

# SEXUAL ACTS AS PERFORMATIVE TEXTS:

*an embodied  
hermeneutics  
for a  
scarred  
world*

by Zachar Laskewicz

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*“Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings.”*

- R. D. Laing<sup>1</sup>

*“I like sex, but not in the way you do. I am syphilis.”*

- D. Cronenberg<sup>2</sup>

*“What our children have to fear is not the cars on the freeways of tomorrow but our own pleasure in calculating the most elegant parameters of their deaths.”*

- J. G. Ballard<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liang, 1976: 1.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.well.com:70/0/Publications/MONDO/cronenbr.txt>

<sup>3</sup> Ballard, 1996: 91.

**Sexual Acts as  
Performative Texts**

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# Sexual Acts as PERFORMATIVE Texts

## AN EMBODIED HERMENEUTICS FOR A SCARRED WORLD

### I THE FATAL DESIRE MACHINE:

#### Foreword

- I.1 These days it is generally accepted that 'technology' has a massive influence on our experience of personal and general corporeality to the point of being instituted into the mystique of postmodern folklore. Technology intervenes in biological processes in specific ways that influence the way we interact with the world, functioning to 'shape and reshape our world' in a very special way, "not just biologically but also culturally" (Lundin, 1999: 5). In this dissertation the intention is to explore the contrasting texts and textualities in which our experience of corporeality is expressed, and in particular the increasing importance of technology in influencing firstly the way such texts are created and communicated, as well as the reasoning behind the creation of dogma that supports conservative textualities in this regard, i.e. popular texts conforming to a set of normative principles about the body and its representation. It will be revealed that the meeting point, or rather the point of conflict at which societal goals conflict most strongly with individual desires, involves the ambiguous path of sexuality and sexual representation, finding expression in texts involved with sexual themes.
- I.2 One text which is of particular interest to this dissertation—although a large number of contrasting texts and their textualities are explored—is J. G. Ballard's *CRASH* (1973); this text is very much a subversion of a set of normative desires over which society would like to have control, but which it will never have, involving a bizarre and frightening fusion of corporeality, primeval desires, sexual expression and technology; the automobile and the surreal violence it can perform on human flesh is used as a metaphor to help comprehend the changing nature of sexual tastes. For many, both Ballard's novel and the film director Cronenberg's cinematic rendition of it (released in 1996) were extremely confronting; this led to shock, followed by disgust and finally attempts to have the film banned entirely, at least in Britain. Why is this so? The way these works function to subvert existing generally accepted understandings about the body, gender, sexuality and sexual practices is brought into question; they became very much the expression of 'a slap in the face of public taste' which is also by no coincidence the title of the first major Russian Cubo-Futurist Manifesto presented by Mayakovsky, Krychenykh, Burluk et. al. to the chagrin of the arts community—the intention was to completely reshape existing ideas about all forms of art, and in fact aesthetics in general.

1.3 Before Ballard's writing and Cronenberg's filmic texts are explored, a number of theoretical steps are taken to build towards a theory of what I define as 'performative sexuality', one which fuses both the notion of the performative in gender studies and the liminal in performance studies. This dissertation begins with a few basic definitions which are designed to explicate some of the terminology. After exploring the nature of textuality and the relationship between text and discourse as far as these terms are defined within the context of this document, particular discursive practices are explored in the sense that texts are viewed as expressions of discourse. Herein performativity is introduced as a type of textuality particularly important to the theoretical development. This is followed by an introduction to the ways the body can be viewed as a text, and the particular ways society inculcates particular textualities towards the body—often of a conservative nature—in an effort to have control over this aspect of its members' existence. After this sexuality is viewed in a similar way to performativity, i.e. as a type of text and also the textualities instituted by society (and those members of society institute on themselves, in a fashion). The dissertation ends with an exploration of textual constructions towards technology, the body, sexuality, violence and death.

## 2 THE INSIDIOUS ENSCRIPTION:

### *Text and Discourse as Products of Power*

2.1 Within this introductory part of the dissertation, the terms 'text' and 'textuality' are defined, particularly in relation to the discourses in which they receive expression and which are inculcated into our universes in a complex process involving any number of different media. In other words texts are revealed to be complex cultural expressions, far more than just vehicles for the storage and transportation of sets of words, i.e. pieces of literature. More importantly however as will be demonstrated below, texts and discourses are revealed to be the means by which both society and individuals achieve and maintain power. This theory is particularly indebted to the French poststructural school, particularly Barthes and Foucault.

2.2 Definitions of terminology essential to developing any theory involved with hermeneutics is the next subject of discussion. I use a number of different categories to describe different ways texts can be considered. The concepts which I have developed for use within this dissertation (and other published works), begin with some of the basic propositions inherent in Ricœur's hermeneutics which are then developed upon and subverted by the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes developed his linguistic and literary-based approach to semiotics through his initial participation in the *Tel Quel* group, members of which included Julia Kristeva and Roman Jakobson, all of whom moved in Parisian circles at that time. Ricœur, the philosopher who developed 'le texte' as a hermeneutic entity to the degree that perhaps no one ever had before, may have also been influential to his colleagues but his philosophy seemed to be based in a structural paradigm; he is responsible for introducing the hermeneutic process of *distanciation* which attempts to explain the process by which texts become progressively 'distanced' from the environments in which they were created. The text becomes an ideal, totally abstracted from its creation and existing in an almost pure state, which is literally 'brought into the real world' only when it is read. Barthes pointed out the inherent problems in this distancing process by demonstrating the dichotomy which sets the concepts of *l'oeuvre* against *le texte*. Traditionally, and in the hermeneutics of Ricœur, the *Work* has received the preference whereas the *Text* has been considered to be an unreliable source of any kind of signification; according to Barthes, however, it is the only kind. Barthes' article functions to set things straight and points out problems inherent in *Work*-based approaches to text. This is best expressed in a paper written by Barthes in 1984 the notion of *le Texte* was extended from being a static expression of written dialogue captured on the page to becoming a dynamic, unclosed, plural 'dialogue with culture' which was in a constant process of adaptation to the dynamic environment in which it found signification. He developed this concept by comparing it to the static notion of the *l'oeuvre* (translated into English as 'Work') which stood opposed to the dynamism of his *Text*; stuck on a bookshelf, the *Work* represented the dominance of the Father, the stasis of knowledge which was believed to remain the same—as is the



case with Ricoeur's realisation of *le texte*— and the eternal nature of some types of 'truth' which are ascribed to specific 'Works'. A religious example of such a Work is the Bible for Christians or the Mahabharata for Hindus, whereas Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) is an example of a Work containing 'scientific truth'. For Barthes, *Text* became the vital means for cultural change to be able to take place, contrasting to the perpetuation of patriarchal power structures inherent in Works. This development was significant, if not entirely original, because it presented the basis for the viewing of texts not only in terms of the words on the page, but also in terms of what the reader and/or participant makes of the text in his or her life. This will have more significance further on in relation to a new paradigm in analysis which has developed thanks to the impact of the cinema on occidental thought.

- 2.3 Development that came after Barthes, particularly in the work of 'social archaeologists' such as Foucault, changed the way we relate to the many discourses which we interact with in the context of social existence. Post-Barthesian theorists began to define texts in new ways and to consider texts to be many more things than simply written manuscripts. Texts had become any 'vehicles' which have the potential to communicate something to somebody, including (for example) films, television programmes, lectures, and as I hope to demonstrate, constructions enscribed on the body like 'gender' and 'sexuality'. In order to encompass their complexity I have developed three theoretical terms to refer to different aspects of any given 'text', namely *textual vehicles*, *textual [discursive] practices* and *textualities*.
- 2.4 *Textual vehicles* are the forms in which knowledge is communicated. The 'knowledge' I'm referring to can signify either 'static' knowledge—finding realisation in Ricoeurian texts which tend to be distanced from their origin such as novels—or 'dynamic' knowledge—expressing itself in enactive or embodied texts which include films, music and even sexual acts. It will be demonstrated the actual 'form' of the vehicle can make an enormous difference because of the varying requirements necessary for any given vehicle to be realised (i.e. if the cultural construction of 'ice-cream' was considered as a text, you wouldn't read it, watch it or question it; you'd be more likely to eat it or put it in the freezer). Moving on to a short definition of the concepts of 'textual processes' and 'textual (discursive) practice'; these notions are developed as a part of the exploration of text that includes two different ways of looking at the realisation of texts when they are 'brought to life' in a Ricoeurian sense or *embodied*.
- 2.5 A 'textual process' is generally considered to be far more than the set of words and grammatical rules which combine to form the complex totality of language; it is not just what one 'says' combined with the 'rules' followed, but includes the way people feel about their vocalisations *as well as* what they realise in the world through their utterances. For example, people who speak more than one language often describe how they switch not just from one set of words to another, or even from one cultural context to another, but how they *feel* different, and this often means that non-linguistic factors are performed differently as well, for example physical actions connected to any given vociferation such as 'I don't know' are also represented in a form unique to the culture (such as shrugging one's shoulders). One can enter the room differently, drive differently, eat dinner with different manners and so on. The term 'textual process' is a term used to refer in general to all of the actions that take place when a given text finds realisation; it implies *multiplicity*. The term 'textual practice' (sometimes also referred to as 'discursive practice'), however, refers in a more specific sense to the embodied context of a text's realisation. The term *processes*, then, implies a multivariied amount of textual types being realised simultaneously whereas *practice* includes embodiment as part of the dynamic process of signification. 'Embodiment' of this type which involves an extended realisation of the concept of language found expression in the theoretical philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the Speech-Acts of Austin;<sup>1</sup> language was seen not as an abstract set of rules as had been the traditional approach to linguistics during the structural period, but as something which could only find meaning precisely because we have bodies to realise it with. The application of embodiment in the study of literature has not been extremely wide but a new paradigm which found initial expression in the study of film

<sup>1</sup> Embodied philosophy found grammatical contextualisation in the work of Halliday, Hasan and their colleagues where sentences were considered in terms of their intended meanings when realised, and what they actually end up communicating (creating their *locutionary* and *illocutionary* acts respectively).

will be introduced further on in a form that will be applicable to literature and which includes theoretical elements taken from embodied theory. The term *textuality* and its origin is expanded upon in the next paragraph; it is demonstrated to have had different meanings in the history of literary studies, but to which I attach my own meaning in this work.

**2.6** Understanding exactly what the term 'textuality' is referring to not a simple task because it has received a rather nebulous application when in use. It is generally used to refer to an ambiguous extension of text of sorts or sometimes as a name to refer to a group or genre of written, visual or 'enacted' texts. Many theorists seem to be unsure as to exactly what the term refers to. The definition I apply to this word and will be using in this dissertation takes the traditional textual 'extension' further. As far as I define it, a *textuality* refers to the way a given society goes about inculcating a given 'textual vehicle' (a term which alternatively refers to the form in which *any* type of culturally-realised text receives its form) into its members. Social inculcation is a term introduced into the theoretical vocabulary by the French sociologist Bourdieu who defines it as an embodied way of understanding the application of knowledge. In other words if a text is the 'vehicle' for the communication of given set of facts that an individual has collected relating to a notion like *the body*, then a textuality refers to the myriad array of different systems a society uses to perpetuate a given 'reading', 'interpretation' or 'enaction' of it, each individual applying an entirely different form of interpretation. It can be generalised, however, that a set of given individuals who share a common background will share enough common aspects for the formation of a generalised textuality which can be argued about or discussed in works such as this one, at least that is the premise of this work. The notion of *textualities* can be seen as particular instances of discourse as they relate to particular texts; this is significant because the relationship between discourse and power (and its expression in given textualities) will prove to be important to theoretical development within this dissertation.

**2.7** As defined above, *discourse* is a general phrase which refers to the given set of Texts which combine to form our sense of reality. It would be in fact possible to define reality as a complex set of Texts and their textualities (i.e. a series of epistemological ways of interacting with the world), although this complex philosophical proposition—and the demonstration of its fundamental truth—is far beyond the scope of this dissertation which looks at a specific set of textualities related to notions such as gender and sexuality. What is important to us here is one of the ideas central to Foucault's thesis regarding the powerful ways such discourses induce power for the purpose of controlling a society (the organisation which institutes and perpetuates the texts of a set of people who are usually united in a specific geographical region). This thesis will become considerably clearer when we start to explore the way society attempts to impose given textualities instituted in the guise of a fictive state referred to as 'normality' in the myriad array of texts and textualities instituted by occidental culture, from pornography, films, magazines, TV advertisements to our attitudes to our bodies and the way they interact with spatiality. The following quote from an article concerning textual communication in the medium of science fiction elucidates this extended concept of text and how it relates to the building up and maintenance of power:

"... the formal features of texts—those ordinarily taken to their irreducible elements, and preceding any critical act by the reader whatsoever—are in fact constituted by readers in a dialogue with a text which is governed by a tacit sense of context. Different formal features are generated by different ways of reading, which are themselves constituted by the assumptions of different communities of readers which change over time. Doctrines like authorial intention and appeals to the objective meanings of words are seen as the retroactive positing of origins which effaces from consciousness the awareness of its own constituting power."  
(Stern, 1990: 67-68)

**2.8** It will become clear that discourse is about power; either in its creation or its subversion generally accepted 'truths'; power is created by either the subscription to or the subversion of textualities, the difference being that society encourages its members to subscribe to its texts by accepting its textualities, and sometimes reacts violently against those who don't or can't. It should be

remembered that although at the same time it sometimes provides certain individuals with the right to realise their sexuality in the form of *covert* rather than *overt* support. It will also be demonstrated, however, how difficult it can be for some individuals, in fact most human beings, to subscribe to the bi-polar heteronormative 'truisms' perpetuated by occidental society because they simply don't exist. They are ideal textualities that some of us may aspire to but will never be able to reach; 'pure' masculinity and 'pure' femininity are (always have been and always will be) fantasies. The following discussion concentrates particularly on the relationship between *Text* and *Discourse* as they relate to a set of textualities perpetuated by society; particularly important is the way such texts help influence the formation of constructions such as 'the body', 'sexuality' and 'technology'.

- 2.9 The cultural texts constructed around gender and sexuality are very powerful ones as will be demonstrated. This type of 'text' of course is one considered to exist in a large range of forms, for which 'textualities' have provided the individuals with the power to make sense of such texts. These societal texts are related to powerful structures that are often combined and compared to the similarly arbitrary constructions of 'nature' and 'technology'. Such texts are traditionally conservative, but often have a quality 'built in': the potential for subversion essential to allow for 'deviation from the norm'; in general however such complex sociocultural texts produce a notion Foucault refers to as the 'truth of sex'—a cultural myth that is perpetuated as a similarly mythical notion known as 'normality', i.e. the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy which is symptomatic of occidental culture to this day still. These complex constructions of 'natural' gender divisions through textual formation are "produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (Butler, 1999: 23). The heterosexualization of desire requires and instates the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine', where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female'.

### 3 THE INEFFABLE EQUATION: *Textual Discursive Practices*

- 3.1 Processes that individuals make use of to apply to a given *textual vehicle* are referred to as 'practices'; examples include the embodied aspects of *reading* a book, *watching* a film or *realising* a sexual act [i.e. having sex]) combined with any sociopolitical or static ones. This form of 'textuality enactment' can contrast highly from individual to individual which helps to explain why although the 'texts' themselves may remain constant for certain events but not for others, i.e. everyone in a given group will agree they are 'watching a film' and therefore will apply similar practices at least in the way it is viewed, although there may be a number of different opinions about what sort of textual practices are being realised when a group of people are 'hearing a story being told around a camp-fire' or 'reading a newspaper in a crowded train'. We apply enormously contrasting textual practices, even though we may have been educated in highly similar fashions; such is the diversity inherent in the human race. The work called *The Crash Controversy* (Barker, Arthurs & Harindranath, 2001) which involves the incredibly diverse range of reactions to the film of *CRASH* as part of an interesting sociocultural piece of research resulting from the 'controversy' which developed after the release of the film. This controversy was, of course, a construction; it was largely created for conservative political goals. Although this work is based on research done in England, it also compares the critical reaction to the film in other European countries and America. What the book comes down to is an exploration of possible textual reactions which depend on the practices applied by individuals who often share general patterns if a large enough sample is taken of similar people; we may end up amused (to the point of laughter), or alternatively shocked (to the point that we are frightened or reel away in horror); in contrast if the textualities we have been provided with don't help us to form an understanding of the film, this could result in miscomprehension, our reaction being boredom (what I refer to as 'textual ennui'); if, however, we have a natural resentment of authority and a knowledge of the societal dichotomies which the film questions, we may well find the film a true challenge to the intellect, or it may expand our horizons towards not only other films but life in general. The possibilities are endless. This will prove more significant, however, when a 'performative outlook' is



taken, just as a performative approach to sexuality will provide us with better means to analyse texts in today's rapidly changing and scarred environment.

**3.2** Cultural texts created in the name of popular culture, i.e. with a set of expected conservative textualities inculcated by the same culture which creates the texts—be they science-fiction or attitudes to sexuality—are naturally conservative as they have to reflect the opinions of most people (commonly referred to as 'the masses') and not a select group of intellectuals and/or academics who may have other opinions. This can be explained in a number of ways depending on the nature of the text; science-fiction film for example needs to be directed this way in order to make money. Films which aren't tailored for the popular market get labelled 'art-house cinema' or (even worse) as being simply unmarketable. For producers aiming on not just making back the cost of the film but also padding their own wallets, the former category—art-house cinema—is an unfortunate necessity in some situations; the latter category—unmarketable film—is an unthinkable prospect. If such a label results, producers feel obliged through the assistance of marketing professionals to force their directors and writers to change their films, who in turn feel obliged to do so as it is the producers who provide the funding for the film. A good example of this move towards the formation of conservative texts as opposed to subversive ones include Ridley Scott's *Blade-Runner* (1982). Under the supervision of the people responsible for funding, the film was changed so that one of its major subversive themes which questioned popular discursive practices towards 'technology' was reduced in shock-value in order to encourage more traditional concepts towards 'biology' and 'family': the main protagonist ends up pairing up with one of the shunned automatons whose extinction was to remain ambiguous. This helps us to understand why texts which subscribe to traditional textualities are 'popular'. They are popular for a very good reason: they reflect the views of the people that go to see them rather than create confusion by forcing them to question their textualities and the practices they realise. Films that sometimes don't succeed in making a great deal of money are very often, as in the case of the original version of *Blade Runner*, not provided their audience with the answers that live up to their textualities, or are presented with images which blatantly contradict the discursive images they have already developed towards such textual structures as those mentioned, i.e. 'the body' and the positive nature of technology and sexuality. The next issue to be examined is the comparison between the notion of textuality and the concept of contrasting 'readings' of texts which in essence means the different discursive practices which can be put into effect upon cultural texts, even ones intended to be conservative.

**3.2.1** Different ways of interpreting texts, then, can be defined as forms of textual discursive practice or 'readings'. The term 'readings' is, of course, taken from a more standard lexicon used to refer to the types of texts consisting of words on paper, although it can actually be applied to any type of cultural text, at least potentially. The intention here is simply to differentiate the concepts of *mainstream* and *tactical* readings, as well as some other important types of 'readings' that will be significant in the context of this dissertation. A mainstream reading of a text is the reading "expected from a literate member of the reader's society" which contrasts to a *resistant* reading where the "text rejects the mainstream or compliant reading" (Cranny-Francis et. al., 2003: 118). This differs to what is known as a 'tactical reading' which is a very specific tactic for using a given text to help prove, confirm or realise a given argument, point or belief. Rather than considering *tactical readings* as textualities *per se*, it is more appropriate to consider them as literary or cultural tools for the realisation of a particular goal rather than an inbuilt way of interpreting text as is the case of most discursive textual practices; *tactical readings* are also referred to as forms of 'textual poaching' and are therefore sometimes considered problematic even though they often function "as a point of departure for a meaning-making practice that empowers the reader" (ibid.: 130). When tactical readings take place within this work or given *vehicles* are referred to which involve texts concerned with textual poaching, it will be pointed out and considered in this context. The following subject of examination is a particular type of text which aims to fulfil conservative textual practices in individuals who read or view them: fantasy textualities (referring particularly to *science-fiction* and *horror*).

