

BOWIE'S *I_OUTSIDE* AS A CONSTRUCTION OF A LIMINOID SPACE



DAVID BOWIE'S *1. OUTSIDE*:
THE CREATION OF A LIMINOID SPACE AS A METAPHOR
FOR PRE-MILLENNIAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The majority of writings on David Bowie have focussed on his early work. Many feel that Bowie's early work has much merit, as has been made clear by the vast pool of both academic and popular writings regarding his work in the early 1970s, his collaborations with Brian Eno in the late 1970s, and his most commercially accepted works in the early 1980s. However, much of the academic writing on Bowie has chosen to focus only on these works and ignores his more recent material. This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the more recent work of David Bowie.

In 1995, Bowie released the album *1. Outside*. Through its music and lyrics, album art, accompanying narrative, music video and live performance, Bowie presents a world of the absurd and violent. He engages with the notions of murder as art, body modification as ritual, and the state of society at the end of the twentieth century. Bowie, in his comments to Ian Penman in *Esquire* magazine, suggests that the proliferation of body modification in late twentieth century Western society acts as a replacement for the Judeo-Christian ethic.

By applying Victor Turner's theory of liminality, it is argued that, through *1. Outside*, Bowie is constructing a representation of a space which is analogous to society at the end of the millennium. For Turner, the liminal stage embodies an

optimistic “storehouse of possibilities,” not unlike a gestation period which precedes new life. Rather than creating a space which fits Turner’s model of the liminal exactly, Bowie suggests a space which is *liminoid*, not exhibiting the full potential of the liminal. Bowie presents themes of nihilism and the alienation of technology, as well as many juxtapositions in visual performance, which serve to give the album a sense of ambiguity contributing to its ambivalent, and thus liminoid, character.

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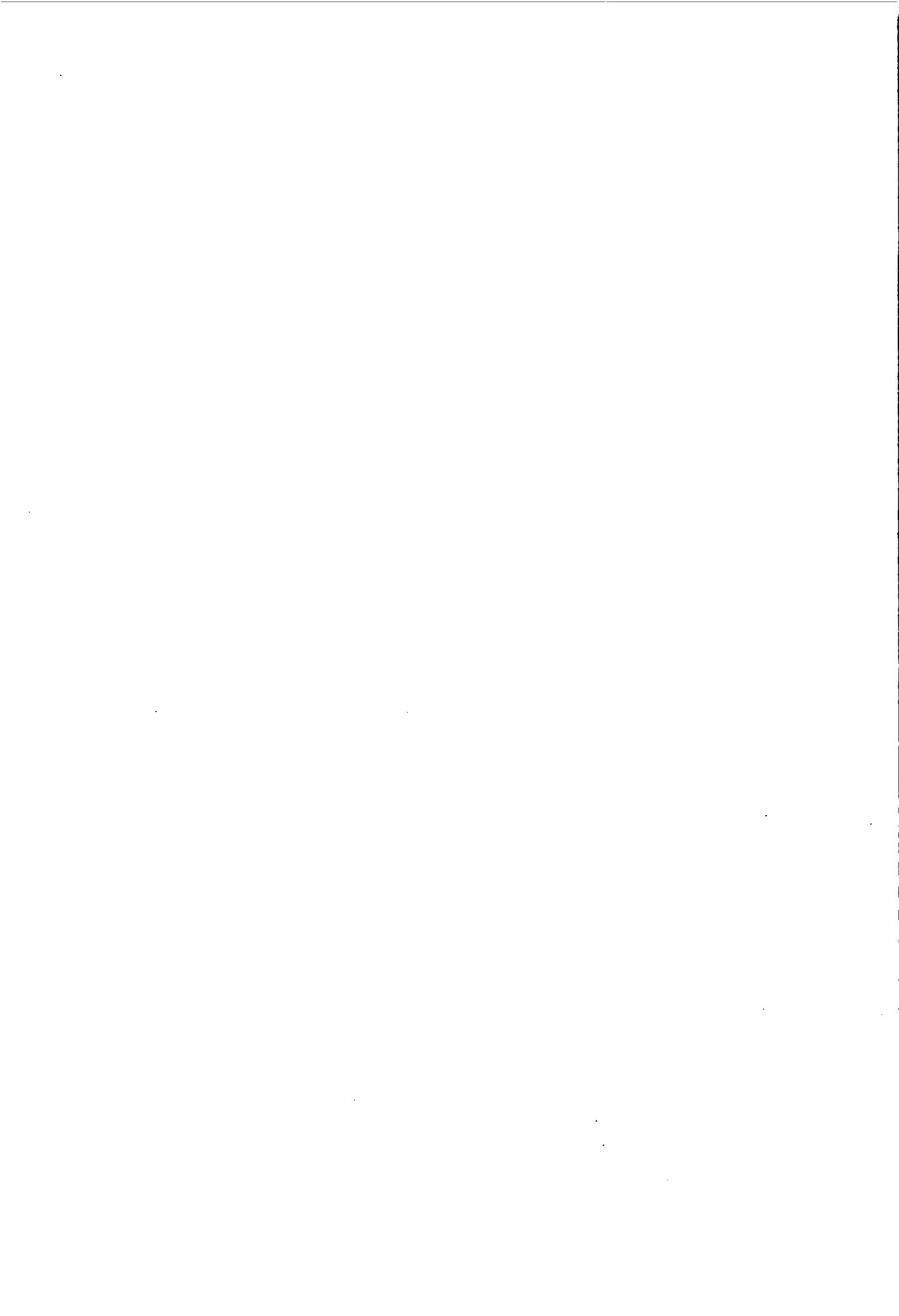
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INTRODUCTION

Students will be writing college dissertations about it very soon.

- Stuart Bailie, in a review of *1. Outside*, in *Vox* magazine.¹

In 1995, David Bowie released *1. Outside*, an album which engages with issues such as murder as art, body modification as ritual, and the state of late twentieth century Western society. This brief introduction will serve to provide some context for the issue of body modification and violence in the music of David Bowie.

It is no surprise that David Bowie engages with themes of body modification and violence in *1. Outside*. As early as 1993, with the release of *Black Tie White Noise*, Bowie was already presenting the listener with word images that bring attention to the modification of the body, violence and nihilism.

In a cover of singer-songwriter Scott Walker's "Nite Flights," he sings:

There's no hold
The moving has come through
The danger passing you
Turns its face into the heat and runs the tunnels
It's so cold
The dark dug up by dogs
The stitches torn and broke

¹Stuart Bailie, *Vox* magazine (November 1995), "Outside: Reviews"; <http://www.algonet.se/~bassman/articles/rev/o.html>; Internet; accessed 24 July 2000.

The raw meat fist you choke
Has hit the bloodlite²

The lyrics are suggestive of the physical and the violent, and although it was not originally written by Bowie, his choice of this particular song shows that he was interested in conveying this subject matter at this time. Also, although the song does not directly refer to the behaviour of body modification, it can be argued that it does foreshadow the grotesque details of “murder as art” in *1. Outside*. The later album’s themes of nihilism and violence are foreshadowed by phrases such as “the stitches torn and broke” and “the raw meat fist you choke.” These lyrics are suggestive of violence and destruction (doubly, with the image of stitches, which serve to close a wound, being destroyed themselves), while also being suggestive of death, with a reference to raw meat, and choking, which can often lead to death.

Later that same year, Bowie released *The Buddha of Suburbia*, a soundtrack for the BBC2 miniseries of the same name. In the CD liner notes, Bowie states:

A major chief [*sic*] obstacle to the evolution of music has been the almost redundant narrative form. To rely upon this old war-horse can only continue the spiral into the British constraint of insularity. Maybe we could finally relegate the straightforward narrative to the past.

On the other hand, modern circumstances having had a dysfunctioning capacity upon pure chronological perspective, my writing has often relied too arbitrarily on violence and chaos as a

²Scott Engel (aka. Walker), “Nite Flights,” lyrics reprinted from <http://www.teenagewildlife.com/Albums/BTWN/NF.html>; Internet; accessed 8 May 2000.

soft option to acknowledging spiritual and emotional starvation. I know I'm not alone with this dilemma.³

Bowie is admitting his own shortcomings in his commentary of society, even though his comments are in the context of a critique or wake-up call for British music. Nevertheless, Bowie turns to this “soft option” two years later with *I. Outside*. Bowie’s comment regarding “modern circumstances” and their “dysfunctioning capacity upon pure chronological perspective” shows that he was at least thinking about the state and perceived speed of late twentieth century society. It is interesting that he mentions a link between “violence and chaos” and “spiritual and emotional starvation” two years prior to releasing *I. Outside* in which he engages with these very issues.

Christopher Sandford, in his book *Bowie: Loving the Alien*, suggests that the road that led to *I. Outside* began with Bowie’s 1974 album, *Diamond Dogs*. He states: “Diamond Dogs was also the beginning of Bowie’s post-modern outlook, in which life was not a coherent story of biography, but merely a succession of moments, each unconnected to the last or the next.”⁴ *Diamond Dogs* is similar to *I. Outside* in subject matter as well. First suggested as a musical based on George Orwell’s novel *1984*, the album presents a dystopian future within which society lives in a state of limbo, without hope for the future.

³David Bowie, liner notes of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, BMG International/Arista 74321 170042, 1993. n.p.

⁴Christopher Sandford, *Bowie: Loving the Alien* (London: Warner Books, 1997), 125.

Often coupled with the theme of hopelessness is that of nihilism, or the rejection of all philosophy and ethics. Many presentations of possible dystopian futures feature the alienating and destructive effect of technology on humanity. Nihilism and alienation of technology are themes which are common in the genre of Industrial music. From purely Industrial bands such as Ministry, to more eclectic groups such as Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails, nihilism has been a predominant theme.

In 1992, the industrial band Ministry released *Psalm 69: The Way to Succeed and to Suck Eggs*. The cover features an etched drawing or photo of an angelic figure seen from behind, framed by various items including an eyeball, razorblade, glove and various mechanical parts. The two most obvious characteristics of this album are the extremely harsh sound of the music and the blatantly critical lyrics of the songs. Musically, Ministry employs drum machines to produce very rapid rhythms, often stressing all four beats with the emphatic bass drum beat. This beat is then combined with extremely distorted guitars which are placed at the front of the mix, and also very rough sounding vocals, treated with distortion effects until they are hardly recognized as human. This results in music which is extremely confrontational and aggressive. Lyrically, songs like "Scarecrow" and "Psalm 69" seem to mock traditional Western spirituality.

“Scarecrow” invokes an image of Christ, “crucified and left in isolation, pictures of our lost morality.”⁵ While these lyrics might be suggestive of a criticism of worldliness and a recognition of the tragedy of Christ’s death, because of “lost morality,” Ministry labels Jesus simply as a “scarecrow,” hanging to scare the birds away. “Psalm 69” is much more blatant in its attack against traditional Christianity. The song begins with a stereotypical minister in a high British accent saying, “Congregation, please be seated and open your prayer guides to the book of Revelations, Psalm 69.” The music begins with a choir backing up grand guitar power chords, with various samples including a man saying “Praise Jesus,” before the guitars begin with full force. They establish a faster pace to the song, and the vocals enter sounding almost demonic with their guttural and rough delivery. The lyrics are violent while also invoking images of ritual: “Drinking the blood of Jesus, drinking it right from his veins. Learning to swim in the ocean, learning to prowl in his name.”

Continuing in this vein, Marilyn Manson released *Antichrist Superstar* in 1996. The first single from this release was entitled “The Beautiful People,” featuring many of the same musical characteristics as Ministry’s earlier release. Lyrically, Manson deals with violence, the image of beauty and the notion of infection. With lyrics like, “There’s no time to discriminate, hate every motherfucker that’s in your way,” and “Capitalism has made it this way, old

⁵A. Jourgensen & P. Barker, “Scarecrow,” lyrics reprinted from <http://www.prongs.org/ministry/albums/alice.php3>; Internet; accessed 11 June 2000.

fashioned fascism will take it away,” many felt that Manson was encouraging violence and hatred.⁶ Manson also suggests that beauty is relative, but the prospects of life are dim: “The worm will live in every host. It’s hard to pick which one they eat the most.” The music is confrontational, although it does not rely on electronics as heavily as is the case with Ministry. Because of the more acoustic nature of Manson’s music, it could be perceived as more human. For instance, the vocal distortion is not produced electronically, but rather by perceived rage on the part of the vocalist. The result is not music produced by an emotionless machine, but rather by an extremely expressive human.

Very human in expression is Nine Inch Nails’ album, *The Downward Spiral*, released in 1994. The album is technologically-themed, with songs such as “The Becoming” describing the alienation of technology and its dehumanizing effects. The lyrics are generally nihilistic throughout the album, dealing with violence, sexuality and suffering:

Bamboo punctures this skin
and nothing comes bleeding out of me just like a waterfall I’m
drowning in
2 feet below the surface I can still make out your wavy face
and if i could reach you maybe i could leave this place⁷

The Downward Spiral liner notes feature close-up photos of what appears to be a painting or sculpture which consists of an assembly of dirt or sand, bits of string

⁶Marilyn Manson, “The Beautiful People,” lyrics reprinted from <http://www.cfnweb.com/manson/acss.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 June 2000.

⁷Trent Reznor, “I Do Not Want This,” lyrics from liner notes of Nine Inch Nails, *The Downward Spiral*, Interscope, INTSD92346, 1994. n.p.

and twigs, bird feathers and a liquid which resembles blood. These photos, which are placed throughout the lyrics booklet, contribute to a sense of destruction and decay. For the tour of this album, Trent Reznor and Nine Inch Nails joined with David Bowie and the *1. Outside* tour, during which the two performed some songs together.

1. Outside could be considered as coming from or being a part of this musical *milieu*, drawing from this atmosphere of nihilism, the alienation of humanity through technology and the criticism of traditional Western spirituality. While Ministry and Manson seem to criticise institutional Christianity directly, Bowie does so indirectly, without being personally invested in such criticism. It is through the comments or actions of others (in *1. Outside*, the actions of the various characters) that these criticisms come. Bowie himself does not necessarily possess a nihilistic world view or believe that technology alienates humanity—in fact, Bowie would probably feel that the opposite is true, considering his recent interest in the Internet and its creation of community—but he explores these themes through characters which conveniently serve to distance himself from any implications or responsibility. This paper will explore two issues which present themselves with Bowie's *1. Outside*. The first is Bowie's engagement with the culture of body modification. In his comments to the press, and in particular, those to Ian Penman of *Esquire* magazine, Bowie suggests that the acts of body modification serve as a substitute for the Judeo-Christian ethic. Bowie also mentions various manifestations of body modification in the written

narrative which accompanies the album, such as the “body play” or performance art of Ron Athey and Chris Burden, and the physical transformation of the fictional “Ramona A. Stone,” all while describing the investigation into the murder of a young girl, whose mutilated body is found on “artistic” display at the entrance to a museum. For many, the act of body modification in its various forms, including piercing and tattooing, is an act of transformation not only of the body, but also of the spirit. In other words, for some, the act of body modification is a transformative ritual, replacing the traditional role of Judeo-Christianity in Western society.

Victor Turner, in his theory of liminality, draws from anthropological studies of non-Western rite of passage rituals to create a model for transformative ritual. From these studies, he theorizes that a rite of passage as a transformative ritual consists of three phases: a pre-liminal phase, a liminal phase, and a post-liminal phase. In the pre-liminal phase, an initiate is a regular member of some socio-cultural state, although it can be extrapolated from a need for a rite of passage that an initiate in a pre-liminal phase is somehow incomplete, needing the transition of a liminal phase. The transition is followed by a post-liminal phase, into which, through some transformative event, the initiate enters as a complete member of society, or considered a member of an exclusive group. Turner defines the liminal phase as follows:

Liminality can perhaps be described as fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a

gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence. It is what goes on in nature in the fertilized egg, in the chrysalis, and even more richly and complexly in their cultural homologues.⁸

Turner's definition of liminality suggests a positive outcome among the "storehouse of possibilities," with the resulting phase being compared to the rebirth of a butterfly, or the emergence of life from the egg. Turner identifies liminal activity in industrial societies as *liminoid*, as opposed to the liminal which "predominate in tribal and early agrarian societies."⁹ He labels contemporary activity which resembles the rite of passage model of transformation as liminoid because it "*resembles* without being identical with 'liminal.'"¹⁰ In this study, an activity which resembles Turner's model of transformation, even if it occurs in the present day, will be referred to as liminal. Furthermore, if the transformative state does not fit into Turner's model of liminality, then it will be referred to as liminoid because of its lack of a positive "storehouse of possibilities" as a result of the transformation, or even its lack of anticipation of positive transformation. In other words, although Turner discusses contemporary examples of transformative events as liminoid, these will instead be referred to as liminal because of their agreement with the definition of the preindustrial liminal model supplied by Turner. While it might be desirable to determine whether

⁸Victor Turner, "Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?", *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, eds. W. Schechner & W. Appels (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12.

⁹Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual," *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 53.

¹⁰Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid," 32.

contemporary rite of passage rituals actually result in positive transformation, this is a difficult task. Not all who employ body manipulation do so for the sake of personal transformation, and certainly the results would be different in various cases. What Turner's model of the liminal does provide is a basis upon which to build a model of the liminoid, where infinite optimistic possibilities are not present after a transformative event.

The liminoid model could then be applied to a greater scope than simply a Western subculture. This liminoid model, it will be argued, is applicable to late twentieth century society as illustrated through David Bowie's *1. Outside* album. Bowie himself, in constructing *1. Outside*, suggests that the album should be read as a kind of account of the period before the dawning of a new millennium. As such, *1. Outside* represents a liminoid phase or space through lyrics, album art, music video and Bowie's live performance. As a liminoid space, it presents characteristics similar to the liminal phase, such as a recombination of familiar elements (including the *carnavalesque*, which is considered liminal in itself) and a kind of limbo state. Substituting for a liminal phase, the liminoid phase changes the teleological progression leading to transformation as outlined by Turner. The multitude of optimistic possibilities and positive transformation suggested by Turner's liminal theory is not a result of Bowie's liminoid phase. Rather, the result is pessimism and fear, and ultimately, the unknown. This unknown corresponds to the state of society upon the dawning of the twenty-first century,

with the “transformative experience” being the actual turning of the clock on 31 December 1999.

This thesis will refer to Victor Turner’s theory of liminality for its definition of a liminal phase, from which it will in turn draw its definition for a liminoid phase. An analysis of some of the music featured on *I. Outside* will utilize Chris McDonald’s method of segmental lyric analysis. In the discussion of music video, the works of Alf Björnberg, Mikhail Bakhtin and Catherine Bell will be utilized. This thesis will ultimately attempt to read *I. Outside* as a reflection of societal anxiety toward the end of the millennium, through its construction of a liminoid space.

It should be noted that this study began with the thought that there would be a simple way to determine that those involved in the subculture of body manipulation, or perhaps youth culture as understood by this author, were engaged in a liminoid model of transformation. If, in fact, a particular group did enter a liminoid experience, was it because they forsook traditional Christianity for less traditional paths of spirituality? This kind of reasoning is problematic because it bears the notion of condescension toward other religious practices, and furthermore judges the behaviour because of its apparent “failure.”

Certainly, this thesis reveals the complexity of Bowie’s album. A simple definition of Turner’s liminality has been chosen for application, which serves as only one possible analysis of what is accomplished with *I. Outside*. This thesis offers much opportunity for further study of Bowie and this work, as well as his

other recent work, particularly within the five year span between and including 1993's *Black Tie White Noise* and *Earthling*, released in 1997. Finally, this project has not explored the musical contributions made by guitarist Reeves Gabrels and pianist Mike Garson, as well as those made by producer Brian Eno, in particular.

Before embarking on the main body of this thesis, it is important to make note of the reception of Bowie's album in the latter half of 1995. This information reveals that Bowie was able to maintain a high level of exposure through his association with Nine Inch Nails and Brian Eno. Although the album did not break any chart records, it was not a dismal financial failure; Bowie's name on any album would certainly ensure a decent sales figure. As for concert attendance, many came out to the American shows to see the co-headliner Nine Inch Nails, while those in Britain were treated to an opening concert by Morrissey, the lead singer of the extremely popular 1980s British band, The Smiths. Unfortunately, many seemed to find the first single, "The Heart's Filthy Lesson," not to mention the entire album, too noisy and dense for radio, as is made clear by its performance on the charts.

1. *Outside* entered the Billboard British Albums chart at #8 for the week ending on October 7, 1995, and subsequently fell to #19 and #36 in the following weeks, disappearing from the chart soon after. In the United States, the album entered the Billboard Top 200 Albums chart at #21 for the week ending on

October 14, 1995, and fell sharply to #51 the following week (the album remained on the Top 200 for a total of five weeks).

The first single from *I. Outside* was “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” which went to #32 and #92 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts in the United Kingdom and the United States respectively for the week ending on October 14, 1995. The single spent only three weeks on the chart in the United Kingdom. “Strangers When We Meet” remained on the U.K. chart for three weeks and peaked at #37 (it did not chart in the United States). The third single, “Hallo Spaceboy,” remixed by the British electronica band Pet Shop Boys, was on the U.K. chart for five weeks and peaked at #12, making it the most successful of all three singles.¹¹

In a review of the album in *Q* magazine, Tom Doyle comments, “A bold and fascinating trip to offer his devoted listenership, *Outside* is undoubtedly David Bowie’s most dense and uncompromising work since *Scary Monsters*, and, as suggested in *Black Tie White Noise*, it’s clear that he is once again imaginatively sparking with life.”¹² Doyle points out these positive aspects of the album while mentioning that “those legions who came in on *Let’s Dance* will most certainly be left completely and utterly bewildered.”¹³ MTV’s Robert Conroy calls the album “good but not great” due to its conceptional backdrop.¹⁴ Many of the critics consider *I. Outside* as a sign of Bowie’s return to creativity,

¹¹The chart information is culled primarily from Billboard magazine as well as “Teenage Wildlife”; <http://www.teenagewildlife.com>; Internet; accessed 25 September 1999.

¹²Tom Doyle, *Q* magazine (1995), “Outside: Reviews.”

