

TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF
THE PERCEPTION OF DEATH

A Master's Thesis

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I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication and Design.

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ABSTRACT

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The historical attitudes toward death are compared with the philosophical tradition of death contemplation to suggest points of divergence and similarities on the notion of the death of the body. Technological transformations of the attitudes toward body that are established through new modes of perception are often confined into the narrow understanding of Cartesian philosophy. Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh overcomes the dualistic consequences of the representational theory of perception thus offering a unified understanding to the elementary relation of bodies to their world. Death must be understood in this bodily sense of Being on which the technological makeup of the daily life plays a crucial and transformative role. The changes in the tradition of Vanitas and the technological penetration of body in Cronenberg's cinema are prime expressions of bodily death. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and textual and visual expressions of encounters with technology and nature are used in order to propose a transformative project to re-establish a primal relation with the intertwinings of death and life.

Keywords: Death, Body, Flesh, Technology, Phenomenology

ÖZET

ÖLÜM ALGISININ TEKNOLOJİK BAŞKALAŞIMI

Akkuş, Murat Baran

Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

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Ölüme yönelik tarihsel tutumlar, felsefenin başlangıcından beri süregelen ölüm üzerine düşünme geleneğiyle karşılaştırılmış ve bedenin ölümü fikriyle olan benzerlikler ve farklılıklar ortaya atılmıştır. Yeni görme biçimleriyle şekillenen bedene yönelik tutumların teknolojik başkalaşimleri, sıklıkla Kartezyen felsefenin dar anlayışına sıkıştırılmıştır. Merleau-Ponty'nin dünyanın bedenselliği kavramı temsilsel algı kuramının ikicil sonuçlarını aşarak, bedenlerin dünyalarıyla olan ilkel ilişkisine birleşik bir anlayış sunar. Ölüm, Oluşun bu bedensel anlamında anlaşılmalı ve günlük hayatın teknolojik karakterinin ölüme yaklaşımın belirlenişinde oynadığı kritik ve başkalaştırıcı rol bu çerçevede değerlendirilmelidir. Vanitas geleneğindeki değişimler ve Cronenberg sinemasında bedene teknolojinin nüfuzu böylesine bir bedensel ölümün temel dışavurumlarındanıdır. Merleau-Ponty'nin görüngübilimi ve teknoloji ve doğayla karşılaşmaların metinsel ve görsel dışavurumları, ölüm ve hayatın iç içe geçmişliğiyle ilkel bir ilişkiyi yeniden kurabilecek başkalaşimsal bir projeyi önermek üzere kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ölüm, Beden, Dünyanın Bedenselliği, Teknoloji, Görüngübilim

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

No amount of preparation can prepare one for the death of the other. That tearing in the fabric of normalcy, the passing of a life full of voice, memories, of love for the other beings or even for the world itself, of knowledge amassed and made use of, of things changed and the world seen. The end of a singular thing that perceived the universe, that experienced its joy and its pain; now lost to the World, to the others and to itself but somehow still lingering, as a collection of bones and flesh that returns to the world once more but also retained in the memories of the other, as a ghostly presence that still occupies the inner life of another person that somehow overlapped with his own, still touching the other somehow as a phantom. In the passing of the Other, there is the recognition of one's own passing away. It can be asked: Will they mourn for me? Will they remember me? It is somehow important that we are mourned, that we exist in the memories of the others. As if we are already anticipating our ghostly existence. Is it the same drive in us that propels us to make signs? To leave traces in words, in images, in narratives of our own making? Or is it our basic participation in the presence of the world, lamenting those who passed as well as our own demise in their eyes: for my perception in my offspring, in

the eyes of the other is going to fade as well; but also looking forward to a life beyond the loss, beyond the pain. Why do we cry if not for expressing that pain? Even in pain, the life itself screams with all its nerves, still wishes for a painless, easy transition and even for eternity still, even in that uninvited, horrible fact of death present in the room, even in that period of mourning where you may be entirely numb with your careless indifference to life, something aches and claws for air. How horrible it is to have to carry that pain of the lost one. There are choices to be made when the death of another is encountered, for example in the way that loss is carried within or the many paths of dealing with the truth of mortality that becomes evident in the death of the other. That loss may be carried in many ways: with dignity, with deep overwhelming sadness, with wide-eyed anticipation of life, with flesh tearing frenzy, with emotional barrenness or with willful ignorance of death. For too easily we are reminded of death: of pain past and of pain to come, of the absence of past ones and always on the horizon absence of our own: the cruel, objective knowledge of mortality of life.

This thesis begins with that encounter with the death of the other and attempts to grasp that encounter within the life of those who are thoroughly engaged with technology. While this does not mean that a familiarity with a certain technology is required to grasp the ideas behind this particular text, the ideas within should be applicable only for those who acknowledge a level of immersion in technology. One example to this is the amount of time spent looking at a screen and the experience of this perception. Rather than glossing over this perception, this thesis grounds its ideas in that experience of looking. This engagement with technology, in order to be understood, must first be acknowledged through awareness. The ways of engaging

with the devices that populate the world can be brought to view by expression. Through a transformed awareness of the technological components of daily life, the daily engagements with the events of life can be expressed as they are lived. In this sense, this thesis will be focused on one particular event: death.

It must be acknowledged beforehand that an encounter with death is fleeting and momentary compared with the amount of engagement with technology. Yet it must also be acknowledged that that encounter with death cannot be considered in isolation, without considering the attitudes toward dying, the variety of representations of death that comes before or after the encounter with death, without thinking about the experience of the daily life. It is within this context of daily experience that brushes with death, be it through the dying bodies of animals or the images of death that are perceived on the surfaces of screens, will be evaluated.

In order to attain this awareness, this thesis uses Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as its main theoretical component. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy attempts to ground the experience of the world through the phenomenological expression of the human being's life. According to Merleau-Ponty, the world opens up to perception at the nexus of the active participation of perception; the permanent perspective of body; the objects and the environment that is revealed and met through perception; the invisible interweaving of language and culture; and the other bodies that exist in a web of intersubjectivity. His philosophy is able to include within it the social and linguistic structures as well as the biological, physical existence of the individual. In other words, Merleau-Ponty brings forth the daily experience of life through his focus on the awareness of the world through perception. It is in this sense that

technology can take up its place in daily life: through perception. It is also in this sense that death is encountered: through perception. Thus in this field of perception that incorporates within itself, say, the structures of language and the flesh of the body, death and technology is brought together and revealed as intertwined. For this thesis, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy provided the perceptual field on which attitudes toward death can be shown to have been transformed alongside the technological transformation of the daily life. As such, this thesis can be considered as a discussion that attempts to reveal the relation between death and technology on the perceptual field that is offered by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

In Chapter 2, two names are introduced that are central to the beginning of this discussion. First is Philippe Ariès. Ariès, in his book *The Hour of Our Death* (2008) examines the ancient tradition of death and compares it with the attitudes that he observes in the industrialized areas of Western World. He calls the ancient tradition the tame death on account for the attitudes that were prevalent. These attitudes, compared with the current attitudes show that death was considered more to be a part of the daily life. It was met, not individually, but with a community. It was not considered to be nothingness, but more of a continuation of life itself. Compared to tame death, this untame and invisible death is a new phenomenon that is particular to the technologically advanced culture of the west. Ariès traces the first instances of the attitudes toward death that are distinct from the traditional attitudes, to the beginning of the 19th century and to the introduction of medicalization, thus providing the thesis with the first instance of the relation between technology and the attitudes toward dying.

The second name is Socrates who argued for death contemplation as a particularly philosophical endeavor. His thrust with this argument was that the philosopher, by pursuing the ideals of wisdom, would not be afraid of death since contemplation of death would reveal death as not something to be afraid of but at the very worst, as something that can simply be not known. While contemplation of death is in itself an important tradition for philosophy, Socrates opposes death contemplation to the worldly pursuits such as pleasure or wealth. Of particular importance for the purposes of this discussion are his warnings against indulgences in bodily matters. While this warning will be discussed in more detail within the thesis, this instance provides the thesis with the first relation between death and body. It is not a coincidence that the idea of a body that dies is encountered in the beginnings of Western Philosophy, within the discussion of the issue of facing death.

Chapter 3 focuses on the body and its significance in life. Schopenhauer, also belonging to the tradition of death contemplation, is the first philosopher that opposes the Cartesian tradition that more or less defines modern philosophy, on the issue of the body. While Descartes considers body to be not much more than a machine, Schopenhauer realizes that the existence of body is different than the existence of other objects. Schopenhauer's philosophy, similar to Socrates, advises death contemplation in opposition to the indulgence in the bodily pursuits. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy focuses on the bodily existence of the human being, bringing forth the daily experience of the world without the moral message against the body. He reveals the visceral aspect of being through his philosophy. In this chapter, the idea that death is the death of the body will be discussed by using Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh, which is used to express the

primal belongingness of the human being to the world. At the end of these two chapters, both death and body have been brought together under the folds of the phenomenological expression, thus putting the idea of the body-that-dies under the light of a single system of thought. This idea cannot be delineated since upon doing so, the intertwining of body and death, of life and death, would be separated and its significance would be distorted. In order to properly deal with this idea, expression rather than definition is required. That is why Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is crucial for the purposes of this thesis.

Chapter 4, first, considers the Vanitas tradition and discusses the changes in this tradition through Richard Leppert's *The Art and The Committed Eye* (1996). Leppert observes that with the rise of medical technologies, coinciding with the pushing of death out of the social life, the Vanitas tradition forsook the horrible image of the decomposing flesh in favor of the anatomical image of the skull. The tradition also began focusing on the luxuries and pleasures and contradicted the message of Vanitas which is, similar to Schopenhauer, a renunciation of earthly pleasures. The expression of death, even in the dogmatically ordered symbolism of this tradition, was subjected to changes that were brought on by technology. Also discussed within this chapter is Cronenberg's cinema for its extraordinary success in expressing the depth of the changes that is brought about by technology while also pointing out the many paths of transgressions and resistances that the body offers. For as Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a visceral philosophy, Cronenberg's cinema is a visceral cinema. The goal of this chapter is to present body and its death as transformed by technology. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy offers the background for this expression through which the understanding of the death of the body is shaped through the

pervasiveness of technology. Whenever technology is mentioned in this thesis, it has to be understood as an increasingly pervasive perspective that threatens to replace all other ways of seeing in favor of this one ordered, efficient and new kind of seeing. It is not the case that technology is solely responsible for perception nor it is the case that all other perspectives are already lost. Life encompasses technology and as will be seen throughout the thesis, the precondition for the immersion in technology is body itself. This thesis attempts to situate the changing attitudes toward death in this particular perspective's increasing presence in the lives of those who are frequently engaged with these technologies. It must be acknowledged that the strategy of this thesis is not to reduce this perspective to one single technology, although examples will be given in Chapter 4 such as gamification and quantification.

In the conclusion, another path towards reclaiming the place of death in one's life will be pointed out. This path considers life and death as already intertwined. As neither life nor death can be defined by themselves or known by themselves, in order to form an attitude towards death one must also consider life in all its forms. It is my belief that life is already intertwined with death and without an understanding of the human being's elementary belongingness to the Earth and to every living thing on this planet, any philosophy of life would be lacking. In this sense, one's own engagement with technology must also be understood within this belongingness, thus neither considering technology as solely responsible for the daily experience of the world, nor abandoning the increasing need for the awareness of the pervasiveness of this new perspective.

CHAPTER 2

DEATH

2.1 Tame Death

In what shape, form, word or image has the idea of death emerged for the human animal? Did he see his own death in the carcasses of animals or his fellow tribesman? Did he look into the darkness of the night and considered it as his future, a time that he would have to necessarily leave the relative protection of his group and venture into the vast unknown? It surely must have meant something that the other human beings stopped being there, stopped responding to sounds, stopped producing sounds and most importantly stopped moving. If an organism that depends on movement to survive becomes immobile, his inactivity must have surprised and even terrified.

Human beings know that they are going to die. No one would deny that a time would come for all when life as one knows will end. This life that is lived is limited. The phenomenon of death is more perplexing since there is no fixed time for death. It is not the case that one is given a date of his death and consider it in relation to that

particular time. In addition to knowing that life is finite; human beings also know that life can finish at any given moment, without any warning. No amount of guessing, clairvoyance or even scientific observation can provide any consoling piece of information, if any information about death can be consoling at all. The simple and terrible truth is that death is inevitable and it cannot be foretold.

This was not always so. As with all such seemingly timeless and objective truths, when the human perspective on most phenomena is considered, the historical context complicates and most of the time undermines convictions. Ariès writes in his book *The Hour of Our Death* (2008) that the oldest and relatively speaking, the most natural death was a death that was often foretold. In the literature of Middle Ages he finds this ancient attitude towards death which goes back to the beginnings of history. The characteristics of this old attitude are what he uses as a frame in which he compares the changes throughout history in the attitudes towards death.

This miraculous quality, the legacy of times when there was no clear boundary between the natural and the supernatural, has prevented romantic observers from seeing the very positive quality of the premonition of death and the way in which it is deeply rooted in daily life. The fact that death made itself known in advance was an absolutely natural phenomenon, even when it was accompanied by wonders (Ariès, 2008: 8).

The accidental and sudden death was considered unnatural and disturbing in contrast to the contemporary attitude: “In this world that was so familiar with death, a sudden death was a vile and ugly death; it was frightening; it seemed a strange and monstrous thing that nobody dared talk about” (Ariès, 2008: 11).

Ariès finds instances of this attitude, which he calls tame death, from Homer to Tolstoy. For two thousand years the traditional attitude towards death remains

unchanged, only to begin disappearing rapidly in the last century. Although this radical change and its causes and consequences will be reevaluated further along, it is appropriate now to say that the relative naturalness of tame death carries more ties with what cannot be properly imagined: the deaths of human ancestors that are forever lost and only reemerge partially in cave paintings and stone tools. One very important aspect of tame death is its communal nature. In the tame death:

Death is not a purely individual act, any more than life is. Like every great milestone in life, death is celebrated by a ceremony...whose purpose is to express the individual's solidarity with his family and community...Thus death was not a personal drama but an ordeal for the community, which was responsible for maintaining the continuity of the race. (Ariès, 2008: 603)

Here Ariès points out that death is an attack on the defenses of the community against nature thus casting the attitudes that are involved in tame death along a continuation of reactions against death that goes back farther in time. The communal aspect of tame death, which the rituals surrounding the death bed are one prime example, invokes the groups that are formed in order to hunt and provide better protection against predators. While any conjectures as to this relation would be highly speculative, the similarities are there. It may be possible to argue that reactions of hunter groups or groups that were continuously under the threat of nature, were communal reactions. The death of one member affected all the other members. These effects were immediate and were directly related to the survival chances of the species. Thus the communal aspect of tame death may be considered as a reaction that was natural in more than one ways.