**3.2.2** Conservative textualities are produced by texts which function to perpetuate the *dichotomies*<sup>2</sup> inherent in a given culture recognised most easily by popular and traditional culture. Textual vehicles cater to these dichotomies primarily because this is the only way that they become popular; if they broke these basic dichotomous rules, people wouldn't be able to relate to them. And it is in this way that textual vehicles of all types play a role in influencing a society's textualities towards certain ideas and concepts. Surprisingly, one of the most modern of textual vehicles that represents technology and scientific development at its most highly developed, often presenting a vision of the future, is sometimes the most conservative of all textual vehicles: science-fiction film. By representing the conquering of unknown forces by man, to use a simple example, the traditional dichotomous approach to nature and culture or the known and the unknown is perpetuated; science-fiction is also notorious for perpetuating a specifically 'masculine' perspective on reality, one which avoids confronting concepts such as female sexuality, human eroticism, emotions, the libido and in fact most other constructions which are connected in a dichotomous fashion to the equally questionable construction of 'femininity', especially American science-fiction films since the 1950s until today. The following passage functions to describe the way such conservative texts which form part of conservative social textualities are perpetuated and form part of the sense of reality constructed by individuals, which I have also defined as *episteme* following the work of Foucault (and from which we construct our own 'texts' or mould sociocultural texts to suit our own needs as will be described in more detail further on [see also Laskewicz, 2003]):

"SF films and TV shows help to construct and legitimize a world in which technology is an abstract category of effects without any specific social and political context, rather than a critical part of a whole way of life. SF foregrounds technology as a special effect... This is also the way news and advertising work... fetishizes commodities: it isolates them from the people and processes which produce them. Cars are displayed in grain fields as if they grazed there, frozen pre-cooked rolls are called 'home-made' because they are warmed up in a microwave in the consumer's kitchen, and so on... SF makes technology into the source of magical objects which enter people's lives and transform them under the direction of higher, more powerful beings."  
(Stern, 1990: 70)

**3.2.3** By abstracting them from the contexts in which they were created, many individuals without the theoretical knowledge or will to question the source of such material, 'cultural texts' as seemingly innocuous as science-fiction and as potently and unashamedly manipulative as advertising are able to change the way we view technology, functioning to construct a very particular, socially appropriate 'textual relationship' with (and between as will prove important) such concepts as technology and sexuality. The way these conservative sociotextual constructions are formed through the creation of such *textual vehicles* as advertising and fantasy films will form the subject of the following discussion, preceded by a brief discussion of the conservative tactics we tend to apply to make sense of our reality in general.

**3.2.4** The tactics individuals use to make sense of texts (introduced above as *textual practices* or *discursive practices*) consist of the complex content of texts and sub-texts existing as constructions which are perpetuated in conservative ways by contemporary society. The cultural texts explored within this work—including both books and films among others—function to 'deconstruct' these categories in the sense intended by the French philosopher Derrida; they will be rendered as problematic because of the dichotomies they perpetuate. These texts will be analysed in terms of contemporary developments in theory and the metaphor for a dynamic approach to such texts that has been ushered in thanks to new approaches within fields as diverse as film analysis, cultural anthropology and theatre studies towards the semiotics of human behaviour, especially since the advent of new forms of technology which have changed the dynamism between the human body and the machines it has created, as well as the contextual factors it exists within (including temporality and spatiality); this includes the introduction and growth in popularity of new media such as cinema, television, and more recently, the internet, which have required, and in turn influenced, the creation of entirely new

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<sup>2</sup> A philosophical concept introduced into the general vocabulary by the French theoretician/philosopher Derrida (described in more detail).

*textualities* and *discursive textual practices*. Because spatial and temporal factors prove to be so important to the creation of such 'textual vehicles' as theatrical performance, I make use of some concepts which I've had to develop from existing theories or invent to provide the means to conceive of these texts; i.e. the notion of the *embodied text* is influenced by Merleau-Ponty whereas the 'enactive' text is my own invention in an attempt to develop a discourse to refer to what I see as a new paradigm in the field of hermeneutics. Although terminology may already exist which refers to similar concepts, the intention in this dissertation is to rethink these concepts and also develop a theoretical discourse to start looking at hermeneutics in a different fashion. To continue with definitions of some of these terms which I have redefined, the 'enactive text' is a *vehicle* which can only be considered in terms of its 'performative' factors; it does not 'signify' unless it is realized in a temporal and spatial environment. I hope to demonstrate that the relationship between enactive texts and societal constructions like the body, gender, sexuality and technology depend on enactive texts to achieve realisation, although often in an intertextual fashion. As far as *textual practices* towards these constructions are concerned, developments in the fields of *Gender Studies*, *Performance Studies* and *Queer Theory* will prove important as I attempt to build a theoretical basis around such ambiguous cultural structures as transvestitism and transsexuality where there sexuality, gender and sometimes even sex are at the very least ambiguous and at the most difficult to classify; in this context a *performative* theory is developed that makes use of the postmodern notion of *liminality* which has been taken from Performance Studies. Through such 'performative liminality' or by adopting regular 'performatively liminal' states, the construction of reality for the participants (and audience) can be either kept constant or gradually changed, by having these textual participants creating for themselves a constantly repetitive, ritual-like performative zone in which they constantly affirm and re-affirm their status as Drag-Queens, Transvestites, Transsexuals and 'in-betweenies'. The first major subject of discussion is the nature/culture dichotomy which defines many of the principles on which occidental society bases itself.

- 3.3.1** In contemporary academic circles, the argument still rages between the 'nature' and the 'culture' schools; it is unfortunate for some to have to admit that this argumentation will never stop, in fact if it did that would probably mean the end of occidental culture as we currently know it. In other words, the basis of development and change in western culture takes as its source this fundamental argument on whether we are founded 'in the womb' or by society as we develop, i.e. as long as the argument is raging, academicism remains healthy. This particular dynamic dichotomy, although most familiar in 'the humanities', receives expression across a wide range of fields, from anthropology to zoology. When a particular school rages strong and the argument stagnates, this can signify a period of intense conservatism in particular fields. At the moment now that the awe rising from the fact that we have reached the beginning of a new millennium has somewhat diminished, many fields are demonstrating periods of marked moves towards the perpetuation of the set of dichotomies on which popular culture usually bases its source of reality (or how it forms its *textual practices*); just as women are losing their rights to their wombs as unborn foetuses become powerful enemies, geneticists are making exciting discoveries which are providing homosexuals with genes allowing them to accept their states as inborn phenomena: right to life lunacy is becoming an accepted part of existence whereas essentialism—a term which will be described in more detail further on—is providing the theoretical material for gays and lesbians to subscribe to the conservative biological dichotomy which conceives of their relationships as purely 'natural' as they fight for the continued battle to marry and adopt children.
- 3.3.2** In light of this new move towards conservatism, there is a front developing on the embattled shore where literary theorists, film-makers, psychiatrists and novelists alike are looking back to older 'textual' forms and rediscovering them in this new context, using them as dynamic 'discursive tools' to provide a strong argument to support their cause. *CRASH*, which can be tactically viewed as a wildly subversive piece of pornography, is one such textual vehicle, existing in the 'textual' forms of a novel by Ballard published way back in 1973, and the relatively recent realization of the same work as a film (Cronenberg, 1995). Both forms are dynamic textual vehicles which (as will be discussed) have been to varying degrees successful in communicating alternative attitudes towards sexuality to a relatively large audience while at the same time questioning existing attitudes perpetuated by society, planting seeds from which textual plants like this dissertation grow. It can be safely said that without risk of

what has been defined as ‘textual poaching’ or deliberate ‘tactical’ reading into this work (and a range of other textual vehicles in a number of contrasting genres) themes that weren't intended to be there, that *CRASH* presents a strong textual statement against any movement towards conservatism. The main theme of this work, however, is to use these ‘texts’ to develop a basis for understanding sexuality according to cultural inculcation; I hope to demonstrate that sexuality is more culturally-determined than many consider, both in and out of conservative fields.

**3.3.3** In this dissertation three different discursive practices towards texts are considered to exist simultaneously, i.e. ‘texts’ are at one and the same time considered by members of occidental society to be a word that signifies a number of different attitudes (such as the three suggested in this work). Although potentially confusing, it has to be accepted that a multisignificational context is applied to many, in fact most concepts, not only through a group of individuals but within the mind of a given individual—he or she not having to be ‘schizophrenic’ to be able to realise these concepts simultaneously. We are able, for example, to accept remarkably contrasting concepts of our own bodies and selves—I remember defining myself as a child firstly in terms of my ability as a student and my academic success, which existed entirely apart from that ‘vile body’ which had dirty thoughts and committed deeds which I found entirely disgusting because of the way society inculcated certain views (i.e. textualities) towards sexual behaviour—particularly through the verbal discourse of other children who often misrepresented the taboo around the subject of anything sexual, created by their parents in the name of religion, or possibly to ‘protect them from self-abuse’. This was all despite my own mother being relatively open towards sexuality and the body; as an innocent child, ‘textually unsoiled’, I asked her to show me her vagina which she had described in detail. Although I can't remember whether she ended up showing me the organ in question, this was only one of many examples I can still recall, and despite this there developed within me the opposing constructions of myself: some of the ‘vile’ textual construction imposed on me as a child still exist and as a result, despite knowing better, I sometimes still feel a pang of guilt while experiencing sexual pleasure. This demonstrates the possibility of contrasting concepts developing and existing simultaneously, and will prove an important understanding to both the concepts of ‘liminality’ taken from *Performance Theory* and ‘the performative’ taken from *Queer Theory*. These terms are the fully developed form of a theoretical language that will be developed during the exploration of a wide range of ‘cultural texts’. These ‘cultural texts’ include the works on whose analysis this dissertation is based, and a list is included below of the various forms these texts will take, summarising the introductory material presented up until this point:

- 3.3.3.1** [i] **TEXTUALITIES:** Sociocultural constructions or abstract cultural constructions such as ‘the body’ and ‘sexuality’ which a given society, through any possible means of communication (i.e. education, conversation, films or even songs) attempts to socially inculcate into individuals, or people inculcate into themselves (usually under textual or intertextual influence).
- 3.3.3.2** [ii] **TEXTUAL VEHICLES:** The actual form in which a given *textuality* finds communication, including both *static* and *dynamic* vehicles—the contrast between these two forms will become an important part of the theoretical development when terms such as *embodiment* and *performativity* are introduced. The term *dynamic* refers to any vehicle which needs a temporal and spatial environment to find expression; although it may exist as a script on paper, its true expression is in its realised form such as a piece of theatre or film, and in this dissertation I am particularly interested in exploring forms of popular textual expression through genre-based films such as science-fiction and horror (important examples of which include the science-fiction film *THX 1138* [Lucas, 1970], the horror film *Le Rouge aux Lèvres* [aka ‘Daughters of Darkness’; Kumel, 1971] and the films of Cronenberg such as *Videodrome* [1986], *Shivers* [1975] and *Crash* [1996] which could be fitted into both categories but generally defy classification). A number of literary vehicles are also explored, particularly pornography (namely Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* and J.G. Ballard's *CRASH* which both explore sexual obsession).

- 3.3.3.3 [(iii) TEXTUAL [DISCURSIVE] PRACTICES: Texts as the practices which individuals actually realise in order to make sense of given 'texts', often (but not always) depending on the form of the *textual vehicle*, i.e. you don't apply the same processes when reading a book and seeing a film because the former requires you to be literate, the latter mostly to obey a set of sociocultural rules such as remaining silent and not running around the cinema like a madman. I refer to these complex processes applied by individuals as 'Textual Discursive Practices' or simply *Textual Practices*. There are basically two sub-divisions of this main category I refer to as *enactive/embodied* and *idealised* practices; *enactive* practices are those that need a spatial environment to take place, i.e. that make use of the 'body' in 'action' whereas the *idealised* practices are those that take place purely in the head and may reflect merely a set of thoughts or an attitude a given individual has. There are obviously a wide range of different ways that texts can be realised—one can equally as well read a book as 'realise' it by watching it burn after setting a flame-thrower to it, as presented in the bleak future universe presented by Bradbury in his Science-Fiction classic *Fahrenheit 451* ('the temperature at which paper burns'; Bradbury 1953).
- 3.3.4 Through this set of three major 'textual formations', the actual amount of constructions we would end up with couldn't be counted on our fingers and toes combined, or even on a calculator; our culture and in fact reality itself is created around us with this infinite amount of *textual constructions*. Without texts, in other words, the universe *as we know it* couldn't exist. Some of these textual practices, however, are more complex than we imagine. Textual vehicles, for example, which belong to the genre of fantasy texts, use a set of semiotic codes which outline our very cultural hopes and fears; these fears belong to the perpetuation of a set of culturally constructed dichotomies which were introduced above in relation to the philosophy above and are also expanded upon further on. One of the *textual enactors* at work is the diegetic force of atmosphere. Tzvetan Todorov (1975), in discussing fantasy works maintains that the central 'pointing device' in these tales is their atmosphere; here the concept of 'closeness' or proximity is brought into question and then resolved. The fact that the opening sequence of a film is set in misty and/or gloomy environments, for example, which then moves into a sequence of sunlight, is a textual tool of both filmic and written fantasy vehicles, where twilight becomes the ultimate representation of disparate, frightening and incomprehensible 'otherness' connected to what we don't know; it is a dangerous territory where it is difficult to distinguish opposing forces, a 'liminal zone' where anything can and probably will happen. Liminality is an important theoretical concept involving ambiguous periods of temporality and/or spatiality that will be discussed in more detail further on. In any case, one of the popular explanations is that this fear of proximity is the fear of the existing potential 'Otherness'-something we cannot quite understand with the textual tools currently in our possession and it therefore frightens us, the dichotomy being the known against the unknown or the 'together' against the 'other' as philosophical constructions. This is described in more detail further on.
- 3.3.5 Freud, however, has a very different explanation to explain the use of atmosphere in fantasy. He explained this fear of proscribed proximity as being a representation of the fear of the grave or being buried alive; this immediately recalls the image of the undead and vampirism. And this fear of the grave is a textual representation of a fear of what Freud calls 'intra-uterine existence' (somewhere in a liminal zone not quite in the womb and not quite out of it either). This psychological explanation for certain fears in individuals which are constructed by their societies adds another interesting textual level to the already complex set of vehicles and practices introduced. Whichever way it is looked at, however, it is clear that *everything* in given textual vehicles has the potential to carry meaning; the question is whether the interpreter of the text finds it there or not; for once and forever 'the meaning' is not, has never been and never will be in the text of its own accord. Meaning itself is a textual construction applied to make sense of our very textual world. The next subject to be analysed is also a textual construction, but this time it is one which can be used to influence both the types of text we analyse and the way we analyse them; I use the term 'performativity' to refer to a type of text which can only receive meaning through its performance, although it can refer to *any* type of human behaviour rather than just what happens on stage.



- 3.4.1** It is clear from the introduction above that to reach an extended understanding of text, it is important to include more of human behaviour as being essentially of a textual nature, from something as abstract as music and the appreciation of art to the rigour of sport or martial arts training. Such texts literally enscribe upon the body a whole set of 'performative' goals which have to be realized again and again through 'practice' (in the sense of *practice makes perfect*). To introduce the notion of *performativity* in a textual context, I'd like to present some primordial connections between 'play' and 'performance' thanks to foundational work by Huizinga. In his work *Homo Ludens* (1950) he attempted to found a new perspective on interpreting human behaviour. According to Huizinga, in comparing the different ways man has been viewed by theoreticians and academics, "next to *Homo Faber* [man the 'doer'], and perhaps on the same level as *Homo Sapiens* [Man the 'knower'], *Homo Ludens*, Man the Player, deserves a place in our nomenclature" (1950: i). One of the major factors connecting the states of performativity and performance is the ability individuals have to see themselves as actors on a (metaphorical) stage; the whole concept of performativity theory is based upon the recognition that in the very act of existing we are in fact 'playing' the roles our societies construct for us. What connects performativity and play, however, is the very ability we have to become part of an audience, any audience, and be moved—to tears or laughter—by what we essentially know from the beginning is false, a set of real-life actors on a stage who are unlikely to be even real relations to the proposed characters being realised (if the textual vehicle being realised is not fiction meaning the characters were actually living people at one time or another). This questioning of *all* human behaviour in a performative context is an expression of the new paradigm in semiotics and sociosemiotics, or the study of signs and social communication; it is really quite unique that we are able to weep, laugh and reach other intense emotional states thanks to the way we interact with cultural texts such as films, books, the news, letters from relatives, conversations and sex acts. This also suggests that we should start looking at how people respond to films because response implies play and the performative; this involves how people *realise, substantiate or enact a performance*—how they 'play it'—within their own lives; in other words the meaning doesn't subsist within the textual object, it is found there (as suggested above) thanks to an individuals textual discursive practices towards the *vehicle* or *textuality* in question
- 3.4.2** Discussing performativity is one thing; defining it is another primarily because of its complexity. There are five major definitions which are commonly used to refer to either performance, the performative or performativity, and each of them has some use to the formation of a general theory here. These five definitions are introduced below:
- 3.4.2.1** Speech Act Theory and Illocutionary Acts: Halliday & Hasan's theoretical developments in the field of linguistics was successful in realising Austin's *speech act* theory in the study of language which meant bringing to life 'enactive' or 'performative' sentences which actually realised something in the real world; this contrasted to the existing abstract/structural approach to language which found its origins in the work of de Saussure and which was still considered to represent the only true way to study language. Halliday & Hasan realised Austin's philosophy in the creation of what they referred to as *illocutionary acts* where sentences were looked at not in terms of the abstract structure of the words as they related to one another in a structural sense, but what they *realised* in the world or how they *acted* upon it. Even 'incomplete' sentences, for example sentences without verbs, could be analysed; for example the *locutionary act* of the sentence 'What a beautiful day' is the realisation in the form of speech of this very sentence, whereas the *illocutionary act* refers to what the sentence actually *enacts* or what the speaker intends to enact or say. The *perlocutionary act*, in comparison, refers to the actual meaning which is communicated, which can account for miscommunication.. The sentence "it's a beautiful day, today", for example, could easily imply that it's a perfect day to go swimming, it could realise a given emotional state (like saying 'I am truly happy') or even be a comparison to yesterday during which the weather was absolutely abominable.
- 3.4.2.2** Play and the Performative: As we grow and continue to interact with our world, our tendrils stretch and extend to a real-life social existence as we continue to learn from 'playing' with at

first our close family and then other children. Whole worlds are formed and play prepares us for the real world; autistic children who cannot comprehend play have difficulty in acquiring language and in developing generally because they are unable to interact with their environment. This demonstrates the clear form of interactions necessary for the performative to catch us very young, as well as the potential seriousness of play which means a lot more to us than we know.

