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Body / Antibody

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Body / Antibody

Abstract

Unique object in the exchange-system, the gay body occupies a locus where a phantom identity and an imagined reciprocity define the poles of the subject-object relation. Made of the right stuff, it is an object circulating in a system that tends to reproduce the concept of identity in its search for mirror images of itself. Often rejected by the world, it has recently become a cynosure equated with sickness, pestilence, and death in the age of AIDS. The representations of that object change: no longer perceived as a part of libidinal economy, it has become a mass of symptoms, having changed from being an index of sexuality into being the visible dissipation of the flesh. The gay body in the age of AIDS is the mark of a pariah with the abject nature of the outcast. The body with AIDS takes the form of a text made of many signs and with many ways of reading the checkerboard pattern of the flesh. And the AIDS-narrative turns the body into the limit of the representable.

Keywords

gay body, locus, phantom identity, identity, occupy, occupies, imagined reciprocity, poles, subject-object, relation, object circulating, identity, mirror image, self, sickness, pestilence, death, AIDS, representation, libidinal economy, symptoms, sexuality, pariah, outcast, signs, AIDS-narrative, limit, representable, homosexual body, homosexuality, gay

Body / Antibody

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Consider the gay body for a moment. What could it be? What does it look like? What eyes see it? I do not mean the body of the male homosexual, defined biologically, genetically, sociologically, and behaviorally. I mean the body of a man, finding his gender as a man and attracted sexually to other men, and not measuring that attraction against some pre-defined normality or morality. Not the individual inhabiting that flesh, finding an identity within, but the phenomenology of that body, the person seen in the bar, the trick, the one-night stand, the body of the long-term lover still seen, now and again, as only a surface of pleasure. The gay body, in other words. Object for eyes like its own, male eyes seeking the signs of assent in other male eyes, object for a similar subject, the gay body occupies a locus of its own definition, a locus where a phantom identity and an imagined reciprocity define the poles of the subject-object relation. The subject sees the object, who in his turn as the subject sees the first subject as an object. And they see the same thing: not a man seeing the body of a woman, but a man seeing his own homologue, perhaps misrecognized, misrepresented, anamorphic, but a homologue just the same.

This is not to say that subjectivity ever fully disappears. In fact, the very possibility of seeing the other as homologue depends on the unvoiced belief that as a man, even as a gay man, this individual is a subject first. Western civilization tells every man that he can see, that he can seize an object with his eyes, and that he can possess. The gay man sees the other as object second, subsequent to his own constitution as a subject. In contrast, a gay woman, a lesbian, has endlessly been taught that as a woman, she is first an object for the structures of civilization, and thus, always already

subjected to them. Thus she can assume her subjectivity only through rejecting the status imposed on her as an object.

Assured of his own subjectivity, no matter how alienated he might feel from the structures of the system, seeing his other as the same, the gay man seizes that other as a capturing of identity through the annihilation of alienation. Fragmentary, yes; repetitive, certainly; alienating at one remove, almost assuredly. The gay body is the representation of subject and object in a happy, timely mix, the “always already” existing hypostasis of subjectivity in search of the recognition of its own identity. The gay body is an object for the homologous other and for the self, both enunciated through a discourse of mirrored desires and a free-play of seductions. The gay body is a challenge, even a provocation to many. Set against the monolith of heterosexuality, the gay body is the incarnation of a refusal of the imposed weight of heterosexual discourse, its trap-pings, and its impolitic impoliteness or gestural liberalism: “*Heterosexual* is not a polite word. It is commonly used only in gay circles or in those liberal settings where there are a large number of professed *nonheterosexuals* present” (Grover 23). The gay body refuses to be “le bon homo” ‘the good homo’ that Tony Duvert describes in *L’Enfant au masculin* (1980): the one acceptable to heterosexual society, the one who doesn’t act queer, the one who, as Duvert puts it, “keeps his anus closed and disdains penises” (66).

Consider the gay body for a moment longer. Made of the right stuff, well packaged, well assembled, it is an object for other objects, circulating in a system that tends to reproduce the concept of identity in its search for mirror images, even “male child,” of itself. It is an object rejected by the world at large yet necessarily, if belatedly, accepted by a world that only recently has relearned to look at what it had forgotten: the male body in general as object. And yet, necessarily, the “heterosexual” structures of the system that organizes representation and signs—and by “heterosexual” here I mean, most impolitely, “*male heterosexual*”—find the object narcissistically and economically pleasing, part of the commodity exchange, yet erotically repugnant. If I look, worries the straight man, will it not make me queer as well?

Because the gay body is uniquely structured through homologous imagery, to consider the gay body then as an object, and not as a sign of an object that is safely packaged with the precautions of semiotics, the viewer must, if only momentarily, accept that his or

her position of viewing is homologous to the position of another gay man. As a viewer, he/she must become a gay man looking at another gay man. For how else can the phenomenology of the subject-object relation be seen for what it is? That is to say, the very identity of the gay body is fundamentally dependent on the mirror image and the structures of narcissism, as are all structurings of identity, but it is also simultaneously dependent on the phenomenology of the other as perceived mirror image, the identity of the subject/object relation to its opposite. And even in cases where the sense of identity seems to come from complementarity (active/passive, s/m, fister/fistee), the complementarity is based on a sense of identity as well as on the structures in which one defines oneself in such a category and through which one implies a singular complement: in the world of the gay body, there is no sense to a fistee without a fister. But moreover, these attributes are preceded, I believe, by a general perception of the gay body, a perception in which the body of the other is "always already" defined in the definition of the body of the self and vice versa.

The gay body replaces the object of Gidean pederastic desire, the pure, adolescent ephebe who is neither woman nor man, more different from the lover than he is different from the female beloved. So too does the gay body replace the homosexual body, defined as the same as the heterosexual body, though merely with a different viewer. The homosexual is defined by the heterosexual community at large as that which is not in its realm. Defined as origin and center, that realm is the one in which the concept of identity seems to dwell. Homosexuality is difference from that realm, though the difference based on the heterosexual concept of identity. According to that system, the homosexual body is the same as the heterosexual body, the only difference being in the desirer. It is no wonder then, as Dominique Fernandez notes in *La Gloire du paria* (*The Glory of the Pariah* 1987), that seeing the falseness of that image leads to a blaze of glory or existential revolt. How could it not, when the "homosexual" is loathsomely defined relative to and secondary to a subject and domain that are not his own:

Genet is the last witness of an era in which the choice of a certain morality almost surely condemned you to revolt, delinquency, evil. His genius consists of making the magic associations of sex and blood, love and death, beauty and curse burn bright for one last time. (29)