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Robert Conroy, MTV (1995), “Outside: Reviews.”

from his creatively stagnant '80s; Conroy states, "In short, not an unqualified success, but compared to *Tonight* and *Never Let Me Down* [both released in the late 1980s], a record of near genius."¹⁵ Rick Moodie, writing in the *New York Times*, suggests that the album could be compared to Bowie's "finest albums of the '70s."¹⁶ Perhaps speaking against Bowie's more radio-friendly albums of the 1980s, *People* magazine's Jeremy Helligar, regarding the single, "Hallo Spaceboy," comments that "such outbursts may be a bit rough on the ears, but then Bowie was never easy listening."¹⁷ Stuart Bailie, in *Vox* magazine, finds that the album does nothing to "shake your emotions" and that Bowie "sounds rather removed."¹⁸ In a rather scathing review, Gareth Grundy comments:

If [Bowie] thinks high art is a cunning way to illustrate end-of-century angst, he's clearly so far up his own behind he can nibble his lower intestine. . . . *Outside* is the sound of a superstar discovering *Blade Runner*, *Neuromancer* and the Apple Mac a decade after us plebs.¹⁹

Interestingly, while suggesting that the album will not be embraced by the general population, David Fricke, in the *Rolling Stone* review, comments that "*Outside* has irresistible charms."²⁰

Although many of the critics praise the work for its creativity, many also think that it is too pretentious to be embraced by a large audience. Their

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Rick Moodie, *New York Times* (10 September 1995), "Outside: Reviews."

¹⁷Jeremy Helligar, *People* magazine (16 October 1995), "Outside: Reviews."

¹⁸Bailie, "Outside: Reviews."

¹⁹Gareth Grundy, *Select* magazine (October 1995), "Outside: Reviews."

²⁰David Fricke, *Rolling Stone* magazine (19 October 1995), "Outside: Reviews."

convictions may have been proved correct by the meagre showing the album made on the charts in both the United States and Britain. In concert, much of the same critical spirit prevailed, although many fans attended because of Bowie's choice of the popular techno/industrial band, Nine Inch Nails.

In chapter 3, much is made of Sanford's description of Bowie's striking clothing and somewhat aggressive disposition during his appearance on David Letterman's television programme. Many of the *1. Outside* concert reviews fail to mention Bowie's appearance at all. Instead, many focus on the co-headliner for the North American tour, Nine Inch Nails. In a review of the concert in Mountain View, California, on October 21, 1995, Barry Walters of the *San Francisco Examiner* dedicates a paragraph to the band, commenting that lead singer Trent Reznor "stalked the stage, threw around his mike stand, tackled his musicians, knocked over the equipment and pounded on his instruments."²¹ Walters suggests that most of the crowd came to see Reznor and Nine Inch Nails. Although he speaks somewhat negatively about Reznor's violent and "bratty" behaviour, and Bowie's cold delivery of the unfamiliar material from *1. Outside*, he comments that "it was oddly moving to see these icons of alienation uniting together, riding each other's stylistic coattails. Their inspired union justified the indulgence of the rest."²²

²¹Barry Walters, "David Bowie," *The San Francisco Examiner* (October 23, 1995); <http://www.sfgate.com/ea/walters/1023.html>; Internet; accessed 9 July 1999.

²²*Ibid.*

Unlike Sanford, Eric Lipton, in the Internet magazine *Addict*, had a more positive take on Bowie's new appearance:

Bowie's taken the stage. The Thin White Duke was wearing, surprise, white. And he's huge. I don't mean in size, although he is considerably taller than Reznor. But there's something more: style. While Reznor throws things around and screams for presence, Bowie strides. He raises his arm. He croons into the mike. He commands the stage, and the audience. His voice, deep and resounding, reduces everything else to a whine. Even the drums are put into place. The man is pure sex.²³

For Lipton, the "new" *I. Outside* atmosphere, if unfamiliar, is still created by Bowie and is, therefore, good. It would seem that Bowie's long time fans were not turned away by the album or the concerts. If anything, many were left longing for more of the same.

Generally, this information reveals that Bowie was successful not necessarily in the album itself, but rather with its presentation, particularly in his choices of who he surrounded himself with. His choice of Brian Eno as producer must have pleased the critics, allowing them to reflect on the much respected collaborations of the late 1970s. Furthermore, Bowie's choice of co-headlining band was a superb one: at this point, Nine Inch Nails' album *The Downward Spiral* had long reached number 2 on the Top 200 charts and had also been certified double-platinum (shipping 2 million units).²⁴ Although its place on the

²³Eric Lipton, "Ziggy Strikes Again! Bowie and Reznor never 'Hurt' so good..." *Addict* 1.11 (November 1995); <http://www.addict.com/issues/1.11/Sections/Live/Bowie-Reznor/index.html>; Internet; accessed 9 July 1999.

²⁴As of the 9 September 1995 Billboard Top 200 chart, Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral* was at number 92, falling from number 88 the previous week. The next week, 16 September 1995, the album was relegated to the lower half of the chart, no longer in the top 100.

charts in September was not very high, the fact that the album remained in the Top 200 and was already deemed multi-platinum made the group a perfect choice to boost attendance at Bowie concerts, which began a couple of weeks before *I. Outside* was released. By aligning with those who would give him the most exposure, Bowie was able to get the most exposure for his work. Although highly speculative, one wonders whether Bowie's choice of Nine Inch Nails was also motivated by his apparent interest in body modification and the widespread manifestation of piercing and tattooing and the like, a behaviour which is arguably more common among their particular audience.

Finally, it should be noted that the audience that enjoys Nine Inch Nails is generally not the same audience that enjoys David Bowie. Many of the reviewers comment that those who came to see Trent Reznor left when Bowie began to perform. In a sense, Bowie was simply an observer during his concerts, singing to an audience that was not necessarily his own. Since many who attended the concert to see David Bowie were confronted by unfamiliar material, perhaps they could also be considered as observers of an "Other." As will be explored in chapter 3 of this thesis, the idea of Bowie performing for an audience while apparently alienating them is an example of juxtaposition which, in combination with other examples, creates ambiguity contributing to a sense of unease.

CHAPTER 1

THE CULTURE OF BODY MODIFICATION

*I hurt myself today to see if I still feel,
I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real*
- Trent Reznor, "Hurt."¹

In "The Diary of Nathan Adler," a narrative printed as part of the liner notes to *1. Outside*, David Bowie writes about the blood-rituals of the Viennese castrationists in the 1970s and the performance art, or "body play," of Chris Burden and Ron Athey. Bowie calls this "ritual art":

My input revolved around the idea of ritual art—what options were there open to that kind of quasi-sacrificial blood-obsessed sort of art form? And the idea of neo-paganism developing—especially in America—with the advent of the new cults of tattooing and scarification and piercings and all that. I think people have a real need for some spiritual life and I think there's great spiritual starving going on. There's a hole that's been vacated by an authoritative religious body—the Judeo-Christian ethic doesn't seem to embrace all the things that people actually need to have dealt with in that way—and it's sort of been left to popular culture to soak up the leftover bits like violence and sex.²

Bowie suggests that the increase of piercing and tattooing that took place in the 1990s, from the common piercing of ears ranging to the more macabre forms of "body art," such as public displays of bloody self-mutilation, are an indicator of a

¹Reznor, "Hurt," *The Downward Spiral*, n.p.

²Ian Penman, "The Resurrection of Saint Dave," *Esquire Magazine* (October 1995); <http://www.algonet.se/~bassman/articles/95/e.html>; Internet; accessed 9 July 1999.

new spirituality. Bowie is referring to the behaviour of self-mutilation as a substitute for the Judeo-Christian ethic in satisfying a deep spiritual longing in society. By also discussing the “ritual art” of Burden and Athey, Bowie is asking if there is a discernable line between pathological self-mutilation and culturally sanctioned body modification and public “artistic” displays. Bowie is also exploring the ritual nature of these activities and how they define and contribute to the spirituality of those who take part in them. Because ritual is often thought of as particularly removed from everyday activities, it could be considered as an act which connects a participant to something other than the everyday, generally considered the spiritual.

In the narrative, Bowie presents a fictional story of the investigation of a gruesome murder. The body is that of a young girl, her dismembered parts put on “artistic” display at the entrance to a museum. The investigator’s primary task is to determine whether this murder could be considered art. Bowie, in the guise of narrator and investigator Nathan Adler, suggests that a precedent for this display of “murder as art” could be found in the violent and bloody performance art of Ron Athey and Chris Burden, as well as in the art of Damien Hirst, in which dead and preserved animals are put on display. In his comments to Ian Penman in *Esquire*, Bowie suggests that these “quasi-sacrificial blood-obsessed” art forms could be an embodiment of the “neo-paganism” associated with the culture of body modification. Specifically, Bowie says that body modification as a form of neo-paganism has helped people to deal with certain issues in their lives that have

not been appropriately addressed by the Judeo-Christian ethic. The behaviour of body modification is often considered transformative not only in the physical sense, but also spiritually. Body modification can be considered a statement against the Judeo-Christian ethic, and also against the notion of the split between the mind and the body.

Through an analysis of various forms of body modification and their motivations, Bowie's critique of the Judeo-Christian ethic will be evaluated. Bowie, while engaging with the notion of body modification as a replacement for Western religion, seems to suggest that an atmosphere of fear and limbo in regards to the future has emerged with the popularity of various manifestations of body modification in the 1990s. Bowie does not propose that this pessimistic atmosphere is directly linked to the activities of body modification, but rather that fear in society is a manifestation of the unknown state of the world after the change of the calendar to the year 2000 (in short, millennial angst). In an interview in *Musician* magazine, Bowie states, "There is almost an unconscious, collective paranoia about hitting a brick wall at the end of every hundred years. . . . An intoxicating swirl of paranoia! It was hard enough ending a hundred years—how do you end a millennium?"³ Through his album, Bowie creates a *liminoid* space, a space which denies known outcomes, as a metaphor for societal anxiety at the end of the twentieth century. In an attempt to come to an understanding of the

³Mark Rowland, "The Outside Story," *Musician* 204 (November 1995), 39.

behaviour of body modification, this chapter will begin by briefly looking at its histories and various manifestations. Also, this discussion will turn toward the exploration of the phenomenon of “body play,” as proposed by Jean-Chris Miller, Rufus C. Camphausen and Marilee Strong, and will address Bowie’s claim regarding the ritual nature of body modification as a return to spirituality.

Various writers on the subject of cultural body modification use differing terms to describe it. For this discussion, the term “modification” will be primarily used, as per Kim Hewitt’s discussion of terminology in the introduction to her book, *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*. She comments that some might object to her use of the term “mutilation” rather than “adornment,” because of the somewhat pejorative connotations of the former, often used to refer to violent destruction so as to render an object imperfect.⁴ Here, “modification” will refer to the action of removal or alteration of a body part. This discussion will begin with the comments of social anthropologist Ted Polhemus in his book, *The Customized Body*, where he explores the general motivations for the behaviour of body modification.

Polhemus suggests that humans are the only creatures who choose to manipulate their appearance, and whose appearance has never been dictated only by genetics, a claim which is difficult to prove, and Polhemus makes no attempt to

⁴Kim Hewitt, *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 1.

do so. He suggests that a most likely reason for such modification is self-expression, but that it also marks group membership. Polhemus continues:

Because colour, pattern, adornments and so on all tap into and express deeper meanings—that is, because red/blue, stripes/dots, etc. are a kind of language—a tribe can use the customized body as a means of expressing complex values, beliefs and ideals. In this the customized body is the medium within which tribal customs are most succinctly and powerfully expressed.⁵

Polhemus suggests that in the Western world, a person has a choice as to which tribe they would like to be associated with at any given time, resulting in a “perpetual motion machine of different, constantly changing ways of altering the appearance of the human form.”⁶ Polhemus is ignoring the fact that the ability to choose one’s associations can be limited by socio-economic factors, such as race, class, religion, etc. Nevertheless, against this notion of constant change are the forms of permanent body modification such as piercing and tattooing, offering a kind of stability and continuity to the self. Without this stability and continuity, a person can feel absolutely powerless and lost in an environment of continual change. By gaining control over the body, one can take ownership of the self, and is more able not to allow anything to happen that is not sanctioned by the self. While control can never be absolutely attained, a person is no longer completely at the whim of constant changes in society; rather, a person is now able to control her own appearance in the face of these changes.

⁵Ted Polhemus and Housk Randall, *The Customized Body* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1996), 7-8. Polhemus’ text is supplemented by Randall’s photographs, which make up a significant portion of this book.

⁶Ibid., 9.

Of course, changing the outward appearance does not necessarily mean absolute control of the self. Physical modification, although certainly linked to thought processes, does not necessarily change them. Furthermore, there is no constancy in the physical in itself. No matter how much control one takes in affecting change in the body, there is always the chance of sudden unexpected change. For instance, various health issues can unpredictably arise. The sense of the physical body as a tangible and controllable element in a constantly changing society is not totally accurate. The physical body is just as susceptible to change, even with the appliance of body modification as a source of stability and continuity, as is the rest of society.

In discussing the culture of body modification in his book, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, Clinton Sanders presents another possible underlying motivation for the behaviour:

Deviation from and conformity to the societal norms surrounding attractiveness are . . . at the core of discussions of appearance and alterations of the physical self. Those who choose to modify their bodies in ways that violate appearance norms—or who reject culturally prescribed alterations—risk being defined as socially or morally inferior. Choosing to be a physical deviant symbolically demonstrates one's disregard for the prevailing norms.⁷

The modification of the body is, according to Sanders, a rebellion against the *appearance* norms of society. By rejecting these norms, a body modifier becomes a symbol of individuality gaining power to determine one's identity. The problem

⁷Clinton R. Sanders, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 2.

with this kind of reasoning is that the appearance norms of society are always changing. What was considered deviant a few years ago is now an apparent norm. For instance, since the late 1990s, various forms of piercing have become common among young people, as have tattoos. Although these modifications may be characteristic of young people rebelling against the appearance norms of their parents, these young people will eventually become parents themselves. The types of body modification will have to change to remain relevant as signs of rebellion against the appearance norms of society. Also, tattoos and piercings as symbols of individuality are increasingly less effective as these physical modifications become norms.

But where do the roots of body modification lie? Examples of body modification through mutilation have been located in various aspects of both Western and non-Western cultures. By exploring these possible origins of body modification, as well as through a discussion of the various types and their motivations, one may move closer to an understanding of the behaviour. With this understanding, a critique of Bowie's comments regarding the spiritual nature of body modification will follow.

Mutilation in Religion and Society

In *Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation in Culture and Psychiatry*, Armando Favazza explores both the clinical behaviour of self-mutilation—for example, “cutting,” or the pathological behaviour of slashing the skin—as well as

the culturally accepted forms of the practice, such as tattooing, piercing and scarification.⁸ He outlines mutilative images in both Western and non-Western religions and in sacred art and secular literature, and then continues to outline specific mutilations in which people engage.

Laying a foundation for the practice of body modification, Favazza explores the role of blood and mutilation in religion, beginning with Tibetan Tantrism. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* outlines a series of meditations on death and birth experienced in various psychological states. Throughout these various states, the meditator experiences the visitation of various peaceful divinities, but these make way for terrifying deities of violence and mutilation. For the meditator, enlightenment occurs when she realizes that these images are being projected from within herself.⁹

In North American Indian mysticism, and particularly in the Sun Dance of the Plains Indians and other buffalo hunting tribes, the mutilation is not limited to a psychological experience, as in the case of Tibetan meditation.¹⁰ The Sun Dance

⁸“Cutting” is often resorted to as a means of remedying the sensation of “depersonalization.” A “cutter” will slash the skin, often on his arms or legs, with a razor blade or another sharp object. This activity will continue until blood appears, which gives the “cutter” a renewed sense of self. This behaviour will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Scarification—the deliberate cutting of the skin for the formation of scar tissue—is a widely accepted practice in non-Western cultures, but is becoming increasingly popular in Western culture.

⁹Armando R. Favazza, M.D. & Barbara Favazza, M.D., *Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation in Culture and Psychiatry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 10. Favazza does not describe the appearance of the “deities of mutilation” beyond their identification as “wrathful” and “terrifying.”

¹⁰Favazza cites H.B. Alexander, *The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

is an eight day ritual and culminates in the Gazing-At-The-Sun dance, which portrays the dangers of warrior life, capture, torture and release. In the ritual, the dancers are “captured” and incisions are made in their backs and chests. Pieces of wood are attached to leather thongs which are then inserted under the cut muscles, and the thongs are attached to a tall pole. The participants dance trying to break free from their bonds, some struggling so violently that the wooden pieces rip through their flesh. The pure in heart should be able to withstand the pain of the ritual and are expected to receive a vision that would make clear the meaning and course of their lives.¹¹

Throughout its history, Christianity has included mutilation at its very core, namely in the passion of Christ. Favazza comments that the most powerful images of Christ and His suffering were developed in paintings between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Art historians have categorized the various images, which find their origins in the Biblical account of Jesus’ crucifixion. These image categories include the flagellation of Christ, the wounded Christ displayed (*Ecco Homo*, or “Behold the Man”), Christ nailed to the cross and crucified, Christ mourned, Mary’s grief (*Pietà*), Christ’s sufferings exemplified (Jesus as Man of Sorrows), and *Arma Christi* focussing on Christ’s suffering—*Arma* referring to the tools of suffering, such as the spear, nails, the crown of thorns, etc. Christian art has also associated instruments of torture with

¹¹Ibid., 11.

biblical figures (the inverted crucifixion of Peter, for instance), and devotional books often vividly depict the gruesome fate of martyrs in both words and drawings.¹²

Other examples of sacred art that refer to acts of mutilation include Hieronymus Bosch's Triptych of the *Garden of Delights* and *The Last Judgement* (from the sixteenth century). Bosch's paintings exhibit various punishments for sin, including being gnawed by animals and having limbs removed. References to mutilation in a religious context also appear in secular literature. In Flannery O'Connor's book, *Wise Blood*, the author presents a character who puts rocks into his shoes before placing them on his feet and wears strands of barbed wire under his shirt, because he isn't "clean" without Christ.¹³ By identifying in such a material way with Christ's suffering, O'Connor's character perhaps endeavours to cleanse himself of his iniquities. Through pain—something that can be felt—he is able to empathize with and thus come closer to Christ. Often stressed in evangelical Protestant Christianity, salvation is attained by faith and through belief in Christ alone. The lack of tangible or physical evidence of salvation, a trend perceived when observing evangelical Protestant Christianity, is resolved in this case by a definite feeling of pain and a resulting permanent mark—proof of an

¹²Ibid., 13-16. Favazza also mentions apocryphal images such as the pierced sacred heart, surrounded by a crown of thorns below a cross. (p. 16)

¹³Ibid., 18-20.



Figure 1.1. Annibale Carracci's *The Dead Christ* (c. 1582).

event of seeking salvation. The marking of the body for the purpose of salvation is a move away from the idea of salvation by faith and towards the idea of salvation through the body and the self. O'Conner thus presents a character who strives to reach Christ through his own self-mutilation and not through any other religious means.

As a particularly potent example of sacred art which focuses on Christ, Richard Leppert explores Annibale Carracci's painting, *The Dead Christ* (c.1582), through which the observer is invited to survey the mutilated body of Christ (see Figure 1.1):

The angle of view gives us access to the multiple penetrations of Christ's body and the principle means by which his body was wounded: the crown of thorns and, especially stiletto-like nails, their irregularly flattened heads visually reverberating with the force of the invisible hammer strikes used to drive them home. . . . Christ's hand is grotesquely misshapen in stiffened reaction to the

iron nail; and its greenish cast, the shade even more evident on the ghastly profiled face, indicates the onset of decomposition.¹⁴

The painting draws attention to various physical mutilations, and brings to light some of the more gruesome aspects of the execution, such as the force necessary to drive nails through a body part. By so doing, the painting makes the event more real; the Crucifixion is no longer a romanticized event or fable. The grotesque details, such as the stiffness of the hand or the onset of decomposition, serve to emphasize the terrible experience of Christ's sacrificial death. The notion of sacrifice as the only means by which to achieve salvation underlies much of Western thought due to the vast influence of the Christian Church. From the perspective of evangelical Protestant Christianity, the idea of salvation through personal suffering would be discouraged, because in such an action salvation is arrived at through the self rather than through Christ. Therefore, the examples of attaining salvation through some physical action, whether by empathizing with Christ or by some analogous sacrifice to that of Christ, represent alternatives to the Christian method of salvation. Salvation through faith alone, a tenet held by most Protestant Christians, would deny a route to salvation through the physical. Through the cultural saturation of Christian images of mutilation, spilling also into secular literature in the case of O'Connor, the idea of salvation through

¹⁴Richard Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery* (Boulder: Westview/HarperCollins, 1996). 115-6.

physical means may be a motivation for the act of body modification as a transformative action.

Images of mutilation are also present in various myths of creation—in particular, in the *Rigveda* (India), *Greater Bundahisn* (Iran) and *Prose Edda* (Scandinavia) religions—where creation is the result of the sacrifice and mutilation of the primordial hermaphroditic being. Favazza explains,

The first sacrifice of the Primordial Being was the origin of the world, and from the mutilation of this being society and social order were established. Over the millennia this myth in its various elaborations has been, and continues to be, reenacted in countless religious rituals. With each reenactment the world and social order are recreated. Participants in these rituals experience the suffering and terror that come with sacrifice and mutilation, but they are rewarded for their participation in this mythic process by feelings of security, solace, well-being, and personal order.¹⁵

Finally, Favazza discusses examples from disparate traditions which suggest that “bodily mutilation is a stepping stone to wisdom, special capacities for healing oneself and others, and a higher level of existence.”¹⁶ He attempts to explain the importance of sacrifice and suffering in the context of religion, suggesting that there is a link between sacrifice and prayer. For example, a person offers a valuable sacrificial gift to a deity anticipating a favourable response in return; the blood and flesh of sacrificial victims serve to rejuvenate the deities themselves. Also, there is a communion which is established between a people and their deity as a result of their partaking of the sacrificial animal. Furthermore,

¹⁵Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 24-5.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 27.

a sacrifice is an act which, through the consecration of a victim, the moral state of the sacrificer is changed, and the act establishes a communion between the sacred world and the present one.¹⁷ As with O'Connor's protagonist, a relationship with the divine is facilitated through physical sacrifice.

Some may view the behaviour of self-mortification or body modification in a religious context as pathological. To differentiate between clinical self-mutilators and those involved in activities mentioned above (for instance, self-flagellating monks in ascetic orders), Favazza comments that the acts of mentally ill self-mutilators have no transcendency: "They have little meaning for the universe or the world or the community at large but rather affect only the self-mutilators and occasionally the members of their small social networks."¹⁸

The obvious question is whether the activities of culturally sanctioned body modifiers have meaning for the community at large as well. The community at large, or the *mainstream*, is defined in opposition to marginalized segments within it. The culture of body manipulation as ritual is marginal, or "outside of what is central and therefore dominant."¹⁹ Those who are involved in body modification are simply a segment of a greater population in Western society.

