fading mementos, love letters, legal documents and receipts, and his littered memory becomes an abject space, a graveyard in which worms "force / Into my dearest dead their blunt snouts of remorse" (Clark and Sykes 1997, 87). Such impressions of the malodorous remains of the past are peppered with wry allusions to the paltriness of daily affairs. Memory and the passing of time are illustrated by the faded and ridiculous fashions of years gone by, which Benjamin describes as "the most radical antiaphrodisiac imaginable" (Benjamin 1999, 79). In the vacuousness of the present moment, the interminably tedious passing of time takes on shades of the eternal. Sublime horror is induced by the unimaginable prospect of perpetual ennui amongst the ruins of antiquity: the narrator imagines himself suspended in time alongside a neglected sphinx swallowed by the desert sands (Clark and Sykes 1997). Benjamin states,

> The *spleen* … exposes the passing moment in all its nakedness. To his horror,
> the melancholy man sees the earth revert to a mere state of nature. No breath of
> prehistory surrounds it: there is no aura (Benjamin 1992, 181 - 182).

In '*Spleen et Idéal*', the narrator remains ambivalent in his attitude towards the loss of the pre-modern world, which is unfolding and is never fully resolved. These poems may be read with reference to Ankersmit's notion of the historical sublime, which results from the irreversible rupture in culture caused by, amongst other things, the French and industrial revolutions. The rupture is a traumatic one, for its loss is never assimilated. Benjamin presents Baudelaire as a

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[31] Also titled 'The Sphinx' in Edna St Vincent Millay's translation

"traumatophile" (Benjamin 1992, 160) for whom shock is the goal of aesthetic experience. He argues that traumas that are not assimilated become the domain of the involuntary (unconscious) memory, and it is this experience which Baudelaire focuses on. In '*Spleen et Idéal*' Baudelaire attempts to reproduce the involuntary remembrance of a lost world and with it the traumatic sensation of its rupture, which is replayed retrospectively. As seductive as it is illusory, this repetition produces increasing melancholic pleasure in the subject fixated by the lost object. As expressed by Freud, Ankersmit and LaCapra, melancholy (as opposed to mourning) indicates a resistance to 'working through' historical losses and may entail the compulsive repetition of experiences of, encounters with, or reflections on trauma[32]. In this sense, '*Spleen et Idéal*' can be read as a response to and repetition of the traumatic loss of the pre-modern world, resulting in a fractured sense of time in which the historical past is compulsively invoked and expelled; the veil of nostalgia is repeatedly ripped away from an annihilated, inaccessible past. Coupled with his satirical treatment of the everyday, the repeated allusions to loss create the grotesque incongruities that characterise Baudelaire's ambivalent treatment of modernity.

Huysmans' 1884 novel *A Rebours*[33], which frequently cites Baudelaire, mirrors his preoccupation with the traumatic emergence of modernity as well as the highly artificial reconnection with the mythic world that nineteenth century kitsch facilitates. The protagonist of *A Rebours*, Duke Jean Floressas Des Esseintes, is an ailing aristocrat, the last of a weakened lineage, an aesthete, a misanthropist and a misogynist. After a debauched youth in Paris, he abandons the city and attempts to create a sanctuary beyond its influence. In elaborately contrived rooms, he surrounds himself with luxuriously bound literature, ingenious perfumes, exotic flowers (which appear artificial) and other aesthetic accoutrements, such as a gilded, jewel-encrusted tortoise that soon dies beneath its rich burden. Alone, impotent, beset by anxiety and digestive trouble—the result of excessive consumption—Des Esseintes is an extreme example of the alienated subject within modernity. Patrick McGuinness comments that the 'Decadent' literature of the late nineteenth century emerged in parallel to an acute feeling of historical decline after the series of events following the rise of the Second Empire, including France's defeat by Prussia and the '*débâcle*' of the Paris Commune. The collapse of the Roman

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[32] Freud relates the 'fort-da' game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which a toddler repeats the trauma of his mother's absence by hiding and recovering his toys. Freud notes that while the boy may be gaining mastery of his loss through this repetition, rewarded by the pleasure of recovery in the final stage of the game, he most likely takes pleasure in engineering this loss in the first place. He states, "under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (Freud 1961, 11).
[33] *Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*

Empire (understood to have expired as a result of its own excess) was frequently invoked as an analogy for nineteenth century France, reflecting a "*malaise*…a sense that everything had been done, said, written, felt" (Huysmans 2003, xvi)[34]. Des Esseintes embodies this excessive sophistication to the point that he may be read as a parody of decadence, extending its logic of perversion to absurd ends. His thirst for novel or bizarre sensations, juxtaposed with his fetishism for antiquity, is just one of many grotesque contradictions that define Des Esseintes (Huysmans 2003).

Like Baudelaire, his response to the cultural losses incurred through modernisation is ambivalent. His country house in Fontenay becomes a supplement for the 'authentic' experiences that shrivel in modernity: nature, art, religion and tradition. Through ingenious artifice, Des Esseintes creates an environment full of stimuli that incite involuntary memory and which mimic nature, indeed, improve upon it (Huysmans 2003). Paradoxically, the new and artificial, privileged over the antique or natural, provokes Des Esseintes' sometimes nostalgic, sometimes melancholic reveries into the recent and ancient past. Des Esseintes' preference for the artificial reflects the power that nineteenth century kitsch objects exerted on their owners, enabling the illusory remembrance of the world that has been lost to history, in spite of, or even because of, their lack of authenticity. In his waking life, however, his experiences represent the state of spleen that is found in Baudelaire's poetry. When he is not dipping into the imagined or remembered past, Des Esseintes is suspended in the present. Bored, ailing, aging, he resembles his unfortunate tortoise: moribund, weighed down by the luxurious remnants of a former world, he is a ruin among ruins. It is notable that when Des Esseintes retreats to the lost world of history, it inevitably sours into an anxious, uncanny version of the past which he pollutes with his neurotic imagination, which in turn pollutes his physical health, stranding him in the barren melancholy of the present. Thus, both past and present, rendered porous, become infected with the spleen which debilitates him, and the longed-for connection with the lost world of the past is rendered impossible. The grotesque disharmonies that constitute Des Esseintes—humorous in his excess, luxurious in his reveries, appalling in his morality—provides a context through which to figure the unresolvable relationship of history and modernity.

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[34] McGuinness notes the irony of this stance from within such an intense period of scientific, technological and artistic innovation.

In 'The Futurist Manifesto' of 1909[35] by Marinetti, the ambivalence towards the lost world that is conveyed by Baudelaire and Huysmans is transformed into a violent repudiation of the past, which evokes the spleen that is attributed to Baudelaire as well as LaCapra's negative sublime. In the manifesto, the grotesque is utilised as a tactic to critique institutionalised history. Marinetti calls for a national cleansing to purge Italy of history and make way for the ecstatic technologies of modernity; to tear down the museums, to unleash incendiary violence, to "free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians" (Cahoone 1999, 188). For Marinetti, these institutions are repositories of loss; therefore by purging society of them, society can be also be purged of loss. He extols the glory of automobiles, locomotives and aeroplanes, simultaneously rejecting the mythic world and refiguring it anew in a hypermasculine, technological context—in which the modern age is likened to the "the Centaur's birth" (Cahoone 1999, 186), cars are imagined as snorting, erotic animals, war is "the world's only hygiene" (Cahoone 1999, 187), and vigorous young men take to monuments with hammers and fire. In this context, the ongoing loss of the pre-modern world is both celebrated and hastened. The trauma that is associated with its passing is re-enacted in orgiastic scenes of mechanised destruction through which loss is purged, and the world can begin anew. Marinetti's Futurism, or anti-historicism, attacks the melancholic and nostalgic impulses that characterise nineteenth century attitudes towards history. The literature of the past is portrayed as effeminate and moribund, while Marinetti endorses a new poetry of action, violence, and speed, concerned with the present moment yet invoking ahistorical time; "Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed" (Cahoone 1999, 187). The extravagance of Marinetti's vision, the amorality of his proposal and the elevated language that he employs locates the Manifesto within the grotesque mode. In addition to these impressions, Marinetti seeks to render the historical field grotesque: perverse and outmoded, with its gangrenous academics wallowing in putrid ruins.

The eternal present moment that Marinetti conjures has correlations with Baudelaire's spleen, in which, divorced from history, "time becomes palpable; the minutes cover a man like snowflakes" (Benjamin 1992, 180). However, the relentless passage of time and the ennui of the suspended moment are not the focus of Marinetti's image of the present. Instead, he is intoxicated by the speed of its passage into the future and by the apocalyptic trail it leaves in its wake. For Marinetti, the goal of the present is to erase the past. This is offered as an antidote to the problematic relationship with history that nineteenth century writers such as Baudelaire

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[35] More were to follow in later years.

record. It may also be seen as a further development of the decadent relationship with history that Huysmans's protagonist Des Esseintes embodies. Both Marinetti and Huysmans's works suggest apocalyptic solutions for a civilisation that has reached a 'final' stage in its decline. However, while Des Esseintes utilises the simulacra that modern technologies afford to enable an illusory union with the past, Marinetti abandons any union with the past in favour of the connection that modern technologies provide to the (mythic) future. Cinzia Sartini Blum argues that Futurism sought to address "fin-de-siécle malaise" (Blum 1996, 82), offering as an

> antidote to the ills of modern decadence…the formulation of a mythical new subjectivity that rejects the limits of history and empowers itself by appropriating the marvels of technology to create a utopian Futurist wonderland infused with primal life forces (Blum 1996, 82-83).

The antagonistic attitude towards history that 'The Futurist Manifesto' of 1909 expresses shares some aspects of Ankersmit's historical sublime, notably the sense of a cataclysmic schism between past and present. The revolutionary rhetoric that Marinetti employs to repudiate tradition evokes the apocalyptic-utopian impulses of other revolutionary cultural movements, but notably does not express concerns about class or political oppression. Although overtly anarchist and avant-garde, the manifesto expresses an aggressively conservative attitude that opposes "moralism, feminism, every opportunist or utilitarian cowardice" (Cahoone 1999, 188) which, in combination with Futurism's virulent nationalism, foreshadows Fascist developments in Italy in the twentieth century (Blum 1996). Indeed, in Marinetti's manifesto there are parallels with the negative sublime that LaCapra identifies through the sacralisation of violence and transgression, the desire for national cleansing through the ritual of warfare and the impression of unfolding future as mythic, ahistorical time. As in the negative sublime, the 1909 manifesto compulsively re-enacts traumatic loss, seeking the collapse of temporal boundaries and the recovery of mythic time, which in this instance is projected into the future. The past, no longer regarded as the site of loss, becomes an object of repulsion. A comparison may be found in Freud's description of the relationship between melancholy and mania, which he argues belong within the one complex—while melancholy indicates the insurmountable nature of the loss, mania suggests the triumph of the subject over the loss, although this may be illusory. Intoxicated by their triumph, the maniac subject will hungrily acquire a new object or series of objects to replace the lost one (Freud 2008). Following this logic, if the impossible mourning for the lost object of the past can be understood in terms of melancholy, perhaps the violent repudiation of the past and the attachment to a mythic future, which is 'recovered' through the

sacrificial transgressions of the negative sublime, represents the triumph over melancholic loss and can be read in terms of mania. In this sense, Marinetti's Futurist manifesto welcomes the demise of the past in favour of the alternative love-object of the future. Advocating forgetting (rejection of the past) through ritualised violence, the manifesto seeks the recovery of ahistorical time in the presently-unfolding future. In both melancholic and maniac attitudes towards the loss of the past, it is mythic, ahistorical time that is revealed to be the real object of desire, however, only the maniac entertains the possibility of achieving this aim.

The '*Spleen et Idéal*' cycle by Baudelaire, *A Rebours* by Huysmans and 'The Futurist Manifesto' of 1909 by Marinetti reveal shifting attitudes towards the pre-industrial world at the time of its disappearance. As speculative historiography[36] within the grotesque mode, these works map the disappearance of the pre-modern world, focussing on uncanny and absurd aspects of the passage of time, the status of the antiquarian artefact in modernity and the role of industrial technology in the modern landscape. Collectively, they express anxiety about the significance of the past in the industrial age, but each work addresses this anxiety in a different way. Baudelaire is concerned with the existential state of spleen that emerges from profound dislocation with the past and any sense of time as a continuum. The narrator is suspended in time, but this is not the ahistorical time of myth, rather, it is a vacuous anti-time which reflects the annihilation of the pre-modern world rather than a blending of temporal boundaries. Excluded from continuous time or history, the narrator is also divorced from a tangible and meaningful future. Des Esseintes, however, finds substitutes for the world of tradition and myth through modern simulacra, such as perfumes that can evoke a forest glade, but this is not enough—he must also find simulacra for the modern, as when, adding to his composition of scent, he transforms his olfactory forest into a polluted industrial landscape. Thus, Des Esseintes lives outside of all experience that is not aesthetically mediated, and he is suspended between fantasies of the lost past and the disastrously unfolding present; in McGuiness's words, "caught between a desire for cultural preservation and a drive for apocalypse" (Huysmans 2003, xxxv). Marinetti, invoking the negative sublime, is more in favour of a smoking, mechanised apocalypse that will eradicate history and unleash the redemptive, heroic future.

These examples, as well as Olalquiaga's account of nineteenth century kitsch, demonstrate the significance of loss as an aspect of historical experience, particularly in relation to the emergence of modernity, which is presented as a traumatic rupture in the traditional experience

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[36] In Marientti's case, 'anti-historiography' could be a more accurate descriptor.

of time. Within the grotesque mode of history, the traumatic and melancholic aspects of historical loss are emphasised, resulting in an often violent sense of dislocation from the continuum of history, ambivalence towards the lost object of the past, and an impossible effort to recover ahistorical time. This recovery is often attempted through an encounter with either the uncanny or the negative sublime, concepts which have some correspondence with the Freudian categories of melancholia and mania. However, even if these troubled versions of the sublime lead to a momentary and illusory connection with the ahistorical realm, they also have the effect of emphasising the disconnection between the pre-modern world, the unfolding present and the inaccessible future. Thus, the sense of loss that constitutes modern historical consciousness is reinforced by the efforts that seek to remedy it. Responses to this loss are characteristically ambivalent, complicated by a traumatophilic tendency in modern aesthetic experience, which seeks the evocation of traumatic affect as a substitute for authentic experience. The grotesque mode of history reflects upon the unresolvable nature of this crisis in historical consciousness, and presents trauma as a site of desire.

Chapter Four

Historical writing in the grotesque mode

Modern and postmodern theorists of history often utilise grotesque motifs as tactics to challenge the claims and methods of mainstream historians. Seeking to dispute the belief that traditional historiography is authoritative, unmediated and conclusive, such writers propose alternative ways of engaging with materials of the past to facilitate multiple interpretations and foreground the subjective basis of any attempt to engage with or narrate history, acknowledging its discursive underpinnings. As the antithesis of the monumental and the classical, grotesque histories also invert the aesthetic and ideological basis of many grand narratives of the history of the West. In telling stories peripheral to the great deeds of major players in world events—of the powerless, outsiders and the abnormal—such theorists are able to investigate grotesque histories of the margin as a counterhistorical strategy that privileges the particular over the general. Such works in the grotesque mode are often characterised by an intertextual approach to history, presenting the historical field as a vast archive of intersecting and often contradictory discourses in which documentary, commentary and creative artefacts compete to produce an impression of the past. This characterisation of history as a tangled knot of discourse is itself a grotesque image that verges on the sublime. Theorists such as Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt present history as well as historical writing as sites of the grotesque as a critical strategy to displace the authority of traditional historiography.

Since Nietzsche critiqued empiricist historians' claims to objectivity, a distinct body of historiographic writing has been concerned with the discursive nature of the historical field. In the early twentieth century, Bakhtin examined the discursive underpinnings of culture and argued that creative works from the past can provide deeper insights into the culture of a given historical period than the empiricist historiographic work. The 'linguistic turn' that arose with poststructuralism has particularly influenced the discussion of history since the 1960s, with Foucault arguably the most influential figure in these developments. Foucault developed an alternative model of history termed 'genealogy' based on Nietzsche's ideas which situates historical narratives within a confusion of interweaving accounts without inherent meaning or connection, as opposed to presenting them within a teleological continuity in the manner of empiricist historiography. Of course, Foucault applies his own historiographic aesthetic and ideological agenda to the genealogical work, explicitly presenting this model in critique of traditional modes, seeking to reveal the structures of power at play in such discourses; a

grotesque inversion of history which "emphasize[s] that "monumental history" is itself a parody. Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival" (Cahoone 1999, 375). Foucault's characterisation of genealogy as carnivalised historical discourse indicates a debt to Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, indeed, his presentation of the historical field as many-voiced, always subject to the erasures and elisions of the speakers, is related to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, the multitude of overlapping and competing voices within culture.

> …at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form. These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages' (Bakhtin 1981 291).

The goal of both Bakhtin and Foucault is to open history to multiple discourses, particularly those that are inscribed upon the body, and by doing so expose and displace the authority of 'monoglossic' historical narratives.

Another pervasive strategy for both writers to challenge official historical discourse has been to privilege marginal subject matter to dislodge the heroic and sanitised histories that have traditionally told the story of Western civilisation. Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais' novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* allows him to read the birth of the Renaissance in the grotesque bodies that populate its pages. For Bakhtin, this novel tracks the rupture in European culture that marks the end of the Middle Ages, and depicts the tumultuous ideological shifts taking place within the culture of the time. The grotesque 'realism' that characterises the novel and Bakhtin's carnival mode in general provides insights into the shift from the religious dogmatism of the middle ages to the secular liberalism of humanism, changes in language and the development of parody as a literary form. In works prior to *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes the grotesque, messy, interconnected and positive body depicted by Rabelais, which laughs at death and the afterlife, as a necessary point of transition from the repellent medieval body to the clean, refined body of Renaissance humanism[37]. However, in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin celebrates the Rabelaisian body for its own sake and the humanist body has a very limited

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[37] Bakhtin scholars note a distinction between *Rabelais and His World* and his other major works. When dealing with carnival in earlier texts, Bakhtin notes the institutionalised nature of parody in medieval literature, folklore and culture, and its essentially conservative nature. It is only later, in his work on Rabelais, that he suggests the radical potential of carnival laughter (Emerson and Morson 2002).

presence. This revised view takes the idea of the exuberant folkloric body well beyond the triumph of humanism and moderation, indeed, as Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson point out, in *Rabelais and His World* carnival becomes anti-humanistic, a force which defends against the 'monologism' of both medieval and Renaissance official ideologies (Emerson and Morson 2002). In Rabelais' novel, the transition between the two official cultures is figured as a grotesque inversion of normative values. It is the fusion of carnival forms and humanist literature that provides a structure through which to "express this historical awareness" (Bakhtin 1984, 99) of a changing world order. The unofficial, topsy-turvy world of carnival is used to describe historical change, and thus, for Bakhtin, historical flux is itself carnivalised and rendered grotesque.

The historical rupture or moment of 'becoming' is situated within images of the grotesque body in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. This body is all orifices and protuberances, vigorously engaged in activities of ingestion, defecation, procreation and expiration, forever spewing billingsgate which simultaneously debases and renews, in the same way that the flinging of excrement both befouls and fertilises. This image of the body in flux is rooted in medieval folk culture, in the exaggerated characters and behaviours of Mardi Gras which operate as the people's 'second life' in contrast to the highly structured life of official culture. Not only is the unbounded grotesque realism of carnival imagery the antithesis of official medieval ideology, it is also an inversion of the Renaissance body and aesthetics. Bakhtin argues that the transitional image of the carnival body represents the death of the old age and the birth of a new one, formulating historical change in the guise of the grotesque. Thus, the image of pregnant death embodies the passing of the Middle Ages as it gives birth to the Renaissance (Bakhtin 1984; Emerson and Morson 2002).

Bakhtin describes the project of *Rabelais and His World* as concerned "with the problems of historic poetics" (Bakhtin 1984, 120). This relates to Bakhtin's interest in literature as historiography, in opposition to Enlightenment or empiricist modes, which seek to purge history of the intrinsic subjectivity, ambiguity and disorder of real life[38]. He argues that creative works, particularly literature, can provide a range of insights into the culture, language and experience of the past. While the world of the past can never be accessed in its totality, careful analysis may yield perspective into former times and places, even as texts gather a multiplicity of new meanings for later generations of readers. This enables Bakhtin to read Rabelais' novel as a

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[38] This also relates to Bakhtin's privileging of the novel as a unique form capable of reflecting the complexity, disorder, ambiguity and manifold meanings of lived experience.

historical document while analysing its literary form and its significance in the development of parody in the novel. Thus, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is not only useful for understanding the rupture in European culture that signalled the end of the medieval period and the birth of the Renaissance, but also the history of carnival modes in literature, which in Bakhtin's description provides a structure through which to understand ideological shifts throughout Western culture. In this context, the development of carnival forms throughout literary history depends upon the strength of official ideology, the status of unofficial discourse and the cultural awareness of historical change. It is the unique blending of official and unofficial discourse in Rabelais' novel that gives the text its richness and historical significance. This is linked to what Bakhtin refers to as the 'history of laughter' in literature. He argues that by the late middle ages the humour of popular culture, no longer confined to festival practice, began to enter other aspects of life, including high literature. This reflected a weakening of official ideology; he states, "Official seriousness and fear could be abandoned even in everyday life" (Bakhtin 1984, 97). By the 16th century, the injection of medieval humour into the Renaissance novel signalled the blossoming of the grotesque as a literary mode. Bakhtin argues that the grotesque reached its artistic summit at the point of greatest transition between historical periods and the relative weakness of both medieval and Renaissance official ideology (Bakhtin 1984; Emerson and Morson 2002).

In this context, Bakhtin claims, carnivalised literature "became the form of a new free and critical historical consciousness" (Bakhtin 1984, 97). However, as rationalism, absolute monarchy and classicism emerged as aspects of official 17th century culture, grotesque forms were gradually purged from high art, although they continued to exist within popular genres. In the dominant culture, stable meanings, beauty and seriousness were privileged, and classical forms were divorced from the grotesque. Bakhtin claims that the eighteenth century represents the period which least appreciated the grotesque (this is the time of Rabelais' greatest unpopularity). The Enlightenment is, for Bakhtin, characterised by "abstract rationalism and antihistoricism" (Bakhtin 1984, 116). The Enlighteners' philosophy of reason and teleological notion of history could not incorporate the ambivalent, ambiguous and unstable nature of the grotesque, although a domesticated and trivialised version of carnival surfaced in Rococo art. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new moment of historical rupture, the French Revolution, marked a revival of Rabelais. Bakhtin states that while the leaders of the revolution elevated Rabelais to the status of cultural hero, celebrating his radical character, they only took into account those aspects of his work which they read as anti-monarchist in nature. After a resurgence of the grotesque in Romanticism, including the Gothic novel, Bakhtin argues that

carnival only exists in modernity in impoverished form, reduced to mere satire and irony[39] (Bakhtin 1984).

Bakhtin's account of the disintegration of carnival in modernity reflects the views of many other commentators, including Benjamin, who argue that the emergence of modernity resulted in widespread cultural dislocation from tradition and the loss of a cyclic experience of time. In *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin argues that the essence of carnival as a regenerating cultural form started to decay with the elevation of official Renaissance culture. It was only during the transition between the archaic world of the middle ages and the newly emerging modernity of the Renaissance that carnival grotesque reached its artistic summit in the work of Rabelais. Bakhtin acknowledges that grotesque modes and carnival forms have continued to permeate modernity, however, he argues that it has never integrated into official discourse as it did in the work of Rabelais. Parallel with the shift from epic narrative to the novel, the communal, external world of carnival has been transported into the interior world of the individual, who is adrift and alienated within modernity. This desiccated form of carnival is like Benjamin's diminished aura; it is apprehended most keenly at the moment of its disappearance. The grotesque is embedded with its own history of development, which for Bakhtin reflects the development of European culture in general. Thus, the grotesque is both a means of representing history and a historically determined experience. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin argues for a model of history rooted in creative modes. The grotesque imagery of Rabelais provides insight into the process of modernisation that took place between the medieval and Renaissance periods; Bakhtin presents *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as a form of grotesque historiography. Bakhtin is explicitly opposed to the empiricist mode of history that has its roots in the Enlightenment—in *Rabelais and His World* he offers a counter narrative to the heroic history of European progress in favour of a grotesque model of history which focuses on ambivalence, incompleteness and transition.

Like Bakhtin, Foucault's model of history operates in opposition to Enlightenment narratives of reason and progress by utilising grotesque themes and structures. He resists the notion of history as a closed, complete and knowable object, and, highlighting its discursive basis, critiques the ways in which official knowledge has been constructed throughout history and how these discourses are inscribed with ideology and the exercise of power. Drawing from Nietzsche, Foucault is critical of the search for 'origins' and truth at the heart of Western historical enterprise. He opposes this linear conception of historical process, in which events and periods

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[39] However, elsewhere Bakhtin celebrates the influence of carnival in the novels of Dostoyevsky.

are connected within a chronological system of cause and effect, favouring instead a model of history which is constituted by disconnection and discontinuity, and which is self critical and self reflexive in its delivery. As the practice of history is inscribed with the interpretation of the historian as well as the discursive underpinnings of the historical records, it is impossible to view history outside of discourse. Therefore, for Foucault history is best viewed as a network of competing discourses which can be examined as texts, rather than a single authoritative narrative which somehow provides direct, unmediated access to the past, or indeed reality. Foucault's approach to history seeks to provide insight into the ways discourse operates in the construction of knowledge, history and experience. Eschewing the quest for historical origins, Foucault favours the many competing histories of, as Alan Munslow describes them, "exclusion (the marginalised or 'other'), inclusion (the accepted as normal) and transgression (normal becoming abnormal)" (Munslow 2006, 131). Foucault presents genealogy as a paradisciplinary mode of history, a carnivalised double of 'proper' history which is grotesque in structure and content (Bentley 2000; Cahoone 1999; Garrard 2006; Goldstein 1994; Munslow 2006).

While Foucault wrote several genealogical volumes including *History of Madness*, *History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*, a pair of anthologies which he worked on provide particular insight into his approach towards the manifold texts competing within the historical 'archive' as well as the strategic advantages of the grotesque: *I, Pierre Riviére, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother…A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*; and *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. Both of these historical anthologies feature the intersection of competing texts which comprise idiosyncratic and contradictory narratives of specific cases. Both anthologies centre on a character notable for their marginality, a murderer and a hermaphrodite, and each character provides a lengthy memoir which narrates their experience. These cases take place in the intersection of nineteenth century medico-legal debates, and constitute moments of transition in modernity which led to the increasing pathologisation of difference. These compilations represent the increasing institutionalisation and psychologisation of otherness—which is figured as grotesque—as a symptom of modernity. While the 'authoritative' accounts in these texts, representative of official discourse in the nineteenth century, are revealed to be part of an attempt to purge culture of grotesque difference, the autobiographical narratives by Pierre Riviére and Herculine Barbin trouble this project. These memoirs spawn a throng of parallel, competing and contradictory texts by experts and others, subverting modern quests for stable

categorisation and revealing that modernity is always entwined with its uncanny double, the grotesque.

I, Pierre…, edited by Foucault, is a collection of texts surrounding the murder case in which Riviére was tried, including legal documents, the opinions of medical experts, the killer's own confession-cum-memoir and a collection of contemporary critical essays by Foucault and his team. Sentenced in 1835, Riviére exists in the intersection of a debate regarding the classification of criminal insanity and the place of psychiatric theory in the legal system. The texts in the anthology compete in this debate, and by confronting them with one another Foucault is staging "a battle among discourses and through discourses" (Foucault 1982, *x*), in which the formation of institutional knowledge and its relationship to the exercise of power can be observed. A transgressive event lies at the heart of *I, Pierre...*, Riviére's murder of his mother, sister and brother. The profusion of texts that encircle this event attempt to explain Riviére's actions and to contextualise them within an institutional framework. However, by virtue of his exceptional memoir, Riviére is not such an easy character to categorise. Foucault expresses his enthralment by the grotesque appeal of this story; how the strange, transgressive 'beauty' of the killer's memoir operates as a 'trap' which threatens to subvert all the other texts in the dossier, and in which the acts of authoring a memoir and a murder are made strangely equivalent, each predetermined by the literary-historical field in which they participate. All accounts of Riviére's character and crime, including the critical analyses by Foucault and his team, are pervaded by a queasy fascination that indicates the work of the grotesque. Not only are the murders that form the basis of this story captivating in their horror, the shifting and incongruent accounts of the killer twist into a troubling puzzle that threads through the tangle of voices: was he mad? Amidst this networks of texts, an unstable and increasingly grotesque image of Riviére emerges that, for Foucault, chips away at the overarching medio-legal authority that eventually declared him insane: the young man is monstrous, moronic, barely literate, a victim, a tragic suicide, and yet he is also articulate, critical, calculating and capable of crafting a memoir of strange and appalling beauty (Foucault 1982).

Riviére's unreliability as a narrator troubles the validity of his confession within the legal, medical and historical contexts in which it exists. In Foucault's compilation of texts, the reader encounters several descriptions of Riviére and his crime before reading the memoir in his own words. Neighbours and legal authorities describe him in monstrous terms;

> Solitary, wild and cruel…a being apart, a savage not subject to the ordinary
> laws of sympathy and sociability…He is short, his forehead is narrow and low;
> his black eyebrows arch and meet…his gait is jerky and he moves in bounds, he
> leaps rather than walks (Foucault 1982, 11).

The character witness statements vary wildly. For some, Riviére is obstinate, bad tempered, profoundly dim-witted and sadistic in temperament—yet according to others, he is gentle, intelligent and a prodigious reader, but has "*a skew in his imagination*" (Foucault 1982, 26, italics in original). Riviére's slaughter of his mother, sister and brother with gardening tools is repeatedly described in detail, and the reader also learns of his propensity for torturing animals and tormenting small children, and an obsessive fear of incest. In his first interview with police, he initially claims that God had instructed him to commit the murders, but later explains that he was in fact acting to deliver his father from his mother's abuse. After he is charged, a petition of mercy submitted by medical experts eventually intercedes, based on their opinion that Riviére is insane. It is after this parade of legal, medical and witness accounts that the reader finally encounters Riviére's memoir. This extraordinarily detailed account outlines the mistreatment which his father suffered at the hands of his mother over a period of twenty-two years, the planning and execution of the crime and the narrator's own account of his solitary activities, ideas and experiences over the course of his life. Riviére explains many of his peculiar actions as ruses to deflect attention from his real projects, and he admits to feigning madness when arrested, yet he continues to describe his crime as one "made to be written and talked about and thereby to secure him glory in death" (Foucault 1982, *xi*). The impression that he conveys is of a madman playing at being mad to conceal the nature of his true madness (Foucault 1982).

Riviére's memoir is also peculiar for its intertextuality. His efforts in self education lead him to immerse himself in Biblical and historical texts, and so he is able to situate his own actions within a misogynist narrative continuum; "…in former times one saw Jaels against Siseras, Judiths against Holoferneses, Charlotte Cordays against Marats; now it must be men who employ this mania…" (Foucault 1982, 108). For Foucault, the intersection of other discourses within Riviére's memoir and his situating of his own actions within a broader field of knowledge demonstrate an intertwining of the tasks of authoring a memoir and authoring a murder. Both are declaratory actions which take place within an existing network of texts and discourses. Foucault states,

> From Biblical history as learned at school to recent events taught or
> commemorated in the fly sheets or broadsides there was a whole province of

knowledge with which his murder / narrative was committed. The historical
field was not so much the brand or explanatory substance as the condition which
made this premeditated murder / memoir possible (Foucault 1982, pp. 208 -
209).