Another aspect of tame death, one is lost today, is a simple resignation to it and acceptance of it as a continuation of life. One of Ariès's examples is illuminating in order to understand this difference. It is from Paul Bourget's *Outre-Mer*. Bourget

travels to the United States in 1890 and witnesses the hanging of a young black man, the servant of an ex-colonel. He eats fried fish with relish and later wears the new shirt that he is handed, “the uniform of execution” and his courage while doing these surprises Bourget. Later the ex-colonel, to prepare his former servant to death, kneels with him and they pray together.

Bourget makes this comment on the scene: “The physical and almost animal courage [he does not understand the immemorial resignation in the face of death] that he had shown by eating with such a hearty appetite was suddenly ennobled by a touch of the ideal.” Bourget does not realize that there is no difference between the two attitudes that he contrasts. He was expecting either rebellion or a big emotional scene, but what he observes is indifference. “I thought about the amazing indifference with which this half-breed let go of life, a life that he cared about, since he was sensual and vigorous. I said to myself, ‘What an irony that a man of this sort...should instinctively arrive at what philosophy regards as the ultimate goal of its teaching: resignation to the inevitable’.” (Ariès, 2008: 27-28)

Even at the end of 19th century, it is clear that this attitude was a rare thing, something that is lost and difficult to comprehend. Bourget’s account thus becomes an encounter with a past and an attitude towards death that seems to be out of reach for the contemporary mind. If the history of tame death is considered, that Ariès traces throughout the two thousand years of western attitudes toward death, the surprise of Bourget becomes itself the surprising reaction. The sudden disappearance of tame death represents a radical break with the tradition. Therefore the reaction of Bourget is the reaction of one who has already forgotten the ancient ways of dying.

2.2. Socrates’s Death

Another man who faced up to his death with dignity and calm comes to mind. Socrates is the model philosopher on which the relation of death and philosophy is first established. When Bourget talks about the ultimate goal of philosophy, he is

acknowledging this fact of the history of philosophy and its relation with the contemplation of death. The story of Socrates's trial and execution is crucial. In his defense against the accusations of atheism and corruption of youth, Socrates does not weep, beg or try to haggle with the jury for a different verdict. In his usual ironic manner, Socrates keeps his calm in the face of death and explains why he is not afraid of the jury's decision even if it is a decision of execution:

To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know. No one knows whether death may not be the greatest blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they know that it is the greatest of evils. And surely it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know (Plato, 2012: 33).

He offers two possibilities on *Apology* (Plato, 2012) two perspectives on death. He argues that either death is a nothingness, a sleeping state (albeit a dreamless one) which, as all experience it constantly and is never harmed by it, should not be feared. What pleasant prospect exists than a constant blissful sleep?¹ The second possibility is a kind of afterlife. Socrates offers his own version of afterlife where he meets up with all the wise men of the past, still able to continue his pursuit of wisdom among all those famous dead such as Homer or Orpheus. It is needless to point out the similarities between all ideas of afterlife and Socrates's version.

Both arguments still appear as if they seem to be all that can be thought about death.

Either we carry on in a transformed state, for death surely have to change something or we cease to exist, which practically means the end of perception. What else is

¹ Death as sleep is not particular to Socrates's philosophy. Ariès (Ariès 2008) points out that the idea of death as a sleeping state is one of the most ancient and popular images of death. It still persists today in many religious beliefs. It even finds its place in the recently science-fictional and presently applicable practice of cryonics, the preservation of the dead in a frozen state. Several cryonics organizations exist today, dating back half a century, proposing life extension services. The hope here, and it is no more than hope since the technology to revive the dead still does not exist, is to be awakened when a certain threshold of scientific breakthroughs are reached. People who are laid to their frozen state will be brought back to life and, presumably, will feel like they have slept a good night's sleep.

there to seriously think about? Can there be a third possibility where something survives death yet is not you? Or a joining up to a metaphysical unity where again your identity, personality or past is left behind or merged with something that is beyond comprehension? A reincarnation which you cannot recall but only exists as a principle? These additions, in the end, amount to a loss that means, yet again, the death of you which renders them pointless. The consoling argument, which is the second possibility that is offered by Socrates, is all that matters: the survival of what makes you yourself, as a person, an individual with a past, with projects and emotions. If these are lost, then it is the death of you.

These possibilities, aside from their own validity, are also important in a pragmatic sense. In *Phaedo* (Plato, 2005), which belongs to the middle-period of Plato's writings and is considered as the beginning of the emergence of his own philosophy, the last scene of Socrates's trial and execution is arrived at. Socrates's friends come to visit him in prison and they spend his last hours in the shadow of death, upon the insistence of Socrates, conversing about the soul and arguing about its immortality. Before moving on to questioning what death is and what may be proposed as knowledge about it is true or not, Socrates offers one of the most important projects for philosophy:

Other people are likely not to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead. Now if this is true, it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives, and then to be troubled when that came for which they had all along been eagerly practicing (Plato, 2005: 223).

Upon hearing this Simmias unintentionally laughs and points out that if the multitude heard Socrates they would think that philosophers desire death and they surely deserve it for doing so. Socrates's answer to this is essential: "And they would be

speaking the truth, Simmias, except in the matter of knowing very well. For they do not know in what way the real philosophers desire death, nor in what way they deserve death, nor what kind of a death it is” (Plato, 2005: 223).

The idea that there are kinds of death and not a single objective event or process is striking. With this idea the pragmatic considerations that have been briefly mentioned is made apparent. All the arguments that will come after this in *Phaedo* and all the teachings of Socrates that can be learned through Plato is cast anew as the practice of a particular way to die.

Immediately after answering Simmias, Socrates offers a definition of death: “We believe, do we not, that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and that the state of being dead is the state in which the body is separated from the soul and exists alone by itself and the soul is separated from the body and exists alone by itself? Is death anything other than this?” The answer is no. The separation of the soul from the body is important in order to understand the kind of dying that Socrates has in mind. Socrates emphasizes a simple fact which will be taken up later: it is the body that dies. The soul, even if it is not immortal, and he makes it known that he is not completely positive that it is immortal, is able to attain actual truths. Truths that the soul can obtain are contrasted with the pseudo-knowledge that one arrives at through senses. So even though the soul may perish (although it is unlikely according to Socrates), the truths themselves that the soul strive to gain and this struggle itself allows one to approach the question of immortality and the problem of his death with courage.

Socrates, even at his last hours, becomes a remarkable model for his friends that surround him. He never loses his passion for wisdom, nor does he succumb to morbid ruminations. Leaving aside the arguments for immortality, which belong to Plato's own philosophy anyway, the reasoning is that the philosopher should not be afraid of death because he should not have much to do with the worldly pursuits of wealth or pleasure. On the contrary, the true philosopher is the one who is in the Godly pursuit of wisdom. Therefore he does not care what he wears, what he earns, his title or his looks. He cares about wisdom, truth, courage and goodness and in the reflection of these ideals. Turning back to the possibilities of death as sleep and afterlife and considering them in this pragmatic sense, these are not only arguments about the nature of death but also instances of preparation, of dealing with one's own mortality, of elevating one's soul so that he can face his end with dignity, courage and with all the virtues of a philosopher. What prepares the philosopher is not only the excellence of his argumentations, their soundness and rationality, but also the very action of reflection on the issue of death. Thus both argumentation and contemplation allows the philosopher to leave behind his bodily attachments so that he can fully commit himself to his love of wisdom.

When one studies the teachings of Socrates and comes upon his warnings against indulgence in the worldly matters such as pleasure and wealth, they may come off as idealistic and a bit out of touch with reality. How to take such expressions without considering them as a rejection of body:

Now, how about the acquirement of pure knowledge? Is the body a hindrance or not, if it is made to share in the search for wisdom? What I mean is this: Have the sight and hearing of men any truth in them, or is it true, as the poets are always telling us, that we neither hear nor see any thing accurately? And yet if these two physical senses are not accurate or exact, the rest are not likely to be, for they are inferior to these. Do you not think so?"

“Certainly I do,” he replied.

“Then,” said he, “when does the soul attain to truth? For when it tries to consider anything in company with the body, it is evidently deceived by it...”
(Plato, 2005: 227)

Still, this judgment would be too hasty because when Socrates talks about body, he does not use it in the sense that say, Descartes would. He does not put forth a soul and body distinction that reduces the body into a thing. Raj Singh (2007: 3) explains this excellently:

The “body” here should be understood in its broader context, as representing the worldly involvements of the human being realized through human senses. It is suggested that for the most part, man’s soul is in bondage when it is absorbed in mundane concerns. The task of philosophy is to obtain the release of the soul from the concerns of the sense-world, for it is only in this freedom of thought that a deeper and fundamental (that is, ontological) knowledge can be gained. It is this death of the body, that is, death of one’s absorption in worldly concerns, that he prescribes for the philosopher.

For Socrates, philosophy is a way of living and living excellently. Discussion of virtues, the good way to live is incomplete without reflection on death: the truth of existence that all humans are mortal. Instead of a complete rejection of body, there is instead a philosophical path that leads to a balanced life which does not shy away from bodily pursuits, yet is in control of these urges and instincts. Instead of being ruled by the body, the body is ruled, tempered and incorporated into the being of the person, resulting in a blending of bodily concerns into the background, freeing the mind to pursue the higher goods of wisdom. In the end, instead of a denial of body, it can be seen that Socrates considered body as a crucial part of a virtuous life.

In light of his ideas about body, the attitude of Socrates towards death emerges as a project that extends to all life itself. One should attempt to live in pursuit of the truths of life according to Socrates, not just when he is faced with death, but all the time,

even when he thinks he is far from the end, or rather even when this fact remains out of his conscious mind, his life should be lived in accordance to his reality.

2.3. On the Relation between Tame Death and Socrates

The last words of Socrates are often invoked in order to illuminate his views on death. After drinking the poison and lying down, with his last words Socrates entreats an offering to his friend: “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius” (Plato, 2005: 403). Asclepius is the god of medicine and healing. Why does Socrates, on the brink of death, makes an offering to Aesculapius?

As Emily Wilson (2007: 117) notes in her book, there has been a number of interpretations of these last words. It is unnecessary to repeat them here but Wilson’s interpretation:

Socrates gives thanks to Asclepius, I would argue, because he has succeeded – metaphorically – in giving birth to his own death. Life is not a disease, death is not a cure. Rather, dying is like childbirth and death is like being reborn. This reading fits the metaphorical scheme of the dialogue much better than the idea that life is like a disease. Socrates has argued that death and life ‘are born’ from one another: the whole argument for immortality from opposites is framed in the language of birth and generation.

This reading has the advantage of tying back the death of Socrates to the ancient ways of dying that Ariès proposes to have preceded all perspectives on death. There is a continuum between life and death as in between life and being asleep. Socrates does not include darkness or nothingness to describe death. He either considers it as sleep or an afterlife, both belonging to the tradition of tame death. Surely, both these perspectives still exist today. Yet their effectiveness is in question.

Death of Socrates thus becomes an example of tame death in two points that have been mentioned previously. It is a communal death in which a group of friends surround the dying man, conversing on the issues of a philosophy and it is the death of a man who considers life and death in a continuum and simply resigns to the reality of his existence.

2.4. The Invisible Death

Both attitudes, belonging to tame death, are disappearing. Dying now belongs to hospital rooms and medical professionals rather than a community and death is a radical break, rather than a state of sleep or an afterlife that preserves some aspects of life.

It has by now been so obliterated from our culture that it is hard for us to imagine or understand it. The ancient attitude in which death is close and familiar yet diminished and desensitized is too different from our own view, in which it is so terrifying that we no longer dare say its name (Ariès, 2008: 28).

This is of course not a complete obliteration nor is it possible to argue that all people resigned to death as calmly as Socrates in the past. Instead this is the emergence of a new paradigm of a death, a new death that Ariès calls the invisible death.

Left alone to die in hospitals; bereft of a supernatural world that peopled the afterlife and realized it as sleep and in a continuum of life; his God dead and his world transformed rapidly, contemporary man, the city dweller, is now faced with a death that is terrifying and horrible to face. According to Ariès (2008), this is a break with a tradition that has persisted for so long that contemporary attitudes are completely new compared to this old tradition. Terror of death is now so unbearable there is an

altogether repression of death that is striking in its insistence and pervasiveness. It would be anachronistic to argue that death was not repressed in the past. However simple and plain the truth of mortality may appear, it is also elusive. As a species that have attained consciousness of this reality, humans are equally adept at ignoring it. I suspect that this was true in Athens 2400 years ago as it is now and Socrates was well aware of it. What changed is that now it is impossible to imagine life and death as comparable. That simple perspective in which life and death belongs to a continuity is disappearing. Death now appears as a terrifying, alien event that should be eliminated completely, an ancient disease that belongs to past.

How was this invisible death born? What was the process that completely reversed the ancient attitudes towards death? Could a natural reaction to death have been directly related to survival? The death of a member of a hunter group directly reduces the chances of survival of the other members of the species. Yet as Ariès (2008) notes, the reversal of the attitude of the community demonstrates that such reactions are not necessary anymore. There are no such communities today, no hunter groups or such close knit relations among a number of people that are related to each other based on life and death conditions.² Because as a species, humans no longer feel the need to defend themselves against nature as much as they did in the past.

It would be impossible to write about all the stages of transformation that Ariès (2008) explains, yet it must be remembered that the modern model of death that has

² It is telling that these kind of groups frequently crop up in post-apocalyptic narratives such as *The Walking Dead*. Is it a longing or a fragment of memory that is still sensitive to these predicaments?

³ The term "objectification" is used here as a more general perspective, distinct from its use in

appeared in the twentieth century is completely new and is particular to the technologically advanced areas of the Western world.