- 3.4.2.3 Performance Theory: Performance theory refers to that wide world of symbolic behaviour that we use in a ritual-like communicative fashion to both create 'performances' and the textualities to conceive of them. It is based on the notion that what we do is learned through symbolic behaviour and enaction, through what we realise in the world as performance. We often apply the textualities that society attempts to inculcate, but the extent to which one interacts with them, comprehends them, and applies to them signification (such as a belief in their ultimate 'truth') depends entirely on one's capacities. Performance theory rejects the possibility of such a truth existing, based on the knowledge that meaning is applied by individuals who depend on the ability to realise it symbolically or performatively in their daily lives.
- 3.4.2.4 Liminality: Liminality, always strongly connected to the notion of performance, is an ambiguous zone in which performative *change* can take place; the 'liminal' is very much a place of temporal and spatial ambiguity, change and transformation. Rather than an object, it is a textual construction; in the case of sexuality it excludes the possibility of some kind of 'natural gender' that has been passed up by the generations like a disease; gender in a liminal sense is very cultural and as a result constantly changes. Sexualities, just like gender and texts, are essentially believed to be cultural constructions which are at the same time uniquely individual. Liminality will prove to be an important addition to this list.
- 3.4.2.5 Realisation of Text through Corporeality: This is a dynamic sense of the performative in that the meaning is placed there by the performer who realises the text through reaction with the dynamism or 'embodiment' of his or her own body (referred to in a general sense as corporeality), making it very much his or her own. This approach demands an attitude to literature which involves the participation, feedback and interaction of the people who participate in representations of textual vehicles or people who can realise them themselves; it stands against the closed book or Barthesian 'Work'-like approaches to textuality which consider the meaning to be inherent within the literature itself.
- 3.5** In all of the five examples of textual expressions above, 'meaning' is never determined as being something static comparable to practically all the systems of film analysis I have encountered from cognitive psychology to postmodern deconstruction which have all included at least to a degree either the enactive aspect of the film (for example the diegetic force of atmosphere) or audience analysis. Cinema has forced its analysts to realise the importance of the subjectivity of the individuals which depend so strongly on the textual practices they apply (which in turn requires a deeper understanding of the society in which the popular or subversive vehicles were provided with meaning). There is no doubt that the growth of film in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has had an influence on literary analysis; it is also likely that because of the theoretical and popular textualities that have developed towards European 'drama'—perhaps developed to their ultimate form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—the approaches to theatre have been able to remain 'transcendent' of realisation, i.e. through textual practices where the signification is believed to exist within the vehicle rather through the practices of those who experience them. Holland, for example, brought out a book in 1975 called *The Dynamics of Literary Response* which concerns exactly those issues concerned with the meaning people apply tend to apply to literary forms; although the theory itself is not very challenging in itself and reflects rather dated textualities from our perspective today, the fact that it was released at all was remarkable enough. One of the interesting themes within the book involves explanations of why we go to see challenging films or read puzzling literature. This is a clear statement against a belief that meaning inheres within the text, concentrating instead on the *textual interpreters* and the practices they apply, which became one of the first dynamic steps towards a more reader-oriented approach to interpretation. Holland's

method was influenced by what then were contemporary developments in psychoanalysis which began with the concept that a person's consciousness worked in a way like a language and with the correct form of analysis could be 'interpreted' and 'helped'. People, as well as the literary works being examined, began to be viewed as texts themselves. This led to more sociopolitical explorations of the ways texts could interact with the lives of individuals, i.e. Martin Barker's *Haunt of Fears* which explored the whole phenomena of horror comics in England and the moves to ban them by conservative English society, or his analysis of the whole issue of the banning and restrictions put upon 'video-nasties' when the video-age began in the 80s. The intention in this work is to include the influence of works such as these which were so closely involved with how people responded to texts. A general expression of this paradigm can be found in many (but not all) contemporary theoretical approaches to literature these days. In Stephen Barker's book (2004) concerning the textual vehicles of Genet (both book, plays and film), for example, this attitude towards the importance of the subjectivity of the people who brought given texts into their lives through practice (i.e. those who directed, lived, painted, performed, directed or even burned them) this attitude is clearly reflected in the authors writing. This is demonstrated in the following quote:

"Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers* constitutes the most incendiary and original first novel of the twentieth century: its impact transformed sexual culture worldwide, suffusing such events as the New York Stonewall gay liberation uprising of 1969, the Tokyo street riots of the same period (for which Genet's work provided the inspiration of a revolutionary culture of violence adhered to by deviant, dissident sexuality), and innumerable works in art, film, dance and writing for which Genet's novel formed an irresistible inspiration to propel images and languages to their most challenging or extreme boundaries."  
(Barker, 2004: 35)

- 3.6.1** Textual vehicles of any kind—including performative ones—have the power to point out particular aspects which make them unique from other texts. By analysing a group of such vehicles that share similar characteristics, conclusions are often drawn about the schools of text or *genre* they belong to. Of genres or textual schools there are almost as many possibilities as there are vehicles. A particularly interesting type of text primarily because of the potential it has to educate its readers about both how texts of a particular genre communicate and the sign systems they use to create patterns of meaning. Texts which belong to this school have two basic characteristics; the first is that they belong very strongly to another genre such as horror or fantasy, and the second is that they function to comment on that genre, often in a parodic fashion, pointing in a diegetic fashion to the textualities and semiotic systems that belong to the genre being parodied. Such texts require 'self-reflexive meta-textual practices' to comprehend them, which means being able to accept that one is watching, for example, a horror film and at the same time witness a parody of the very structures that generally go unquestioned. Such vehicles exist in literary and theatrical forms, but cinematic realisations still seem to be the most popular. *Creepshow* (Romero, 1982) is a popular and amusing example; this film literally 'brings to life' a comic-book of the *EC-Tales of Terror* kind, where the reader—and therefore also the audience—interacts in a special way with the comic book (it ends up seeking revenge on the father who at the beginning of the film was responsible for its getting thrown into the trash); by force of extension the text demonstrates its influential effect on life by having it force itself in an intertextual fashion into the lives of the protagonists, who ironically enough, are part of the movie. A lesser-known film called *I, Madman* (English/European title: 'Hardcover'; 1989, Takács) which parodies the discourses and textualities supporting B-movies and explores the genre of trashy fiction read in hardcover editions from the 50s, a situation is presented which has a girl running from scene to scene believing that the bizarre characters in the book are seeking a strange type of revenge on her; rather than developing it towards a realistic climax where the audience realizes that the girl herself is a dangerous mentally disturbed patient who *believes* she is part of the plot, it actually does have the mad scientist and his monsters escaping from the book, and only the book's destruction can save the characters. These types of vehicles, although interesting, attempt to lay the blame on the text itself which is believed to be performing the evil, not the individuals who are able to read into it whatever their carefully formed textual practices allow. Even though they express rather conservative textualities, they demonstrate how texts can radically influence life by mixing the fantasy of the texts

with the realities in which the texts are brought into reality by being 'read' or 'participated with' in some fashion.

- 3.6.2** It is not only textual participants and the protagonists within the fictional works who participate in an expression of this diegetic function within fictional works. The authors of literary vehicles have been long aware of this genre-based commentary function, although authors of the postmodern era seem to make particular use of this technique. There is a wide-range of examples of narratives which involve writers whose stories comment upon the 'real-life' situation being focussed upon; very often there is an ambiguity between what takes place between the narrative of the author which comments in a similar fashion on both the way texts influence our lives, but also how our very sense of reality is formed by the texts our society inculcates and which we realise in our own unique way. Examples of this form of literature include John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) that ultimately erases the temporal boundaries between the Victorian era and the modern reader's present moment; the author takes risk by making self-referential commentary on the practice of writing throughout the novel. Fowles takes numerous opportunities to speak directly to the reader in asides that describe the process of writing fiction from an author's perspective. Other examples include Margaret Atwood's recent novel *The Blind Assassin* (2000). This is an ambitious achievement which involves a narrative giving way to conversations between two people collaborating on a science fiction novel; the textual participant would be inclined to assume that he or she is learning about the genesis of one of the major characters who committed suicide at the beginning of the novel. The voices are those of an unidentified young woman from a wealthy family and her lover who is a hack writer and socialist agitator on the run from the law; the lurid fantasy they concoct between bouts of lovemaking constitutes a novel-within-a-novel which features gruesome sacrifices, mutilated body parts and corrupt, barbaric leaders. Despite subtle clues, it is more than halfway through Atwood's *tour de force* before it becomes clear that things are not what they seem; this novel questions the way signification is always searched for in the past, but that such an interpretation of events which have taken place—either in the distant or the recent past—reflects very much more the experience of the textual participant's present state than it provides an insight into the past; by interacting with texts that involve what is experienced as 'the past' is constantly and repeatedly reconstructed. As Ferhervary comments, "the relationship between history and so-called subjective processes is not a matter of grasping the truth in history as some objective entity, but in finding the truth of the *experience* ([italics Laskewicz] quoted in Weiss, 1992: 148).
- 3.6.3** Theatre (including the music-theatre, discussed below) is as influenced by this textual genre as any other medium. Examples from history include Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* which features a play-in-a-play, or Chekhov's *The Seagull* which parodies avant-garde theatre by beginning with an 'experimental' realisation of drama, functioning to comment upon the arbitrary nature of dramatic communication as well as the way western theatre attempts to create a sense of 'reality' in its realisation of social existence, as if the actors on the stage were *really* the people they were playing. In a deliberate attempt to contrast to this specifically western tradition, Brecht—the important German theatre-maker—was influenced by forms of theatre he experienced in the orient. These were theatre forms which constantly make use of such a diegetic pointing function—such as the use of half-masks in Japanese *Noh* theatre which pointed to the actors beneath them—which he then for his own reasons appropriated into his theatre; as a writer he is well remembered for his *Verfremdungseffekt* ['alienation technique'] where he compares different and contrasting discourses by using self-referential tools (such as plays-within-plays)—in essence creating a sense of alienation or distance between the audience and the performance while at the same time commenting upon the way theatre communicates; an example of this is his well-known *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* (English title 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle'; 1948) which includes an adaptation of a Chinese play concerning two mothers competing for a child. In the story this performance-within-a-performance comments upon the other narrative involving a group of Caucasian farmers arguing over ownership of land that has been ravaged by Nazi tanks; they are visited by a bard who retells the chalk-circle tale. The nazi tank motif was no coincidence in that it comments upon the fact that the author was in self-imposed exile from the Germans while he wrote it.

- 3.6.4** Comprehending the world of music-theatre sometimes also requires the adoption of self-referential means as well. Brecht's musical collaborations with Kurt Weill are particularly well-known examples where music is used for its *Verfremdungs*-function; as people don't usually suddenly start singing in the middle of the street, just as they aren't usually followed around by a complete band or symphony orchestra, when a singer suddenly interrupts the drama with a song it *automatically* creates this self-referential diegetic pointing function. A well-known example is the Brecht/Weill collaboration *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahogany* (1939) which includes the well-known song 'Alabama-Lied' ('Show me the way to the next whisky bar...'). Next to musicals, opera as well plays a self-referential function. Richard Strauss—the Viennese composer who worked with the librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal on a number of interesting projects—has also created an opera-within-an opera, or rather a chaotic environment in which characters from both a musical and Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* theatre are forced into the parody of an opera which is taking place on stage (and is also within another opera). Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1916) attempts to explore the problematic representation of women in the theatre by exploiting deliberately a burlesque actress who imposes a seemingly sexually-liberated reality on an Ancient Greek story; during the prologue which sets a composer, conductor, choreographer and a group of performers against each other are united suddenly by being forced to put on 3 different performances at the same time. The resulting chaos provokes many questions about sexual roles—the role of the composer, for example, who the audience is introduced to during the prologue which begins the opera is cast as a soprano meaning that two 'women' fall in love during the first 15 minutes of the performance; even though the audience knows that she is representing a man, the way seeing two women kiss provokes a reaction from its audience is a powerful representation of the difficulty of lesbian representation in the theatre. At the same time Zerbinetta, the lively and seemingly sexually-liberated character taken out of an *Opera Buffa* performance is a powerful figure contrasted to the sober and almost asexual Ariadne from Greek myth who is put there to provoke questions not about the ambiguity of sexual categories, but the right of women to experience pleasure. *Opera Buffa* is an Italian version of the North American 'burlesque' tradition which found its origin in the old West of colonial times; arguably it influenced female exploitation in the theatre more than any other. Zerbinetta's important presence in the performance provokes questions about whether a woman's subjectivity can also play a role in her attaining pleasure—allowing her to achieve her ends and enjoy her body—even though she is essentially there to be 'gazed at' by men according to the discursive relationship set up in western theatre.
- 3.6.5** An extension of this theme in textual vehicles involves authors distancing themselves rather than the reader from any signification within the work; the reader is obliged to find the meaning in the texts themselves rather than have it imposed on them by the author. Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* is considered to be post-modern in nature; the complex, archetypal and sometimes inexplicable metaphors require considerable participation from the reader who has to apply his or her own signification in the text. A letter from her, the original version of which I have in my possession, involves answers to a reader's questions who could not comprehend the use of metaphor. She comments on the fact that even for her, the metaphors have meant different things at different times and that therefore if there is any meaning there, the reader has to find it; even for the author the meanings she applied to textual realities she felt the need to create have been in a state of flux and development since she wrote the book. Interestingly, I wrote back to her, saying how much I actually 'understood' the narrative which spoke beyond words alone, communicating into musical discourse; later when I was to return to the book, my meanings had changed, as Lessing notes, "have you ever read a book where it seemed different the second time you pick it up years later? The book hasn't actually changed, you have."
- 3.6.6** Like *CRASH*, *Memoirs of a Survivor* was a partial attempt at autobiography, which has been interpreted by many different people in many different ways; the only reason Julie Christie agreed to do the film realisation of Lessing's novel, according to Lessing, was because she thought it was about nuclear war, as did the director, David Gladwell; the film was an enormous financial failure even though Julie Christie played the part unforgettably. It was probably a failure because of this nuclear holocaust 'misreading', but according to Lessing, there are no 'misreadings' unless you think there is only one correct one. In *Memoirs of a Survivor* the main protagonist—who remains unnamed—we assume is a



representation of Lessing herself; in *CRASH* the main protagonist who becomes drawn into the reality of the sexually-obsessed Vaughn and his nightmare sexual world actually shares the name of the author. Both books involve a rather negative image of the future, although the primary difference centres around the way *CRASH* at first seems to subscribe to a genre which it then subverts (*Memoirs...* seems to belong to a genre of its own). When the book was first written, however, it was generally considered by its readership to be 'science-fiction', and even Baudrillard who celebrated certain aspects of it had articles published about it in science-fiction journals. In 1995 a year before Cronenberg's film of Ballard's novel was released, and therefore probably during the time of filming when Ballard was in contact with Cronenberg, Ballard released an introduction which defined it in terms of an entirely contrasting genre, namely pornography (which is closer to the form of representation used in the film); in any case times had changed and the novel had become all the more real and potent to its audience. Looking back on his work in 1995, Ballard has decided that the writer no longer plays the role of moral adjudicator, meting out carefully planned and articulated lessons; this sort of control belongs to the past, and thus text has left the control of the author's hands:

"I feel myself that the writer's role, his authority and licence to act, have changed radically. I feel that, in a sense, the writer knows nothing any longer. He has no moral stance. He offers the reader the contents of his head, a set of options and imaginative alternatives"  
(Ballard, 1995: i)

**3.6.7** This is similar to Lessing's notion that the reader changes and not the book, almost as if Ballard has returned to his book years later and is rereading it according to a different set of almost morally adjudicated discursive rules. Stepping outside of one's own text and looking back in at it from the outside like this I refer to as *Self-Reflexivity*. An important expression of *Self-Reflexivity* is humour, i.e. we often discuss authors or actors who are 'parodying themselves', ultimately the perfect *self-reflexive* act.

**3.6.8** There is a realm of self-reflexive textual vehicles which refer as well as to the 'characters half in and half out' of the reality being presented in whichever fashion. I use an example of an entirely imagined African primeval ritual in which the town fool or joker on a certain day gains a special status that sets him apart from his standard position at the lower end of the social-scale. For that day, he becomes the 'town's serpent', the human representation of an ancient natural god that eats children. Everyone knows he won't eat any children, and yet they are scared of him; in fact mortally terrified. The actual ritual performance involves the 'fool' commenting on how ridiculous everyone looks pretending they are afraid of him, despite the fact they know he is harmless. In any culturally textual act such as this which involves what will be defined as *performative liminality*, everyone is playing the healthy cultural game known as *Cultural Reflexivity* where either the individual or the culture is able to *simultaneously* function within one's culture, and to step outside of it and comment upon it as an outsider as well. Just as individuals do it towards themselves and their cultures which are complex sets of textualities and texts, textual vehicles themselves such as novels and films are often structured this way to achieve similar cultural goals. In *Queer Theory*, an area of academic discourse developed by lesbians and gays which questions the heteronormative textualities perpetuated by society; 'camp' and 'drag'—both concepts which have emerged from the gay & lesbian community—are able to express this *reflexivity* well, especially when they find realisations in performance. In the following division this performativity is explored and demonstrated to communicate

## 4 THE EMOTIVE REALISATION: *Performativity & the Senses*

**4.1.1** The next subject of analysis explores the role the senses play in helping us to create reality; in our interaction with a given performative act which takes place in a temporal and spatial environment, our senses are important in giving that act texture, and arguably the most important of these is the visual one, where our attitude or practice towards a given act is communicated most strongly through the

way we gaze at it. Performativity, however, doesn't just concern moving and speaking; it involves primarily the *interaction* that takes place, and it is through *textual interaction* or even *textual conflict* that learning processes can occur. Learning as it is defined by occidental culture involves again the dichotomies which structure western culture; the teacher and the pupil are in a dominant/passive relationship, where the teacher talks and the students listen. The actual 'truth' of the matter (as far as that is possible) is that most of what we learn we actually pick up from interacting with the world, from talking, and touching, and looking and smelling; but this is generally not considered to be 'the right kind' of education or at least that no useful 'knowledge' is communicated. 'Knowledge' is considered to be an intellectual capacity and not an emotional one, for example; the senses therefore oppose the intellect and this type of sensual learning is considered, whether overtly or covertly (which is more often the case) to be of an inferior nature. This is of course a ridiculous proposition because it still remains that most of our 'learning' is done *performatively*, by interacting with the world, i.e. before we even begin attending educational institutions, our interactions with the world help to define the way we view it; in my book *Music as Episteme, Text, Sign & Tool* (Laskewicz, 2004) I referred to that set of textual practices which combine to make up our sense of 'knowledge' and therefore our experience of reality as an *episteme*, following Foucault; in that work, I stand against one of the major dichotomies inherent in occidental culture by attempting to prove the fact that 'music is an episteme' meaning that music is considered to be a dynamic kind of knowledge.

**4.1.2** Performativity is an essential part of this episteme, meaning that it is performing and reperforming our roles or interacting again and again with that world to see if it has changed and if we have to adapt our textual practices or our *epistemes*. Our textual practices have to remain up to date if we are going to remain adapting to a changing world; even if we consider ourselves to be conservative, our textualities are simply never static; they need and require constant practice. In this activity, each of our senses plays its own role; an individual placing different emphases on each of the senses depending on personal preference, needs and necessity (e.g. a blind person will make more use of touch than one who can see, although everyone interacts with the world in some way by performing it and learning from it). In this regard, a particularly important emotion is that of 'pleasure' because it is pleasurable behaviour that we will be drawn back to perform again and again; and standing on the wrong-side of a dichotomous relationship, the senses are viewed in a negative fashion when in actual fact they play an absolutely essential role in forming basic structures such as our sexualities in that everything we experience through our senses has the potential to be influential in this regard, whether it be a sound, a taste or a smell; sexual acts are built in performative contexts from a complex jigsaw puzzle of elements which combine to make a sexuality, although as is the same for the performative, it is in the constant process of gradual change, until we stop sensing that is, in other words until our deaths.

**4.2.1** Although popular textualities towards knowledge acquired through the senses is rather negative, they are beginning to be counted as valid forms of experience and knowledge in postmodern theory; Mulvey's theoretical work on *scopophilia*, defined as the 'pleasure derived from looking' (Mulvey, quoted in Cranny-Francis et. al., 2003: 151), involves comparison of the male and the female gaze both in the theatre, the cinema and daily existence. When it comes to the senses, pleasure is an important ontology; there are of course many different types of pleasure). Mulvey considers the senses in terms of their ability to represent opposing dichotomous forces, demonstrating that the masculine gaze which defines the way film is viewed in occidental society is essentially imbued with a voyeuristic edge:

"The man watching the film, argues Mulvey, is viewing the playing out of the active-male/passive-female dichotomy. The actresses in the film connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. The male spectator derives enjoyment from looking at the female form displayed for his enjoyment. He also derives pleasure from identifying with the male protagonist, the actors in the film."  
(Cranny-Francis et. al., 2003: 160)

**4.2.2** It is therefore no coincidence that the control and/or possession of women is one of the recurring themes of the dichotomy perpetuating Hollywood, even today (be it in a somewhat disguised form). It is an expression of essentially SM [*sadomasochistic*] relationships which function to 'enscribe'

heterosexuality onto not only the film's narrative but to the process of film-watching as well. These will prove to be important notions for defining the performative.

**4.3.1** The visual sense, of course, is not the only one to influence people as they create their identity or sense of self; as we can see in the whole notion of cultural enscription, our very movements and actions are determined by the way we textually interact with an environment, i.e. the textual discursive practices we apply to make sense of the environment. The senses are in fact the *only* way that information exchange can occur with the world. Many people consider that society is purely responsible for training its members to use their senses in certain ways or for providing them with the textualities to make use of their senses, but this is not entirely true; many of the ways we interact with reality we actually teach ourselves. I have defined the complex epistemological structure that consists of a combination of what we teach ourselves and what society teaches us as the 'sensual episteme' which determines the processes by which we interact with our environment (see Laskewicz, 2003). As Foucault points out, power is inherent in discourse, and he defines a term to refer to the power that is induced by the sensual episteme over an individual to experience his or her spatial and temporal environment in a certain way known as 'biopower'. Biopower is discussed in the following passage from a book discussing issues central to the study of gender and the 'construction' of sexuality:

"Biopower produces docile bodies. We don't have to be under the watchful eye of a prison guard to discipline ourselves. Think, for example, of school: how we keep an eye on the clock to be on time for classes. We learn to sit for long periods until the bell rings; we remain at our desks. Our bodies themselves respond to the disciplinary frameworks set out for us. And it is a particularly powerful idea when one thinks of the ways in which our bodies are doctored: how the institution of medicine regulates our bodies and channels them from the moment of conception on. Anyone who has spent any time at all in a hospital has probably experienced that the very building itself is constructed to keep a watchful eye on patients."  
(Cranny-Francis et. al., 2003:189)

**4.3.2** Lacan emphasises the fact that we are born into linguistic/grammatical systems of representation which provide us with an 'epistemic' foundation for the basis of our perception of reality. In a Nietzschean sense, it is against this sociocultural grammar as *ideology* which individuals who wish to question it must stand; if unable to do this, they remain within a strict set of confines and those alone. Because in the same way that we are inserted into grammatically structured linguistic systems that precede our existence, we are similarly inserted into systems of visibility as those described above, although other forms of perception have to be included as well, i.e. touch, smell, hearing and taste are also systems which are culturally defined, although occidental culture tends to favour sight above all other senses because it is with their eyes that one becomes linguistically 'literate' (and sight is also dichotomous in the sense that it is associated with traditional types of literature and learning; it is with sight that we read, as such it is opposed to the danger of emotions and feelings). Assigning a gender to these visual systems has actually been particularly representative of occidental culture, functioning to politicise these insights; because of the epistemic structure of our education systems, females are inculcated to be 'looked-at' as mentioned above, whereas men are inculcated to have the power to gaze upon them.