Here, Foucault presents a model of history in which not only the narration of history by
historians is prefigured by the literary-historical field, but the actions and statements of historical
players are themselves prefigured by the discursive field in which they operate. In this
'genealogical' framework, Riviére's memoir is surrounded by competing texts which seek to
categorise it and fix it with a stable meaning. However, it is the profusion of contradictory and
overlapping texts within the volume which make this task impossible. The result is in keeping
with Foucault's model of genealogy: a confusion of discourses which, rather than elucidating the
truth of the past, illustrate its ambivalence while highlighting the competing intentions of the
speakers. It is the antithesis of authoritative, objectivist history, instead offering a vision of the
past which is a tangled mass of contentious texts, grotesque in content and structure.

Similarly, the heart-rending story of Herculine Barbin is told through a collection of texts: a
memoir, a 'dossier' of reports, documents and press clippings, and the short story 'A Scandal at
the Convent' by Oscar Panizza, reportedly inspired by the real life case of Barbin. Barbin, who
lived as female until early adulthood, was declared to be male upon a series of interventions and
examinations by church, legal and medical authorities, and eventually committed suicide after
living as a man for several years, impoverished, sickly and alone. Foucault situates Barbin's case
within a period of scrutiny regarding the 'true' sex of ambiguous individuals, such as in cases of
hermaphroditism and so-called sexual perversity during the late nineteenth century. As in the
case of Riviére, Barbin's story is presented through intersecting discourses, ranging from
official, unofficial and popular to overtly literary in character. The insidious nature of the
positivist quest to categorise is embodied in Barbin's case, while the genealogical presentation
of the collected texts confounds this project. As in Riviére's case, Barbin's character shifts and
mutates throughout the collected texts—a tragic heroine, a perverse deceiver, a man succumbing
to abjection, a medical curiosity, a dissected body and, in Panizza's story, an object of erotic
contemplation. Like *I, Pierre…*, this anthology centres upon an uncanny detail—the unknown
nature of Barbin's genital organs, which are slowly revealed throughout the narratives until their
graphic dissection during autopsy by a fascinated anatomist (Foucault 1980). Barbin's
characterisation is both grotesque and deeply tragic. In this collection it is possible to read an
interplay of marginality and identification that recalls Warner's comments about audience

reception in the 'late' grotesque (inaugurated by Romanticism), in which sympathy displaces derision. This is a particularly effective strategy that allows Foucault to demonstrate the ways in which the marginal body becomes a discursive battleground in historical and institutional contexts, as Bryan S. Turner has stated, "how the language of person is inflicted on the silence of physiology" (Turner 1982, 126).

Both of these historical works, in which Foucault rejects the omniscient narration and objectivist stance of traditional historiography, utilise the uncanny delights of the grotesque to convey an image of the past which is both tragic and sensational. Other than their faithfulness to the archive, these histories bear some resemblance to the broadsheets and lurid press reports which they cite, and so it is not only the medico-legal-historical field in which the texts operate, it is also popular history, folklore and literary fiction. This is a necessary debasement of heroic history which critiques its supposedly disinterested stance towards the past. By invoking grotesque affect, these histories provide an experience of the past which is at once contradictory, steeped in conflicting discourses, and thrilling in its presentation of violence and transgression. Gallagher and Greenblatt comment that Foucault's "sensationalism, this striving after "terror and awe," produced a heightened sense of being on the extremities of the historically knowable, at the very edge of what we could know, cognitively, about the past" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 71). The sensationalist appeal of these texts and the horrified *frisson* that they convey also bears some resemblance to the 'true crime' genre. These anthologies are comparable to the Gothic mode of fiction, which frequently presents the degeneracy of the past as an uncanny force which threatens present day values. To contemporary readers, these compilations might evoke a barbarous image of the past in which oppressive structures of social control, such as nineteenth century medical and legal institutions, filter into anachronistic communities, leading to profound physical and psychic decay until culminating in a horrible end. Their presentation within a historical mode, regardless of their basis in real events, refers to the tantalisingly incomplete Gothic fragment, in which a document from the shadowy past is unearthed (Baldick 1993). While these compilations are exhaustive in their presentation of source material, they do not produce a unified or conclusive image of the past. They present an image of infinitely reproducing discourses that obscure the past in their wake. Discourse itself, particularly the official discourses of legal and medical institutions, takes on an uncanny shade as a powerfully generative force that confounds and controls.

Similarly, the image of the historical field as an unquantifiable and infinitely expanding tangle of texts and experience conveys a dizzying impression of the historical sublime. Gallagher and Greenblatt note that much of Foucault's work seeks to induce such effects through the shocks of sensational and gruesome subject matter, fragmented narrative structures and references to the limits of human understanding—recalling the premodern experience of wonder which is antithetical to empirical scientific thought. Like wonderment, the sense of the grotesque that arises in Foucault's image of historical discourse can vacillate between contradictory emotional poles, indeed, in his introduction to *The Order of Things*, he confesses to

> …a suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite* (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 72).

Gallagher and Greenblatt describe this "nightmarish counterhistory" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 72) as the sublime horror that both repels and drives Foucault's engagements with the labyrinthine archive and leads him, paradoxically, to impose order upon it. They also identify this as a strategy that is pursued in many counterhistories in which the tension between the known and the unknowable is exploited to transmit a temporary *frisson* of the historical sublime, which they describe as the 'real' (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001)[40].

Following Foucault, Gallagher and Greenblatt explicitly frame their work, which has been branded New Historicism (although Greenblatt would prefer 'poetics of culture'), within the critique of the 'grand narratives' of traditional historiography that has existed at least since the nineteenth century, but more specifically in the wake of the 1960s (Veeser 1989). Each works outside of the 'proper' historical discipline—Gallagher is an art historian and Greenblatt is a literary critic—and in viewing culture as a heterodox assemblage of texts, they are able to 'read' a vast range historical artefacts in the context of other texts. Their interest is in the marginal texts and objects excluded from the historical canon because they are inconsequential, inexpert and ephemeral. Two structures, the anecdote and the body, are particularly pervasive for Gallagher and Greenblatt because they reveal the trace "of the accidental, suppressed, defeated, uncanny, abjected, or exotic—in short, the nonsurviving—even if only fleetingly" (Gallagher

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[40] Gallagher and Greenblatt's usage references the Lacanian sense of the term, which is much like the sublime in that it eludes comprehension and is unrepresentable (Evans 2006). Hal Foster has explored the traumatic character of Jacques Lacan's 'real' in relation to postmodern art that seems to entail the return of the repressed (Foster 1996).

and Greenblatt 2001, 52). This touch of the historical sublime is evoked most forcefully through strategies of the grotesque.

In their essay 'The Potato in the Materialist Imagination', Gallagher and Greenblatt examine the interplay between materialist notions of history and the practice of 'body history' established by Foucault. Rather than the tangible 'facts' of history, body history investigates the subjectivity of historical experience lived through bodies, institutions and activities. Gallagher and Greenblatt argue that body history "demonstrate[s] that the body has not only been perceived, interpreted and represented differently in different times, but also that it has been lived differently" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 221). In this essay, the writers explore the potato debate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, demonstrating the potency and instability of the potato as a grotesque signifier in English culture at the time. They reveal that the materialist rhetoric of economics and social welfare that constituted the debate was in fact deeply entrenched in cultural values regarding the changing relationship of the people with the land in modernity, as well as a sense of the body as a site of modernisation, figured either in a positive sense as progressive abundance, or fearfully as disconnection and cultural degeneration. In this analysis, the potato is shown to be a symbol of modernity that is both utopian and apocalyptic in its implications for civilisation, its contested status revealing uncertainty about a shifting relationship between nature and culture. The potato emerges most forcefully in its fearful interpretation as a grotesque signifier for all that needed to be purged from English civilisation in order to maintain an appropriate balance of nature and culture under the changing conditions of an industrial economy. In this way, Gallagher and Greenblatt demonstrate the significance of the grotesque as the uncanny other of progressive modernity, as well as a strategy that subverts the primacy of materialist and positivist modes of history (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001).

Gallagher and Greenblatt examine the English potato debate that spanned from the 1790s to the 1830s, which concerned the potential of potatoes to replace grain as the staple crop consumed by the working poor. The dispute concerned the volume of yield in proportion to available land, issues relating to wages, population growth and the economy, and the effects of dividing the social strata on the basis of staple food—potatoes for the poor and wheat for the wealthy. As the cost of grain determined the cost of labour, and vice versa, it was a short step to equate the people with the food itself, leading to a division between the kind of person that consumed grain and the potato eaters. The writers comment that through the rhetoric of the debate, the potato began to symbolise the indigenous, earth-bound body of the people that worked the land, either

as the abundant and fertile "root of plenty" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 111) or the lumpen, tasteless tuber that reproduces prolifically underground. The supposed primitiveness of the potato (despite its recent introduction to Europe), its lack of cultural mediation in production and its origin in the primeval earth, led to it being viewed as 'mere' food, unlike grain, specifically bread, which was symbolic of a cultural network of production, economy and community. The power of the potato as a signifier for the absence of culture indicates the entanglement of "matter and idea" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 112) in the debate; the impossibility of separating ideology from the world of things. The alienation of the potato from the network of production, its status as mere food, led to it becoming a grotesque symbol for the uncanny other of modernity: the absence, rather than abundance, of culture, and with it the erasure of moral economy and community[41]. The potato threatened evolutionary degeneration. In light of this association and the introduction of the potato from America to Ireland in the seventeenth century, the potato also came to signify the grotesque double of British culture—the Catholic, colonised and rebellious poor of Ireland (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001).

The image of the potato that is conjured in the debate is grotesque in its difference from the white bread of culture. The potato is a lumpen mass of protuberances that grows unseen in the earth, to be uprooted and eaten by the grubby poor as they squat in their bog-like dwellings. This is the imagery conjured by the journalist William Cobbett, who wrote home to England about the plight of the Irish peasantry in 1834. He portrays the Irish as muddy beasts huddled in huts dug into the ground, eating the same food as their animals, burning peat which has also been excavated from the earth, suffocating in their half-buried state. Subsisting on the potatoes grown in their own land, they have no need to work or engage with the community, and reproduce unchecked. Thus, as the potato eradicates culture, civilisation has descended into the soil. According to Cobbett, the potato is the means by which the Irish peasants are exploited and are brought "lower than the very ground" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 116), indeed, are almost transformed into potatoes themselves. It is the potato's uncanny ability to convert the people that eat it into its own likeness that poses the greatest risk to progressive modernity as well as British culture. Gallagher and Greenblatt comment that in this context the potato, which was transported from colonial Virginia and enabled the Irish to survive the attacks by the English, is the symbol,

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[41] Similarly, Sidney W. Mintz's (1986) history *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* examines the global upheavals that have been caused in pursuit of this single food, including colonialism, war, slavery and the industrialisation of the workforce.

substance yet enemy of British colonialism, for "Irish survival is assured by a symptom of the very thing that seems to threaten it" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 117)[42].

For Gallagher and Greenblatt, the potato represents a limit of signification for nineteenth century materialists—as 'mere' food divorced from culture, the lowly potato represents an abundance of matter, "where the Real is the physical ground of our existence, as harsh and unremitting in its determinism as it is generally indifferent to our constructions of its import" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 112). However, the authors argue, even 'mere' matter is a culturally loaded concept. Representing the end of culture, for its opponents in the debate the potato threatens a perilous descent back to nature and the annihilation of acceptable boundaries between people and the land. The authors demonstrate that when 'mere' matter is revealed to hold the potential for such a grotesque inversion of modernity, the culturally embedded nature of objectivist disciplines such as economics and agricultural science becomes apparent. Gallagher and Greenblatt use the grotesque to critique the objectivity of such empiricism, revealing its unsettling presence even in arguments about agricultural reform. In tracing these currents throughout the historical archive, they present a model of history which works in opposition to empiricist modes, instead presenting the historical field as a collection of texts always subject to new interpretations and confrontations with other discourses.

Referring to the practice of counterhistory that is constituted by the work of Foucault and others who oppose the objectivist claims of traditional historians, Greenblatt and Gallagher state, "a knowledge of modern times requires constant reference to, and imagination of, all that modernity leaves unregistered in consciousness" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2001, 64). The four counterhistorians examined in this chapter explore marginalised aspects of modernity by utilising devices of the grotesque. By presenting the historical realm as a site of the grotesque as well as utilising grotesque affect in historical writing, these theorists offer a model of history in which the grotesque is embedded in the experience of modernity. The work of these four writers demonstrates the significance of the grotesque as an oppositional mode in reaction to empiricist history. In narrating the emergence of modern subjectivities, history and historical writing are rendered grotesque: shifting, monstrous and marginal. By presenting the grotesque narratives of

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[42] An archetypically grotesque parallel to Gallagher and Greenblatt's essay is Jonathon Swift's satirical pamphlet of 1729, *A Modest Proposal: For Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and Making Them Beneficial to the Public*. The pamphlet proposes, in reasonable and measured tones, that a percentage of children of the Irish poor should be sold and eaten as a great delicacy in the interests of the national economy, population control, as a means of income for their parents, and to limit the spread of Catholicism in Ireland (Swift 2008).

marginalised individuals and bodies, these counterhistorians offer an alternative version of modernity which brings to light the elisions in historical, medical, legal and political discourse. In these texts, the grotesque body and the transgressive individual are shown to exist outside of official modern discourse, despite efforts to control them or make them knowable. These texts rewrite the history of modernity, and in doing so take on the form of modern history's uncanny double, the grotesque.

Chapter Five

The materiality of the historiographic grotesque

Empiricist history seeks to purge itself of the grotesque, as its characteristic ambivalence and nuanced interplay of uncanny and pleasurable affects are antithetical to the heroic myths of objectivity and progress favoured by empiricist modes. However, the attempt to evacuate modernity's uncanny 'other' from the classicising narratives of monumental history is never wholly successful, often drawing attention to the very element it seeks to renounce. This can be observed, for example, in medical histories, which are frequently cast within a broader narrative of progress in which the protagonists strive towards noble goals for the betterment of society. However, as critics such as Foucault have noted, histories of medicine are also histories of the body and thus are inscribed by structures of power that attempt to reduce the body (and the subject) to an object of knowledge and discursive practice. Histories of the subjects of medical scrutiny have frequently been marginalised along with the covertly grotesque sensibilities embedded within the exercise of power and its official historiography. Relegated to the margins of historical knowledge, grotesque histories cluster around the classicising project of monumental history. This can be read in relation to the humanistic tradition of art history established by Giorgio Vasari, a mode that presents historical progress as the arc towards artistic perfection, a classical aesthetic construct achieved through a balance of virtuosic realism and manneristic invention, embodying values of truth and beauty. Practitioners, materials and techniques that exist outside of this aesthetic project are excluded from the 'fine' art canon proper to this mode of history, although the peripheries of the canon are porous, and the trace of the grotesque is often present[43]. Histories of the non-canonical materials of wax and photography contain curious slippages between the humanistic endeavours of art and science as well as practices of popular culture that are connected to notions of transience, all of which are entrenched in a grotesque sensibility that reveals a troubled relationship with the lost realm of the past: the historical field.

This chapter is both 'a history of' and 'of history'; it concerns the history of materials that have associations with the grotesque and the ways in which these materials are themselves steeped in

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[43] Examples of classical art that feature incursions of the grotesque abound. Kenneth Clark discusses the contorted beauty of neoclassicist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' idealised women, exemplified by the *Grande Odalisque*'s extended spine and the figure of Jupiter in *Jupiter and Thetis*, which Clark describes as a "strange hieroglyphic of the female body, the neck like an amorous swan, the elongated arms, boneless, distorted, and yet disturbingly physical" (Clark 1976, 116).

grotesque notions of history. A recurring motif in this investigation is the grotesque figure of the doppelgänger, the uncanny double or ghostly 'it' which haunts the reasoned subject of modernity. As previously outlined, the grotesque can be seen to operate as the repressed 'other' of the cultural line that travels from the Enlightenment through to modernity, indeed, its presence recurs with unnerving regularity. The doppelgänger is the grotesque symbol of all that is absent, purged and forgotten in the official culture of modernity; it can illuminate the material histories that exist at its margins. This history of wax and photography is a narrative of doubling and duplication, imitation and reproduction. These currents intersect forcefully in the malleable figure of the hysteric, whose recurring re-enactments of the past are compulsively documented through wax and photography, and whose body—dualistic in its symptomatic performances as well as the performance of symptoms—at times resembles the materials that describe it. This chapter is divided into a series of couples: Lineages and Survivals; Anatomies and Visages; Impressions and Possessions; and Recursions and Returns. After considering the relationship of traditional art history to the grotesque, an analysis of wax and photography's roles in medical history will unearth resonances between the historiographic grotesque, the doppelgänger and the hysteric. It can be argued that these overlapping modalities work to destabilise the monological bias of objectivist historiography. As will be demonstrated, such critique is already present in the work of several contemporary artists who employ materials and techniques that evoke the grotesque.

Lineages and Survivals

The humanist tradition of art history that traces its origins to Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* [44] and can be followed through the intellectual lineage of Kant, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Erwin Panofsky and E. H. Gombrich, amongst many others, has been the canonical mode practiced in Western academic contexts for centuries. Throughout its existence, this canon has faced threats of incursion from competing historiographic and artistic modes, some of which have succeeded in muddying the purity of the classical canon, but many of which have been denied entrance to the pantheon of great artists and styles. However, just as the discipline of empiricist history has been subject to increasing criticism from the nineteenth century onwards, academic art history has been the object of a contentious debate regarding its methods, ideology and exclusions. Perhaps the greatest challenge to the humanistic mode of art history has come from what Harold Bloom has disparagingly called "the School of Resentment" (Bloom, 1995, 491); postmodernist

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[44] *Vita de'piu eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani*, first edition 1550, second edition 1568.

reappraisal and critique of the canon, frequently on grounds of gender, class and race. Feminist critics including Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Mieke Bal have drawn attention to the ideological structure of academic art history which has excluded female artists, non-Caucasian artists and 'craft' practices from the high art canon while celebrating representations that are shaped and consumed by a Eurocentric and masculine gaze. In reappraising art history from a feminist perspective, these critics challenge the politics of exclusion that shape the ostensibly objective historiography of aesthetics and offer alternatives to the mode (Bal 2006; Pollock 1991; Shaw 2003).

Similarly, Georges Didi-Huberman has critiqued "the *tone of certainty*" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 2) that permeates objectivist art history that promotes the "positivist myth—the omni-translatability of images" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 3). Highlighting the violence that is committed by the historian in reducing the complexity (what Bakhtin might call the messiness) of the absent historical field, Didi-Huberman notes that the art historian tackles an even more elusive object: the aesthetic work as a relic of the lost past. Like other historians, the historiographer of aesthetics is prey to the tugs of melancholy and nostalgia that render the lost object of the past the focus of an impossible yearning for recovery. However, the uncanny attraction exerted by the relic of the lost past upon the subject stranded in the present is seldom the focus of objectivist art historical scholarship. Didi-Huberman argues that, like objectivist history in general, the promulgators of the mode have sought to imbue art history with the status of a science and to render the art work itself a reducible object with a fixed meaning that slots neatly into the lineage of influences and styles inaugurated by Vasari[45]. He notes that the twentieth century work of Panofsky takes inspiration from Vasari and Kant to develop a model of art history which is both humanist and positivist in its ideological structure. He states, "Art was acknowledged less as a thinking object—which it had always been—than as an object *of* knowledge, all genitive senses conflated" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 82).

In keeping with the project of empiricist history, the myth of progress permeates the heroic narrative of art history, in which genius artists strive for aesthetic perfection and eternal fame. In this mode, 'truth' and 'beauty' are the stable qualities inherent to the work of high art, while

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[45] Vasari's history depicts the artists of the Renaissance, unshackled from the medieval world view, as components in a historical arc towards perfection that reaches its summit with Michelangelo. In this context, the achievements of Renaissance artists are distinct to the "barbarous German style" (Vasari 1998, 117) of medieval art.

ambiguity, ugliness and vulgarity are antithetical to its classicising aesthetic. The traditional high art canon has a place for aspects of the grotesque, which, as in Raphael's sixteenth century decorative panels commissioned by Pope Nicholas III, are in the vein of the Renaissance *grottesche* and serve the dual purpose of displaying virtuosic mannerism while conveying nostalgia for the golden age of the ancient past (Adams and Yates 1997). However, the absurdities and horrors of the grotesque, bereft of the elevating caprice of the *grottesche* and the sublime pathos of tragedy, are unpalatable to humanist tastes, belonging more properly to the 'barbarism' of the pre-modern—the medieval, and to some extent, the northern Renaissance[46]. The fact that a much larger set of aesthetic traditions exists outside of the classical canon is crucial to its mythology of excellence and exclusivity. In the dialectic of high / low, the vast inventory of styles and practices outside the canon are notable only by their absence. By presenting humanist tastes as universal, cultural value as self-evident and scholarship as disinterested, objectivist art history seeks to deny the subjectivity of taste and interpretation, including the metahistorical aspect of any attempt to understand the past (Haskins 2005; Shaw 2003).

The grotesque mode of history is therefore antithetical to objectivist art history. It is concerned with marginal practices and perspectives, ambivalent meanings, the fundamental instability and unreliability of the work of history as a mediated experience of the lost world of the past, and it features the incursion of contradictory affects in the construction or experience of history. Art history cast in a grotesque mode is thus positioned to examine slippages between effects and affects in the historical aesthetic work, and to consider the incidence of uncanny pleasures in engagements with the past. Grotesque historiography can be both creative and anachronistic in its interpretation of the object of the lost past, as the accuracy, verisimilitude and formal qualities required by objectivist historiography are in dispute as the exclusive methods through which an engagement with the past can take place. However, an ostensibly objectivist historiographic work may unwittingly fall into the territory of the grotesque, further examination revealing covert resonances of uncanny pleasure or semantic crisis at the metahistorical level. The distinction between objectivist and overtly grotesque historiography may not always be clear, and will more frequently be a question of interpretation; a directed reading of classical aesthetics may uncover the trace of the grotesque through the effort dedicated to its repression,

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[46] As opposed to the southern Renaissance, which attempts to make a break with the artistic modes of the Middle Ages, medieval aesthetics and culture are integrated into the work of northern Renaissance artists, notably Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Albrecht Durer.

as in Bakhtin's discussion of the newly figured Renaissance body, "All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated…The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret" (Bakhtin 1984, 29). In relation to the history of aesthetics, the grotesque anti-canon can include 'low' art practices and aesthetic works not conventionally viewed within the discipline of visual art. It may regard as 'historical' relics of the past, works that represent or allude to the past or even objects that possess a thematic or material quality that relates to transience, memory or preservation, particularly the conjunction of all three. Indeed, it is the materiality of the historiographic grotesque which can be most revealing of the troubled and troubling attempt to engage with the lost object of the past, particularly the materials of wax and photography.

Wax is a sculptural medium that has been used in the West to depict the human body, in whole or in parts, for thousands of years, as the material possesses qualities that are particularly well suited to mimicking flesh. It is an organic substance produced by the bodies of bees that softens with heat, can be poured when molten. Wax has traditionally straddled the life / death divide, having long been associated with processes of preservation, embalming and funerary rites. Wax's functional link with the treatment of the dead body intersects with its uncanny resemblance to motionless and slightly moist flesh. Since antiquity, death masks and live casts of faces have been used to preserve and supplement the unique presence of a particular individual. This and the seemingly disparate practices of presenting wax ex-voto effigies and body parts as religious offerings, and using wax to produce hyperrealistic anatomical renderings of the body in scientific contexts, actually intersect in their evocation of human presence and their engagement with notions of death. The material qualities of wax—its sweatiness, conductivity, receptiveness to touch, the translucent surface that absorbs rather than reflects light, and most importantly, its extreme plasticity—have been exploited by artisans and artists to imitate human presence to an unnerving extent. Wax's resemblance to human flesh blurs distinctions between real and fake, original and double, presence and absence, live and dead; the wax figure is a curiously ambiguous artefact, and it is this fundamental uncertainty that contributes to its grotesque resonances. Alongside its discomforting resemblance to human flesh, the material qualities of wax are also a source of uncanny affect. Didi-Huberman states, "The reality of the material turns out to be more troubling because it possesses a *viscosity*, a sort of *activity* and intrinsic force, which is a force of metamorphism, polymorphism, impervious to contradiction (especially the abstract contradiction between *form* and *formlessness*)" (Panzanelli 2008, 155). Its malleability and liminal status between solid and liquid, coupled with its

similitude to human flesh, invest the material with the transmutations and uncertainties of the grotesque. As a transitional medium that has functioned throughout the centuries as an intermediary between opposing states, most frequently the passage from life into death, wax possesses a structural relationship to notions of transience, preservation and memorialisation. Wax is thus functionally and thematically linked to considerations of history and the unstable connection between the present and the lost world of the past (Bloom 2003; Panzanelli 2008).
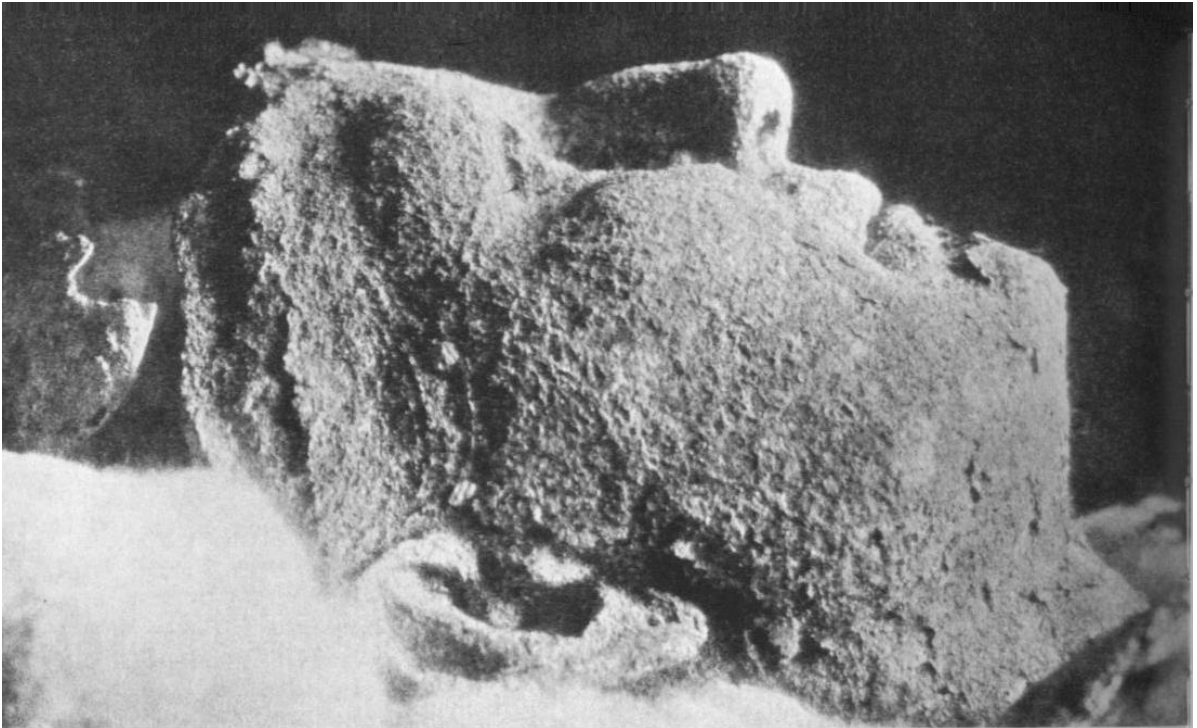

Fig. 5.1 Wax head from a Roman grave (Panzanelli 2008, 176)

Despite the extensive use of wax in representations of the human face and body throughout Western history, after Vasari it was largely absent from art historical scholarship until Julius von Schlosser wrote *History of Portraiture in Wax* in 1911 (Panzanelli 2008). This pioneering work, according to Didi-Huberman, has been largely neglected by art historical scholarship and is more likely to be cited in anthropological contexts that consider the 'decorative' arts (Didi-Huberman 2003). However, in tracing the cultural and artistic lineage of wax sculpture, Schlosser utilised some of the concepts of his contemporary, the art historian Aby Warburg, particularly the notion of artistic 'survivals': the continuation and repetition of forms, motifs and representations throughout the *longue durée* of historical time. Didi-Huberman writes,

> Time conceived as a succession of direct relationships ("influences") or
> conceived in the positivist way as a succession of facts had no appeal for
> Warburg. Instead he pursued, as a counterpoint or counterrhythm to influence
> and fact and chronology, a *ghostly and symptomatic* time (Didi-Huberman
> 2003, 274).

According to Didi-Huberman, subsequent art historians including Panofsky, Gombrich and H. W. Janson sought to purge Warburgian history of at least some of the implications of the survival concept, labouring the assertion that the Renaissance revival of classicism was indeed the 'rebirth' of a dead form, rather than an aesthetic thread that had survived through the Middle Ages. In this way, the concept of survival threatens the sovereignty of the grand revivals of the Renaissance, presenting a model of aesthetic descent which is, by contrast, ahistorical in its haunting evocation of an involuntary memory of cultural forms, and potentially contaminating in its linking of the modern to the premodern. The ghostly metaphor employed by Didi-Huberman in characterising aesthetic survival as a "poltergeist" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 277) to be exorcised from classical art history suggests the uncanny resonances of Warburg's notion of survival and its affect on objectivist art historians.

Rather than 'poltergeist', Didi-Huberman's metaphor might be more suggestive in this context if read as 'doppelgänger'. Milica Živković (2000) notes that the theme of the doppelgänger, which developed in German Romantic literature only after a long and diverse tradition in folklore and religion, is an ambivalent figure that always operates in relation to an original subject, whether the double is conceived of in positive terms or, as is more common in Christian contexts, it takes on sinister characteristics. Živković comments that in modern literature, the unfettered and frequently transgressive actions of the double represent the desire to escape cultural constraints while indicating a profound crisis of selfhood. She argues that the doppelgänger points to pressure points within modernity;

> As a manifestation of a forbidden desire, of everything that is lost, hidden, or
> denied it points to the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it focuses on the
> possibility of disorder, that which lies outside the law, that which is outside the
> dominant value system. It is in this way that the double traces the unsaid and
> unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, made "absent"
> (Živković 2000, 127)

A grotesque cipher for all that is expunged from modernity, the doppelgänger is a potent model for Warburg's concept of aesthetic survival taken up by Schlosser in relation to wax. Indeed, as

Dimitris Vardoulakis (2006) notes, the double both 'interrupts' modernity and refigures it as a point of interruption, enacting Freud's return of the repressed. This relates to Andrew J. Webber's (2003) characterisation of the doppelgänger as a point of historical disruption or incursion within modernity, as it returns as "the spectre of lost time" (Webber 2003, 9). He notes, "Like all ghosts, it is at once an historical figure, re-presenting past times, and a profoundly anti-historical phenomenon, resisting temporal change by stepping out of time and then stepping back in as revenant" (Webber 2003, 10). Similarly, John Pizer (1992) has observed that the figure of the double in Romantic literature has been used to indicate the unstable characteristics of memory as well as notions of inherited guilt. The uncanny experience of history heralded by the doppelgänger, representing both the yearned-for object of the absent past and the crisis of its illegitimate return, is a powerful image of the historiographic grotesque, reflected in the 'ghostly' aesthetic survivals of wax recorded by Schlosser and, as will be seen, the figure of the wax or photographic double.