How the technology has come to be integrated into such an essential part of being, that is, death, is first, a question related to technology and second, to being. Such a question is possible because of bodies. This point may be better understood when the teachings of Socrates are reconsidered. Whatever the case, it is not disputed that Socrates discussed the issue of death in his many dialogues with the citizens of Athens. Although claiming a kinship of death and philosophy can be refrained from, it cannot be denied that contemplation on death is an issue that cannot be articulated without the help of that philosophical endeavor to grasp such a subject. It may be that such thoughts are essentially philosophical, whatever that entails. Anyway, Socrates is a solid evidence for such an argument. It is thus crucial that when Socrates contemplates death, he points to a body and a body that is lived. He does not regard the question “What will death be like?” to be much of an answerable question. Rather he emphasizes that such questioning is itself essential to live a balanced, healthy life. Even if there is a separation of soul and body, they are both considered to be a part of this reality itself.

This is not a management of eating disorders, a ten point list for healthy living, a role model like Dr. Oz. The balance is not within a diet, but between a diet and an active participation in philosophical dialogue. Imagine someone sitting in dinner and saying something like this: “Let us talk about philosophical issues such as death and not what we wear, how much we weigh or what we look like. Let us talk about how we live and die.”

The reversal of attitudes toward this relation between bodies and death is revealing. It is not the goal of Socrates to hold death at bay as long as possible when he prescribes a life that turns away (or halfway) from material pursuits. The pleasures that one may reach through bodily pleasures or amassing wealth is found unworthy for the soul of the philosopher who strives to reach some truth about his reality. This is not an evasion of the idea of death nor is it a morbid endeavor that embraces nothingness. Rather it is, again for the lack of a better word, a philosophical stance: one of reflection, of contemplation. On the other hand, if the attitudes toward bodies are technologically mediated, it follows that medicalization may be internalized as a way of living. It is not for a balanced life in which the meaning of life and death is contemplated that wealth or health is pursued. It is also not because technologies transform humans into robots that follow and make use of these technologies, as if these technologies are solely responsible for the life of a person. The pursuit of a longer life attempts to keep death at bay as long as possible.

Ariès (2008) traces the beginnings of medicalization to Tolstoy's *Three Deaths* (2008) and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (2008). There are twenty-five years between these books and Ariès finds in *Three Deaths* (Tolstoy, 2008) the beginning of the lie. This lie is the lie that tries to hide the truth of death from the loved one and maybe even from the self. A rich businessman's wife is diagnosed with tuberculosis and her condition is considered hopeless. But the husband cannot bring himself to tell this to her wife. There is a hesitation now that was absent before. Now the idea of death has been shrouded in secret. All the people around the dying person now participate in this play and death is driven into further secrecy. Only with the help of an older

cousin can this reluctance be overcome and “the classic scenario of the good death in public” can begin.

On the other hand, Ivan Ilyich is condemned to live this lie to his last days. Before his death however, Ilyich becomes obsessed with his diagnosis and the prescriptions of the doctor. He reads books, compares similar cases to his own symptoms, and consults other doctors but all his knowledge about his illness cannot console him. Yet “his state of mind is dependent on two variables: the diagnosis of the illness and the effectiveness of the treatment” (Ariès, 2008: 565). His anxiety is alleviated when his treatment is effective and he gets anxious when things go wrong. When the doctor becomes unsure of the diagnosis, Ivan Ilyich abandons his trust in medical science and immediately resorts to religious, magical thinking: he goes to a charlatan who “heals with icons”.

Then begins a long night, in which Ivan Ilyich must endure in silence the pain and ugliness of the physical disease, as well as the metaphysical anguish... “The worst torment was the lie, this lie that for some reason was accepted by everyone, that he was only sick, and not dying, and that if he would only remain calm and take care of himself, everything would be fine; whereas he knew very well that no matter what was done, the result would only be even worse suffering and death...” (Ariès, 2008: 567)

As much as the pain of sickness, the lie torments Ivan Ilyich. Because his own death first becomes a result of a diagnosis, a phenomenon that occurs between his organs, something objective that only medical science has control over and second, even when everyone realizes that he is dying, the truth never emerges and thus he cannot live his own death. The glaring contradiction of living one’s own death becomes something natural when one considers how one dies.

Is this not exactly what Socrates warns against, the lies that are uttered just as Ivan Ilyich tells himself at his death bed? Is this not the same lie, that if one remains calm and take care himself, everything will be fine? The truth is what is revealed when one considers his life and realizes his life as something that is finite. No matter the amount of years that are accumulated and added up to the end of a life, the end does not change and the outcome is still the same. This does not mean that staying healthy or attaining success is worthless and meaningless. What this means is that when they are considered and pursued as ends in themselves, the perspective of the basic facts of reality is lost, such as mortality.

Thus according to Aries (2008: 595) the most recent model of change begins with medicalization and in a more general sense, with the technology behind this:

People began to believe that there was no limit to the power of technology, either in man or in nature. Technology erodes the domain of death until one has the illusion that death has been abolished. The area of the invisible death is also the area of the greatest belief in the power of technology and its ability to transform man and nature.

It is not a coincidence that the lie and the impact of technology both concerns death. Technology has become a lasting and pervasive phenomenon for the life of the human being. This was not so for Socrates. He did not live in a world that was thoroughly transformed by science and technology. Yet his sensitivity for the truth of one's own reality still retains its relevance, which is after all, the beginning of science itself.

2.5. Conclusion

A brief reconsideration of the advice of Socrates on the issue of indulgence on the bodily pursuits is adequate at this juncture. It has been shown that although he may first come off as an idealist that completely overlooks the daily experience of living, this would be a wrong impression. What Socrates has in mind is a life that balances contemplation with the worldly pursuits, both elevated by a conscious, deliberate focus on how to live and die.

The idea of a body as the word is generally used is absent here. It is yet to arrive, fully fledged, in Cartesian philosophy, which will be discussed in the following chapter. For now it is enough to notice that contemplation on death, in itself, as a state of being, is not the crucial part of the philosophical contemplation of Socrates on the issue of mortality. Rather the question of how to live and face death is much more important since the issue of death only arises for the living.

This is not an issue that is particular to Socrates or Ivan Ilyich or you and me. Death has been a familiar phenomenon of life since the pre-historical man first come to be uniquely conscious of his existence. It was an inevitable fact of life as it is now. What changed, and what changed radically is the contemporary ability of the species to eradicate pain, make life significantly more secure and in the end, control nature and bodies to the extent that the rules that were not even considered as changeable is now challenged. Thus what Ariès considers as the ancient, monolithic tradition that persisted for thousands of years has been disappearing rapidly in the technologically advanced, urban life of Western world since 20th century, replaced by an invisible,

terrifying event that escapes the grasp of daily life, vaporizing into the objectifying perspective of science and technology thus losing its familiar face to be replaced by something new.

CHAPTER 3

BODY

In the need to contain the dread of death, lacking the ancient traditions that helped one to incorporate it to one's life relatively easily, new ways are needed to protect from the awareness of mortality. Without stable attitudes that are shared across a community e.g. the dogmatic symbolism of memento mori, new attitudes that lack coherency and resists easy categorization are born. In other words, the attitudes toward death reflect in the variety of ways that attempts of escape are made.

It is the body that dies. In the absence of a belief in a soul or an afterlife, this basic truth becomes an unbearable, terrible fact. But have these religious beliefs been lost? Is it possible to believe in today's world that belief in a soul or afterlife is a thing of the past? No matter the answers, it is reasonable to think that the victory of science in the last couple hundred years have been shaping more and more lives. Following this, it is not hard to notice the relation between death and technology yet again. The simple conclusion that can be drawn is that the attitudes toward death are in constant relation with the state of the world, the times are lived in, the knowledge that is possessed. So it may be said that even if death is an existential category, something

that is personal and related to the individual life of the human beings, it also stands outside of the control of the individual and his own attitudes are affected by the prevalent attitudes toward it. The change that can be observed in the change from the tame death into the untame death of the 20th and 21st century is a symptom of this condition.

For all the objective knowledge that the Western society produce, death still evades thought easily. It is as if the words themselves are absent, leaving behind extreme expressions such as nothingness, darkness, and total unconsciousness. Maybe a simple answer should suffice: the separation of the soul from the body. What this means is that death is a severing of all that makes an individual, a subject with a particular history, a singular identity. Even in this idea, death is a hinge that operates between the spheres of this world and an afterlife. The moment that an attempt at understanding it is made, there appears something metaphysical that is supposed to survive the body.

What about those who do not believe that anything will survive the body? For those who believe that life is limited to this world, that there can be no afterlife and that nothing will survive the body, it is hard to consider death as a separation or a transformation. The finality of death weighs heavy for the modern mind. It is no wonder that occupation with bodies is increasing e.g. physical alterations, variety of diets, anxiety of body images, not just for living a good life, but arguably, to avoid the primacy of body in the composition of reality, and the mortality of it long as possible. The approach to how to live a life and face death may have come closer to a distorted version of the Socratic approach to death. Where he argued for abstaining

from bodily concerns in order to grasp an ideal world and thus consider death as nothing to be feared, an overly concerned attitude towards the body can be the sign of an attempt to reduce the body into this ideal world, thus attempting to overcome its limitations.

The objectification of body, traceable back to the ontological duality of Descartes, may be considered as the most significant step towards this shift in attitudes toward death.³ Very much influenced by the birth of the modern scientific method and the successes that it was responsible for, the foundational system of subjectivity as wholly independent from body can be found in the Cartesian philosophy. In such a system, the body is reduced to an object.

This is a necessary step within the birth of the scientific, technological outlook of the western culture. Body is considered as an object that can be charted medically, observed scientifically and understood rationally. With the advance of medical technologies, this outlook came to be normalized but even in the 18th century, it can be seen that with Descartes the meaning of body starts to change. It begins to lose its significance related to evil and this is a very crucial change. But for now it is enough to observe that this change is due to the emergence of the modern scientific outlook. Surely the reduction of subjectivity into the metaphysical realm of soul by Descartes must now seem old fashioned. But the effects of this new understanding of bodies are still alive and influential. For instance, mental activities (or what it means to have a mind) are explained through chemical reactions or physical explanations. If not as machines, some consider human beings as objectively determined by logic,

³ The term "objectification" is used here as a more general perspective, distinct from its use in psychology yet still obviously related.

evolutionary rules and physical laws. At least, this viewpoint is gaining ground and is one of the main components of a technologically mediated perspective.

How to think about death when it can be thought that beyond what can be impartially observed awaits a world still unobserved and little less? Too readily death is thought as if it is nothingness. But what does it mean when death is said to be nothingness? If the phenomenological argument that consciousness is always consciousness of something is accepted, then how to think nothing? Surely, to think about death is always to think about something. There is no perspective on death that can escape the worldly being of human, his life. Since every approach to it necessitates a living, breathing body and a working brain, death is never nothing. It is always the death of an organism that evolved a brain capable of contemplating on death and also, to a degree, created the very conditions for this contemplation. There is nothing metaphysical about death since it is the very essence of nature that death exists. It is the necessary condition for life itself. Every thought about death reflects something back, captured by words. Yet the scariness of the thought may not have anything to do with what it means. Maybe what is dreadful about death is that it does not have any meaning in itself. The curse lies in the very language of despair that emerges when one thinks about death as his personal annihilation. Having the ability to abstract death from life itself, against the completeness of experience and the inability to know death in itself, is a kind of curse yet it does not curse life itself. When Socrates refrains from asserting any possibility of knowledge of death itself, instead offering two very traditional ideas of death and focusing on the very act of contemplating death as such, he overcomes the obstacle of wallowing in the desire to know the unknowable.

In the carcasses of roadside kills, in the passing away of loved ones, in the images of violence and in the sickness and pain that it brings, the fact of mortality is reminded. No matter how hard this truth is repressed, there is little chance of escaping from living it, embodying it. If it is a survival instinct coded into genes or a social construct that constantly keeps it in control, not-so-deep-down the reality of death makes itself known. The technology which allows the human species to dominate nature is for the present incapable of eradicating death. It also cannot offer a consoling piece of knowledge about death aside from postponing it. However, that deep craving for life itself, which Schopenhauer will call the will-to-live, cannot but desire life while at the same time having to carry the burden of knowledge of mortality which is, from another perspective, a curse of this flesh, this body. Why know this and not know what it is like? It is the missing tooth that constantly calls attention to itself. The absence of knowledge of death is unnerving.

The reversal of attitudes toward death finds its parallel in the attitudes toward bodies. Modern science and technology persistently alter perspectives of most aspects of reality. Consequently, neither death nor bodies are exempt from these shifts in perspective. Attitudes toward bodies: anxieties about aging; standards of beauty that creates impossible images to compare appearances to; the endless stream of information that regulates what, when and how to eat; constant reminders to move, to exercise; eating disorders and body anxieties; chemicals of all kinds that are used to control every aspect of bodies are all closely related with this radical shift in the attitudes that technology plays an important role in shaping. This by no means reduces these attitudes to the inner mechanisms of certain technologies since these

attitudes must be considered within the existential categories, within the life of the individual.

3.1 Schopenhauer and Body

Raj Singh (2007) trails the connection between death and philosophy from Socrates to Schopenhauer and Heidegger. His focus is on Schopenhauer and the intimate relation of his philosophy to death contemplation and eastern thought. Raj Singh points out to Schopenhauer's essay: "On Death and its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature" as a substantial lead for the connection between Socrates and Schopenhauer on the issue of death and philosophy. After repeating the thoughts of Socrates on how philosophy is a rehearsal of death, Schopenhauer (1966: 463) goes on to make a comparison between human beings and animals:

The animal lives without any real knowledge of death; therefore the individual animal immediately enjoys the absolute imperishableness and immortality of the species, since it is conscious of itself only as endless. With man the terrifying certainty of death necessarily appeared along with the faculty of reason. But just as everywhere in nature a remedy, or at any rate a compensation, is given for every evil, so the same reflection that introduced the knowledge of death also assists us in obtaining metaphysical points of view. Such views console us concerning death, and the animal is neither in need of nor capable of them. All religions and philosophical systems are directed principally to this end, and are thus primarily the antidote to the certainty of death which reflecting reason produces from its own resources.

Schopenhauer's emphasis on the contemplation of death is also a very essential part of his whole philosophical system. The subject of body and death is central to Schopenhauer's ideas about the world as Will. The concept of Will, which will later be one of the influences of Nietzsche, is according to Schopenhauer reality itself. It is a mindless, non-rational force that does not have a goal other than perpetuating itself.

The crucial part is that the body is the key to understanding the entirety of being as Will.