¹⁷Ibid., 31. Favazza cites anthropologists: Tylor (no information given); J.G. Frazer, "The Origin of Circumcision," *Independent Review* 4 (1904), 204-218; *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1958); G.E. Smith & W.R. Dawson, *Egyptian Mummies* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924); and H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice*. L'Année sociologique 2 (1899), published in English as *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (London: Cohen and West, 1964).

¹⁸Ibid., 44.

¹⁹Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., "Marginal/Marginalization," *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 174.

The larger group, referred to here as the community at large, does not perform body modification as ritual. Body modification is often seen by mainstream culture as deviant, and thus the actions of body modifiers only affect themselves and their relatively small social network, in relation to the mainstream. This is not to say that the practices of subcultures are unimportant. Rather, the meanings of their actions are not recognized by the larger community, and are often recognized as deviant or abhorrent. Some of the lesser practices of body modification, such as various ear, facial and navel piercings, have seeped into mainstream culture, and in so doing, have lost much of their association with ritual and transformation. Although in one sense, the actions of body modifiers are aimed directly at the community at large as an act of rebellion against the mainstream aesthetic, in another sense, the belief of the transformative nature of the action to which some body modifiers subscribe is lost to mainstream culture. In the mainstream, the modifications have become adornments which serve an aesthetic purpose or as a means by which an individual follows a particular trend. The actions of body modifiers, who recognize the acts as transformative, therefore have little meaning for the community at large. Favazza's statement regarding clinical self-mutilators can equally be applied to body modifiers. Unfortunately, his statement does nothing to help to differentiate between the two groups. The line between pathological self-mutilation and culturally sanctioned body modification is still difficult to determine.

Types of Body Modification

In order to more easily grasp a variety of types of mutilation, it is worthwhile to attempt to compartmentalize them. Rufus C. Camphausen divides the techniques into four types: noninvasive, invasive, temporary and permanent. Noninvasive practices refer to those methods which are only applied onto the surface of the body and do not involve any structural change of it. Such decoration includes body paint and hair styles. Invasive practices refer to techniques which modify any part of the body—temporarily or permanently—by cutting, piercing or changing its surface, introducing foreign substances, or changing the body's bone structure. Temporary decorations can be further classified as short-term or long-term, depending on how long they last after their application. Permanent changes refer to invasive modification of soft-tissue (the elongation of an earlobe piercing, for instance) as well as hard-tissue alterations (such as bone changes and amputation).²⁰

An ancient permanent and invasive modification was that of head moulding. In ancient Egypt, constricting bandages were wrapped around the heads of infants to produce a slope similar to that of the king. This activity continued in Europe until the middle of the 19th century (greatly influenced by phrenology).²¹ An example of temporary mutilation of the head occurs among

²⁰Rufus C. Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal: A Celebration of Body Adornment* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1997), 18-22.

²¹Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 61-3.

the *Hamadsha* of Morocco, a lower class healing brotherhood, where head slashing is practiced in a healing ritual.²²

Favazza mentions the mutilation of the eyes as rare and not culturally accepted (except in biblical references). The piercing of ears for wearing jewellery is an ancient tradition, as is the piercing of the nose in Indian culture. Major modification of the nose is generally only performed for cosmetic reasons, although piercing of the nose and mouth are increasingly common in the West. Piercing is the most widespread form of body manipulation, with the earlobe being the most popular site. Polhemus points out that simple piercing is not the only possibility as some insert plugs into the holes to stretch them, adding larger plugs or heavier jewellery over time. The choice of which body part is pierced often reflects a certain privileging of that part:

the enormous lip plugs of the Amazon tend to be found amongst those tribes where the art of oratory is highly developed and respected while the most startling examples of nose piercing found in New Guinea tend to occur in societies where smell is accorded great significance and where breath is equated with the life-force.²³

It is interesting to note that the modifications in this case have a direct relationship with the spiritual life of the society. These body modifications are not only aesthetic adornments but also have a ritual significance.

²²Ibid., 66-7. Favazza notes that the *Hamadsha's* ritual is considered extreme by most other Muslim healing groups.

²³Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 37.

Less popular among both Western and non-Western culturally sanctioned body modification is the amputation of fingers. Favazza states that unnamed African tribes perform this activity as a sign of engagement and marriage, as a sacrifice at funerals, to heal a sick person, or to protect them from disease. The mutilation of hands and arms is often performed in Middle Eastern countries as punishment for crimes such as stealing, and the hands are often associated with special powers (Favazza uses the example of the Western occult belief in the “hand of glory,” a severed hand of a hanged man said to possess healing powers).²⁴ The most common form of modification of the feet was foot binding in China, where young girls had their feet tightly bound to force the toes back toward the heel for many years, resulting in a tiny foot measuring three or four inches, making walking very difficult. The foot, referred to as a “Lotus Foot,” had extremely erotic connotations in Imperial China, and those girls who underwent the process were highly sought after as courtesans or wives by wealthy men.²⁵

Modification of the skin is significant, as the skin is often perceived as “a border between the outer world and the inner world, the environment and the personal self.”²⁶ In clinical cases, Favazza comments that “cutting” often occurs during an experience of “depersonalization”:

Certain psychopathological conditions such as acute psychosis or hallucinogenic drug intoxication may cause the skin-self border to

²⁴Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 106-9.

²⁵Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 59.

²⁶Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 123.

rupture, with the result being an inability to perceive where the body ends and the outside world begins. During the experience of a phenomenon known as depersonalization, persons may retain a grip on reality yet feel that something strange is happening to their sense of self. To terminate this frightening and numbing feeling they may deliberately slice open their skin. . . . The cutting causes blood to appear and stimulate the nerve endings in the skin. When this occurs cutters first are able to verify that they are alive, and then are able to focus attention on their skin border and to perceive the limits of their bodies.²⁷

A common practice of modification of the skin in the West is the tattoo.

The word “tattoo” was first recorded by Captain James Cook, derived from the Polynesian word *ta*, for knocking or striking.²⁸ Sanders explains:

The dominant function of tattooing in all tribal societies was to denote the bearer’s status or social identity. Commonly, the painful tattoo process was part of the rite of passage to adult status. By stoically undergoing the tattoo ritual, recipients could demonstrate their bravery to the other members of the group.²⁹

Tattooing also served to identify the bearer in the afterlife, and to provide luck, protection and good health in the present one.³⁰ In Western culture, the tattoo is historically connected to deviance and disvalued social groups.³¹ Many people, especially those in nonconformist groups, get tattoos to demonstrate their defiance

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Sanders, *Customizing the Body*, 14. Sanders quotes the diary of Captain James Cook during his exploration of the South Pacific in July, 1769: “Men and women [of Tahiti] paint their bodies. In their language, this is known as ta-tu. They inject a black colour under their skin, leaving a permanent trace.”

²⁹Ibid., 10.

³⁰Ibid., 11.

³¹Ibid., 3. Sanders suggests that this connection to deviance also gives significant power “to separate ‘us’ from ‘them.’”

of traditional authority while providing a sense of identity and belonging to a certain group.³²

Scarification (also called cicatrization) refers to the process of cutting the skin in order to produce scars, and is prevalent among those with darkly pigmented skin which is not as suitable for tattooing. Scars are often produced for beauty and to indicate social status. Favazza comments,

it seems likely that the scars resulting from self-mutilation may themselves have a symbolic significance related to the notions of rebirth, the continuity of the life process, and the stability of relationships. The presence of scar tissue is a physiological indication of wound healing. In cases of deviant self-cutting, the formation of scar tissue may sometimes symbolize psychological healing.³³

Another form of scarification is branding, where a hot piece of metal comes into contact with the skin. Jean-Chris Miller suggests that there may also be a physical reason for this painful modification: “People who have been branded speak about the incredible endorphin rush they get (sometimes they go into a low level of shock!)—and the incredible pain they feel once the endorphins wear off.”³⁴

Through the processes of scarification and branding, the skin becomes textured due to the formation of scar tissue. Lamenting the disappearance of traditional scarification in African countries where it has been banned, and its lack of strong

³²Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 125-7. See pp. 18-9 of Sanders’ book for a brief history of tattooing in Western culture, which suggests the roots of the association of tattooing with the defiance of authority.

³³*Ibid.*, 130.

³⁴Jean-Chris Miller, *The Body Art Book: A Complete, Illustrated Guide to Tattoos, Piercings, and Other Body Modifications* (New York: Berkley Books, 1997), 117.

following in Western culture, Polhemus says, “the customized body will become a more purely visible [rather than textural] phenomenon, its tactile possibilities lost forever.”³⁵

Castration is a form of genital mutilation which is employed for punishment and prevention of sexual misconduct, enhanced religious spirituality, and heightened social status in institutionalized eunichism.³⁶ Favazza comments that male genital mutilation is performed for many reasons:

sanitation, substitution for human sacrifice, symbolic castration, desire to be like women, elevation of the status of manhood, sexual differentiation, enhanced fertility, contraception, resolution of identity conflict, permanent incorporation into a social group, control of sexual urges, a mark of caste, a test of endurance, a covenant with God, and so on.³⁷

Male circumcision is one of the most common and culturally accepted forms of body modification in the West, finding its roots in ancient Judaism. In the account of God’s covenant with the Patriarch Abraham in Genesis 17, God commands him and his descendants to confirm their covenant with the sign of circumcision, or the removal of the foreskin of the penis. Theologian Allen P.

Ross comments:

By this symbol God impressed them with the impurity of nature and with dependence on God for the production of all life. They

³⁵Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 24. As evidenced by various television news segments on the behaviour of self-mutilation, such as *CITYPulse*’s string of reports (Toronto, early 2000) and a feature on ABC’s *20/20 DOWNTOWN* programme (October, 1999), the act of Scarification continues to be a major part of the culture, and participation in this form of modification may be growing.

³⁶Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 146.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 153.

would recognize and remember: (a) that native impurity must be laid aside, especially in marriage, and (b) that human nature is unable to generate the promised seed [referring to the nation of Israel]. . . . Any Israelite who refused to be cut physically in this way would be **cut off** (separated) **from his people** (v. 14) because of his disobedience to God's commands.³⁸

With the advent of Christianity, circumcision became a symbol of separation, purity and loyalty to the covenant: “[Saint] Paul wrote that ‘circumcision of the heart’ (i.e., being inwardly set apart ‘by the [Holy] Spirit’) evidences salvation and fellowship with God (Rom. 2:28-29; cf. Rom. 4:11).”³⁹ The physical act of circumcision survives to this day both as a physical sign of obedience to the Abrahamic Covenant and as an apparently hygienic modification.

Male infibulation refers to the practice of putting a clasp (fibula) or string through the foreskin, making erection either painful or impossible.⁴⁰ The various forms of female genital circumcision are all considered an attempt to regulate female morality, and are strongly discouraged in Western culture. Camphausen adds:

With all due respect for people's individual choices and all celebrations of one's body, I believe there are certain borders it is better not to cross in order to remain an accepted member of whatever group, and certain practices it is better not to follow or encourage, such as forced clitoridectomy, circumcision, or castration. Those latter practices do not result in the dazzling

³⁸Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, eds. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 58. The bold typescript indicates the quotation of Scriptures in Ross' commentary. Also, it should be noted that Ross does not clearly specify what “native impurity” implies.

³⁹Ross, “Genesis,” 58.

⁴⁰Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 158-9.

works of art produced by men and women of the world's remaining tribal cultures.⁴¹

Here, Camphausen draws the line of acceptable mutilations when the subject is not making the choice, or given the choice to be modified. Unfortunately, Camphausen overlooks the fact that male circumcision is generally performed without the subject's consent. Conversely, Fakir Musafar, an American pioneer in body modification, suggests that the view of female genital mutilation, such as a clitoridectomy, as sexual domination or slavery is a Western idea:

The only time we run into possession of human beings by other human beings is in societies which have begun to accept Western "civilized" ideas and which get a cash economy. . . . The idea of possession, the idea of slavery, the idea of using in bondage one person by another is strictly as civilized idea. It does not exist in the primitive world. I've researched this deeply.⁴²

Such a view is not characteristic of what has been called the Modern Primitive movement, as is made clear by V. Vale and Andrea Juno in their introduction to *Modern Primitives*, the book from which Musafar's comments come. They suggest that many of the non-Western cultures from which the movement derives its inspiration have been "dubiously idealized and only partially understood." They comment that activities such as clitoridectomy are simply forms of repression and coercion.⁴³ Although Musafar is regarded as an expert in the area of ritual body modification, his comments here provide evidence of his own

⁴¹Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 23.

⁴²V. Vale & Andrea Juno, eds. "Fakir Musafar," *Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual* (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1989), 21.

⁴³Vale & Juno, "Introduction," *Modern Primitives*, 4.

ignorance. Vale and Juno's statement that these activities constitute "repression and coercion" is a common view held in Western culture, and Musafar's lack of tangible research to back up his claims does nothing to disprove this view.

A recent physical modification in Western culture would be aesthetic dentistry, where holes can be drilled through the teeth, metal caps are inserted onto the teeth, or the teeth are filed into points like those of an animal.⁴⁴ More extensive body modifications are, from the most common, weight training or plastic surgery, to the more rare, corset or waist training to remould the waist (this is a practice which could prove to be damaging to the bones and internal organs). Polhemus mentions Musafar and another "Modern Primitive," Orlan, as examples of those pushing the envelope of "body art," displaying extreme plastic surgery modifications and other changes, such as muscle restriction (to produce a bulge above and below the restricting band) and penis stretching.⁴⁵ Some may even implant foreign matter beneath the skin, creating a distinctive contour on the surface.⁴⁶ These artists are pushing the boundary of the definition of art, asking what is appropriate to be considered as such. Similarly, in the accompanying narrative to *I. Outside*, Bowie presents the case of a murder in which the investigator must establish whether the resulting mutilation should be considered as a work of art. It could be extrapolated that Bowie is asking the same question

⁴⁴Miller, *The Body Art Book*, 118.

⁴⁵Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 93-4.

⁴⁶Miller, *The Body Art Book*, 120.

regarding the more common manifestations of body modification prevalent in present society, but uses a spectacular example in doing so.

Miller uses the term “body art” rather than body modification when discussing the various manifestations of modifying the body. She also discusses non-permanent adornments such as *Mehndi* and body paint. *Mehndi* comes from the Indian tradition of decorating a woman’s hands and feet with complex patterns with henna dye (originally done to celebrate her wedding). The dye lasts from ten days to six weeks, and body paint is immediately removable using water.⁴⁷

Polhemus suggests that the temporary nature of body paint can serve to underline the significance of certain rituals or events, setting the events apart from the everyday. Also, body paint can function as a marker of personal development (defining age groups among the *Nuba* of Sudan, for instance) or as a transforming agent in the form of war paint.⁴⁸ Camphausen comments that henna is regarded as magical, making the wearer “more receptive to the invisible yet omnipresent fields of energy in which we live.”⁴⁹ Sanders mentions clothing and hair styling as important physical alterations as well; Polhemus suggests that clothing tends to focus attention to body parts that remain uncovered.⁵⁰ He also suggests that hairstyle works in similar ways as the more permanent modifications discussed previously, citing the hairstyles of the males of the *Nuba* tribes of Sudan and

⁴⁷Ibid., 114-6.

⁴⁸Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 11.

⁴⁹Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 47.

⁵⁰Sanders, *Customizing the Body*, 4; also Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 11. Polhemus also discusses clothing as “second skins” in detail (pp. 79-80).

young *Masai* warriors.⁵¹ Various acts of hygiene, including shaving, along with wearing wigs and manicuring nails, as well as clothing accessories (such as shoes and masks) and, as a less common phenomenon, gender modification, come under the rubric of body modification.

In many of the cases listed above, the boundary between body modification as “art” or as aesthetic adornment and as ritual is being blurred. This blurring of the boundaries can perhaps be attributed to the place that ritual inhabits in these non-Western societies, as suggested by Victor Turner. Through his discussions of the notion of liminality, which will be further explored in the next chapter, Turner suggests that the idea of everyday life, or the banal, separate from ritual is a Western postindustrial one. In these non-Western tribal societies, Turner suggests that the everyday is permeated with ritual.⁵² The idea that a Western subculture may exhibit this same blurring of boundaries could be an example of the movement of these cultures towards non-Western world views. Camphausen calls this a “return to the tribal,” embodied in those that refer to themselves as “Modern Primitives.”

Piercing is a rapidly increasing phenomenon in Western culture, with “Modern Primitives” creating new piercing possibilities. The term “Modern Primitive” is attributed to Fakir Musafar, who was one of the first Americans to publicly practice body modification as ritual and is considered a pioneer in the

⁵¹Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 50.

⁵²Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance,” 12-13.

teaching of proper piercing and ritual techniques. Musafar, born Roland Loomis in 1930, states, “We used the term to describe a non-tribal person who responds to primal urges and does something with the body.”⁵³ He suggests that the “primitive urge” works by someone performing a modification spontaneously, not necessarily being connected with any group. Vale and Juno point out that the term “primitive” in this context is used to connote “original” and “primary” rather than “less advanced” or “less civilized.” They state, “Obviously, it is impossible to return to an authentic ‘primitive’ society. . . . What is implied by the revival of ‘modern primitive’ activities is the desire for, and the dream of, a *more ideal society*.”⁵⁴

This desire for a better society finds its most powerful recent expression in the countercultural movement of the 1960s. Youth culture’s dissatisfaction with Western ideology resulted in their appropriation of non-Western practices and ways of thinking as an alternative. With the advent of the 1970s, the counterculture fragmented in various directions. John Clark, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, in their overview of subcultural theory, suggest that from among this fragmentation emerged two distinctive strands:

one way, via drugs, mysticism, the “revolution in life-style” into a Utopian alternative culture; or, the other way, via community

⁵³Vale & Juno, “Fakir Musafar,” 13.

⁵⁴Vale & Juno, “Introduction,” 4. The emphasis is that of the authors.

action, protest action and libertarian goals, into a more activist politics.⁵⁵

Although these authors are primarily speaking of British subcultural movements, their insight sheds light on the origins of the “revolution in life-style” to which many “Modern Primitives” hold. Rather than being overly activist in their desire for a better culture, the “Modern Primitives” look to other means to achieve their goals. The subversion of society in an effort toward its transformation occurs through the transformation of individuals within that society, achieved through body modification rituals.

Recognizing the increase of “Modern Primitive” behaviour in late twentieth century society, Polhemus suggests that body piercing has become very popular because of the lack of ritual and rites of passage in industrial societies.

He explains:

Here, perhaps more than in any other area of body customizing, we see the extent of the “Modern Primitive” revolution—the rediscovery of ritual, of body arts previously condemned as “barbaric” and, most importantly of all, of the fact that it is our bodies and what we do to them which define us as human beings. In an age which increasingly shows signs of being out of control, the most fundamental sphere of control is re-employed: mastery over one’s own body.⁵⁶

The fact, though, is that ritual has long been present in religious contexts, particularly in Catholic Christianity. It is true that various forms of body art have

⁵⁵John Clark, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview,” *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, S. Hall & T. Jefferson, eds. (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1976), 61-2.

⁵⁶Polhemus, *The Customized Body*, 38.

been condemned , probably attributed to Western society's split of the mind and the body, where attention on the body is considered indulgent. Furthermore, it is true that the body defines the self. In the past, and even in the present, there are those that strive to define themselves by how they adorn the body, without using permanent or semi-permanent modification (for instance, through clothing, hair style, etc.), and they do so successfully. Even so, Polhemus shares these views with Favazza, Camphausen, and other writers on the subject of body modification. They would seem to blame societal control for the repression of this behaviour. Also, Polhemus' comments suggest the privileging of the body over the mind. The idea of reclaiming control of the body comes about as a result of the split between the mind and the body which has been prevalent in Western philosophy and culture since René Descartes' (1596-1650) statement, "I think, therefore I am."⁵⁷ From this statement, his followers deduced that the human mind should be privileged above the human body and even God. With the increasingly fast pace of late 20th Century society, the tangible control of the body is often seen as a viable option for a sense of stability, rather than the traditional emphasis on the mind. These views will be further explored later in this discussion.

⁵⁷René Descartes developed these thoughts in his books, *A Discourse on Method*. trans. John Veitch (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949) and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. ed. and trans. George Heffernan. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1990).

Body Play

Among the most extreme forms of body modification is the notion of “body play.” Although the term often refers to acts of body modification, the emphasis is on the *event* of being modified. The act of modification is focussed upon as a ritual and as a transformative experience. An example of this is found in the Native Sun Dance ritual as described earlier in this chapter. Jean-Chris Miller explains:

Body play takes many forms. It can be temporary piercings or cuttings that are done for a specific event and then removed. It can be more intense, like body suspensions, where piercings are made in key points in your body, chains are attached to the jewellery, and you are then lifted off the ground, suspended by your piercings. . . . People who partake in these extreme forms of body play usually do so for their own spiritual or sexual reasons.⁵⁸

Camphausen also talks about the popularity of “body play”:

Today, more and more urban and neotribal people have discovered new and old uses of pain, even beyond the S/M scene, both gay and straight, that have sprung up during the last years in most greater cities. In many of the recent publications concerning piercing and tattooing, modifying, or even customizing the human body, one finds statements concerning the conscious and mainly positive use of pain. In recent years, more and more people have attended the “ball dances” organized in various cities across the United States [where] . . . the more daring participants have balls hooked into their flesh and then dance until, as they say, the “flesh rips.” Most who have undergone this new ritual of the “modern primitives movement” enthusiastically report on the liberating and transforming effects of the pain thus created and transcended.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Miller, *The Body Art Book*, 121.

⁵⁹Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 86-9.

Marilee Strong discusses blood play or blood sport (yet another term for “body play”), which grew out of sadomasochism, in which partners slash and pierce each other for sexual excitement. Strong recounts the comments of a young participant in such activities, discovering her motivations as “overcoming the fear and shame she has been conditioned to feel about the blood in her body, marveling at the sight and touch of it.”⁶⁰ Raelyn Gallina, a piercer from the San Francisco area, suggests that when one gets pierced or scarred, a sacrifice is made with blood and pain, opening a door for transformation or healing to take place.⁶¹ This is yet another instance of the line between ritual and art being blurred, where the ritual nature of body modification is seeping into the act of body adornment. This blurring of lines is also evident in Strong’s account of the life and performances of Bob Flanagan, a performance artist and self-proclaimed “super-masochist.” Flanagan was born with cystic fibrosis and grew up with the cloud of death hanging above his head; he maintained that he wanted to experience as much sensation as he possibly could before his death. Strong elaborates:

Flanagan linked his fascination with bondage to his life as a prisoner of a disease beyond his control. “In order not to be terrified of it, I sexualized it,” he said. Aware of how out of control his life really was, he craved surrender—“but *I* determine the surrender and who I surrender to” he declared.⁶²

⁶⁰Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream: Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), 144-5. This book deals mainly with the pathological behaviour of cutting, although Strong dedicates a chapter to the practices of piercing and body play.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 146.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 155.