Additionally, there are similarities between Warburg's concept of artistic survival and Bakhtin's notion of 'genre memory', by which the 'spirit' of ancient modes such as carnival persist and resurface throughout subsequent works into modernity, inherited through contact with prior works which possess traces of the genre, regardless of whether the creator possesses knowledge of the ancient form (Emerson and Morson 2002). In Schlosser's work, the concept of survival is employed to demonstrate the ways in which the practice of wax portrait sculpture has endured as a cultural form outside of the conventional canon of art historical styles (Didi-Huberman 2003). With regards to the popular and commercial cultural contexts in which wax persisted in the early twentieth century, Schlosser notes, "It is after all not such an uncommon phenomenon for an ancient cultural product to live on in the lower social strata as a "survival" of a development process that has run its full course" (Panzanelli 2008, 173). This comment points to the debased, kitsch status of wax in modernity and conveys a sense of the material having exhausted its relevance; no longer imbued with the sacred character of its earlier uses, the medium persists as a relic of earlier cultural forms. It is grotesque in the sense of Baudelaire's image of the defunct past that "makes itself present" (Swain 2004, 10) in the modern moment, an apparently extinguished force invading the present in the form of ruins, as doppelgänger. However, this debasing of the material does not make its persistence irrelevant. Roberta Panzanelli notes that Schlosser and Warburg share with Freud the conviction that wax sculpture endures as a remnant of cultural and social practices from a range of origins, "wax *embodies* the complex knot of anachronistic survivals in the surface of our culture" (Panzanelli 2008, 6).

Freud (2008) develops further connections between wax, memory and the unconscious in his 1925 essay 'A Note Upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"'. In this work he presents the Mystic Writing-Pad (or '*Wunderblock*'), a contemporary novelty item, as a model for memory and perception. The writing pad sandwiches a sheet of wax paper between a piece of celluloid and a slab of brown wax. It is possible to produce dark marks on the wax paper by writing on the celluloid with a stylus. If the sheet of wax paper is separated from the celluloid and the wax slab, the writing disappears. However, as Freud notes, the wax slab retains a permanent trace of the temporary writing, thus providing a model for the interaction of perception and memory in which the covering surfaces are analogous to the stimuli received by the sensory organs and the wax slab is equivalent to the unconscious mind. The interplay between the two functions is revealed by "the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception" (Freud 2008 215). In the context of the current investigation, Freud's essay provides a potent image of wax as a substance of unconscious 'remembering' which complements Schlosser's locating of cultural survivals within the medium. Thus the impressionable, malleable qualities of wax link the material to notions of transience, preservation and memorialisation. Coupled with its debasing associations with popular culture, wax operates as a repository of traces and impressions that would (or should) otherwise remain unseen and unspoken.

The collapsing of material and historical process suggested by Schlosser and Freud erodes the aesthetic distinctions of influence and style, while the procedure that they describe runs counter to objectivist notions of chronology and progress, suggesting instead that the history of the object may be considered through the traces of memory embedded in the thing itself. The 'genre memory' of wax shapes the trajectory of the medium: like the impressionable material itself, it is marked by contact with earlier practices and meanings that are carried on into subsequent articulations of the form, as if by contagion. This image of history as an organic residue, a disease inherited by the present, invests wax with an uncanny persistence that confounds its canonical characterisation as a dead form—to follow Didi-Huberman's description of aesthetic survival and building on the theme of the doppelgänger, it may be more appropriate to describe it as an *un*dead form, one which returns, illegitimately, from obsolescence. These ideas echo the sentiments of Thomas McEvilley, Lawrence Weschler and Umberto Eco in suggesting that history is subject to the periodic ebb and flow of modernist and postmodernist currents; resurgences and revivals interacting outside of linear chronology. Weschler argues that, rather

than postmodern, such tendencies may be better described as *pre*modern (Weschler 1996). Citing Weschler, Mark Dery describes the premodern as "a time whose hallmarks are deliriously heterogeneous tastes and a boundless appetite for the marvellous and the monstrous" (Dery 1999, 148), an idea that has some similarities with Bal's notion of a 'contemporary' baroque, which she positions within 'preposterous' history (Bal 2001; Baum 2001). Bal describes the mode of preposterous history as "a way of "doing history" that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights" (Bal 2001, 7) in a fashion that mimics structural qualities of the baroque. Grotesque historiography encompasses such incursions of the premodern, inasmuch as the grotesque is itself a premodern mode characterised by a sense of something that was meant to remain buried having come improperly (and perhaps pleasingly) to light, and the way in which the spectre of the unwelcome past (such as the medieval) threatens the nostalgic lineage linking the modern to the mythical past (as in the classical).

In this context, representations of the body in the marginal medium of wax can be seen to operate within an involuntary memory of the premodern at a cultural level, a grotesque premodern that threatens classical notions of aesthetic lineage. Schlosser traces the practice of producing recognisable wax representations of individuals through the direct cast, specifically on those who are deceased, to antiquity. He argues that this practice came about through the desire for realistic representations of individual faces, distinct from generic, archetypal representations that may trigger the imaginative power of memory, pursuing instead "the total victory of absolute, maximally individualized pictorial form" (Panzanelli 2008, 177) in which he frames the entire history of portraiture, citing the photograph as its modern counterpart and double. According to Schlosser, the use of wax in funeral rites was most prevalent in the Roman Empire, particularly the death mask which records the identity of the deceased while resisting the decomposition of the body, sometimes interred with the body or displayed in the homes of descendents, and the public mourning rites in which full body wax effigies were displayed in place of the body. Schlosser describes such effigies as 'prosthetic' corpses, their function to supplement the presence of the dead by presenting a simulacrum in its place. In the case of the death mask, the wax cast shares a particular proximity to the body itself, bearing the trace of its touch and acting as a relic in its absence. Through its extreme naturalism and its resistance to decay, the wax double of the dead goes on to take the place of the body, affirming the deceased's continuing existence despite having been lost to the world of the senses (and the present). The ancient practice of displaying an effigy of the dead finds its survival in Christian contexts in the Middle Ages, particularly in effigies of deceased nobles and royals, many of

Fig. 5.2 *Head of Doge Alvise IV Mocenigo* (Panzanelli 2008, 202)

Fig 5.3 *Queen Elizabeth* (Panzanelli 2008, 207)

which bear the morbid characteristics of the death mask. Little is known about funereal waxes between the decline of the Empire and the Middle Ages—Schlosser argues that etymology of 'wax' in Romance languages of the period attests to its persistence as a signifier that encompasses ideas of portraiture and the copy. Schlosser's notion of wax's survival as the continuation and resurgence of older forms is reflected Panzanelli's claim that wax's history is one of disappearance and reappearance (Panzanelli 2008).

The use of wax sculpture in Christian rituals survived at least into the twentieth century in the form of ex-voto offerings, themselves a rearticulation of pagan practices which also involved the dedication of wax candles and figures to a deity. The Christian ex-votos were frequently presented in supplication or thanks for the healing of a diseased body part, hence the production of waxen lungs, breasts, limbs and so on, dedicated in displays of fragmented body parts. In parallel, whole body replicas of the donor in wax and unformed lumps of wax which corresponded to the donor's body dimensions were presented as offerings, both of which are analogous to funeral effigies, although the formless mass of wax reduces the identity of the donor to a lumpen abstraction. In the case of the effigy, personal effects such as clothing owned by the individual heighten the wax copy's function as a relic of the subject, producing greater proximity to the body of the donor and thereby enhancing the authenticity of the double as supplement for the absent original. Schlosser locates a sacrificial sensibility in such offerings, in which the copy stands in for the body itself, and the 'sympathetic magic' that is invoked is aided by the copy's resemblance to the donor. He presents this impulse as the root of the tendency towards extreme realism in wax portraiture, and by implication, portraiture in general (Panzanelli 2008). This image of the wax double suggests a notion of the doppelgänger which stands in for the lost object of the past. In this instance, rather than appearing as a melancholic spectre of ruin, the double functions to restore dead time through a nostalgic revival, presenting a body frozen in time.

Schlosser's locating of modern portraiture within the tradition of the funeral effigy echoes Freud's identification of primal cultural practices that find their expression in modern psychopathology, notably in *Totem and Taboo* (Brill 1995). More interested in cultural 'singularities' than an overarching theory of culture, Schlosser acknowledged the problematic nature of wax and its troubled history, regarding "*the material itself, wax, in the position of a critical tool*" (Panzanelli 2008, 159). His consideration of the 'magical' qualities of wax and the icon in the context of early twentieth century scholarship sets him outside of the dominant mode

of art history, for he attaches an intangible and ghostly power to the object which resembles memory and leaves its trace in modern culture, pre-empting Benjamin's notion of the aura. The locating of such uncanny survivals in modern culture runs against the grain of notions of civilisation, progress and perfection inherent to objectivist history. Indeed, despite their virtuosic realism, votive waxes are absent from canonical art history due to their low cultural status, their religiosity, largely anonymous artisanal origins, apparent lack of originality and the unease that they provoke in the viewer. Didi-Huberman describes the affect of wax votive objects as one "of *discomfort* and *crisis*" (Didi-Huberman 2007, 7), resulting from their 'vulgar' realism and the challenge they present to a history of aesthetics that seeks to ignore them. Indeed, their excessive verisimilitude is a source of grotesque affect, inspiring the uneasy commingling of fascination and horror.

Didi-Huberman argues that the history of the wax ex-voto "must give account of a *different temporality* that, within it, insists and resists every chronology of evolution or 'progress'" (Didi-Huberman 2007, 7). The key to interpreting the history of the devotional wax for both Schlosser and Didi-Huberman is to acknowledge the grotesque resonances of the objects which allow them to operate as uncanny doubles of the symptomatic body and to participate in a transaction in which the fleshly, sacrificial wax is embedded with a desire for healing or salvation. The wax thus becomes a conduit for contagion and desire; the material is both the diseased flesh of the donor and their yearning made solid (Didi-Huberman 2007; Panzanelli 2008). The objects also participate in a complex negotiation with death which invests them with funereal overtones: they offer a substitute for the transitional, dying body, ensure that a version of the body remains uncorrupted on earth, and by offering an exchange of flesh they also secure the afterlife of the donor. Indeed, it is the slippery religiosity of the waxes and their dependence upon tradition that is at the heart of their exclusion from Vasari's nascent art history. Schlosser maintains that during the Florentine Renaissance in which Vasari lived, votive effigies and body parts were produced prolifically, displayed *en masse* in churches such as the Santissima Annuziata. Despite his celebration of the heightened naturalism employed in the art of the times, Vasari gives wax sculpture scant attention in *Lives of the Artists*. Ignoring the antiquity of the practice, he credits the artist Andrea del Verrocchio as the inventor of the technique of taking plaster casts 'from nature' and its ensuing implementation in death masks and their domestic display, and in turn the production of votive waxes. He claims that Verrocchio trained a certain Orsino in the practice, who went on to produce a waxen effigy of Lorenzo de' Medici to commemorate a failed assassination attempt. Scholars have since revealed that this Orsino in fact came from a

long line of wax artisans who were intimately engaged in the production of votive effigies. Vasari's invented lineage of the wax effigy attempts to erase the influence of the practice upon Renaissance artists' efforts to achieve increasingly naturalistic effects, while asserting the primacy and genius of the artist's invention (Didi-Huberman 2005; Panzanelli 2008; Vasari 1998).

However, as Schlosser notes, Vasari does cite the influence of death and life masks upon Renaissance art and portraiture. Many examples of ceramic and bronze portrait busts bear the trace of the death mask—sunken features, absent expression—despite sometimes ineffective attempts to remodel the features to resemble a living subject (Panzanelli 2008). It is this proximity to death that Didi-Huberman argues led Vasari to remodel the history of portraiture, to cleanse it of its religious overtones, and to recast the sculpted portrait as a humanist invention. However, as Didi-Huberman argues, all Christian art, and by extension, all realistic secular art, is entrenched in ideas of death, in which the artwork "makes death into a rite of passage, a mediation towards the absence of all death…[Interactions with Christian artworks] have all lived in the double desire to kill death and to imitate death at the same time" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 227)—anticipating the apocalyptic resurrection of the dead while replicating Christ's sacred deathliness. Schlosser presents the devotional waxes of the Florentine churches as the 'missing link' in the development of naturalism in Renaissance art, refuting the classical notion of the period as a 'pure' phenomenon of culture and instead presenting it as heterogeneous blend of survivals and reinventions (Panzanelli 2008). His history of wax portraiture thus situates the entire history of Western art within a game of death, in which its trace is obscured and unveiled (brought horribly to light) through naturalistic depictions of bodies which are at once all too present, mimicking the living presence of an individual, and all too absent, resonating with the morbid undertones of an unmoving body bereft of life. Even Gombrich writes of the "wax image which often causes us uneasiness because it oversteps the boundary of symbolism" (Gombrich 1977, 53), its uncanny presence suggesting real flesh, with all its deathly connotations, to the viewer. More than a crime of taste, classical art historians have rejected wax because of the grotesque threat of psychological uncertainty it poses through its morbid realism, an all too obvious souvenir of the long running dialogue with death that permeates Western culture.

Anatomies and Visages

This dialogue is heightened in subsequent contexts in which the wax body was viewed. Never a 'pure' art, wax's use in the popular culture of the church extended to practices of spectacle and

public life that became more widespread from the eighteenth century in particular, and which were increasingly engaged in encounters with 'histories' that were founded upon the death of their subjects. Around the same time, the blossoming scientific disciplines that grew out of the humanist Renaissance found a use for wax that was uncannily reminiscent of votive practices: the wax effigy became an imperishable substitute for diseased and lifeless bodies. Schlosser notes that by the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the baroque aesthetics which favoured ostentation, high drama and illusionism were perfectly in keeping with the hyperrealistic quality of waxes, for example, the overtly religious agenda of Counter-Reformation art which exploited uncannily naturalistic effects to produce a queasy piety in the assembled masses. In parallel and throughout the following century, wax portrait busts were commissioned by courtly patrons and also increasingly by a broader market. The wax cabinet, a precursor of the waxworks museum, detached from the ecclesiastical setting of votive display to utilise the spectacular qualities of wax figures. Schlosser maintains that these practices continued to draw on the histories of the death mask and the funeral effigy in preserving the appearance of the nobility and the deceased, "in which the motivation is individual and whimsical, at times producing grotesque excesses" (Panzanelli 2008, 263). Despite its baroque sensibilities, wax sculpture was produced prolifically throughout the eighteenth century, when its tendency toward hyperrealism was fully exploited. At the outset of the century, Gaetano Giulio Zumbo was making miniature wax dioramas that show the gruesome effects of disease and decomposition upon human figures partially clothed in baroque drapery, lamenting within ruined classical landscapes (Fig. 5.4). These grotesque *teatrini* (little theatres) attempt to blend the high aesthetics of tragedy with an anatomical rationalism that serves to thrill as well as educate[47] (Panzanelli 2008). The theatricality and corporeality of Zumbo's teatrini extended into two separate streams of wax sculpture that reflect the emerging modernity of the eighteenth century: anatomy and the public spectacle of wax portraits of celebrities (or historical personages). Each practice is steeped in grotesque effects and affects, sharing an intimate proximity to the dead body as a contradictory site of repulsion and desire, and heightening the uncanniness of funeral and effigy waxes while taking advantage of an ambivalent pleasure in looking at (and, by extension, possibly touching) a body rendered vulnerable through immobility.

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[47] Pamela Pilbeam notes that the Marquis de Sade was a great enthusiast of Zumbo's work (Pilbeam 2003). Panzanelli comments that Zumbo's little theatres are not historical scenes but imagine an apocalyptic future while referencing classical styles (Panzanelli 2008).

Fig. 5.4 *Gaetano Guilio Zumbo, The Plague*, c. 1690 (Panzanelli 2008, 7)

Anatomical waxes were employed increasingly throughout the eighteenth century to show the structure, functions and ailments of the human body. While illustration, 'natural' anatomies (actual tissues dried and preserved) and sculpture in other media were also used to disclose the secrets of the body, wax's fleshy qualities, malleability and long history of representing the body and its parts made it particularly well suited to the task. The earlier use of wax in funerary contexts, to provide an impermeable substitute for the rotting or absent corpse, was revived in the anatomical context in which the malodorous, seeping and slushy bodies of cadavers were disagreeable to work with, did not last long enough to serve as reliable models and were not always easy to come by. Joan B. Landes comments that such representations of the anatomised body "relieved the anatomist of repeated confrontation with the decaying remains of a dissected body, and… they performed the imaginative function of fictively endowing the corpse with the attributes of life, thus fulfilling the dream of a transparent view of the living body" (Panzanelli 2008, 41). The intellectual pursuits of the time were marked by a desire to understand the machinations of the body, which led to the production of other kinds of bodies: automatons that

could replicate the functions and appearance of the body to the extent that they could be said to possess the qualities of life, as in Jacques de Vaucanson's Flute Player, an automaton in the form of a man, which, in order to play its instrument, was endowed with the ability to breathe. At a time when the study of the body threw the existence of the soul into doubt, the line between living bodies and lifeless objects was growing vague, and the uncanny doubling of dead / living bodies by automatons was a source of uncertainty and anxiety[48] (Wood 2002). Anatomical waxes thus proliferated at a time that was besieged by conflicting ideas about the relationship of the body and the soul, and was haunted by the spectre of modernity's doppelgänger, the grotesque. The practice of anatomy was particularly fraught by religious anxieties about the fate of the soul once it had flown from the subject—when the Resurrection came, the dissected body would not be able to rise and be judged with the rest of the dead. The waxwork provided something of a loophole in supplying a sanitised alternative to the cadaver, however, production of a full wax figure could sometimes require the dissection of hundreds of corpses, resulting in more of a double bind (Panzanelli 2008).

Steeped in this intimacy with death, the wax objects are themselves situated in a double bind of representation—they are both too naturalistic and too idealistic to function wholly as either art or science, combining the uncanny, corporeal presence of votive effigies with the manneristic conceits of classical art. They present a narrative in which death has been mastered, opened up and rendered visible, where the dead, with glowing skin and serene expressions, resemble the living, and where the mode of display elevates the dissected body to an object of veneration, as it luxuriates on cushioned drapery within glass cabinets. Such display invests the scientific object with religious undertones, recalling the display of embalmed saints as well as votive effigies in glass vitrines. Gombrich's remark that the waxwork 'oversteps the boundaries of symbolism' is only partially true of these objects, which are shaped by the classical aesthetics befitting Enlightenment pursuits. They present an excess of realism that is almost obscene in its celebration of mutilated, spectacular bodies, but they also perpetuate the game of death in which its trace is both concealed and revealed. This is achieved through their idealising tendency drawing on humanist aesthetics, in which the body is contained, elegant and clean—the opposite of the boundless carnival body described by Rabelais, which haunts these classical anatomies as

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[48] Such discomfort about the possibility of life in inanimate objects was explored in the uncanny stories of E. T. A. Hoffman and Mary Shelley, amongst others. A particularly powerful example is provided in *Frankenstein*, in which the fragmented body parts of corpses are reassembled and reanimated, with the technologies of modernity producing a doppelgänger in the form of the monster.
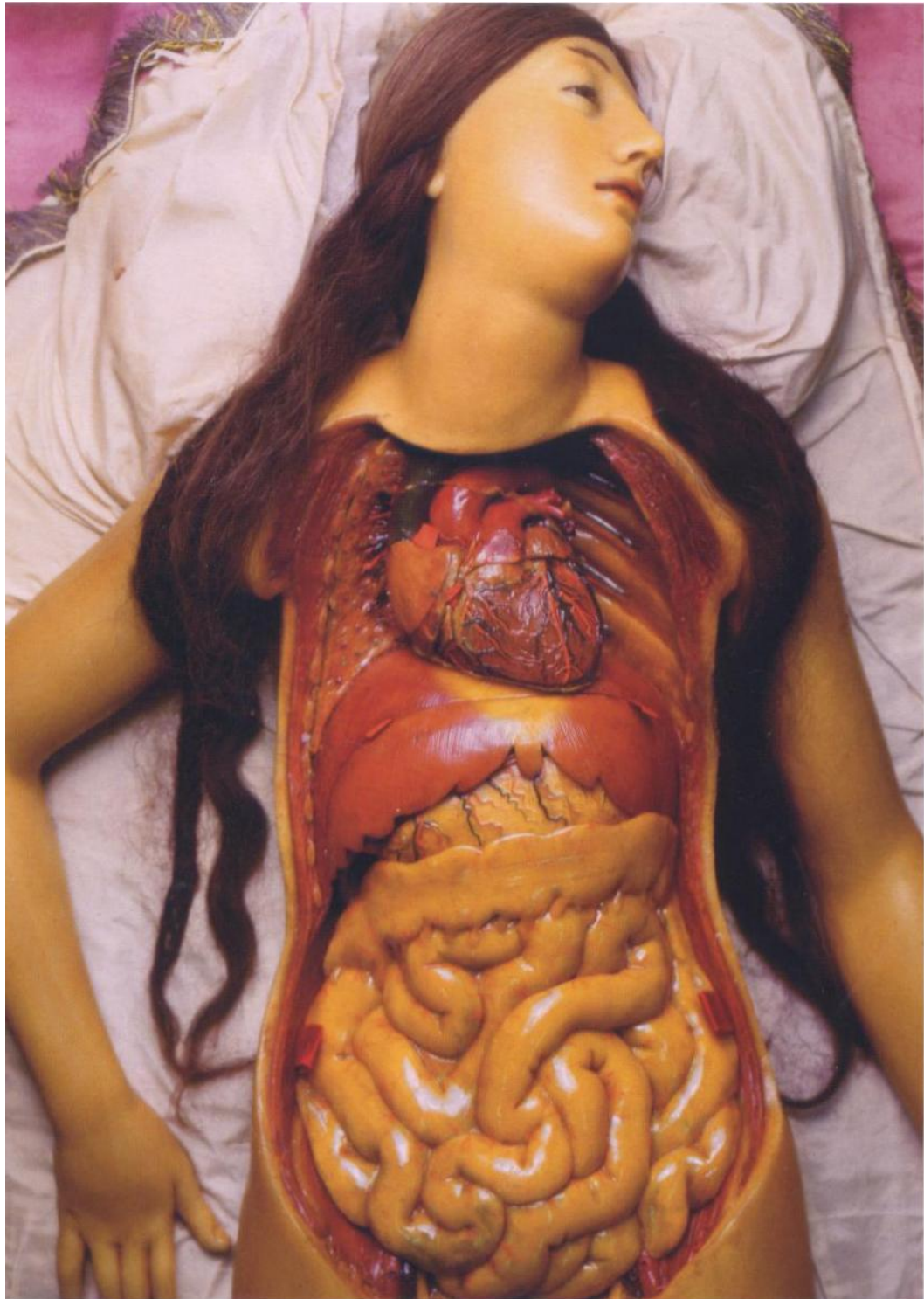
Fig.5.5 Workshop of Clemente Susini and Giuseppe Ferrini, *Detail of Venus Figure*, c. 1170-75
(Panzanelli 2008, ii)

their purged double. This is particularly true of the anatomical waxes of the Bologna tradition, which extended into Florence and in which the simultaneously naturalistic and idealising tendencies of the practice are exemplified by the waxes Clemente Susini produced for La Specola Natural History Museum in the latter part of the eighteenth century. His works invest the abject object of the dissected cadaver with beauty and grace, organs slotting in place like clockwork and limbs arranged in elegant poses derived from classical art, vital in male bodies, and passive in female. Such merging of naturalism and idealism is particularly evident in his 'anatomical Venuses' in which female sexual passivity is equated with the recumbent corpse (Fig. 5.5). Susini's classicising verisimilitude allows him to exorcise the trace of death from the dissected body; however, by depicting the cadaver as an object of desire he merely heightens the uncanny power of the waxwork while inviting the scandalised gaze of the voyeur (Panzanelli 2008; Warner 2006). Panzanelli notes that the waxes of the scientific mode are "halfway between artwork and artefact, between scientific tool and horrid simulacrum" (Panzanelli 2008, 5).

Objective science is contaminated by the scopophilic pleasure of looking at the violated (in more sense than one) corpse in these examples. Such waxes present a fragmentary meditation on death that bears some resemblance to the baroque *memento mori*, but in which the moral message about the mutability of the body and the eternal life of the soul is polluted by the object's status as an anxious testament to mastery of science and the uncanny power of art to fake the presence of a body. These waxen objects with the ability to double human presence carry the history and unsettling affect of the votive effigy, but rather than purge wax of its religious character, the anatomists merely transferred it to support the worship of science. In this context, the Enlightenment itself takes on uncanny shades in its ability to reduce the human body (and with it, the face and the soul) to little more than a sophisticated object. The anatomical wax is thus a point of intersection for several threads: the ghostly survival and doubling of the votive effigy lurking within the progressive object of science, anxieties about the distinction between human beings and artfully counterfeited objects, and a grotesque taint of pleasure seeping into dealings with the dead or diseased body. The eroticised wax cadaver is reminiscent of apocryphal stories of the pornographic waxes that supposedly enjoyed a vigorous trade at the time and which overlapped with the production of portrait wax figures by artists such as Madame Marie Tussaud and her teacher Philippe Curtius (who is rumoured to have produced such objects). The disappearance of the pornographic wax epitomises wax's illegitimate and poorly preserved

history[49], and this fabled object suggests a further conjunction of the uncanny desires and erotic deathliness that infect the exquisite anatomical waxes of Susini (Bloom 2003; Panzanelli 2008; Pilbeam 2003; Warner 2006).

Madame Tussaud's effigies amass all of the wax survivals already discussed, and also play a part in the historical rupture of the French Revolution and the construction of historical sensibilities in its wake, as well as the development of spectacular popular culture experiences through which an illusory connection with the past can be facilitated. The uncanny resonances of Tussaud's waxworks, the discomforting / delightful *frisson* they transmit to the viewer, and their participation within a historical narrative of crisis situates them within the mode of grotesque historiography. Tussaud was not the inventor of the wax exhibition, indeed, wax salons and travelling fairground exhibitions were already a popular form of entertainment in the eighteenth century, and the manufacturers of such objects were frequently the same producers of wax anatomies as well as sculptures in other materials that fit more readily into academic notions of art. From these origins, a growing trend throughout the following century would be the public exhibition of wax 'pathologies'—diseased body parts rendered in gruesome detail, most notably male and female genitalia exhibiting the symptoms of venereal disease—the function of which was essentially half education, half sensation. Tussaud's teacher Curtius was himself a physician who had constructed anatomical models and made the transition into popular waxes, marketing these and other objects as curiosities to provoke wonder. Curtius and Tussaud's relationship is somewhat mysterious—she claimed to be his niece, but may have been his daughter—one of many ambiguities in the mythologised history that Tussaud constructed around herself to explain her transition from royal portraitist, to patriotic chronicler of the French Revolution, to royalist émigré in England. Such ambiguities pervade the waxes she produced throughout her life (many of which continue to be exhibited as later generation casts from the original moulds) indeed, Tussaud's history points to a personal malleability comparable to wax[50]. Throughout the generations, her waxes have been subject to reinventions and revisions according to the favoured mode of presenting the histories that they supposedly provide unmediated access to through their proximity to the body of the historical figure (Bloom 2003; Pilbeam 2003; Warner 2006).

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[49] This adds a further resonance to the term 'lost wax' which refers to the technique in which a wax model is burnt out to produce a bronze copy—neatly illustrating the process by which high art materials and practices have displaced wax craft and erased its trace, despite the materials' interconnectedness.
[50] A life-sized self-portrait of Tussaud has been an enduring feature of her exhibition since its inception, the wax doppelgänger displacing the original in more ways than one (Fig. 5.7).

Fig. 5.6 Possibly by Philippe Curtius *Portrait bust of a man (self-portrait?)*, c. 1782 (Panzanelli 2008, 70)

Fig. 5.7 Madame Tussaud's self-portrait, copy from an 1842 original (Bloom 2003, 9)

The strength of the historiography of the Revolution presented by Tussaud's waxes and their modes of display depends upon their supposed authenticity as relics and the audience's pleasure in succumbing to their uncanny affects. As relics of the historical dead, her portraits function similarly to waxen effigies in votive and funerary contexts. Their impact is particularly reliant upon the myth that the portraits Tussaud made in her lifetime were derived from life or death casts, imprinting the objects with the touch of the subject and creating the illusion that the viewer is looking at (perhaps illicitly touching) the actual face of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, Robespierre, Marat, and so on, frozen in the moments just after death. In Tussaud's memoirs written in the nineteenth century, she presents herself as a reluctant pawn in the Jacobin project of memorialising the heroes and enemies of the Revolution, forced to cast guillotined heads and other cadaverous objects for public display in an atmosphere that was both ceremonial and grotesquely festive. Uta Kornmeier notes that the legend that the Revolutionary waxes were based on death masks supplies the objects with a reverential aura of historical authenticity that underplays any artistic mediation in their subsequent production and display by Tussaud. She comments that the cast portrait bears such a close proximity to the subject that it almost operates as part of the body; "Therefore, the portrait based on a face cast is a representation of a person's face not because of its resemblance to the face but because it is part of the face—as its usually unnoticed negative equivalent" (Panzanelli 2008, 76). Because of the waxes' ability to evoke the presence of their subject, according to Kornmeier, Tussaud was at pains to conceal that the cast waxes were actually taken from clay models, preferring to play down her artistic skills to invest the portraits with an illusory authenticity that enabled apparently unmediated access to the historical subject and the epic narrative in which their deaths participate. This impression of authenticity is enhanced by other relics supposed to have touched the historical subject— clothing, possessions, and (allegedly) the actual guillotine blade that severed the heads on exhibit. The power of these objects as historical relics is therefore dependant upon an impression of the touch of the deceased body (Panzanelli 2008; Warner 2006). This is equivalent to the votive 'magic' of wax, in which the presence of the referent is transmitted, as if by contagion, through the wax double's trace of the diseased or deceased body.