To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word will. Every true act of his will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body. The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for the understanding (Schopenhauer, 1966: 100).

In other words, a human body cannot merely be an object among other objects. It surely is an object just like any other object. But a human being also inhabits his body. Schopenhauer challenges the relation of body and subjectivity that was up to him considered within the Cartesian framework. Schopenhauer rejects the mind-body dualism by focusing on the lived experience of the body which does not feel as if it is merely an object that stands out there, observable through cause and effect relations. Instead body is given in two ways, as representation and as Will.

How to think about Schopenhauer's Will? It is at first instance very familiar. Before even considering death, will is the hunger and its satisfaction, desire and its frustration. The Will is that endless pursuit of happiness, of possessing an object, the abject fear that the exposure to flesh and its monstrosities provokes. It is the pendulum that goes between boredom and satisfaction, creating the illusion of a very near future where the tide of reality falls; where actually human beings are surrounded by nothing in a perpetual present: the nothingness of a past that is

destroyed and a future that is yet to arrive. The tragedy of existence, death having the lead part, is the tragedy of a body that is unable to control the Will acting out on its own, manifesting itself in the pursuit of the world itself, where a tidal wave of hunger, desire, need and pain is penetrated by momentary relapses of pleasure. The pessimism here is disturbing and uncomfortable for the positivist. As such, Schopenhauer is the lone figure in post-Kantian German Idealism that culminates in the philosophy of Hegel.⁴

Just like Socrates, Schopenhauer argues for a philosophical system that embraces the certainty of death and makes it an integral part of its perspective. Similarly, he argues for a rejection of this Will which he considers the bodily pursuits to be the primary appearance of. Where Socrates focused on a death that meant a refrain from bodily pursuits in favor of philosophical contemplation of death, the rejection of will by Schopenhauer begins with a realization of the Will as the root evil of existence:

This denial of the will-to-live seems to be essentially the same as what we have called “death-contemplation,” or the practice of doing without what is commonly called “the good life.” According to Schopenhauer, there are two mutually connected insights that lead a thoughtful person to choose the path of willlessness. The knowledge of boundless suffering of the human and animal world combined with its transitoriness, that is, a compassionate acknowledgement and a conscious identification with the sufferings of others could inspire one to renounce the matter-of-course life of the will. At the same time, the knowledge of “the inner nature of the thing-in-itself,” or the rare possibility of the otherwise blind will-to-live becoming self-aware, also drives one toward a voluntary willlessness. Only in the human entity, the will has a possibility to take a pause, become aware of its own machinations and to deny itself (Raj Singh, 2007: 44).

When one realizes the immense suffering that lies at the heart of nature at any time and the pointlessness of all the bodily pleasures in the face of this suffering; and when one grasps that all worldly pursuits amount to nothing in the face of death, he

⁴ Nietzsche condemns the philosophers who forgets the bodily aspect of existence.

arrives at the philosophical frame of mind which renounces the Will and all its representations.

Schopenhauer (1966: 311) makes use of a symbol of the vanitas tradition, the soap-bubble, reminding us that all is in vain:

Every breath we draw wards off the death that constantly impinges on us. In this way, we struggle with it every second, and again at longer intervals through every meal we eat, every sleep we take, every time we warm ourselves, and so on. Ultimately death must triumph, for by birth it has already become our lot, and it plays with its prey only for a while before swallowing it up. However, we continue our life with great interest and much solicitude as long as possible, just as we blow out a soap-bubble as long and as large as possible, although with the perfect certainty that it will burst.

While the contrast with the positivism of German idealism is apparent, the pessimistic argument here stands at the other edge, failing to recognize experience in its entirety. It may also be easily argued that existence is neither a system that would arrive at a positive age of enlightenment that would eradicate all ignorance and pain, nor is it a principally evil phenomenon that is filled with pain and suffering. It may be said that existence is contradictory in that it is filled with joy and suffering, ignorance and objective knowledge, certainty and ambiguity all at the same time. It is confound; and it is irreducible to one aspect of existence or one outcome out of all the unimaginable paths of future.

Leaving aside the pessimistic arguments, the important part here is the central role of body in the philosophy of Schopenhauer. By considering the Will and the body as two aspects of the same thing, Schopenhauer challenges the Cartesian understanding of a mind, influencing body through a cause-effect relation. There is no soul in Schopenhauer's philosophy but a blind, terrible principle that takes form as the body

of a human being, among other things. The uniqueness of the human being is its ability to comprehend death in all its certainty. But he also has the ability to remedy this certainty by metaphysical thoughts. One example is the mind – body duality that is at the foundation of Cartesian philosophy. Here the body is a vestige that is shed on the instance of death which amounts to a rejection of both the bodily, fleshy aspect of experience and the inevitability of death. Schopenhauer realizes that both are part and parcel of day to day life but also takes the argument further and generalizes pain and death as the essential principle of all existence. Following this, the only respite from the evil of existence is reflection on the inevitability of death and suffering; and the recognition of these in the others and hence a renunciation of all bodily aspects of being.

Why body is thus rejected? Nietzsche (2005: 202) has these to say about Schopenhauer:

Specifically, he is a viciously ingenious attempt to use the great self-affirmation of the 'will to live', the exuberant forms of life, in the service of their opposite, a nihilistic, total depreciation of the value of life. He interpreted art, heroism, genius, beauty, great sympathy, knowledge, the will to truth, and tragedy one after the other as consequences of 'negation' or some need to negate on the part of the 'will' -the greatest psychological counterfeit in history, Christianity excluded.

Schopenhauer fails to affirm the will to live. Rather he negates it by considering art as a need on the part of will to negate itself, perpetuating the morality of Christianity. This may also be said about Schopenhauer on the issue of body. When the existence of the human being in this world is considered, it is true that there is nothing ideal about it. He gets sick, suffers and dies. Yet there is also joy in life. And not just mere satisfaction, there is pleasure and happiness in the very matter of existing as a body, of having emotions, loving and hating. However finite it is, the fact of mortality does

not imply that the will to live should be negated in spite of living. Otherwise it would mean a kind of surrender to death.

While Schopenhauer recognizes that existence is grounded in this world, in the flesh and bone of bodies, he does not delve into all its implications. His pessimism and failure to negate death implies that his ideas about body were just the first instance that would later be further elaborated by later philosophers.

3.2 Lived Body

What is meant when it is said that it is the body that dies? It seems like the religious idea of life as expressing the duality of experience as life and something else than life, which is more often death. In the religious perspective, death is kept at bay since there is no actual death. There is something imperishable, pure and ideal that must resist the earthly pull of desire and suffering. Even the fate of this body is irrelevant when considered against the immortality of soul. Faith thus acts as salvation from death but also death itself is salvation from pain, doubt and anxiety. This is of course again only available to those who manage to restrain their bodily impulses, belong to a community that shares the same religious reactions and rituals and is able to face death as a community, and live according to a set of rules that are all in all, dogmatic. In other words, they must learn to die in life in order to face death without fear.

Putting aside the religious interpretation of the question, can a scientific perspective be assumed? Assuming an objective perspective to bodies, it may be concluded that human beings are nothing more than bodies and that death is a natural phenomenon

that must be faced rationally. Yet this view seems to constrain thought to a purely objective reality that often fails to capture the irrational, ambiguous and contradictory nature of Being. For instance the symbolic language of memento mori attempts to give expression to this reality, occupying a considerable place in the inner life of pre-industrial, pre-medicalization human being. Science replaces this view with an entirely different outlook that lacks such morality but inevitably has ethical consequences. Overlooking the ethical questions, it may at least be argued that scientific viewpoint cannot exhaust all the possibilities of expression that attempts to capture in words the entirety of the world as it is experienced by human beings.

What is necessary in order to understand this body that dies is an account of what it means to live a body and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is able to achieve this. In order to understand what he has to say about bodies, a closer look at the historical context of his philosophy is necessary.

Hass (2008) argues that one of Merleau-Ponty's greatest achievements is his overcoming of the representational theory of perception. Descartes considers body and soul as ontologically distinct substances that somehow interact with each other. The subject – object dichotomy that lies at the foundation of modern philosophy is thus born and body is immediately cast outside the scope of experience, relegated to a machine with observable parts, operating within a strict cause – effect relationship. However Descartes does not arrive here out of the blue. In his search for certainty in knowledge, his famous method of doubt eliminates the information that one gets through senses, finding perception easily deceived. For if it is often impossible to tell

if it is a dream or not while dreaming, might one not be dreaming still even when one supposed to be awake? In the end, only this “I” remains in the face of the method of doubt, the metaphysical subject that is more or less devoid of flesh and bone and desire.

In the Cartesian framework, thus the world of senses, what is perceived through eyes and ears and all the other organs are just representations of another substance that causes these representations through the senses. This mind should not be understood in today’s cognitive sense since it is metaphysical and belongs to another, ideal world. The distrust of senses is nothing new but the resulting mechanistic ideas about the nature of senses is the opposite of the long-standing tradition of organic nature of the world as can be found in Aristotle. The Cartesian Theatre is thus born out of a dualistic nature: on the one hand, the pure immortal soul that experiences the world and on the other, the world that operates according to Newtonian physics rather than Aristotelian. The mind-body dualism that this idea results in has been one of the primary problems of Western modern philosophy.

Hass (2008) considers Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy as the overcoming of two traditional theories of perception. One is the representational theory of perception as can be found in its classical form in Cartesian philosophy. This is an empirical tradition which considers sensation as consisting of atomic parts. These sense-qualia end in perception as an “internal veil of ideas” which can only exist in a dualistic and theological framework. This religious and dualistic perspective conceals the deeper fact of perception that is lived. In other words, the daily experience of the world does not reveal such a distinct duality. The screen that I am perceiving as I write these

words appear to me as here and not as a reflection on a screen that is supposed to be in my mind. Even body itself becomes a representation as it comes to be understood through the metaphors of technology and science. As a consequence, body becomes a machine and experience becomes the experience of a soul that occupies the body as a ghost. The other tradition is contemporary physicalism. This tradition has the merit of not being dualistic but it is reductionist. It reduces perception into neurophysiological processes. While these are surely essential parts of experience, they can in no way exhaust the reality of phenomenal world.

This is not the place to examine these traditions in detail. It is enough to say that Cartesian understanding of perception distorts the lived experience and replaces it with a fantastical contraption of a machine-body that houses a soul. This perspective fails in so many ways. One is its inability to give a proper account for the interaction between these two distinct substances and another is its representational theory about perception which betrays several essential characteristics about lived experience. On the other hand, physicalism surely explains an aspect of the reality of perception but it often overreaches and claims that there is no more to perception than physical interactions between the material world out there and minds. The failure of physicalism is less obvious since it is ridiculous to argue that theories of cognitive science or neurobiology fail to explain the reality of perception. As Hass (2008) argues, this is not the case. Scientific explanation about perception is absolutely necessary and essential to understanding. The argument here is that the success of scientific explanation should not be mistaken for the whole story. The phenomenal world that emerges for the human being is always more than a discourse or a text. There is always something left behind, something that cannot be said by a single

discourse. Failure to acknowledge the inexhaustible nature of reality constraints the understanding of the world into a single perspective.

Than what is phenomenology? What kind of a perspective it is? What does Merleau-Ponty offer us to enrich the understanding of perception and bodily being?

Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. But it should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense. The phenomenological world is not pure being, *but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears.* It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. For the first time the philosopher's thinking is sufficiently conscious not to anticipate itself and endow its own results with reified form in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: XXII)

The extreme subjectivism and the extreme objectivism that plague both Cartesian philosophy and contemporary physicalism are united in phenomenology. Yet even phenomenology cannot fully exhaust the multiplicity of possible perspectives that are born out of the intersection of personal experience, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Even "the phenomenological world is not pure being".

The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system 'Self-others-things' as it comes into being; to reawaken perception and foil its trick of allowing us to forget it as a fact and as perception in the interest of the object which it presents to us and of the rational tradition to which it gives rise (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 66).

Simply put, against the two traditions of representation which is always related to how these traditions consider body, phenomenology is a return to experience as it is lived. It is no wonder that one's body is crucial in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. In the system of self-others-things, in other words in the field of phenomena, body occupies the singular position as the opening of being into this field.

The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them. In the self-evidence of this complete world in which manipulatable objects still figure, in the force of their movement which still flows towards him, and in which is still present the project of writing or playing the piano, the cripple still finds the guarantee of his wholeness. But in concealing his deficiency from him, the world cannot fail simultaneously to reveal it to him: for if it is true that I am conscious of my body via the world, that it is the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 94).

Similar to the realization of Schopenhauer, Merleau-Ponty argues that one's body is not simply an object among other objects. In fact it is impossible to consider one's body as one considers other objects of the world since body itself is the very permanent perspective through which one perceives the objects. It is impossible to perceive bodies as if they are simply objects such as a chair. To perceive a chair is to perceive it from a distinct perspective which one is already aware is not restricted to that one side of the chair. My body can move around the chair and take positions in relation to it. On the other hand, one cannot move around one's body. There is but one single perspective of it which is permanent. In fact, Merleau-Ponty (2005) argues that the permanency of body is of a different kind from the permanency of objects and also the permanency and absence of objects can only be understood in relation to the permanency of body.

This should not be understood as a simple duality between a permanent body and a world of objects. On the contrary, the body and the world, even if they may seem to be separate from each other, are in a continuous reciprocal relation with each other. This reciprocity holds an important place in *Phenomenology of Perception* and is later taken up again by Merleau-Ponty and given new expression as reversibility and flesh. Even more than reciprocity or simple exchange between the body and the world, there is a difference that overlaps and intertwines the body and the world that it meets: "...between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123)."

The gap between my body looked at and my body looking is the very space of openness that allows one to sense the world around him. Through this difference between my body seen and my body seeing emerges the world as it is perceived. It is true that the objects that I perceive are different, other than me. Yet they open up themselves to senses. In other words, the openness that Merleau-Ponty ascribes to the body is not a gap that leaves the world of objects on one side and a pure subject on the other. There is not opposition but an "overlapping difference" which perfectly captures Merleau-Ponty's conception of living perception (Hass, 2008).