Genet is perhaps not the final example, for there is always Tony Duvert, who marries the image of the Gidean adolescent with that of the Genetian homosexual hero always in revolt. Among other remarks in his *Abécédaire malveillant* (*Malevolent Primer* 1989) note the following: “*Il m’aime* signifie en clair: il accepte que je le capture, l’apprivoise, et le viole, et le tue, et l’enterre” ‘*He loves me* means plainly: he accepts that I capture him, tame him, rape him, kill him, and bury him’ (11). By and large though, with the advent of gay liberation in the late sixties, the gay body replaces the homosexual body, as the definitions of the latter are finally seen to be derivative of a self-defined heterosexuality that determines its other. Liberation tells us that the gay body must be equal, nonderivative, not accepted, but just there. As George Bauer has demonstrated in his excellent article, “Le Gai Savoir noir” ‘The Black Gay Science,’ and as I have tried to show in *The Shock of Men*, there are a number of writers, including Proust, Barthes, Tournier, and Camus, whose writings do not accept the secondary nature of homosexuality and whose works are illuminated in a variety of ways by their refusal to accept secondary status. But it takes gay liberation, both in deed and in writing, the latter best illustrated by the work of Guy Hocquenghem, such as *Le Désir homosexuel* (1972), *L’Après-mai des faunes* (*The After May of the Fauns* 1974), and *La Dérive homosexuelle* (1977), to actualize these discourses and make them part of the currency of exchange. As Fernandez pithily remarks, “Four million Frenchmen, who thought themselves homosexuals, woke up gay” (42). It is no wonder that this new gay body, constituted by a discourse that has long struggled for the self-assertive validity of its subject, leaves many still in the dark.

Let us pause in this account of the gay body to consider the subject of this article. I am interested in exploring the representation of the gay body as the object of discourse in the last ten to fifteen years. First, I am limiting the investigation to literature in French by reasonably well-known writers. This is not, I underline, a hegemonic move, given the nature of the discourse of gay writing. Certainly a Foucauldian reading of the subject would integrate famous and unknown alike, and my reading risks being considered exclusive, hegemonic, or unnecessarily discriminatory. But I would hypothesize that the very constitution of the object of the “gay body” is done through the rise and cohesion of discourses that dominate. The writers whose work I am looking at here, including Gilles Barbedette, Renaud Camus, Guy Hocquenghem, Dominique

Fernandez, Yves Navarre, and Hervé Guibert, write the gay body publicly into existence. The gay body is constituted as an object out of a more general gay hermeneutic as the last object constituted by that hermeneutic developing over the course of a century, a development I have discussed at length in *The Shock of Men*.

Obviously, too, though there is a dialectical process of selection that involves an audience ostensibly sympathetic to these discourses, an audience that is predominantly gay male or at least “non-homophobic,” the dialectic might be seen to occur between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The discourses that constitute the object of the gay body might be those that “heterosexuality” deems acceptable, and thus, those that seem to stray the least from the definition of “homosexuality” that “heterosexuality” sees fit to provide. The object of discourse is constituted through a series of exclusions. The represented object comes into being by a coalescence of various fragmentary discourses, the very existence of which excludes other discourses, other objects, other exclusions. The gay body comes into existence as the object of discourse along with the desires expressed by, cathected onto that body. The body does not exist without the subject desiring and discoursing about the object: the body, a function of the man-as-object, and discourse, a function of the man-as-subject, meet, interweave, dance together in a field, not of Deleuzian desiring machines, but one of melded identities and unalienated subject-object relations. As Renaud Camus notes in one of the volumes of his diary, *Vigiles* (*Vigils* 1989), what he seeks is “the harmonious, muddled circulation of desire and gaiety in both senses of the word, happily confused” (13).

Consider the gay body again. The overt manifestations of its appearance were the events of 1968, the Stonewall riots, the development of the rue Sainte-Anne and later the Marais, the disco-fever of the 1970s. It is a body made of reflections of the self, a self that may be tautologically perceived as a reflection of that very same body image, image of self and other at once. The gay body is composed of its surfaces, projections, and orifices, variously figured, neatly described, opened and closed, folded and unfolded in just the right way, *pli selon pli*. The gay body, object for the eye of the beholder who is himself ideally beheld in the same way, is always in the process of being undressed, if not already undressed when confronted. Skin is everything substance, whatever that be, is there merely to fill out the skin in the right way. Muscle is the greatest misnomer in this world of surfaces.

The body is its skin focused into zones of pleasure, of pain, of pain as pleasure. Discourse makes that body and frames those zones of pleasure; in this discourse of sexuality, the distance between the signifier and the signified is reduced to zero by the complete transparency of the discourse. While Camus' work offers a plethora of examples, including a whole book called *Tricks* (1979), there is a poignant early one in Roland Barthes's *Incidents*, his 1969 jottings on some encounters in Morocco. Here he quotes someone's come-on or pick-up line: "‘Je ferai tout ce que vous voudrez,’ dit-il, plein d’effusion, de bonté et de complicité dans les yeux. Et cela veut dire: *je vous niquerai*, et cela seulement” ‘I will do anything you want, he says, full of effusion, good will, and with complicity in his eyes. And that means: *I’ll screw you*, and only that’ (53-54). One always knows what the other wants even in an approximate foreign language. The discourse is transparent, for the signified is the body, the body that desires, the body that has that desire “always already” inscribed for the self and the other to read, remark, reinvest with this reading.

Certainly the transparency of the sign system does not mean that the gay body is itself transparent. Far from it. Rather, the gay body, constituted as a reflection of the discourse of desire, is there in all its readability and all its flashy visibility as the demonstration of the locus of desire. Writing that body and rewriting the signs on that body, signs that circulate as simulacra of themselves—for the sign is always there, on the body—is the act of the gay writer remarking the gay body that is both not his and his. It is not his, as the body of the other, as yet untouched, but is his in its constant readability: “Ecrire, c’est dire son désir, et l’inscrire, c’est déjà le satisfaire à moitié” ‘To write is to speak one’s desire, and inscribing it is already to satisfy it halfway’ (Camus, *Vigiles* 30).

And then: AIDS.