**4.3.3** Gender is a concept or set of ideas and attitudes towards the body, sexuality, rather than a set of biological truths; it will be discussed in more detail further on. It can be viewed, therefore, as a constructed cultural text in most senses, one which according to conservative or traditional textuality is defined entirely on the basis of *genitality*; one of the main theoretical intentions in this dissertation is to demonstrate that someone's gender is more often determined by how they *performatively* relate to their world than according to the sexual organs they have. Transsexuality and some other ambiguous categories of gender are used as the basis to demonstrate particular situations where genitality not necessarily coincides with gender, i.e. a 'female' for all looks and purposes could prove to have a penis all the same, as unhappy (or alternatively as happy) as she may be with having one. *Genitality* assumes a biological truth; it assumes a Barthesian UR-text in many senses; that there is only one way to be 'woman', and a way to be a 'man'; this assumption will prove to be extremely problematic.

- 4.3.3.1** Sexuality, of course, is something entirely different—or is it? It isn't problematic anymore for gender and sexuality to differ; it is even possible for them to be entirely opposing; if one is a homosexual, i.e. to enjoy having sex with men and be a man at the same time. But, then again, that textuality was accepted in Ancient Greece and has been a generally accepted one even in the occident for most of this century to varying degrees of tolerance. Lesbianism as textuality may be relatively new in comparison, but practically every culture which finds itself on the earth today their language has a name for it, and internet has no doubt played a role in helping to make it a more universally known concept. If sexuality and gender don't depend on each other, and it doesn't depend on genitality, does gender depend on anything at all or is it entirely constructed by the individual? This is a problematic concept in itself; no one gets up in the morning and decides on their sexuality, let alone their gender. Gender is a highly personal concept one feels very strongly about, and is often not one that can be chosen. Bloom, in her book entitled *Normal* which primarily concerns female to male transsexuality, uses an effective metaphor taken from a Kafka story about a man who believes and has always believed that his 'outside shell' is monstrous, but that there is a good, pure human waiting to burst out of its chrysalis; whenever he looks in a mirror and sees the horrific stick-insect that the rest of the world is quite willing to accept is him, he feels a deep misery. This is how personally people can feel about gender, especially if doesn't match their genitality. So in that case it seems easy to define: gender is a personal in-born feeling about oneself, and since we can now remove the 'chrysalis' to reveal the beautiful butterfly within—thanks to technology developments that now allow *Gender Re-assignment Surgery*—all is cured. Gender can be defined this way, right?
- 4.3.3.2** Wrong. Why? Because there are, then, of course the 'in-betweenies', the ones who can't decide whether they are men or women; then there are the hermaphrodites who are both men and women, and then there are the 'neutral' ones who belong to a type of gender that is neither man nor woman or a variant; they tend to reject the whole concept of gender and thus don't develop a sexuality at all (and therefore remain chaste). Most of the textualities perpetuated by popular culture in the occident only recognise two dichotomous possibilities; it is difficult to imagine that that will be changing in the near future considering the period of conservatism we're currently going through. Although the textualities perpetuated by our society are gradually adapting, and now generally recognise gay men and lesbians, this is only in terms of the male/female dichotomy—a heteronormative vision of gay sexuality, for example, pairs an effeminate and a masculine man. In this context it is unlikely that extra textualities will be created to make sense of some of the 'in-between' genders and sexualities listed above.
- 4.3.4.1** So how can a theoretical structure be developed to include these categories? This is where a hierarchical dichotomous approach is completely rejected, and a set of varying possibilities on a gradient is considered in its place. Performance theory and the performative are also important concepts to this structure. Whenever a person 'performs' in any fashion to promote a part of their identity—either on the stage or in the context of daily existence—be it involving their gender, sexuality, personality or any combination of these or other personal factors, it is defined as *the performative*, and since people never let-up being themselves, generally, we can always say they are behaving *performatively*; individuals are often involved in an extremely complex set of contrasting performances (some of which they are aware of and do deliberately, and others which occur subconsciously). A particular type of performance unique to particular places frequented by gay men are realised by *drag queens*. It could be suggested that these shows are also realisations, confirmations and reconfirmations of parts of the gender and/or sexuality of the performers (and to an extent a textually well-informed audience as well).
- 4.3.4.2** Transvestites are very often men who feel at certain times, either in their lives or during the day, that they need to express their 'womanhood'; they are highly different to drag queens – although they also ultimately create their own form of womanhood they are often heterosexual, have families but just like to 'cross-dress', which means to adopt or apply a performative text that becomes associated for them with 'womanhood'; they then like to perform it whenever they get the need to feel 'womanly', but otherwise are *happy* leading their 'normal' lives (i.e. their everyday existence if that conforms to

what we have been brought up to consider a heteronormative textuality). Are there any other genders? Well, only as long as there are people...

- 4.3.4.3** There are many areas of ambiguity which can't be covered here: Is it possible for drag queens, transvestites or transsexuals to be categorised for the moment of the performance as essentially 'female', or is this even their intention? When do they stop becoming the one category and move over to 'womanhood' if this is the case? Whether their gender is 'man', 'woman' or somewhere in-between, the performances involve their own unique category of gender and sexuality which exists in the 'liminal' space of the performance.
- 4.3.5** In this brief discussion, I hope I have been able to introduce the main problematic behind the constructions of *gender* and *sexuality*; there simply aren't enough of them to go around, especially in western culture which tends to recognise only two. There are obvious problems with this, namely that the dichotomies which support popular textualities are *impossible*, in that in 'reality' (as far as one exists that isn't a construct), notions such as *gender* exist on a very complex level of gradations separating man and woman; admitting that biology isn't the determinate factor for either gender or sexuality is basically admitting that *everything else* is possible as well, not only that men with female genitals can exist, or that women with male genitals can exist, and then there are also the categories discussed above whose gender aren't classifiable at all. In any case, whether or not they fit into existing categories, *performativity* is essential to who they are as people, although the more ambiguous they may feel about their gender, the more important it is to form a 'performative environment' with others who share their 'gender affliction'.
- 4.4.1** A *gender affliction* is intended to be an entirely subjective term, i.e. it is only an 'affliction' if the individual laboured with it feels uncomfortable, tormented or even tortured. It can also be an affliction if it brings about societal difficulties; although the individual may have no problem dealing with their emotions, society may perpetuate textualities of intolerance which can certainly make life more difficult. As gender affliction is so culturally bound and depends on how its linguistic systems and beliefs divide their genders into groups and how an individual or group of individuals cope with genders that don't fit. For example, in some non-western cultures such as certain American Indian tribes, men that feel an irrepressible desire to dress as their females do are considered to have magical powers and are thus able to perform a special role in their culture. Since 'performance' is considered to be something that happens on a stage, and as described above in relation to the notion of 'being-looked-at-ness' *performance* is often considered to be inferior to 'real-life'; 'acting like a man', therefore, is only 'acting' if you are *not* a man. And many men who don't think too hard about this actually believe it to be true, and if asked off-hand, they'd tell you it was ridiculous that there was anything they were doing that would particularly set them off as being different to anyone else. There is no doubt, however, that masculinity as it realised in the occident is as equally 'performative' as it is for transsexuals; in attempting to bring to life or embody the dominant dichotomy representing males as being so dominant. This finds expression in the way men walk with legs astride, the way men sit with knees apart, exposing their genitals to the people they are talking to. I was demonstrated this on watching a course for women during which they were taught to be a man etc. I thought it was about acting, but it, of course, wasn't; it was the movements that typified men in general; I was at first surprised, then completely shocked that I could have believed that there was anything else except for the *performative* which defines who we are, and, like everything else, is in a constant state of flux and development.
- 4.4.2** If you look, however, at the complex set of movements, gestures, phrases and attitudes that make up 'manhood' which represent dominant ways of behaving in occidental society it is possible to make a comparison between this type of performance and the way, for example a transvestite or drag queen may 'camp-up' their womanhood; the only difference is that those who are *performing* know they are doing it, whereas those realising 'performative behaviour' don't. I didn't realise until I wrote my first book *Music as Episteme, Text, Sign and Tool* (2003) that performativity was so essential to *everything* we do, even while I was training to be an actor. Basically I didn't realise that there was no Barthesian UR-Text which we could look back to the origin of behaviour for ALL men; like most others still do; even



as a gay man, I looked negatively at drag queens and transvestites, and in fact anyone who could or would not obey the performative textual rules imposed on them by society. Not realising how imposed they were, I in turn failed to work out how intolerant my behaviour was; only now can I see the extent of my restrictions.

- 4.4.3** Many individuals spend their lives fighting *against* the performative, in an attempt to try to adopted embodied texts that are taught to them by society; alternatively some people learn to deal with them tactically, i.e. to apply their 'alternative' sexualities at different times as they know will prove the least problematic, induce the least amount of abuse from people on the street or at one's work, the smallest amount of disapproval from one's colleagues, the least number of looks of disbelief from the general public who have only been exposed to completely uncomprehending textualities, or even the least moments of complete insecurity when somebody just doesn't know *how* to react to you as you stand against not only their idea of 'gender' but 'personhood' in general. This could help to explain why drag queens, transvestites, transsexuals and people who belong to other ambiguous sexualities make arrangements with themselves to express that part of their personality which is repressed by society only at particular times when society provides the outlet for such expressions of 'the performative' (i.e. discos) or '[stage] performance' (i.e. drag shows). Drag queens thus become 'utterly divine' on Friday nights—not embodiment of the feminine at all really, but something entirely different and unique for the participants, something which is *more than* the feminine and often extremely exaggerated seeing that the individuals have made—most likely subconsciously—this special arrangement to only express their feminine side at a certain time; this is indeed a performance in the sense of a stage show, but it can also be seen as a ritual which is essentially symbolic behaviour to the extreme. At the same time it is also the performative, be it of a very special type.
- 4.4.4** It is possible, then, that realisations of the performative could be actual theatrical or staged performances of some kind. But are all performances realisations of 'the performative'. To make a comparison, let's compare a drag show to a theatre performance—such as Fierstien's *Torch Song Trilogy*—which is about gay drag queens. They are both performances of some kind, but only the ones realising the gender of the participants in one form or another are true examples of the performative, so unless Fierstien himself is playing the part he played in the film (himself), then it is just a collection of actors playing parts. The point here is that *all* gender—and not simply that which self-consciously dramatises its theatricality—is *performative*, but not all 'theatricality' is performative. This is obviously a highly complex matter, and will be discussed in greater detail further on. Particularly *gender*, but also *sexuality* need to be seen as restrictive terms where it is doesn't speak for itself to determine their ontology. Performativity questions the discursive way society attempts to regulate our behaviour; individual's ways of using and reusing these categories for their own identity suggests a new metaphor, one that empowers the individual living the discourse through his or her body, i.e. living the female as a drag queen but becoming 'more female' than most women consider 'lady-like'. The 'performative' and the 'imitative' introduced originally to refer to human behaviour by Butler confirm the following:
- 4.4.4.1** (i) The power of ritualisation and ritualised acts, a part of both sexual textuality and textuality in general which is not taken into consideration in literary textual approaches.
- 4.4.4.2** (ii) The important role an individual plays in meaning-bearing performative practices in the formation of self.
- 4.4.4.3** (iii) While every individual is in some way different, at the same time there is an essential fiction to the notion of absolute 'individuality' in that no one is really free of one's environment and everyone does their best to adapt in some fashion.
- 4.4.4.4** (iv) The dynamic role performative practice plays in forming embodied structures we make use of to express our gender, and ultimately our very identity.

## 5 THE CORPOREAL VOCIFERATION: *The Body as Enscripted & Embodied Sociocultural Text*

- 5.1 In this dissertation, complex cultural constructions such as ‘the body’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender’ are considered as types of text. Here the intention is introduce aspects of the ‘bodily text’ which connect in an ‘intertextual’ fashion with the constructs ‘sexuality’, ‘gender’ and ‘the body’, concepts which are particularly important to this dissertation. One of the main subjects presented is the theoretical term ‘bodily enscription’ which includes the definition, how it finds expression in embodied practice and the sort of ‘knowledge’ it makes use of. After this the notion of embodiment is explored and the role it plays in the sociopolitical formation of the body, at least at an introductory level. Lastly some examples of the complex crossing of textualities which takes place when cultural texts such as gender and the body encounter one another and find living ‘embodied’ expressions in given environments through the realisation of individuals.
- 5.2 The body as a ‘text’ is not *written* in any traditional fashion. What actually finds expression in practice includes the way the text is inculcated into individuals, the complex set of attitudes that help people form their concept of their own bodies, the bodies of others and the general concept of the human body. Subjects of discussion include the types of text which play important roles in determining how our bodily texts are ultimately enscripted, particularly in terms of embodiment, enactive textuality and performativity. An example, however, of one of the many complex factors which plays a role in influencing our textuality towards the body, involves the space it moves in, what has been referred to as the ‘politics of location’. This is also one of the textual environments in which gender encounters the body, influencing the way individuals experience a given location as being gendered in a given fashion, i.e. masculinised or feminised, often delineating “what kinds of bodies are permitted and welcomed in certain kinds of spaces, and what kinds are not” (Cranny-Francis et. al., 2004: 212).
- 5.3.1 Many textualities which have been imposed by society on its members are no longer in existence because other texts changed, and the existence of texts according to textual practices *depends* on the presence of other texts. The chastity belt, for example, was one of the most inhuman and uncomfortable fashion accessories that has ever existed. It was used in the Middle-Ages to ensure that a woman would remain faithful to her husband and consisted of a metal band attached around the waist which only the wearer’s husband had the key to. It depended on intertextual factors such as the ‘rights of a husband over his wife’s body’ and the ‘rights of women over their own bodies’ which are in any case both sub-texts of the larger dichotomous text of ‘masculinity versus femininity’, brought into intertextual interaction with sub-texts like ‘a Wife’s Duties to her Husband’ as well as the embodied sub-texts ‘Comfort’ and ‘Experience’ (among many others). The chastity belt, fortunately, hasn’t been used for hundreds of years, primarily because in a sociopolitical sense men’s power gradually dwindled, women’s sense of personal rights grew; they began to realise that they didn’t have to have something so ridiculously heavy tied around their waists all day and night. Textual constructs such as these which depend on both personally embodied textual practices, such as how one relates to something one wears, combined with social and/or political textualities as discussed above, are referred to as *sociopolitically embodied textualities*.
- 5.3.2 Although the Chastity Belt hasn’t been widely adopted for hundreds of years, it hasn’t been anywhere near that long since the extremely problematic construction of the *corset* was taken off the market, or the process of *footbinding* was banned in China. Both of these constructions encouraged and promoted women in a certain way thanks largely to the general attitudes at the time to the textualities related to femininity and beauty perpetuated by European—and Chinese—culture at the time. The corset was a highly uncomfortable fashion item that caused women to become breathless and even led to internal damage and mutation of the ribs, whereas footbinding depending on the gradual restriction of the growth of girls feet by wrapping or binding them to increasing levels of tightness and then pressing them into tiny slippers. Textualities relating to both these forms of bodily restriction, even though one was used in the Victorian era, and the other in China up until it was banned by British colonialism and then communist China, depend on intertextual interaction with the textualities that

then existed towards 'female beauty' and 'female comfort'. It was more important in the Victorian era and pre-communist China for women to conform to a certain ideal of beauty than it was for them to be comfortable. For women during the latter part of the Victorian era, the corset gradually lost popularity and was slowly removed from the shelves; this was because one textuality became less important in relation to the other, namely comfort in relation to beauty. Women were considered in this period to be inferior to men in many ways—they still are in China today—as the dichotomy separating men from women was perhaps at one of its peaks. The textual expression of both the corset and the process of footbinding depended on the embodied textualities relating to men's right to gaze upon women, fulfilling a desire to exploit women for purely physical reasons, the fashions and performance traditions of which thrust specific bodily parts outwards or accentuated them in some other way; women were put 'on show' for the entertainment of men in many different senses. Despite the fact that in Europe the 'embodied textuality' towards the corset was making women faint and the textuality towards *lotus feet* in China was causing little girls to only be able to make 'dainty', small steps (basically preventing them from ever being able to run), it still remains true that most women were very happy to be able to mutate their bodies in these fashions because of the way existing textualities towards texts such the body and 'femininity' were perpetuated; of course, the irony is that only the wealthy could afford to wear items such as this in Europe whereas in China it was restricted to the rich and royalty.

- 5.3.3** It has to be remembered that textual inscriptions such as footbinding and the corset, were based on the textualities that were imposed by society, and that they depended not only on men's desires (although that may have been the impetus behind them), there were also fictions, such as the fact that women were 'special' and thus deserved such 'special' treatment—the folk or popular textuality tended to inform them that if there was discomfort it was their own fault—they weren't in fact special enough to not have to endure pain. The perfect woman didn't even *need* a corset, remember! Footbinding, in comparison, made a woman not only similar to a 'perfect woman', but a goddess, which was the embodiment in Ancient China of beauty itself. For both textual vehicles, these facts inscribed the idea that there was a 'vested interest in maintaining the beauty system', for corset-wearers it was attaining perfect beauty, and for footbinders it was becoming 'divine'; it became important to perpetuate the oppressive textuality of femininity that is underwritten by this notion in both western (at least European) and eastern (at least Ancient Chinese) cultures.
- 5.3.4** Luckily, these ideas gradually changed and these somewhat barbaric items stopped being used; the corset was removed from the shelves of shops and eventually banned. Textualities that were positive towards women started to develop in the Late-Victorian era. When the embodied textualities of pain and discomfort started to inform women, they began to realise that there was nothing special associated with hurting themselves, which had been informed by new developments in medical science. The surprising thing is how long corsets were able to exist despite the general existence of such texts stating categorically that they shouldn't, under any circumstances, be worn. The sociopolitical force of textualities perpetuated by culture, however, is enormously strong; so strong, in fact that girls don't even need corsets these days because new concepts of the connection between diet, health and weight are allowing girls to *fit into their clothing even before they've bought them*; existing idealised images of beauty which function as textualities is informing females as to how the 'ideal' woman needs to look (usually for the purpose of being 'looked at' by men). In extreme cases these idealised textualities lead to psychological sicknesses such as *Anorexia Nervosa*, perhaps even more damaging than the corset ever could have been. One even wonders if corsets would still exist if feminism hadn't developed and become so widespread; of course, this development is connected to the growth of the middle-class, social change and other complex intertextual influences. It is clear, however, that bodies are still very much 'wrapped-up' in today's sociopolitical textualities, in fact inextricably so; in this way any given 'organic' truth is forced into the lime-light as a form of sociopolitical discourse.
- 5.4.1** Despite the general conservatism prevalent in society today, sociopolitical discourses are continuing to change in line with general intertextual change, particularly in relation to both gender and sexuality. Sets of rules and dichotomies which seemed unbreakable, are now more than ever fluid; others which were fluid are now far more rigid. This is the result of the conservative forces in society which are

creating textualities which serve to strengthen traditional notions such as the modern concept of beauty. Any textual practice or realisation related to beauty—such as the process of putting on make-up or the beauty contest—which involves expression in a real-time environment are known as *embodied texts*. The beauty contest, a complex textual construction which has seen a great deal of change throughout the twentieth century, has undergone radical change in the twentieth century. It went from having as its central textuality a rather whole or ‘complete’ vision of womanhood where the contestants’ beauty was secondary to what they could do, to a rather reduced one—from the perspective of men only where the most important factor being judged relates to the ‘being-looked-at-ness’ of the women, i.e. their beauty only. This is largely because of the change in relationship between a complex set of embodied and sociopolitical texts which has resulted in women actually *losing* power as they are forced to become ever thinner and thinner to fit the latest fashions.