Flanagan subscribed to the belief that “little deaths,” in the form of his various performances, would prepare him for ultimate death. Strong quotes Flanagan:

That’s what a lot of [S&M] activity is: these planned-out scenarios that are like dying. . . . But it’s only for five or ten minutes; it’s only experiential and then it’s over and you walk around and live out your day, *relieved*. . . . Especially in the early days, these feelings would build and build until I’d have to do it, but once I’d had enough sensation and gone far enough, there was an immediate release afterwards, and I felt peaceful, calm and sharp—like I could do anything.”⁶³

Bowie appropriates the notion of “body play” in the accompanying narrative to *I. Outside*, in the form of graphic descriptions of the work of artists such as Damien Hirst, Ron Athey and others. In a particular performance described by the writer of the narrative, American performance artist Ron Athey repeatedly pokes a knitting needle into his forehead until blood appears, and then blots his head with the paper towels, creating HIV positive “inkblot” patterns with his blood. Like the actions of Flanagan and others, Bowie suggests that Athey’s performance acts as a means of therapy or transformation. The question also asked is, if this can be considered art, why not murder? Bowie, like the detective in the narrative, does not seem to present a solution to this question. The narrative will be further explored in chapter 2.

⁶³Ibid.

Towards an Understanding of Body Modification

It is very difficult to come to a single conclusion regarding the motivations behind the behaviours being explored here. As is evident in the following discussion, there are many, often disparate, reasons for body modification.

Favazza suggests a general motivation for such behaviour:

Culturally sanctioned self-mutilative practices [in non-Western cultures] are traditional and reflect the history, symbolism, and beliefs of a society. They affect the individual, but since they are woven into the fabric of social life they also frequently affect the entire community. . . . [Culturally sanctioned and deviant self-mutilation] serve an identical purpose, namely, an attempt to correct or prevent a pathological, destabilizing condition that threatens the community, the individual, or both.⁶⁴

Favazza's equating of deviant self-mutilation with body modification in terms of purpose could be read as supporting the idea of body modification as transformative ritual, acting as a correction or prevention of some problem. His comment also suggests that a participant in culturally sanctioned actions is needful of the act of modification for their general health. Furthermore, these practices often require the participation of a group of persons, acting in a social way as well, thus fostering group solidarity. They prevent social disorder by clearly, and often permanently, defining statuses and differences between sexes and generations.⁶⁵ Body modification seems also to act as a relief of tension and aggression, offering a sense of control to the participant in a chaotic environment.

⁶⁴Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 191.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 191-2.

Specific modifications are often brought about for specific purposes.

Regarding scarification, Favazza suggests:

the cutter, in effect, performs a primitive sort of self-surgery complete with tangible evidence of healing. Scarring serves an additional purpose in that it can 'mark' a hurtful occasion. . . . The sensation of pain and the presence of blood not only interrupt the monotony of depersonalization but also indicate that the cutter is, indeed, alive and that the body's border of skin is intact and in place.⁶⁶

Such acts can also serve as an alternative to suicide (a substitution of the destruction of the whole with the destruction of a part), an indication of desperation, a manipulative ploy for attention, a remedy for perceived internal or external flaws, and as an act of creation: the production of a wound is then cared for and nurtured to health.⁶⁷

Jean-Chris Miller suggests that body manipulation is a form of self-expression. Miller explains:

These permanent marks are what define us as human beings. They are a means of self-expression and a vehicle of self-awareness, two qualities that separate us from other living things on this planet. . . . Tattooing, piercing and other adornments have been used for centuries in rites of passage, in religious rituals, or as a form of tribal identification—in *all* cultures. . . . [they are] a permanent souvenir of a life-changing moment.⁶⁸

Miller suggests that body art is used by some to reclaim an ancestral custom, or to symbolize an important event or transition in their lives. She comments that the

⁶⁶Ibid., 195-6.

⁶⁷Ibid., 196-8.

⁶⁸Miller, *The Body Art Book*, 1.

various forms of body art are important for two reasons: “They give us control over our bodies and they express things about our inner selves that words alone often cannot articulate.”⁶⁹ Miller gives a different reason than Favazza for engaging in such corporeal modification:

Because we have few rites and rituals that mark life transitions or prove our devotion to a particular group or idea, body art often fills that void. Whether to signal a life passage or to enforce a belief, the ritual and permanency of body art fulfills some basic need we have as sentient beings.⁷⁰

Some might argue that Western institutionalized religion, primarily Christianity, provides rites and rituals, and affords the opportunity for a participant to be devoted to a particular group. With Western society’s move away from institutionalized religion, body art seems to fill that void in some cases. Also, Miller suggests that body art serves as a way to recognize and celebrate the physical body, often increasing sexual stimulation (in the case of certain nipple and genital piercings).⁷¹ What is most interesting to Camphausen is the fact that the invisible self is becoming more visible; many choose to have genital piercings and even tattoos done in semipublic settings. Camphausen explains:

Often recreating a sense of ritual, such people lay bare to the group not only their skin but also their experience of both intense pain and intense pleasure. Whether or not the onlookers chant during the operation or welcome the newly adorned with applause and hugs afterwards, what we see in essence is a new member joining

⁶⁹Ibid., 4-5.

⁷⁰Ibid., 29.

⁷¹Ibid., 29-30.

the tribe in a bond that is beyond family or nation or race or gender.⁷²

This description of community membership could also be applied to religious communities. The Christian community, in particular, has often prided itself in its unqualified acceptance of all and any who subscribe to a belief in Christ and His teachings. Thus, the culture of body modification might parallel Christianity more than some might suggest.

Building on Musafar's definition, Miller also uses the term "Modern Primitives" to describe some of those who modify their bodies:

Modern Primitives incorporate the traditions of other cultures with futuristic visions of the human race. They embrace not only the old world of magic and mystery, but the new world of cybernetics and virtual reality. They take body modification to new heights by using the latest surgical and chemical technology to recreate themselves according to their own wishes.⁷³

Miller agrees with Favazza, and others, that there is a political element involved in body modification, where one is asserting control over their own physical being.⁷⁴

Sanders argues that group membership is the underlying reasoning behind all types of physical modification:

No matter what the overt purpose of the alteration—protection from supernatural forces, communication of sexual availability, demonstration of courage, symbolization of membership, or whatever—all types of body modification have a decorative

⁷²Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 79.

⁷³Miller, *The Body Art Book*, 31.

⁷⁴Ibid.

function. The transformation makes the body aesthetically pleasing to the individual and the relevant reference group.⁷⁵

Sanders also suggests that less frequent forms of piercing (of the nose, cheeks, nipples, genitals, etc.) are commonly viewed with disfavour, therefore “eminently suited for symbolizing disaffection from mainstream values.”⁷⁶ In apparent contradiction to Sanders, Camphausen suggests that many types of body adornment and modification have little to do with attaining a “look” or conforming to a social vision of beauty.

Rather, many of these techniques are aimed at awakening potentials of consciousness that are fully human and natural, rather than extrasensory or paranormal, but that need to be trained and activated in order to function at their very best.⁷⁷

Camphausen does not provide any concrete examples of these “potentials of consciousness” awakened with body modification, suggesting simply that the acts are facilitators in revealing human potential. Elsewhere, he seems to provide a more spiritual motivation for body adornments, and tattooing in particular:

it becomes clear that the contemporary return to the tribal represents a swing of the pendulum of history, another loop in the continuous flow of time. Humanity, on reaching the end of one cycle and entering a new one, is more open to change at such crucial moments and seems to become sensitive yet again. . . . What we currently witness is a reemergence of the tribal spirit from within the human psyche: genetic memory manifesting itself. Amid the concrete and silicon with which we’ve fashioned our world, the mythical serpent of the dreamtime is once again arising, reminding and recalling us to roots almost forgotten.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Sanders, *Customizing the Body*, 6.

⁷⁶Ibid., 8.

⁷⁷Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 55.

⁷⁸Ibid., 65.

According to Camphausen, the “return to the tribal” is caused by the reemergence of instinctual behaviour, due to a “genetic memory.” His evoking of the idea of genetic memory being “awakened” at the end of one cycle and at the beginning of another is interesting, and corresponds with Bowie’s idea of the increase of the behaviour of body modification (and a new spirituality) at the end of the millennium. He continues by suggesting that this popularity of body modification is also accompanied by a return to tribal activities and ways of looking at the world. He supports this by pointing to the increasing number of youth and adults experimenting with altered states of consciousness, which Camphausen associates with tribal shamanism. The profile of tribalism is also raised through the ecological movement and herbal rediscovery. Camphausen suggests that the expression of the tribal impulse is evident in forms of dance music that come close to being trance inducing.⁷⁹ In fact, the phenomenon of “Rave” culture revolves around the notion of a formation of community and a communal experience of spiritual transcendence.⁸⁰ He explains:

One of the subdivisions of house [music] has been given the name “Trance.” In addition, it is not simply the style of dancing that approaches or revives the nature of tribal dancing, but also another dimension. In those places and at those moments where all the elements are just right—the crowd, the music, the ambience, the moon—something happens that goes beyond the merely individual experience. Suddenly, in the way of synergy, the participating individuals actually disappear and a concerted, coherent, and

⁷⁹Ibid., 96-99.

⁸⁰For an excellent discussion of spirituality at the end of the 20th Century, which mentions “Rave” culture, see <http://www.altculture.com/aentries/s/spiritux.html>; Internet; accessed 25 March 2000.

merged group is born, for however short a time. In those very moments, the tribal spirit is truly manifest and, just as in tribal societies, the dance becomes a release and a catharsis for an entire community.⁸¹

Elsewhere, Camphausen suggests that the increase of sexual freedom in the 1990s, which finds its roots in the 1960s Counterculture, is a move toward the tribal.⁸² Such a comment is difficult to support because, although the author mentions the resurgence of Tantra workshops and events occurring in dark corners of nightclubs, there are also many people, particularly teenagers, moving in the opposite direction, choosing sexual abstinence. The evidence for this lies in youth campaigns such as “True Love Waits,” which claims to have over one million adherents, and other primarily Christian youth abstinence movements.⁸³ Whether this move to a more strict sexual conduct is a response to the supposed tribal tendencies of society is hard to determine; the abstinence movements, fueled by the support of public figures such as Alison Gertz, a heterosexual woman who contracted AIDS after a one-time sexual encounter, also stressed a move towards “safest sex” as a response to the threat of the AIDS virus.⁸⁴

Camphausen continues by discussing the presence of pain in modification and its relative absence in everyday life:

⁸¹Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 99.

⁸²Ibid., 100.

⁸³See <http://www.truelovewaits.com/endorse.htm> for an extensive listing of Christian denominations, youth groups and individuals who support abstinence until marriage.

⁸⁴Author Unknown, “Gertz, Alison”; <http://www.altculture.com/index/aentries/axgertz.html>; Internet; accessed 7 April 2000.

As has been done with the realities of birth, sex, and death—the other “wet” and “dirty” truths that belong to human life—pain has been banned from discussion and experimentation and from everyday discourse. It is seen almost exclusively as something unwanted, as something to get rid of by all means and as soon as possible.⁸⁵

The thought of the banishment of pain seems to be reasonable. After all, pain is generally a signal to the body that something is wrong with it. This author finds no pleasure in pain and recognizes the role that it has played as a means of control and oppression in society. Also, pain is often associated with death and loss, which is, in turn, associated with sadness. These emotions and sensations are inevitably present in human life, but are not necessarily desired. Camphausen does not provide a convincing argument for the reinsertion of pain into “discussion,” “experimentation” and “everyday discourse.” His claims that the experience of pain reveals human potential is vague without concrete examples.

Nevertheless, Marilee Strong also links pain with personal enlightenment. She suggests that the popularity of various forms of body manipulation roughly parallels the rise of clinical cutting. She explains,

Young people in the 1960s began searching for ways to free their minds and their bodies from cultural norms, rejecting conventional standards of dress and adornment and exploring a number of ancient traditions—from Eastern mysticism to Native American rites to Satanic rituals—in a quest for personal, spiritual, and political enlightenment.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 83. The stressing of elements of the body, bodily functions or fluids, is a part of Mikhail Bakhtin’s *carnavalesque*. The *carnavalesque* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, in relation to Bowie’s music video for “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson.”

⁸⁶Strong, *Bright Red Scream*, 141.

Like Camphausen, Strong also traces the popularity of body piercing in Western society through the 1960s and the exploration of Eastern mysticism during that time. Strong mentions Fakir Musafar's views toward body manipulation as a transformative experience hearkening back to primitive ritual:

Musafar sees modern primitivism as a way of reclaiming the body from god, parents, government, churches, doctors—all the figures and institutions to which people have ceded control in Western society. He insists that what he does to himself is not self-mutilation but physical enhancement, not sickness but a search for a state of grace.⁸⁷

Like Favazza, Strong is attempting to provide a clinical view of the behaviour, which she makes clear throughout her chapter, and suggests that many people who engage in piercing or scarring, although not all, are motivated by some of the same reasons as those with pathological problems—for instance, reclaiming their body from abuse.

An elaborate ritual or rationale does not necessarily make a behaviour healthy. It's hard to argue that someone whose entire lifestyle and identity is built around cutting their flesh, spilling their blood, or reconfiguring their body is not acting out deep-seated needs and conflicts. For both groups [pathological and cultural], however they choose to view themselves, cutting the skin is a powerful ritual of transformation and transcendence, faith and salvation—a reconnection with something primal.⁸⁸

Psychologist Mark Schwartz adds:

The basic syndrome of self-cutting is that if I pierce my body I'm alive, I can feel. . . . Has there ever been a culture that is more spiritually confused and numb than ours from overstimulation? . . .

⁸⁷Ibid., 143.

⁸⁸Ibid., 146.

Whether it be heroin or bingeing [*sic*] and purging or slicing on your body . . . these are all syndromes of giving yourself an injection of adrenaline to run away from the emptiness and the numbness of alienation and disconnection.⁸⁹

Schwartz's comments echo those expressed in Reznor's quote, with which this chapter began. The singer must hurt himself in order to feel; with pain comes an awareness of the self. In the case of "Body Play," pain is often used to find relief from guilt, or to atone for some debt. Pain can also be a means to transcendence of ordinary consciousness, and as a sign of strength, discipline and endurance.⁹⁰

Finally, in an interview with a man who performed his own penis bisection, the interviewer asked how the modification fit into the man's transcendental/spiritual life:

At a most basic level, this modification transcends the physical body in terms of modifying it and also in terms of overcoming the physical pain and possibly danger which accompany the cutting itself. At a symbolic level it represents overcoming fear of death of the physical body, and fear of what may await on the other side. For me, it represents victory in the moral struggle that let me put these fears aside.⁹¹

This man's comments echo those of Bob Flanagan, and point to a spirituality attained through the modification of the body.

As Polhemus and others have suggested, the act of modification is also an act of rejecting the notion of the split between the body and mind. The body

⁸⁹Ibid., 149-50.

⁹⁰Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 86.

⁹¹Author Unknown, "Splitcock!," *BME*; available from <http://www.bme.freeq.com/people/split/index.html>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2000. *BME* is an excellent resource for those interested in body modification. However, the site is *extremely* graphic. Therefore, please take caution when viewing.

becomes the focus of attention and the subject of adornment, mutilation and modification. In this man's case, the fear of death was encompassed in his physical body, and thus by addressing it through its modification, he is able to transcend his fear. The mind is relieved of fear through a change of the body; the split between mind and body is transcended through modification. In the other examples of body modification, there is a constant emphasis on the body and a return to the awareness of the body and its sensations, including pain and pleasure. The culture of modification does not only act as a replacement for the Judeo-Christian Church, as per Bowie's suggestion, but also as a rejection of the mind/body split. In this particular case, through his actions the man not only privileges his own body but also reinforces his spirituality outside of the traditional Christian context.

Body Modification as Alternative Spirituality

The idea of the various manifestations of body modification as ritual as rebellion against the Judeo-Christian ethic is but one possible motivation for the behaviour. As mentioned in the opening of this discussion, the narrative that accompanies *1. Outside* refers to artists such as Chris Burden and Ron Athey, who are well known for their forays into the more macabre realms of performance art. Dominic Wells, in an interview for *Time Out* magazine, asked Bowie about his apparent morbid fascination regarding body modification, wondering if it was an expression of the old myth that art could only result from suffering. Bowie

responded, “Also it has something to do with the fact that the complexity of modern systems is so intense that a lot of artists are going back literally into themselves in a physical way, and it has produced a dialogue between the flesh and the mind.”⁹² Bowie suggests a few things in his comments regarding the concepts and themes he is addressing in the album, with which this chapter opened: the increase of tattooing and piercing—and the extremes of such behaviour often manifesting themselves in works of art—is a sign of society turning to a new form of spirituality as an alternative to the one presented by the institutionalized Christian Church; and that in an increasingly chaotic world, the body is the last bastion of control for the individual.

From within the Christian institution, there have also been criticisms which suggest the return of ritual in those factions of Christianity which have laid them aside. In a study of the state of Christian liturgy in postmodern culture, Frank Senn supplies an explanation for the downfall of traditional liturgical forms of Christian religion from the viewpoint of someone inside the Church. He suggests that Western culture at the end of the twentieth century has no coherent sense of history: “Their sense of living [is] only for the moment with no meaningful tradition on which to build and no destiny of promise toward which to move.”⁹³ He continues:

⁹²Dominic Wells, “Boys Keep Swinging,” *Time Out* 48 (August 23-30, 1995); <http://members.tripod.com/~dbfan/articles/timeout.html>; Internet; accessed 1 February 1998.

⁹³Frank C. Senn, “Epilogue: Postmodern Liturgy,” *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 696.

This puts historical Christianity in an untenable cultural situation because it proclaims a salvation event that happened in history. There is a minimum historical awareness that is required to tell the story of salvation and to proclaim the promised destiny of the people of God. The church's mission is to tell the biblical story to the world and to enact it before God in worship. How does the church pursue this mission in a world that lacks narrative coherence?

Senn suggests that the introduction of the lament in liturgy may provide a balance to an escapist church experience. The author states:

Greater exposure to the element of lament in psalms, hymns, and prayer might provide optimistic worshippers with a more realistic assessment of the human situation and offer those who have experienced personal defeat in a success-ridden society an opportunity to "cry out for the resurrection of their lives."⁹⁴

Furthermore, Senn suggests that the fears of society, such as loss of time, natural decay and so forth, could be combatted by "attention to the sacramental life, the historical liturgy, and traditional ecclesiastical polity."⁹⁵ Senn is suggesting a greater emphasis on the sacraments and ritual of the Christian Church to better serve postmodern society.

Through his own non-Christian blood-rituals, in which cattle are slaughtered and displayed, Hermann Nitsche provides another critique of traditional Christianity from outside of the Church:

⁹⁴Ibid., 967-8. The author suggests for the reader to refer to David Power, "Liturgy, Memory and the Absence of God," *Worship* 57 (1983), 326-9

⁹⁵Senn, "Epilogue: Postmodern Liturgy," 968. For further reading, Senn suggests Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

Christianity has, through radicalizing the, already in antiquity, important division of life into the one on this side and one beyond, . . . not only separated but suppressed the dionysiac.⁹⁶

Nitsche's complaint is that the Church has destroyed the instinctual and festive element of human nature. His purpose is to try to recapture a sense of the dionysiac through non-Christian ritual and pagan-like sacrifice.

It is possible that the increase of body modification in Western society points to the failure of the institutionalized religious establishment. The Christian Church has long been the legislator of moral laws and the regulator of cultural behaviour to a certain point—Western society has often had a subculture that has rebelled against what they perceived as the Church's repression. With the propensity of piercing and other forms of body modification, there has been a reclaiming of the body, which could be read also as a move against the adage that the body is untouchable because it is formed in the image of God. Bowie suggests that the Church has not dealt with sex or violence in an adequate manner, which has thus encouraged culture to take the initiative in creating new rituals and transformative experiences. As has been suggested by this discussion, many of these cultural "concerns" have been addressed by Eastern mystical and tribal religions (or some piecemeal appropriation of them by Western culture). Remembering Camphausen's comment regarding the banning of "wet" and "dirty" truths from the everyday, it is probable that he is also blaming the Church

⁹⁶Wolfgang Wunderlich, "Zum Konzept Des Buches," On the Concept of this Book," trans. Andrew Clegg Littler, *Hermann Nitsche: The O.M. Theatre 80th Action* (München: Verlag Fred Jahn, 1988), 31.

for the ban. Perhaps it is too easy to blame a single (although powerful) institution for society's ills, or for the difficulty some have in living in such a society. Nevertheless, there is a move away from the Christian Church by a segment of Western society, as is clear by the discussions in this chapter.⁹⁷ But where does this leave this segment of society? The next chapter will argue that Bowie perceives a segment of society as caught in a kind of rite of passage before the "transformation" of the twenty-first century. The 1990s constitute a sort of *liminal* phase at the end of the twentieth century, a notion that will be explored in the next chapter. Camphausen suggests that this "return of the tribal" is a historical phenomenon—the time is right—while others have concluded that the behaviour is a response against the seemingly chaotic aspects of late twentieth century society. The only possibility for consistency and control lies in that achieved on or over one's own body. As was suggested by the lyric appearing at the beginning of the chapter, perhaps it is only through pain that one can truly feel in a society out of control; and it is through this pain that a better state of being is attained.

⁹⁷Of course, there are those who genuinely ascribe to Christianity who also have tattoos and piercings. The appropriation of the *ritual* nature of these non-Western forms of body modification is generally undertaken by those not ascribing to Western Christianity, or by those who would not traditionally be considered followers of Christ for reasons briefly discussed earlier in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

AN ANALYSIS OF *I. OUTSIDE*

Narratives (stories) traditionally come to a definite end (unlike life); that's why we like movies and literature—for that sense of *closure*—because they *end*.

- Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*.¹

In chapter 1, *I. Outside* has been discussed in relation to Bowie's statement concerning its engagement with the culture of body modification and its critique of the Judeo-Christian ethic. Because the act of body modification has often been viewed as a transformative experience, one possibility is that it has moved in to replace what is not being supplied by institutional Christianity; as an element of non-Western culture, body modification, while also serving other purposes, can act as an alternative to the Western belief system.