Where does one start? How does one write (of) the gay body with AIDS or even of the gay body in the age of AIDS? To ask that question is to proceed too quickly. Certainly, the protagonist in the universal story and individual stories of the disease, more often than not, is gay, a protagonist given various roles of subject, i.e., victim; agent, i.e., typhoid Mary; and object, i.e., medical patient. Yet it is not true that he has become the disease and that the disease has become him despite all the confusion in various circles about the disease and its discourses.¹ Yet it is not my concern *here* to dissociate the gay man from the disease or the disease from him:

AIDS affects everyone, period. No, I am trying to describe what may now (or still) be the gay body despite AIDS and/or faced with AIDS. And I am trying to see what gay writing of that body might be under the same conditions. Where desire and discourse once enjoyed free-play in which they unerringly, clear-sightedly, and penetratingly aimed at and reached their targets, there are now barriers, blindnesses, precautions, aversions, and diversions. The adjectives and adverbs modifying the transparent fulfillment of desire have given way to nouns, impediments, and solidities; in any case, the transparent has disappeared.

One cannot look, and if one looks, one does not see through to the target that is already known, conquered, and internalized. Yves Navarre, a Frenchman writing in Canada, discusses AIDS in his novel *Ce sont amis que vent emporte* (1991); for him AIDS has rewritten the body and the text:

Si je me rase à mon tour, privilège d'être debout devant le lavabo, je me coupe parce que je n'ose plus me regarder. Je suis tailladé. Je tremble même en écrivant. Il y va de ces lignes comme de mes joues, de mon menton, de mon cou, le sang perle ci et là. Les coupures de presse collectionnées par Rachel sont, également, autant de signes.

If I then shave myself, with the privilege of standing in front of the sink, I cut myself because I no longer dare to look at myself. I am covered with shaving cuts. I tremble even while writing. These lines are like my cheeks, my chin, my neck, the blood pearly here and there. The press clippings that Rachel gathered are as many signs as well.² (99-100)

When one does look, one sees someone else, one sees the signs of illness and death. In *L'Orage de vivre* (1994), Pascal de Duve suggests that the Kaposi-spotted patient conceives of his stigmata as a martyrdom, and in so doing, he renders his reflection ever more beautiful (163).

AIDS has figured a martyrdom, the death of a thousand cuts, a slow death of a Saint Sebastian for a new age. AIDS rewrites the text, rewrites desire, or sends it packing. In place of the flows of desire and the *loquèle* of text, a veritable litany of conquests, is the body, slowly ebbing away, as its reintroduced solidity fades. The body reappears where there was the skin, the surface of desire. Now the

body is undeniably there, sick and visible; the body is reintroduced only to fade away in a gradual unreading, a slow or rapid flow toward death: "Sida égale mort. En trois mois ou en deux ans, par pourrissement, par étouffement, par asphyxie, par liquéfaction, de n'importe quelle façon mais toujours sans appel ni échappatoire" 'AIDS equals death. In three months or in two years, by rotting, smothering, asphyxiation, melting away, any way possible, but always without a hope, without a reprieve' (Fernandez 175).

It is perhaps only a coincidence that two of the writers here, Guy Hocquenghem and Hervé Guibert, both now dead, wrote books on blindness. But with the appearance of the gay body in all its solidity, tenuously constituted now between the transparent skin of yesterday and the dissolution of tomorrow, blindness is no longer an ethical possibility or even a trope without consequences. As Duvert points out, blindness can mean invisibility (*Abécédaire* 26). One can be willfully blind and not see the gay body. One can look away, pretend that the disease and the body are not there. Motivated by a detour in vision, the body as object undergoes a transformation. First of all, it is no longer the transparent skin, the continuity of flow and pleasure. The knowledge necessarily knows/shows the detour from a body and not from a flow. Now more than ever, the body is the fragmentary series of palpable body parts dissociated from a whole that one pretends does not exist. In *Vigiles*, Camus writes of an American whose look "ne procède pas d'une inquiétude exagérée quant au fléau, en tout cas, car s'il ne paraissait pas adverse à ce que je le baise, au contraire, il ne voulait pas que j'enfile une capote" 'did not come from an exaggerated uneasiness about the scourge in any case; on the contrary, for if he didn't mind me fucking him, he didn't want me to put on a rubber' (262).

Willful blindness also means the destruction of reciprocity in the subject-object relation. The other is different from me; yet I deny his difference in turning away from it. There is no direct flow of vision and desire to the accomplishment of desire through the repetition of a discourse defined *grosso modo* as the language of the clone zone. No, the body in front of me cannot be seen as a body. I must retain my will to the other's invisibility at all costs. One knows, though, that after the mid-eighties this turning away, this refusal to see the body, itself changes into something belated. For the turn comes after having seen the body. So it is equally clear that in turning away or in not turning away, the subject recognizes that the

other is potentially different and that the body of the other is not undeniably there.

And certainly once there is the sign of disease, there is often the will not to see in order to pretend that AIDS does not exist. Notable, of course, are the various reactions of the press, which now seem shameful and have entered the literature in that way. Fernandez notes, with irony, that the left-wing newspaper "*Libération*, the champion of virtue, raised its voice against the rumor that Michel Foucault died of AIDS" (144-45); he goes on to lambaste the now defunct gay weekly *Gai Pied*, which also started out denying "la gravité du sida" 'the seriousness of AIDS' (145). At the edge of the discursive praxis I am examining, Michel Tremblay's *Le Coeur découvert* (*The Discovered Heart* 1992) is the story of two men, the older Jean-Marc and the younger Mathieu. Early on, Jean-Marc peremptorily speaks of his will to blindness, as he prefers not to think about AIDS at all (24).

One can avert one's eyes, a turn that Hervé Guibert, in one of his last works, seems to make into an allegory. In a series of AIDS-narratives that I have discussed in *Alcibiades at the Door*, Guibert faced, as squarely as possible, the problem of an AIDS-ravaged body, his own in this case, or at least that of his rhetorical narrator, virtually indistinguishable from the author. Yet one late work, *Mon Valet et moi* (*My Valet and I* 1991), is not the story of a young man dying of AIDS, but of an old, feeble man merely fading away. And whereas one could not talk of Freudian denial where Guibert is concerned, one could certainly see this work as the narrative about denial: all the signs of homosexuality are there; it just happens that "it" is not there. For example, the character is not gay: "On raconte que les homosexuels sont attirés par les uniformes, ceux des marins, des pompiers, des légionnaires. Moi qui n'en suis pas, j'ai toujours été fasciné, presque érotiquement, par l'habit des larbins de tout poil" 'They say that homosexuals are attracted by uniforms, those of sailors, firemen, legionnaires. I'm not homosexual, I have always been fascinated, almost erotically, by the outfits of flunkies of all sorts' (21-22). He has never dressed in drag: "La seule chose qui ait de la valeur de nos jours, ce sont les photos compromettantes de soi, prises pendant sa jeunesse, qui sont planquées dans des coffres-forts. Les photos où l'on a posé en femme, si vous voyez ce que je veux dire.—Non, pas du tout, ai-je répondu, de telles photos n'existent pas dans mon passé" 'The only thing that has value nowadays are compromising photos, taken in one's youth, hidden away