The most important expression in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology may be the flesh. According to Hass (2008: 138), there are three different ways that Merleau-Ponty employs this concept. One is the carnal nature of Being:

This carnal ensemble of myself, other creatures, and sensible things is part of what Merleau-Ponty means when he speaks of "the flesh of the world": not the absurdity that everything is literally flesh and blood, but that despite all the irreducible differences, we all share kinds of corporeality. In this first sense of flesh as

carnality, Merleau-Ponty uses the term as an intentional, strategic alternative to the age-old notion of “matter”—a notion that homogenizes everything it touches and eliminates every ounce of sensual contact. No doubt: “flesh” is sometimes used by Merleau-Ponty for its power to evoke the sensual carnality of living experience.

In other places, Merleau-Ponty uses flesh as designating reversibility. The paradox of the objects is an appropriate example for this second sense of flesh. Even though the objects are different than us, they are not the opposite. There is a latent reversibility and an intertwining between the world and me.

The third use of flesh may be said to follow from other uses. What Merleau-Ponty expresses is a field of Visibility that one arrives at when he considers perception. What is called the seer and the visible world is caught up in the same fabric of flesh. What Merleau-Ponty calls the “fundamental narcissism of all vision” has two senses. First is the reversibility of seeing where one’s body is the opening to a world that both transcends itself but also is itself a part of. Merleau-Ponty describes this as if the world and the body are two mirrors facing one another, neither one of them carrying a more real image than the other, reflecting each other as a couple and thus are more real together than either of them alone. The image that is born out of this reversible relation is one sense of the narcissism of vision since it is nothing more than himself that the seer perceives: he is captured in this Visibility where it is not possible to strictly point out where he ends and the world begins. Here the second sense of the narcissism of vision is arrived at, through which the third sense of the flesh can be understood.

And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity—which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the

visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual." Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139).

In this elementary sense, flesh is a general Visibility that every perceiving thing is a part of. This flesh is not a substance and it is also not a mind. As such, the other individuals, the sky above and my own body are all flesh insofar they are Visible. There is no objective reality that stands outside the subject as if the seer perceives the world from another dimension, another substance that touches without touching, sees without seeing. Merleau-Ponty argues simply that seeing is being seen and being seen is being intertwined in the reversible folds of the flesh. This is not just being looked at by another person. It is the overlooked, silent perception of the world which in the normal course of things resists awareness. Yet it is also very familiar. When writing on a keyboard, the awareness of the positioning of fingers as they find the letters that make up the words that are intended to be written down or the plastic of the buttons that give tactile feedback to fingertips remain silent. It is this silent but fundamental bodily being that Merleau-Ponty expresses in his concept of flesh.

The flesh of the world is not the body in itself. It is neither subjective nor objective but the landscape for all such perspectives. My body is my opening into the flesh but

this opening is not in opposition to the flesh. In fact the body, by respect of it being seen, is itself flesh. This should not be understood as a homogenous experience of the world, a reduction of Being into a central concept that attempts to exhaust all perspectives. On the contrary, as a folding over of all seems to the same fabric of Being, flesh is thoroughly heterogeneous and is a field that multiplicity of perspectives, that of mine and the other, emerges.

If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an "intercorporeity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 140).

With his notion of flesh and intercorporeity, Merleau-Ponty points us to the notion of living perception, a lived body. Experience of the world is not a representation of a reality that can only be grasped through rationality. On the contrary, experience is the direct presentation of the world. However, reality is not passively received. The world emerges as a field of perception born out of the interaction between the body, the objects and other people.

3.3 The Body Is Not a Machine

Embedded in the folds of flesh, the lived-body cannot be circumscribed by a single perspective. The complexity of the permanence of body and its fundamental relation to perception as an organic being that exists surrounded by what Merleau-Ponty calls the Invisible, which is the domain of language, culture, social structures and art is too

much for a single discourse to explain away. While both The Visible and The Invisible are aspects of flesh, the domain of The Invisible is harder to express in a phenomenological framework. But it can be seen in the ways that attitudes have a way of informing perception. The case in point is the mechanistic perspective of body that plagues Cartesian philosophy.

The philosophy of Descartes distorts the reality of being body by constricting life into the narrow framework of cause and effect, effectively rendering body no more than a machine. This understanding of the body flies in the face of lived experience, failing to account for the deeper recesses of our fundamental being in the world. This is essential to the human being, his body and his being caught in an intersecting web of perspectives, of other bodies, of aspects of his bodily being, his gender, his race, his mortality. Failure to incorporate such fundamental elements of experience in turn results in reductive attitudes toward the inexhaustibly rich and deep fabric of reality.

In my being I cannot discern myself as a ghost or a mind in a machine or an objectively circumscribed organism. I inhabit a succession of perspectives, a variety of experiences that invariably involve the body as their nexus. However, the fundamentality of bodily being cannot prevent the obstruction of elementary “belongingness” to the same world: the primal existence that is forever intertwined within the folds of flesh.

Cartesian philosophy is indebted to the birth of modern scientific model that purports to capture perception, yet by dint of its capture, is itself captured by its own mode of looking. What Foucault (Foucault, 1995) calls the age of “Man-the-Machine” is in part a history of Cartesian philosophy and its representational theory of perception

and its consideration of body in mechanistic terms. The representational understanding of perception still informs language, the ways of thinking about seeing. And while the body is not considered as a machine nowadays, is it not sometimes thought that mind is a kind of computer?⁵

Can these discourses, these models of body that fail to realize the lived experience in turn affect the perception of the world? The answer is yes and no. Yes they can and they do inform the way the world is perceived.

It was postulated that our experience, already besieged by physics and biology, was destined to be completely absorbed into objective knowledge, with the consummation of the system of the sciences. Thenceforth the experience of the body degenerated into a 'representation' of the body; it was not a phenomenon but a fact of the psyche. In the matter of living appearance, my visual body includes a large gap at the level of the head, but biology was there ready to fill that gap... Now the psychologist could imitate the scientist and, for a moment at least, see his body as others saw it, and conversely see the bodies of others as mechanical things with no inner life. The contribution made from the experiences of others had the effect of dimming the structure of his own, and conversely, having lost contact with himself he became blind to the behaviour of others. He thus saw everything from the point of view of universal thought which abolished equally his experience of others and his experience of himself (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 108).

It is obvious that these perspectives of bodies, the ways the world is perceived themselves can have a blinding effect to the lived experience of the world. Certain ways of looking, such as the objective perspective of science, can obscure certain aspects of reality. But this does not preclude the phenomenological expression. As such, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can be considered as a counter-transformative expression that attempts to alleviate the distortive effects of extreme objectivism and extreme subjectivism.

⁵ The Computational Theory of Mind has been an influential view in the philosophy of mind.

3.4 Death Within The Flesh

In *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1957), a film that is filled with medieval images of memento mori, Death comes to the Crusader and after declaring that he has been with him for all his life, asks the knight if he is afraid. The Crusader answers, “My flesh is afraid, but I am not”. When the Crusader utters the word flesh, he is using it in the traditional medieval sense. The flesh that sins, that is weak and that cannot escape death. This flesh is in contrast with the religious aspects of the soul, its purity and its ability to attain immortality. It is this flesh that is afraid of death but somehow, somewhere inside, the Crusader is not afraid.

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh is quite distinct from this traditional notion. It may however be argued that in choosing the word flesh and emphasizing the reversibility of one’s body with the world itself, Merleau-Ponty brings forth the perishable nature of bodies. As all living things die, so do we.

So it is this body that dies: the body that is caught up in the flesh, reversible between the world and itself. How to think about the death of such a body? The Crusader’s belief in the immortal soul can be hard to assume. In that religious tradition, the flesh is not the flesh on the bones, as if it is a vessel for the soul. With Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, the body and soul is expressed in a single utterance. At the core of Being, at the expression of lived experience, the enfolding of the world over itself can be glimpsed. In body’s belongingness to the world, there is something that resists the objectifying gaze but can only be fully expressed and not explained. Or rather,

this something is only distorted when it is subjected to materialist or physicalist accounts; or even to the narrow perspective of a single discourse.

How to understand death without recourse to a metaphysical realm or without objectifying it? In other words, can phenomenology help us face death, that most elusive and dark notion? The attempt seems absurd at first look. Since death is never experienced, it is impossible to talk about it in terms of lived experience. Yet even if there can be no talk of death as there can be talk about the tree that is seen from the window, there is no denying death, not more than the tree can be denied. How is it that such nothingness, such a state of non-being - for death seems as if it is nothingness - can be a part of Being? Because if death is taken to be merely the obliteration of oneself, an event horizon that is the very antithesis of life, similar to how the experience of bodies is distorted, there is a distortion of death and sometimes a surrendering. There is surrendering because death is already hidden out of view, out of life. Death becomes transcendent, something that defies understanding. For nothingness is simply too alien to experience and language fails to capture it. This failure to capture it in discourse, to delineate death in precise terms, gives birth to more despair. The consequent logic is simple: if death would become such an objective event, than it may be dominated. If it were to emerge as an observable event with definite contours, it may be prevented. Yet the dreadful attempt of realizing death in the background of its nothingness is a new phenomenon. It is the new death of 20th and 21st century, pushed out of the house, the city and the life of the community; it could never be pushed out of the deeper core of the individual. Its certainty and its connection to one's own life are simply too essential to be completely hidden from view. However, as death becomes taboo and all the

traditional ways of facing it disappears from social life; as religious faith is threatened and cast into doubt, there are few ways for the modern human being to deal with this core issue. Considering death from such an individual perspective, in the expense of other perspectives, such as the traditional attitude towards death, is a direct consequence of a general attitude toward life itself. The eternal nothingness of death and the pervasive fundamentality of this idea is a result of these shifts in attitudes, precipitated by medicalization, by industrialization and by the normalized attitudes that belong to scientific advances dating back to 17th century e.g. the representational theory of perception. Technology and science threatens to obviate other perspectives, casting the religious attitude as simply too metaphysical for the modern human being. But it too fails to comprehend life and death as it is lived.

Yet death resists. It resists being dominated. This resistance, in the face of all the enhancements of daily life with technology and science, begins to stand out more and more. The pain is eliminated but death remains unconquerable. Against this resistance against objectifying, of precise articulation, more often than not there can be surrendering.

This surrender is troubling; it even affects those who face up to death with all courage. When it is argued that death anxiety is the fundamental anxiety and the source of all creativity, already the experience of the world is surrendered to an original contradiction that simply cannot be understood without a primal belongingness to life. Reducing all cultural activities of the human being as a

reaction to death is a turning away from the completeness of Being⁶. Consider a simple meeting with death. Consider coming upon the carcass of an animal in the woods, in a state of decomposition. A fox stands outside even when it is alive, with its hurried activity and his avoidance of danger, but if it is a dead fox, something else stands out: its inactivity. It is not simply an immaterial thing as if it is a rock but it is an empty husk. It seems unnecessary even an anomaly in itself. Yet consider the life that is teeming in its belly even if it is a disgusting image. What is that disgust but the very interweaving of life and death, too apparent, too fleshy for comprehension? It lacks the animating something, it does not react to the predator's perception of it, it does not run away with adrenaline coursing in its veins, it does not have a life that may be imagined when it disappears behind the bushes. An emotion of pity can be felt, but deep there is also an awareness of the inevitability of it, of the inconsequentiality of emotions such as pity or disgust. In the end, the encounter with the dead body of the fox is not simply an encounter with death, but with life in all its ambiguity. That is the flesh of Merleau-Ponty: the very overlapping of life and death that cannot be constrained by the objectifying look of science or the duality of religion. In the meeting of a dead body, in the absence of a loved one, in the great catastrophes that tear down the normalcy of experience, there is too much awareness of the belongingness to life which is the very field for the emergence of the idea of death. And in this awareness of reversibility, the instant that the flesh becomes visible in its anonymity, death itself becomes an aspect of this Visibility.

Neither my birth nor my death can appear to me as experiences of my own, since, if I thought of them thus, I should be assuming myself to be pre-existent to, or outliving, myself, in order to be able to experience them, and I should therefore not be genuinely thinking of my birth or my death. I can, then, apprehend myself only as 'already born' and 'still alive'—I can apprehend my birth and my death

⁶ One of the most influential proponents of this view is Ernest Becker and his book *The Denial of Death* (Becker, 1997) in which he argues for death as the primary source of anxiety, following the works of other existential psychologists such as Otto Rank.

only as prepersonal horizons: I know that people are born and die, but I cannot know my own birth and death. Each sensation, being strictly speaking, the first, last and only one of its kind, is a birth and a death. The subject who experiences it begins and ends with it, and as he can neither precede nor survive himself, sensation necessarily appears to itself in a setting of generality, its origin is anterior to myself, it arises from sensibility which has preceded it and which will outlive it, just as my birth and death belong to a natality and a mortality which are anonymous. By means of sensation I am able to grasp, on the fringe of my own personal life and acts, a life of given consciousness from which these latter emerge, the life of my eyes, hands and ears, which are so many natural selves. Each time I experience a sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being, the one for which I am responsible and for which I make decisions, but another self which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. Between my sensation and myself there stands always the thickness of some primal acquisition which prevents my experience from being clear of itself. I experience the sensation as a modality of a general existence, one already destined for a physical world and which runs through me without my being the cause of it (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 250).

The anonymity of death is the anonymity of the skeleton in memento mori and also the anonymity of the Will of Schopenhauer. Merleau-Ponty saves this anonymity from its rational and religious foundations and situates it at the heart of nature, the body. This body and its primal Being can neither be the place of a fundamental death anxiety that structures all human activity and penetrate all Being, nor is it free from death anxiety since it is here in this primal sense that the awareness of death resides in, but never in isolation. Death is simply too intertwined with life for it to be realized in itself and any attempt to do so is a relatively new and a definitely failing enterprise.

Aside from this first meeting with death, there is also another sense that death makes itself known which is its certainty and the knowledge of this certainty that human beings possess but also is possessed by it.

...my birth and death cannot be objects of thought for me. Being established in my life, buttressed by my thinking nature, fastened down in this transcendental field which was opened for me by my first perception, and in which all absence is merely the obverse of a presence, all silence a modality of the being of

sound, I enjoy a sort of ubiquity and theoretical eternity, I feel destined to move in a flow of endless life, neither the beginning nor the end of which I can experience in thought, since it is my living self who think of them, and since thus my life always precedes and survives itself. Yet this same thinking nature which produces in me a superabundance of being opens the world to me through a perspective, along with which there comes to me the feeling of my contingency, the dread of being outstripped, so that, although I do not manage to encompass my death in thought, I nevertheless live in an atmosphere of death in general, and there is a kind of essence of death always on the horizon of my thinking. In short, just as the instant of my death is a future to which I have not access, so I am necessarily destined never to live through the presence of another to himself. And yet each other person does exist for me as an unchallengeable style or setting of co-existence, and my life has a social atmosphere just as it has a flavour of mortality (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 424).