However, as Kormeier notes, in support of this illusion of authenticity, Tussaud's mode of display has been subject to many revisions. This is particularly evident in the collection of guillotined heads presented as material evidence for a truncated history of the Revolution, where the heads of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette are viewed in conjunction with those of the revolutionaries Carrier, Fouquier-Tinville, Robespierre and Hébert. Tussaud transplanted much

Fig. 5.8 Allegedly by Marie Tussaud, *Death Head of Marie-Antoinette*, photograph c. 1919 (Panzanelli 2008, 77)
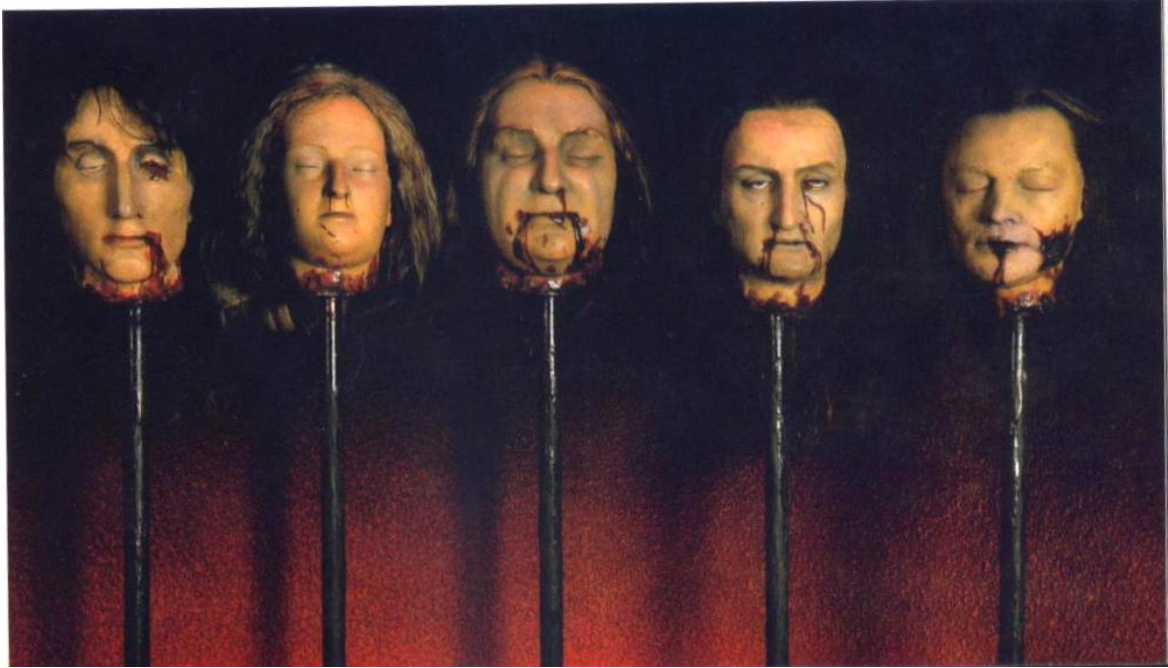
Fig. 5.9 Allegedly by Marie Tussaud, *Death heads of Hébert, Marie-Antoinette, Louis XVI, Carrier and Robespierre*, photograph c. 1996 (Panzanelli 2008, 78)

of her collection to Britain in 1802, where the Revolutionary waxes travelled the country alongside effigies of popular English figures until settling into a permanent museum in London. It was necessary for Tussaud to distance herself from any French Revolutionary allegiances, emphasising her connection to Versailles and her support of the British monarchy in order to appeal to a middle class clientele. Despite such efforts towards respectability, in the early nineteenth century, the grotesque allure of the Chamber of Horrors was significantly enhanced by its French flavour (as the potent 'other' of Britain) and its apparently bona fide depiction of the Terror (Pilbeam 2003). While the impact of the Revolutionary waxes has been dependant upon the impression of authenticity that they convey, it has been necessary to continually update the waxes and their mode of display to appeal to the audience's taste for horror and sense of veracity. From the earliest surviving photographs of the display taken in 1919 up until the present, the heads have variously appeared serene and disembodied, bled of all colour, impaled upon crimson bloody pikes, cadaverous and sweaty upon a dungeon floor, and discoloured by facial haemorrhages with clotting blood streaming from eyes, nose and mouth. The emphases of the displays have shifted from restrained dread to pathological monstrosity, and they rely upon the scene's narrativisation of the executions to convey a sense of historicity. However, these

displays interpret historical narratives freely, ignoring that the heads of the king and queen were never displayed on pikes and that, leaving aside the actual pathology of decapitation, all of the heads exhibited in the mise-en-scene of a single moment were guillotined at different times (for instance, the king and queen were executed nine months apart). The impression of historical verisimilitude thus depends upon the intense drama and horrific affect of the scene, its hyperrealistic augmentation of history within the compressed space of a single moment (Panzanelli 2008).

Tussaud's waxes cater to a populist taste in history as narrative, summoning the religious connotations of the wax effigy to create the illusion of an authentic encounter with the lost world of the past. The mythology that situates the wax portraits in intimate proximity to the dead figures of history, and the museum's flexibility in reconstructing the history of the Revolution in pursuit of the most (pleasurably) horrifying impact on the audience, roots Tussaud's historiography in a speculative aesthetic mode, rather than the objectivist historiography that it cites through its museological pretensions. The impact of Tussaud's Revolutionary waxes is decidedly grotesque in its thrilling, hyperrealistic depiction of severed heads that, in Gombrich's terms, overstep the bounds of symbolism. Tussaud's historiography utilises aesthetic and historiographic devices, but it falls outside of both disciplines, contaminated by the trace of the grotesque in the debased material of the wax and the unabashedly populist theatricality of the displays. This kitsch historiography teases, picks at the historical rupture of the Revolution and attempts to provide access to it through its hyperrealism, depicting a frozen moment of cataclysm, an interminable process of splitting from the pre-Revolutionary past in the continuously unfolding post-Revolutionary present. Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette's heads are the centrepieces of this rupture, citing the symbolic weight that their executions carried in the Revolutionary context and the cultural upheavals that they heralded, but they also reiterate the age-old function of the death mask and funeral effigy as objects of mourning, 'prosthetic' substitutes for the actual bodies of the deceased, which are lost to the present as soon as they begin to decompose. Over time, the melancholic nostalgia that characterised the tone of the display in the early twentieth century was replaced by a gruesome meditation on physical and psychic decay, situated within a postmodern aesthetics of shock. The deathliness of the heads has always been the focus of their display, but tastes in death have shifted and the displays have been adapted over time in pursuit of the greatest uncanny affect. Earlier iterations unveiled the subtle trace of death upon a head that might otherwise be alive, relying on the waxes' inherent naturalism and their historical authenticity to unsettle the viewer's sense of dead and alive, real

and fake, past and present. Increasingly throughout the late twentieth century, the heads presented exaggerated symptoms of death and decay, illustrating Eco's description of the kitsch sensibility of wonder that constitutes the postmodern display of the past, a deeply artificial assemblage in which (like Jean Baudrillard's characterisation of the simulacrum) the double supersedes the original, and the viewer is overcome by "kitsch reverence… thrilled by his encounter with a magic past" (Eco 1987, 10) in a fantasy in which the living and the dead mingle. In both iterations of history, melancholic and horrific, the grotesque is the vehicle through which an engagement with the past is achieved, a queasy yet thrilling evocation of the historical realm that is preoccupied with its status as dead matter—something facilitated by the fleshy properties of wax and its long association with rituals of mourning and commemoration.

Despite wax's survival in popular contexts such as the wax work museum, anatomy cabinets and side shows[51] throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Schlosser states that as an art form, "wax sculpture had in truth died its civil death along with the ancien régime" (Panzanelli 2008, 297). In this light, Tussaud's severed heads might also be read as a memorial to the material which had served to represent the heads of nobles in pre-Revolutionary contexts, and which was displaced when the social conditions that had supported its patronage fell away. 'Correcting' the slippage between popular effigies and portraiture, the revival of classicism from the eighteenth century followed on from the Renaissance in celebrating the 'purity' of ancient statuary, particularly the whiteness of marble, and rejecting the low cultural status of polychrome, to the extent that the British Museum ordered the scrubbing of the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon in the 1930s to enhance their whiteness—despite the evidence that ancient Greek sculptures were originally painted in vivid colours (Mirzoeff 1999). While the taste for waxen polychrome portraiture had subsided, other factors also sped wax's demise: a legal environment that granted greater access to cadavers for dissection alongside technologies that could slow the rate of decomposition, and most importantly, the development of photography as a technique for preserving the likeness of the living as well as the dead; as Schlosser states, "The fact is that the camera obscura finally extinguished the last flickering pulse of the venerable art" (Panzanelli 2008, 287). While the photograph superseded the wax portrait in terms of realism, it

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[51] In 'Sleeping Beauties in the Fairground: The Spitzner, Pedley and Chemisé Exhibits' Kathryn A. Hoffmann (2004) refers to the popular display of female bodies in flesh and wax in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which the spectacle of the sleeping woman was a major draw card. She also discusses the Spitzner Museum, now mostly destroyed and dispersed in fragments, in which the exposed body of the medical Venus is repeatedly unveiled in dramatised medical *tableaux*.

inherited wax's uncanny affects and possesses a comparable intimacy with death and the transience of the lived moment.

Impressions and Possessions

Benjamin has commented on photography's surfacing in parallel to the emergence of industrial modernity and its role in documenting the vanishing aura of the premodern world, as in Atget's photographs of Parisian streets. He claims that the vanishing aura lingers in these images as well as the early blurry, melancholic portraits of the nineteenth century before disappearing from photography altogether when its use became widespread in full fledged modernity (Benjamin 1992). However, theorists such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes have argued for the ongoing survival of something like the vanishing aura in the photograph due to its ability to preserve dead time, to capture the disappearing moment at the very instant of its transience, investing it with funerary overtones and drawing attention to the mortality of its subject. The photograph echoes the wax portrait's imitation of presence while drawing attention to its absence, reinforcing its inherent uncanniness. Sontag states that "All photographs are *memento mori*… all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (Sontag 2002, 15), while Barthes argues that there is a "terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (Barthes 2000, 9). As a souvenir of loss as well as a horrifying revelation of mortality, this intertwining of memory, nostalgia and melancholy in the photograph induces an uncanny experience of time. It offers a token, or relic, of history while presenting an apocalyptic prophesy: all is dead or dying (Barthes 2000; Sontag 2002). Sentimental post-mortem photography of the nineteenth century performs a similar function to the wax funeral effigy and death mask in preserving the features of the deceased before they are claimed by organic decay, offering in its place an incorruptible object that facilitates interminable mourning. The stillness and crispness of nineteenth century post-mortem photographs emphasises their deathliness, in contrast to the subtle motion blurs that disrupt portraits of the living, and which were minimised by the use of elaborate braces and props that transform the photographic portrait into a covert documentation of bondage. Like the death mask, one source of the nineteenth century post-mortem photograph's uncanny affect is the crisp realism that attests to the presence of life, in conjunction with the stark immobility that points to its complete absence. The aesthetics of sentiment which drench these images in such pathos—the child's body arranged in church finery as though sleeping, the empty shoes that act as allegorical punctuation marks—also invest the photographs with a premeditated theatricality that contaminates the immediacy of mourning (DeLorme 2004).
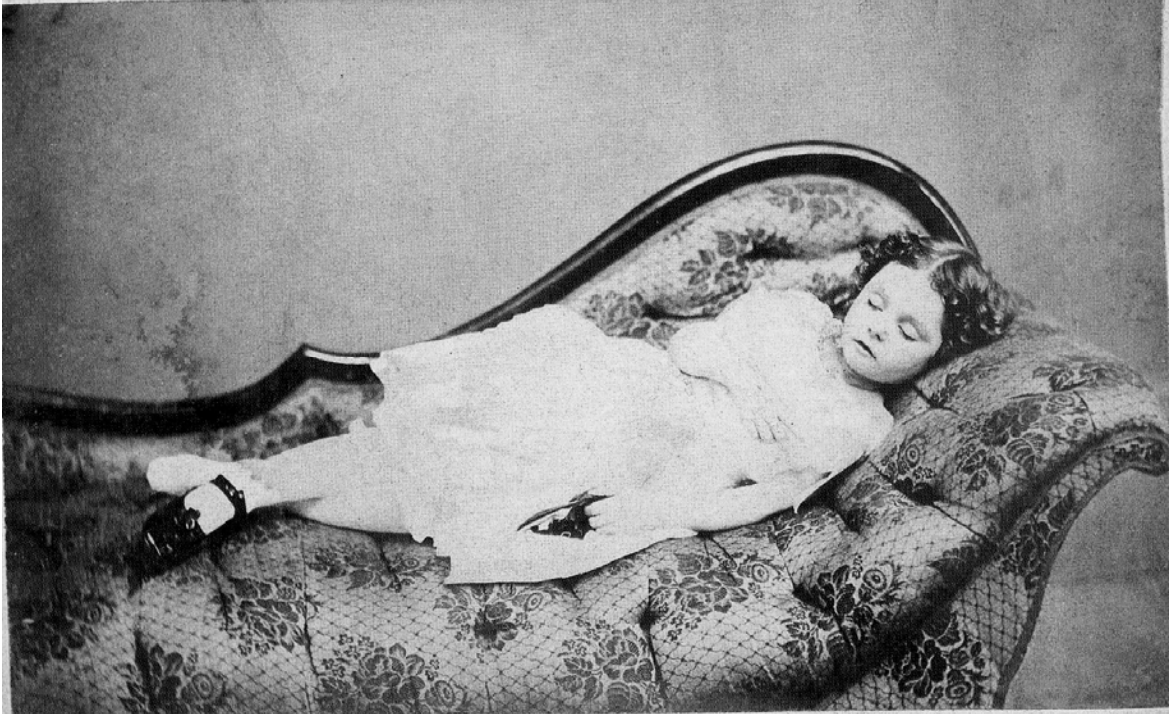
Fig. 5.10 Memorial portrait c. 1860s (DeLorme 2004, 133)

In this context, photography shares a functional relationship with the history of wax and that it bears the trace of its touch. Both materials convey a preoccupation with annihilation and preservation that reveals a troubled relationship to the lost past as dead matter, a relationship steeped in nostalgic and melancholic desires founded upon a pleasure in looking. These confluences invest the wax figure as well as the photograph with an uncanniness related to their paradoxical impression of life-within-death as well as death-within-life. Each material thus exists as an anachronism, a relic that is both in and out of time due to its participation in a dialogue with the lost past. The photograph does not possess the corporeality of wax, however, faces and bodies proliferate as ethereal phantoms within the photographic image, literally disembodied. While photography has been used to document manifold aspects of the visible (and the invisible) world, the human body, along with its complex interplay of presence and absence, has been a particular focus of photography's history—indeed, Atget's images of Parisian streets are particularly notable for their absence of human figures. William A. Ewing, writing in the mid-1990s, argues that the proliferation of photographs of the body at the time is not due to "fashion, but urgency" (Ewing 1995, 9) inspired by shifting notions of the body due to science and ensuing debates about the body, gender and cultural values—a set of debates not at all confined to postmodernity or the end of the millennium. Such urgency might be read in all

photographs of faces and bodies throughout photography's hundred and seventy year history[52], for it is the unrelenting urgency to record the ephemeral and shifting trace of the subject and the body before they are lost forever to "time's relentless melt" (Sontag 2002, 15).

The uncanny resonances of photography and its relationship to the ephemeral body were particularly pronounced during its emergence in the nineteenth century. The photographer Félix Nadar's memoirs note the novelist Honoré de Balzac's anxiety about being photographed. Balzac had a notion that "every body in its natural state was made up of a series of ghostly images superimposed in layers to infinity, wrapped up in infinitesimal films. …each Daguerreian operation was therefore going to lay hold of, detach, and use up one of the layers of the body on which it focussed" (Sontag 2002, 158). This image of the photograph stripping away the ghostly layers of the body, and with it, the soul, echoes the 'sympathetic magic' that Schlosser locates within the wax portrait: the uncanny power of the double to supplement, substitute and even deplete the essence of the original subject—pre-empting Benjamin's receding aura. In addition to echoing Oscar Wilde's doppelgänger story *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, Balzac's description also recalls colonial stories of assorted 'natives' fearing that the camera would steal the soul, a motif that Warner argues has been used in support of colonial depictions of the Other as primitive, but which may be more revealing of the exercise of power taking place in photographic representations of the colonised, and is suggestive of Western anxieties about the uncanny quality of the ostensibly objective photographic image in the nineteenth century. Lindsay Smith states that from its first emergence, photography was associated with a kind of magic, and Alison Chapman comments on nineteenth century apprehensions about the 'umbilical' bond that the photographic image exerts on its referent (Chapman 2003; Smith 1998). The esoteric qualities of the photographic process—the transubstantiation of rays of light into a material, two-dimensional image—also lent itself to attempts to capture phenomena invisible to the human eye, as in the practice of supernatural and psychic photography by spiritualists as well as scientists such as William Crookes (Warner 2006). Here, the apparently disparate modes of spiritualism and science intersect in their contribution to an aesthetics of wonder, echoing the convergence of religious, scientific and aesthetic modes in eighteenth century waxes; as Smith comments, "…the invention of photography blurs fundamental distinctions between the nineteenth-century philosophical positions of empiricism and transcendentalism" (Smith 1999, 4). However, parallel to these attempts to capture the image of intangible phenomena, photography was also employed to

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[52] Daguerre's earliest photograph was taken in 1839 (Sontag 2002).

document the structure and symptoms of the human body with an exactitude that trounced contemporary pathologies in wax. Echoing the classicising anatomical waxes of the Bologna school, Ewing notes that scientific photographs of the human body from the nineteenth century are not designed to be artistic, however, certain motifs in the images such as folded drapery and luxurious furnishings mimic the conventions of painting (Ewing 1995).

James Robinson's 1874 photograph *Man with Shoulder Amputation* (Fig. 5.11) uses a standard mid-nineteenth century device of a mirror to produce a second image of the injury from another perspective (Burns 1998). The ornate, oval mirror attached to a vertical stand behind the man's shoulder quotes a motif that permeates the history of painting as a reference to God's omniscience, the vanity of human affairs, the doubling effect of mimesis, the virtuosic skill of the painter and, later, the preoccupation with fragmented subjectivities and self-reflexivity that characterises modernism and postmodernism (Johnson and Smith 1993; Martz 1991; Warner 2006). The doubled image of the unnamed man's amputation within the scrolling frame of the mirror is intended to inspire awe in the surgeon's skill and the wondrous, baffling effect of science upon the body; as Stanley B. Burns states in commentary, "Survival was rare enough to be a reportable event" (Stanley 1998, n. 34). The sublime mystery of the body documented in this image is laced with a similar "double desire to kill death and to imitate death at the same time" (Didi-Huberman 2005, 227) to that which Didi-Huberman describes in reference to Christian art. This image reports a triumph over death but is infused with motifs of absence—the nameless man recently bereaved of an arm, the shoulder stump documented in the phantasmic body of the photograph and doubled in the equally disembodied space of the mirror image. The photograph is thus an impermeable and immortal double (a double doubling, thanks to the mirror) of the body testifying to the defeat of death, and at the same time a covertly melancholic reminder of the omnipresence of death, the absence of a living subject in the photographic and mirrored doubles. The image's survival as a historical document merely reinforces its deathly overtones, as the man who survived the amputation is now, of course, long dead, and his body reduced to dust. The photograph's antiquated features—its graininess, the man's greased hair parting, and, dominating these details, the ornate mirror—imbues it with the melancholic nostalgia that characterises a relic of the lost past, while the double amputation of the phantasmic body of the patient (doubly visible, doubly disembodied) invests it with an uncanniness related to bodily fragmentation and a proximity to death. Covertly aesthetic devices within the image, including the mirror displaying virtuosic surgical skill and the diagonal
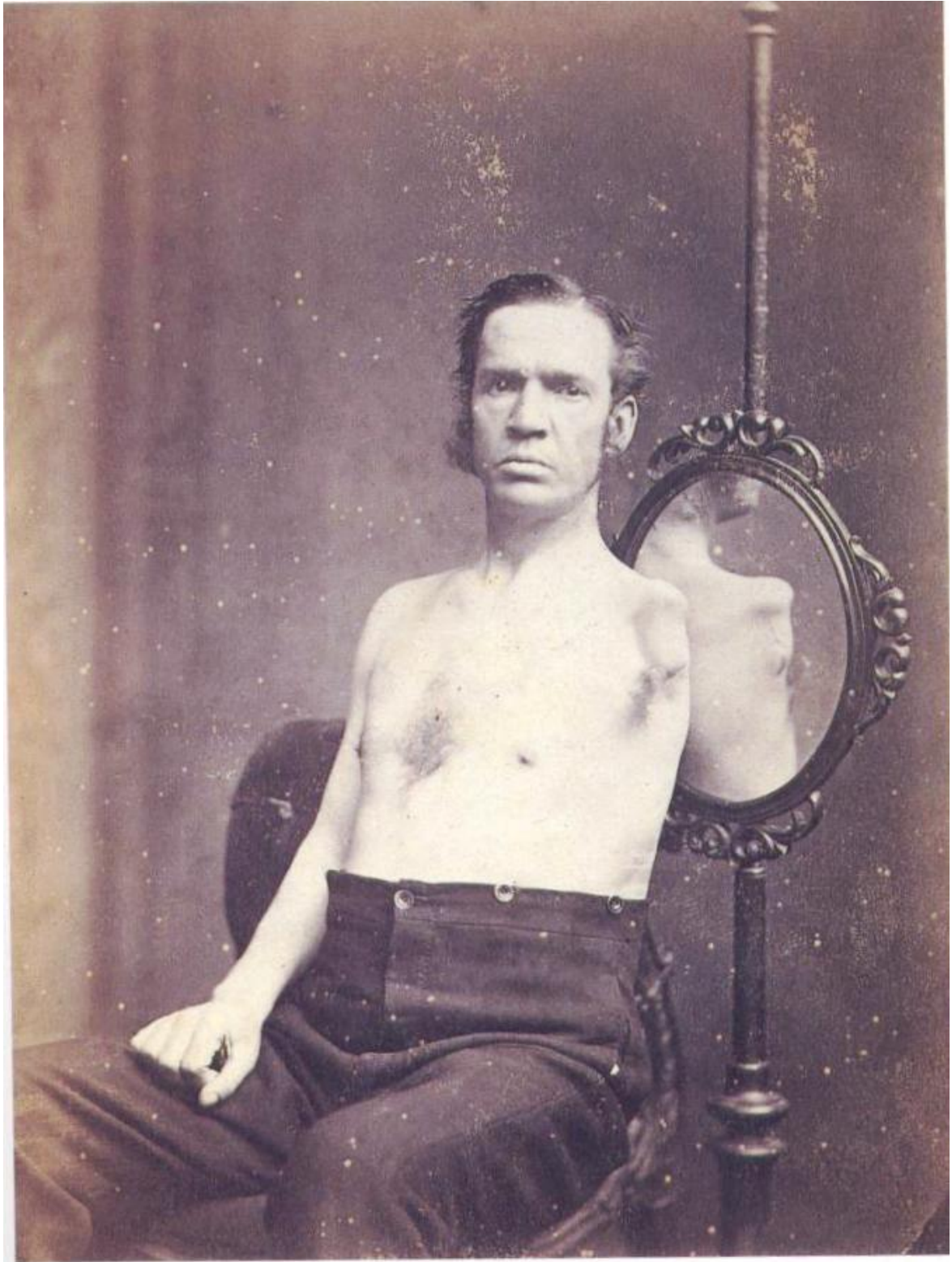
Fig. 5.11 James Robinson, *Man with Shoulder Amputation*, 1874. Albumen print (Burns 1998, Plate 34)

composition that travels from bottom left to top right, attest to slippages between art and science in support of a voyeuristic and uncanny experience of wonder.

Wax and photography possess similar histories of exclusion from the fine art canon due to their popular and utilitarian applications in rites of sentiment as well as medical practice. In the nineteenth century, photography was at the centre of a debate regarding its status as a medium—whether it should be categorised as an art or a technology (Wells 2004). While photography was eventually redeemed as a high art form, colour photography took longer to be accepted, echoing the reception of polychrome wax in its uncomfortable, almost pornographic overabundance of realism (Sontag 2002). Damaging to both wax and photography's qualification for the canon has been their association with feminine craft, both having been practices accessible to women due to the materials' popular origins, something that has provided further justification for their lowly cultural status. However, the distinction between work produced by male and female wax artisans does not appear to have been as pronounced as the gendering of masculine and feminine modes of photography in the nineteenth century—perhaps because wax artists drew upon a long artisanal tradition, and the practice was always marginal to the canon and was already a moribund form by the end of the eighteenth century.

One of the most influential artists and scientists of the Bologna tradition of wax anatomy was a woman; Anna Morandi Manzolini enjoyed international scientific prestige fostered by the unique cultural environment of eighteenth century Bologna, surpassing her husband Giovanni Manzolini in success, and being formally awarded the title Chair of Anatomical Modelling at the University of Bologna in 1758. Rebecca Messbarger notes that the Manzolinis were unlike other wax anatomical artists of the period in that they sought naturalistic and unadorned representations of the dissected body instead of attempting to imbue it with classical notions of beauty. She adds that Morandi's works also exist outside of the *memento mori* mode of many artists of the time, "serv[ing] to evoke not fear and pathos but scientific wonder" (Messbarger 2001, 80). Despite Morandi's widespread recognition as a scientist and sculptor, the significance of her work was downplayed until quite recently, and most historians describe her as the assistant of her husband (Messbarger 2001). During Tussaud's lifetime, there were several wax museums fronted by a female proprietor—Patience Wright and Mrs. Salmon were direct competitors of Tussaud when she worked in London, all working women artists capitalising on wax's uncanny appeal (Warner 2006). Marjan Sterckx also comments that female sculptors have

long been associated with softer sculptural materials which are considered secondary to the masculine canon.

> These practices, the sculpting of stone and wood, versus the modeling of clay and wax, are respectively associated with the features hard, public, monumental versus soft, private, intimate. In turn they were and sometimes are still, demarcated along gender lines: being commonly associated with the masculine and the feminine (Batchelor and Kaplan 2007 88).

However, as Ann B. Shteir notes, despite the professional successes of some female artists, in the nineteenth century the domestic art of wax flower modeling was deemed to be an acceptable activity for ladies of leisure within the emphatically demarcated confines of the private realm. She states, "Wax flower modelling is a narrative of malleability, with women perhaps more as objects than as agents. ... Discourses of elegance and gentility in the books that promoted wax flower modelling for women differ markedly from the robust tone of business acumen manifested in the careers of eighteenth-century waxwork managers" (Shteir 2007, 659).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, photography was also viewed as an appropriate past time for the nimble hands of women, alongside other sentimental domestic crafts like hair work, embroidery and flower wreaths (Smith 1998; Warner 2006). Olalquiaga comments that even the heroic nineteenth century preoccupation with natural history was debased by the touch of a woman, "downgraded to a superfluous triviality—"the naturalism of the boudoir"" (Olalquiaga 2002, 281). Despite the contribution women made to fieldwork, collecting and publishing on natural history, the Victorian domestic interior was the one arena in which they could freely apply their findings, leading to homes which resembled museums in their categorisation and display of the dead relics of the past (Olalquiaga 2002). Nineteenth century women's photography was similarly situated around the home and is often overtly domestic in content. Nineteenth century attitudes towards the practice of photography by women are revealing of a gendering of the discipline, based on distinctions between light and dark, in which the masculine illuminates the shadowy recesses of the feminine and the unreasoned; between sharp and soft focus, in which the geometric perspective and clarity of focus of the masculine photographic gaze is contrasted with the soft, and by implication, unskilled, gaze of female photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron; and between professionalism and amateurism, in which the domestic settings in the work of women photographers pale in contrast to the heady and serious subjects beyond the confines of home (Chapman 2003). However, as Smith argues, while women's photographic work was marginalised, it was itself disruptive of normative

Fig. 5.12 Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel at the Tomb*, 1869-70 (Warner 2006, 204)

hierarchies in which the domestic, and with it, the feminine were relegated to the peripheries, instead presenting a world with women and children at its centre, and affording "women a space from which to explore important psychic and social questions" (Smith 1998, 36-37). Cameron's work is dominated by mournful photographic portraits of women and children which Warner describes as emblematic of photography's connection with "memory, record, retrospection, and mourning" (Warner 2006, 209).

The traditional exclusion of wax and photography from the canon attests to their marginal status as art forms, while intersecting aesthetic survivals supply the materials with uncanny resonances of death, absence, mourning and remembrance that focus on the body (or its double) as a relic of the vanished past. These overlapping associations in both materials facilitate an encounter with the historical realm that is rooted in an uncanny experience of the body permeated by voyeuristic pleasures and desires; an engagement with grotesque history. This engagement is particularly heightened by the incursion of the female body and the feminine as a site of the grotesque, either as an 'unearthing' of marginal experience or as an uncanny object of representation that induces grotesque crises in the viewer. For these reasons, the nineteenth century photographic, waxen and performative depictions of hysterics as directed by Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot and collected in the "*living pathological museum*" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 281) of the Salpêtriére asylum can be read as embodiments of grotesque history that both observe and exceed the boundaries of the fine art and scientific canons. Furthermore, the notion of hysteria as explored by Charcot, Joseph Breuer, Freud, the surrealists and numerous scholars since the 1970s—polymorphous, unreliable, seductive, haunted and haunting—is grotesque in both form and content, possessing a particular relationship to the lost realm of the past, which returns symptomatically as an invasive force played out in the body of the hysteric, leading Breuer and Freud to assert that "*hysterics suffer for the most part from reminiscences*" (Breuer and Freud 2004, 11). The hysteric experiences the recursion of the past as a foreign body, which renders the body itself alien, doubled. This model of hysteria, in which the body is possessed by a phantasmic repetition (or reinvention) of the traumatic past, renders the illness and its symptoms an iteration and embodiment of grotesque historiography. A particular notion of the 'feminine' pervades depictions of hysteria, a grotesque femininity that eludes definition, commands desire, and transfixes through uncanny and abject performance. This grotesque feminine contaminates the hysterical body and its witnesses, making its restaging of history unreliable. Consequently, while the institutional internment, surveillance and representation of hysterics constitutes a history of subjection, the performance of the hysterical body also works to confound and undermine the

authority of the scientific, aesthetic and historiographic devices through which it is depicted. The materials used to represent hysterical bodies visually, namely wax and photography, are invested with the institutional authority of science but also possess affective qualities that seep into the experience of these depictions: the seductive and uncanny doubling of the body through materials that elicit a confrontation with the deathly realm of the vanished past, and which intrudes on the present in a grotesque return: as doppelgänger.