in strongboxes. Photos where one is dressed as a woman, if you see what I mean. No, not at all, I answered, such photos don't exist in my past' (32). He participates in the narcissism of subject-object identification and even sees himself as a woman: "[J]e n'arrive plus à savoir si c'est lui à gauche, ou moi à droite, comme si nous étions une seule personne dédoublée. Parfois aussi je nous surprends dans le miroir transformés en femmes. C'est un tableau assez cocasse" 'I can no longer figure out if he is on the left or I on the right, as if we were only one person duplicated. Sometimes I discover us in the mirror transformed into women. Quite a comical picture' (59-60). He wants to have his temperature taken rectally, which is obviously neither here nor there, but seems of a piece with the rest of the remarks: "Mon valet veut toujours me mettre le thermomètre sous le bras, alors que moi je le veux dans le trou comme au bon vieux temps" 'My valet always wants to stick the thermometer under my arm, though I want it in the hole like in the good old days' (50). He refers to the dimensions of his valet's genitals, a taboo in straight fiction, except, I believe, in self-referential first-person (pornographic) narrative: "J'ai trouvé qu'il avait un gros sexe, beaucoup plus gros que le mien quand j'étais jeune" 'I discovered he had a big penis, much bigger than mine was when I was young' (85). And he even accepts water sports: "Il m'a pissé dessus, pour m'apprendre à me taire, a-t-il dit" 'He pissed on me to teach me to shut up, he said' (84). The symptoms are the same in this text that is "not about AIDS": "Il ne regarde jamais mon corps décharné, c'est comme si je n'en avais pas" 'He never looks at my emaciated body; it is as if I didn't have one' (48). For now, I would just say that this is, in many ways, a meta-text about the turning away from the reality of AIDS, an allegory about denial. I shall return later to this figure of non-homosexuality.

Let us look directly at the gay body now in the age of AIDS. What one sees first of all, in this skin made flesh, is the decomposition of the body. Inside and outside are laid bare, but it is always the signs of decomposition that we see rather than a silent dilapidation of the body described by Hocquenghem in *Eve* (1987): "demi-faces bleues de Kaposi, maigreurs squelettiques, herpès à répétition, ganglions boursoufflés" 'faces half blue with Kaposi, skeleton-like thinness, endless herpes, swollen lymph nodes' (232). The scene is the same in almost every text, with the obligatory description of the visible sign of the disease: "Il avait fait glisser la manche de son pyjama et montrait une coulée violacée qui partait du haut de l'épaule

et descendait jusqu'au coude, comme si une aubergine monstrueuse avait bourgeonné sur la chair" 'He had slipped off the sleeve of his pajamas and showed a purple flow that started at the top of his shoulder and ran down to his elbow, as if a monstrous eggplant had flowered on his flesh' (Fernandez 189). On the other hand, when the signs are not visible, one can almost make believe that AIDS itself is not there, as Renaud Camus seems to do at one point in *Aguets* (1990):

J'ai eu plaisir à voir, qui déjeunait à la Coupole, hier, et à saluer, Jean-Paul Aron, qui me semblait présenter sa mine habituelle, et n'avait nullement l'apparence cadavérique que lui prêtaient les photographies et même les commentaires du *Nouvel Observateur*, le mois dernier, quand il a fait sa fameuse déclaration publique de Sida.

I was glad to see and say hello to Jean-Paul Aron, who was having lunch yesterday at La Coupole. He seemed to look the same as usual and had none of the cadaver-like appearance given him by the photographs and even the comments of the *Nouvel Observateur* last month, when he made his famous public declaration of having AIDS. (38)

One could hardly accuse Renaud Camus of willful blindness or self-delusion, though what one could say is that the wishful thinking is what Camus himself calls a hope: "He had been infected for several years. But he represented a sort of medical miracle, and, of course, a hope: he had no symptoms of the illness, and up until a few months ago felt completely chipper" (*Vigiles* 233). Nor could one level such an accusation at Hervé Guibert. Both Camus and Guibert, each in his own way, have been at the forefront of the "normalization" or dedramatization of being gay. And whereas Camus has not published much on AIDS, Guibert faced the problem squarely in *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* (*The Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* 1990), *Le Protocole compassionnel* (*The Compassionate Protocol* 1991), and *Cytomégalovirus* (1992). So it becomes necessary to look further: I would hypothesize that the construction of the gay body is such that it is perceived necessarily with its signs affixed. Before and during the age of AIDS, the gay body is a hybrid of body and sign. Before AIDS, if there is no perceptible sign, one cannot see that it is a gay body: it is only a homosexual body, indis-

tinguishable from a heterosexual one. With AIDS, if there is no perceptible sign, one cannot see the disease. If one cannot see it, read it, and thereby seize it, its invisibility remains the most constant and insidious feature. Unreadable and unsigned, AIDS is the phantom object that seems a product of rightist xenophobia, incipient paranoia, or both. As Fernandez writes:

Besides, given such promiscuity with faceless, anonymous, unknown people, you could get any illness, in particular the one whose importance was exaggerated by the rightist press, but which appeared even more dangerous because the way in which it was transmitted was still unknown. (64)

No sooner constituted as an object for the gay observer (subject, reader of signs), the gay body soon metamorphoses into something unimagined for it as it came into being. Whereas one might have thought that the gay body would eventually become an object among other objects, especially in a postmodern consumer society, chosen or unchosen by the masses, but certainly not invisible to them, it has become equated with its incipient disappearance. In the general imagination, the gay body equals the AIDS-infected body. For the gay subject, this means the realization of the dissipation of the flesh; for the non-gay reader, the fearful heterosexual, this means the specter of the pariah himself, Typhoid Mary for a new generation: “dans le crâne du boucher, homosexuel est devenu synonyme d’infecté par le sida” ‘in the butcher’s mind, homosexual has become the synonym of infected by AIDS’ (Fernandez 142).

Given the readability of the sign, the full-fledged presence of visible AIDS, the danger for most, save the most paranoid, seems to have passed. If one has tested positive, and—must one say it?—one continues to participate in the social contract, one takes precautions to prevent another from getting AIDS. If one is visibly sick, say with KS, the sign is there for all to read. Sick, the gay body fully signed anew, though with a series of signs of death, has once again become its surface. Two series of signs are generated at this point to fill out the various texts: one series relates to the gradual dissipation of the body, as the gay body shrinks like some latter-day *peau de chagrin*. This series is itself actually double, consisting on the one hand of a series of symptoms, most often visible or readable signs of the disease, and on the other, of a gradual perceptible decline of the body, a recognition of decrepitude. The second series consists

of the various medical attachments and procedures appended to the body. If the first consists of two sets of signs that signify subtraction, the second consists of augmentations. The body is transformed.