I. Outside can also be thought of as a reflection of an element of society at the end of the millennium, particularly those involved in the “new cults of tattooing and scarification and piercings,” as Bowie says. This reflection is created by the various elements that make up the album. These include the lyrics, and a narrative in the liner notes which presents a strange world of the absurd and violent. The lyrics are generally pessimistic, addressing themes of hopelessness

¹Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 139.

and the alienation of technology, while much of the music sounds improvised, without traditional teleological tonal movement and closure. Reprinted in the liner notes, the lyrics are practically illegible, transformed and blurred into masses of letters and shadows. The album art contains digitally manipulated photos of Bowie as the various characters in the narrative, including Nathan Adler, Baby Grace Blue and Ramona A. Stone. This chapter will explore the *I. Outside* album and its accompanying narrative, with a discussion of the album art, lyrics and music, with the view that these various elements contribute to the formation of a space in between two states. The first state, or *pre-liminal* state, is one of incompleteness, in anticipation of some form of transformation. The final state, or *post-liminal* state, is an unknown, analogous to the state of society following the arrival of the new millennium. In Victor Turner's notion of the *liminal*, this resulting state consists of the reintegration of a participant of a rite of passage into society as a complete or new element. Bowie constructs a space that is *liminoid*, before a transformative event, or the turning of time to a new millennium, in which the participants are unaware of a positive outcome after the transformative event. To begin, the diary will be examined to determine how it contributes to the formation of this space.

The Diary of Nathan Adler

The CD liner notes open with the title, "The Diary of Nathan Adler; or The Art-Ritual Murder of Baby Grace Blue." The narrative is additionally titled, "A

non-linear Gothic Drama Hyper-cycle,” and it recounts the investigation of the murder of a 14 year-old girl named Baby Grace Blue. Assigned to the investigation is Detective Professor Nathan Adler, an officer of the Arts Protectorate of London, who works in their Art-Crime division. His job is not to find the murderer, as one would expect, but rather to determine whether the act of murder constitutes art.

The first section of text acts as an introduction to the crime scene and the investigators. What is first graphically described is the rather grotesque appearance of the victim, found in the Oxford Town Museum of Modern Parts, New Jersey. And it is here that the question is asked, “It was definitely murder—but was it art?”² The firm for which Professor Adler works is described as a corporation funded by the Arts Protectorate of London, “it being felt that the investigation of art-crimes was in itself inseparable from other forms of expression and therefore worthy of support from this significant body.”³ Adler then notes that the Art-Crime people were given the opportunity to exhibit three rooms of evidence and comparative study work at the 1994 Biennale in Venice. The object of study for the exhibition was Mark Tansey’s “The Innocent Eye Test” (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

²David Bowie, “The Diary of Nathan Adler,” liner notes of *1. Outside*, Virgin 7243 8 40711 2 7, 1995. n.p.

³Ibid.

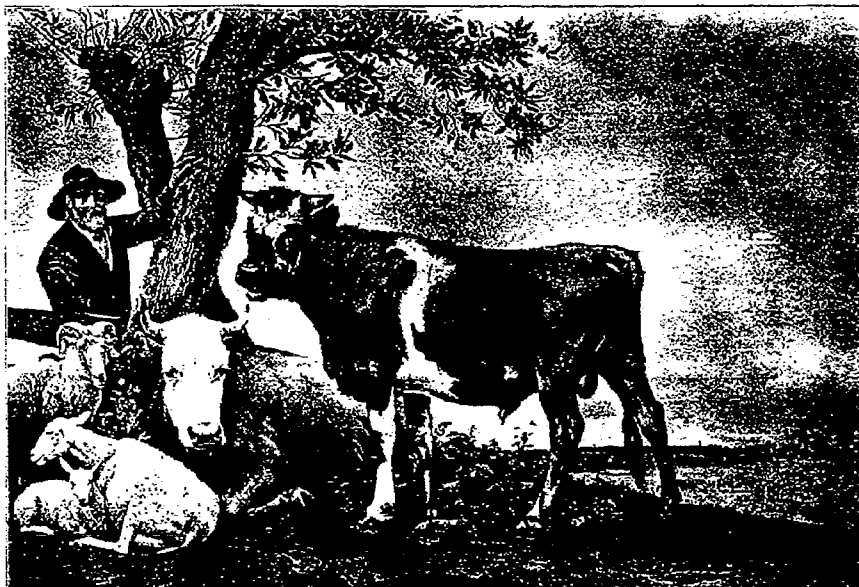


Figure 2.1. Paulus Potter's *The Young Bull* (1647).

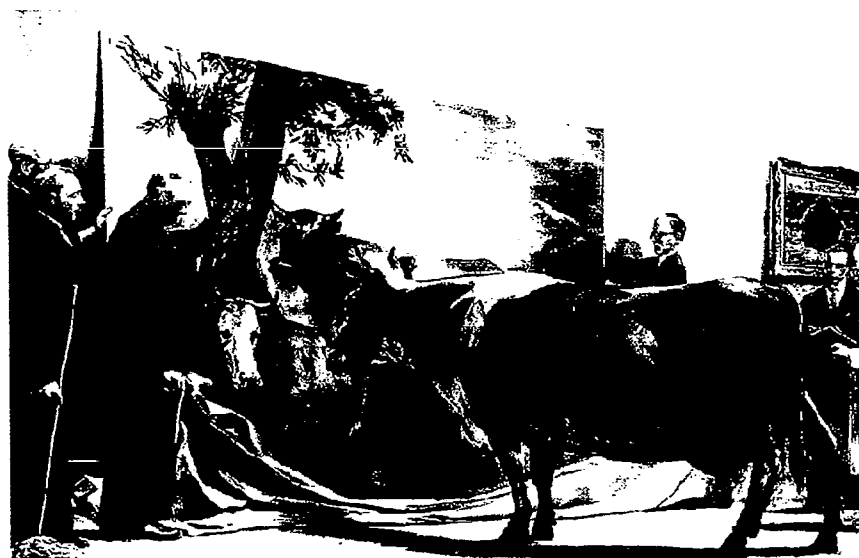


Figure 2.2. Mark Tansey's *The Innocent Eye Test*.

Arthur C. Danto, in his book *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*,

comments:

The painting is a comical masterpiece: a cow has been led into a picture gallery in which two paintings are hung—Paulus Potter’s *The Young Bull* of 1647, . . . and one of Monet’s grainstack paintings of the 1880s or ‘90s, . . . and the question is whether the artist has attained a degree of realism in depicting one of them—a young bull—that would dupe an innocent animal into responding as if it were confronting reality rather than representation—bull rather than a painting of one.⁴

What is truly remarkable about Tansey’s painting is its ability to convince the observer that the event actually occurred in history. Danto suggests that the painting is presented in “serviceable realism, flatly illustrational, that vouches through the absence of artifice to the veracity of what is shown,” similar to the illustrations in a children’s science encyclopedia of some sort depicting various moments in science history.⁵ Danto continues:

Potter may fool an animal, but Tansey may fool you or me, if we believe that he is recording an actual event. . . . The realism of Tansey, . . . belongs to our age by not belonging to it except as an archaism, but not so archaic that it falls outside remembered experiences of living personas. . . . *The Innocent Eye Test* is not itself, really, an experiment, but rather a demonstration of the truth that painting, even when realistic, is about more than what meets the eye, and hence the “test” for whether we understand a painting has less to do with our spontaneous, so to speak, “animal” responses, than our ability to reconstruct the meaning of the painting, construed as a kind of visual text.⁶

⁴Arthur C. Danto, “Mark Tansey: The Picture Within the Picture,” *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 16-17.

⁵Ibid., 17.

⁶Ibid., 17-18.

This reference to a reproduction of apparent reality evokes the notion of *hyperreality*. Hyperreality, a term coined by French theorist Jean Baudrillard, refers to the idea that one cannot differentiate between the “real” and reproductions of the real. Hyperrealism occurs when reproductions of something seem more authentic or powerful than the thing being reproduced.⁷ The study of *The Innocent Eye Test* as the depiction of reality is an example of hyperreality. Baudrillard would suggest that this participation in new “orders of simulation” leads to the disappearance of meaning.⁸ With the study of Tansey’s painting in Bowie’s narrative, the Art-Crime people have decided that their spontaneous, or “animal,” responses are most important; in other words, Art-Crime has made no attempt to truly understand the meaning of the painting. The three rooms of evidence and comparative study work “proved that the cow in Mark Tansey’s “The Innocent Eye Test” could not differentiate between Paulus Potter’s “The Young Bull” of 1647 . . . and one of Monet’s grain stack paintings of the 1890s.”⁹ Not only is this a conclusion arising out of a presumed event—the extrapolated end of a fictional event—but it could also serve as a rather strict judgement of the skill of an artist. Are the “daubers” (as the Art-Crime people call themselves later in the Diary) simply supplying an educated guess as to the result of the test, or are they suggesting that Potter’s cow was ultimately not convincing? Or perhaps the

⁷Childers and Hentzi, eds., “Hyperreal,” *Columbia Dictionary*, 142.

⁸Childers and Hentzi, eds., “Simulation,” *Columbia Dictionary*, 280.

⁹Bowie, “The Diary,” n.p.

most probable answer would be that they are suggesting that the cow does not have the intellect to tell the difference between simple paintings, which, although realistic, are not actually real. The point of this discussion is to try to understand the kind of corporation Adler works for. The role of Art-Crime Inc. is an interesting one; it serves to ask questions and answer queries which would seem absurd in the real world. It is probable that few would want to know the result of "The Innocent Eye Test," except perhaps as a fleeting curiosity certainly not worthy of a grand investigation. The idea that such a preposterous notion, the recognition between Potter's and Tansey's cows, would be explored sheds light on Adler's present investigation. It is also seemingly absurd that he would be in charge of determining whether the murder of Baby Grace Blue is art.

As has been established in the first chapter, the subculture of body modification, of which body play and performance art are a part, is certainly visible in Western society. If some of the performances of Bob Flanagan, which he referred to as "little deaths," can be called art, then why not a more extreme case of violence resulting in actual death? While presenting Adler as a detective trying to sort out this particular case, Bowie asks larger questions of present day society regarding the age old question of the definition and nature of art, and where and whether limits should be placed.

Adler claims that the precedent for art-murder (worked up through to "concept muggings" of '98-'99) was laid with the Viennese castrationists and Hermann Nitsche in the '70s, among whom one performer, Schwarzkogler, is

believed to have died mutilating his penis in performance in 1969. The next precedent comes in the form of Chris Burden, who actually crucified himself on the top of a Volkswagen. The piece was entitled "Transfixed" from 1974, and featured the artist on top of the Volkswagen, arms outstretched and palms nailed to the roof of the car, being seen only for a few moments, with the car emerging from a garage and then returning to it.¹⁰ After a reference by Adler to Bowie himself (remarking about bar frequenters fully robed in surgery regalia in the '70s), Damien Hirst is mentioned, with his "Shark-Cow-Sheep thing." Hirst's claim to fame in the realm of the macabre included his response to Jeff Koons' parody of the art world consisting of a basketball suspended in a fish tank. Hirst suspended a dead sheep in a tank of formaldehyde (entitled "Away From the Flock"); the sheep was joined by a group of works which included a 14-foot tiger shark also in formaldehyde as well as cow and calf combinations, dead and preserved for all to see.¹¹ Bowie is no longer referring to the fictional events described previously, but is now recounting actual events as precedents to the fictional. Perhaps it is here that Bowie is sincerely showing his concern regarding which direction the behaviour of body modification, or more specifically performance art, could go. From the presentation of dead animals preserved in

¹⁰Audio Interview, "The Last Beetle," From "An Interview with Chris Burden" at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, February 5, 1999, by Daniel Birnbaum; <http://www.artnode.se/burden/>; Internet; accessed on 19 July 1999.

¹¹Please see <http://www.altculture.com/aentries/d/damxhirst.html>; Internet; accessed on 19 July 1999.

formaldehyde, perhaps the next possibility could be the display of a mutilated human much like the one Adler found at the entrance to the museum.

The narrative jumps to Thursday, October 27, 1994 and Manhattan, to a performance by Ron Athey entitled “Four Scenes in a Harsh Life.” In the performance, Athey continuously pokes a knitting needle into his forehead until he begins to bleed. Bowie writes, “Athey says he is dealing with issues of self-loathing, suffering, healing and redemption.”¹² The narrative returns to the “present,” December 31, 1999, with Adler returning to his office which used to be artist Mark Rothko’s studio, where the painter also committed suicide. By searching a Databank, Adler links Baby Grace with three others: Ramona A. Stone, Leon Blank and Algeria Touchshriek. He feeds their combined vital information into a computer program designed to output a randomized melange of text: “[it] re-strings real life facts as im-probable [*sic*] virtual-fact.”¹³

Here Bowie is hinting at his hypothesis regarding performance art and body modification in general. Athey’s comments serve to fuel Bowie’s suggestion as conveyed in the quote that began chapter 1: through these activities, the participants deal with issues such as healing and redemption, which would traditionally be dealt with through Western institutionalized religion. Athey’s act of repeatedly poking a needle into his forehead constitutes a spiritual experience as well as a public spectacle. Mark Rothko may have been an artist who did not

¹²Bowie, “Diary,” n.p.

¹³Ibid.

deal with his issues properly, or perhaps felt that the ultimate sacrifice of his own life would be his only redemption. Bowie gives an account of one who was not able to find what he was desperately needing from this world, and who resorted to death rather than to continue the search.

From the swirl of random phrases the narrative jumps yet again to Berlin, June 15, 1977. Bowie provides some context for one of the characters, Ramona A. Stone: she is a “no-future priestess . . . vomiting her doctrine of death-as-eternal-party into the empty vessel of Berlin youth.”¹⁴ The tongue-in-cheek tone of the diary is most apparent in this section, in which death and suicide are treated as simply ways to “check-out” with Ramona as some master manipulator rather than a murderer. Perhaps Bowie is portraying Adler as one who has seen too much, who must resort to humour to carry on in his line of work, much like a seasoned television detective. In another sense, Nathan Adler is as his name suggests; he is literally *addled*, or confused. By presenting the macabre topic of the diary in this tone, Bowie softens the emotional blow of the event—the murder of a young girl. But he also brings a kind of order to a chaotic situation. It is a detective’s role to provide a neutral perspective to a crime scene, detached from the horror of the event. By using humour and the absurd, Bowie is able to provide a narrative that is marked off from the real, making the reader able to reflect on

¹⁴Ibid.

the events. In his essay, "Toward a Poetics of Performance," Richard Schechner suggests that this "theatrical frame" is necessary in contemplating events:

Theater, to be effective, must maintain its double or incomplete presence, as a *here-and-now performance of there-and-then events*. The gap between "here and now" and "there and then" allows an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives.¹⁵

Through the creation of a fictional account which, through the study of cows and so forth, contains elements of humour and the absurd, Bowie is able to cope with the horror of murder. He is dealing with the possibility of the real events by distancing himself from them in this way. This type of presentation also allows those who read it to contemplate the events which take place.

In the following section, from within this fictional account, Bowie again directly references the real world. He refers to an issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, featuring fashion photos by Guy Bourdin, a French photographer apparently very interested in the macabre.¹⁶ Bourdin was known for a photo spread in which he placed flies on pale-faced models, giving the appearance that the models were dead, and in another shoot gave models flesh "hats" made of flanks of cows. Adler says, "We're mystified by blood. It's our enemy now. We don't understand it. Can't live with it."¹⁷ The article from *The New Yorker* describes Bourdin's photography as morbid but fascinating.

¹⁵Richard Schechner, "Toward a Poetics of Performance," *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 169. Schechner condemns the actions of violent performance artists as a stimulant to more violence.

¹⁶Bowie is referring to an article by Anthony Haden-Guest, "The Return of Guy Bourdin," *The New Yorker* 70 (November 7, 1994), 136-46.

¹⁷Bowie, "Diary," n.p.

Masochism and narcissism pervade the fashion world, and from them Guy Bourdin, toting his own psychological burdens, distilled images of unsettling beauty. "What Guy did," Serge Lutens says, "was conduct his own psychoanalysis in *Vogue*."¹⁸

Bourdin is a example of one who needed to search for other means to deal with issues within himself. Bowie gives yet another instance of a person who is dealing with inner conflicts in a very different way than would be expected in Western society. Bourdin is somehow dealing with his "psychological burdens" through death and blood.

The final section of the narrative is back in the "present," rather humourously recounting Ramona's business endeavors including a body-parts jewellery store in London, Canada. Some of the customers were known to disappear and one rather recognizable celebrity did so after a visit to purchase a gift to celebrate her pregnancy. The text ends with a grand revelation: the child of that pregnancy would now be the same age as Baby Grace. The final words are, "To be continued..." suggesting the lack of closure to the narrative. From the beginning, though, the Diary was not constructed as a complete narrative, with a firm beginning and end. Reeves Gabrels, lead guitarist on the album, elaborates on the details of its conception:

David was aware of those aspects of the subject matter but after becoming aware of what the lyric content implied he looked into it further and revised and rewrote. The whole plot outline unfolded out of a spontaneous freeform improv that happened on the last day of full band recording [in] March 94. The spoken word pieces

¹⁸Haden-Guest, "Guy Bourdin," 143.

between tracks are the best examples of that as it happened. those tracks are the band and david improvising live [with] no overdubs. the order and plot were imposed/invented by david after the fact.¹⁹

Bowie suggests that the story of *I. Outside* is much like life, “an ongoing saga with no beginning and no end.”²⁰ As with the theme of the narrative of murder as art, the style of the narrative as disjunctive stream-of-consciousness also points to the notion of boundary. Where is the division between improvised narrative and formal narrative? These questions also apply to the music of the album, much of which was created through improvisation. Through these many elements which make up the album, Bowie is questioning the idea of boundary and the crossing of lines. In addition to this, Bowie is constructing a space between these lines. This idea of space may be explored through Victor Turner’s concept of *liminality*.

Victor Turner and Liminality

The questioning of boundaries is a thread which runs through the entire album, including the music, lyrics and narrative. The narrative was conceived from improvisation and is written without closure of any kind. Also, the music on the album was, for the most part, initially improvised, and the questioning of boundary exists here as well. Where is the boundary between improvised music and formally structured music? One example, entitled “The Motel,” suggests a

¹⁹Reeves Gabrels, Personal email to author, dated 25 January 2000. The original punctuation and capitalization has been preserved.

²⁰Penman, “Saint Dave,” n.p.

move across the boundary from improvisation, or limbo, to formal in terms of harmony, which will be explored in more detail later. The video for “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson” also contains many images of juxtaposition which suggest the difficulty in determining boundary. For instance, in the video, images of a plaster cast being sawed in half are juxtaposed with images of a real person actually being pierced. In the one case, an inanimate object is adorned and modified as a work of art. In the case of the actual person, the suggestion that he is being adorned and modified as a work of art is a more difficult claim to make. Bowie is asking what the difference is between piercing as art and the more extensive forms of body modification. What is the difference between sawing a mannequin in two and doing the same to a person in the name of art? These issues are not easily resolved, and Bowie makes no moves toward that end. His refusal to give concrete resolutions to these issues, which may stem from his own confusion regarding the culture of body modification, is evident through his video and live performance.

Juxtapositions also abound in the other elements of the album. The narrative structure consists of references to reality—the performances of Ron Athey and others—with the description of a brutal murder and an absurd investigation. Through this juxtaposition, the narrative deals with the idea of the boundary between murder and art. What is the boundary between form and non-form, both in written narrative and in musical structure? The question of

liminality is at the core of this discussion: this album plays with the liminal—or the “in between”—jumping in and out of it, from one side to the other.

Victor Turner addresses social and structural conflicts as motivations for ritual rather than psychological motivations from within individuals. Thus, he focuses on an individual as an entity controlled by group processes. Catherine Bell suggests that his work has been used as a starting point for other scholars to explore the relationship between the individual psyche and society, and has been expanded upon to be applied to ritual not only in the social arena but also within each person. She comments that those drawing on Turner are concerned with how ritual integrates the social and the individual, both externally and internally.²¹

In his article, entitled “Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?”, Victor Turner introduces the concept of the *liminal* phase in rites of passage, “a no-man’s-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future as anticipated by the society’s normative control of biological development.”²² Turner is suggesting a phase that leads to a post-liminal, transformed state of being. His liminal is like a cocoon for a caterpillar, resulting in a butterfly—a new form of life at the end of the experience. Turner refers to many forms of expression drawn from rituals from non-industrial societies, among them theatre and body marking and modification, as “liminal

²¹Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 172-3.

²²Victor Turner, “Are There Universals of Performance,” 11.

configuration[s].”²³ Turner echoes Bowie’s views on society, stating, “there are today signs that the amputated specialized genres [such as theatre, body art, etc.] are seeking to rejoin and to recover something of the numinosity lost in their . . . dismemberment.”²⁴ He refers to theatre, body art and so forth, as “amputated” and “dismembered” because these genres have been removed from the centre of society and confined to leisure time. Turner explains:

Rapid advances in the scale and complexity of society, particularly after industrialization, have passed this unified liminal configuration through the analytical prism of the division of labor, with its specialization and professionalization, reducing each of these sensory domains to a set of entertainment genres flourishing in the leisure time of society, no longer in a central, driving place. The pronounced numinous supernatural character of archaic ritual has been greatly attenuated. . . . One source of this excessive “meta-” power is, clearly, the liberated and disciplined body itself, with its many untapped resources for pleasure, pain, and expression.²⁵

This comment echoes Bowie’s suggestion that body modification is marker of a search for a new spirituality, different from Western Judeo-Christianity. Here, Turner is suggesting that industrialization is to blame, not the Judeo-Christian ethic. It is because of industrialization that societal ritual, possibly in the context of Western institutionalized religion, has been lost. Turner suggests that the body, as a source of pleasure and pain, is also a source of the supernatural through

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

rituals involving the body. These rituals contribute to Turner's "liminal configuration," which lead to a transformed state of being for the participants.