- 5.4.2 These constructions are also characterised by a parodic, almost campy tribute to what the old contests represented. Today the beauty contest represents—depending on the textual practice which one perpetuates—either a contest judging the superficial sides to femininity, or a fully performative ‘gender comic-book’ of sorts representing a *liminal* camp, or even as a form of bodily exploitation—an embodied text which literally participates in the minimalisation and reduction of the female body. This is a truism for many women who reject the traditional ‘beauty’ textuality which is perpetuated by our culture and its institutions, easily giving one the impression that the situation is not only not going to get better for women, it is actually becoming more and more problematic; these days the beauty contest or pageant, for example, involves considerably more cases of self-abuse to attain the ideals of beauty perpetuated by culture—like self-starvation—than it ever used to. The young women of today, if they either participate in such pageants or just subscribe to the same textuality that views as ‘normal’ an emaciated image of women, glorify pain rather than beauty, suggesting some sort of ritual-based practice or martial arts rather than a celebration of beauty; such practices which a woman feels obliged to realise through her body are very much *embodied* texts. Other texts which are enscripted in this way include the condition *eczema* which is a general term to refer to a condition which can reflect states of tension, stress or other mental disturbances which become reflected on the epidermal layer (upper layer of the skin); this is a real physical example of the theme that will prove to obsess Cronenberg whose films are interpreted from the perspectives of embodiment and sexuality: how bodily texts can ‘betray’ their hosts—in the manner of an extremely out-of-place erection—at the most inappropriate times.

## 6 THE ALTERNATIVE REALISATION: *Text and Sexuality Today*

- 6.1 The intention is to continue in this part of the dissertation from the body to the textual expression of sexuality and the surprising extent to which I propose our sexualities are influenced by discursive practices extending from enactive and embodied texts. The idea that a ‘sexuality’ can be interpreted as a type of ‘textuality’ which finds expression in sexual acts as ‘textual practice’ is further demonstrated. Just like the complex cultural text that we allow to be enscripted on our bodies, sexualities become *inculcated* in the sense intended by Bourdieu who introduced this term in the context of the dynamic cultural construction he referred to as *Habitus*, a complex and dynamic cultural structure which is able to include both ambiguity and cultural change and *through which cultural textualities receive practice* (see Bourdieu, 1990). Aspects which are excluded in traditional theoretical approaches to complex cultural structures such as sexuality will become clearer in further discussion. Such traditional approaches usually involve the rigid dichotomy which forms the basis of many occidental cultural texts; either taking the ‘biological’ or ‘cultural’ approach to sexuality results in gross simplifications in an attempt to comprehend an incredibly diverse spectrum of sexual practices from on the one hand an elaborate gay SM-‘performance’ and on the other to a green high-heeled shoe fetish. Developments in the twentieth century have made it impossible to interpret data in a comparable way to how it was thought of at the end of the 19th century; the utter terror that the twentieth century brought with it has also played a role in explaining the current conservatism.

Despite this conservatism, contemporary thought has still brought us into a new paradigm; this was unavoidable. In other words, not only the 'theoretical concepts' concerned with sexuality need to be considered which are transcendent of practice; rather the sex act itself, in full gory detail, needs to be included to even attempt to gain an insight into how people relate to their sexualities and use them to interact with their world, which means including temporal, spatial and 'performative' elements. *Performance Theory* and 'the performative' both play an important role in defining the way we apply textualities to our sexual and/or performative practices. In an attempt to overcome the wide and diverse spectrum of sexualities and 'sexual performances', heteronormative culture attempts to call up the rigid *Nature-Culture* dichotomy separating the dominant-and therefore superior-*Culture* from the passive-and therefore inferior-*Nature*; it is a hard dichotomy to escape as it pervades almost every aspect of existence in western culture. Homosexuals, constantly and repeatedly through their practice, flagrantly subvert this paradigm merely by behaving in a way which, for them, is normal, explaining why society has demonstrated its dislike for homosexuality on an innumerable amount of occasions.

- 6.2 The twenty-first century, however, is demonstrating a continued theoretical conservatism in an attempt to repress this performative movement in *Queer Theory*; not only popular texts but also more formal scientific ones are attempting to reconstitute this static dichotomy in contemporary thought. This conservatism, however, has changed form; there is a movement among homosexual men and women to apply this dichotomy as a textuality to their own sexuality. Known as 'essentialism' this movement assumes that "homosexuality exists across time as a universal phenomenon" (Jagose, 1996: 3). A new generation of gay & lesbian academics who subscribe to this textuality recognise a development and a history of its own, even if it is somewhat marginalised. In terms of the popular textuality being expressed among the typical lesbians & gays of today, essentialism signifies a 'guilt' and 'blame'-free approach to their sexuality; because of the belief in the inborn nature of their *forbidden desire*, there is no sense of searching for an origin, i.e. an overbearing mother, an absent father, being brought up in a school for boys or girls, sexual abuse or pre-œdipal desires.
- 6.3 If essentialism represents the new conservatism in gender studies by representing the 'natural' or 'biological' textuality, *constructionism* by contrast stands at the opposing pole representing the more complex 'cultural' alternative. Constructionists, "assume that because same-sex sex acts have different cultural meanings in different historical contexts, they are not identical across time and space" (ibid.: 9). For the essentialists, ambiguous textual constructions are difficult to comprehend such as bisexuality and transvestitism. Even more difficult to cope with for some proponents of the essentialistic textuality, are some forms of transgenderism where its exponents do not wish to have the surgery done and choose voluntarily to remain in an ambiguous state of not quite being one sexuality or the other. These problematic forms of sexuality, as suggested above, are in essence of a 'liminal' nature; liminality, also introduced above in relation to the concept of 'cultural-reflexivity', represents a 'state-of-in-betweenness'-it also suggests that such an ambiguous state can not only educate its exponents about the nature of developments in the textualities involved with their ontology, but also provide an interesting theoretical source for comprehending human symbolic behaviour. Moving on from sexuality, the following subject to be explored examines textualities and textual practices towards another problematic cultural construction that plays a role in our analysis of the provocative textual vehicle *CRASH* in the two major forms it is realised in (literature and film).

## 7 THE AUTOMOTIVE ENSCRIPTION: *Contemporary Textualities towards Technology*

- 7.1 Another important textuality which plays a defining role in this dissertation involves the discursive practices towards technology, and especially the intertextual interactions that take place between the sociopolitical, sociocultural and performatively embodied practices connected to sexuality, gender and their expression in embodied sexual acts. In the following discussion the intention is to demonstrate how Ballard's *CRASH* and a number of Cronenberg's films are used as discursive textual vehicles to



express and subvert the theoretical concepts already introduced up to this point, i.e. embodied, liminal and performative texts and how they function in society. These intertextual interactions between sexuality, sexual acts, the body and technology demonstrate some extremely problematic assumptions that are made, and also how society tends to abuse the conservative forms of these textualities to exploit its members, for example the way advertisements-extremely conservative and exploitative societal texts-function to connect technology and a dichotomous heteronormative sexuality in order to sell products like cars, which have in effect become the symbol of masculinity in our society *par excellence*.

- 7.2.1** Towards technology as a sociocultural construction, vehicles such as science-fiction and horror films have proven themselves to represent a relatively conservative set of texts. If they didn't represent such textualities, a large percentage of the populace (also referred to as 'the masses') wouldn't have the fitting practices to make sense of them and therefore wouldn't pay to interact with them in any way either as book, live cinema, theatre or DVD.
- 7.2.2** The cinema, arguably more than any other textuality, has expressed an increasingly more restricting set of conservative dichotomies, particularly in the last thirty years. Science-fiction films concerning fear of machines or of technology in general, for example, usually negatively affirm such social values as freedom, individualism and the family. In films of the 70s, technology was frequently a metaphor for everything that threatened 'natural' social arrangements. Conservative textualities associated with nature were generally made use of as antidotes to that threat. But what are referred to as 'technophobic films' are also the site where the metaphor of nature which sustains those values can be most saliently deconstructed. From a conservative perspective, technology represents artifice as opposed to nature, the mechanical as opposed to the spontaneous, the regulated as opposed to the free, an equalizer as opposed to a promoter of individual distinction, equality triumphant as opposed to liberty, democratic levelling as opposed to hierarchy derived from individual superiority. Most important for the conservative individualist critique, it represents modernity and the triumph of radical change over traditional social institutions. It should not be surprising, then, that this era should witness the development of a strain of films that portray technology negatively, leading to this state of *technophobia*.
- 7.2.3** Such technophobic perspectives are most visible in the early 1970s in films like George Lucas's *THX 1138* (1970), set in a completely dehumanised society where all of life is regulated by the state. Individuals are forced to take drugs to regulate sexual desires; thoughts and individual action are monitored by electronic surveillance devices. In this film, technology becomes connected to everything that goes against the definition of humanity today; its vision is not only conservative, but enormously bleak. According to Ryan there are other reasons that explain the conservative nature of science-fiction of this period, including the gradual replacement of people with machines (1990: 65). Yet new technologies influence the development of practices in other ways as well; they actually enable and provide people with access to alternative institutions and lifestyles. As the constantly changing textualities and textual practices are demonstrating, the social world is being deconstructed, rethought and then reconstructed again. The conservatism of such films, however, is their affirmation of the bi-polar heteronormative structures they promote which are hidden within a fear of technology; such vehicles may seem to be standing against the conservative *Nature/Culture* dichotomy by presenting a future world in which reality has changed for the worse, but in fact they actually function to positively reaffirm that the traditional structures which are entirely arbitrary and which are connected to western culture in a dichotomous fashion, are the only possible forms of existence. This conservative perspective is communicating the clear message: if we aren't careful, our technology will run riot and we will lose all the constructed textualities which are so subtly enforced in western culture. It is not surprising, then, in this context, that individuals associate the Ballard/Cronenberg vehicle *CRASH* with the genre of science-fiction. As I will demonstrate, however, the messages behind *CRASH* present a far less conservative set of textualities.

## 8 THE PREMATURE EJACULATION:

*A Preliminary Summary*

- 8.1 The intention has been firstly to introduce a number of theoretical terms related to the concept of *text*, namely *textuality*, *textual (discursive) practices* and *textual vehicles*. I developed these terms to create a varied approach to text which includes the texts themselves (as 'vehicles') in whichever form they may exist-be that a film, a novel or a social act, the way society *inculcates* or 'educates' people to interpret texts (referred to as *textualities*) and lastly the set of practices individuals make use of to make sense of any given text (referred to as *textual practices* and sometimes as *discursive practices*). In effect, a context is created for texts which are brought to life in society to be considered, and the concept of meaning is considered in terms of what its interpreters make out of it and not in terms of meaning that is believed to be already there. In addition, a wider context is created for consideration as *Text*; a theoretical environment is constructed which includes both *embodied* and *enactive* practices which need to be realised in dynamic spatial and temporal environments. In particular and through the notion of embodiment in textual practice, realisations of (staged) performance and the concept of 'performativity' and 'the performative' are discussed as tools for exploring such practices which need to be realised to be made sense of, like musical texts or sexual acts; such practices also become a metaphor for a new approach to textuality based on the perspective of the interpreters rather than the authors.
- 8.2 In this dissertation, the main intention has been to develop an understanding of performance and performativity to gain an insight into how certain *embodied texts* communicate *sensual knowledge* relating such complex socially inculcated texts as sexuality. Such texts are realised through the process of *textual practice* in the form of sex acts; sex is considered to be 'embodied practice' *par excellence*. In addition, particular vehicles-both the literary and filmic versions of *CRASH*, among others-are explored which provide alternative insights into given textual categories by subverting the traditional dichotomies that are perpetuated by a conservative society. It takes as a given the fact that our world is a scarred one: It is scarred 'textually' by the hypocritical way our society promotes its textualities through media such as the television. It is *scarred* by the enormous amount of violence which is acceptable but the small amount of healthy, mutual, tender expressions of sexuality-between a hetero couple, let alone a pair of gay men or lesbians. It is perhaps most potently *scarred* by the conservative dichotomies that attempt to hierarchise reality into a set of bi-polarities.
- 8.3 Ballard suggested in his novel *CRASH*-which has been borne out in reality-that it would be poetic justice to go *against* society and combine the things that are forbidden *overtly* in the form of the application of ineffectual textualities, but which are encouraged by society *covertly* in a hypocritical fashion in order to make money (i.e. through advertising). The overt attempts to control the 'safety' of the masses include the passing of legislation which are rarely, poorly or inappropriately enforced. They also present themselves in the form of other social structures such as 'safety-net' programmes which attempt in a futile, almost pathetic way to influence people who rarely pay attention to them, as they enjoy far more watching the *real* violence which takes place either on the freeways or the television. In *CRASH* the novel, the character Ballard actually says at one point that he is 'relieved' when at last he has an accident after having been warned about them for so long.
- 8.4 Such cultural structures, then, are *overtly* ridiculously ineffectual and *covertly* extremely insidious. One of the first tools used by the advertising industry, for example, is referred to in French as *distanciation*; it is a term introduced by Ricœur referring to the process of distancing or alienation in the field of hermeneutics. In essence, the technological object in question is removed or abstracted from its 'true' textual environment. Most of us would be able to admit that the automobile is one of the most dangerous pieces of technology which can get into the hands of the inexperienced, naïve or just plain stupid; we know, for example, that the only form of death which is more common than being mutilated in a horrific, almost surreal fashion in a car accident, is old-age. But in a process of *distanciation* where the text is 'distanced' from this original source so that they can sell their cars to a duped public, the advertisers attempt to remove all sense of danger from their item by demonstrating

its 'safety features'. This, of course, is not enough; *safety* in itself is considered a boring given, so instead they combine their advertisements in an intertextual fashion with the other end of the bi-polar scheme or hierarchy: sex and violence as 'dangerous' practices which one is *allowed* to enjoy because men are *supposed to* exploit women or commit acts of violence. This finds expression, for example, in advertisements that show babes on the back seat and guys at the front gossiping about the new expression of their masculinity; they seem to have complete control over the babes and the technology. Or perhaps an advertisement that includes a rugged looking man who is evidently a spy; he enters a casino, steals the money and secret documents from the safe and then escapes in his *Model de Nouveau* automobile, dragging a babe along with him who more than willingly divests herself of her clothing, ending the advertisement (having crossed all necessary paths). Advertisements like this, however, don't even require women. This means that the absence of women accentuates their presence as being the bi-polar opposite; if the man is on his own in the car, advertisements often show him out 'conquering nature' by literally driving over it; the woman is there, but she is everything outside the car being conquered-danger and sex are with you, 'but, yes, as the driver of our *Model d'excellence* YOU are the one who has control over what is rightfully yours in society' It goes without saying that these 'rights' include owning a car. It's no wonder this particular fashion accessory has become for men such a textual symbol of their manhood. Simple textual vehicles such as standard car advertisements acting as *covert* exploitation of the bi-polar dichotomies are almost laughable. At the same time it has to be remembered that there is nothing really to laugh about at all: people buy those cars and are therefore influenced by those advertisements; they live up to the basic beliefs that have been inculcated into them by their society.

- 8.5 Our society has perpetuated for so long the construction of an idealism related to the notions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' as bi-polar opposites where the man is dominant and the woman is passive, it is not surprising that it should creep into practically every aspect of our lives. Foucault demonstrates in his work *On Sexuality* that although the archetype of the sadist/masochist has existed for as far possible back into the history of man, what is being realised today is something unique to our culture today; it is more than just the expression of an ethic-it has become a way of life. Most people are familiar with the image perpetuated by society of the sadist as the cruel 'evil figure' who kidnaps and mistreats the 'damsel in distress'; this archetype found ultimate expression in the work of de Sade which celebrated this SM relationship, and all other forms of what was considered to be 'depravity' at its time of writing. Foucault notes, however, that the SM scene as it now exists is a relatively new phenomenon; although many who participate in it may attribute it to the 'eternal nature' of this relationship type, there is no doubt that its dynamics are still put to the use of the commercial market for the pure purpose of making money and also that it is now being realised in a new kind of 'sexual environment' in continually new fashions; although it may be reliving 'archetypes' that were constructed in our society in the Middle-Ages and well before, the forms it is being realised in now are entirely different. The gay community, automatically sensitive to 'performative cultural change', were the first to jump on the SM bandwagon and have become its representatives. They are responsible for developing symbolic environments such as leather bars to 'act-out' complex fantasies of many varying kinds. In the sense intended by Huizinga, environments like leather bars and dark rooms become the spaces in which complex 'play-like' situations take place. It is when the individuals involved in the 'performance' or 'play' stop being their everyday selves and become for the time they are participating in the event anonymous participants in a sexual theatre; it is a highly serious type of role-playing. This is the all-male rendition of the bi-polar dichotomy separating MALE from FEMALE, except in this situation they are both men. In this particular relationship, however, one of the parties becomes the TOP whereas the other party becomes the BOTTOM.
- 8.6 When the whole gay sex act became simplified down to a TOP exerting a powerful relationship over a willing BOTTOM (a sadist thus against a masochist) referring to an individual's position in a sex act rather than anything about their subjectivity as individuals, a *distanciation* process of sorts was already taking place. That started during the last twenty years and was propagated largely by the internet and word of mouth. Individuals are further *distanced* from their original identities when they don the specially designed costumes which have been created in a bizarre imitation of such archetypes in the human consciousness as 'the executioner', 'the sadistic major' or any other possibility down to the

complete merging into a single block of pure sadism when one wears the full latex body suits and realises violent sexual acts. 'Leather Bars' for 'Leather Men' have popped up all over the world; it has become not only a new sexual practice but a *culture*, and a diverse one at that. Leather guys consider it to be more than just sex; it's a lifestyle, just as being a skinhead is a philosophy as much as it is a way of wearing your hair and having anonymous sex. Be it a lifestyle or a philosophy, it is certainly a strong symbolic expression of the realisation of 'performatively' embodied texts. Much of skinhead behaviour involves an actual erasure of the identity of the people involved in the sexual practice as the initially symbolic power relationship merges into animal expressions of pure lust; the last thirty years has seen an enormous growth in this expression of what is referred to as 'nasty' sex—*nasty* represents on the one hand a new approach to sexuality where the mean, unpleasant and degrading behaviour of the TOP towards the BOTTOM is considered to be a standard part of one's sexual vocabulary, and on the other it represents a new paradigm towards sexual behaviour in general, one which has been spilling over for quite a few years now into hetero culture which has embraced it whole-heartedly. Society is now busy structuring a set of textualities to make sense of it all.

- 8.7 In this regard, the film *O Fantasma* is particularly interesting (Jose, 2003) because it demonstrates the gradual reduction of an individual's personality—a trash-man, already pretty close to the refuse of society—who can't communicate with people very well, but becomes obsessed with a motor-bike rider, finally descends completely into animal-hood. He kidnaps his fantasy victim and rapes him; the film has gone full circle and it has returned to its beginning, the first scene of the film. The black dog, aching to get in to the room of the black latex figure fucking (raping?) a naked man, just as the end of the film shows the gradual rise of the sun over Lisbon as the latex-man/animal-without-identity laps water from a dirty pool and then throws it up like a bird attempting to feed its flock.
- 8.8 Sexual practice is instituted according to a set of textualities which function as *mythology*; one is taught that sex is the almost divine union of two individuals. In a uniquely hypocritical fashion, something unique perhaps to occidental society more than any other, the very opposite becomes the actual desire-object, precisely *because* it is the forbidden. Considering all these givens, the fact that Ballard combines sex, violence and automobiles to come out with the 'joy of car accidents' seems almost natural; the fact, as mentioned, that it is coming true in individuals who are longing to drive their vehicle at top speed, for example, into another car or a wall—some of whom I met during research for this project—makes it a frightening one. The next subject of discussion is the actual contents of the book and the film and what I think the textual creators are attempting to demonstrate, using the theoretical structures which have been introduced already in this document. *CRASH* in both its forms stands strongly *against* the heteronormative 'mythology' existing about sexuality, making it a highly interesting vehicle for literary analysis. First, however, some of the implications of the genre of pornography which found its initial origins in the burlesque tradition (which in turn found its origins in the Italian *Opera Buffa*) are explored, as both Ballard and Cronenberg attempted to use this medium as an effective means to communicate their potent message.

## 9 THE WONDROUS GAZE: *From Burlesque to Pornography*

- 9.1 The textual category of 'pornography' is explored in terms of its sociopolitical consequences—such as its exploitation of women—and its possibilities as a literary genre (taken advantage of in *CRASH*, at least according to Ballard's own admission in a new introduction to the work written in 1995). I begin by exploring the origins of pornography in performance forms as diverse as the Italian *Opera Buffa* tradition, those that took place at the Parisian *Moulin Rouge* in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but especially the 'Burlesque' tradition which has influenced the representation of women on the stage in perhaps more than any other form. Rather than as a static and incommunicative medium, it will be revealed that dynamic possibilities do exist for pornographic texts to communicate information about gender and the power inherent in bodily abuse typified in pornographic vehicles (particularly Ballard's *CRASH*). By exploring 'sexual acts' as textual practices which at first glance appear confronting,

horrifying or just ridiculous gain a more pertinent shadow of meaning when viewed as dynamic performative texts that provide answers not previously considered.