When underlining the general dissipation of the sick body, classical narratives of illness tended to use the symptom as a sign of an order of discourse other than medical, as Susan Sontag shows in her book *Illness as Metaphor*. To wit: a narrative of tuberculosis in the nineteenth-century or even cancer in the twentieth underlined symptoms to talk about morals, ethics, repressed passions, or existential isolation. In works like Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Dumas' *Lady of the Camellias*, the afflicted character undergoes moral change, ethical reflection, or participates in a system that relates the dissipation of an individual to his or her social/societal function. Contemporary fiction about cancer changes the scenario somewhat in its description of the sick body by augmenting the figures of illness with an overlay of medical science. The radical otherness of cancer about which Sontag writes so eloquently is figured in the list of symptoms, which may serve to show the distance of the individual from the cold, alienating establishment of knowledge and/or be a metonymy for the inexpressible ravaging of the subject.³

Certainly AIDS-literature shares with cancer-literature the attempt to express the pain of the subject through a list of symptoms and signs about the body-as-object. Yet in the literature of AIDS, the litany of symptoms serves in a different capacity as well. Symptoms are listed to test the reader's mettle, to force the reader to view what he or she would willingly not see. And the litany of symptoms, in its evident mastery of the language of medicine, pushes the limits of the literary. Specifically, the very idea of a list of symptoms and signs, or interventions, such as in Hocquenghem, who provides in *Eve* both a list of daily medical interventions (269-70) and a list of occasional procedures (274), seems to test the limits, not of the representable, but of the interesting; along the same line, in his book *Le Fil* (1994), Bourdin devotes well over a page to discussing how the AIDS-infected character studies his own feces (48-49). If we continue to read, we must look and we see the gay body anew. Under these conditions, we are being asked to suspend our aesthetic interest in favor of another pleasure of the text. Who, one would ask quite crudely, wants to read a litany about intubation and resuscitation, about biopsies and excisions, about pharmacopoeias and etiologies, about spinal taps and EEG's, about intravenous drips

and endless needles? In his first AIDS-narrative, Guibert provides a mix of drugs and symptoms, as if the very integrity of the body were now always threatened by a double discourse:

[J]’avais eu divers maux secondaires que le docteur avait traités, souvent au téléphone, les uns après les autres: des plaques d’eczéma sur les épaules avec une crème à la cortisone, du Locoïd à 0,1%, des diarrhées avec de l’Ercéfuryl 200 à raison d’une gélule toutes les quatre heures pendant trois jours, un orgelet douteux avec du collyre Dacrin et une crème à l’Auréomycine.

I had various secondary diseases that Dr. Chandi had treated, often over the phone, one after another: patches of eczema on my shoulders, treated with a 0.1% Locoïd cortisone cream, diarrhea treated with Ercéfuryl 200, one pill every four hours for three days, a suspicious looking sty treated with Dacrin eye-wash and an aureomycin cream. (*Ami* 167)

The very idea of such a list being a literary object or even an element of an ongoing narrative seems to reach right into our received ideas of normative textuality. It is not every subject that is able, or willing, to cooperate in being re-viewed. In such cases, the author paints an abject individual whose gesture is a hollow effort at rebellion: “Un jeune homme qui pouvait avoir l’âge de Marc, le cou et les bras hérissés de tuyaux et d’aiguilles, eut la force de tourner les yeux dans leur direction et de leur adresser un regard furibond” ‘A young man who could be Marc’s age, his neck and arms stuck with tubes and needles, had the strength to turn his eyes toward them and glare at them’ (Fernandez 182). But in general, if we are viewing the body once more, it seems that the gay body cannot resist the final dissolution of its subjective component into its objectivity. It has become its own corpse, offered up to the reader who witnesses that death. If only it were possible, the last act of this tattooed individual in the throes of death would be a final defiance of this all-penetrating, but hardly pleasing, gaze. Raphaël de Valentin’s remark in Balzac’s novel *La Peau de chagrin* (*The Wild Ass’s Skin*) about his desire to “livrer un cadavre indéchiffrable à [la] Société” ‘deliver an undecipherable cadaver to society’ (434) becomes Hocquenghem’s speculative musing in *Eve*: “Peut-être mourrai-je d’une maladie inconnue, intestat scientifiquement” ‘Perhaps I shall die of an unknown illness, scientifically intestate’ (276). But as Lévy and Mousse point out, that corpse is worthless: “The

sacred nature of the body, moreover often lauded in homoeroticism, having been affected by the illness, the dead body no longer bears any value" (108).

Pierced, repierced, and remarked, the gay body is given as the object that no one would willingly look at, but which is, endlessly, tragically fascinating in its dissipation. Less a body than a collection of signs that cohere through the discourse of the individual text and through the mutations of the protean disease itself, the body with AIDS itself takes the form of a text: so many signs, so many ways of reading the checkerboard pattern of the flesh. And to be sure, the AIDS-narrative turns the body into the limit of the representable, in a turn in Western narrative that no one would have predicted. Still at the center of the narrative, the individual object, living and simultaneously dying, becomes almost a black hole defying representation as a whole, defying description. No moral system links the individual signs, no substance links what was once just the surface object of the narcissistic gaze.

Each individual symptom, too, even in its benign form, seems to test the possibility of a continuously linked textuality. So in Guibert's AIDS-allegory, *Mon valet et moi*, it is a question of dissipation with each individual symptom that tends, on the one hand, to insist on the corporeal, and on the other, to diminish that corporeal in its very announcement. Thus the protagonist says that "J'ai découvert le plaisir de l'incontinence" 'I've discovered the pleasure of incontinence' (70) and is expecting that "Bientôt ce sera ma diarrhée, encore plus chaude que l'urine" 'Soon it will be my diarrhea, even warmer than urine' (71). He notes, almost with pleasure, that "je pétai de plus en plus fort dans ces soirées mondaines" 'I farted louder and louder at social gatherings' (10) and that, in short, he has become so emaciated that he is just skin and bones (16). The body appears, where once there had been nothing more than the folds of skin forming the illusion of the law of the phallus, or its various invaginations of buttocks, anus, pectorals, etc. But once there, that body immediately begins to melt. Fernandez notes: "Les joues, qui avaient dû être prospères, s'étaient effondrées et pendaient en flasques rides sous les yeux cernés de poches grises" 'His cheeks, which must once have been full, had fallen, and hung in flabby wrinkles beneath his eyes ringed in gray pouches' (188). And in *Eve*, Hocquenghem shows the very image of a confused subject and object melting in the mirror:

Un jour, je me suis vu, torse nu, devant la glace, en me relevant. On dirait une photo de camp de concentration. Les côtes ressortent sous la peau comme si elles allaient la crever. Les bras sont des allumettes, les jambes ont fondu. Je n'ai même plus de fesses. Et en plus je suis couvert d'escarres à force de vivre couché. Enfin et surtout, j'ai le regard traqué, paniqué, d'une bête sauvage aux abois.