He further expands his explanation of the liminal (and what he calls the liminoid) in his essay, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual." Turner introduces the concept of the liminal phase of a rite of passage ritual. For this, Turner refers to Arnold van Gennep's book *Rites de Passage* (1908), in which, according to Turner, it was van Gennep's intention "that his term 'rite of passage' should be used both for rituals accompanying an individual's or a cohort of individuals' changes in social status, and for those associated with seasonal changes for an entire society."²⁶ Van Gennep outlines three phases in a rite of passage: separation, transition and incorporation. Separation refers to the demarcation of what Turner calls "sacred space and time" from the everyday, and consists of initiands entering into the rite of passage, and moving "beyond or outside the time which mentions secular processes and routines."²⁷ The intervening phase is referred to by van Gennep as "margin" or "limen," in which the initiands move through a period of ambiguity and a kind of social limbo. Turner refers to this phase as *liminal* in his further discussions, which will be outlined in more detail later. The final phase in the rite of passage is the "incorporation" which returns the initiand to total society in their "new, relatively

²⁶Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid," 24.

²⁷Ibid.

stable, well-defined” position within it.²⁸ Turner acknowledges that the three phases vary in length and complexity in different kinds of rites of passage, as well as among different regions and peoples and so forth. Nevertheless, Turner maintains that “it is rare to find no trace of the three-part schema in ‘tribal’ and ‘agrarian’ rituals.”²⁹

In van Gennep’s model, an initiand in the liminal phase is frequently marked by physical separation from the rest of society. Furthermore, they are stripped of name and clothing:

[they] undergo a “leveling” process, in which signs of their preliminal status are destroyed and signs of their liminal non-status applied. . . . In mid-transition the initiands are pushed as far toward uniformity, structural invisibility, and anonymity as possible.³⁰

The initiands are weakened by their loss of definition, but are also liberated from social obligations. Furthermore, they are considered enlightened, as students presented with sacred and secret information. Turner explains:

In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down, but by way of compensation, cosmological systems . . . may become of central importance for the novices, who are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth genres, such as dancing, painting, clay-molding, wood-carving, masking, etc., with symbolic patterns and structures which amount to teaching about the structure of the cosmos and their culture as a part and product of it, in so far as these are defined and comprehended, whether implicitly or explicitly.³¹

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 25.

³⁰Ibid., 26.

³¹Ibid., 27.

Also, a characteristic of the liminal phase is the recombination of familiar elements, often in grotesque combinations, in order to defamiliarize them.

Turner then states:

It is to . . . [relatively stable, cyclical, and repetative] kinds of systems that the term “liminality” properly belongs. When used of processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale complex societies, its use must in the main be metaphorical. That is, the word “liminality,” used *primarily* of a phase in the processual structure of a *rite de passage*, is applied to other aspects of culture—here in societies of far greater scale and complexity.³²

Turner suggests that the term “liminal” cannot be used in postindustrial rites of passage, but rather the term should be “liminoid.” A main reason for this revolves around the idea of leisure. He comments that, in agrarian cultures, work and play are indistinguishable.³³

Work is now organized by industry so as to be separated from “free time,” which includes, in addition to leisure, attendance to such personal needs as eating, sleeping, and caring for one’s health and appearance, as well as familial, social, civic, political, and religious obligations (which would have fallen within the domain of the work-play continuum in tribal society).³⁴

In postindustrial society, leisure and “free time” can be conceived as a “betwixt-and-between, a neither-this-nor-that domain between two spells of work or between occupational and familial and civic activity.”³⁵ Leisure has become the new liminal phase, a place where popular culture is allowed to play with the *status quo*.

³²Ibid., 29-30.

³³Ibid., 34.

³⁴Ibid., 36.

³⁵Ibid., 40.

Turner's model drawn from van Gennep describes a rite of passage ritual in agrarian and tribal cultures as consisting of three phases. For various reasons, Turner suggests that the liminal phase does not occur in post-industrial society, but rather that something like it, a *liminoid* phases, occurs in its place. What this thesis suggests is that the liminal phase, as suggested by van Gennep's original model, and implied by Turner's description of liminality presented in the introduction of this paper, occurs in contemporary society. The extent of the accuracy of the present behaviour with that of agrarian and tribal liminality is difficult to determine. Does body modification in its various forms, as a liminal activity, lead to positive transformation of some kind? This question is difficult to answer. Turner does suggest that this sort of behaviour might constitute the liminal:

Just as when tribesmen make masks, disguise themselves as monsters, heap up disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in myths and folk-tales, so do the genres of industrial leisure . . . *play* with the factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbably, surprising, shocking, usually experimental combinations. But they do this in a more complicated way than in the liminality of tribal initiations, multiplying specialized genres of artistic and popular entertainments, mass culture, pop culture, [etc.].³⁶

Turner further distinguishes the liminal in tribal cultures and the liminoid in Western culture: "In the so-called 'high culture' of complex societies, liminoid is not only removed from a *rite of passage* context, it is also 'individualized.'"³⁷ In

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 52.

this study, the individual action of body modification, whether manifesting itself as simple piercing or as bloody mass amputation in a public performance setting, are observed as little rites of passage, each consisting of van Gennep's three phases. The notion of body modification as a liminal phase and ultimately a transformative event has been suggested by Fakir Musafar and others cited in the first chapter. Bowie seems to support such a connection through his comments regarding the "neo-paganism" of body modification and its reestablishment of the numinous.

The liminal model could then be used to understand pre-millennial Western society. With *1. Outside*, Bowie suggests a modification in Turner's transformative phase. Bowie presents a space that does not fully match the characteristics of a liminal phase, and will thus be referred to as *liminoid*. One way that Bowie achieves this is through themes presented in the lyrics of the album. Through the lyrics, Bowie is suggesting an environment that calls for the transformative result of a liminal phase, but the environment does not fully achieve this. He presents a world which cries for the endless opportunities of new life offered by the liminal, but the lyrics, through their themes of nihilism and the inhumanity of technology, contribute to this liminoid phase: a place where one loses one's individuality, as in the liminal phase, but is not set apart or revered as enlightened. The hope of transformation is clouded by a fear of the unknown, perpetuated by the liminoid phase's ambiguous character, in which boundaries are blurred and absolutes are difficult to determine. In Bowie's *1. Outside*, the

endless possibilities of transformation and new life are not available because they are not recognized. Rather, the resulting state after this phase is an unknown one, analogous to the change of the calendar at the end of the millennium. Bowie presents themes of nihilism and darkness, which, coupled with themes of the inhuman progress of technology, serve to reinforce a pessimistic attitude regarding the result of this phase. These themes are particularly clear in the lyrics of "The Heart's Filthy Lesson," and "Strangers When We Meet."

A Segmental Approach to Lyric Analysis

Bowie explains how many of the lyrics were conceived:

I'd been writing in a style that I copped from Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, the cut-up/cutting-into sections of prose and then sort of resorting them and recombining them in different ways. . . . So at the start, when the band started improvising, I'd put all the paper all over the table and just sort of read.³⁸

The presentation of the lyrics, constructed through random "cut-up" techniques, lends itself to a thematic reading through the tool of segmental analysis. Although lyrics presented in a narrative fashion may also be consumed thematically by the listener, lyrics which are constructed as "segments" may be more easily analyzed by using a thematic segmental approach. In an unpublished paper in which this analytical technique is presented, Chris McDonald discusses the need for a new kind of analysis that takes into account "some of the ways in which sung lyrics

³⁸Moon Zappa, "David Bowie," *Raygun* 30 (October 1995), n.p.

differ from written or spoken poetry and prose.”³⁹ In his paper, McDonald suggests that lyrical analyses are generally either “content analyses,” which treat lyrical meaning as self-explanatory, or “privileged interpretive reading,” which treat a song as a complete narrative. McDonald suggests that songs are not generally “integrated wholes,” citing the work of Simon Frith, Dave Laing and Mark W. Booth, among others.

Simon Frith criticizes lyric analyses which attempt to delineate those lyrics that are “real” from those that are “fairy tale.” He suggests that this distinction is arbitrary to the listener. Also, content analyses assume that the “content” (or “meaning”) of song lyrics are the same for all listeners. Frith suggests that “song words are not about ideas (‘content’) but about their expression.”⁴⁰ In his book, *The Experience of Songs*, Booth cites Edward Doughtie regarding the tendency of song lyrics to contain images which may be related to a central theme, but tend to be isolated from each other: “they accumulate rather than develop.”⁴¹ McDonald comes to the following conclusion:

rather than being the poet’s art of the *mot juste*, the popular songwriter’s or lyricist’s art is often one of selecting an appropriate phrase or segment from the cultural field, placing it into a context, and juxtaposing it with other segments. In other words, Booth and Frith suggest that popular song is less concerned with an “original

³⁹Chris McDonald, “Toward a Segmental Approach to Lyric Analysis,” (Unpublished paper, Presented at IASPM Canada, St. Catharines, Ontario, 1999), 1.

⁴⁰Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 163-4.

⁴¹Edward Doughtie, “Simplicity and Complexity in the Elizabethan Air,” *Rice University Studies* 51 (1965), 4-6; quoted in Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 24.

phrase” so much as an original, novel or appropriate use of a “familiar phrase.”⁴²

McDonald also draws from Dave Laing’s approach to analysis, which in turn draws from the principle of “intertextuality” from literary criticism. Terry Eagleton explains:

All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of “influence” but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the original work. There is no such thing as literary “originality,” no such thing as the “first” literary work: all literature is “intertextual.”⁴³

Childers and Hentzi state that “no text can be read outside its relations to other, already extant texts.” There is an “intertextual web of relationships” from which the reader cannot escape.⁴⁴ Laing approaches the analysis of lyrics by exploring “networks of connotations” rather than autonomous narratives.⁴⁵ Agreeing with Laing’s approach, McDonald suggests that “many song lyrics will frustrate the attempt to find a unifying narrative thread or conceptual linearity within [them]. It may be more useful to seek out what sense or senses accumulate through the segments and phrases used in a song.”⁴⁶ He continues by defending his analytical technique, preferring the conception of “people selectively taking from music

⁴²McDonald, “Lyric Analysis,” 4. McDonald is referring to Simon Frith, “Why Do Songs Have Words?”, *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (London: Methuen, 1981).

⁴³Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 119.

⁴⁴Childers and Hentzi, eds., “Intertextuality,” *Columbia Dictionary*, 159.

⁴⁵Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (London: Open University Press, 1985), 74.

⁴⁶McDonald, “Lyric Analysis,” 5.

whatever fits most relevantly into their lives, even if this results in an incomplete lyrical reading.”⁴⁷

In this discussion, a segmental approach to lyric analysis will be attempted. Unlike McDonald’s analysis of the lyrics of Rush, which takes into account “a combination of keyword internet searches, indexed books of quotations, my knowledge of Rush’s influences and common ancillary interests of Rush fans, and discussions with friends and colleagues to collect intertextual examples,” this analysis will look at broader associations of certain words and themes which recur or are stressed, by “lyrical address, tone, dialect and vocal delivery—which may colour the meaning of a song’s segments.”⁴⁸ This lyric analysis will focus on the first two singles released, “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” and “Strangers When We Meet.”

“The Heart’s Filthy Lesson”

Reeves Gabrels provides some context as to how the song came to be as it is on the album:

during march the band would spend a couple of hours improvising every day based on a manifesto/providing atmosphere for a spoken word piece/or simple inspiration generated by the desire to play. it was from one of these free improv sessions that “hearts” arrived (in slightly different form) on tape. it was pretty much left alone until david, dave richards and i listened to it again and did some editing of the piece which gave it slightly more conventional form. i

⁴⁷Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸Ibid., 6.

added a rhythm guitar and david did a vocal [with] redone lyrics about english landscape painting (as the original lyrics were incomplete). i objected and eventually david salvaged the original lyrics and completed them in a darker vein that was true to the original spontaneous version. we moved some of the instrumental hooks around a bit to make them more “hook like.”⁴⁹

The song is set up as a kind of disjointed conversation: the lyrics are “To be sung by Detective Nathan Adler,” and include personal reflection, one-sided conversation directed to Ramona (probably Ramona A. Stone) and pleading with another character called Paddy (see Figure 2.3). The first section, what will be called Adler’s “personal reflection,” is a rather ambiguous passage of four short lines. It is unclear as to what “the Diamond” refers, although it could refer to a person, as is perhaps revealed by the pronoun “her” in the last line, also pointing to “the Heart’s Filthy lesson.”⁵⁰ Vocally, this section features Bowie with a closed, almost sneering, voice as opposed to his more open voice used on tracks such as “The Motel.” The most stressed word of this section would be “hell,” which is sung with much air being released, giving the delivery a sense of growling. Coupled with this delivery, the word is liberally treated with reverb, and is faded out while the “Oh” from the next line is faded in, creating an elision between the two lines.

The next section will be referred to as a one-sided conversation with Ramona. As mentioned above, the “Oh” comes in as an extension of the previous

⁴⁹Gabrels, Personal email, dated 23 January 2000.

⁵⁰The word “Motel” is a mistake; “Hotel” is sung on the album version as well as in live versions.

Figure 2.3. Lyrics for “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson.”
(Bowie/Eno/Garson/Campbell/Kizilcay/Gabrels)^a

<i>Intro</i>	Heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson
<i>Adler’s Personal Reflection</i>	There’s always the diamond friendly Sitting in the Laugh Hotel The heart’s filthy lesson With her hundred miles to hell
<i>One-Sided Conversation with Ramona</i>	Oh, Ramona, if there was only something between us If there was only something between us Other than our clothes Something in our skies Something in our skies Something in our blood Something in our skies
<i>Paddy/Chorus (Personal Reflection)</i>	Paddy Paddy, who’s been wearing Miranda’s clothes? It’s the heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson Falls upon deaf ears It’s the heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson Heart’s filthy lesson Falls upon deaf ears Falls upon dead years

^aLyrics: Bowie. Publisher: North America - Tintoretto Music (BMI) administered by RZO Music, Inc., Rest of World - Tintoretto Music/RZO Music Ltd. Lyrics reprinted from <http://www.davidbowie.com/freebowie/bowie/chronology/albums/95o/lyrics/hearts.html>; Internet; accessed 1 April 2000. In the lyric sheet of the Japanese double CD version of the album, the various characters are listed above the lyrics of particular songs which they are to sing.

Figure 2.3. (Cont'd)

<p><i>One-Sided Conversation with Ramona</i></p>	<p>Oh Ramona, if there was only some kind of future Oh Ramona, if there was only some kind of future And these cerulean skies</p> <p>Something in our skies Something in our skies Something in our blood Something in our skies</p>
<p><i>Climactic Portion</i></p>	<p>Paddy, Paddy? Paddy will you carry me, I think I've lost my way I'm already five years older I'm already in my grave</p> <p>I'm already I'm already I'm already Will you carry me? Oh Paddy, I think I've lost my way</p>
<p><i>Conclusion</i></p>	<p>Paddy What a fantastic death abyss Paddy What a fantastic death abyss It's the hearts filthy lesson Tell the others It's the hearts filthy lesson What a fantastic death abyss Tell the others It's the hearts filthy lesson Paddy What a fantastic death abyss It's the hearts filthy lesson Tell the others</p>

line, leading to this conversation. The phrase to Ramona, “if there was only something between us other than our clothes” is a reference to absence and suggestive of longing. The following four lines, “something in our skies . . . blood,” carries with it a sense of violation and pollution. If there is something in the blood, there is often an infection of the bloodstream or some other medical problem. This phrase could also be thought of as a reference to ingrained cultural ideas or an instinctual urging; for instance, one may have “flying in their blood” and decide to become a pilot. Also, blood is often thought of as the most intimate thing that can be shared (as in “blood brothers,” for instance, where a pact is sealed by the mingling of their blood). Kim Hewitt, in her book *Mutilating the Body, Identity in Blood and Ink*, adds:

The act of shedding blood is perhaps the most universally powerful example of crossing the barrier between the external and internal body. Although different cultures have different levels of alarm at seeing blood shed, all recognize bleeding as precious fluid leaving the body. . . . Fear of AIDS has caused blood and other body fluids to be thought of even more frequently as sources of possibly fatal contamination.⁵¹

Something in the blood is, first of all, pervasive of a person, as the blood flows throughout the body. Blood is an essential part of a living person; without it one dies. The idea that there is an infection throughout the body, or that this intimate fluid is permeated with “something,” coupled with the tone of the music, suggests longing for some kind of healing or resolution of this “infection.” In another

⁵¹Hewitt, *Mutilating the Body*, 16-7.

sense, the term “something” is suggestive of the unknown, which evokes Adler’s confusion. The tone of the music is very dark and dense, with various voices and disparate unnatural sounds coming to the listener from various aural directions. These various elements contribute to an atmosphere of confusion and fear. They also suggests longing and depression—the inability to change the present situation.

In the lyrics, a question to Paddy follows, “Who’s been wearing Miranda’s clothes.” The concept of the wearing of another’s clothes is linked with deception and again, violation. Bowie continues singing that the Heart’s Filthy Lesson: “Falls upon deaf ears/Falls upon dead years.” If one cannot hear an important message, then one is doomed to live without it; in this context, those who are “deaf” are without hope, fated to meet whatever doom may come. “Dead years” can carry with it both connotations of nihilism and of regret, that those years past have been wasted and are gone.

Bowie then returns to the one-sided conversation. The first lines of this section suggest nihilism and extreme pessimism. Interestingly, “cerulean” refers to a dark blue like the colour of the sky. This term is rather ambivalent, although it is interesting that its connotation is not pessimistic, as it would be if it were referring to a grey or dirty sky, for instance. But juxtaposed with this suggestion of a deep blue sky is the proclamation of something invading the skies (“something in our skies”) and the blood, a cry of violation and infection.

Directly following an aurally striking moment in the song, a moment when all the music stops and all that is heard is a sigh, Adler pleads to Paddy: “Paddy will you carry me—I think I’ve lost my way.” Bowie presents a speaker who has lost all his strength and bearings, pleading with a partner to help him continue on his way; time has lost its meaning as well.⁵² He then sings, “I’m already five years older, I’m already in my grave.” The idea of time passing too quickly is a common one at the end of the twentieth century, where time no longer seems to be in abundance. Even with the advent of computers and other supposedly time-saving appliances, many would concede that there seems to be less time. The loss of time suggests the loss of opportunity, again contributing to the sense of sadness and longing for more time. This section of the lyrics is stressed by a “sigh” at its opening and also features Bowie singing his highest pitch of the song. Coupled with these musical elements, the increased appearances of Bowie as singer at this point in the music video draw attention to this section of the song, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Following this important moment, Bowie ceases to sing and simply speaks the lyrics, referring to death and darkness in a rather insistent and excited voice.

Segmental analysis offers the opportunity to read the lyrics of a song not as a linear narrative but as a variety of segments. The problem with a segmental analysis of this particular song is that only one category of segments is obvious,

⁵²In the written narrative, Adler claims that he was born in 1947, which happens to be the same year as Bowie himself. One could then conclude that, of all the characters in the narrative, Adler would be the character most closely associated with Bowie himself.

Figure 2.4. Lyrics for “Strangers When We Meet.” (Bowie)^b

Yooou, yooou, yooou	Halfway sadness
Yooou, yooou, yooou	Dazzled by the new
All our friends	Your embrace
Now seem so thin and frail	It was all that I feared
Slinky secrets	That whirling room
Hotter than the sun	We trade by vendu
No pecchy frairs	Steely resolve
No trendy rechauffe	Is falling from me
I'm with you	My poor soul
So I can't go wrong	All bruised passivity
All my violence	All your regrets
Raining tears upon the sheet	Ride rough-shod over me
I'm bewildered	I'm so glad
For we're strangers when we meet	That we're strangers when we meet
	I'm so thankful
Blank screen TV	That we're strangers when we meet
Preening ourselves in the snow	I'm in clover
Forget my name	For we're strangers when we meet
But I'm over you	Heel head over
	But we're strangers when we meet
Blended sunrise	Strangers when we meet
And it's a dying world	Strangers when we meet
Humming Rheingold	Strangers when we meet
We scavenge up our clothes	Strangers when we meet
	Strangers when we meet
All my violence	Strangers when we meet
Raging tears upon the sheet	Strangers when we meet
I'm bewildered/resentful	Strangers when we meet
For we're strangers when we meet	Strangers when we meet
	Strangers when we meet
Cold tired fingers	
Tapping out your memories	

^bLyrics: Bowie. Publisher: North America - Tintoretto Music (BMI) administered by RZO Music, Inc. Rest of World - Tintoretto Music/RZO Music Ltd. Lyrics reprinted from <http://www.davidbowie.com/freebowie/bowie/chronology/albums/95o/lyrics/strangers.html>; Internet; accessed 1 April 2000.

although there may be a multitude of less obvious or less emphasized segments. In the case of “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” an application of McDonald’s segmental analysis model results in a thematic reading of the lyrics. By referring to lyrics and phrases such as hell, blood, deaf ears, etc., the song conveys a feeling of hopelessness, nihilism and confusion. Musically, this feeling is supported by Bowie’s own sneering vocalization, the cold and distorted accompaniment and his various declamatory stresses on certain words. In an analysis of the second single from the album, multiple segments are apparent.

“Strangers When We Meet”

A segmental approach to the second single, “Strangers When We Meet,” yields multiple categories of segments and gives a well-rounded interpretation of the lyrics (see Figure 2.4). The song is to be sung by Leon Blank, the prime suspect in the murder of Baby Grace. The first category of segments contains words and phrases that refer to weakness and regret, not unlike the segment explored above. Examples such as “thin and frail,” “violence,” “tears,” “bewildered,” and so forth suggest a character—in this case, Leon—that is suffering in his own depression. He is “resentful,” forgetful and “tired” as well, all pointing to weakness. One of the most poignant parts of the song occurs toward the end with the following lyrics:

Steely resolve is falling from me
My poor soul all bruised passivity

All your regrets ride rough-shod over me
 I'm so glad that we're strangers when we meet

These lyrics refer to one losing motivation, wallowing in inactivity, being overcome by another's perceived guilt, and experiencing a strange contentment in loneliness. These lyrics are, again, much like those discovered in "The Heart's Filthy Lesson."

But there is also another category of segments referring to technology. Bowie writes, "Blank screen TV preening ourselves in the snow." The meaning of "preening" in this context is unclear, as is the meaning of snow. Is the snow mentioned here actually frozen rain or is it referring to what is being displayed on the blank screen of the television? "Preening" is most probably a reference to fixing oneself up, looking at oneself in the "snow" of the television in a narcissistic way. This could be read as a pathetic image.⁵³ The notion of a television that is tuned to "snow" or static suggests a television that is not working properly. The image of a television tuned to a dead station conjures up relationships between televisions and future technology. One needs only to think of such culturally influential films as *Blade Runner*, where televisions are often shown with static being broadcast, or perhaps television programmes like *Max Headroom*, in which televisions could not be turned off. William Gibson's extremely influential novel *Neuromancer* begins with the phrase, "The sky above

⁵³The author is indebted to Dr Susan Fast for making this reference clear.

the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.”⁵⁴ A television tuned to a dead channel broadcasts visual and aural distortion; it is also a distorted image.