Charcot's work at the Salpêtriére in the outskirts of Paris, already a centuries-old hospice and asylum for women, commenced in 1862 and over the coming decades engineered the display of hysteria and hysterics in museological, iconographic and performative modes which attested to the authority of science while lingering upon the spectacle of a sublimely unknowable disease that was most visibly played out in the female body. According to Didi-Huberman, "Charcot rediscovered hysteria" (Didi-Huberman 2003, xi)—with Charcot, the ancient definition of hysteria as the symptom of a 'wandering womb'[53] was revived and updated in accordance with positivist notions of illness, but was nevertheless conceived of as a feminine disease (even in men), or more accurately, a disorder of the feminine (Didi-Huberman 2003; Foucault 2006). By observing, cataloguing and dissecting the women of the Salpêtriére, Charcot introduced empirical order to the bedlam of the asylum, however, the phantasmagorical spectre of hysteria and the apparently inexhaustible repertoire of symptoms displayed by the hysterics under his custodianship eluded such categorisation, eroding the physician's resistance to the allure of his symptomatic patients and the pleasurable exercise of medical power. Indeed, parallel to the performance of hysteria by Charcot's patients runs his own performance of clinical mastery in what Didi-Huberman describes as the aesthetic style of "the medicine of the *Belle Epoque*" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 18). This style was iterated in several forms: in the museological collecting of specimens that included wax pathologies, cadavers and the living bodies of the

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[53] Hysteria is an ancient concept that addresses abnormal symptoms and behaviours, traditionally locating the origin of the disease in the female reproductive system. Ancient Egyptian and Greek scholars, including Plato, considered hysteria to be caused by the displacement and ambulation of the uterus throughout the upper body of women. This anatomical model of hysteria continued to have influence throughout subsequent periods of Western medicine, blending with supernatural and psychological theories of the ailment. The uterine model of hysteria also led to the linking of the disease to sexual activity in women, whether due to an excess or deficiency, frequently adding a moralistic element to the interpretation of the condition. Mark S. Micale notes that while seventeenth and eighteenth century models of hysteria moved away from a genital notion of the disease towards a neurological model, also considering the incidence of hysteria in men, nineteenth and early twentieth century theories actually reinstated hysteria's earlier connection with sexuality. He states, "It should be noted that Freudian psychology in a real sense represents a second resexualization of the hysteria diagnosis; however, this time the sexual appears in the guise of an integrated *psycho*sexuality rather than genital anatomy or reproductive biology" (Micale 1995, 28)

patients themselves—Charcot himself stated that the Salpêtriére was itself a "*living pathological museum*" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 281)—curated within the vast collection of the asylum; the display and performance of hysteria by (often hypnotised) patients at Charcot's weekly lectures at the clinic as well as private salons in his home; and the commissioning and complication of exhaustive photographic catalogues of hysterical bodies, the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, that are presented as objective depictions of the disease while covertly corresponding to artistic, theatrical and pornographic modes.
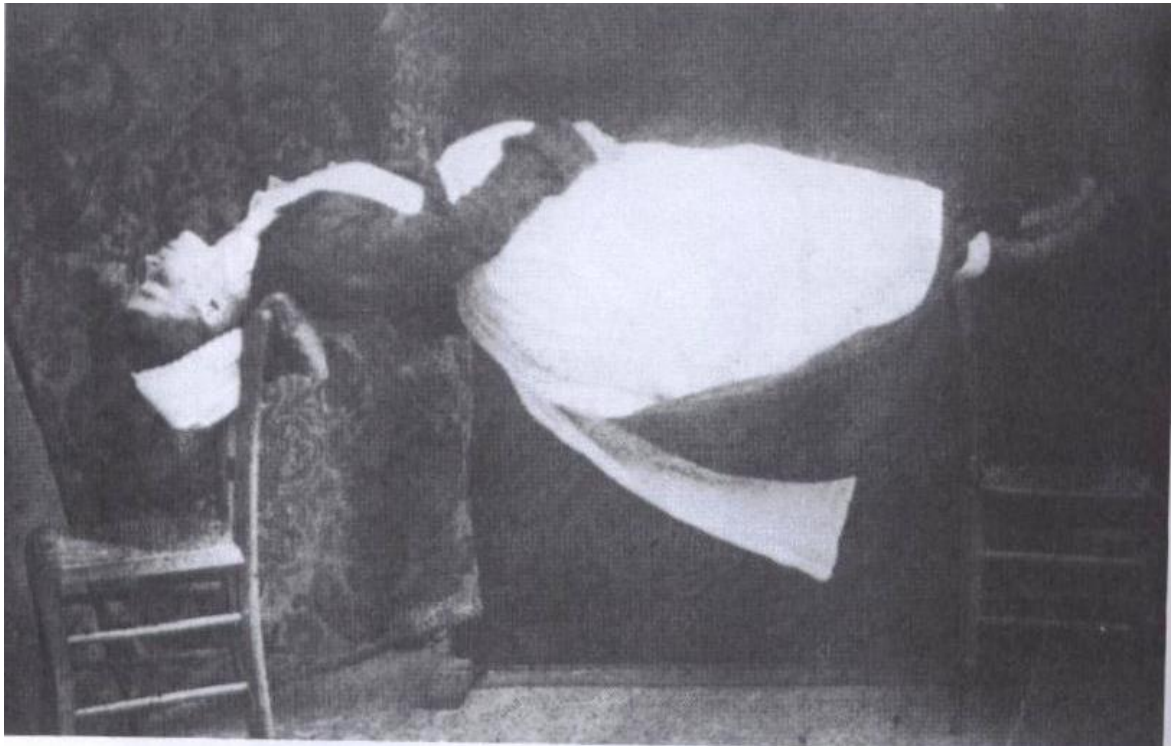
Fig. 5.13 Paul Régnard, *Lethargie: Muscular Hyperexcitability* (Augustine) 1877-1880 (Didi-Huberman 2003, 194)

The *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* is an exhaustive visual record and categorisation of the stages of the hysterical 'attack' as postulated by Charcot. The women in the photographs appear in narrative sequences, in various degrees of dress, documenting the progression of hysterical symptoms that Didi-Huberman describes as "Spasms, convulsions, blackouts, semblances of epilepsy, catalepsies, ecstasies, comas, lethargies, deliria: a thousand forms within a few moments" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 115). He explains that Charcot's great

innovation was to project an ordered system upon the hydra of apparently disparate, random and excessive symptoms, naming distinct phases:

> the *epileptoid* phase, mimicking or "reproducing" a standard epileptic fit; *clownism*, the phase of contortions and so-called illogical movements; "*plastic poses*" or "*attitudes passionnelles*"; finally *delirium*, so-called terminal delirium, the painful phase during which hysterics "start talking," during which one tries to stop the attack, by every possible means (Didi-Huberman 2003, 115)

Charcot's conversion of these phases into photographic images exploits, and is transfixed by, the dramatic and visual potential of the hysterical 'attack', rendered particularly picturesque through its performance by female subjects. In these images, hysteria is enacted as a display of monstrous femininity, bodies possessed by a boundless and alien force which is both terrifying and seductive in its supernatural overtones and transgression of nineteenth century codes of acceptable feminine behaviour[54], while upholding notions (and fantasies) of the feminine as a realm of unreason, animalism and potentially unbridled sexuality. The grotesque performance of female bodies possessed by hysteria in these images is encoded with erotic motifs derived from artistic and pornographic modes. 'Augustine's' phases of attack take place amidst folds of drapery revealing glimpses of flesh, and her unloosened hair and rapturous facial expressions allude to the sexual-spiritual ecstasies of saints in baroque art. The photographic serialisation of the attack, which leads to progressive undress, increasingly 'lustful' *attitudes* and a heightening of drama mimics pornographic conventions that belie the images' presentation as disinterested documentation. While the urge to record and exhibit the possessed bodies of the hysterics can be interpreted as a convergence of medical desires which, as Mary Hunter notes, emerge from wonder, sexuality and power, the performance of hysteria by the subjects themselves may reveal a similar interplay of desire commingled with the power to command and confound the medical gaze[55]. Consequently, the images that emerge in the *Iconographie* are the result of a fascinated and fearful interplay of desire and repulsion between men of medical authority and the female inmates under their care (Did-Huberman 2003; Hunter 2008).

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[54] Therese Lichtenstein comments that "Women who did not conform to the conventional roles assigned in patriarchal culture—namely, wife and mother—were pathologized" (Lichtenstein 2001, 109).
[55] A notion supported by the fact that each photograph required an extended period of time for the exposure to succeed—meaning that the hysteric would have had to have held her 'spontaneous' pose for up to twenty minutes in some instances (Didi-Huberman 2003).

Fig. 5.14 Paul Régnard, *Attitudes Passionnelles: Extase* (Augustine) 1878 (Didi-Huberman 2003, 147)

In the images of the *Iconographie*, there is a tone of discovery that conveys an impression of 'history in the making' which promotes a grotesque experience of wonder through the novelty of the photographs and their compilation within a collection that conveys museological authority. Such compilations of case studies or pathologies both proclaim the new while offering works for posterity, or as Hunter states, such objects are "trophies of medical conquests" (Hunter 2008, 49). She is referring to the wax pathologies or *moulages* that flourished during the nineteenth century—rather than artfully modelled wax anatomies, such objects were created from direct casts of diseased body parts and, like Tussaud's waxes, derive their authority from the supposed authenticity that results from the touch of the symptomatic body, despite a process of artistic mediation that involved decisions about colouring the wax, inserting hair and reworking lesions to make them visibly 'legible'. Like ex-votos, most *moulages* feature fragmented body parts, but unlike the largely anonymous artisanal origins of devotional waxes, many nineteenth century medical waxes are accompanied by the name of the physician and the signature of the *mouleur*, investing the objects with medical as well as artistic authority in an uncommonly blatant alliance between the two modes. Hunter comments upon the disproportionally large volume of *moulages* representing the diseased sexual physiology of women as well as realistic painted depictions of female patients in the collection of Dr. Jules Émile Péan, a contemporary of Charcot, arguing that the amassing of such objects not only attests to the authority of medical knowledge, but their encoding with notions of realism, veracity and immediacy also "point[s] to a desire for the real" (Hunter 2008, 45) that weakens such claims to power. She also argues that,

> By examining the representation of women *in* wax and *as* wax, it is evident that the medium was considered a perfect material for the rendering of female bodies in medical contexts: bodies that fluctuated between the real and the ideal, sickness and health, education and entertainment, sentience and unconsciousness, beauty and horror (Hunter 2008, 43).

The grotesque resonances of the material, subtly undermining the solemn medical authority with which the waxes were presented, also point to a grotesque notion of femininity that is polymorphous, fleshy, morbid and seductive: hysterical, but also waxen (Hunter 2008).

While nineteenth century medical documentation of hysteria was largely photographic and illustrative, a small number of casts of hysterical bodies exist, most notably the full body waxen cast of 'Berthelot' of the Salpêtriére, a three dimensional copy of a body that is also doubled in a
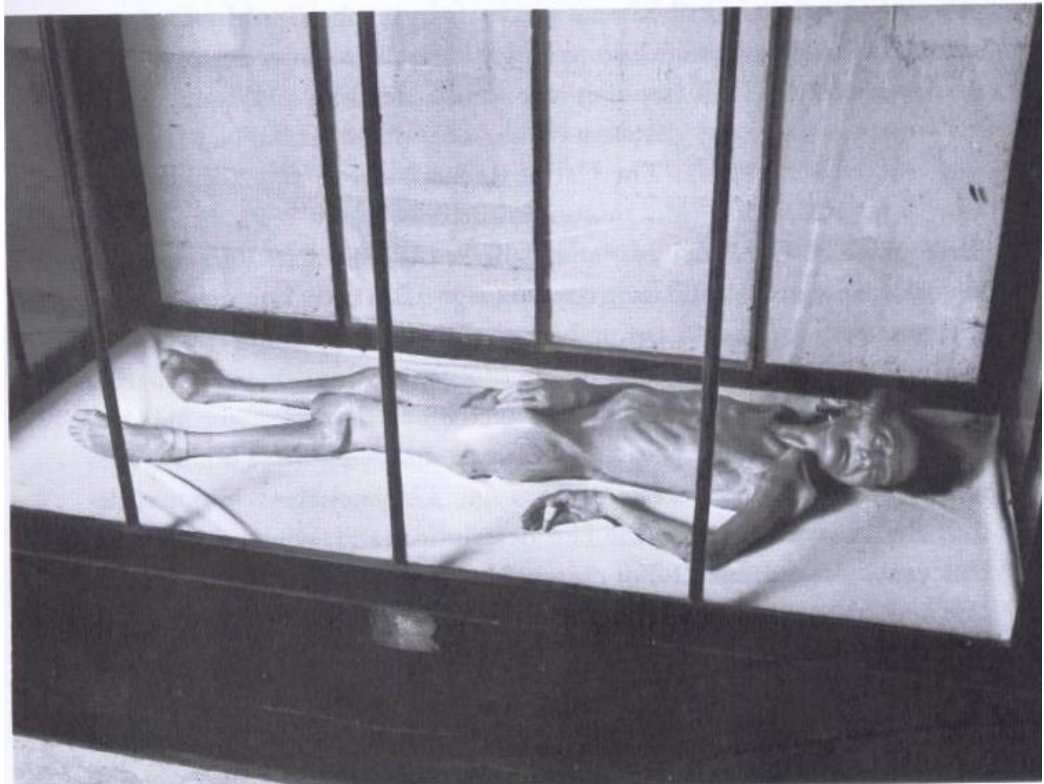
Fig. 5.15 (Top) Photograph of 'Berthelot', from Charcot's clinical dossiers
Fig. 5.16 (Bottom) Wax cast of the same patient (Didi-Huberman, 2003, 31)

photograph directed by Charcot (Fig. 5.15 and 5.16). Frozen in moments now long gone, Berthelot's body displays advanced decrepitude; skeletal, misshapen, she is the antithesis of the medical Venus as imagined by Susini and nineteenth century painters such as Gabriel von Max and Henri Gervex. Her body does not squirm in the seductive throes of hysterical possession as in the photographs of the *Iconographie*, indeed, in the photograph she appears as a cruel inversion of the classical salon nude, and in the wax object the cadaverous overtones of her body exceed even the usual deathly resonances of the material. The stark nakedness of Berthelot's frail body in both examples is one source of their queasy attraction, emphasised by the careful replication of pubic hair in the wax copy and the occasional scrap of fabric—her meagre bandages and crone's nightcap contrast with the sumptuous fabric of the couch and the crisp sheet that her waxen body rests upon, reminiscent of a hospital bed. While the photograph reads as a parody of the classical nude, the wax evokes the saintly effigy of the church, but stripped of its ecclesiastical finery and displaying an earthly suffering that has not been relieved by the passage into the hereafter. Indeed, this body does not promote sentimental notions of death and the afterlife—as an immutable copy of a body long since lost to organic decay, the wax Berthelot is an eerie reminder of the omnipresence of death and the vulnerability of the body. Close to one hundred and fifty years after these objects were produced, as historical artefacts the photograph and wax present a body marked by difference and destined for the grave, a grotesque inversion of the feminine ideal constructed and paraded as a relic of medical authority, and a depiction of a hysterical body that attempts to present a desexualised subject which is nevertheless encoded with aesthetic notions of nudity and the fleshy corporeality of a body rendered passive through immobility. As Hunter argues, the excessive realism of the photographic and waxen doubles of Berthelot conformed to a specific "…style of death, deformity, and illness. Unlike the idealized bodies of marble and plaster Venuses that lured viewers by their beauty, this wax woman enticed them by her disfigured hips and bony skeleton" (Hunter 2008, 53).

The twice doubled body of Berthelot the hysteric can also be viewed in relation to several entwined themes throughout the history of wax, photography and medical discourse. Berthelot's somnolent, or perhaps dead body in wax seems to participate in a vast lexicon of depictions of the female body in an uncanny, yet seductive state somewhere between life and death. The topic of wax sculpture has been the subject of numerous comparisons to the Pygmalion myth, in which the desire that an artist, who is disgusted by everyday women, feels for his cold and

inanimate sculpture enables the metamorphosis of the hard material to a conductive waxen state which is subsequently transformed into warm flesh.

> She seemed warm: he laid his lips on her again, and touched her breast with his hands—at this touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft: his fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface, *just as wax of Hymettus melts in the sun and, worked by men's fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes, and is made fit for use by being used* (Bloom 2003, 44)[56].

Ovid's reference to wax in a fantasy of feminine passivity finds its literal embodiment in the anatomical Venuses of artists such as Susini, apocryphal stories of pornographic waxes, and the 'Sleeping Beauty' at Madame Tussaud's museum that was modelled by Curtius, supposedly based on Louis XV's mistress Madame Du Barry, and which featured a clockwork mechanism that made her bosom heave as she 'slept'. Some scholars have speculated that this Sleeping Beauty with a hollow chest may have originally been presented as an anatomical Venus, and this intertwining of death, desire and the female body is particularly suggestive of wax sculpture's troubling necrophiliac quality (Warner 2006). Elisabeth Bronfen's discussion of the persistence of erotic and sentimental images of dead women throughout the history of Western art is particularly relevant when considering such objects. She argues that death and the feminine are conflated because of their supreme otherness within Western culture, in which "the feminine gendering of the corpse serves as a strategy for veiling death" (Bronfen 1992, 88).

The interplay of desire and the uncanny serves to fascinate and repel in such depictions, which Bronfen argues are 'symptoms' of Western culture's traditional inability to assimilate knowledge of death, a denial which is nevertheless made evident through the depiction of deathly states that are melancholic and erotic, and in which the feminine becomes the cipher for such anxious fantasies. She relates the profusion of depictions of dead women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the emergence of mesmerism and spiritualism in which "…the hypnotised, often feminine medium, in its corpse-like state, could gain access to the realm of the dead and enter into a dialogue with the deceased" (Bronfen 1992, 4). The female hysteric, herself often hypnotised, resembled the medium in her uncanny trance state which Bronfen argues emerges from the traumatic, and repressed, recognition of the subject's mortality (Bronfen 1998). The seductive photographs of the hysterics of the Salpêtriére resemble the spirit photography of the time; indeed, they present simultaneously sublime and uncanny images of subjects physically present while psychically absent, which persist as melancholic mementos of

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[56] Italics in original.

bodies now long dead. Thus, the twin bodies of Berthelot exist at the intersection of several themes: the entwined grotesque histories of wax and photography, with their troubling interplay of death and desire; the repeated depiction of grotesque femininity as an object of desire and repulsion within medical discourse; and recursions of the grotesque doppelgänger haunting modernity as its uncanny 'other'.

The psychoanalytic notion of hysteria that emerged out of Freud's formative internship at the Salpêtriére under Charcot is also significant in its presentation of a possible model of grotesque historiography. In Breuer and Freud's work of 1895, *Studies in Hysteria*, they propose a model of the illness that situates traumatic memory at its root. In this theory the traumatic memories of the hysteric generally stem from sexual abuse during childhood, however, Freud later revised this hypothesis in favour of a psychic crisis resulting from unassimilated, and therefore traumatic, sexual fantasies on the part of the patient, which re-emerge in the form of wildly divergent psychic and physical symptoms. The authors' preliminary statement may be read in relation to both theories: "the psychical trauma, or more precisely, the memory of it, operates like a foreign body which must still be regarded as a present and effective agent long after it has penetrated" (Breuer and Freud 2004, 10), in which traumatic knowledge lurks within the patient as an alien force, veiled and revealed by hysterical symptoms that signal the harrowing return of memories rendered unreliable by the influence of fantasy. This image of the unknowable past repossessing the present in a horrific return, or the symptomatic survival of something that was meant to remain dead and buried, tainted by uncanny desire, is particularly useful when considering the qualities of grotesque historiography.

Frida Gorbach has already proposed hysteria as a model of history that can challenge the dominance of empirical modes just as hysteria has troubled medical authority. She states that both empirical history and medical discourse have sought to promote the objectivity of their fields while marginalising subjectivity and uncertainty, however, the disciplines have traditionally been concerned with mapping anomalies and otherness, revealing a "fascination with limits" (Gorbach 2007, 95) which recalls Hunter's examination of medical desire (Hunter 2008). Arguing that both medical and historical discourse seeks to repress ambiguity, contradiction and desire, Gorbach presents hysteria as a 'symptom' of history;

> As a symptom, hysteria would come to be the expression of something obscure,
> indecipherable, something we believed to have been forgotten once and for all.
> The truth it expresses does not depend on signification but restores to the scene

all that had to be excluded so that the science of history would be possible (Gorbach 2007, 96).

For Gorbach, hysterical history provides a model in which it is possible to address "ambivalences and paradoxes" (Gorbach 2007, 97) in retellings of the past, especially in regards to traumatic historical narratives that feature crises of identity in postcolonial contexts. Gorbach's notion of hysterical history can be assimilated into the historiographic grotesque, which emphasises the uneasy interplay of desire and the uncanny, as well as the unreliability of representation, in engagements with the past.

Recursions and Returns

Hysteria's grotesque returns have been a subject of fascination for many artists, notably the Surrealists in the first half of the twentieth century, with André Breton and Paul Eluard claiming in 1928 that "Hysteria is not a pathological phenomenon and can in all regards be considered as a supreme means of expression" (Lichtenstein 2001, 117), as well as "the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 148). The Surrealists, entranced by photographs of the adolescent Augustine in the throes of her *attitudes passionnelles* fifty years on, found an uncanny eroticism in the imagery of the Salpêtriére that appeared to present a poetic challenge to empirical modes. Amongst their numbers was Hans Bellmer, who worked in Germany during the Nazi rule of the 1930s, and whose serial photographs of life sized dolls with fragmented body parts transmit many of wax and photography's uncanny survivals through the presentation of melancholic, nostalgic and hysterical bodies. In this series, Bellmer stages numerous photographs in which a doll composed of hybridised body parts, displaying childish features in conjunction with voluptuous eroticism, appears in scenes that allude to seduction, violation and death. The doll frequently appears as an assemblage of legs, abdomens and female genitalia; its parts are connected by prominent ball joints that enhance its already globular form; fragments of clothing such as Mary Jane pumps, white socks, ribbons and a dress in disarray at the ankles contribute to narratives of disrobement and fetishism. The settings of these photographs are reminiscent of nineteenth century women's photography in that they take place in and around the domestic environment, but these scenes are claustrophobic and threatening, taking place in the confined space of stairwells and doorways, or lurking expectantly in threatening woodland. The multi-limbed and often headless female body that Bellmer compulsively poses and rearranges in these menacing, yet sexually charged scenes displays symptoms of extreme dislocation and fragmentation, sometimes engaged in a mute internal struggle that is constructed in erotic terms. His photographs are reminiscent of Charcot's

Fig. 5.17 Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée* (*The Doll*), 1938. Black-and-white vintage gelatine silver print (Lichtenstein 2001, 88)
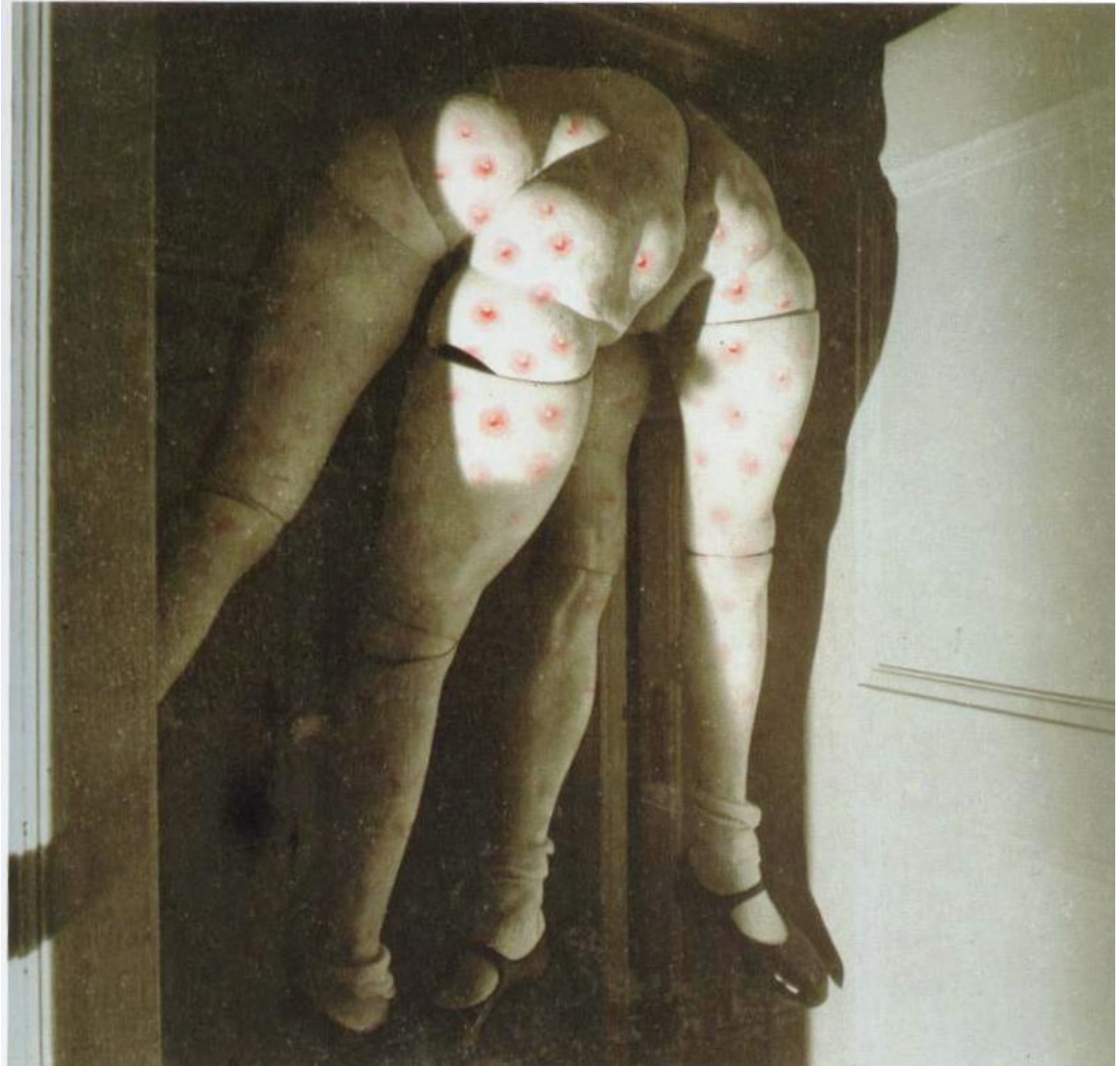
Fig. 5.18 Bellmer, *La Poupée* (*The Doll*), 1938. Hand-coloured vintage gelatin silver print (Lichtenstein 2001, 113)

collection of hysterical bodies in the *Iconographie*, bringing to the surface the voyeuristic and compulsive interference of the director / artist.

In this light, Bellmer's theatrical engagements with the doll's body may be interpreted as an imaginative revisiting and restaging of scenes from the Salpêtriére fifty years on. The doll's contorted poses and lascivious victimhood, combined with the impression of confinement and the voyeuristic gaze of the photographer, make explicit the dialectic of seduction and subjugation that pervades the *Iconographie*. Furthermore, the physical crisis that afflicts the doll in each image evokes the alien force that possesses the hysterical body in trauma; conflicting forces of repression and desire are converted into physical symptoms of fragmentation, reproduction and abandonment. One image in particular makes plain that such metamorphoses are signs of a symptomatic physiology: in a hand-coloured print of 1938, the doll hangs limply from a door frame, twin pairs of legs and buttocks pocked by syphilitic sores (Fig. 5.18). The artist situates a kind of ecstatic pain in his doll-victim, who is composed only of sexual characteristics that are repeatedly doubled and mirrored in visions of uncanny eroticism. Such motifs of doubling are heightened by Bellmer's decision to present the sculpture in photographic form; the body-double, which resembles a set of conjoined twins, is again doubled in the object of the photograph, which is also multiplied in serial form across images that present infinite variations on a theme. Such gestures towards multiplicity reflect the endless parade of hysterical symptoms as well as the uncanny resonances of the wax effigy, translated into the new flesh of the doll sculpture, and the photograph, which records the fragmentary moments in which Bellmer compulsively interacts with the doll's body, repeatedly, in instants that are lost forever[57] (Lichtenstein 2001).

Therese Lichtenstein (2001) argues that Bellmer's mutant doll was designed as a grotesque inversion of Nazi aesthetics and notions of normative sexuality. The doll's ever-unfinished, ever-becoming body, displaying symptoms of decay and regeneration, works against the neoclassical, predominantly male body idealised by the Third Reich. Its lumpy curves, decadent femininity, transgressive sexuality and warped forms are the antithesis of the upright musculature and understated eroticism of the masculine Aryan ideal. This opposition resembles the challenge that Rabelais' depiction of the boundless medieval body presented to the contained humanistic body, as Bellmer's use of the grotesque is a tactical assault on classical aesthetics.

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[57] Lichtenstein suggests that the doll may also be read as a double of Bellmer's body, a hermaphroditic doppelgänger upon which he projects hysterical fantasies.

Lichtenstein also notes that several images of the doll convey a melancholic, masochistic yearning for the lost realm of the past, rejecting the angular modernity and intolerable constraints of the Third Reich. Victorian fabrics and signifiers of childhood allow the artist to reconstruct an erotic and anxious vision of the past that is dominated by motifs of ruin and decay. Bellmer's incomplete mourning for a mythologised past which is simultaneously debased and idealised in the doll-theatre conveys ambivalence towards the legacy of history and hope for the future. Parallel and contrary to the Nazis' yearning for a mythical golden age, according to Lichtenstein, Bellmer's "nostalgia functions as a double process of mourning: acknowledging the past as ultimately irretrievable and mourning the loss of the desire to desire the past" (Lichtenstein 2001, 148). Thus, Bellmer utilises the grotesque as a device through which an anxious and incomplete engagement with the past can take place, in which the uncanny character of the lost realm, as dead matter, is negotiated through ambivalent eroticism, and the hysterical body is exploited as a counterpoint to the classical body of a nostalgic golden age. Moreover, the body effigy of the doll evokes wax survivals to convey ambiguities between live and dead, real and fake, consent and assault, while the medium of photography attests to the transitory and irretrievable nature of each lived moment, transformed into ruins. Lichtenstein comments, "By incorporating both the qualities of life and death (the uncanny) in his doll's body, Bellmer produces a temporary (fetishistic) warding off of the inevitable (death)" (Lichtenstein 2001, 45). Bellmer's doll photographs present a grotesque meditation on the body's passage from life into death, as well as the irretrievability of the past which nevertheless haunts the present in a hysterical return.