One day I saw myself, naked from the waist up in the mirror as I got up. You'd think it was a concentration camp photo. My ribs stick out under the skin as if they were going to puncture it. My arms are match sticks, my legs have melted away. I have no buttocks left. And I'm covered with bed sores from living lying down. And, especially, I have the fearful look of a hunted animal on its last legs. (266)

Such examples are rife. Compare Guibert's description of his own daily encounter with his nude body as he describes it in *Le Protocole compassionnel*:

Cette confrontation tous les matins avec ma nudité dans la glace était une expérience fondamentale, chaque jour renouvelée, je ne peux pas dire que sa perspective m'aidait à m'extraire de mon lit. Je ne peux pas dire non plus que j'avais de la pitié pour ce type, ça dépend des jours, parfois j'ai l'impression qu'il va s'en sortir puisque des gens sont bien revenus d'Auschwitz, d'autres fois il est clair qu'il est condamné, en route vers la tombe, inéluctablement.

This confrontation every morning with my nudity in the mirror was a fundamental experience, renewed each day, I cannot say that the perspective it offered helped me get out of bed. Nor can I say that I had pity for this guy, it depended on the day; sometimes I have the impression that he'll make it out alive since people returned from Auschwitz; other times, it is clear that he is condemned, ineluctably heading toward his grave. (15)

The mirror as the locus of alienation is a frequent motif in these narratives, almost a shorthand way of describing the differences between a struggling internal subjectivity and the abject body in view. In *Eve*, Hocquenghem (43-45) provides an example, as does Navarre, who offers a particularly poignant moment in which the

narrator serves as a mirror into which one cannot look: "The most difficult thing is to shave David in the morning without cutting him" (99).

The gay body in the age of AIDS cannot maintain the liberty of its subjectivity. And as such, the very objectivity of the body examined changes: the specific nature of the gay body as object was predicated on the reciprocity of the subject-object relation. Now though, the object is forced three times to be a non-reciprocal object: forced to be a collection of symptoms, treatments, and tubes for the reader, forced to be the object of a nonreciprocal other within a text, and forced finally to be the object of the vision of the medical profession. The medical gaze, once under control, is as multiple as the procedures, as diverse as the symptoms. For each, there is a fractional glance, the attempt to codify a profusion of signs that can be looked at but never fully seen. Of an EEG, Hocquenghem writes that it was a "[r]éseau arachnéen de sinusoïdes, la carte de mon moi ne s'adresse qu'aux spécialistes" 'spider-like network of sine-waves, the map of my mind is for specialists only' (*Eve* 280). And Guibert's version of his map, offered in *A l'ami*, is much the same:

Je n'ai jamais si peu souffert que depuis que je sais que j'ai le sida, je suis très attentif aux manifestations de la progression du virus, il me semble connaître la cartographie de ses colonisations, de ses assauts et de ses replis, je crois savoir là où il couve et là où il attaque, sentir les zones encore intouchées, mais cette lutte à l'intérieur de moi, qui est celle-ci organiquement bien réelle, des analyses scientifiques en témoignent, n'est pour l'instant rien, sois patient mon bonhomme, et regard des maux certainement fictifs qui me torpillaient.

I have never suffered as little as when I learned that I had AIDS; I am very attentive to the manifestations of the virus' progress; I seem to know the cartography of its colonizations, its assaults, and its retreats, I think I know where it waits and where it attacks, I feel the zones as yet untouched, but this struggle within me, quite real organically, as the scientific analyses show, is, for now, nothing, wait a while good fellow, given the certainly fictive ailments that assail me. (45)

The medical glance, ironically enough, comes to stand in the locus of the original observer, the one involved in a reciprocal relationship with the object. The medical gaze is not the negation of the homoerotic glance. It is as if in reverse, through a mirror, through the wrong end of the telescope, the photographic negative of a former objectivity. Once the gay body was all skin formed into illusions of the ideal phallus and its incarnations. Now, subject to the medical gaze, the gay body is all symptoms and insides: "C'est une folie scopique: endoscopie, colonoscopie, rectoscopie, je te passe les détails. On se sent transformé en chose, en mannequin, en jouet qu'on éventre et dont les ressorts sautent à la figure de l'explorateur, à subir de telles investigations" 'It's a scopic madness: endoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, rectoscopy, I'll spare you the details. You think you've become a thing, a model [*mannequin*], a toy that is opened up and whose insides spring out at the investigator from such explorations' (Hocquenghem, *Eve* 275). The flesh that once was invisible, if not to say phenomenologically nonexistent, has now been brought to the surface, new sex organs for the scopophilic glance that fulfills the most abject of relations for the body. And finally, the scopophilia is a necrophilia of sorts, as the doctor, or the medical gaze, sees the person who used to be gay, the person who used to have a gay body. Or as Hocquenghem dramatically puts it in the same novel, "celui à qui on ne fait plus l'amour" 'one to whom love is no longer made' (139).

What of sex, what of the sex organs, what of the mythical partial object: the condom? Again, if we consider the gay body as the generalized object of investigation, broader than any division into passive and active, any *a priori* separation of bodies into seronegative and seropositive individuals, we can logically imagine three kinds of sex with another individual: unsafe sex, safe sex, and no sex. The first two terms are obviously open to interpretations outside the scope of this article: on the one hand, the term unsafe sex, or a somewhat nicer if equally inaccurate version, unprotected sex, is just old-fashioned sex. It is sex before AIDS, sex that does not take AIDS into account as a watershed; it is therefore, at least in the minds of many, the cause (as well as the mode of transmission) of the disease. It is the version of sex found to be "morally repugnant" to some, as Leo Bersani notes in his excellent article, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (214-25).⁴ On the other hand, there is safe sex, protected sex, safer sex, *sexe sans risques*. And there is, of course, the only

introduction of the concept of chastity in the gay world, sex becomes one possible behavior among others. Where sex was heretofore an activity in a set with no other members, it now becomes part of a generalized pattern of behavior. Is this a renormalizing of sex or a simultaneous removal of its specificity and its purported dangers? As Fernandez remarks:

Among those directly threatened by the epidemic, in the “at risk” categories of the population, I foresee an infinite variety of reactions. Some will give up all sexual activity, some will become maniacal about precautions, some will change nothing of their habits, out of fatalistic resignation or selfish threat, some will light a candle in church, some will send their checks to the *Institut Pasteur* to hasten the discovery of the vaccine, some will think that the danger is only for others, some will seek it out willfully, the some will play Russian roulette and others, the mystics running toward the immolation. (160)

With the gay individual of indeterminate retrovirus status, his body becomes visualized as being composed of potentially dangerous parts mixed with innocuous parts. If we return to the model of the gay body as a surface phenomenon versus the body itself as a permeable solid, we see that in some parts of the physique, the skin remains skin, while in others it seems to have a “secret architecture.” The penis, votive lingam of gay liberation, becomes the tool, organ, weapon of potential death. Bersani asks if the rectum is a grave; we must ask as well, “Is the penis a weapon?” Certainly this is the case for the radical feminism on which Bersani focuses, but what of the gay body? I do not think the reorganization of material in the new semiotics of gay sex returns the penis to its traditional, heterosexist role of penis-as-sword. But quite frankly, it is difficult to tell. Always a phantom member of the language of the body, the penis well-nigh disappears in post-AIDS gay writing. In attesting this disappearance one notes that the penis, deprived of its sexual function, can simply become one organ among others, one bodily part among others, all of which are undergoing the same gradual decrepitude (*Valet* 48, 85). And at the very least, the penis loses its phallic power and thus its potential to kill another: in *A ceux qui l’ont aimé* (*To Those Who Loved Him* 1992), Michel Manière bluntly avows that he no longer gets “hard-ons” (23).

Renaud Camus offers, I think, the clearest overview of this phenomenon. Now obviously, his writing is not focused on AIDS, whereas the novels in question (with the exception of Tremblay's) all take AIDS as their subject or as part of their subject. For that reason, Camus is especially helpful here: he still views the gay body as sexual object, whereas most of the others have taken their narratives to a locus "beyond" sexuality. Rare then are the remarks in any text that engage the question of the penis. Aside from the decrepitude mentioned above, the penis appears in two guises. In one incarnation it remains vaguely visible, a taboo zone between the safety of the surface and the danger of the body:

De "précautions," en effet, il se souciait comme d'une guigne. Et d'ailleurs, plus tard, il a commencé à jouir dans ma bouche, sans prévenir, et je n'ai eu que le temps de reculer la tête et de recracher comme je pouvais son premier foutre, dont le passage sur ma langue m'inquiète un peu, tout de même, maintenant. J'ai d'ailleurs observé au sauna, par la suite, quand la lumière était revenue, bien des scènes de la plus complète imprudence, qui me paraît inimaginable.

He didn't give a fig about "precautions." And besides, later, he started to come in my mouth, without warning, and I had barely the time to pull back my head and, as well as I could, to spit out his first cum, whose passage over my tongue still bothers me a bit now. Later with the light back on in the sauna, I observed many completely imprudent scenes, which seems unimaginable to me. (*Vigiles* 415-16)

If oral sex is not dangerous then it can be part of the now nostalgic view of sex as the possible complete reciprocity of subject and object. It is in a vague no-man's land (or everyman's land) between the absolutely forbidden action of anal intercourse without a condom and obviously SSR activities such as mutual masturbation: "Je n'allais pas prendre pour lui des précautions; mais s'il n'en prend jamais davantage, me faisait-il, lui, courir des risques? Est-il dangereux de se faire sucer la queue?" "I wasn't going to take precautions for him; but if he never took any more, was he putting me at risk? Is it dangerous to have one's cock sucked?" (*Vigiles* 274). In Camus' case, his sexual preferences have always tended toward what we now call safe sex (mutual masturbation) and away from anal penetration: "Pour

moi, je n'ai décidément pas d'érotisme anale. Cette zone de mon propre corps, peu sensible, sauf à la douleur, ne m'offre que des plaisirs réduits" 'Decidedly, I have no anal eroticism. This zone of my own body, rather unsensitive, except to pain, offers me only reduced pleasures' (*Vigiles* 90). In *Fendre l'air* (*Splitting the Air* 1991), Camus calls *frottage* the act that is closest to "l'homosexualité pure, la moins entachée de ressemblance et d'homologie avec l'autre amour" 'pure homosexuality, the least stained with resemblance to the other love' (224). Thus, Camus' work is the least likely to be affected by the changes in sexual practice. Still, his notes are the only ones we have to go on.

The other appearance of the penis (one's own or that of one's partner) is in its immediate disappearance into a condom: "je l'encule non sans deux capotes obligeamment fournies et même sur moi passées par lui" 'I fuck him with two rubbers obligingly offered by him and which he put on me himself' (*Vigiles* 365-66). A condom returns the body to where it was, for it makes the penis a skin once again: only surface, no substance, and no danger. The sheath, a word used both for condoms and for the protective envelope for swords, makes sex medically safe. It also gives life to the illusion that gay sex is still the same thing, a play of surfaces, of endless foldings and unfoldings; in *Vigiles*, Camus writes of a prospective trick:

[I]l y a étendu un véritable tapis, et disposé sur le tapis, outre sa personne complaisamment étalée (et d'ailleurs plaisante à l'oeil) un flacon de poppers, des capotes anglaises, un tube de crème; le tout très méticuleusement aligné, très visible, comme à une devanture de magasin. Joli garçon, *safe sex*, nitrite d'amyle, technologie de pointe, tout ça me va très bien . . .

He spread out a rug, and on that rug, aside from his own spread-out body (moreover, pleasing to the eye) a bottle of poppers, rubbers, a tube of lubricant; all quite meticulously aligned, very visible, like in a storefront. A good-looking boy, safe sex, amyl nitrate, up-to-date technology, all that suits me just fine. (321)

The condom is a wall of complete division, radical deconstructive other for the membrane such as the tympanum or the hymen that join and separate, as Jacques Derrida has shown in "Tympan" and "La Double Séance." The condom joins two skins, separates, de-

nies, closes off what they might contain. If it is penetrable or permeable, the condom just is not a condom. And finally, the condom almost miraculously makes the rectum an impermeable surface once more, now nothing more than the sheathing invagination of the surface skin. For if a seropositive individual is responsible enough not to have sex, it is nonetheless logical to assume that the penis of the other may potentially be dangerous. So the condom makes his penis a skin once more, through which nothing can be transmitted, and the subject's anus, cast as the object of the gaze/penetration of the other, an equally impermeable, if not to say impregnable, locus.