- 9.2 In this dissertation, paragraph 4.3.1 introduces the metaphor of society as an existing linguistic system *against which* individuals have to act in order to be able to analyse it with any 'self-reflexive' depth; the individuals who are able to react against it, at least theoretically, for the purpose of study, are mostly able to live within it quite happily (such is the advantage of *self-reflexive* cultural processes which allow the individual to be part of a society, but 'gaze in' at from the outer peripheries at the same time). Many individuals, however, who are not academics or philosophers, especially those who are born with or have constructed within them (depending on your perspective) a *gender affliction*, this linguistic system just doesn't work; the bi-polar dichotomies are totally inappropriate for applications into their lives as texts. Our society provides many opportunities at the same time for them to give expression to this 'affliction'; although it is *constructed* in such a way for these individuals that they are actually 'subverting' the system, at least in an embodied fashion—for example gay men who take advantage of the cruising possibilities around the docking areas of New York, or who participate in drag performances—it has to be accepted that even if such events are clandestine to the 'official structure' of the semiotic regime which surrounds their concepts of normality, such events *still* occur within a society's structures. They receive *covert* rather than *overt* support by society. This is fortunate; otherwise there would be a great deal more individuals unable to develop a sense of self.
- 9.3 Pornography is an example of a collection of 'clandestine texts', i.e. that society supports *covertly* rather than *overtly*. This is perhaps the best example of such a genre which polite society refuses to recognise exists but still takes place thanks to the *covert* support of underground organisations. Although there have been a few periods, particularly in France, during which pornography achieved the status of being worthwhile literature, receiving support from writers and critics of both the avant-garde and gentile society, it has generally been 'underground' that such pornography receives expression. Perhaps it is a pity that individuals who wish to celebrate their sexuality by either writing, reading or watching a 'pornographic' vehicle have to feel so uncomfortable about what they are doing, having shops that sell such goods in places which are inaccessible to open viewing and providing individuals with the chance of remaining anonymous; further on forms of gay pornography are also revealed as promoting a rather negative image of this sexuality which unfortunately many gay men use to help form their sense of self.
- 9.4 Pornography, however, remains a problematic area of study precisely because it so controversial. Not only does it stand against the basic ideologies of occidental culture which promote a chaste lifestyle until one is married, but it also is used by society as a medium to encourage its bi-polar dichotomies; there are just too many examples, especially in the relatively recent pornographic video market which produced hard-core porn for a bargain basement price, of pornographic vehicles which encourage the complete sublimation of women to men in the most degrading of fashions so that a generation of men is growing up with the idea that women not only should submit to male desires concerning their own pleasure, but that they should do it gladly. It isn't surprising, therefore, that feminism has developed a discourse *against* pornography in that pornography is a representation of society. Clearly such an approach isn't sufficient for a genre which spans such a wide temporal realm and all the major media of expression, and which has been used *off and on* by writers such as Bataille and Ballard to express other themes for the expression of very particular thematic material. Writing it off as exploitative is simply reductive and although we have to admit that the genre *can* exploit women, some pornographic vehicles such as the epic filmic vehicles *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door* celebrate the expression of women's subjective sexual pleasure rather than the purely the satisfaction of either a man's sexual pleasure of his 'gaze'.
- 9.5 It is true, however, that pornography found its origins in precisely in the forms of performance that propagated an approach to viewing that situates women as the central objects of an essentially masculine *gaze*. Unless one is able to view it in a reflexive fashion, this approach to viewing is so deeply embedded in our culture that there are few who question it, either men *or* women. Women actually participate in the expression of this *episteme* not only be agreeing to see the examples of



vehicles which promote its reductive view of women, but by wearing make-up, high-heeled shoes, fish-net stockings, low cut dresses and any other fashion accessories that thrust towards the viewer in a diegetic fashion either their genitals or the 'genitive' (genital-like) nature of other parts of their bodies—such as lip-stick which eroticises the mouth, essentially turning it into a 'dental vagina' [*vagina dentata*]. Women, however, can hardly be blamed for this; their society socially inculcates this practice into them by promoting the products they use to transform them into the kind of woman our culture expects a woman to be and by promoting textualities which makes them feel good about themselves when they do this. By constantly viewing a society's vehicles which encourage a particular way of behaving—starting from very young in the form of Barbie dolls or any other number of toys for girls—it is not surprising that individuals wish to imitate it. The question now needs to be asked *how* such a reductive view of women was able to develop.

- 9.6 Such an approach is evidently not new as it is clearly one of the many expressions of the bi-polar dichotomy separating men from women, where women become the passive targets for the 'naturally' dominant male desire. The expression of sexuality during the Renaissance was not as repressed as it was during the following centuries or as it is these days. The 'golden-age' of Italian art rethought in a new context Ancient Greek culture, and so 'opera' was created; thanks, therefore to a complex process of 'inappropriate textual interaction' an entirely new discourse was created in which sexuality became one of the primary forms of expression. Even though Ancient Greek myths were the subject, the actual operas used the gossipy environment of the gods to celebrate a wide range of sexualities, sexual possibilities and sexual acts. The Renaissance soon ended and the Catholic church gained a hard grip on formal societal expression; in addition the growth of the Protestant movement created even more conservative expressions of sexuality where the symbolic aspects of religion available within the context of Catholicism were simply banned; under the restrictions of Catholicism, there existed the possibility for the imaginative personal rethinking of the religion and individuals could apply personal meaning to texts read but not comprehended in Latin which were believed to have magical meaning. As such, sexual expression went 'underground' and forms such as the *Opera Buffa* developed which can be considered to be the source of the burlesque tradition. With covert support, this form became entertainment 'for the masses'; sexuality was put on display, bawdy jokes were told and costumes of women became progressively more transgressive.
- 9.7 *Opera Buffa*, after going further underground and finally extinguishing under the pressure of the Catholic Church, received a revival of sorts in the parlours of Paris which found its most performative expression at the *Moulin Rouge*. For the situation as it was for middle to upper-class men of the period, such a development was necessary; they simply considered it their right to have a place in which they could *covertly* transgress the strict regulations set-up by Christian society which in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw a fusion of Protestant and Catholic ideals in any uneasy truce. The confines of marriage which had become with the growing of the middle-class in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries an increasingly binding structure for men. This middle-class, especially those not 'born into' wealth and nobility, needed to maintain a level of total respectability towards their society; clandestinely, thus with covert societal support, prostitution grew as an industry and 'brothels' began to develop in forms which presented women as pretty, girdled and confined packages which men could use as they saw fit, in relatively respectable environments which saw the growing middle and upper-classes spending their free time viewing performances of women scantily dressed, playing cards with each other and, of course, taking women into the individual parlours set-up for what was the ultimate intention of such institutions: the sex that Victorian society despised so much (and which it yet had to encourage to avoid the flourishing of the trade of prostitution on the streets). These places were environments of a highly 'performative' nature; not only did 'performances' take place which promoted the dominant male gaze, but the sexual act became a more powerful encouragement of the same episteme.
- 9.8 In the United States, during the colonial era, a similar development was taking place; it was undoubtedly influenced by the traditions that were taking place on the other side the world, specifically continental Europe, but what became known as the 'Burlesque' tradition was to influence theatre in general and the expectations many have of women more in occidental than any other form; women as the objects of male gaze because the basic understanding of the role of women, and it is no

coincidence that this would be universalised when Hollywood became the centre of movie-making; the same ideals found cinematic form, propagating an extremely sexist way of 'looking'. At its best, burlesque was a rich source of music and comedy that kept America, audiences laughing from 1840 through the 1960s. Some sources try to wrap burlesque in a mantle of pseudo-intellectual respectability. Yes, it involved transgressive comedy and songs, but the primary attraction of burlesque was sex. In the form of ribald humour and immodestly dressed women. Although many dismissed burlesque as the tail-end of show business, its influence reaches through the development of popular entertainment into the present. Without question, however, burlesque's principal legacy as a cultural form was its establishment of patterns of gender representation that forever changed the role of the woman on the American stage and later influenced her role on the screen. The very sight of a female body not covered by the accepted costume of bourgeois respectability forcefully if playfully called attention to the entire question of the place of woman in American society. From here, as the middle-class continued to grow and views became more liberal, the burlesque transformed into something entirely different as part of a gradual process of change; the illusion of respectability disappeared as the unnecessary elements of humour, dance and music began to become less important. As the cinema took over these functions, burlesque descended into expressions of ribald sexuality and finally extinguished entirely, cinema having taken over its function completely. Something new, which contained only that aspect which cinema despised—sexuality and sex—had to be taken up by another genre. The development of pornography in film has to be viewed in this complex context.

## 10 THE VILE BODIES: *Pornographic Expression*

- 10.1 Sexual pleasure, like many types of pleasure is considered the least developed of all human functions; being based in the oldest part of the limbic structure, the *hypothalamus*, it existed before the development of the extended functions of the left and right cortex of the brain. Interestingly, the female orgasm, or at least recent research pertaining to it (see Flaherty) demonstrates that the female orgasm is based in the right cortex, whereas the male orgasm is considered to be based in the hypothalamus, even though sexual 'pleasure' in both sexes also seems to originate in this region (although it must be remembered that so little is known about the brain that as far as this is concerned it is still all considered on the basis of theories rather than facts). In any case, because of its basis in the least developed side of the brain, that shares areas with drug addiction (and not 'intellectual' pleasure enjoyed while, for example, reading a book, which involves the right cortex), it can be explained why society has such a negative approach to it and often wishes to suppress both literary and embodied texts concerned with it. The mind/body distinction which found expression in the work of the philosopher Descartes (but which was already present in the dichotomies being perpetuated by society, as will be described in more detail further on) also helped to enforce a rather negative image of bodily-related processes such as excretion and sexuality. As a result, since the early days of Catholicism right up until present day Protestantism which is reflected by society itself rather than the church, textualities which not only suppress certain types of knowledge concerning sexuality, especially those that deviates from the norm (but in fact any type of knowledge, encouraging either silence or a normative textuality), have not in fact influenced the *degree to which sexualities play a role within our lives* (largely because sexuality is the one area that can't be suppressed as it is related to such primeval kinds pleasure and desire) but well *the forms in which they influence our existence* which will be elaborated further on. In other words, society attempts to impose on its members a very particular sexual text called 'normality', even though the wide range-the enormous continuum in fact-of sexual behaviours suggest that 'normality' is impossible. Society has very specific reasons for attempting to do this. In the following discussion the intention is to explore some of the forms of textuality and its textualities which society attempts, common to most cases, to suppress, or alternatively to encourage (which happens far less often unless it conforms to a very specific set of factors, which has already been proved an impossibility). I start of describing sexuality as expressed in literary forms, either as *eroticism* or *pornography* as both textual vehicles and textualities which society has attempted to either suppress, or alternatively under very specific circumstances, encourage.

- 10.2** Eroticism can be defined as a particular genre or textuality, one which often crosses over with a wide range of other forms, in which sexuality is celebrated, but where the sexual act itself becomes a realisation of 'literature' by adopting a set of rules that relate to this textuality (such as writing style and adoption of metaphor) which function to glorify the medium itself as much as its contents. Erotic writing is supposed to be 'arousing' but in a way that is able to arouse *without* having to rely on imagery that is anywhere as explicit as the contents of pornography. Writers who have become famous for eroticism include Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller. In comparison, pornography is a much more problematic form of expression; except for in a few very restricted situations in the Anglo-American world it has largely been restricted to a public of men whose identity must remain anonymous since being associated with pornography is considered according to the heteronormative textuality that there must be something wrong with you or more specifically the way your sexuality finds expression. The few times it has been accepted in Anglo-American history have involved particular sociopolitical developments which have found similar expression in textual vehicles, such as the few times when people didn't feel ashamed to show they lining up to see such a film, for example on the release of the well-known filmic pieces of pornography *Behind the Green Door* and *Deep Throat*. Their acceptance has only been tolerated by necessity of a society which found no other way to cope with its legislation which could not, at that time, forbid its expression, as well as being combined with a set of looser approaches to the concept of connecting one's textuality towards sexuality as being related to the quest for pleasure rather than the quest to reproduce. In France, however, which has always had, in general, an open approach to the expression of a textuality which in the situation of artistic expression was willing to accept any type of textual vehicle using 'artistic' means (it is no coincidence, for example, that Miller and Nin were both writing in Paris). This led to the creation of famous works of pornography that according to Sontag in her article *The Pornographic Imagination* (2001) follow a set of rules which form the textuality she uses to define the genre, including *l'Histoire d' O* and Bataille's *l'Image* and *l'Histoire de l'oeuil* (where Bataille was writing as 'Lord Auch'). In occidental culture in general, however, largely due to the influence of 'Christian' repression on our construction of sexuality, pornography is defined as being *dirty*, and in general as being of a lower class, not therefore worth of analysis, which according to Sontag can be attributed "to a festering legacy of Christian sexual repression and to sheer physiological ignorance, these ancient disabilities being now compounded by more proximate historical events, the impact of drastic dislocations in traditional modes of family and political order and unsettling change in the roles of the sexes" (2001: 85). The traditional textuality perpetuated by society usually attempts to insinuate a belief that sexual expression as the quest for pleasure is something vile and dirty, something which French writers such as de Sade, and then later Bataille and other writers of the 20th century, were to question. According to Sontag, their writing suggests "something much more profound than the backwash of a sick society's aversion to the body" (ibid.: 103). One of the main points that Sontag makes, and which I will develop in this work in relation to the textual expression of particular authors and film-makers, is that sexuality "remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness-pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires, which range from the impulse to commit sudden arbitrary violence upon another person to the voluptuous yearning for the extinction of one's consciousness, for death itself" (ibid.). This connection in pornography between sex and death is an important one, and will prove important in relation to the particular works being analysed, in particular Ballard's expression in the form of a novel of his subversive (and somewhat morally-inclined) vision of sexuality called *CRASH* (1973) and Cronenberg's perhaps more liberated realisation of this novel as a film in 1996.
- 10.3** Forms of pornography realised only on video which encourage violence against women don't necessarily perpetuate this connection between death and sexuality; they are far more conservative and therefore questionable. Recently, as well, certain forms of pornography which cross the boundary separating it from the genre of 'exploitation' (especially since the video age which saw the equally questionable creation of the textuality towards *video nasties*) have revealed themselves to perpetuate conservative textualities towards women which sees them as being ultimately vehicles designed to realise the sexual pleasure of men. This conservatism is the extreme realisation in an embodied form of a dichotomy that occidental society is based upon, namely the dominant/passive dichotomy which finds extreme expression in sexual acts where women are debased, undergo punishments, have

themselves wounded (whipped, burned, flayed and sometimes even knifed) so that men can attain heights of sexual pleasure; it essentially, according to a school of feminism, and one which I subscribe to, perpetuates a form of *compulsory heterosexuality* which has needed reinforcement in our culture by textual vehicles such as this form of filmic (video) textuality which denigrates women, and is one which is questioned in Cronenberg's films such as *Videodrome* (1986). As far as gay video pornography is concerned, apart from a very small genre of works, usually directed by French creative directors who work particularly in this medium such as Cadinot, a similarly conservative textuality is reinforced, one which enforces a negative image of gay males towards themselves as homosexuals. This finds expression, firstly in the language used by the participants in this form of pornography. The 'characters' within the dramas which take place, usually of limited content, during the film, refer to their sexual organs as being separate to their own bodies, using directive words such as 'that' to refer to their own organs, i.e. "suck that dick," "pull that cock" almost as if it does not belong to their own bodies. It has also resulted in the creation of such larger constructions as 'glory-holes' which distance sexual organs from their owners in a similar way, but in a more direct fashion. The person using the glory-hole inserts his or her sexual organ through a small hole in the wall, while an individual on the other side provides pleasure to *that organ* rather than that individual; no people as such are involved in this sexual act, just emotionless disassociated organs. In the large number of gay men who enjoy pornography, this helps to perpetuate a rather negative approach to sexuality, and therefore problematic symbolic vehicles such as 'glory-holes' in a simple sense which disassociates organs on the one hand, and on the other the far more complex semiotic construction of 'leather culture' which perpetuates the heteronormative dominant/passive dichotomy. Works like Ballard's *CRASH*, presenting itself as 'pornography', attempts to subvert this very conservative realisation of pornography which expresses itself in violating women and disassociating men's organs from their bodies. Examples of the 'glory-holes' discussed above are included in the illustrations below:



10.3.1

Illustration 10.1: *a leather guy dressed in a leather costume performing fellatio on a disassociated cock*



10.3.2

Illustration 10.2: *four men involved in a 'leather' performance*

10.3.3

Illustration 10.3 & 10.4: *glory-holes and a guilt free expression of penis worship*

10.3.4

**10.4** Ballard, and Cronenberg who realised *CRASH* as a film in 1995, interprets *CRASH* as an essentially 'pornographic' novel, pornographic in the sense that it is the most "political form of fiction, dealing with how we use and exploit each other, in the most urgent and ruthless way" particularly to the detriment and abuse of women, who are the most woefully treated in this work, becoming the victim of masculine creations and male-oriented fantasies. He also sees it as a type of 'cautionary' tale, warning "against that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that becomes more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape" (Ballard, 1995: 6). Either way, as a cautionary or pornographic tale, Ballard's attempt to enunciate through fiction a desire to communicate something truly frightening that is happening to the repeated performative behaviour that we call sexuality through the influence of an increasingly important part of our lives: technology, machinery and mechanisation.

**10.5** Sexuality, then, is seen to be a 'dangerous' and 'unpleasant' form of textuality that must be avoided as far as this is possible. Adorno was able to say as early as 1962 that "the actual spiciness of sex, continues to be detested by society" (Warner, 1999: 21-22). Many people think that the sex, can never be normal. It is disruptive and aberrant in its rhythms, in its somatic states, and in its psychic and cultural meaning. Although it is the same society that encourages the exploitation of sexuality for the sale of its products as it is that makes judgements about whether or not 'sexual practices' are 'disgusting' or 'tolerable'; such is the hypocrisy of occidental culture. This hypocrisy can be expressed in the reaction to Genet's 'pornographic' texts that were for so long banned in the United States: "all of the many censorings and prosecutions of Genet's work, particularly in the USA, revealed the oppressive structures of power in the institutions and governments that attempted to impose those controls, rendering them exposed to ridicule and contestation" (Barker, 2004: 84). The nature of the sexual act connected directly to our baser instincts, something civilised people as such don't want to have connected to their notions of self. Leo Bersani wrote in a classic essay of 1987, "There is a big secret about sex; most people don't like it" (Perhaps because sex is an occasion for losing control, for merging one's consciousness with the lower orders or animal desire and sensation, for raw confrontations of power and demand, it fills people with aversion and shame. Although sexuality does



reach back to the beginning of time as we know it, our need for it and the forms in which we crave it are constantly changing with the flows of society; hypocritically, society stands opposed to this and longs for a uniform sexuality which can be understood in terms of eternal or time transcendent truths; it only *overtly* allows sexuality realised in the restricted concept of the bond of marriage, which it is opening up to gay males all over the world in an increasingly more regular form. The following discussion is involved with ways that *CRASH* deals with some of these issues.