Similarly, the contemporary artist Berlinde De Bruyckere uses the fragmented body to explore grotesque aesthetics and to interrogate art historical modes. She uses wax to create bodies that are at once hyperrealistic and impossibly contrived; they are composed of absences, often lacking heads, appear to have been deprived of innards and bones, and are more cadaverous, more tragic than any medical wax. They are marked by the touch of real bodies; De Bruyckere makes casts of body parts which she then reworks and combines in assemblages that connote the presence of a real body while presenting incontrovertible evidence of its absence—the waxen bodies on display clearly lack the physical characteristics of life, resembling flaccid laboratory specimens that are displayed with the gravity of museum pieces. In the *Schmerzensmann*[58] series, De Bruyckere derives the title from a Renaissance work by Lucas Cranach the Elder depicting the tormented Christ, and has conceived the five suffering bodies of the series as anti-
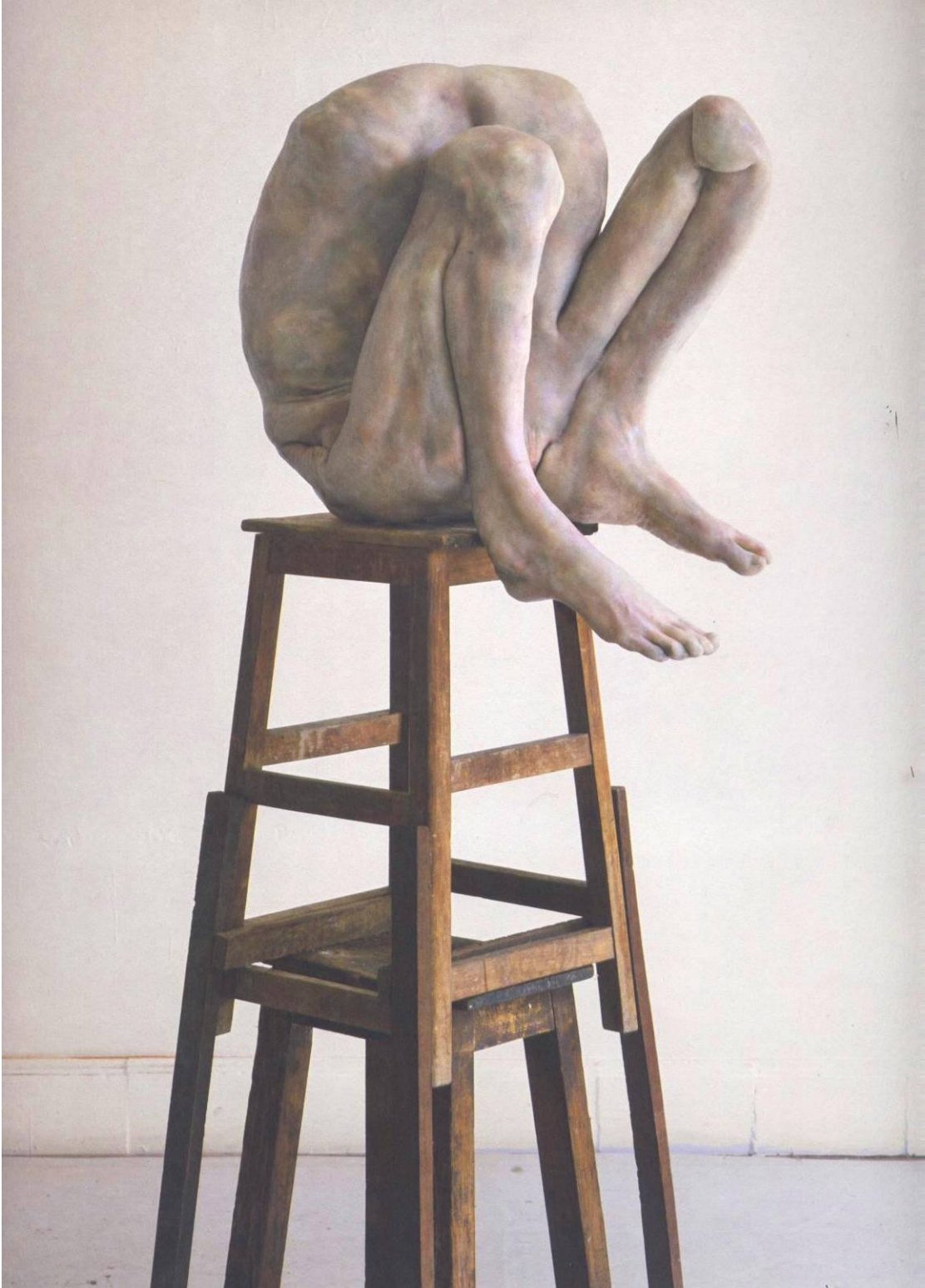
[58] 'Man of sorrows' in German (De Bruyckere 2006)

Fig. 5.19 Berlinde de Bruckyere, *J. L.* 2005 – 2006. Wax, expoxy, wood, metal (De Bruckyere 2006, Plate 7)
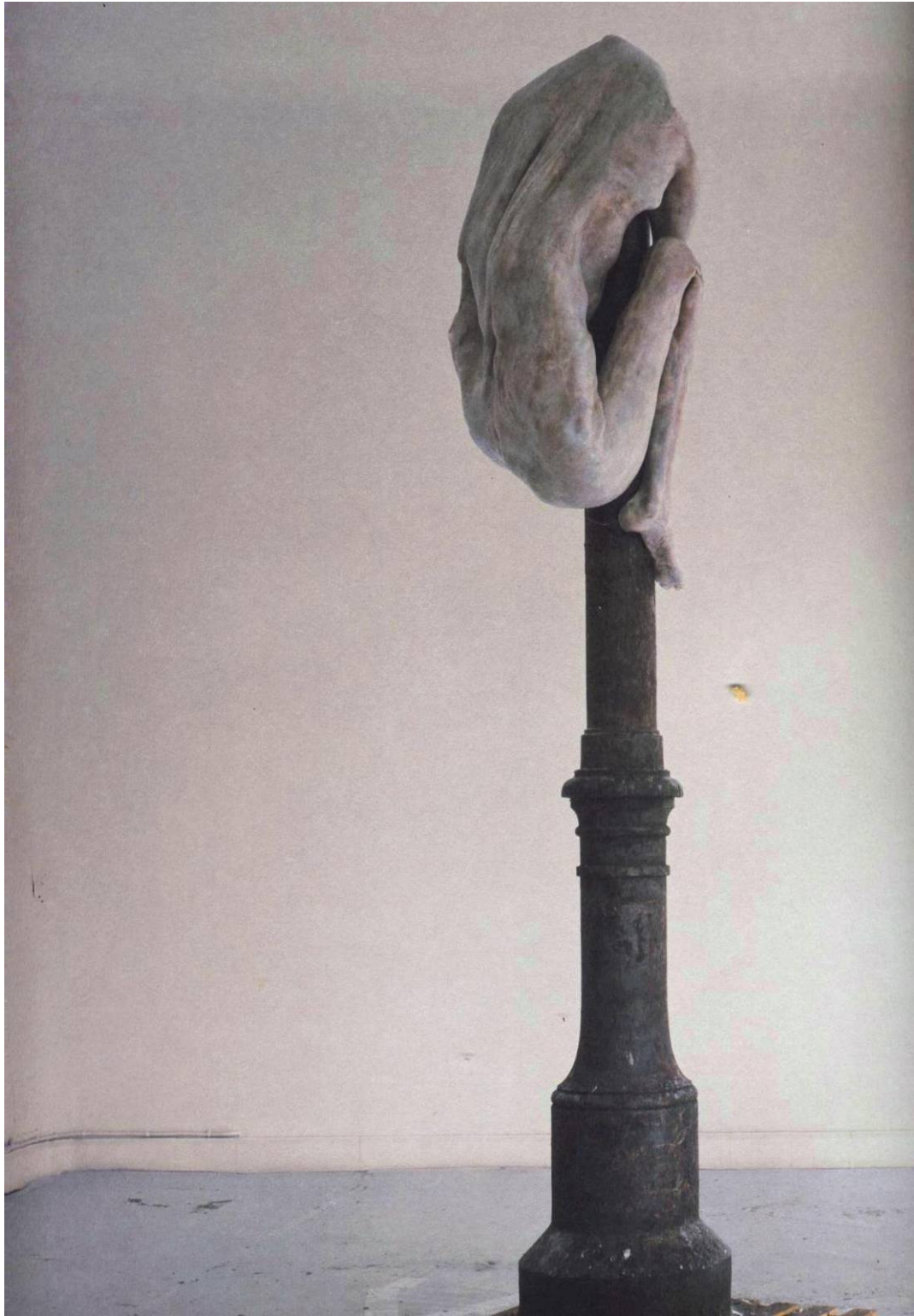
Fig. 5.20 De Bruyckere, *Schmerzensmann IV*, 2006. Epoxy, wax, iron (De Bruckyere 2006, Plate 34, detail)

monuments which she contrasts with heroic civic sculptures such as Nelson's Column (Fig. 5.20). Each of these apparently spineless bodies is propped up by a second-hand architectural column, the purpose which is nothing like the proud pillars that convey heroic figures such as Nelson to the heavens, instead displaying a "naked, vulnerable and anonymous man who is fixed to a post, with no story" (De Bruyckere 2006, 5). De Bruyckere critiques the symbols of monumental history through the debased material of wax, with its gummy, fleshy substitute for the rigid materials of heroic sculpture—bronze and marble—and the inglorious, recycled materials of an architectural ruin. She summons a vision of the past which is anonymous, amnesiac and festering, and which fixates upon history's deleterious impact on the body of the subject, which is presented as the grotesque 'other' of the heroic body of monumental history. The uncanny affect of De Bruyckere's waxes is considerable; they transmit all of wax's survivals to inspire horror and pity in the viewer, who is confronted by an object that conveys the disquieting presence of a corpse. This waxen residue appears to be the substance of a history of atrocity, a monument to a mute, traumatic past that trespasses on the present, unsummoned (De Bruyckere 2006).

Michaël Borremans works in drawing, painting and film, but like De Bruyckere, he appropriates motifs from historical modes, particularly early twentieth century photography, to produce a hallucinatory and amnesiac vision of the past. By translating, restaging and evoking the motifs of historical photography in other media, Borremans exploits the nostalgic aura of such images while depriving them of their original context. He presents an atmosphere in which the historical realm is summoned as a ghostly fragment, and concealed through unlikely juxtapositions and the obvious erasure of defining characteristics. In *The Swimming Pool* (Fig. 5.21), a billboard sized image captivates the patrons of an indoor swimming pool—the bathers' appearance implies that this is the 1950s. On the billboard, a hand paints "people must be punished" in red capital letters upon a young man's chest. Recalling mid-twentieth century medical footage[59], this image alludes to outmoded and potentially brutal treatments of the body. The written message brands the man's chest with a retrospective determination of guilt that appears to be aimed at the bathers, although their disaffected stances imply that they regard this statement with detachment—they are bystanders. Faded notes hover at the upper margins of the image alongside rough diagrams mapping the architecture of the pool complex (van Duyn 2008).

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[59] In developing this work, Borremans may have used mid-twentieth century medical footage as source material—the BBC series *James May's Twentieth Century* (2007) shows a very similar scene in the episode 'Body Fantastic', in which a doctor paints points on the chest of a young male patient to illustrate the placement of the heart.
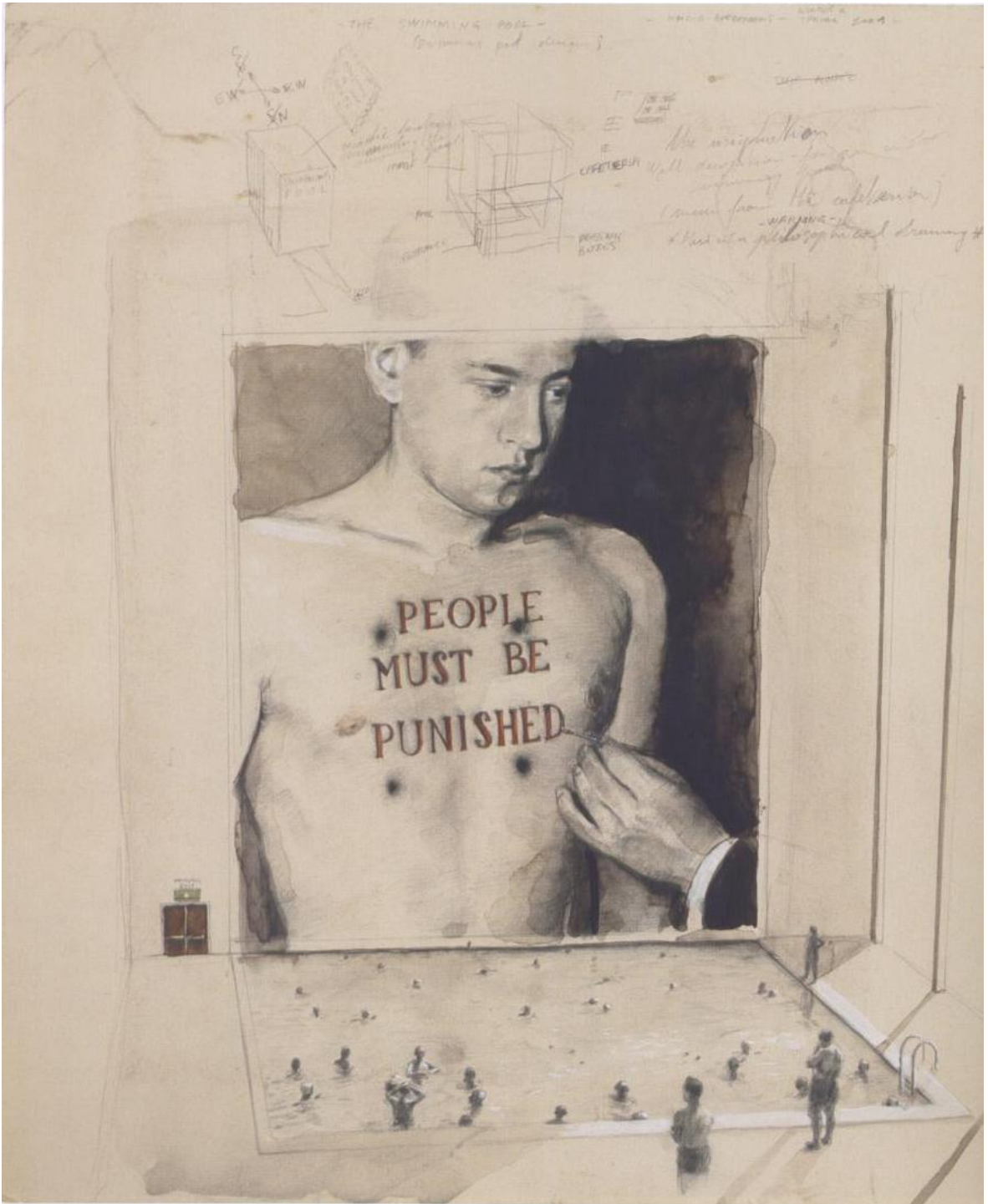
Fig. 5.21 Michaël Borremans, *The Swimming Pool*, 2001. Pencil and watercolour on cardboard (van Duyn 2008, 18

The heavy-toned inset image with its ominous slogan dominates the composition and invests the architectural elements with an underlying menace that seems to be directed at the unwary bathers. In this drawing, Borremans exploits the nostalgic aura of mid-twentieth century photography to inform a surreal and sinister evocation of the post-war period, in which history invades the present as a miasmic force, dream-like and inscrutable. Philippe-Alain Michaud comments upon Borremans' appropriation of archival images, "The personages with their obsolete clothes and hairstyles…are reflections of bodies that have existed and of which they have become the ghosts, bogged down in the pigment of the painting" (van Duyn 2008, 47). In Borremans' images, the uncanny and nostalgic resonance of photography is duplicated in other media, evoking the historical field but rendering it even less accessible, rendered incomprehensible by too many translations, a site of yearning and concealed horror (van Duyn 2008).

The *Portraits* series by Hiroshi Sugimoto combines the ghostly qualities of wax and photography in a further complication of the dialectic of real and fake, original and double, presence and absence that plagues both materials. This series presents a collection of photographic portraits of famous figures including Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn (Fig. 5.22), Yasser Arafat and Princess Diana, the images taken from waxen effigies in popular history museums such as Madame Tussaud's. These crisp images in inky black and white present a triumph over wax's characteristic resistance to photography—the distinction between wax and living skin is further eroded in the *Portraits*. Panzanelli comments,

> The photographer has "resuscitated, séance-style, the waxen corpses," consigning the effigies to the ultimate paradox: the mimetic ambiguity of the material is finally resolved in the timeless space of the camera, where movement is necessarily imperceptible and thus theoretically possible (Panzanelli 2008, 3).

In Sugimoto's *Portraits*, the sculpted copy is doubled again in the photographic image. This creates an unsettling heightening of the wax figure's naturalism which merely emphasises the absence of the object and the historical figure which it refers to. These images parody commemorative portraiture by presenting a portrait of a portrait which, in the case of the Tudor waxes, may itself have been based on earlier portraits, creating a chain of replication and reinvention that invests the wax object with the authority of the photograph, despite the unreliability of all of these modes in recalling the actual presence of the historical referent.

Fig. 5.22 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Anne Boleyn*, 1999. Gelatin silver print (Panzanelli 2008, 7)

Sugimoto's amalgamation of the grotesque resonances of wax and photography mocks the fantasy of an authentic encounter with the lost realm of the past by presenting hyperrealistic depictions that are completely devoid of presence and yet offer the illusion of historical experience. In this sense, Sugimoto's *Portraits* can be read as an analogy of historical discourse: a process of representation which conveys the illusion of authentic experience, despite its fundamental unreliability. In the *Portraits*, Sugimoto exploits the uncanny affect of wax and photography to convey scepticism about the possibility of reconnecting with the past[60] (Panzanelli 2008; Sugimoto n.d.).

The marginal materiality of the historiographic grotesque works to trouble the boundaries of the art historical canon, while offering the affective grounds for a consideration of history that is facilitated by the materials' contradictory qualities of realism and unreliability, lifelikeness and deathliness, original and double, and presence and absence, leading to an encounter with history which is at once arresting and troubling. In these encounters, wax and photography transmit the aesthetic survival of the death mask and the post-mortem photograph, conveying what Didi-Huberman describes as "the shock of *anachronism*" (Panzanelli 2008, 161) to the contemporary viewer. This shock is one of horror and pleasure, forming the basis of an unsteady flirtation with the lost realm of the past which is transitory and incomplete, rooted in loss. Parallel to the materiality of the historiographic grotesque run notions of doubling and hysteria which are useful for considering speculative iterations of historical discourse that exist outside of objectivist modes. Material explorations of grotesque historiography invested with hysterical forms and concepts provide critiques of objectivist history while suggesting alternative ways of engaging with the past.

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[60] Other contemporary artists that have explored links between wax and history include Matthew Barney, who in *Cremaster 2*, posits a speculative genealogy in which serial killer Gary Gilmore is the descendant of Harry Houdini, and in which bees and their waxy excretions operate as an uncanny historical force. According to Nancy Spector, the bees "metaphorically describe the emancipatory potential of moving backwards in order to escape one's destiny" (Spector 2004, 36). Juan Antonio Ramírez (2000) has written about the metaphor of the beehive throughout history, and particularly in modernism, demonstrating the cultural significance of bees and their products in relation to notions of healing, order, perfection, spiritual destiny and in the case of wax and honey, more unsettling associations related to the body, fear and desire. Artist Yinka Shonibare has utilised the cultural descendent of the wax effigy, the mannequin, and batik printing processes that traditionally incorporate wax, to critique histories of empire and colonialism through carnivalised *tableaux*.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Praxis—*Revelations: contemporary visions of apocalypse*

In proposing the category of the historiographic grotesque, this thesis has outlined several characteristics of the mode and a number of its applications. I have presented a definition of the term, considered its significance for works that address the emergence of modernity, identified its presence in examples of critical and speculative historiography, and analysed slippages between themes and materials through the examples of wax and photography. It has not been possible to provide a comprehensive survey of grotesque engagements with the past—in this research I have only touched on the potential of the field. I would have liked to have examined grotesque notions of time and obsolescence in the work of the Marquis de Sade; to interrogate the nostalgic fetishism of Bellmer in juxtaposition to the work of Lewis Carroll, Vladimir Nabokov and the outsider artist Morton Bartlett; to investigate the grotesque 'relic' exemplified by mourning art and the embalmed corpse as public memorial; and to have examined in depth the appropriation of museological modes of display by contemporary artists in critique of objectivist historiography—but this was not possible within the scope of the current investigation. By focussing on the grotesque as a means to represent historical rupture, marginal experience and notions of transience in both the theoretical and creative components of this thesis, I have supported the existence of the historiographic grotesque and identified some of its critical applications. In addition to these investigations, in 2009 I examined apocalypse as a grotesque historical sensibility through an exhibition that I curated for Fremantle Arts Centre entitled *Revelations: contemporary visions of apocalypse*. I wish to present this exhibition as a case study that operates as theory-in-practice in relation to the historiographic grotesque. In discussing the exhibition in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I am signalling the potential for alternative applications of the historiographic grotesque, in this context, within curatorial practice. The artworks presented in the exhibition support many of the contentions of the thesis, while viewer responses to the exhibition underscore the ambivalent affect of the grotesque.

Revelations featured the work of six Western Australian artists who engage apocalyptic themes as a means to consider the legacy of history as well as its implications for the future: Tori Benz, Ryan Nazzari, Pia Bennet in collaboration with Joshua Fitzpatrick, and Travis Kelleher in collaboration with Andrew Nicholls. In this exhibition, these artists presented ambitiously scaled, multi-component works that investigate themes of collision, disruption and dislocation

inherent to the apocalyptic mode. The contradictory nature of apocalypse as a source of horror as well as a site of utopian desire is played out in the artists' works, in which the sublime and the grotesque intermingle. Across the works, the theme is interpreted in various ways, but the paradoxical nature of apocalypse as an ancient tradition that envisages the (imminent) end of time provides the stimulus for a range of grotesque engagements with the notion of historical rupture. The artists engage with these concepts by examining marginal subjectivities, including those related to the body and sexuality; by depicting the ennui of the present moment suspended in time, yet cluttered with the ruins of the past and anxieties about the future; and by employing media that transmit grotesque resonances related to the materiality of the body and the boundaries of classical aesthetics. Additionally, the artists utilise nostalgic, melancholic and carnivalesque motifs to envisage apocalyptic time (the ever-unfolding end) as a problematic pregnant with cultural meaning. Accordingly, this exhibition functions a compilation of speculative historiography that exploits grotesque devices to interrogate the cultural mode of apocalypse.

Apocalypse is an enduring theme that has permeated Western culture, amongst others, for millennia and is repeatedly redefined in new contexts. While the end of the world as we know it is traditionally figured in religious terms, and in a contemporary context global catastrophe is increasingly seen in scientific terms, apocalypse continues to be a rich and varied theme in the popular imagination. Historically, painting has been an especially pervasive mode for the representation of apocalypse, and the artists selected for *Revelations* all have a relationship to painting, whether as their preferred mode of practice or as a source of reference for works in other media. Rather than dislodge the intertwined modalities of painting and apocalypse, the works in *Revelations* explore their interrelatedness and use this as a tactic to interrogate the vast lexicon of symbols and styles that constitute the visual vocabulary of apocalypse. While painting and apocalypse share a privileged place within the canon of art history (Jan Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece or *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* focuses on one of the central themes in the Apocalypse of John, the sacrificial lamb who presides over the souls of the saved after the final judgement) the artists in this exhibition are particularly interested in the marginal narratives, the mad hallucinations and the apocryphal stories of the damned that cluster outside of the canon. Their visions are closer to the vernacular space of popular culture in which apocalypse is a favoured theme, from the rhetoric of warring politicians, Hollywood blockbusters, and the fevered blogs of would-be prophets, to the phantasmagoric, psychosexual worlds of outsider artists such as Henry Darger. In this context, apocalypse is more of a sensibility than a concept,

an apprehension of annihilation which permeates the fragile membrane of daily life and leaks into the unwary mind.

A secular notion of apocalypse, and one closely related to the present study, may be found in decline and decadence as theories of historical process. Nevill Morely (2005) argues that while historians traditionally resist the use of the term 'decadence' when discussing historical 'decline' because of its artistic and literary associations, the two concepts are in fact closely related, and the privileging of one term over the other can be attributed to aesthetic and ideological bias. Historians of decline often attempt to situate the progressions and descents of culture within an organic cycle of rise and fall, but resist speculating on the 'meaning' of such a system. Morely states that arguments for historical decline—of the Roman Empire, for example—are frequently legitimated by the use of quantitative data such as economic records and population statistics, however, he maintains that such microcosmic devices fail to conclusively explain the "general social malaise" (Morely 2005, 576) of a society in decline. While historians of decline seek to justify the concept scientifically, proponents of decadence examine the aesthetic and philosophical characteristics of the rupture between the lost past and the present. Morely states that both approaches locate the historical moment (often the present) within a broader temporal field in which an earlier golden age serves as the standard from which the moment has declined. He notes that nostalgia is an essential characteristic of both tendencies; even earlier periods of decadence are held up as ideal examples of cultures in decline. Thus, while history is destined to repeat itself, with every cycle the ideal is diluted. And, most relevantly, both theories convey uncertainty with regards to the 'end' stage of decline. Morely states, "decadence implies a trajectory and standing as an intermediate stage between the lost ideal and—utter darkness, the triumph of barbarism, a new order?" (Morely 2005, 578). The apocalyptic implications of both decadence and decline form the root of their historicism. It presents historical process as the journey from an ahistorical golden age, to a period of rupture in which the connection to tradition is corrupted, and then to the end of historical time, figured in apocalyptic terms—exemplified by Rome burning[61].

The decline and fall of ancient Rome has frequently been narrated in terms of its 'decadence'. The erotic, aesthetic and economic excesses of the Empire have been presented as the cause of its extinction and the origins of Europe's descent into the barbarism of the Dark Ages. There is a

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[61] As Harpham notes, the exhumation of Rome during the Renaissance gave rise to modern notions of the grotesque (2006).

deeply moralistic sentiment in the construction of decadence as a theory of history. It posits disproportionate wealth, aesthetic sophistry and sensory excess as the unnatural bloating of a civilisation beyond healthy limits. It is the disease of an overly secularised civilisation, a sickness caused by a surplus of culture and a broken connection to the sacred world of myth and religion. This description certainly bears some resemblance to contemporary life in the economically bruised West, although many would argue that in the post-September 11 environment religion is of an importance not seen in some time, and that the ambivalent values of postmodernism are no longer applicable. John, writing his Biblical revelations in exile on the island of Patmos almost a century after the death of Christ, depicts his own world in decadent terms: he rails against the seven churches grown rank with religious wavering and equates Rome with Babylon, drunk on sin. He predicts the holy catastrophe that will unseat the rule of Babylon and cleanse humanity of its iniquities; Rome will fall as punishment for its excesses (Hall 2009). In the context of modernity, the collapse of the Roman Empire was frequently invoked as an analogy for the 'decadence' of nineteenth century France. In the creative works of the time, the notion of decadence was linked to an experience of historical rupture in which the past is encountered melancholically as ruins, and the future is regarded, ambivalently, as a further stage of cultural decline. Chapter Three discusses the suffering sensualist of *A Rebours*, suspended between fantasies of the lost past and the disastrously unfolding present; in Patrick McGuiness' words, "caught between a desire for cultural preservation and a drive for apocalypse" (Huysmans 2003, xxxv). Such a sensibility can be observed in all of the works in *Revelations*, which express deep ambivalence regarding the legacy of the past and the uncertainty of the future. Each artist uses the theme as a means to examine historical depictions of apocalypse as well as notions of ahistorical time. Accordingly, each artwork depicts apocalypse as the experience of historical rupture, whether on an epic or personal scale.

Viewer responses to *Revelations* were varied. Ric Spencer's review of 8 January 2010 in *The West Australian*'s "Today" section engages with the ambivalence of the theme, namely the utopian as well as catastrophic possibilities of apocalypse, and the persistence of the notion in contemporary culture. He hits upon historical notions of decadence and decline inherent to the apocalyptic mode, suggesting that cycles of birth, death and transition are at play on a cultural as well as psychological level. Spencer also identifies the exhibition's grotesque methodology, "The show is immediately foreboding in monotones and dark over-painting but lighter in what sneaks through the dark atmosphere; namely humour, play and biting cynicism" (Spencer 2010, 7). Guest book entries provide an indication of the exhibition's affect on individual viewers.

Many comments respond positively to the works' seductive as well as sinister qualities: "Very moving and all works imbue me with the sense of the artists foreboding feeling of the apocalyptic. Awesome"; ""Nicely" captures the essence of Apocalypse. Foreboding and hit me nicely". Other comments express unease about this conjunction of contradictions: "Very weid Yuck!" (sic); "This is SO disgusting! ew!" The discomfort that the works inspired in many viewers is contrasted with the responses that identify them as paradoxically beautiful or moving. This deviation in viewer responses to *Revelations* is revealing of the inherent ambivalence of the grotesque—its contradictory qualities, namely the commingling of the uncanny with pleasure or desire.

For *Revelations*, Bennett and Fitzpatrick produced an ambitiously scaled artwork with two components: *Lilith* and *Mountain.* In these works, the artists investigate apocalypse as an ahistorical, utopian vision that inevitably degenerates into historical decay and extinction. *Lilith* utilises floor space in the hall gallery and *Mountain* engages the wall space in the main gallery of Fremantle Arts Centre. The artists cover these expansive surfaces with distorted imagery that is evocative of cultural and environmental extinction. *Lilith* conveys post-apocalyptic space through the ruined grandeur of the flooring, and in *Mountain* a sense of unfolding apocalypse pervades a mythical landscape. In *Lilith* and *Mountain*, the grotesque and the sublime intermingle amidst motifs of excess, repetition and collision which characterise depictions of apocalypse.

Lilith is an intricately patterned, fifteen metre linoleum floor initially inspired by the faded grandeur of a ruined palace in postcolonial India. A threshold through which the viewer must pass to enter the exhibition, the floor is simultaneously luring and repulsive, with an expansive floral pattern gouged into its surface. A black, sweaty wax coats the petals of the blooms which erupt across the surface of the floor. The unity of the floral design is disrupted by matted clumps of human hair which accumulate around the contours of the pattern, evocative of decomposed remains. Gingerly treading across the floor, encountering its luxuriously abject textures, transmits an archeological sensation of discovery. This could be the site of some long-ago extinction, an Egyptian pyramid buried by the desert, Mayan ruins reclaimed by the jungle, the stone corpses of Pompeii—some civilisation that has been wiped out at the height of its prosperity and only remains as ruins—recalling Baudelaire's image of the ruined world. Flecks of gold trammeled into the surface of the floor signal the decadence to which this culture once succumbed. The juxtaposition of materials suggestive of abundance and decay, encountered

Fig. 6.1 Pia Bennet and Joshua Fitzpatrick, *Lilith* (detail), 2009. Silk cut linoleum, ink, hair, oil paint, wax (Costantino 2009, 11)

physically, by walking on them, makes for an unsettling experience; a fabricated ruin, *Lilith* exploits the deathly connotations of wax and hair to entice the viewer to recoil, and yet touch. *Lilith*, as the first work the viewer encounters as well as the most confronting in terms of materials, inspired the majority of guest book comments: "I found the lino engaging—was not sure I should be walking on it"; "Had overwhelming urge to sweep it up! Liked the roses though"; "The roses are awesome but the fur looks like some animal has been ripped to shreds…bluergh!" ; "Where we're going…we don't need…HAIR. Something DRASTIC happened here…"

Lilith's floral embellishments mimic the factory-produced patterns of Victorian England, an empire intoxicated by wealth born from industrial technology and colonial enterprise, yet near puritan in its official morality. Like the late nineteenth century Paris of Huysmans, many grappling with English modernity were besieged by feelings of crisis related to the sense of having irrevocably lost an ancient relationship to nature and myth through the advent of the industrial technologies which transformed daily life. The popular aesthetics of the time called for decorative works which were produced on an industrial scale; the intricately scrolling leaves and flowers of William Morris' Edenic designs are representative of the mournful Victorian fixation with a natural world that had been lost through the advent of modernity (Olalquiaga 2002). This post-apocalyptic sentiment permeates the nostalgic presentation of natural forms in *Lilith*. The citation of nineteenth century decoration in relationship to the dimensions of the corridor also references Fremantle Arts Centre's history as lunatic asylum from 1864 to 1910, intertwining the colonial histories embedded in the gallery, the ruined Indian palace and Victorian England in general. These relationships reinforce the link between the missionary impulse of Victorian Protestantism and dubious efforts to 'improve' the insane, the poor and the non-European; to save souls and earn a few spiritual brownie points before the final reckoning. Bennett and Fitzpatrick's depiction of modernity as ruin conveys a melancholic yearning for the past while alluding to the moral ambivalence of such idealisations—a reticence which arrests nostalgic reverie.