One category of sexual activity remains: sex between two seropositive individuals. Not surprisingly, the body as object seems entirely to disappear in the two references to the situation. In one, in Guibert's writing, AIDS itself looms up as the object, against which two helpless, lost subjects seem destined to lose: "Il était devenu ardu, pour Jules et pour moi, de rebaiser ensemble, bien entendu il n'y avait plus rien à risquer qu'une recontamination réciproque, mais le virus se dressait entre nos corps comme un spectre qui les repoussait" 'It had become difficult for Jules and me to screw again, of course there was no longer any risk except for a reciprocal recontamination, but the virus stood there between our bodies like a ghost pushing them off/away' (*Ami* 155). On the next page, the ghost is safely transformed into a memory:

Je réattaquai ses tétons, et lui rapidement, mécaniquement, s'agenouilla devant moi, les mains imaginaires liées derrière le dos, pour frotter ses lèvres contre ma braguette, me suppliant par ses gémissements et ses grognements de lui redonner ma chair, en délivrance de la meurtrissure que je lui imposais. Ecrire cela aujourd'hui si loin de lui refait bander mon sexe, désactivé et inerte depuis des semaines.

I attacked his nipples anew, and rapidly, mechanically, he kneeled before me, his hands imaginarily tied behind his back, to rub his lips against my fly, begging me in his tremblings and groans, to give him my body again, to free him from the pain I was imposing on him. To write that today, so far from him, gives me an erection in an organ that has been inactive and inert for weeks.

(156)

Elsewhere, in Navarre's work, the body itself dissolves into its own disintegrations, the empty spaces between the loci where the folds used to be: "Nous nous sommes fait l'amour, avec dévotion, presque comme avant, presque. On aime les plaies, les failles, les grains de beauté, les cicatrices, les manquements, les élans, les excès, les humeurs, les vertiges, et les errances de l'autre" 'We made love to each other, with devotion, almost like before, almost. We like each other's wounds, faults, beauty marks, scars, lacks, rushes, excesses, humors, dizzinesses, wanderings' (Navarre 109). In both cases, the gay body disappears, not simply as it does when only one body is at stake, but in an act of transubstantiation, metamorphosis, transhumance, metempsychosis. The body falls into its scars, its absences, its own subjectivity. Grounded in that act of sex, in a first person plural that is itself disappearing, heading toward oblivion, the act of sex completes the recognition that the self, constituted as other, is fading away.

One final point, odd to realize, necessary to announce. The change in the gay body through the eighties brings a return of non-homosexuality within gayness. In Tremblay's novel, Mathieu is married and has a four-year-old son. As I have noted, *Mon Valet et moi* is, at least superficially, about a heterosexual old man; the lover in *A l'ami* and *Protocole compassionnel* is bisexual. Though *a Gloire du paria* remains steadfastly gay, the AIDS infection comes from tainted blood, not from gay sex (241). *Eve*, too, turns to heterosexuality (and incest, to boot) and away from gay sex. And in Navarre's text, David, the character dying of AIDS, has fathered a son with a Japanese woman. Of the authors I am examining in this short study, only Camus seems to remain non-nostalgic for some heterosexual utopia, a world one presumes uninfected with AIDS. Yet even he makes a remark that moves him from the mark of free, unbridled gay sexuality that he always seemed to cherish unconditionally: "*Tricks*, tricks: mais c'est une pratique qui n'a son intérêt que si l'on a d'autre part le coeur à l'ancre. Ils ne peuvent pas être le tout d'une vie sexuelle, et moins encore d'une vie sentimentale" '*Tricks*, tricks: it's a practice that is interesting only if one's heart is anchored elsewhere. They can't be the totality of a sex life, and even less of an emotional life' (*Aguets* 216).

Some would undoubtedly say that this seemingly obligatory turn away from the gay body in its sexual identity and availability for free-play is part of the internalized homophobia of all gay men, though I would find it difficult to speak of homophobia in the case

of Camus and Guibert among others. Some would see it as the necessary corrective to the rampant sexual freedom of the seventies, a textual eschatology and morality play, a punishment for promiscuity. And still, it seems that a third solution, the one limned above, is perhaps more appropriate. If I am correct in these hypotheses, the gay body defined by its free-play no longer exists. Its objective correlative is now split between the partial object that is the condom, an object impossible, yet necessary, to fetishize, and a transcendental signifier still attached to the object: the imaginary, pure, heterosexual body, the myth of virginal love we were all once taught as children. We are thus in the process of witnessing some of the symptomology of the formation of the dialectical antithesis of the gay body.

Will there be another gay body? A synthesis? Assuredly. What form will it take? It is too soon to tell. Will the gay body once more be a sign of *la gaya scienza*, of life and of love? One can only hope.

Notes

1. For an excellent study of the discourses of AIDS in contemporary France, see Robert Harvey's article "Sidéens/ Sidaïques." Harvey looks at the multiple discourses of AIDS, of which the literary is only one set. Elsewhere, Joseph Lévy and Alexis Nouss have written a comprehensive overview of what they call a novelistic anthropology of AIDS, which involves an examination of a variety of French and American novels. They look at the thematics of the depiction of the illness, the descriptions of the various stages of the disease, the relations between the illness and death, the depictions of death and its social constructions, and the relation between AIDS and sexuality, specifically homosexuality. As anthropologists they take the novels as so many artifacts, signs of a social structure. If I have a quarrel with this book it is that what we might consider a more literary side is eschewed in favor of literature as testimony.

2. I point out Navarre's nationality because the responses of the newly negotiated figure of the gay body and AIDS do vary from country to country. I include Navarre in this overview of the subject but draw the line somewhere, in a no man's land, between him and Michel Tremblay, the Québécois writer. Still, as we shall see below, Tremblay has a similar reaction, at least on one count, to the phenomenon in question.

3. Susan Sontag's two works on illness are formidable studies of the relation of the language of illness to the subject. As she says in the book on AIDS, "As tuberculosis had always been regarded sentimentally, as an enhancement of being (it), cancer was regarded with irrational revulsion, as a

diminution of the self" (12). In distinction to Sontag, I would remind the reader that I am attempting to focus on the structuring of the body. Obviously the two fields are not completely distinct.

4. In his construction of a gay-focused argument, Bersani is speaking specifically of Andrea Dworkin's and Catherine MacKinnon's views about heterosexual intercourse. I think his point is valid (as does he) for the rhetoric around homosexual anal intercourse. Both this article and Jan Zita Grover's article come from a special issue of *October*: "AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism," edited by Douglas Crimp. In a world where the information about AIDS changes almost daily at the scientific level, this collection remains absolutely compelling for the acute perceptions of its various cultural analyses.

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