The same nature that bursts presence and which “opens the world to me through” the perspective of body, is itself the essential contingency of life. The flesh is thus the very opening to a world that both transcends, but also grounds the individual to its body. In other words, death is neither a fundamental anxiety nor avoidable by any strategy. Just as social life is an essential part of existence, so too is death. Aside from clearly demonstrating Merleau-Ponty’s notion of death as intermingled with life, it also points back to the communal attitude towards death. Merleau-Ponty may have stumbled upon this natural attitude, in the sense of it being a monolithic tradition that lasted for thousands of years, in his expression of the elementariness of Being.

Yet even the “flavor of mortality” cannot be free from the prevalent attitudes toward life that inform aspects of daily experience. There is a basic surrendering to death when it is considered as *the* essential source of anxiety, a shattering truth that lies at the core of Being, at the dramatic inner life of the infant. It overlooks other such essential parts of reality such as the Flesh, the intertwined existence of the human being with the World; such as love, which can move human beings and inform their

lives as much as death; and such as technology, which has tremendous effects on the perceptual field and imagination. In short, Being emerges as the nexus of a variety of perspectives, of an intermingled Visibility with the Invisible.

The same surrender also follows from the objectifying look that pervades daily experience. In considering death as divorced from daily experience, it becomes unbearable to look at, ungraspable in its own term which results in the shift of attitudes that renders death invisible. As if its moment of disappearance is a fact of nature and not our making.

3.4 Conclusion

The contingency of existence in the World is thus reflected in the contingency of attitudes toward death. Even its certainty is now in doubt. It appears that technology is always on the verge of announcing immortality. But it is through the analytical mindset that one can attempt to grasp death in its certainty as if it can be reduced to a mathematical equation. Death can never be realized in its entirety since it is too integral to existence for it to be completely circumscribed by any one discourse, narrative or perspective.

The attitudes toward death that have radically shifted alongside the scientific revolution and the advance of technology are given an ontological basis with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The field of perception is where attitudes toward dying and the prevalent ways of seeing the world come together. In this sense, death and technology can be considered within the same field, giving more proof to the

impact of technology on aspects fundamental to Being. Also enabling a framework that can consider technology together with the existential categories, with the daily experience of Being. Technology is thus cast as intertwined within the perceptual field, with the body and the flesh.

The body that dies is the death of a perspective that is constantly equated with one's own being. But Being exceeds even the body, subsumes it under its folds and thereby transcends it. The very opening of Being into a world exceedingly filled with presence is the very reason of its mortality. But death cannot be understood solely by its contingency. It is by the nature of Being this openness comes with a price. The flavor of mortality is nothing more than the flavor of the World. Filled with pain and death alongside joy and life, an attempt to reflect on death must realize these two aspects as belonging to the same thing: the experience of the world. Otherwise, death becomes an insurmountable limit to thinking and the antithesis of life. Whereas Being is always a being that is born and inevitably dies. Being born and dying are the natural horizons for a life that admits no thought of nothingness to its folds. Only in the abstract and objectifying framework of 20th century death becomes the menace that it is. There is no essential death anxiety other than the historical facts of attitudes toward death.

Therefore an account of death that incorporates these radical transformations in every sphere of culture and social life must also deal with technology and science.

CHAPTER 4

TECHNOLOGY

It is not that one cannot think about death. But it is the other's death that can readily be understood. What is hard, or maybe even impossible, is to realize one's own death, to apprehend a world without the permanence of one's own body. For it is this permanent perspective that the body inhabits the world by – live the world – and there is no experience of another perspective, one without this body. On the other hand, the comings and goings of the others are ordinary. They often move into other rooms, out of houses, out of vision. Sometimes, even after the death of the other, we await their return, unable to grasp the finality of their departure. How is it possible that person, that living, breathing, moving body that was full of voice, that reacted to me, that had its own inner life, could now be totally immobile, unreactive, and unable to talk to me? I am here waiting for it to reappear yet it never comes. It is a fact that it would never come but still it is hard to come to terms with it. Something inside, sometime after one's death, still awaits a kind of return. Not as a miraculous affair beyond the rules of the world but more as a naïve attachment to the permanence of the world, its seemingly unchanging structure which is nothing more

than the sense of being alive: we inhabit the body permanently. Life itself is nothing more than this inhabitation, a bodily belongingness to the world. Life itself is the pain and joy; the sickness and the pleasure of the body; the possibilities offered and limitations imposed by the body. We live by it and we die by it. That is the factual core of every one of us: ‘the great equalizer’ is actually not simply death but the totality of our bodily Being. This is the fact of being bodies, of genders, of races, of having disabilities but also the shared fate of all life, of the many perspectives of death and of countless meetings with it.

Yet it is inevitable that death is thought about somehow in spite of it being the domain that resists being known. Death is like a landscape with a wall that separates here from there, just like LeGuin describes in *Earthsea*. All knowledge amassed, all experience lived is in this side of the wall and what is beyond is simply color or colorlessness. Yet the wall is neither here nor there. It is a limit that belongs to both life and the supposed afterlife. More than it defines the afterlife, because there is nothing to define anyway, death defines life itself as the looming limit that is carried within. Being involves death and life simultaneously.

4.1 Memento-Mori

Although death is now made into taboo, the cloaking of death under the medical gaze of science or the biological definitions of expiration came gradually. In the still life painting of “Vanitas”, the transformation of how death is perceived is evident. In this tradition the subject is death as well as the soul. Just like Schopenhauer’s solution to the meaninglessness of existence is abstaining from the Will’s drive, the intended

moral message of these paintings is the renunciation of the bodily pleasures. The vanities, from the simple beauty of a flower to the luxuries of wealth are contrasted with the macabre presence of death, most commonly represented by a skull. Yet this is already the 17th century and the clean and almost bleached skull is relatively new for the tradition.

For several centuries beginning in the late Middle Ages, European painters and sculptors produced numerous images and tomb effigies that attempted to juxtapose the death of the body and the eternal life of the soul. Artists commonly focused on the *process* of the body's reduction to a skeleton, lavishing imaginative attention on its putrefaction. Death was rendered both frightening and disgusting – the body literally made food for worms and vermin that slithered through or crawled from the body's cavities (Leppert, 1996: 57).

The disgust that is evoked by these foul images is almost completely erased from the tradition by the introduction of new ways of seeing. The contrast between a body that, however disgusting, necessarily decays and returns back to nature and the eternal soul that escapes the fate of the body could not be sustained in the Cartesian understanding of the body as machine. The flesh of the body and its primal existence had to be forgotten and replaced with a new mode of perception, one that forgets the elementary kinship of the body to the Earth.

By the seventeenth century, death was no less a matter of concern, but it had some competition. Modern secularization, evident in the advance of European humanism, focused more on the here and now, and much less on the hereafter. The ubiquitous realization that life was short was tempered by the argument that, at least for people of means, living had its mighty and increasing pleasures. Death (stilled life) as a visual object became at once abbreviated, abstracted, and rationalized, and rotting corpses disappeared from representation. Ironically, in the course of only a few decades the subject of death provided an excuse to deny death's reality in the very moment of representing it (Leppert, 1996: 57).

What was replaced is a sense of death that was vulgar and horrible to witness. In addition, superstitions about death did not cease to exist. But the triumph and credibility of science and new modes of perceiving marginalized such beliefs in the

advent of secularization. The industrialized city now operated to its own rhythm, its own specific contours, its own particular sicknesses and anxieties. It was this world that Hans Castorp left at the beginning of *The Magic Mountain* (Mann, 1969) and arrived at a place where time and space is different from the city. In *The Magic Mountain* (1969) Thomas Mann tells the story of the young engineer Hans Castorp, leaving the industrial flat lands to arrive at the International Sanatorium Berghof in the Alps. While his aim is at first a brief visit to his cousin Joachim Ziemssen, his visit first turns into months and then into years as he is also diagnosed with tuberculosis. However, his diagnosis is never certain, only some suspicious spots show up in his X-Rays. Nevertheless Castorp takes up to the “horizontal” life of the Sanatorium, spending hours in his lounge chair, resting and contemplating life as he never had in the busy life of the flat lands. His life changes into thermometer readings, fiery love affairs between the patients, long discussions about the virtues and shortcomings of enlightenment and countless hours of lying horizontal, resting.

The novel discusses the core issues of modernity in the dialogues between the characters. Mann himself acknowledged his debt to Nietzsche’s ideas about the shortcomings of modernity. In fact, the pre-war society that occupies the beds of the sanatorium can be said to be the last instances of a kind of living that would be lost with the start of the First World War at the end of the novel. In this sense, Mann’s book captures that moment just before the war in the character of Castorp, “life’s delicate child”.

For the purposes of this thesis, out of the many complex ideas that the novel discusses, medicalization is important. The patients of the sanatorium constantly

measure their temperatures, discuss their illnesses and are divided into sects according to their sicknesses. For all the centrality of illness, death is never discussed openly by the staff and the dying patient is segregated from the general populace of patients. One of the central chapters in the book, titled *Snow*, tells the event of Castorp going on a trip to the mountains and getting caught up in a blizzard and nearly dying. While near death, Castorp dreams a vivid landscape, full of people who are kind and full of love but in the end sees the horrible image of a child being eaten by two women, which represents the nature's savagery. With the end of this chapter, Castorp arrives at one of the central ideas of the novel: "*For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts*" (Mann, 1969: 743). He wakes up from the dream and is able to return back and promptly forgets the conclusion he arrived. A brush with death can reveal some truth but that moment of enlightenment passes and is forgotten in the daily life. Castorp does not get lost simply because of his carelessness but wants to get lost in the silent, the white wilderness of the mountains. He pushes forward as if he could arrive at a state of mind; find an image offered by the untouched nature of the mountains that could present him with the truth. Yet the truth of love and death that he arrives at the dream of love and death is transitory. Mann balances the optimistic message of this idea with skepticism for sustaining that moment in the daily life, which was revealed in the savage force of nature. The sanatorium is a place of perpetual illness and recovery, sustained by obsessiveness in the body and its illnesses, a recluse from the savagery of nature.

The life at the mountain is not pure and devoid of the advances of a new age. For example, technology impacts and confuses Castorp's life. As Schultz (2001) points

out, there are two instances where Castorp meets with technology. One is the X-Ray and the other is gramophone. In both instances, being the impressionable fellow he is, Castorp is indelibly marked by these occurrences with these devices through his various senses. X-Ray confounds him; gramophone immerses him.

The X-Ray images of Castorp's cousin's, his love affair Clavdia's and his own skeleton immediately evokes the message of Vanitas – memento mori. However, the skeletal image that is anonymous in the traditional symbolism of Vanitas here carries significance beyond a moral lesson: the image of skeleton belongs to that person that is alive, that moves and speaks and is sick. While a Vanitas painting may contain symbolism and later as Leppert (1996) notes, increasingly excessive goods of luxury and pleasure to balance out the morbid subject, the X-Ray image is harder to come to terms with. It contains neither ornament nor a clearly coded moral message.

This is a personal and terrifying encounter of a mind that is torn between the physical and the metaphysical. Castorp was once an engineer but later in his stay on the mountain becomes a student of biology. While he dabbles in these sciences, he also attends a séance to summon ghosts. These events point out that science is problematic beyond its internal mechanisms. It is problematic as technology that produces images and replaces old modes of perception. These new kinds of perceptions pave the way towards the transformation of Being, or at least new aspects of Being, which are still in development and along with it the transformation of death. It must be noted that this new way of perception that is informed by science and technology is not death itself and science is not solely responsible for how these attitudes changed. The relation between the body and its death was

established long ago, in a different yet overlapping and resurfacing sense, by Socrates (maybe also before Socrates, in the emergence of perception infused with ideas and reflectivities). But the introduction of new ways of perceiving the world such as the X-Ray image carries significance as being one of the elements of the transformation of the relation with mortality.

Both the anatomical charting of the body and the production of the photographic image of the body introduces a different perspective to the very opening of the human being to the world. The symbolic framework of *memento mori* is long eradicated from daily life. The sense of “flesh” in *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1957) and the many images of *memento mori* that is displayed now belong to a different death, one that was ordered and maintained by the symbolism, the faith and the structure of religion but also faced as a community. On the other hand, the terminal patients in the sanatorium in *The Magic Mountain* (Mann, 1969) are segregated from the relatively healthy ones. They die lonely deaths in their rooms and are not allowed visits by other patients. Death is hidden from view.

4.2 Cronenberg’s Cinema

Aspects of life have been transformed since the last hundred years. It is a feeling, if not a fact, that these changes are accelerating. It may be argued that those who inhabit the cities and makes much use of technology continuously, are participants in the latest evolution of human beings’ project of dominating its planet and finally, controlling his fate. To that end, an enormous world has been created that is more and more penetrated by devices and is seen, felt and perceived yet again with the help of these devices but this time enhanced with information and embedded in

systems of seeing, touching and manipulating these screens, buttons, touch surfaces. Human beings move to live in cities that are cement and block with intermittent pockets of nature and pets; see and perceive designed surfaces, images and structures; and are thoroughly captivated by screens. These are only the last cycles of a transformation of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs by the scientific perspective that permeates some of the world views. New ways to perceive the worlds are learned and most of the time, these scientific truths appear as religiously dogmatic in their claim for objectivity. The discourses and devices that are created by science and technology seem to be constants of daily inhabitation in the world; they mingle with reality in surprising ways. In ways that cannot be foreseen and are still unprepared to be heard or seen as Hans Cartorp is in *The Magic Mountain* when he first sees the X-Ray machine, its sounds and flashes, its unsettling mechanisms.

Yet it is not the case that technology eradicates all thought in favor of one. Thinking itself creates many possibilities of overcoming, of criticizing itself but it also finds recluses, regressions and all kinds of perversions, as Ballard would say. Technology promotes one way of seeing the world at the expense of all other ways of seeing. There now opens numerous frames in the perceptual field that constantly demand attention. Even the systems of signification that is required to parse the information that pours forth through these screens is a system that have to become familiarized with, to be initiated into, to be included in the dialogue, to understand its language.