The title *Lilith* also refers to the apocryphal story of Adam's first wife, who was made from dust like him, unlike Eve, who was made from Adam's rib. As his equal, Lilith refused to submit to him, escaped ever-blooming Eden by saying the magical name of God, and subsequently became a demon. Marginal texts cluster outside of the Biblical canon, including the apocrypha (hidden books) extraneous to the canon and the pseudepigrapha (false writings) which are

excluded from it. Several of these texts are apocalypses. Bennett and Fitzpatrick draw upon this multitude of mythical origins and endings to hypothesise a notion of apocalypse which is ongoing and cyclical. They state, "This use of repetition foreshadows the possibility of multiple, circular or continuous apocalypses—collapsing the logic of temporal linearity and suggesting notions of collision and extinction" (Bennett and Fitzpatrick 2009, personal communication).

Fig. 6.2 Bennett and Fitzpatrick, *Mountain*, 2009. Oil on board (Costantino 20009, i)

Lilith's counterpart is *Mountain,* a six metre wide diptych featuring a geological formation which often figures in sacred texts as a point of union between the human and the divine. When standing on either end of *Lilith*'s rank surface it is possible to see *Mountain*. A herd of deer punctuates a landscape in which inky forms bleed into a portentous horizon. The deer, a European animal resonant with heroic narratives, seem to be in the thick of an environmental disaster. A Rorschach blot slits the sky immediately between the six animals, revealing that the image is constructed of mirrored parts. The repetition of the mirrored image is imperfect; the landscape stretches and distorts across the length of the two boards, until ending abruptly in a white void. The two boards are of unequal depth, the right hand board jutting out from the wall. Such unsettling asymmetry of an otherwise mirrored image contributes to a sensation of dislocation. Closer inspection of the painted surface reveals the pixilation of a low resolution digital image. This decayed, debased image has been appropriated from an unrevealed source,

blown up and re-rendered in meticulous detail, transformed into a site of unfolding disaster. This fragmented landscape is suggestive of the end and the beginning of time; apocalypse and genesis collapsed into a looping cycle of historical decay.

Also borrowing from religious narratives, Benz's *Apocalypse Studies* are a series of drawings which engage a notion of 'personal' apocalypse, an intimate space pregnant with insomniac imaginings. In each drawing Benz has applied delicate layers of graphite to a gesso board the colour and texture of bone, rubbing back into the image to build soft tones and shadows. The twelve panels form a story board narrative evocative of a graphic novel without words. In this series Benz draws on imagery from the biblical Apocalypse of John, also known as the Book of Revelation. Benz's narrative flirts with the utopian implications of apocalypse (the new order that it heralds) while swarming with more sinister imagery; locusts, ravenous dogs and prone bodies swim in and out of visibility, suggesting the unfolding chaos of apocalypse. The *Studies* narrate the apprehensive time of pre-apocalypse. A gathering swarm of locusts encroaches into the intimate space of a sleeping couple watched over by dogs. In the half light of the bedroom, the dogs waver between their wild and domesticated states, appearing protective or threatening at turns. As the couple rolls in and out of waking, their dreaming lives intrude into the shadowed room in which they lie. The woman's growing belly signals that the time is near.

The locust and dog motifs reflect Benz's interest in the history of humanity's relationship with animals and the symbolic meanings that we attach to them. The locusts are a direct reference to John's prophesised plagues in Revelation. Over the panels of *Apocalypse Study Locustidae No. 1-3*, the locusts appear to break through the fabric of daily life from some other realm. As a growing multitude, they pose an unknown threat to the gathered family unit in *Locustidae No. 1*, perhaps an omen of things to come. The panels which form *Apocalypse Study No. 1-9* may take place several years after the locust plague, or perhaps they exist within the same time; the waking inverse world to the dream space of the locusts. In the smeared shadows of the couple's bedroom, a pack of dogs lingers beside the prostrate bodies. Benz draws on a cultural history in which dogs have often been associated with the link between the world of the living and the dead. The Egyptian jackal-headed god of the underworld, Anubis, and the three-headed dog Cerberus, who guarded the threshold to the Greek underworld, are two examples of an almost global history of the association of dogs with the passage from life to death, in which they range from faithful guides for the dead to scavenging creatures which feast on carrion and even judge the souls of the deceased. Benz's dogs, unobserved by their human companions, shift within this

Fig. 6.3 Tori Benz, *Apocalypse study no. 7*, 2009. Graphite on gesso on marine ply (Costantino 2009, 3)

ambivalent state between domestication and wildness, occupying a grotesque slippage between companion and scavenger. These connotations are integral to Benz's personal symbology of apocalypse, reduced to human scale, where death and new life coexist, where extinction takes place within a cycle of renewal, and where the wide scale disaster prophesised by John is embedded within the utopian promise of a new world.

The infiltration of ancient texts and traditions within the dream-space of the contemporary couple is suggestive of a collapsed temporality in which the past leeches into the present through nightmares. This incursion of the uncanny past distorts the experience of the present without transforming it; it reveals the alien trace of the ancient within the conventions of the contemporary. Benz's depiction of the past as a haunting remnant that heralds the apocalyptic future infuses the present with ennui—suspended and apprehensive, the couple somehow exists outside of time. The woman's pregnant belly situates the images within a cycle of waiting; similarly, this experience of the body is one that is shown to be both of and marginal to normative chronology. As discussed in relation to Gallagher and Greenblatt in Chapter Four, the body can be read as a signifier of that which is extraneous to the historical canon—the experience and depiction of the body in certain contexts can run against the grain of the classicising project of monumental history. Benz's use of the pregnant body is both autobiographical and symbolic, operating as a marker of apocalyptic time. Her use of media alludes to the inside of the living, or the outside of the decomposed, body—layer upon layer of cream coloured gesso is suggestive of bone; hairline fractures punctuate the surface at points. Similarly, her insistence on the marginal medium of drawing[62] as a means to examine the monumental theme of apocalypse roots this narrative within the peripheral. Benz's evocation of bodily apocalypse is subversive of the patriarchal textual tradition, operating as an apocryphal account. While the female body (notably that of the Whore of Babylon) is often used as a symbol of moral decline in apocalyptic texts, Benz's depiction of the maternal female body as a site of apocalyptic time refers to the crossing of thresholds, particularly that of inside and outside, reflected in the bone-like texture of the gesso ground, as well as that of past, present and future, underscored by the incursion of the ancient past into the present in the shape of nightmares. Guest book comments indicate that viewers found this work less troubling that *Lilith* while responding to the weight of its sentiments: "powerful and riveting. Beautiful"; "Apocalypse Studies very evocative, heartfelt, it's lovely". The melancholic atmosphere that

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[62] Historically, drawing has been seen as inferior to painting, representing a necessary preliminary stage in the development of 'greater' works.

pervades Benz's work creates a nuanced experience of the grotesque; rather than confronting the viewer with visions of the abject, *Apocalypse Studies* focuses upon an ambivalent state of being out of time.

The image of apocalyptic time presented by Benz's series is echoed in Nazzari's five-part series *In the Wilderness of Now and Then*, which also focuses on the ambivalent space of personal apocalypse; he presents amorphous, tragic-comic creatures caught between a yearning for utopia and an attraction towards destruction. Their moist eyes and sausage-like mouths strain to contain a deeply troubling experience of fragmentation and disintegration; these obscene faces appear afflicted by contradictory feelings of rapture and torment. Nazzari's paintings may have inspired one visitor's comment: "Creepy shit". The characterization at play is explicitly grotesque, referencing the figure of the clown and using infantile ornamentation as ironic devices to produce an exaggerated impression of existential suffering. The internal apocalypse afflicting these creatures is revealed through ruptures in the surface of the image. Each painting, initially appearing roughly rendered, is in fact composed of several layers. The artist has concealed eyes, noses, mouths and patterned fields of stars and grids beneath a thick layer of black paint. These hidden details can be discerned as textures beneath the exterior layer, but they also tear through the painted surface. This relates to the ancient Greek etymology of the word 'apocalypse', which is 'to remove the veil'; the sudden ruptures in the black surface repeatedly tear away the veil that conceals the chaos of apocalypse. Nazzari's technique also gives rise to impressions of the subterranean, concealed and disguised—associations that accompany theories of the grotesque.

In Nazzari's series, apocalypse is presented as a psychological experience that unfolds in the present moment. The artist describes the work as,

> …an exploration of our constant wavering between belief and disbelief; hope and despair; nature and the supernatural, the series *In the Wilderness of Now and Then* reminds us of the subjectivity and mutability of experience … Paralysed by infinite possibility, we are comfortably oblivious and painfully aware. Hope leaves us fatigued, now and then (Nazzari 2009, personal communication).

In their paradoxical existence, this state between being and not-being, Nazzari's creatures convey the nihilistic horror of a universe without certainty. The intricate patterns which, when visible, adorn the surface of the paintings are merely the tip of a vast and unknown universe. The selective application of grids, stars and scales may be read as ornamental, a *grottesche* gesture
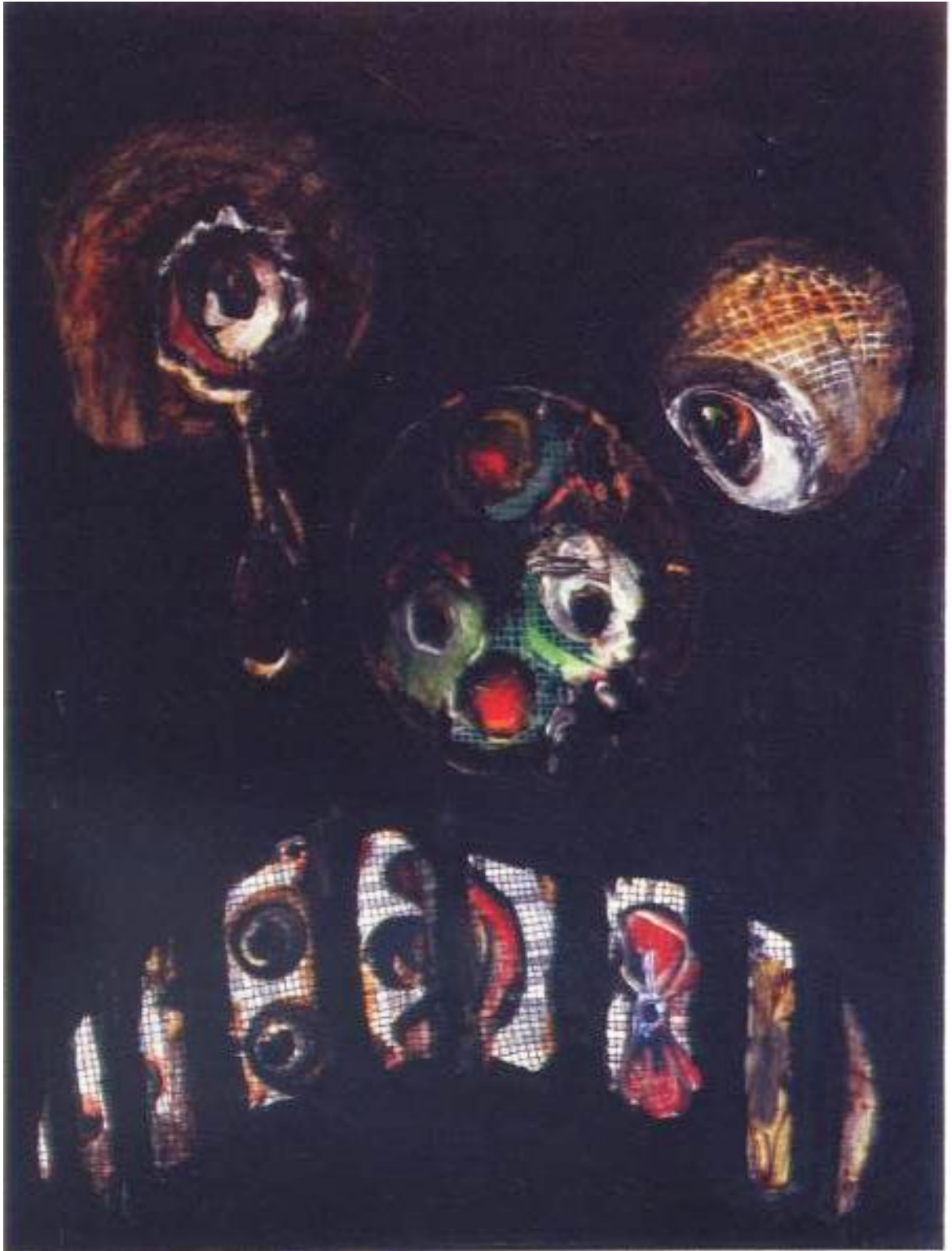
Fig. 6.4 Ryan Nazzari, *Untitled* from the series *In the Wilderness of Now and Then*, 2009. Oil on canvas (Costantino 2009, 4).

which fails to mediate a horrific reality. However, close examination of the paintings reveal that these patterns are in fact extensive; they lurk as an infinitely expanding universe hidden beneath a veil of black paint. These densely structured systems refer to things beyond the comprehension of the simple beings that populate the canvases: the unknown realities of time, space and the metaphysical realm. In contrast to the traditional use of pattern in Islamic art, which refers to the infinite complexity and underlying order of God's creation, Nazzari's use of pattern instead refers to the inherently disordered, unknowable systems which construct the world upon which human beings attempt to impose order. The apocalypse which Nazzari's characters attempt to assimilate with only partial success is the one which has always been there: the unrelenting wildness of an unknowable, unreasoned universe. The sense of time that the paintings convey is ahistorical; as in Benz's drawings, Nazzari's creatures are suspended in time, trapped between the ruined past and the catastrophic future. *The Wilderness of Now and Then* echoes Ankersmit's notion of the historical sublime, characterised by extreme dislocation in time resulting from a traumatic rupture that separates the subject from the past.

In Nicholls' series of drawings *Swarm* and the video work *Blood and Thunder,* in collaboration with Kelleher, the artists directly reference historical depictions of hell, Satan and the apocalypse in visual art, film and literature. *Swarm* is a throng of demons clustering around the threshold space of the gallery's fireplace. *Blood and Thunder* appears on a screen concealed within the fireplace itself, while the silhouette of a ruined cathedral glimmers golden on the opposite wall. This suite of works engages with the architecture of the gallery to mimic the high drama of a Gothic cathedral. Nicholls and Kelleher's citing of the Gothic creates a space which is both ecclesiastical and kitsch; they present a depiction of hell that is camp, visceral and homoerotic in nature, and which regards the highly charged notion of apocalypse with a humorous eye. Their appropriation of historical forms also provides the mechanism for a carnivalesque exploration of the male body characterised by fragmentation, hybridisation and semantic instability.

Swarm features a proliferation of creatures that borrow from historical diabolical imagery while parodying the ecclesiastical canon, reminiscent of the demons which torture the placid saint in Martin Schongauer's fifteenth century etching *The Temptation of St Anthony* and which populate the visions of Hieronymus Bosch. Nicholls' demons display the monstrous hybridisation of forms that can be observed in medieval marginal illustrations as well as notions of the Renaissance *grottesche*, peripheral to classical aesthetics, and also engage the more

Fig. 6.5 Andrew Nicholls, *Swarm (series of 83 drawings)* (detail) 2006-09. Archival ink pen on watercolour paper (Costantino 2009, 6).

contemporary understanding of the grotesque that involves an intermingling of desire and horror. A viewer described their response to this work as follows: "Nicholls—wierd, eery but intriguing" (sic). In *Swarm,* sexuality in particular is shown to be a site of the mutations and torments of the demonic. A sweet embrace between neoclassical youths spawns a sinewy, testicular tumour that lurks menacingly beside the couple (Fig. 6.5). A deformed assemblage of body parts copulates with itself. Monstrous phalluses form a distinctive motif of Nicholls' diablerie: a native orchid sprouts penises; a fanged, disembodied member snarls; prickled insects lurk in place of pin-up boys' genitalia. For Nicholls, such depictions are both complicit with and critical of religious orthodoxy. He states,

> I am interested in the ways that evil has been depicted historically (in particular, as aligned with overt sexuality), and how (according to the Catholic doctrine in which I was raised), as a homosexual, I am destined for hell - should the world end tomorrow, it seems pretty clear where I will end up. My engagement with this material is self-consciously camp. I explicitly align myself *with* these texts and their morality in order to draw attention to the politics of marginalisation with which they engage on an implicit level. To all intents and purposes therefore, my works are meant to promote a conservative relationship to Christian doctrine. They are religious artworks (Nicholls 2009, personal communication).

Whilst 'queering' religious narratives which threaten transgression with eternal punishment, Nicholls also invests the anti-canon of homoerotic imagery and pornography, perhaps even desire, with an apocalyptic sensibility. His focus on marginalised aspects of the body and sexuality are reflected in his choice of media as well as his subject matter: these intricate, ornamental drawings are executed in the lowly medium of ink marker pen. Similarly, his mode of illustration is antithetical to the humanist art historical canon. Derivative of popular Victorian tastes, or kitsch, Nicholls' approach is both subversive of the moralism of the Victorian children's book and resistant to the tradition that privileges 'high' art modes such as painting above marginal craft practices such as illustration. Consequently, *Swarm* utilises the grotesque as a tactic to critique the histories of religious doctrine and the fine art canon.

Nicholls and Kelleher's video *Blood and thunder: a romance* is a reinterpretation of Matthew Lewis' eighteenth century novel *The Monk*, a seminal work of Gothic literature in which the anxieties of enlightened Protestantism are projected onto a melodramatic backdrop of medieval

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Fig. 6.6 Travis Kelleher and Andrew Nicholls, *Blood and thunder: a romance* (still), 2009. Digital video (Costantino 2009, 12)

Catholic excess. In the artists' re-visioning, they work with the text's already overt themes of lust, cross-dressing, incest and spiritual damnation to produce a seductive vision of diabolical torment in which selling one's soul to the devil and going to hell doesn't seem so bad, after all. The young monk at the centre of the story is damned by his desire, and is forced to fight for, eventually losing, his soul to the devil. In this battle for the soul, writhing, flame-like bodies wrestle against a highly artificial cathedral setting until being swallowed by the smoking mouth of hell (which echoes a favourite fixture of medieval and early Renaissance mystery plays). The artists respond to a moralistic sensationalism in the text which condemns sexuality while

lingering upon it. They uncover the ambivalence of Lewis' text, working to undermine the overtly moralistic message of the novel by emphasising its frequent slippage into covert, yet celebratory, desire, in which the apocalyptic judgement of the soul is refigured in erotic terms. Like *Swarm*, *Blood and thunder* appropriates pre-existing forms to comment upon the historical marginalisation of homosexual desire and experience in religious and artistic contexts. Nicholls and Kelleher employ kitsch aesthetics and melodramatic direction to enable incursions of the grotesque, drawing attention to the desiring body that is repeatedly concealed or relegated to the peripheries in historical contexts.

The exhibition *Revelations: contemporary visions of apocalypse* provides a useful case study on which to conclude my investigation of the historiographic grotesque. It demonstrates the significance of the grotesque for considerations of history, pointing to the instability, unreliability and ambivalence that characterises the attempt to engage with the past. The works in the exhibition underscore the relevance of the grotesque in representations of historical rupture, indeed this rupture is depicted as an explicitly grotesque schism between past and present, frequently figured melancholically. This relates to the findings of Chapter Two, in which I examine the significance of loss to the emergence of modernity. The works also demonstrate that the marginal and the grotesque are thematically intertwined, using these motifs as a means of resisting or critiquing the monumental histories of art and religion, reflecting my exploration in Chapter Four of works that use the marginal and the grotesque as counter-historical strategies. Similarly, the presentation of grotesque motifs through media marginal to the art historical canon is used by the artists in *Revelations* to critique the classicising aesthetics of humanist art history, and in some of the works the use of marginal media also bears a relationship to the body that is suggestive of death, transience and the trace of the absent past. Both of these elements are explored in Chapter Five in relation to the media of wax and photography; the works in *Revelations* indicate that the breadth of material engagements with the historiographic grotesque is not limited to these examples.

The historiographic grotesque as outlined in this thesis offers a critical framework through which to examine, interpret and represent 'the past' in a broad range of iterations, from the traditional historical work to speculative modes such as visual art. The potential of the field is extensive, and as a tactic it offers the tools to examine history from aesthetic and philosophical perspectives, a strategy that I have developed in response to White's *Metahistory*. This study presents the historiographic grotesque as a means of reading and presenting the experience of

historical rupture, building on notions of the grotesque as central to the experience and representation of modernity, with similar implications for postmodernity. This investigation also identifies the prevalence of the grotesque in histories of the margin while providing an analysis of the ways in which the use of artistic media can be read as material historiography. The creative production component of this research, *Diseased Estate*, operates distinctly but in relation to the theoretical work as a counter-historical critique of monumental colonial history in Western Australia. My overriding contention throughout this thesis is that the grotesque provides the grounds for an affective engagement with the past that seeps into monumental, objectivist and speculative historiography alike. It is concerned with the fundamental strangeness of the past, this spectre that confounds the present and which teases with the promise of knowledge. It also reflects the allure of the past, that impossible object of mourning which can never be fully recovered. However, the incursion of the uncanny unravels such engagements with history with the horrified recognition of the dead, diseased and demonic matter that constitutes the past and our attempts to recapture it, absurdly, in the present. The mode of the historiographic grotesque encompasses these contradictions.

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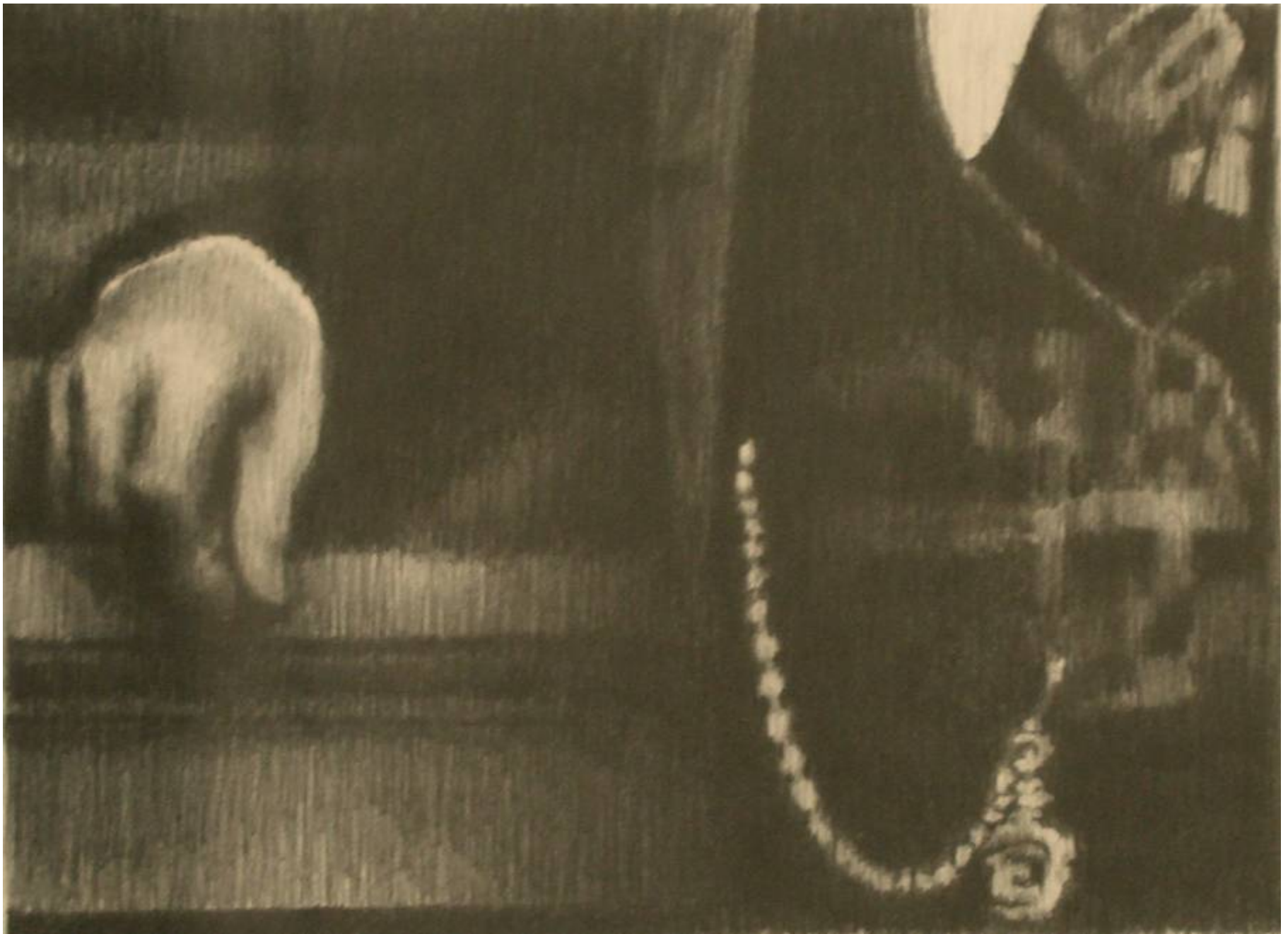
APPENDIX:

THEA COSTANTINO

Selected artwork 2006 – 2009

2006

From 'Archive' series

Waistcoat

Cufflinks

Odalisque

Tie Pin
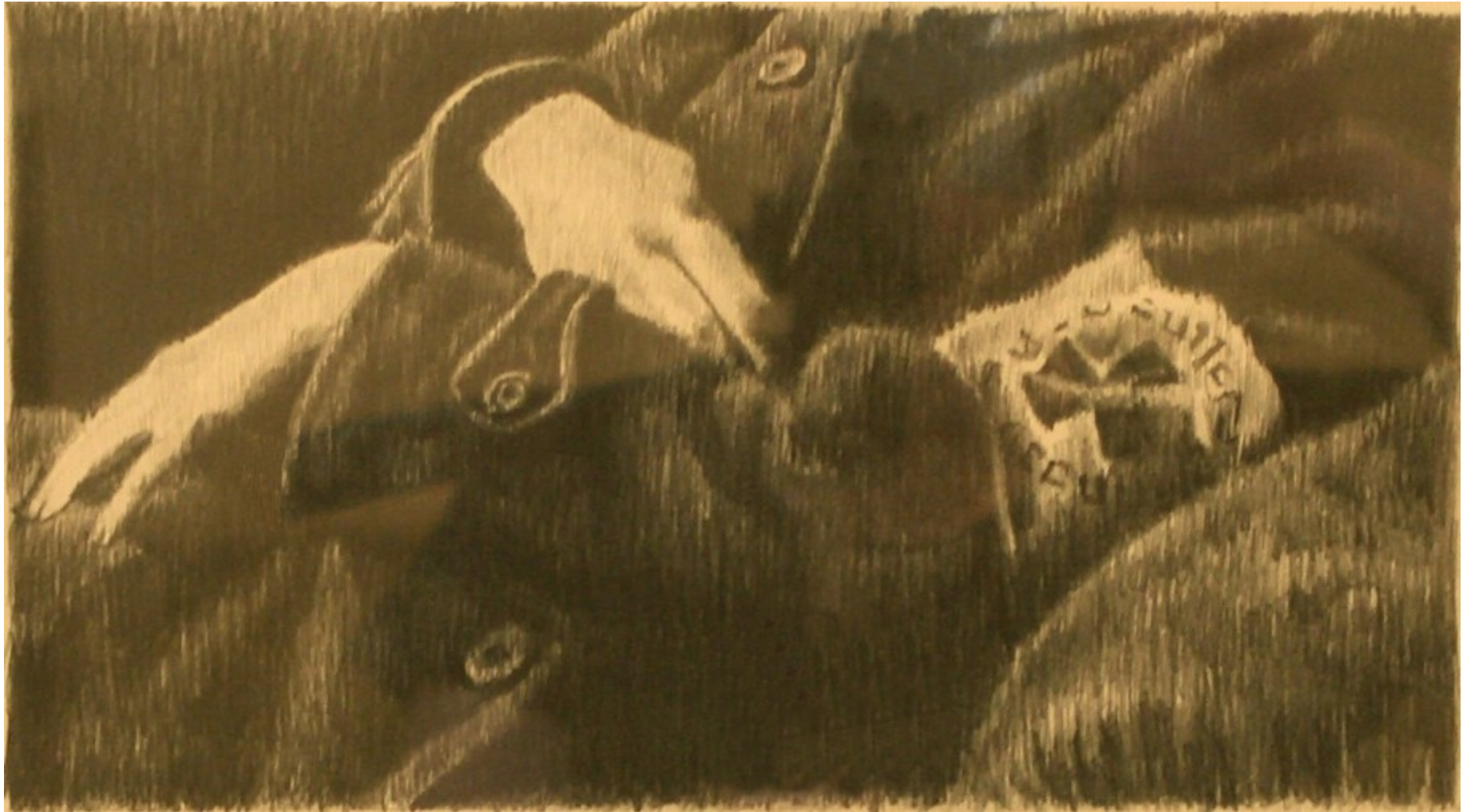
Officer´s daughter

Teeth

Stained hands

Truncheon (detail)