The idea of the television taking over a person’s attention to the extent that one cannot do anything but peer into the screen, is a very negative one, and this idea has often moved concerned parents to encourage their children to spend less time watching it. The mention of a static television set in this song conjures up that concern of television taking attention from a person. The fact that it is transmitting essentially nothing suggests that it isn’t working properly. Thus, the advanced technology hasn’t helped the singer of the song, by perhaps informing or educating, or even entertaining, but has instead contributed to his pathetic character. The character, like a static television, isn’t working properly either. Perhaps the loss of humanity in technology results in a distorted image of the self, or one that is not “working” properly. Perhaps the modification of the body, because of its resulting awareness of “something” real through pain, serves to correct this distorted self-image.

Bowie continues to refer to advanced technology. He sings, “Cold tired fingers tapping out your memories,” which could be read as a reference to one typing on a keyboard. This statement is emphasized by its musical context, as it comes after a piano solo culminating in a descending line down to the dominant,

⁵⁴William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1987), 3.

where the vocal line comes in, presumably leading the listener back to the tonic, which doesn't happen. Bowie's voice reaches the same pitch levels as in the previous verse, but the entry is much more emotionally charged because of the solo occurring directly before it. The general vocal delivery is much more open than in the previous number. Reeves Gabrels provides a unique insight regarding the effectiveness of these lyrics:

when we did strangers when we meet i did very much play off the melody for emotional motivation. . . . the best performances of this song are from the live "earthling" tour. . . . for some reason that song and it's lyrics (blank screen tv...) had a lot of resonance on the road.⁵⁵

A segmental analysis of the lyrics suggests an atmosphere of longing, hopelessness, darkness and of technological advancement that is cold and not advantageous to humanity. Further, the lyrics do not point to any redemption or positive event in the future. These themes contribute to a space which could be called liminoid, not quite reaching the ideal liminal as presented by Turner. It is a place of limbo without the range of possibilities afforded by the liminal, and no sign of the transformative as a result of the struggle in this "in-between" phase. It is unclear as to why Bowie includes apparently positive lyrics within this context. The immediate feeling that this author had when first hearing this songs was that the speaker had decided to resign to the hopelessness of his situation (whatever that might be), that "it is better this way." Such a reading is certainly

⁵⁵Gabrels, Personal email, dated 23 February 2000.

not optimistic. Nevertheless, Bowie's inclusion of apparent optimism offers the opportunity for various readings of the song, as well as opening other avenues of possibility for what Bowie is conveying through it.

A Brief Discussion of Album Art

Victor Turner suggests that those living in a postindustrial society are trying to reclaim the numinous. Many members of society at the end of the twentieth century would agree that technology has sped everything up. Many would suggest that society is speeding out of control, and, as Ted Polhemus suggests, many would look to their own bodies as the last item that they can truly control. Bowie reflects this negative attitude towards technical advancement through the creation of the antagonist Ramona A. Stone. In her spoken segue track, Ramona A. Stone speaks technologically-themed phrases such as "I've been having a *mid*life crisis ... I've spat upon deeply felt age." The first phrase uses "midi-" rather than "mid-," a clever use of the acronym for "musical instrument digital interface." The second phrase, when considered along with the photo included in the liner notes, may suggest that Ramona has reconfigured herself to defy age by some technological modification. In the digitally manipulated photo of Bowie himself, Ramona is a green-skinned woman with metallic gear on her torso and an artificial arm (see Figure 2.5). Aurally, Bowie has transformed his voice electronically into at least three voices speaking at the same time—using a harmonizing synthesizer—and the accompanying music is cold and mechanical,



Figure 2.5. Ramona A. Stone.

using synthesizer string pads and various samples of industrial noises. He has transformed himself into something like a character from a video game, much like a science fiction warrior in a simulation. Again evoking Baudrillard's hyperreal, Ramona has become reality in the narrative. The only sound that is not electronically processed in some way in this segue is provided by a piano interjecting various quick successions of notes.⁵⁶ The photo coupled with the sound and lyrics of the segue suggest progressive technology. The hopelessness of progressive technology is revealed in Ramona, a green-skinned semi-human manipulator, as revealed in the narrative; the idea of optimism in technology is

⁵⁶The piano is a "neutral" instrument, as discussed by Paul Théberge in *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), because of its familiarity and traditional use, as well as the direct connection between bodily gesture and the resulting sound. This relationship can be "completely severed with electronic devices." (p. 199)

nowhere to be found. Darkness and pessimism are also reflected in the reprinting of the lyrics. The lyrics for “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson” are reprinted in varying size fonts, sometimes blurred and seemingly cut up (see Figure 2.6). They are printed in black within light-coloured boxes on a green and black background, an effect which makes successful reading of the complete lyrics almost impossible. Also, the lyrics for the following song on the CD, “A Small Plot of Land,” are listed just beside these in an almost completely illegible state: blurred white printing over the black background. The lyrics for “Strangers When We Meet” are printed in a somewhat clearer manner, but in four thin closely-spaced columns, which is confusing to the reader (see Figure 2.7). The words are difficult to read further to the right of the page due to the “interference” of a tinted photo and more text. In addition to conveying a similar sense of darkness and confusion as the music itself by actually hindering the ability of one to properly read the lyrics, such a presentation also causes one to question why the lyrics are reprinted in the first place. The images blur the lines between reprinted lyrics and artistically manipulated photos, and may cause one to question at which point such an image could still be called reprinted lyrics. Bowie contributes to a space between these lines—this liminoid space—by suggesting an atmosphere of confusion to the reader.

Musical Analysis: “The Motel”

The themes throughout *1. Outside* deal with the culture of body modification, as they are generally explored in chapter 1. The narrative deals with murder as art, and contains references to body play. Is there a way to relate the music of the album with the lyrical and other themes? From the segmental analyses attempted previously in this discussion, themes of confusion, infection, regret and the influence of technology are made apparent to the listener. The question is, how are these themes reflected in the music of the album, and how do they connect to the culture of modification? A particularly powerful demonstration of this connection is embodied in the seventh track on the album, “The Motel” (see Figure 2.8 for the lyrics to this song).

- The track begins with background noise and people talking beneath a jazz-like piano and bass accompaniment. The atmosphere created is suggestive of a club or bar where people congregate for a short time before returning to their previous activities. A bar is a place of leisure outside of the everyday. Similarly, a motel as a transitional place evokes the notion of a liminal space. The limbo atmosphere created in this opening establishes the aural space evoking a transitory location.

The beginning strains of music are sparse and airy, with scattered piano and bass entering, playing over an accompaniment oscillating between G \flat and F tonal centres, with a string pad providing a pedal of E \flat at the back of the mix. Bowie enters at the downbeat of the eleventh bar of 4/4 time with a melody line

Figure 2.8. Lyrics for “The Motel.” (Bowie)^c

For we're living in a safety zone
 Don't be holding back from me
 We're living from hour to hour down
 here
 And we'll take it when we can

It's a kind of living which recognizes
 The death of the odourless man
 When nothing is vanity nothing's too
 slow
 It's not Eden but it's no sham

There is no hell
 There is no shame
 There is no hell
 Like an old hell
 There is no hell

And it's lights up, boys
 Lights up boys

Explosion falls upon deaf ears
 While we're swimming in a sea of sham
 Living in the shadow of vanity
 A complex fashion for a simple man

And there is no hell
 And there is no shame
 And there is no hell
 Like an old hell
 There is no hell

And the silence flies on its brief
 flight

The razor sharp crap shoot affair
 And we light up our lives
 And there's no more than
 Re exploding you
 Re exploding you
 Like everybody do
 Re exploding you
 I don't know what to use
 Makes somebody blue
 Me exploding re exploding you

^cLyrics: Bowie. Publisher: North America - Tintoretto Music (BMI) administered by RZO Music, Inc. Rest of World - Tintoretto Music/RZO Music Ltd. It should be noted that the lyrics are highly contested in many official sources. These lyrics were compiled by comparing the official David Bowie Internet website (<http://www.davidbowie.com>), the Japanese liner notes (from *1. Outside* v. 2, BMG Victor, Inc./Arista Japan, 1996, BVCA-2801/02) and the recording itself.

that follows the oscillations of the accompaniment (see Figure 2.9). At m. 39, he begins singing on different pitches, oscillating between B \flat and A corresponding to the G \flat and F of the accompaniment, at the same time that the drums enter to solidify the quarter note pulse. It is at this point in the song that the vocals provide the mediant in relation to the accompaniment's tonic; the harmonic progression of V- \flat VI-V-etc. (F-G \flat -F-etc.) in B \flat is suggested. At m. 47, Bowie hits a C, the highest pitch thus far (the lyrics here are "It's lights up, boys") with the listener expecting a resolution to a tonic, which does not happen. Rather, the accompaniment returns to the G \flat /F oscillation. At m. 59, the vocals return to the pitches B \flat /A using different lyrics than before, but then repeating the previous section from mm. 39-46. The vocals continue upwards to C as in the previous case, but then continue to D \flat and finally hitting E \flat while the accompaniment lands decidedly on the tonic, accentuated by distorted power chords in the accompanying guitars. The song finishes without vocals, with the instruments playing the tonic harmony, while the song fades to an end.

There is no real sense of arrival for the listener until m. 83 when the vocals reach E \flat and the accompaniment cadences on the tonic. This arrival on the tonic is emphasized by highly distorted power chords, the only appearance of distortion in the song so far. Walter Everett, discussing power chords, comments, "the listener is forced to hear . . . an assertion of tonic based solely on non-pitch factors: 'a tonic is likely to . . . receive an attack more emphasized . . . than that of

Figure 2.9. Formal analysis of "The Motel."

Measure Number/Time	General Key Centre	Comments
1-12 (0:00-0:48)	oscillating between G \flat /F	Intro
13-20 (0:49-1:25)	vocals enter G \flat /F	A section
21-26 (1:26-1:52)	instruments only	interlude
27-34 (1:53-2:25)	vocals G \flat /F	A' section,
35-38 (2:26-2:43)	instruments only	interlude
39-46 (2:44-3:07)	vocals B \flat /A, "there is no hell...", drums enter	B section; here, the vocals can be heard as providing a third to the accompaniment's tonic; the harmonic progression to this point seems to be V- \flat VI-V (F-G \flat -F-etc.) in B \flat
47-50 (3:08-3:33)	vocals up to C, further harmonic movement in accompaniment	C section;
51-58 (3:34-3:45)	instruments only G \flat /F	interlude
59-66 (3:46-4:10)	vocals return B \flat /A	B' section
67-74 (4:11-4:35)	"there is no hell..."	B section
75-82 (4:36-5:00)	vocals up to C - D \flat	C' section
83-94 (5:01-5:37)	vocals hit E \flat	D section; an <i>arrival</i> on I-V- \flat VII-I-etc. in E \flat , power chords
95-115 (5:38-6:40) (fade)	no vocals, static tonic harmony	Outro

its temporal neighbors.”⁵⁷ In this case, the assertion of a tonic *is* based on pitch factors—in other words, there is a cadence immediately before the arrival on the tonic—but the tonic comes rather unexpectedly. The piece doesn’t begin on a tonic, and a dominant is not recognized until its resolution to the tonic emphasized by distorted power chords. It is also through non-pitch factors, heavy distortion in this case, that the tonic is established. In his discussion of Heavy Metal music, Robert Walser discusses power chords and distortion in terms of power:

distortion functions as a sign of extreme power and intense expression by overflowing its channels and materializing the exceptional effort that produces it. . . . Distortion begins to be perceived in terms of power rather than failure, intentional transgression rather than accidental overload—as music rather than noise.⁵⁸

The resolution on the tonic is accentuated by the distorted power chords, and thus the resolution is a sign of extreme power. The song traces a movement from airy and scattered accompaniment, treated vocals and oscillations to an intensely expressive arrival at a tonic, complete with Bowie’s highest sung pitch and distorted power chords, outlining a chord progression of I-V-*b* VII-I-etc. This could be thought of as an arrival to a settled structure from a very loose structure, achieved through the inclusion of drums to solidify the quarter note beat to the playing of a progression rather than an oscillation of chords. One cannot help but

⁵⁷Walter Everett, “Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can Be a Sticky Subject,” *Expressions in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. W. Everett (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 332. Everett is quoting Allan Moore, “Patterns of Harmony,” *Popular Music* 11/1 (1992), 77.

⁵⁸Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 42.

draw a parallel between this reading of the song and the process of a rite of passage ritual as discussed by Turner and the culture of body modification as explored in the first chapter. The initiates are in a liminal state, basically undefined and generic in their cultural role; the music is atmospheric and impersonal without reaching any resolution. After an unsuccessful ascent to C, hoping to reach E \flat , the music suddenly returns to a stable place, marked by order and confidence, which could be an analog of the resulting phase of a rite of passage.⁵⁹ Reinforcing this feeling, during the final strains of the song, guitarist Reeves Gabrels guitar plays a melody which basically harmonizes the tonic of the key. His melody line, played clearly with little distortion, provides closure to the song. No longer is there any tonal confusion or uncertainty; Gabrels' melodic outlining of the tonic chord further establishes this arrival at balance and stability.

Through such a reading, the song's form can be recognized as pointing to certain behaviours explored in the previous chapter. The spirit of mutilation and modification as a transformative event is certainly reflected in this piece. The moment of transformation, at m. 83, corresponds to lyrics that point to violence: "me exploding re exploding you." But instead of a negative view of violence, perhaps an explosion could be seen in a positive light, as in a sudden strong outburst of emotion; in this light, an explosion could be thought of as an emancipation rather than a destructive and violent event. Read in this way, this

⁵⁹Perhaps a "cut" or "piercing" occurs at m. 83, with the sudden appearance of distorted power chords.

song suggests an analog to Turner's liminal phase: the transformation occurs with a feeling of order and stability following. Bowie moves from the general sense of the liminoid, conveyed in the album as a whole, to a song analogous to the middle phase of a rite of passage. Bowie's intention with this positive presentation is unclear. In an album that is rife with negative themes contributing to an atmosphere suggesting a liminoid phase, not reaching the full extent of the liminal as outlined by Turner, this analog to the liminal is unexpected. "The Motel" may represent Bowie giving body modification its chance; this is the one song that says, "Yes, the behaviour works. Be transformed." However, it could also be perceived that Bowie does not put his faith in the activity as a force of change, as is made evident by the other elements of the album, forcibly by the music videos for "The Heart's Filthy Lesson" and his live performance.

CHAPTER 3

BOWIE'S VIDEO AND LIVE PERFORMANCE

There's the idea that there's a great brick wall and we can't possibly get past—that on December 31, 1999—I think it's egotistic—we'll all suddenly not be here. I think this is a feeling of panic and desperation that produces a massive momentum, as it does at the end of every century. It's only an exaggerated version, coming to the end of the millennium.

- David Bowie, *Seconds* interview.¹

As has been explored in the previous chapters, *I. Outside* engages with issues including body modification and extreme acts of violence—towards the self and/or others—as art, all of which Bowie has suggested, in his comments to the press and to Penman in particular, is a manifestation of the search for a new spirituality different from Judeo-Christianity.² Through his comments in *Seconds* magazine, as well as through the accompanying narrative (as it takes place on 31 December 1999), Bowie is engaging with the idea of the state of society at the end of the millennium. He suggests that Western society suffers a certain anxiety toward the end of a century. He may also be suggesting that the liminoid space which is represented in the album is a characteristic of society at

¹George Petros & Steven Blush, "I Don't Feel as Though I Hold a Torch for One Particular Style of Music, I Find that Absolutism Outmoded." *Seconds* (August/September 1995); <http://www.algonet.se/~bassman/articles/95/s.html>; Internet; accessed 19 March 2000.

²Bowie makes similar comments in a *MusiquePlus* special and VH1 interview, both television appearances, from 1995.

this time; the liminoid is not simply a fictional construction, but an actual societal state.

This chapter will focus on the visual aspects of the album, particularly exploring the music video for “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” and Bowie’s live performance of “A Small Plot of Land.” Through a study of the music video, various juxtapositions will be revealed. It will be argued that Bowie uses these juxtapositions to create a sense of ambiguity, contributing to the creation of a liminoid space. This ambiguity may also reflect his confusion regarding the subject of body modification, and may further extend his application of the liminoid space to a specific segment of society.

Video Analysis: “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson”

Alf Björnberg, in his article, “Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video,” introduces an extensive model for the study of music video. Björnberg comments that “the specific characteristics of (the visual dimension of) music video attracting the attention of writers and scholars may be summarized as the breakdown of linear narrativity, of causal logic, and of temporal and spatial coherence.”³ Various writers, such as Aufderheide and Kaplan, suggest that these traits are due to the “postmodern condition,” the development of technology (including the ability to produce music videos) and

³Alf Björnberg, “Structural Relationships of Music and Images in Music Video,” *Popular Music* 13/1 (1994), 51.

various explanations regarding the nature of the audience. Björnberg points out that what these authors and scholars have overlooked is the significant role of music in the context of music video, suggesting that the music is somehow “dominated” by the visual aspect.⁴

Björnberg proposes a list of “analytical dimensions” used in his analysis of music video. The list includes: discursive repetition/structure of lyrics/function; demarcation; symmetry; musematic repetition; directionality (or pitch-related directionality); motorial flow; dynamics; sound processes; and individuality predominance factor (referred to as IPF, being a measure of the signification of ‘individuality’ in a piece).⁵ This analysis will begin with an exploration of some general characteristics of Bowie’s video, “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson.”

To begin, the video’s visual content will be arranged according to its corresponding musical sections, as in Björnberg’s analyses (see Figure 3.1).⁶ The video utilizes quick editing of images and consists of mainly brown, yellow, red or black hues; everything is presented as through a rust or sepia lens. The scenes take place indoors—in an artists’ studio—and the “world” is very much in decay,

⁴Ibid., 53. Will Straw also suggests that rock journalists have made a similar claim, “that music video had made ‘image’ more important than the experience of music itself,” and “that music video would result in a diminishing of the interpretive liberty of the individual music listener.” See Will Straw, “Music Video in its Contexts: Popular Music and Post-modernism in the 1980s,” *Popular Music* 7/3 (1988), 247.

⁵Björnberg provides much more detail for each of these elements on pp. 56-9 of his article. Some of these terms are clarified further in this paper’s discussion of a synthesized analytical method.

⁶Ibid., 61.

Figure 3.1. Visual account of “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson” arranged according to corresponding musical sections.

SECTION	DESCRIPTION
<i>Intro</i>	The video opens with an image of a white mannequin against a beige background, followed by various images of the environment in which the video is taking place, presumably an artists’ studio. Bowie is shown in a black t-shirt and pants, smoking, followed by an image of a dancing person wearing a minotaur mask. As all the instruments begin to play, a group of tattooed and pierced persons, here referred to as “punks” because of their various peircings and violent dancing later in the video, walk down a flight of stairs. Also, there is a marionette playing a set of drums.
<i>Verse 1.0</i>	Bowie, wearing black, is shown singing, while images of the punks throwing sand and other substances onto a mannequin, are quickly cut to, mixed with close-up shots of a female punk.
<i>Verse 1.1:</i> “Oh Ramona...”	The punks are shown to be wheeling a cart of some kind around, while Bowie is shown “playing” with a mannequin and dancing. ^a A female punk walks toward a bath in a light robe.
<i>Verse 1.2:</i> “Something in our skies...”	There are more shots of the woman moving closer to the bath. Bowie, not shown singing, dances, thrusting his arms into the air and moving quickly; punks “adorn” the mannequin with various substances and are shown sawing its torso. At the bath, the woman drops her robe revealing her bare back and buttocks at the very start of the instrumental section.
<i>Instrumental</i>	Shots of the woman bathing are intermingled with quick shots of a male punk getting needles pierced through his brow. Images of Bowie’s face making exaggerated gestures—putting his hands on his face and opening his mouth, for instance—are cut with projected images of gaping mouths on a wall. The woman is lifted out of the bath by a circle of punks. This is followed by various close-ups of punks in front of swinging suspended light bulbs; other punks are then shown pulling and hanging from large ropes in a larger room. Shots of Bowie wearing white—“artist” Bowie—are then shown.

^aBowie has his arm around its shoulder and sings to it, smiles at it, puts his hand on the figure’s chest and head, etc.

Figure 3.1 (cont'd)

Chorus	<p>“It’s the Heart’s...” Bowie as “artist” is shown singing briefly, and then sketching or painting something on the floor. The punks pulling on the ropes are revealed to be lifting mannequins by their heads, suspending them over the floor of the studio. “Artist” Bowie is shown in a small circular metal cage-like enclosure, applying red paint to his white shirt and his face. Images of a man being covered in red paint and other substances and accessories are presented, intermingled with shots of a woman drinking or spilling liquids on her face. More sawing of the mannequin’s torso is shown here. The viewer at this point can become confused as to which object is being decorated or worked on: the man or the mannequin.</p>
<i>Verse 2.1</i>	<p>Bowie is shown singing “Oh Ramona,” while images of the adorned man—now completely covered in red paint—destroying boxes or some small items are shown. The dancing minotaur is shown again, while a mannequin is decapitated.</p>
<i>Verse 2.2</i>	<p>Bowie is shown sitting in a chair with a minotaur mask in his hand, with various Bowie face shots and quickly edited images of the events recounted above.</p>
<i>Bridge</i>	<p>This section begins with the sound of a sigh interrupting the music for just a moment; Bowie is in the chair reaching upward. The mannequin is then drenched with liquid, and its head is removed. Bowie is showed in the chair with the minotaur mask on. In a climactic sequence, punks walk slowly with a large bull head and place it on the mannequin, encircling the figure and then walking away from it. During this sequence, there are many images of Bowie singing the song.</p>
<i>Coda</i>	<p>The camera iris opens on the image of the punks gathered at a table, not unlike the traditional image of Christ’s Last Supper. Various close images of the punks eating are shown, and then the punks are in front of the table violently “moshing” and throwing mud or paint at each other. Bowie is shown singing, again “playing” with the mannequin, and there are three consecutive shots of the word, “OUTSIDE” on the set walls. Bowie is shown sitting in the chair, and the marionette playing the drums makes its final appearance, as does the dancing minotaur. The final scene is of the minotaur sitting in the chair, unmasking itself to reveal Bowie as the music fades. As he pulls the mask off, his face is happy, but gradually turns sorrowful as his head falls to his chest.</p>



Figure 3.2. Bowie with mannequin in “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson” video.

with waste and litter scattered throughout the set (see Figure 3.2 for an image of Bowie “playing” with a mannequin, from the video).