There are numerous examples to the ways that technology changes the perception of the world. It is in these particular perceptions that technology is first met. These perceptions of certain instances of technology may preclude a conception of

technology in its totality. But in the bodily perception of technology there is found an expression of the current existence of the human being that relates him to his elementary belongingness to the world, within the flesh, in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the term. The screens in front of those who are there to perceive them reflect back to them a sense of seeing the world, both in the variety of interfaces that perceived, in the brightly colored and high-definition openings of a certain modality of technology that glare, flicker and beam at the center of perception of the world. These screens are perceived and met with bodies, by skin and vision; by sitting and positioning the heads in certain fashions, writing and reading in new ways, constructing and attaining knowledge in certain ways. In other words, partaking in technology to such extents and to such depths that there is an overlapping in the bodily, primal Being and the new modes of perception that are offered. Just like the painter sees the world seeing himself and his art is an expression of this overlapping; there is an overlapping and belonging with technology. This is not to say that those who daily engage with technology are androids. Rather it means that there have to be an awareness of perception as revealing the world itself. In other words, the Cartesian understanding of representation has to be replaced by an understanding of the world as present to the self and as such, the ambiguity that is inherent in existence can only be said to have been problematized further by technology and not entirely caused by it.

Cronenberg is one of the few artists who are able display the relation between technology and body; and the transformation of reality by this relation. For instance in *The Fly*, Seth Brundle transforms into Brundlefly: a monster that is both machine, insect and human.

In the course of the film he Seth starts out not being able to teleport organic matter, because he doesn't understand the flesh. In the course of the film, he is increasingly compelled to endure the burden of the materiality that he is unable to comprehend or master. His body is traversed by physical forces, and submitted to stresses, that are more and more intolerable. By the end, he is all too acquainted with the flesh: he is even merged with the machinery that alters him, with the telepod itself. This new body, this mass of mingled tissue and metal, is a burden too great to bear. Its sheer weight epitomizes sensory and corporeal overload: an overinvestment of the muscles and the nerves, a sensitivity and vulnerability too great to be endured, and yet that must be endured. Seth crawls forth and gestures imploringly to Veronica; death is the only release from this relentless process, this hell of embodiment. This excruciating materiality cannot be redeemed, this contaminating alterity cannot be assumed or possessed. Yet it is precisely the untenability of this position that is most important, and most affirmative. To the extent that the flesh is unbearable, it is irrecuperable. The extremities of agony cannot finally be distinguished from those of pleasure. Bodily intensity is in this sense an other to power, an excess that disturbs it, a surplus that it cannot ever control or appropriate (Shaviro, 2006: 148)

In addition to demonstrating the excessiveness of the flesh and its uncontrollable primacy, Cronenberg also shows the body's intrinsic openness to the world. How is it possible that a human being can merge with a fly and a machine? The body that is related to the immaterial world of technology or the insects and other animals is the precondition for such a monstrosity as *Brundlefly*. The computers, the data they produce, the cars driven, the city lived in and the entirety of the human species are all enfolded within the flesh of the world. There is an elementary connectedness that at once leaves the self open to all kinds of transformations, often disgusting and cruel, monstrous. But from another perspective, precisely because body and technology is intertwined together in the flesh, the body cannot be contained within technology. The visceral aspect of the world overflows the many perspectives of it as the very condition of perception. Cronenberg's cinema can be the perfect example of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in terms of its expression of the human being in his sheer embeddedness in the world.

In *Videodrome*, Max entangles with the screen and is transformed into a video machine by a wound / vaginal opening in his chest.

Brian O'Blivion's categorical, video-recorded pronouncements are repeated like mantras throughout the film: "The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye; therefore the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain." When experience is absorbed by video technology, then this technology is itself quite palpably "real"...The more images are flattened out and distanced from their representational sources, the more they are inscribed in our nerves, and flash across our synapses. The real is not "lost" so much as it is redescribed in consequence of a radical epistemological break or shift: it is no longer what is referred to, but what suffers and is transformed (Shaviro, 2006: 138).

The technological understanding of the self should never be so alien from that primordial sense of Being since it still overlaps with that bodily understanding of the world. This is not a metaphysical understanding nor can it be exhausted merely by physical description. It is rather an expression of life, be it phenomenological, visual or textual. This is the aspect of Being that is fleshy, material, visceral and Cronenberg captures it in exhilarating ways. His films express the radical transformation that can be traced back to the medicalized death of Ivan Ilyich, or even earlier, to the 17th century and the scientific revolution.

4.3 Technological Transformation

What was forgotten during this transformation process? Was it the primal existence of the human species at its earlier stages of evolution, of pure horror of nature under the open sky, a precarious security that threatens one's existence all the time? Was it a relation with life that denied anything other than anxiety? They were scared and yet outside language, literally, yet they drew, they had that urge to left a mark, to express

something about the world. What does one see in Herzog's *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, in the blood red smear of one's own body on the wall of a secluded cave in France? Already painting was the dream of a mirror that one saw oneself seeing; as well as the drawing of an animal, of meat, of the pleasure and the comfort of that meat. It is the former sense of painting that Merleau-Ponty saw in Cézanne. Painting as a mirror, a seeing of oneself seeing, that primal order of perception that cannot assimilate his own seeing within different strands of thought, under language or a variety of filters. In the pre-historical man's mark of his hands that he leaves on the dark temple of the cave one goes to that familiar, childlike and elementary perception of the world. Even Herzog cannot be as fatalistic as he often is and admits a sort of communication that is mediumless, dramatic, childlike and material all at once. In that sense, the contrast with the albino alligators that comes at the end of the film is striking. These mutant products of technological transformation of the world are now our marks, there to witness the world after the humans are long gone. Herzog believes that there will come a time on this Earth that no human will exist; no one will be here to perceive it. Life as the death screams of millions of species in the middle of a vast nothingness. And why not? For surely as all things alive, which our species is, so too they will die. This biological sense of thinking neatly opposes Schopenhauer's thinking which attributes a brute dumbness to the daily Being of the human due to an inability to realize death in face of the factuality of the world. Equally elusive is the ability of the species to imagine a state of the world devoid of death anxiety. This new mark of ours, this albino alligator, is not as naïve as the mark of the one who, probably excitedly, touched the stones with his colored hands. The first sense of drawing, of writing, but mostly someone coloring the world itself.

It may be admitted that there is as much childlike naiveté in that act of marking as in the entirety of the bodily existence in the world.

So there is nothing forgotten except the apocalyptic vision of the albino alligator. It is the memento mori that reappears as science fiction: from the beginning of civilization to the fall. The albino alligator is the strange, funny and already ghostly image of a decadent civilization that built strange and deadly wonders. The contrast of the personal significance of mark making with the manifestation of the deadly precision of nature is itself problematic in its duality but Herzog cannot be at fault for his apocalyptic vision. Apocalypse is that imminent threat of death that invades us thoroughly as much as our ancestors at the dawn of time.

Landscapes of apocalypse invade games and films. What is a zombie but the return of the worm ridden, decomposing image of the dead that belonged to the earlier tradition of Vanitas? These images that were once so potent and later robbed of their dogmatic symbolism, returns again and again in different ways. The strength of the zombie lies in its ability to incorporate many anxieties and fears about the world. It is the fear of the other, those alien and incomprehensible bodies; the fear of the bodily death of the self; fear of nature revealed as pure agony. A vampire is also dead but it still carries that romantic idea of desire as distinct from body. Vampire is dead but it can also love, lust for the blood. Zombie on the other hand is the Schopenhauer's Will in its entire monstrosity: pure mindless hunger for flesh. It is another instance of death personified, anonymous and repulsive. Can the fascination with the zombie be a fascination with death? Can it be an attempt to perceive death without admitting death completely? Is it another instance of death drive or simply a prelude to an

image of the world that is not crowded, a world that is cleansed of bullshit, of the trivial and the banal? Since for all the scientific narrative that is thrown at the reasons for the existence of zombies, the general sense of the zombie is still metaphysical. How can death be animated? To answer this, it must be remembered that death also danced in that old tradition that represented it in its terrifying and decomposing aspect. The procession of flagellants in *The Seventh Seal* is such a representation of death.

4.3.1 Gamification and Quantification of Daily Life

In what ways do humans live differently from those who have come before technological advances of the last century? What can this reveal?

As Cartesian philosophy reduced body into machinery, the body is now reduced into information. Can this be considered a strategy of survival of the species? One of the recently revealed drives behind this project is still marginal yet seemingly plausible notion of existing as pure information. It follows directly from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that such an existence would resemble nothing of this world that human beings now inhabit since they inhabit the world with their bodies. But is not this already the meaning of singularity: a world that is unimaginable? Not for the first time in history, science needs to become metaphysical if all there is to existence can be summed up in code. Being, translated into ones and zeros is nothing more than a ridiculous reduction; yet that bigger project of escaping death is not ridiculous but crucial to existence.

Two current trends that are primarily born out of the technological perspective are quantification and gamification. Quantification is a fairly recent movement that is based on collecting data from every aspect of daily life in order to get a clearer picture of life. The goal here is the enhancement of life in various ways such as health, success and a general sense of well-being. This view of life, while it never proposes to be the single perfect perspective on life, is itself another instance of the greater emergence of technology since the last three hundred years. Putting aside the supposedly purely rational undertones of such a trend, one of the reasons behind this reduction may be as old as the human being: survival. The quantification may be another way of living longer, of being more successful or attaining happiness and as such, it betrays a deeply seated fear of life, a retreat into the realm of numbers, of data, of incorruptible world of forms. Just like the flesh from the skeleton disappears to reveal only the abstracted, symbolic skull - the head, the seat of rationality, an empty throne - the daily life is being abstracted into infographics, into immense storages of data and into an entire way of life that is infused by information.

Gamification is another trend that may be considered as a moment in the transformation of daily life. The reason behind this is to enhance certain services, such as the tools of social media, with a system of gaming that offers a playful experience. The medium of games must be considered as distinct from this trend since gamification mostly employs a fairly narrow and boring sense of gaming which is that of simple point collecting and achievement oriented systems. Here again a simple minded visualization and reduction of life, as well as games, is evident.

Both trends must be considered as containing within them more than just the technological perspective. They also have an existential and caring attitude towards life. Yet they are, in their current form, also are not entirely distinct when considered within the history of technology and its impact on existence, particularly the ubiquity of technological / scientific outlook. This is not to say that both can express something deeper about life, offer new ways of seeing that would be enriching. Games especially are already capable of such expression with a growing awareness of both the shortcomings and strengths of the medium. In other words, games are art in the sense of expressing the world by relating to that instinct of playing which is also commonly observed in the life of the animal.

It is also no wonder that death and dying is part and parcel in games. From gruesome to cute, death and war maybe the single greatest aspect of gaming. They are not that far away from the attitudes toward death and the great escape from mortality.

4.3.2 The Screens

Aside from their connection to other forms of expression, the sheer numbers of screens makes them distinct from other frames that came before them. They require attention in certain ways; they enforce certain perspectives that are distinct from natural perspectives. In this sense, the flatness of screens is crucial. For "...the lived experience is not flat, without depth, without dimension, it is not an opaque stratum with which we would have to merge" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 124).

Can screens be considered as depthless? A screen is, in one sense, definitely an object with depth. It sits atop desks, inside pockets, hangs on walls. It occupies space and itself has color and dimensions. You can view it from multiple perspectives, go around it or touch it. Yet the screen, in its mechanical sense, is not a complete screen unless it shows something. It is a screen insofar it is an opening, a bright frame that can broadcast all images that can be produced by humans. In this sense, it holds near infinite possibilities.

Yet the images on screens are in another sense different from the objects outside them. They surely refer to the outside objects, they are in many ways related to them, yet they lack the depth, the weight of the objects. What is different here is a narrower bodily relation with the images on screen compared to the relation with the objects of the world. This narrowness has everything to do with the bodily constraints that screens impose. A screen reveals itself only in certain perspectives due to its flatness, thus closing off other virtual perspectives that body can in relation occupy.

It may be argued here that painting also is a flat image. It too cannot be looked at from other perspectives. For instance, just like a screen, you cannot see a painting from behind whereas a rock, a tree or a mountain can be seen from multiple perspectives. Merleau-Ponty's (2007: 75) thoughts about Cézanne is revealing in this point:

Cézanne does not try to use color to suggest the tactile sensations which would give form and depth. These distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception. It is only as a result of a science of the human body that we finally learn to distinguish between our senses. The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the data of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the center from which the data radiate. We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor. If the painter wants to express the world, the arrangement of his

colors must bear within this arrangement this indivisible Whole, or else his painting will only be an allusion to the things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable fullness which is for us the definition of the real.

The strength of painting lies in its expression of perception as the artist's bodily intertwining with the totality of Being, the experience of daily life, and the base perception of the world. What Cézanne teaches us with the brush of his strokes is our base existence in the flesh. In one sense, it can be argued that what is seen with the screens cannot present this primal overlapping with the world because perception of the screen is continuously disrupted by an interface, by an endless stream of information that engulfs the image.

Is not Cézanne's painting or even a Vanitas already a part of perception? In other words, does not a painting present itself to the eyes, be it a cave painting of an animal or a skull painting of Cézanne? In this sense, does not a screen present itself already if it is to be seen? Can one be not intertwined with a screen as much as he is with a tree? These questions disappear when Merleau-Ponty's remarks are considered, that Cézanne tries to attain particularly the primal perception that is radically different from the scientific perspective on human body, the ugly influence of Cartesian philosophy. The primal presentation of the painting to the viewer, made possible with the active perception of the viewer, is what enables Cézanne to express that unity of body and the world.

When Cronenberg shows Max in *Videodrome*, kissing the lips of Nicki Brand, he draws his inspiration from that same sense of the fleshiness of the world. Technology's penetration of body, an image so prominent in his cinema, is possible because the body and the material world, but also the invisible world of symbols can

exist in the same brush stroke, or the video recording. It is this sense of the relation with screens that limits the perception of the world while also opening the way forward for unique experiences. The simple act of looking at screens is able to transform the experience of the world. This is not a surprising assertion when the world that emerges is considered as it is actively perceived in an overlapping relation of seeing and being, touching and being touched, in a unity of perception. That is why the TV screen throbs and bulges just like flesh. What is surprising is not only the surreal and terrifying image of a fleshy screen but the active engagement of Max with this monstrosity. Cronenberg is able to transform this funny and disgusting event into a deeply fascinating and even sexual expression of technology's impact on Being.