## II THE SCARRED WORLD: *Sexuality, Technology & Violence*

- II.1 One of the main themes underlying Ballard's innovative novel *CRASH* involves some of the more frightening roles technology could play and is probably already playing in the formation of our sexual identities, particularly the automobile which has already proved itself to be a lethal instrument of death. In contemporary society, instead of becoming an object of abject fear and terror, the automobile has become infused with a vital, intrinsically human form of eroticism; it is quickly pointed out by *CRASH* enthusiasts (towards either the book or the film) how strong cars are as erotic symbols in contemporary society, and as well how many children are beget in their wake. Stephen King's novel *Christine* (1983) similarly points out problems inherent in the male obsession with cars and the strong relationship between sexuality and the automobile, but in his novel which subscribes to the rules of the horror genre, the car itself—a '58 Plymouth—is the 'evil' one, surprisingly reversing the technology by having its car as the female sex; but I think unfortunately that it's no purposeful brave dichotomous move from Stephen King: rather the 'female' represents the alien spirit who has taken over an essentially 'good' car. The nature/culture dichotomy discourse is not transgressed at all; the two opposing forces just happen to occupy the same vehicle. Will the hero allow himself to be seduced who uses the erotic power of the car to suck him into her vortex? It hardly matters; after the piece of infernal machinery has been defeated and the hunk of metal that forms the essential feminine that men fear and wish to personify as machinery, the problem is over and the participants (still living) can go on living an existence that corresponds to the restricted reality created by the author in the limited discursive world of his novel. Ballard and Cronenberg, in contrast, don't provide their readers with such a simplistic set of dichotomies; their creations are not intended to perpetuate a set of conservative ideologies—their message is far more ambiguous. As it was, for many who read the novel and saw the film it was either totally incomprehensible or so highly distressing that left it with an extremely unpleasant aftertaste. My intention is to demonstrate that although both artists had a specific message to communicate, they managed to realise it in an interesting and amusing fashion.
- II.2 There are an incredibly large amount of potentially textual vehicles associated with cars which makes them such interesting cultural constructions. Examples include Motor Shows where people wait hours to see cars bolted to the ground, car racing where speed again becomes connected with the eroticism of cars and its essential masculinity and museums which exhibit beautiful older models. The textual event known as the 'demolition derby' where cars are basically driven into one another for the audience's amusement is probably one of the factors influencing Ballard in this development of the concept of *CRASH* where a society of the 'near' future becomes attracted to the surreal violence apparent in events like the demolition derby. They could be interpreted as being textually dangerous because many of the audience members *believe* and *enjoy* the performance thinking that it is actually a dangerous event they have become a type of participant in, even though they are generally pre-rehearsed and harmless, like pro-boxing. In addition to the demolition derby Ballard uses as another important theme the crowds which form around car accidents to watch the real life spectacle of destruction, mutilation, misery and death despite the potential horror of what they will see. The internal structures of one's car are very personal spaces, and having strangers transgress on them is sometimes an unpleasant experience indeed, explaining many of the negative attitudes towards the textual practice of 'hitchhiking'; in order to discourage it, a textuality towards hitchhiking has developed which has involved the expression of many vehicles which have been invented or exaggerated about the murderous threat of picking up hitchhikers, although this is not necessarily a

reaction to the violation of one's automotive space. Some textualities discourage hitchhiking for entirely different reasons: for many people sex becomes associated with hitch-hiking which becomes intertextually associated with other textualities which repress this aspect of this cultural text:

"Standing by the exit road, waiting for my next pick-up, I watch the cars and lorries go by, just occasionally driven by someone wouldn't mind getting to know better. Sex is, of course, an ever-present possibility in the course of hitching. The long-distance driver has little else to think about - hence the huge demand for chocolate and those sucking sweets. And sharing your car - a very intimate, private, personal space - with a complete stranger is, frankly, a form of promiscuity (though at least with casual sex you don't have to talk to your tricks)." (Simpson, 1999: 117)

**11.3** Despite the amount Ballard may have liked the film version, the already existing textualities and textual practices towards automobiles (which were intimately connected with male domination, technology, speed and power) existing in a protestant and conservative U.K., and the work of both Cronenberg and Ballard as subversive and therefore 'exciting' directors, Cronenberg's film version of *Crash* had created a great deal of 'teexpectations' (expectations towards given cultural vehicles). The publicity campaign-how many orgasms can you reach per hour?-communicated a clear message about the film: it was going to be sexy, titillated their teexpectations by fulfilling conceptions they already had about 'naughty' films that transgressed, in a high-brow way films like *The Story of O* and in a low-brow fashion, the innocuous *Percy*. When *CRASH* actually ended up coming out, its public were indeed disappointed; its 'cold gaze' and matter of fact may of representing sexuality, and the increasingly bizarre practices at first were laughable and then began to shock (even before people saw it) as 'textual machines' were set in motion by conservative English who had been formed by textualities constructed by critics playing to a clear conservative political agenda; some of them hadn't even seen the film); it was these same people who attempted to have the film banned for its 'utter depravity'. Because of this, it had a great deal of trouble with censors and popular opinion all over the country. When *CRASH* came out a great deal of questions were posed about how these issues should be dealt with. Should individuals have the right to choose or should society choose for them? Who can decide what is in a public's 'best interest'? In the end, it is the artist who has to be able to make his or her own choice about what he or she wants to represent; we will ultimately partake far worse of the illness in the very attempt to repress it. Some of these issues as they relate particularly to the cultural construction of the following dichotomy which seems complex, but can be simplified down to its seemingly hypocritical model which both seem to involve the inclusion of technology.

**11.3.1** CARS & SEX [culture] =  
HETEROSEXUALITY (healthy sexual practices)  
People are dominant to the technology they have created, and use it as a means to enhance their sexual experiences; they follow the rules and are rewarded.

*as opposed to...*

**11.3.2** CAR ACCIDENTS & HUMAN FLESH [nature] =  
PERVERTED SEXUALITY (depraved sexual practices)  
People are basically 'passive' to the growing 'monster' of traffic which dehumanises them; they transgress and are punished.

## **12 THE SEXUALISED VEHICLE:** *The Automobile as Sexual Object*

**12.1** The first part of the dichotomy above, the popular one that makes people like to the point of obsession the devices they buy and the technologies that surround them, involves the car as an explicitly danger-free sex object; our society, through its slick textual vehicles of film and TV which help develop textualities that connect sex to vehicles. Because of the ability of characters in TV shows

to have high speed chases and never get hurt many people grow up believing that there is little risk in driving; even as children cartoon characters are constantly driving off cliffs and step out of their vehicles without a mark on their body; one can even remember the kind car which as technology had a positive relationship with its owner (such as the Disney vehicle *Herbie*), or even the positive relationships people develop with their cars in cartoons like *Wacky Races*.

- 12.2** Although a car is constructed with many safety-based devices such as windbags (which have actually proved to be more fatal than safe), it remains and always has been a potentially dangerous tool of death and destruction; the textuality expressed by the media and the car industry is a complete illusion. The 'auto'-eroticism played upon by the author deliberately stands against these conservative constructions, but it recognises at the same time their importance to our lives. Early on in the novel, for example, Ballard describes the 'typical' primordial sexual experiences of young men:

"Young men alone behind the wheels of their first cars, near-wrecks picked up in scrap-yards, masturbate as they move on worn tyres to aimless destinations. After a near collision at a traffic intersection semen jolts across a cracked speedometer dial. Later, the dried residues of that same semen are brushed by the lacquered hair of the first young woman who lies across his lap with her mouth over his penis, one hand on the wheel hurtling the car through the darkness towards a multi-level interchange, the swerving brakes drawing the semen from him as he grazes the tailgate of an articulated truck loaded with colour television sets..."  
(Ballard, 1973: 17)

- 12.3** In a similar fashion, Simpsons discusses the way children develop their textual practices towards masculinity and femininity from their parents, particularly towards their parents' favourite objects or the ones that they can see are connected with their notion of masculinity:

"Boys work out very quickly that Dad's car is the measure of his masculinity. Mum has her dresses, mysterious underwear and make-up. Dad just has his car. And it takes him away from home (where Mum is queen) into the world of men, where the one with the best 'specifications' is king. School playgrounds everywhere are alive to the sounds of little boys arguing about whose dad has the fastest, most expensivest, biggest car. And although boys grow into men and their acorns are supposed to grow into great oaks, men never quite lose the dream of having a better, bigger one that Dad or nature intended."  
(Simpsons, 1999: 93)

- 12.4** *CRASH* begins with Ballard—a man who has a healthy masculine relationship with his car—and his wife Catherine enjoying a lull period in their relationship; they are both involved with sticky affairs with others. They have together an SM-like connection between sexuality and violence; enjoying kinky sex by screwing while discussing what they do with their lovers or watching television and including the horrific violence they watch as part of the sexual act. They both seem surprisingly uninterested in what they are doing to each other, however; this is especially noticeable in the film—it is almost like they are having sex while they are not even there. Cronenberg's film which consists of a string of sex acts, *resembles* pornography—or at least a really *bad* skin-flick shot on video—in an embodied fashion in that the characters seem to be so absent, almost as if the sex they are having is an obligation put on them by the film-maker. The coldness and absency of technology is also grafted onto basic human sexualities in the novel:

"The junction of her mucous membranes and the vehicle, my own metal body, was celebrated by the cars speeding past us. The complex of an immensely perverse act waited upon her like a coronation."  
(Ballard, 1973: 113)

- 12.5** The importance of the automobile in Ballard's sexuality is exaggerated in the following quotation, where if you remove the sentences and part sentences concerning Vaughn's body and homosexual sex acts, it actually appears as if he is making love to a car. Example [1] shows the text with the sexuality, whereas [2] is obviously edited:

- 12.5.1 [1] "With my fingers I touched the scar on his penis, then felt the glans within my mouth. I loosened Vaughan's blood-stained trousers... The jutting carapace of the instrument binnacle presided over the dark cleft between his buttocks. With my right hand I parted his buttocks, feeling for the hot vent of his anus. For several minutes, as the cabin walls glowed and shifted, as if trying to take up the deformed geometry of the crashed cars outside, I laid my penis at the mouth of his rectum. His anus opened around the head of my penis, settling itself around the shaft, his hard detrusor muscles gripping my glans. As I moved in and out of his rectum the light-borne vehicles soaring along the motorway drew the semen from my testicles."  
(Ballard, 1973: 202)
- 12.5.2 [2] "With my fingers I ... felt the ... jutting carapace of the instrument binnacle. ... With my right hand I parted ... the hot vent ... for several minutes, as the cabin walls glowed and shifted, as if trying to take up the deformed geometry of the crashed cars outside, I laid my penis ... around the head of ... the shaft, hard detrusor muscles gripping my glans. As I moved in and out ... the light-borne vehicles soaring along the motorway drew the semen from my testicles."  
(ibid.)
- 12.6 It is actually through encountering Vaughn which has them both on a downward spiral to achieve a transgressive but ultimately 'transcendent' sexuality. From the very beginning when he has a car accident which he describes as the 'most comprehensive thing that had happened to him in years', the character Ballard is clear that this 'new sexuality' is only meaningful in terms of the automobile: "Detached from his automobile, particularly his own emblem-filled highway cruiser, Vaughan ceased to hold any interest" (Ballard, 1973: 117). He remembers the importance of the car in his early sexual experiences with his wife which is foundational in forming his textual practices in this regard.
- "I remember my first minor collision in a deserted hotel car-park. Disturbed by a police patrol, we had forced ourselves through a hurried sex-act. Reversing out of the park, I struck an unmarked tree. Catherine vomited over my seat. This pool of vomit with its plots of blood like liquid rubies, as viscous and discreet as everything produced by Catherine, still contains for me the essence of the erotic delirium of the car-crash, more exciting than her own rectal and vaginal mucus, as refined as the excrement of a fairy queen, or the minuscule globes of liquid that formed beside the bubbles of her contact lenses."  
(Ballard, 1973: 25)
- 12.7 The theme of absency and sexuality pop up again when he suggests that this sexuality is in a way completely emotion-free; the sexual act becomes an act for the act's sake and nothing more, a sort of idealism that can ultimately only be realised in death - which ultimately and horrifyingly (particularly clearly in the film) becomes the primary goal of the main characters. In this sense, the automobile is obviously a metaphor for the non-emotional, machine-like state that J. G. Ballard evidently senses we are developing towards as we increasingly 'become' the machines that continue to influence our lives more and more. Here again the dichotomous model introduced above is thrown out of alignment and the world order continues on a downward spiral. Sexual encounters with Vaughn seem to be the point at which this receives its strongest expression:
- "Vaughan excited some latent homosexual impulse only within the cabin of his car or driving along the highway. His attraction lay not so much in a complex of familiar anatomical triggers - a curve of exposed breast, the soft cushion of a buttock, the hair-lined arch of a damp perineum - but in the stylization of posture achieved between Vaughan and the car. Detached from his automobile, particularly his own emblem-filled highway cruiser, Vaughan ceased to hold any interest."  
(ibid.: 117)

### 13 THE MECHANICAL CORPSE: *Mechanisation in CRASH*

13.1 One of the strongest themes in the book and to a lesser extent the film is mechanisation and more pertinently the depersonalisation brought about by mechanisation of the body through an involuntary usurping of technology into one's textual and sexual practices and therefore one's self. It is most likely less obvious in the film primarily because it is easier to play literary tricks with emotions like *ennui* in writing than it is with visual images, although Deborah Unger does a remarkably good effort playing someone who is generally bored with the exigencies of life, her character Catherine having done almost everything at the beginning of the novel (including flying a plane; the novel begins with her completing her last course and the image of her flying over the city, reaching the heights which still aren't quite high enough to satisfy her desire, reach towards transcendence). Holly Hunter's Dr Helen Remington is also remarkably good at making every line sound as superficial as it is meant to; it could be being spoken by a machine in that it has little emotional loading and is in general like 'party-talk' or garbage discourse; the type of things you say to someone you really don't want to know anything about and don't want to know anything about you but are nonetheless obliged to converse with them for half an hour; in the novel Dr Remington's only true sign of affection is towards the plastic dummies involved at the traffic control research centre, which although pathetic is a little poignant. Especially in the novel, one of the primary metaphors is mechanisation which becomes expressed in the behaviour of the characters towards one another. Ballard takes the mechanisation analogy further by making people look, smell, sound and behave like machines in many ways. In both the book and the film, the image of smoking (i.e. 'emitting smoke like a machine') is a particularly strong metaphor. Even Dr Helen Remington smokes: "I started to smoke at Ashford - it's rather stupid of me" (Ballard, 1973: 73). Descriptions of some of the characters also compare them to machines, such as the following description of Gabrielle: "Her strong face with its unmatching planes seemed to mimic the deformed panels of the car, almost as if she consciously realized that these twisted instrument binnacles provided a readily accessible anthology of depraved acts" (ibid.: 100). Finally, the sexual act itself is compared to the workings of a machine in more ways than simply repetitive machine-like movements, although in the following description this type of motion forms an important part of the metaphor concerning intercourse:

"Braced on his left elbow, he continued to work himself against the girl's hand, as if taking part in a dance of severely stylized postures that celebrated the design and electronics, speed and direction of an advanced kind of automobile."  
(Ballard, 1973: 142)

13.2 The sexual act achieves ultimate expression through its practice, as according to performative theory which relies on a sense of repetition, 'practice' in the sense of rehearsing 'getting it right' or 'making sure that all the equipment still works'. Just as the sexual act is mechanical, Ballard observes that mechanisation hammers its way into other areas of sexual practice; rather than seeing sex as an emotional journey made by the characters involved, in its mechanisation and transformation into a different type of machine-like performative act, it becomes continually reduced of such 'human' factors as *emotions*; from this, orgasm becomes not the emotional climax for two individuals aiming to pleasure each other, but a sudden violent end to a mechanical journey between points 'A' and 'B'. 'Motion' and not 'emotion' is the important factor; resulting from this sexual climax is simply the 'accident' (or result) of the journey brought about by the constant driving motion of the body. This is an expression of a new type of sexuality which doesn't involve physicality in the sense it is traditionally understood, standing against traditional approaches to how sexuality should work. Although for many of the readers of Ballard's book and the viewers of Cronenberg's film this may be a difficult concept to fathom, for the characters themselves it is logic incarnate and the ultimate expression of their sexualities according to the textualities that have gradually developed, or rather gradually developed, but receive a sudden kick burst by the somewhat 'driven' Vaughn who is the first (after Seagrave) to reach the end of his journey, but which the others follow, in an incredibly violent fashion in a spiral downwards towards mechanisation and mutilation



## 14 THE EXTINGUISHED ORGASM: Sex & Death

"For many people, donations mean that a dead body is deprived of some of its personality while a living person is given the personality of a stranger."  
(Lundin, 1999: 7)

- 14.1** Despite the Cartesian distinction of mind and body, BB points out the fact that our concept of 'whole-personhood', deeply entrenched in our textualities, are being questioned, in her context by surgical developments, in Ballard's by the gradual fragmentation of the human body by car accidents as prostheses replace limbs. According to Haraway's influential article on the cyborg, we are the last generation of true humans. As BB notes, the textualities perpetuated by society are gradually being changed by current developments in surgical technology, as a growing feeling of ambivalence towards the human figure grows just as the body as a complete 'whole' becomes fragmented. This could be resulting in the growing identification with a detached 'pornographic' body; pornography involves in a similar way an almost impersonal erotic that shows the sex as it is but seems to obsess in the description rather than the erotics of the act. This is why pornography, for many, remains similarly unarousing, although as Cronenberg demonstrates, its popularity is increasing; Ballard's novel uses a descriptive erotics of language which makes his novel less conceivable as pornography than the film which for reasons described below has a direct connection with the film medium. Ballard's reasoning becomes a questionable moral phrase which is only interesting in the respects that have been introduced earlier in this dissertation, whereas Cronenberg's artificial-feeling whole is complete as an artistic classic. It is true, however, that Ballard's book was written in 1973! As I will describe pornography connects sex and death, and it is for this reason that Cronenberg is more successful in using the film medium to create the metaphor than Ballard is; his novel is actually far too erotic (despite his actually claiming otherwise, not only in the preface but also in the novel itself as he tries to desexualise the homosexual act as it occurs). The reasoning behind this, as well as a discussion of the present of the sex/death theme, are explicated below.
- 14.2** With or without pornography, sex and death are two bodily-related textual concepts which exist in our minds and which in many respects have a subtle connection. One can't help thinking of the French notion of the orgasm as 'un petit mort', or the auto-asphyxiation (self-strangulation in effect) as a form of "auto-eroticism"; the feeling of orgasm being accented by the 'feeling of death' one feels as the brain stops receiving oxygen. For many who undergo this process, the thought that they are undergoing 'little deaths' without dying must go through their minds.
- 14.3** As an extra 'introductory' preface to the novel *CRASH* Ballard states that pornographic means are employed to explore the connection between sex and technology; Sontag, in her article on *The Pornographic Mind* explores the work of Bataille (among others) and decides that pornography is comparable to science-fiction (genre often connected to both Ballard and Cronenberg), that pornography can have an imagination if it is dealt with in an exploratory fashion, and that those obsessed with sex (and who thus often end up becoming involved as creative artists with pornography) are ultimately on a quest towards death. According to Sontag, human sexuality is a potentially violent and ultimately questionable phenomena that due to its taboo-breaking connection with animal impulses connects the moment of conception with the moment that consciousness is extinguished. The following fragment from Sontag demonstrates this interest:

"Tamed as it may be, sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness - pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires, which range from the impulse to commit sudden arbitrary violence upon another person to the voluptuous yearning for the extinction of one's consciousness, for death itself."  
(Sontag:103)

**14.4** This is an observation that seems to be well reflected in the work of Bataille, whose sexual imagination seems to find equal beauty in dead and even sometimes mutilated bodies as it does in naked or sexually active ones. According to Sontag, Bataille understood more clearly than any other writer she knew that works dealing with lust and the obscene lean not towards the 'gratification of Eros' but instead the 'gratification of death' (Sontag: 106) as demonstrated in the following excerpt from Bataille's *l'Histoire de l'oeuil* in his description of its sexual heroine, Simonne:

"...on a sensual level, she so bluntly craved any upheaval that the faintest call from the senses have her a look directly suggestive of all things linked to deep sexuality, such as blood, suffocation, sudden terror, crime; things indefinitely destroying human bliss and honesty."  
(Bataille: 11)

**14.5** Ballard's book seems to have taken this up with a vengeance as he follows Sontag's guide with almost academic reference, whereas Cronenberg, in contrast, has always shown a similar fascination with both, suggesting that the Ballard is trying to expend a moral lesson whereas Cronenberg is the one using sex and death as themes to explore his artistic fascination with the 'flesh', although his demonstration of the narrative only in terms of one sex act after another makes an interesting allusion to the pornographic medium.

**14.6** Ballard's notion of 'auto-eroticism' is also a play on the notion of 'auto-asphyxiation' which certainly refers to a way of dying. For those who are not familiar with the term, auto-asphyxiation is a type of sexuality where people achieve orgasm by strangling themselves to the point of death, or having themselves strangled. Unlike the notion of will towards death in *Crash*, however, auto-asphyxiation is a real and in fact popular form of sexual-play which is designed to heighten the sense of orgasm.

**14.7** For Ballard as the main protagonist within the novel, even though the sexuality firstly seems to be connected between cars, then car accidents, we soon realise that the ultimate sexual realization is when death is achieved by being 'mutated' physically and totally, transfigured in an almost transcendental sense by the penetrating nature of steel machinery pushing and ripping into human flesh. Even early on in the book Ballard considers his own death (Ballard, 1973: 15). Later, with love, he considers killing his wife Catherine (ibid.: 181). Even closer towards the novels climax, the death of Vaughan which begins the novel in a cyclical sense, Ballard resigns himself to the beauty of Vaughan's attempts to kill his wife; in a fashion that should be shocking, but for some reason unless you really think about it while reading the novel, it isn't, Ballard ultimately accepts the fact that Vaughan might be successful:

"Still uncertain whether Vaughan would try to crash his car into Catherine's, I made no attempt to warn her. Her death would be a model of my care for all the victims of air-crashes and natural disasters. As I lay beside Catherine at night, my hands modelling her breasts, I visualized her body in contact with various points of the Lincoln's interior, rehearsing for Vaughan the postures she might assume. Aware of this coming collision, Catherine had entered an entranced room within her mind. Passively, she allowed me to move her limbs into the positions of unexplored sex acts."  
(Ballard, 1973: 218)

**14.8** These are the sex acts which would take place with a dead body within the crashed confines of a car; it is a deliberately jarring concept, and in this respect that Ballard is successful in forcing the reader to see the connection without bringing in his own moralistic framework.