2008

Investigations

Fallen

Bed rest

Abdominal tumour

Mastectomy

Surgeon

Swollen lip

Horses

Parlour

Irene

Memorial
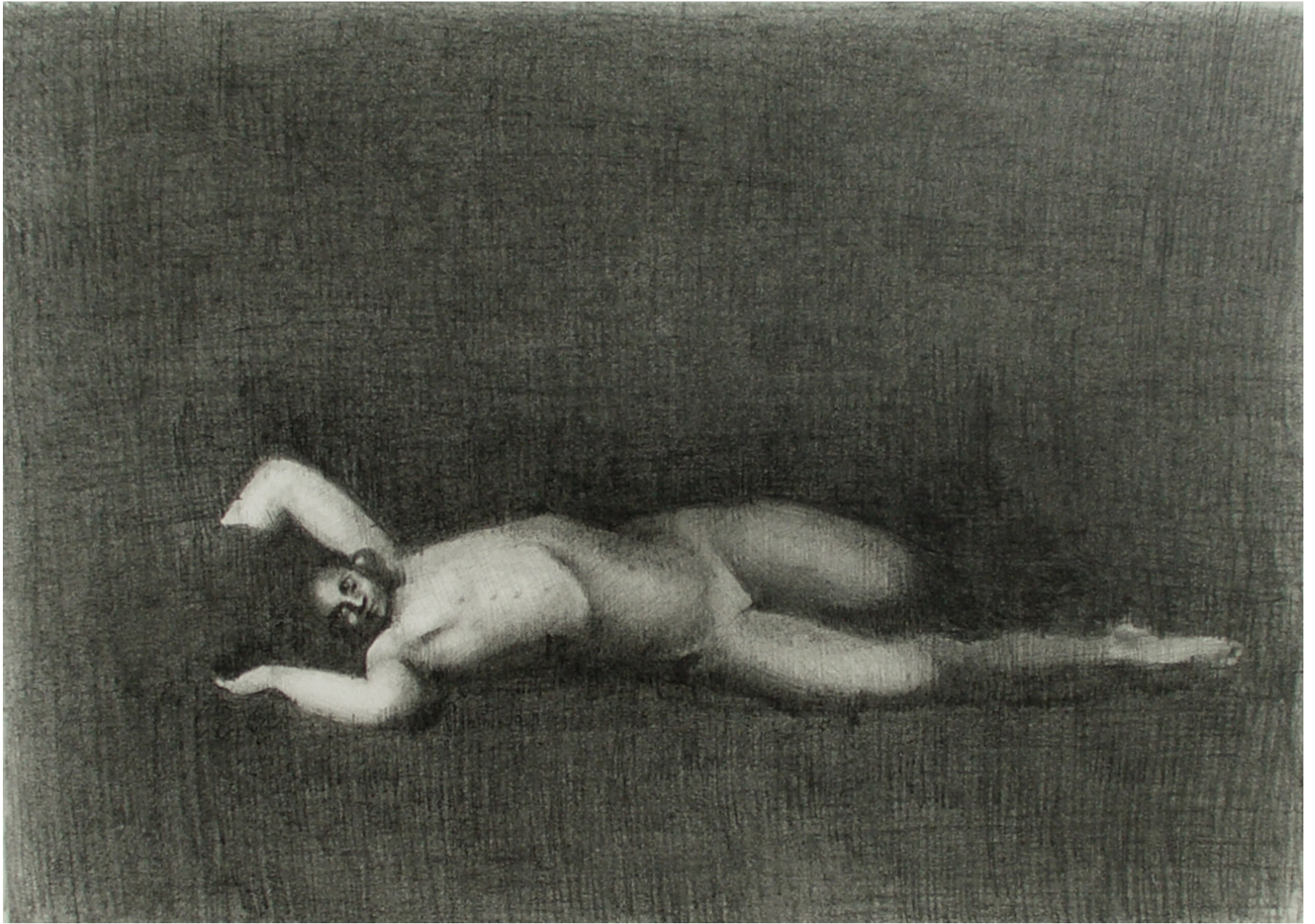
Evelyn

2008

From 'Portrait wall' series

Wedding

War wedding

Horseback

Missing, St Kilda 1968

Luna Park, 1968
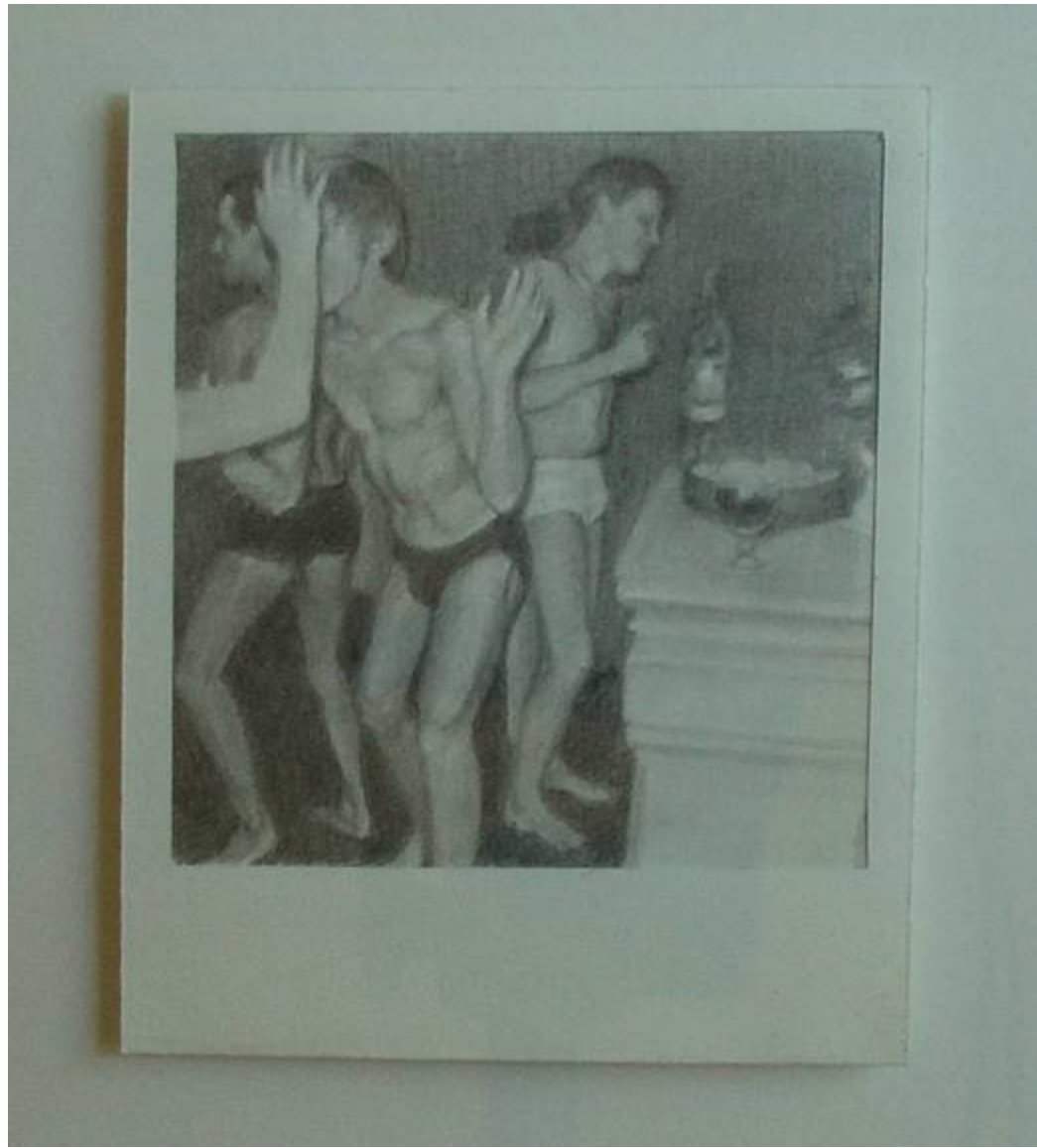
Polaroid I
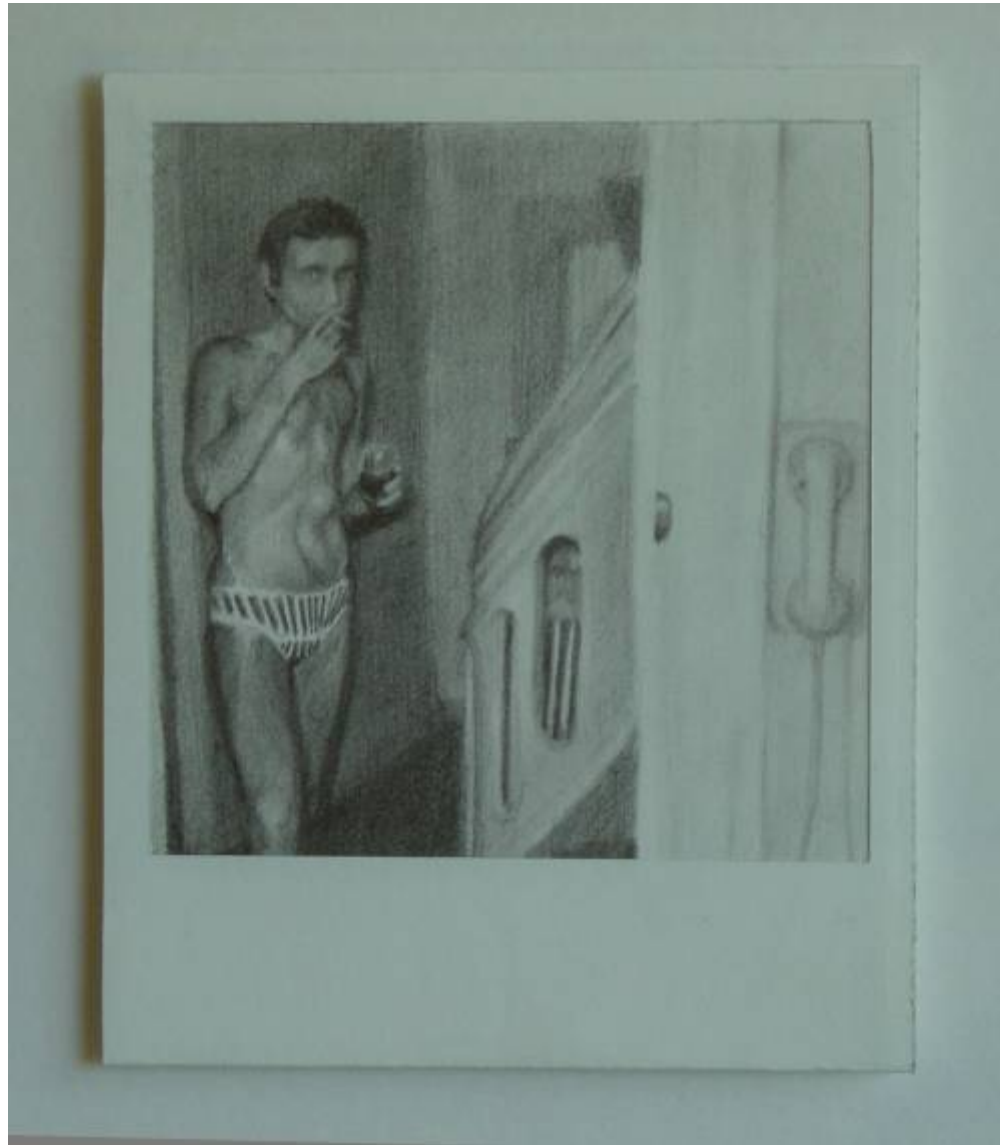
Polaroid II

Sun aria winner, 1968

2008 - 2009

From 'Shirtfront' series

Apprehended

Official

Ceremonial

Empirical

Formal

2009

Not from series

Parade

Nation Building

Nation Building (detail)

2010

Diseased Estate
John Curtin Gallery
September 16 – December 10 2010

Exhibition view

Condition (a)
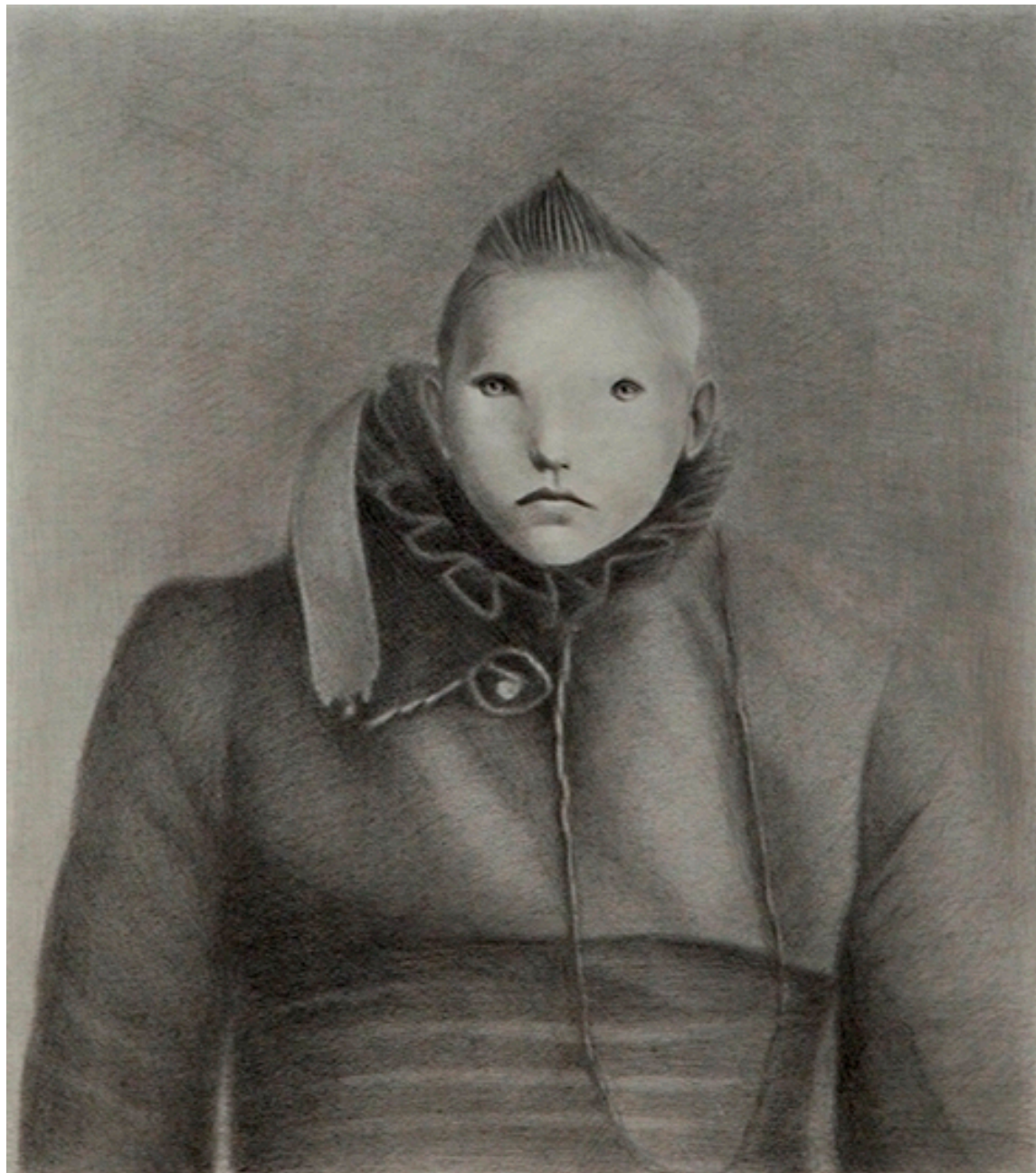
Condition (b)

Disorder (a)

Disorder (b)

Symptom (a)

Symptom (b)

Malady (a)

Malady (b)

Revenant (a)

Revenant (b)
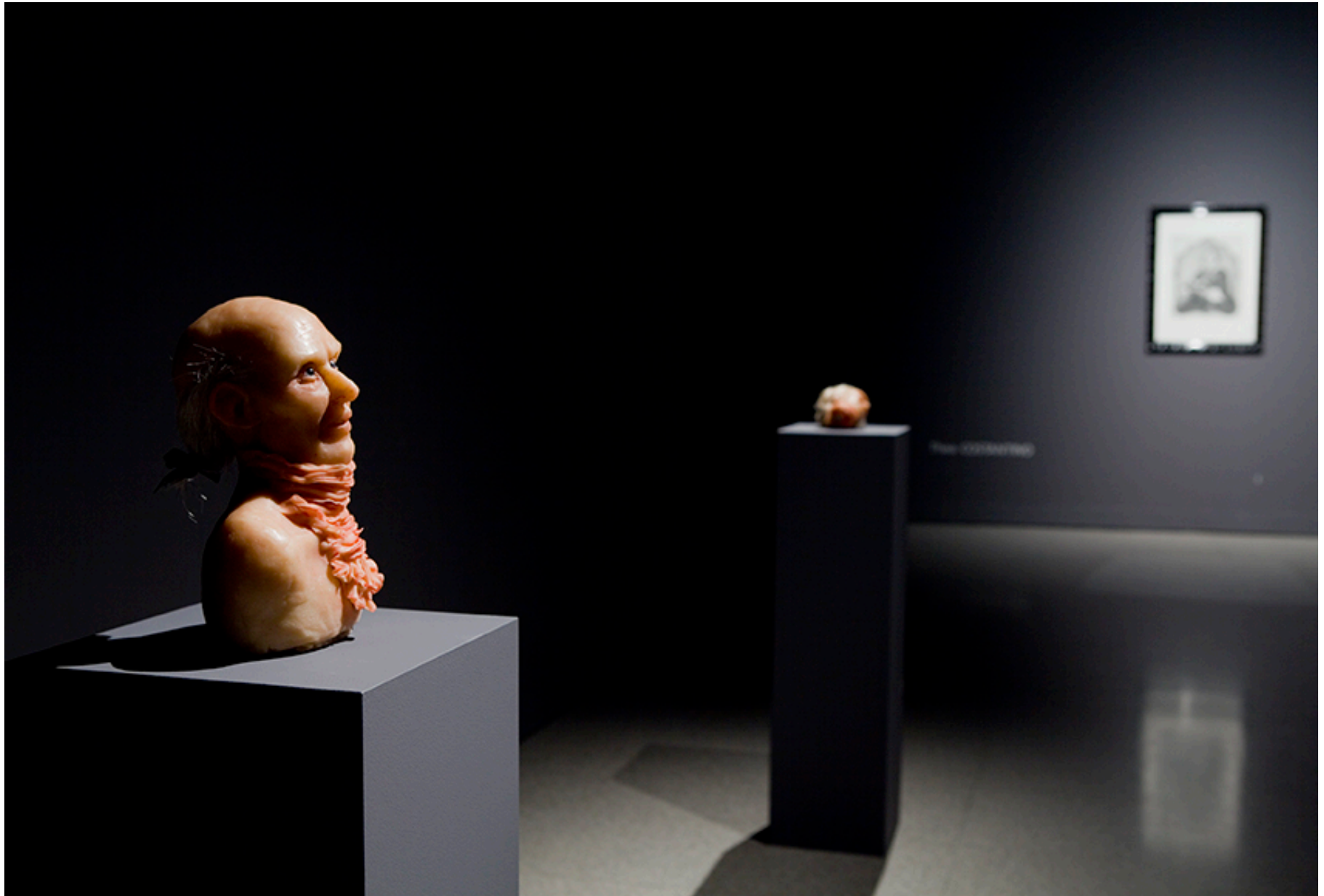
Exhibition view

DISEASED ESTATE

THEA COSTANTINO

DISEASED ESTATE

The native orchid possesses no scent discernable to the human nose. It barely resembles a flower. Waxy arabesques unfurl from textured flanges leading into a gaping cavity. The *Paracaleana nigrita* sports an egg-shaped tumour atop its spindly stem and extends an obscene protuberance. *Prasophyllum giganteum* is a rigid assemblage of black, sweaty tongues. *Drakaea elastica*, or Praying Virgin, proffers its hairy, pockmarked labellum to passing wasps, mimicking the female, duping the male into frantic copulation. They are not made for the pleasure of our eyes, indeed, they are barely legible to them.

Mrs Louisa Bradbury, *Qualities of Native Orchids: Unpublished Papers 1839 – 1843*, Viviparous Press

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The package arrived in mid September, when the sodden specimens in the flower beds should have been in bloom. I'd been waiting for this delivery since those earliest museum visits on Custody Saturday, inhaling dust motes and perceiving something half rotten in the whiff of WW2 memorabilia, where chipped store mannequins smiled in khaki mourning weeds. Since donning the bonnet for a nineteenth century family portrait at Pioneer World, where we were instructed not to smile, I'd been awaiting this package. And through those antique fairs in that 'heritage rich' country town, accompanying the step-parent and eager to prove my passion for the antediluvian, the quaint, and the slightly foxed. The waiting grew even keener when the adjunct family receded into the mists of second divorce and estrangement and when I luxuriated like Carroll's caterpillar in plumes of intoxicating smoke, contemplating the junkshop cool of my student digs. Finally, rounding on the Archive with the predatory gaze of the researcher, I picked this thing up on eBay, of all places.

Had it not been so very old, had it not been crafted by Horatio Mordant himself, his fingerprints discernable in the surface of the petals, the artefact would be entirely without value. As far as botanical models go, it's a little naïve. Generations of neglect have seeped into its skin, now the colour of a smoker's middle finger. Unlike a real orchid, the wax facsimile has a distinct and nagging odour.

Mordant's orchid arrived when I was completing my Masters dissertation on the Grubb Archive, a topic planted in my frontal lobes during my first year as an undergraduate, stroked and nurtured by the same academic until I found myself writing on a topic of her choosing, in her area of expertise, drawing on her research. Helen held monthly meetings at her house, all of us Higher Degree by Research students in attendance, husband Gary silently topping up our glasses as she, swinging on a chair, revealed the arcane mysteries of the Archive. In retrospect, she was completely drunk, but her mouth and nose were a little like my ex-stepmother's. I was helpless.

Helen guided me down a trail already trodden by her purposeful heels; I reconstructed the pathological crisis of the early settlers as though it was my very own discovery. In ornamental prose reminiscent of Helen's I conjured the swampy textures of the Swan River Colony, embroidering the story of settlement and disease with accounts of daily life inspired by rather than derived from the records.

I wrote how Louisa, wife of Lieutenant Bradbury, cultivated the interest in botany proper to all educated ladies. I saw her trudging through the boggy pastures of her new home, flushed pink, gathering specimens and preparing once again to write to Captain Mangles. Her notes reveal an unseemly enthralment with the generative aspect of these uncharted blooms, at least to my smutty post-Freudian eyes. Undeterred by Mangles' lack of reply, Louisa dissected, transcribed and labelled. I had the Lieutenant remark that he found all this slicing and dicing unsettling. And the sun had made her skin peel. Into this domestic tableau I allowed tragedy to erupt: without warning, young pink Louisa died. Always delicate, prone to coughs and colds, she had not yet borne her first child. She slipped away in the night after a protracted bout of vomiting. Sadistically, I noted that amidst his grief the Lieutenant had reflected that the final image of his wife slick with her own bodily fluids was not one that he wished to carry in posterity.

Such details injected life into the desiccated business of history; I'd learned this from Helen. The colony's population was small; within a few generations signs of inbreeding would become apparent. Almost all of the settlers were hypersensitive to light, their pink skins were ravaged by sores and they experienced persistent

thirst. A Mrs. Frederick Suett, the wife of a speculator, took ill in 1834 with what was thought to be scarlet fever. However, scrutiny of the doctor's report reveals anomalies: accompanying the characteristic strawberry tongue and peeling skin were colossal facial buboes and an unrelenting olfactory hallucination of boiling cabbage.

The litany of symptoms grew, decade by decade. Facial deformities proliferated—young women in particular developed disfiguring conditions, dashing familial marriage ambitions. Conditions of the eyes were common, inciting speculation about the injurious properties of the Antipodean sun, which induced squinting. At advanced stages of illness the skin of the neck and shoulders would split, forming folds and ruffles that were sensitive to the touch. Spontaneous abortions dropped like ripe figs. Worst of all were the acephalist births—infants born without a head. Miraculously, many survived to adulthood, nourished by orifices in the neck.

By mid century the growing pathological crisis was a source of public outcry. The Unsightly Persons Act of 1853 called for the confinement of the profoundly diseased according to the following criteria: the extent of the disease and its affront to public decency; the social standing of the diseased, to be supported by character witnesses; and the capacity of the diseased to undertake physical labour or otherwise useful activities. The first work house for the diseased poor was established in Fremantle in 1871. The site has long been rumoured to be haunted; such folklore supports a bustling trade in ghost tours.

All this was necessary exposition. However, finding myself on a predetermined path, I was unable to deviate, to form my own inlet into the greater stream forged by Helen, who, as a result of her work on the Archive, was now Professor Hartnett. I replicated. I reproduced.

I wrote how, in 1872, a dissection was performed before an audience of specialists. The woman, an Irish wet nurse charged with a double infanticide, had been bagged and hanged after an extensive hunt in the forests of the South West. Dr. Smithson's report recorded the following:

> The body was brought to us unclothed. Sores pocked the face and body. Those parts of the neck untouched by the noose retained the gnarled skin folds of the disease under investigation. I drew them apart with a pencil; this revealed the undersides to be a vicious red, the folds connected by mucous membranes. The genitals were externally normal. … The first incision, through the abdomen and up to the throat, revealed lesions. Fine white tendrils, firm to the touch, wrapped around the organs, particularly the upper intestine, piercing them in places. We set about extricating this tangle; our audience craned forward in their seats, hands on each other's shoulders. The organs were sequentially removed—the liver and heart were enlarged. The organs of generation were grossly malformed, with supernumerary appendages and several lesions. The ovaries were coated in coarse fibres and burst forth pearlescent fluid when squeezed. When the organs had been removed, the truth of the condition was revealed. Milk white blooms of Oriental extravagance unfolded in the humid depths of the thoracic cavity.

This was the first sighting of *Prasophyllum mucormycosis*, the parasitic orchid indigenous to the state's South West. Horatio Mordant, botanist, was permitted to make a copy. The propagation of the orchid was unknown; its purpose in blooming in the body was a mystery. Mordant speculated that grazing kangaroos ingested the spores and that the growing plant, nourished by intestinal soil, burst through the gut of the animal to be pollinated by carrion feeders. No evidence was found to support this theory.

The botanists of the colony were fiercely competitive; Mordant's attendance at the dissection was a stroke of good fortune. Unable to draw, Mordant had chosen the Sisyphean task of rendering the alien flora in wax, a medium that was prone to melt in the warmer months. Autumns were optimistic, winters were productive, spring full of the promise of wild flowers, but the horror of summer would slowly unfold and eventually the waxes would collapse. In professional circles Mordant was viewed as a hack, persisting with obsolete techniques more appropriate to the funeral home than the laboratory. He enjoyed a brief fame as a result of *Prasophyllum mucormycosis*, and appealed for it to be named *Prasophyllum mordant*, however Smithson was ultimately credited with its discovery. Mordant elected for a slow death by consuming sulphur scraped from match heads. His apprentice, Edgar Grubb, found the body.

Grubb was Helen's particular focus and her meal ticket. Her four-hundred page work *Diseased Estate*, which won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Non-Fiction, was the undisputed authority on Grubb and the pathological history of the Swan River Settlement. Helen successfully campaigned for the state museum to dedicate a permanent room to Grubb. It contains mostly relics: his suit, a lock of hair, his dentures. The exhibit has not proven popular with visitors, who mostly come for the dinosaurs.

The state museum employed Edgar Grubb as a junior custodian in 1875, and he soon grew expert in taxidermy. In his memoirs he fondly notes his neophyte horror at drowning marsupial mice for pelts. By 1881 he gained his seniority; he managed archives relating to the diseases of the Swan River settlement. He cloistered the records jealously; only high ranking officials were permitted access to what he described as "inflammatory information". His contribution to the archives led to his appointment as Chief Investigator of Public Health in 1901. He oversaw the establishment of an Unsightly Persons colony and shrimp processing plant on Rottnest Island.

Diseased Estate remarks that Grubb's professional achievements concealed a desperate life. He lost his youngest daughter through a gambling addiction. He

was once discovered naked in the museum vestibule by the museum director, surrounded by taxidermy specimens. He reportedly scratched incessantly. His secretaries never lasted. When Grubb died in 1914, it was rumoured that his corpse emitted no scent. He was preserved according to the traditions of Russian orthodoxy; the corpse was tied to a wheelchair, and molten wax and cadmium were injected into the veins.

The conclusion of my dissertation speculates upon Grubb's attempts to monumentalise himself in life and death. I assert, following Helen, that careerism and a morbid fear of contagion drove his relentless clamber up the social ladder, his misogyny, his secrecy, and his confinement of the deformed. By ensuring that his body would not turn to dust, he secured immortality: a wax work in a state funded tomb.

Diseased Estate recounts that the Grubb Archives were founded in 1923 in recognition of Edgar Grubb's contribution to civic history. However, due to funding

cuts and the modernisation of museum practice, the collection floated homeless between institutions for more than forty years. In 1962 fragments were stored in the home garage of the premier, under suffrage. The Archives were rejected by several universities due to, in the words of one academic, 'a paucity of scientific, historical and aesthetic merit'. In 1980 the most valuable items were auctioned. Most of the collection was probably incinerated.

In the mid-1990s, Grubb enjoyed a revival amongst a small group of academics who celebrated, with some mockery, the marginal history contained in the Archives. Conditions with hesitant names such as 'gimlet eyes' and 'troubling deformity' were illustrated in numerous photographs. Particularly treasured were images of the acephalists, which the academics suspected to be a hoax. Helen photocopied her favourites and pinned them to her cork board, occasionally drawing speech bubbles which made the victims utter inappropriate remarks. An undergraduate student made a formal

complaint; the photocopies were taken down.

On a frigid Thursday in early August, having endured an hour of public transport to reach the university, I poked the final draft of my dissertation into Helen's overstuffed pigeonhole. Riding the bus home I allowed the tinny din of undergraduate students' headphones blare without protest; I had ascended.

I heard nothing for a fortnight, then an envelope branded with university insignia appeared between utility bills. It was formal notice of academic misconduct: Level Three plagiarism. I had stolen the intellectual property of my own supervisor. I was permitted to revise my research and submit new work. Helen would no longer supervise; she blocked my email address and telephone number, didn't acknowledge my lengthy apology-cum-accusation letter. Associate Professor Glen Farradale was my allocated replacement. Two years off retirement, he hadn't yet "gotten onto the email"; he would accept only hardcopy written work which he would return defaced with minute, illegible cursive within seven days of receipt. With imperial sobriety, his nostrils whistling as he exhaled, he would urge me to "interrogate, interrogate, Tina, uh, Pia…"

Obediently, I interrogated. I sought out Helen's primary sources—ephemera in the state archives, birth and death notices, hospital collections. I wrote to collections in the eastern states, the United Kingdom, searching for anything that would confirm the existence of Edgar Grubb's work on the Archive and the terrifying diseases of the colony. This yielded surprisingly little. The only evidence for Helen's entire body of research consisted of the Unsightly Persons Act of 1853, a photograph of Edgar Grubb, senior museum custodian, and the death notice that recorded the tragic suicide of Horatio Mordant, wax artist. The Grubb Archive was not absent because it had been neglected—it had never existed in the first place.

I inserted a note, folded in half, into Helen's pigeon hole. *Diseased Estate is fiction.* She agreed to meet. I suggested that she might lend her support to my current research, which was following a praxis model: an exhibition of artefacts from the Archive. Shaky primary sources are one thing, but it's hard to dispute flesh and blood. Although we were sitting inside, Helen kept her sunglasses on throughout the meeting, and, speaking in a murmur, revealed brief distress flares of coral lipstick embedded in her teeth. She agreed to resume supervision of my thesis. A week later I received a suite of images rolled into a cardboard tube sent by unregistered mail; antique photographs that had been artfully doctored with the aid of a 1990s-era photocopier. I had them transferred to vintage paper by an expensive specialist south of the river. I also contracted a sculptor friend to produce some wax works. She was grateful for the money but aggrieved by the unpalatable character of the material, which was neither solid nor liquid; she described it as *insidious*.

When Professor Helen Hartnett delivered her opening address at the exhibition, black clad, she described it as a landmark moment in the scholarship of Western Australian heritage. It was gratifying, she noted, that her own work had inspired such interest in Grubb's legacy, so impeccably researched by this young curator. She avoided me for the rest of the evening; when the crowd was dispersing I overheard her arguing with a waitress who insisted that the wine had run out. I left without saying goodbye.

Thanks to the growing field of Grubb Studies, more artefacts have been recovered by collectors; no longer regarded as junkshop detritus or kitsch Westraliana, forgotten fragments of the Archive seem to emerge daily. As an undergraduate I myself owned an anatomical model of the female reproductive system that had been converted into an ashtray; a gift from Helen. Like the spores of the *Prasophyllum mucormycosis*, which is not a true orchid but a fungus that mimics its form, such wondrous relics are ingested passively but never fail to have a transformative effect.

I had planned to keep Mordant's orchid as a surprise, to unveil it to Helen when I graduated. Instead, I display it on a window sill, in full sunlight. I am monitoring its inevitable collapse.

Thea Costantino 2010

Images

This publication supports the exhibition:

DISEASED ESTATE

John Curtin Gallery
September 16, 2010

**This exhibition is presented as the creative production component of *Diseased Estate:
Historiographic Grotesque* for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Curtin University**

DISEASED ESTATE