It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world. When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 397)

The paradox of visibility should not be understood in a negative way because it is the very opening of the Being into a world, the very site of human being's belonging with the flesh. As such, the paradox of visibility that is generated by computers, by their insistent occupation of the world as fields of images, cannot be carried on to an altogether pessimistic conclusion. These fields of images that are historically informed by scientific and technological undercurrents, as with all human expression, holds the potential to overcome the limitations that are imposed on them

by being realized as what they are, as only instances of a general tendency to transform the world into a rational, discrete and at the end controllable whole through the reduction of all ways of seeing the world into one single perspective. This is not to say that there is a state of art that have overcome all limitations, as if there can be an end to expression or to perception. To await such awareness is to forget the central limitation of human existence: the body. Yet there is, as always, a possibility of transformation as long as there is death, the ultimate transformation of body, its final return to nature.

4.4 The Death of the Flesh Reconsidered

Let us once more return to the traditional message of memento-mori. When Crusader admits that his flesh is afraid, he is not simply guilty of a dualistic ontology. His words may sound alien because he acknowledges the flesh and its decomposition rather than reducing it to its anatomical mechanism or dismissing it as unthinkable. Bergman personifies death and by virtue of this anthropomorphism invites death to the social world, amongst the people, the community, to a game of chess between two people, thus infusing the film with a sense of hope. The moral message of memento mori remains intact in the Bergman's cinema, proving the adaptability of the traditional attitudes toward death into other mediums. Thus it may be argued that although the Vanitas tradition and the symbolic framework that it operated within may have been forgotten, the message that it conveys resonates still: remember death.

Even with the symbolism of Vanitas erased, even with the dead, dying and the terminal patient pushed out of daily life and community, even with technology promising freedom from pain and a prolonged life-span, death returns. It returns as monstrosities, transformed by some metaphysical scientific process; it returns as zombies, decaying and limping and moaning with hunger; it returns as all the little adjustments that are made throughout the daily experience of the world, with the goal of escaping from facing its visceral components; it returns as war, murder, blood, gore and violence that pours forth through the screens. Simply put, the invisibility of death is just a vanishing act, an illusion. As with all illusions, something real is always revealed at the end of the chain of concealments and trickeries. Death cannot be get rid of even if it is hidden completely out of view and kicked out of the daily life. It finds ways of return. What this implies is that death is only distorted and not completely invisible. As Merleau-Ponty (1968: 150) argues, as all such ideas, death is known by all, yet at the moment of definition disappears:

Each time we want to get at it immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explicitation [*sic*] does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivative.

It may also be argued that primal existence in the world, the intertwinement with flesh is itself the origin of a certain kind of awareness of death. Death is perceived even if it is through a screen; or as an absence in the family or a pet dying. Yet the available attitudes that one can assume towards it, a common concealment and obstruction of death or the fervent attempt to stay young and stave off death, precludes a real relationship to develop with one's own mortality.

The transformation of attitudes toward bodies by technology is one of the most important elements that go side by side with the changing attitudes toward death. There is no flesh in the sense that the Crusader considers his body to be. There is however still the flesh of the world that human beings inhabit and are united with at the core of their being. This flesh may be considered as the monstrous and fascinating flesh of Cronenberg, one that is gradually penetrated by technology but still retains its deep radical “alterity”⁷ along with its familiarity. The death of the flesh reappears in radical new formulations and each formulation seems to be more and more technological in its make-up.

4.5 Conclusion

The question is then how can one redevelop and capture that relation with death and the world again? Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy points to a possible transformation that aims at reestablishing the world as present to self.

In this reconfigured sense of the world, death itself must reappear as present to oneself. In order to achieve this, the Cartesian understanding of perception has to be purged and replaced with a return to the actuality of the fullness of senses. Perception of the world has to be the field of discovery of one’s own mortality rather than scientific observation, technologically / scientifically ordered vision or a religious surrender to a single perspective of the world. By situating body as the nexus of Being, Merleau-Ponty brings the actual experience of the self, the world of daily life, into the forefront. The merit of his philosophy is the overcoming of the

⁷ As Sharivo (Shaviro 2006) describes the body to be.

duality that is inherent in thought and which results in false notions about life as it is lived. By focusing the discussion on seeing, Merleau-Ponty transforms the awareness of what is seen into a process that reveals perception in action. More than that, the body is revealed as elementarily connected with the world, pointing the way to a primal sense of Being that informs all life.

While technology occupies more and more of daily life, the body retains its resistance, its well of carnal powers and desires. It is the great failure of science that the body still has to die so it is kept secret, hidden from view. In other words, technological and scientific way of looking at the world merely obscures the relation of body with death. What results is a distorted and abstract perception of death that is depthless, flat and devoid of flesh, like the bleached and anatomical depiction of skull in late Vanitas. Death becomes something to be avoided when science becomes the tyrant of perception. Between the extreme positions of suicide and denial of death, all shades in between are being erased. There remains no possibility of incorporating death into the folds of life, which it already is anyway. Thus death becomes the great nothingness where in fact it is present in the flesh.

The flesh screams when it becomes aware of great danger. There lies dormant, not so deep down, the animal, the instinct of the species, and the life of the body that cannot be defined or delineated by any science. For all those years of civilization, that dark hunger, that primal flow of life can still not be controlled. With the spark of danger, with a meeting with death, a transformation can be ignited or that chance too may be passed over. This is not to say that the only possible way of thinking to counter the technological thinking has to give primacy to death. On the contrary, by only

considering death as intertwined within the flesh, can the entirety of Being be brought to view. Not to be understood, but to be expressed and better, to be lived.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The answer may still be hidden in the woods, in the mountains, in the depths of the oceans, in the hearts of exploding galaxies, in the recesses of bodies. Truth is such an ambiguous thing that it may already be blooming in the very source of this ambiguousness, inside the folds of Earth itself. The question to this answer is not “What is death?” or “Why is there death?” or even “Why do I have to die?” Rather it is the oldest one asked, the question that can only be asked by a human: “How can I face death without surrendering to it?”

Escaping death often results in abandoning life. And escaping life is itself surrendering to death. But the game has to be played even in the face of certain loss. What is the difference of winning or losing compared to all life that have come before and perished without a memory left intact? Yet it is one of the redeeming aspects of life that death is fought with teeth and nails.

Science has been weaponized in this fight, not because of any fault in itself, but because of a tendency to refrain from life in fear of death. Scientific and

technological advances have greatly increased the quality of life and the quantity of life-spans yet this has come at a cost: an obstruction of human life from its primal essence. In itself, no device of technology is able to completely make the human into a machine or entirely erase his bodily connection to life. But the totality of technology, the environment of the city and the ubiquity of screens in the perceptual field have transformed aspects of Being by sacrificing the plurality of perspectives at the altar of progress and the project of immortality.

As can be witnessed in Cronenberg's cinema, there are paths of resistance, sites of transgression that betrays the success of this murder. Bodies open up to technology without prejudice and the resulting forms of perception are unpredictable, monstrous and holds potential beyond imagining. The flesh, the elementariness of the world overlaps with technology and bodies, enfolding both in a field of perception that gives rise to new kinds of seeing the world, new ways of Being.

Aside from these new, technologically informed experiences, there exists another path, one that may be better suited in the personal quest of facing death. Although it is a rather sentimental thought, nature presents alternatives to technological thought. This does not mean however, that technology and nature are opposed to each other in a simplistic duality. Rather as one must be aware of his life as a life that opens up to screens, to computers and to cities, one must also be aware that there exist trees and stars that can and does tell something about life, however unaccustomed most human beings have become to listening them. Hesse (1972) beautifully captures this alternative way of thinking: "Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach

learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life". The law of life is the law of death. Or rather, law of life was always the law of death and only later cut in half, to leave out the sick, terrifying, painful aspect, and failing terribly.

A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.

So the tree rustles in the evening, when we stand uneasy before our own childish thoughts: Trees have long thoughts, long-breathing and restful, just as they have longer lives than ours. They are wiser than we are, as long as we do not listen to them. But when we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy. Whoever has learned how to listen to trees no longer wants to be a tree. He wants to be nothing except what he is. That is home. That is happiness (Hesse, 1972).

Trees offer new metaphors of life. These new metaphors are not shortcuts for alleviating anxiety or seclusions from life. Rather it is a return to a state of mind that harmonizes life and death in perception, that is aware of life not as contained within the brain, or some biological system but as an active inhabitation of a universe that always offers a way "home". There is nothing alien and other in a tree, nor are we strangers stranded on a planet. The elementary belongingness of the human life to universe is revealed in the thoughts of trees if one can listen to them.

However, it is already hard for the city dweller to have such an experience. The painting, if Merleau-Ponty and Cezanne are agreed with, offers expression of such perception, but can it replace actually being in a forest?

I'd never imagined that trees could be so weird and unearthly. I mean, the only plants I've ever really seen or touched till now are the city kind--neatly trimmed and cared-for bushes and trees. But the ones here--the ones living here--are totally different. They have a physical power, their breath grazing any humans who might

chance by, their gaze zeroing in on the intruder like they've spotted their prey. Like they have some dark, prehistoric, magical powers. Like deep-sea creatures rule the ocean depths, in the forest trees reign supreme. If it wanted to, the forest could reject me--or swallow me up whole (Murakami, 2006: 124).

Actual perception of the forest also reveals its strange power. Murakami's textual expression reveals the uneasiness one feels when he enters into a world that is radically different than his own. The city dweller is scared to be in the presence of life in all its strangeness. What is strange may be the reaction itself. How far have we come to forget and be scared of trees? Or rather, what activates within oneself when one ventures into to the forest that something magical, prehistoric awakens? Also forgotten are the stars, faded by millions of lights that are used to drown out darkness.

After a simple dinner I go out on the porch and gaze up at the stars twinkling above, the random scattering of millions of stars. Even in a planetarium you wouldn't find this many. Some of them look really big and distinct, like if you reached your hand out intently you could touch them. The whole thing is breathtaking. Not just beautiful, though--the stars are like the trees in the forest, alive and breathing. And they're watching me. What I've done up till now, what I'm going to do--they know it all. Nothing gets past their watchful eyes. As I sit there under the shining night sky, again a violent fear takes hold of me. My heart's pounding a mile a minute, and I can barely breathe. All these millions of stars looking down on me, and I've never given them more than a passing thought before. Not just stars--how many other things haven't I noticed in the world, things I know nothing about? I suddenly feel helpless, completely powerless (Murakami 2006: 124).

The powerlessness that one can feel in the face of nature betrays a hint of the hubris that raises its ugly head in the attempted technological dominance of bodies, of nature. Encounters with uncontrolled, untame nature troubles and scares. Even if all one gets is a sense of tranquility, these pockets of time and space are visited briefly, followed by the return to the city. The experience is thus submerged under the greater rift of city life, that all so familiar rhythm and space quickly replacing that brief encounter's uneasiness with more distractions. We have now become so

accustomed to seeing the world in one rationally ordered configuration, that the vast nothingness of the stars, the excessiveness of universe and the strange power of life can sometimes be troubling. Worse, the forest and the stars are mute and nothing transpires in that peculiar perception. It may create anxiety not just because of a feeling of insignificance in the face of the vastness of the universe, but also because such encounters reveals our kinship to something strange and alien, but also somehow familiar and real. What is this but the fate of all life, of flesh and blood, of forest and supernova, of quarks spinning and super-strings vibrating, of cloud and rain, of earth and fear?

The albino alligators at the end of *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* belong to another vision of the apocalypse, one that foregoes the ruins of cities and a small community that faces constant mortal danger. Instead Herzog imagines a landscape that lies in a later future: one that is repopulated by animal life, a return of the lizards of the Triassic period, due to global warming or another such catastrophe of our own making. The albino alligator could easily be transported to the post-apocalyptic world of Ballard in *The Drowned World* where the Earth recesses back to prehistoric times of cold blooded animals that are able to withstand the new climate. Aside from this contrary image of post-apocalyptic landscape, the unique position of Ballard is that as the world regresses, so does the existence of the human regresses along with the world. As such, the landscape becomes a reconfiguration of life beyond recognition yet still made vivid by the textual expression of Ballard. How to relate to that jungle-world yet still exist in this apartment, now, in this body? Ballard implies that the technological transformation of the world is never complete is constantly pregnant to new kinds of perception, new ways of Being. Human beings are merely

at the death throes of an ancient world that is pregnant to a future that is already mingled with the past and the present. The continuities with lizard life and the jungle in Ballard, the transgressions of media devices with the body in Cronenberg, or even the stark contrast with the expression of pre-historic human being with the emergence of new creatures that silently witness the destruction heaved by human beings all point to intertwinings between the material and the immaterial, the future and the past, the ambiguity of senses and the objectivity of science, all swirling through our lives around the nexus of bodies dead, bodies moving, bodies seeing bodies reclined in various positions, bodies at the throes of pleasure and boredom. It is now obvious that apocalypse itself is another expression of human beings that try to make sense of the world and their maddeningly unrealizable position in the universe. Human being perceives death in all aspects of the world mingled with life and surely despairs, never knowing what exactly he wishes for or what exactly he is afraid of, oftentimes forgetting his primal continuity with the world.

Death in this sense is at once familiar and alien. It is part of the body but also part of the greater unity of Being. Death resides in the folds of the flesh as well as in the screens of computers. What must be reclaimed is a sense of death that is present. Present in the body but also in the life of the community. What must be reclaimed is a truthful admittance of death's presence, into the life of the individual but also into the life of the community, and what is necessary is a chance to look. To look with deep fear, but with a spirit that refuses to surrender to death at every step of the way, that embraces life with all its ugliness and beauty, that considers death as an aspect of the flesh and flesh as the enveloping folds of life, and with chance, with a little smile that acknowledges and appreciates the absurdity and ambiguity of it: the death

of a person, a subject, an individual who had the heart to look at stars and comprehend the universe in all its vastness, who dreamt beautiful landscapes and the ravaging destruction of apocalypse, who played with all his might and ran with all his speed, who moved gracefully, who endured pain and suffering, who killed, murdered, gave life, breathed lungfuls of air and opened his eyes to everything, who searched for things amidst the great ocean of objects, who believed in things, who perceived reality while also denying it, who expressed himself in every move of his muscles, who sought pleasure every chance he had, who loved however pathetically, however in vain but loved anyway.

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