**15 THE IRRESISTABLE MUTILATION:***The Erotic Nature of Car Accidents*

- 15.1** Bataille's work *l'Histoire de l'oeil* ('History of the Eye'/'Story of the Eye') doesn't only demonstrate a marked fascination with the connection between sex and death; he equally enjoys describing acts of bodily mutilation and its ultimate sexual possibilities, something which Ballard seems to have taken on (whereas for Cronenberg the main theme remains the *mutating* effects of car accidents and its eroticisation) rather than the erotics of mutilation (Ballard's field).

"I remember that one day, when we were in a car tooling along at top speed, we crashed into a cyclist, an apparently very young and very pretty girl. Her head was almost totally ripped off by the wheels. For a long time, we were parked a few yards beyond without getting out, fully absorbed in the sight of the corpse. The horror and despair at so much bloody flesh, nauseating in part, and in part very beautiful, was fairly equivalent to our usual impression upon seeing one another."

(Bataille: 10-11)

- 15.2** Ballard suggests symbolically in his work in a foreboding sense that technology actually functions to 'deconstruct' the body-both physically in the sense of bodily mutilation and dismemberment, and intellectually in the sense of textual inscription; by inscribing itself into our conscious and subconscious minds, as clearly demonstrated by Ballard, it is changing the sorts of things we expect or desire from the world; Ballard's example is one of the strongest forces in occidental culture, namely sexuality. Because technology is changing the way we relate to our bodies it is changing the cultural processes that involve our bodies as well.
- 15.3** One wonders if Ballard (the writer) was influenced by the well-known story of the Mexican-painter Frida Kahlo who was scarred for life in a serious car accident on a bus that literally 'stole her virginity' (using her own words) by penetrating her genitalia during the accident. Like Gabrielle she was also seriously paralysed but that didn't stop her from having a fulfilling sexual existence. Like Gabrielle, Kahlo's bisexuality was pronounced, although the striking contrast was in the vehicles; Kahlo was in a school bus, whereas Gabrielle was restricted by the confines of her sports car which later provided her liberation after the dreadful blood-loss which is symbolic of her 'technological' loss of virginity.
- 15.4** Ballard makes clear the growing familiarity people are having with car accidents; unlike Bradbury who distances such a 'crowd' from the community by presenting them as a spooky alien presence, essentially faceless and identityless, which steals lives by restricting access, Ballard presents a 'crowd' (rather spectators consisting of people than a crowd of absence) which could consist of anyone of his readers or anyone of us: "I watched the people in the cars, peering through their windshields as they adjusted the frequencies of their car radios... I seemed to recognize them all, guests at the latest of an unending series of road parties which we had attended together during the previous summer" (Ballard, 1973: 221). These road parties, revelling in violence and mutilation, plays on the desire that each of us has to stop and take a guilty peek when we see that someone has had an accident of some kind. Vaughn's questionnaire for the 'project' which he seems to experience as transcendent but which is hard to view in any other fashion than as exploitation, is where Ballard crosses the border separating eroticism from destructive pornography. Of course this is what Ballard wants to achieve for his moral lesson on what dangerous society could very well bring about in a future world, where Ballard all too worryingly points out the fact that "the future is now." An excerpt from Vaughan's questionnaire is included below:

"...the scarlet light from the neon sign over the portico flared across these grainy photographs of appalling injuries: the breasts of teenage girls deformed by instrument binnacles, the partial mammoplasties of elderly housewives... In several of the photographs the source of wound was indicated by a detail of that portion of the car which had caused the injury: beside a casualty ward

photograph of a bifurcated penis was an inset of a handbrake unit; above a close-up of a massively bruised vulva was a steering-wheel boss and its manufacturer's medallion. These unions of torn genitalia and sections of car body and instrument panel formed a series of disturbing modules, units in a new currency of pain and desire."  
(Ballard, 1973: 275)

## 16 THE MORBID TRANSMIGRATION

### *Concluding on Death & Transcendence*

- 16.1.1** The intention in this last section of the dissertation to explore the possibility of working out whether ultimate conclusions about the way our society is developing its attitudes towards such complex constructions as sexuality and technology, and in particular what lessons, if any, can be learned from the textual vehicles created by Ballard and Cronenberg as well as the textualities which have influenced and continue to influence them. Central issues explored within this conclusion include the realization that the performative side to our gender is constantly in a process of development and change, particularly in our early years of development, but also throughout other major periods in our life; Ballard demonstrates this particularly well by showing his protagonists' sexualities, considered by essentialists to be predetermined at birth, which prove themselves to be in a constant state of flux and development as they interact in dynamic ways with other textual constructions-the obvious example of which is technology-and the frightening, nightmarish example of which includes for Ballard scarring, mutilation and ultimately death. Cronenberg in contrast brings to the fore the concept of 'Otherness' which is constructed both physically-becoming enscribed on the body-and mentally thanks to societal inculcation. He is also interested in gender as an influencing textuality; his horror is created by combining sexuality and mutation in a sometimes bizarre fashion creating both physical and mutation and also sickness of both the mind and the body. Cronenberg's horror is evoked in individuals when they encounter things which contradict their inculcated textual constructions, mostly corresponding to the set of strict dichotomies presented by the philosopher Derrida. These dichotomies exist because they are instituted or inculcated in the form of conservative textual vehicles such as popular cinema (especially from Hollywood). If vehicles are created which function to subvert these dichotomous textual constructions in the work of Ballard and Cronenberg functions to inform and reinform us about a large number of dynamically 'performative' textual practices which are in a constant process of change influenced by a wide number of external factors over time during our existence on this planet. This includes how we construct and continue to reconstruct our bodies, the things we find 'sexually arousing' and how all of these constructions change with time and external influence.
- 16.1.2** In order for the characters to discover their transgressive new 'sexuality' which completely transcends human flesh and involves a unique connection with the automobile, a complex sexual journey of sorts has to be taken that covers all different types of existing recognised 'perversions', almost as if Ballard is deliberately attempting to shock us by presenting continually more violent and/or perverse types of sexual fulfilment from sadism through forms of incest to cannibalism. Sadism is a form of sexual behaviour we may not have all participated in, but we are most certainly aware of; it crosses over into the field of traditional sexuality in both a hetero- and homosexual sense, leading in the book to "a new sexuality born from a perverse technology" (Ballard, 1973: 13). Ballard probably starts his journey into presenting his transgressive sexuality because sadism is a representation of pain as the realisation of what media tries to tame. It is understandable in the sense that violence is something everyone enjoys at least viewing from a distance, watching films, television, and as the author demonstrates scrambling to witness mutilated bodies fresh from car accidents. Ballard describes this as "...extensions of that real world of violence calmed and tamed within our television programmes and the pages of new magazines" (Ballard, 1973: 37). The automobile and its culture, one which is all too present already within contemporary culture as we make the way into a new millennium, becomes in Ballard's hands a metaphor for a machine-like state of humanity and a horrific, surreal violence of culture as its textual catalyst. Ballard is attempting to teach us a lesson about how we should be aware of the many

different ways society attempts to lull its population into security about the nature and intention of violence. Ballard and Cronenberg, each using contrasting media of representation, tell a tale that reflects violently upon a way of living and relating to our reality. This more than emphasises the whole theme connected to sex, violence, car accidents and death; Cronenberg uses the motif of transcendence when it is in fact nothing more than glorified sadomasochism combined with a bizarre fusion of technology, violence, death and a desire to realize for just one moment a state of perfection before transfiguring into a mutilated corpse at one with the technology that helped to create the desire for this sexual release. In the cold hard state of death there is little hope for spiritual enlightenment; their attempts at transfiguration through sexual practice are ultimately as empty and passionless as the rest of the desperate performative sexual gestures brought alive by the hope of their final deaths, the parameters of which they themselves plan in an effort to come to terms with their scarred and ugly world. In such a reality, there is little hope for the human race.

- 16.2** It is impossible to make conclusions about the point Ballard was trying to make and he makes this boldly clear in his 1995 introduction which allows for multiple readings. It is certainly true, however, that in the context of sexuality and technology as we construct them in today's world, the book is a lot closer to our construction of 'reality' than it was in 1973, and when Baudrillard 'interacted' inappropriately with the text from the perspective we take today to create a discourse of cold sexual communication with artificial extensions of our orifices; a poststructural *tour de force* in theoretical terms where merely by physically interfacing with technology by having it rip holes in our flesh we achieve some kind of sublime transcendence. It could even be that Ballard was attempting to distance himself from this somewhat problematic discourse; rather than becoming a figure to represent a new sexuality, the distancing effect of his introduction provides his public with the opportunity to reflect itself on the text only in terms of their own creation essentially absolving the author of blame for Baudrillard's theoretical transgressions. In 1996, when the film came out, Ballard was more than pleased with the 'cool' result, it was the ideal vehicle for Cronenberg to express his major thematic material: the unreliability of the flesh, the ultimate malevolence of a society which smiles at us while it gradually watches us fry in our own refuse, what the (moral) results are of sexual otherness and how mental sickness or disease can result in mutation to our physical bodies and *vice versa*. Cronenberg was able to reflect himself through *CRASH* onto the cinematic medium and created a dynamic textual vehicle that is able to communicate to an audience of today; it will undoubtedly, like his other films, become increasingly more accessible with time; when it was released, it was a little too close to the nerve and people in general still hadn't developed the textual constructions to interpret it. Ballard's introduction was not just a moral afterword, it was almost a way of saying goodbye to his text as he permitted it to be realised as cinema; predicting the textual paradigm shift that new expressive media such as the internet and interactive multimedia (combined with the dynamism of the cinema) would eventually bring after the turn of the century, Ballard distanced himself from this piece of writing like a father says goodbye to his son who is leaving home to explore the world, never to return.
- 16.3** The representation of the characters of *CRASH* as developing towards a transcendent moment of final pre-mortem stimulus is a recognition that in partaking in this violent world we are admitting that what many of us ultimately long for is a moment of unification with the image. This is a fraction of a second where one literally 'becomes' the cinematic; it is at one and the same time eternal and but an instance of time scratched there forever because of the mayhem and death that brings misery into the lives of those injured by the exigencies of a flight for permanence. This longing is inculcated into society by a visual culture that exploits its members by presenting the automobile as the ultimate of all sexual expressions, realising perhaps more than any other 'vehicle' the dominant/submissive dichotomy so typical of our culture. At the same time and in an opposing fashion society pummels the same populace with contradictory images celebrating extreme violence which glorifies persecution of minorities, the abuse of women and the lifting of technology to an almost divine status. It is also a representation of a longing for on the one hand ecstasy and enlightenment to fight our growing *textual ennui* and on the other what can only be realised in the cold silence of the grave; one almost wonders if this is an expression of an intra-uterine desire to return to the womb. Truly frightening is the fact that the tools of our death should be eroticised symbols of our fragmented contemporary society in which sexual satisfaction and the act of eroticism is becoming painfully fragmented from our bodies.



- 16.4** Living in a dynamic and changing world where technology is playing a continually more significant role in our lives and our bodies are gradually being replaced by machines, in a world dominated by the automobile in a visual, aural and in many cases an olfactory sense, our attitudes to the surrounding environment are in turn gradually changing. *CRASH* involves the subversive development of a transgressive sexuality realised through the hard, cold and violent anonymity of the car accident which rips through flesh like a pick-axe through typing paper. Although in his 1995 insert into his novel Ballard suggests that an author no longer is in the position to preach to anyone about anything, choosing the book to be of a 'pornographic' nature the author seemed to be making very specific comments about the extremely problematic way our society perpetuates certain epistemological notions into us, particularly as far as sex and violence are concerned. Through its reaction to pornography which is still considered by many to be the most degrading and disgusting forms of fiction, society demonstrates most clearly its articulation of a textuality towards the body and sexual practice which condemns transgressive sexual practice, including masturbation, and which teaches its members to live and relive an outdated dichotomy in its performativity. As I have demonstrated at different places throughout this work, it seems to have no trouble communicating massive amounts of violence to even the youngest of our society members, but no matter how open a given set of parents may be, most children will still grow up considering sex to be a taboo subject of an abnormal nature, whereas violence, murder, mutilation and other hideous forms of human slaughter and misery from natural disasters to genocide, are everyday subjects of conversation. In the book it is made very clear at many times through the nature of the narrative that such 'textualities' towards violence can't but help influence one's approach to sexuality, which remains an uncontrollable given over which society has a limited amount of control. The book is therefore filled with violent episodes involving horrific car accidents described in morbid detail, even if the only victims are plastic dummies. Fans of the book have even complained that the violence of the book was not nearly fulfilled by the film, the same film that drew so much criticism from its British audiences because of its excessive violent context. This communicates a strong message about the medium of film and its sociopolitical force rather than its actual content; many of the politicians who put in complaints on behalf of their electorate never even bothered to see the film; the fact that it was a film was enough, whereas the more violent content of the book didn't seem to bother anyone, even right back in 1973 when it was written. The filmic medium has instilled an approach to literature which includes not only the content of the 'text' itself but also the complex intertextual reactions with its audiences, sometimes the most interesting of all commentary (and arguably the most relevant). The primary difference between the book and the film, then, involves the *medium* rather than its *content*.
- 16.5.1** Moving to our final conclusions, the major function of *CRASH* is to demonstrate the danger of what our society is doing to us by repressing 'bodily' sex & sexuality; instead it encourages the glorification of cars, the ultimate 'sexiness' of both speed and domination, and technology itself, all in the name of making large amounts of money. The film, which caused a far greater controversy than the book ever did, was used as a political tool for the purpose of societal exploitation. What the politicians (most of whom hadn't actually seen the film) were basically saying was that the film-makers were sick deviants who liked to get screwed while having car accidents. I wonder who was really 'getting screwed' here? The critics, the politicians or the people who read the review and didn't see the film?
- 16.5.2** So what can be learnt from this unfortunate misreading of a textual vehicle? It shows for one that we are not at all safe from a society which, as the book suggests, is in an almost absurdly ironic fashion attempting to teach us to be safe on the road with its meaningless and limp road safety programmes and to soundly castigate the youths who steal cars for the extreme 'excitement' of speed-racing; at the same time it allows itself to be paid off by the car industry which earns millions of dollars making its automobiles go even faster, look sexier and have even more attractive gadgets when they are actually contributing to growing pollution, the destruction of the ozone layer and the ultimate 'traffication' of all the open country we do have left. This thematic element is even clearer in the book than in the film, but the message would have been more widely communicated had its critics been more open to its subversive content.

- 16.5.3** In any case, the film received this reading largely because of the way it refused to glorify the little violence it did show, like the car accidents which become sudden events experiencing but a moment of collision. They were horrifyingly quick; loud and striking but over in a second like in real life, and shocking to observe. There is no set of close-ups to reduce the feeling of violence, no reduction of film tempo to warp the sense of reality and glorify the instance of collision as Baudrillard attempted to celebrate in his science-fiction articles. The sex acts are filmed in a similar way. The film begins with people fucking each other, often anally; they seem rather disinterested in the whole thing, like porn actors who aren't particularly good at their job. That is until they meet Vaughn-but the sex is still just plain old sex in the style of pornography. The book actually lacks this 'cold/cool gaze' which is so central to the film; although it concentrates on the character's abnormal sexual obsessions, and it often tries to reduce the sex of its emotive nature, Ballard can't help but *sound* erotic even if he tries not to, something I complain about in relation to the so-called 'emotionless' gay sex scene which Ballard the character seems to be enjoying a great deal, even if cars have to whiz by, hit them while in action or in the past have formed horrific scars on the orifices being entered. In order to exaggerate this effect, Cronenberg undoubtedly left out the LSD scene which is written from the horrified perspective of the Ballard (character) who starts to see reality in an entirely different fashion. This would have totally spoiled the pornographic content of the film and appear highly incongruous; unfortunately, most people go to the cinema to escape the exigencies of everyday life, not to be reminded of the horrific world we live in, so it is not surprising, if unfortunate for the viewers who missed the film, that it had no great financial success in some countries, especially where it was textualised as being potentially of an erotic nature. Inappropriate textual interaction would have simply resulted in mystification rather than an alternative understanding; either that or boredom (or both).
- 16.5.4** In this respect, cinema had a disadvantage in that the filmic text is more restricted. This is because a more conservative audience has access to it; although it is dynamic, film requires no way near as much interaction as a book which has to be read. In other words, the text doesn't really require much textual participation compared to a book; the text 'enacts itself' like a music box when opened and the audience remains passive. Although they are passive, the film is obviously still watched and listened to with great attention; because of the fact that they can do so without effort, and little interaction, a larger audience has access to it and entirely different textual practices are applied. Therefore people have far greater expectations of the film; for a film audience an entirely different set of parameters need to be applied, and it so happens that if textualities are questioned in a film it will receive enormous criticism from popular culture in the form of people not going to see it. Reading many reviews of Ballard's *CRASH* from both satisfied and unsatisfied readers, however, I get the impression that some who come to the book *after* the film are for a similar disappointment; the 'expectations' of a book are to live up to its realisation as a film. As the media are so contrasting, this leads to a wide array of contrasting responses which depend on the textual circumstances of each individual; some hated it for its flowery style whereas the film had matter-of-fact coolness about it. A homosexual audience could be slighted to the point of offence by a narrative which entirely strips the gay male scene of having any sexuality at all (whereas in the film it lives up to its realisation of the flesh). The film, however, is criticised by a feminist audience for subscribing to the dichotomous structure which engenders the screen as a medium for men to gaze at the female body; there are a large amount of scenes where women show their body parts and the sex scene with the Gabrielle, played by Rosanna Arquette, has her dressed in kinky, almost burlesque clothing, becoming in every which way representative of a male fantasy (although one could also see the pleasure she obtains from having one of her wounds graphically fucked as being an expression of her power).

- 16.6** However, although the book will always remain a novel and the film a form of cinema, as Ballard demonstrated in his 1995 introduction, the paradigm change which is currently overtaking western culture is demonstrating that the author actually has nothing to say; any meaning that is found in a given text has to be put there by its textual participants, and therefore the meaning changes with every new age, and ultimately every new participant. The next point of discussion explores other similarities connecting the book and the film, or points at which the thematic material coincide even if the methods of realisation differ, hoping to discover the points at which sexuality and technology become fused as image and word simultaneously.
- 16.7** The experience of *CRASH* produces a 'nasty' aftertaste for the audience, who are often confused, thinking this aftertaste is the result of inappropriate textual interaction: maybe I didn't quite 'get' what was going on? For many who experience either the book or the film, the reality is that for the time the fiction is realised with its particular build-up and dynamic, a textuality is briefly, if only for a minute, accepted as a possibility as mentioned above. The possibility of acceptance of something which *should* appear horrid I refer to as a 'nasty textuality'; I call it 'nasty' because it is a term with a specific reference among the practitioners of sadomasochistic sex, particularly gay men. It is used by the dominant 'Top' to refer to the mean, sadistic but at the same time self-aware and even ironic sexual practice performed towards the masochistic 'Bottom'. The point of adopting this term is that like the film-maker and the author who created *CRASH*, those participating in 'nasty' sex know it is play and don't take it too seriously. Although Ballard's vision suggests in some senses a rather bleak vision for the future as I will discuss in more detail below, there is no doubt that Ballard and especially Cronenberg were doing the equivalent to realising 'nasty behaviour' when they created their vehicles; the novel and film are filled with uniquely ironic moments which comment if only briefly on the self-reflexive nature of the text and the evident self-awareness of the ultimate impossibility of its 'transgressive sexuality'.
- 16.8** In the theoretical foundation which begins this dissertation, occidental society is viewed as a 'grammatical' construction the rules of which function to perpetuate a set of dichotomies; an individual in the process of his or her life tends to develop textual practices which are either *for* or *against* these rules, and thus reality and the construction of the 'normal' (and the 'abnormal' or *queer*) is formed. Occidental society demonstrates its hypocrisy in many forms, which are made obvious by both forms of *CRASH* because they use essentially some of the same major themes to influence the textual participant to gradually shift their opinions to actually consider a type of sexuality as being possible which for most of the members of this society could never exist; like popular textualities which exploit the dichotomies constructed by society to sell themselves (or specific products, as in advertising). Ballard and Cronenberg alike use their media to build their own constructions which blatantly oppose those perpetuated by society, so blatantly that it could appear ridiculous, but done in such a convincing way that one is led to question or at least to reveal as a structure and not a truism the societal grammar which many never question (as they never need to). In both the book and the film, heterosexual acts fuse with homosexual acts, which fuse in turn with what appear to be extremely deviant acts such as cannibalism and incest as the 'flesh' gives way to the greater attraction of metal as it rips through human tissue like a knife in water and ultimately produces something far more potent than orgasm: death.

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