The video could be thought of as conceptual. In her article, “Music Video: The Popular Pleasures of Visual Music,” Cathy Schwichtenberg begins by breaking the genre of music video into three formal categories: performance videos, where a concert atmosphere is recreated by the visual images; narrative videos and conceptual videos. Conceptual music videos present sets of images which, by their interrelationships with the editing and music, develop a concept. Schwichtenberg suggests that “this type of visual music proffers suggestive

resonances to be linked together in our musical experience of a concept.”⁷

Contributing to the conceptual nature of the video are brief moments of action which suggest linearity. For instance, there are distinct sequences of events, such as the “baptism,” the adornment of the mannequin and the feast. Through the barrage of images that assault the senses during this video, the viewer experiences a sense of disorientation and confusion. The dynamism of the images makes a linear narrative nearly impossible to perceive. The video could be seen as conceptual, while following a rough narrative sequence; it can be divided into four parts, the actions culminating in the adornment with the bull’s head and ending with the feast. The video begins with a “preparation” scene, where the group is introduced, moving from a flight of stairs through the artists’ studio environment. A woman is then shown being “baptised,” while a man is shown being pierced. Following this is a sequence of “preparation,” where both a mannequin and a man are adorned with various objects and liquids. The third part is a climactic section in which the mannequin’s head is removed and replaced with that of a bull. Finally, the video ends with a scene depicting a feast.

Schwichtenberg’s discussion of conceptual videos may suggest another reading: “Visual fragments are related as metaphorical equivalents for a ‘feeling’ evoked by ‘moving’ music.”⁸ The visual images in this video are often disparate

⁷Cathy Schwichtenberg, “Music Video: The Popular Pleasures of Visual Music,” *Popular Music and Communication*, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992), 124.

⁸Ibid.

though seemingly occurring in the same enclosed “world.” The video’s dark and dull hues, quick edits, and images of violence and dirt serve to reflect the aggressive timbre of the music—particularly emphasized by the sound of the electric guitar—and the nihilistic sense transmitted by the lyrics (for instance, “if there was only some kind of future”). The sound of the electric guitar hook is dense, noisy and extremely processed, contributing to the uneasy atmosphere created by the images. Combined with extremely quick edits, the visuals and sound of the video contribute to a sense of insecurity and anxiety. The constant changing of images and the lack of linearity presents the viewer nothing upon which to focus. Also, among the various elements in the video are those that seem to be contradictory, and others that are more complex than simple contradictory pairs. These various elements, along with the conceptual character of the video, contribute to its ambivalent quality. These elements will be referred to as *juxtapositions*.

Juxtapositions

Carol Vernallis, in her article, “The Aesthetics of Music Video: An Analysis of Madonna’s ‘Cherish,’” suggests that both music and image create large sectional divisions, thus taking into account the information culled by Alf Björnberg’s discussion of discursive repetition/structure of lyrics/function.⁹

⁹Carol Vernallis, “The Aesthetics of Music Video: An Analysis of Madonna’s ‘Cherish,’” *Popular Music* 17/2 (1998), 153-4.

Björnberg's discussion of discursive repetition refers primarily to the determination of the form of a piece, breaking it down into subsections according to function, including verse, chorus, bridge, solo, etc.¹⁰ As mentioned, this video can be divided into roughly four major sections: an introduction/opening scene; the preparation and adornment of the mannequin and person; the completion of the mannequin/Minotaur; and the feast. Between the introduction and the preparation scenes is an "interlude," consisting of images of the piercing of the man and the "baptism" of the woman. Also, between the preparation of the mannequin and its final adornment is an extremely disruptive musical event. At this particular moment in the piece, all the instruments are absent and a sound akin to a sigh is heard before the music begins again (marking the beginning of the third section). Vernallis comments that "in music video, the shape of the musical line can correlate to the shape of the visual image."¹¹ The most striking characteristic of this "break" is not only its suddenness but also the contour of the visual image accompanying it. Generally, one would think of a downward motion when hearing a sigh. Often, in one's own experience, with a sudden exhale of breath, the upper body seems to descend releasing all the air in the lungs. In this case, the visual image is of Bowie sitting in a chair, suddenly reaching upward with his hands and head, contrary to the expected contour. This opposition causes

¹⁰Björnberg, "Structural Relationships," 57.

¹¹Vernallis, "Aesthetics of Music Video," 157. Her discussion of form follows on pp. 159-60.

the event to be disruptive to the viewer, audibly as well as visually, and leads the viewer into the climactic scene of the video: the final adornment of the mannequin. This event is aptly named as a sigh because of its role in breaking the motorial flow of the piece, which involves a constant $G\flat$ pedal, and is reinforced by a constant rhythm of drums and bass as well as flowing, virtuosic piano and aggressive guitar lines. In addition, the event serves as an element of juxtaposition, contributing to a sense of ambiguity in the video.

Björnberg's discussion of demarcation generally refers to a division not determined necessarily by repetition, but by "the number of musical dimensions exhibiting change."¹² For Björnberg, demarcation is contributed to by changes in lyrics, melody, harmony, etc. These changes would support the broader reading of form above, but act to break the piece into further subsections. The most obvious musical change is in the mode of the melody line, which contributes to the feeling of tonal area. Throughout the piece there is a constant $G\flat$ pedal, with Bowie's opening melody suggesting a $D\flat$ minor tonality. When he begins singing "Oh Ramona....," the key in the melody has changed to $G\flat$ -Lydian, which moves to $G\flat$ minor when Bowie sings, "Something in our skies." With the beginning of the chorus, the key of the melody has again changed to $F\flat$ -Lydian (a transposition down a tone from the mode of the previous section). Simplified, the piece is an

¹²Björnberg, "Structural Relationships," 57.

oscillation between $G\flat$ (the starting and ending tonal area) and $F\flat$.¹³ These changes in tonal area do correspond to changing lyrical “sections,” and contribute to the musical narrative of the piece; the sections in $F\flat$ arguably demand a return to the framing mode of $G\flat$. This last statement would come under the rubric of Björnberg’s notion of “directionality.” Björnberg explains the concept of directionality as “an attempt to summarise the effects both of parametric dimensions such as mode (‘tonal language’) and of non-parametric aspects of tonal organisation.”¹⁴ This tension between the two tonalities is another example of juxtaposition, which serves to keep the song in a state of harmonic limbo. This tension again serves to give the video another element of ambiguity. An important recurring element in this video is a moment when Bowie is shown singing the song (rather than simply posing or moving). Björnberg uses the term, Individuality Predominance Factor (IPF), which is “based on a reading of the dualism of lead vocal melody and instrumental accompaniment in terms of the individual/background relationship.”¹⁵ For the purpose of this analysis, Björnberg’s notion of IPF will be slightly altered: the discussion of this element will revolve around instances of the appearance of the featured artist as singer.¹⁶

¹³A more complete map of the tonal areas of the piece follows: $G\flat$ pedal- $d\flat$ - $G\flat$ Lydian- $g\flat$ - $F\flat$ Lydian- $G\flat$ Lydian- $g\flat$ - $F\flat$ Lydian- $G\flat$ pedal.

¹⁴Björnberg, “Structural Relationships,” 58.

¹⁵Ibid., 59.

¹⁶Björnberg discusses the different presentations of the featured artist in Bruce Springsteen’s “Human Touch” video, but concludes only that the presence of three “different” artists and their apparent synthesis mirrors the form of the piece, which ends in an extended coda section (a musical synthesis). The use of the term in this discussion stresses the presence of the “individual,” that is, the featured artist.

This reading of a modified “Individuality predominance factor,” indicating the attention given to the individual as opposed to the “background,” suggests a privileging of certain lyrics in the piece. One is likely to be drawn to a segment of a music video that showcases the featured artist predominantly, and will arguably pay more attention to the musical and lyrical events occurring during this time. The image of the featured artist is one of the only constant elements in the context of this music video, and as such, it serves as an anchor for the viewer’s attention. In “The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” Bowie is shown many times while the mannequin/Minotaur is finally adorned, singing, “I’m already . . . Will you carry me? Oh Paddy, I think I’ve lost my way.” This is the only section of the video where Bowie is often shown singing the lyrics. The instances of Bowie singing the lyrics privileges those lyrics, and enhances the visual images that surround him. The privileging of these particular lyrics stresses their sense of confusion, a cry of dependence and the rapid passage of time (“I’m already five years older/I’m already in my grave”). The sense of confusion contributes to the atmosphere of insecurity and desperation. These various juxtapositions ultimately contribute to a sense of the liminoid in the video.

Although the idea of anonymity or limbo is a characteristic of the liminal phase, the context is one of *passage*. Those that are involved in a rite of passage are considered set apart and enlightened, and gain a certain stature as a result of the rite. With the many elements of juxtaposition which create a sense of ambiguity and confusion, there is no enlightenment for the participants, nor does

there seem to be any result at the end of the rite. The juxtapositions serve to confuse the viewer and support the video's apparent purpose of projecting ambivalence. The constant oppositions and juxtapositions contribute to the effectiveness of the video as a representation of a liminoid state, by casting it into a state of limbo, without any hope of closure or finality.

Further reinforcing the idea that the video is a representation of a liminoid state is the presentation of familiar elements in new combinations. Most notably, images of Christian ritual and iconography are intermingled with those of the *carnavalesque*.

Iconic Images

In "The Heart's Filthy Lesson" video, there are at least two kinds of iconic imagery presented to the viewer: images of primarily Christian ritual and those of the *carnavalesque*. Through the use of these images, the video can be read as the depiction of a rite of passage or a transformative event. The *carnavalesque* imagery serves to perhaps reinforce the video as a transformative vehicle, much like Rabelais' books, as analyzed by Mikhail Bakhtin, in which these images were typified.

The major types of ritual images in this video are as follows: the "baptism" of a woman, the piercing of a man's forehead (reminiscent of Christ's crown of thorns), the preparation of a mannequin through adornment and modification, and the decapitation and attaching of a bull's head to the

mannequin, with the group then encircling the completed figure. The video also contains images which invoke Christ's crucifixion as well as the traditional image of the Last Supper. This discussion will begin with the significance of the "baptism" of a woman in the context of the video.

After the first verse of the song, the images of a woman disrobing, uncovering her bare back and buttocks, are shown. Interwoven with images of Bowie's face and of the piercing of a man, the woman lowers herself into a tub of water, where she fully submerges herself and is later raised out of it by a group surrounding the tub. They put their arms beneath her and lift her out of the water with her remaining in the same lying position as she was in the tub. She is subsequently lifted above their heads, and thus this sequence of images ends.

Of course, the idea of baptism is primarily a Christian one. In describing the transmutation of rituals due to social circumstances, Catherine Bell provides a concise outline of the development of the Christian ritual of baptism. Originally fashioned after the experience of Christ, which is described in Matthew 3:13-17, Christian baptism was a marker of the entrance of a person into the Christian community. Bell comments,

As befits an alternative sectarian group outside mainstream Judaism and critical of Judaism's accommodations to a worldly ethos and political necessities, Christians made a sharp distinction between insiders and outsiders—the "way of life" and the "way of

darkness”—and ritually guarded it with rites rich in the symbolism of death and rebirth.¹⁷

With the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E., in which Christianity was deemed legal in the Roman Empire, the religion moved from being a sect to being a recognized church. Institutionalization followed: the Church became involved in all areas of life, including marriage, death, and appropriating Roman festivals as Christian holidays. Bell comments:

Hence, the elaborate initiation of the adult catechumen [or initiate] ultimately divided into a rite of infant baptism, confirmation, and communion. In this ethos, the Christian community was no longer a marginal schismatic Jewish-Gentile sect nursing millennial expectations of the end of the world. It was now in a position to be quite at home in the world, closely tied to the major political institutions of the early medieval period, with a growing understanding of its role in the world and its history.¹⁸

Interestingly, most present Christian charismatic and evangelical churches, developing from the Protestant movements of the 16th Century, return to the idea of baptism as a commemorative act, imitating the historical act of Christ. In certain evangelical circles, the baptism in water is an act of identifying with Christ, and is often recognized as an initiate's public display as a follower of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷Catherine Bell, "Ritual Change," *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 213.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁹See Section VII, Number 2 (b) in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada's *Statement of Fundamental & Essential Truths: Article V of the General Constitution, By-Laws and Essential Resolutions adopted by General Conference 1994*; accessible at <http://www.paoc.org/about/believe.html>; Internet; accessed 16 April 2000.

The use of the image of a woman appearing to be baptized is interesting. Bowie may be invoking the evangelical church here, which in itself is critical toward institutionalized Christianity in the form of Catholicism with its extrabiblical liturgical rituals. But the action is certainly on the outside of any kind of Christian presentation. For instance, the baptism occurs in a tub, into which the woman enters by herself. She is nude upon entering the water, a state which would not be tolerated in a religious setting. Finally, the images of her baptism are intercut with those of Bowie's grotesque facial gesturing and of a man being pierced in the forehead. This clash of images is not conducive to any pacifying religious experience or positive transformative event in the traditional sense.

The images of a man being pierced by needles through his forehead, the criss-cross of pins appearing like a "crown" of sorts, also conjures up images of Christ's crown of thorns. Perhaps the intent here is similar to that of Flannery O'Connor's character discussed in the first chapter and the beliefs of some that to become closer to Christ, one must identify with Him and His pain. This path to Christ is not a traditional one, but rather an access to God through the self and one's own actions. Why is this image shown in the video, and at this particular spot in the video, intercut with the images of the baptism? One can consider another participant as an icon of Christ, since at the end of the video, he presents himself with arms outstretched as if crucified. His gaunt figure supports a popular image of Christ on the cross, suffering, weak and frail. The inclusion of this

image in the video can be read as another evocation of Christ and His crucifixion. The mutilative and ritual nature of Christ's crucifixion is undeniable, but its icons present in the video serve as familiar elements in unfamiliar contexts, which is characteristic of a liminal space. It will be shown later that, with the conveyance of ambiguity, this space becomes liminoid.

Further suggesting the image of Christ, the final section of the video consists of a feast. While much of the subsequent images of consumption lean toward a more *carnavalesque* reading, the opening of this section with the camera iris revealing the frontal view of the complete table is reminiscent of the traditional paintings of the Last Supper. Christ is often a focal point at the centre of the table, surrounded by His disciples. This first view is not in focus, further adding to the possibility that this is a direct evocation of Christ's Last Supper; it is no longer clear that the viewer is observing a David Bowie video. For a moment, the video seems to call up a religious image from antiquity.

Intermingled with these Christian images are images of non-Christian ritual, such as the adornment of the mannequin and its adornment with a bull's head and worshipful encircling of it by the group. This takes place after the disruptive event of the "sigh," which serves both to draw the attention of the viewer in the direction of what follows, and as an instance of juxtaposition contributing to ambiguity in the video. Obviously, the action of adorning a mannequin and then encircling the representation of a minotaur is not a ritual that is even remotely rooted in Christianity. The encircling of the mannequin invokes

non-Western ritual in the fact that it is not recognizable as traditionally Western, although the worshipful encircling of the completed mannequin suggests the worship of idols. But why the emphasis on this portion of the video and its images? The ritual does not involve conventional religion, nor does it “praise” the classical body. As will be discussed in more detail later, the “classical body” as presented in Renaissance statuary also represents rationality itself and everything “high” and intellectual. The minotaur is not an example of the classical body; this new minotaur body represents the “low,” the marginalized and the physical.

The reasoning for the appearance of Christian ritual is more difficult to establish. Rob Walser, in his discussion of the use of mystical and religious themes in the music of Heavy Metal groups such as Iron Maiden and Led Zeppelin, comments that religious imagery, along with myth and other types of images, are “sources of power and mystery.”²⁰ Apart from Christianity, heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden draw upon various traditions, including the Occult, Romantic poetry and even Egyptian civilization.²¹ Speaking specifically about Iron Maiden, he states,

Fans at a concert participate in an empowerment that is largely musically constructed, but which is intensified by ritualistic images that sanctify the experience with historical and mystical depth. . . . In concerts or with recordings, Iron Maiden fans can experience a utopia of empowerment, freedom, and metaphysical depth,

²⁰Walser, *Running With the Devil*, 154.

²¹Ibid., 151-3.

constructed in part out of ideas that have been excluded from the utilitarian world of work and school.²²

Walser's suggestions can be easily applied to Bowie's use of Christian images in the video. These images invoke historical depth and depict ritual that is outside of the "everyday." The use of Christian images in the video serves to draw attention to ritual and sacrifice as possible methods to engage with the spiritual. As such, they are empowering, providing the listener with new resources to make sense of his or her own social experience. The Christian images may work in this way, but they're effectiveness is changed by their interaction with other types of familiar images.

What then is the purpose of presenting an apparent baptism, the many invocations of Christ as well as the Last Supper, with images of ritual and also the *carnavalesque*? An explanation can be found by referring again to Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Turner states:

Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events. . . . Then the factors or elements of culture may be recombined in numerous, often grotesque ways, grotesque because they are arrayed in terms of possible or fantasied rather than experienced combinations—thus a monster disguise may combine human, animal, and vegetable features in an "unnatural" way. . . . In other words, in liminality people "play" with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements.²³

²²Ibid., 154-5.

²³Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid," 27.

By combining various familiar elements, including a “baptism” and those of Christian iconography, as well as the *carnavalesque*, the video may be initially read as representing a liminal space. Turner’s comments fit the video almost perfectly, even with the statement regarding the recombination of human and animal elements in the creation of a monster; in this case, a bull’s head is combined with a human body to create a Minotaur, which is an example of the many juxtapositions in the video.

As a familiar element, the *carnavalesque* serves its purpose in the establishment of a kind of liminal space, but it also serves as an example of transgression. The *carnavalesque* overturns the official; it is a statement against the status quo. The discussion will now turn to an exploration of the *carnavalesque* as transgression.

Transgression

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, in their book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, shed some light on the *carnavalesque* as a move against the “high” and “official,” but not simply in behaviour or appearance but in all areas of culture. They begin by discussing the notion of the “high” and “low” in culture:

We have tried to see how high discourse, with their lofty style, exalted aims and sublime ends, are structured in relation to the debasements and degradations of low discourse. We have tried to see how each extremity structures the other, depends upon and

invades the other in certain historical moments, to carry political charge through aesthetic and moral polarities.²⁴

Through their discussion, the authors also explore the contradiction inherent in the “low,” being both reviled and desired. There is a political imperative to reject and eliminate the “low” by the “high,” but there is also a desire by the “high” for this Other. The “top” attempts to eliminate the “bottom” for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover that it is dependent upon the low-Other, “but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life.”²⁵

The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. This is evidenced by the history of the representation of ‘low’ entertainment and the carnivalesque.²⁶

Bakhtin’s *carnavalesque* has moved from a study of Rabelais’ work to the development of the notion into a critical inversion of all hierarchies and official realms. Stallybrass and White continue:

In Bakhtin’s schema grotesque realism in pre-capitalist Europe fulfilled three functions at once: it provided an image-ideal of and for popular community as an heterogeneous and boundless totality; it provided an imaginary repertoire of festive and comic elements which stood over against the serious and oppressive languages of the official culture; and it provided a thoroughly materialistic metaphysics whereby the grotesque ‘bodied forth’ the cosmos, the social formation and language itself.²⁷

²⁴Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 3-4.

²⁵Ibid., 5.

²⁶Ibid., 6.

²⁷Ibid., 10-11.

But the authors also point out that some critics question whether the “licenced release” of carnival activity might deem it as simply a form of social control of the low by the high.²⁸ They reply:

It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression. The most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*.²⁹

The authors then point out a similarity to Bakhtin’s concept of high/low inversion referred to as “Symbolic Inversion,” developed in the collection of essays edited by Barbara Babcock, *The Reversible World*. She writes:

‘Symbolic inversion’ may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political.³⁰

It is in this spirit that Stallybrass and White wish to use the term “transgression.” This notion can be directly applied to the behaviour of body modification. The behaviour, in many cases, not only transgresses mainstream cultural codes of appearance, but it also transgresses the very notion of the “classical” body as held in Western society.

²⁸Ibid., 13.

²⁹Ibid., 14.

³⁰Barbara Babcock, *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 14; quoted in Stallybrass & White, *Transgression*, 17.

Later in their discussion, the authors discuss Bakhtin's notions of the "classical" body and the "grotesque" body, and their contrary nature. The "classical" body, as presented by Renaissance statuary, is generally on a pedestal, placing the observers in a state of admiration, gazing upon a moment of time: "it immediately retroflects us to the heroic past, it is a *momento classici* for which we are the eternal latecomers, and for whom meditative imitation is the appropriate contrition."³¹ Thus, "the grotesque body stands in opposition to the bourgeois individualist conception of the body, which finds *its* image and legitimation in the classical."³² The classical body became the identity of rationality itself, representing the "high" discourses of philosophy, theology, law, etc. "The 'grotesque' here designates the marginal, the low and the outside from the perspective of a classical body situated as high, inside and central by virtue of its very exclusions."³³ Stallybrass and White advocate that one should not treat the *carnavalesque* as nothing more than a political binary, but rather that one should take a wider view of transgression: "The 'carnavalesque' mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such. In this process discourses about the body have a privileged role."³⁴

³¹Stallybrass & White, *Transgression*, 21-22.

³²Ibid., 22.

³³Ibid., 23.

³⁴Ibid., 26.

Stallybrass and White also discuss the marketplace as a bounded enclosure and a site of open commerce:

At the market centre of the polis we discover a commingling of categories usually kept separate and opposed: centre and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity, high and low. . . . The market square . . . is only ever an *intersection*, a crossing of ways.³⁵

From the authors' comments, a parallel can be made between the marketplace and a liminoid space, as both of these spaces are rife with juxtaposition. Stallybrass and White further suggest that the marketplace is like the body.

The tangibility of its boundaries implies local closure and stability, even a unique sense of belonging, which obscures its structural dependence upon a 'beyond' through which this 'familiar' and 'local' feeling is itself produced. Thus in the marketplace 'inside' and 'outside' (and hence identity itself) are persistently mystified. It is a place where limit, centre and boundary are confirmed and yet also put into jeopardy.³⁶

The marketplace, both as a site of juxtaposition and as an analog for the body, leads to another observation. The marketplace as a site of the carnivalesque is also a site of the liminoid. Stallybrass and White discuss the notion of liminality:

Victor Turner has similarly argued with respect to role reversal that carnival is 'a moment when those being moved in accordance to a cultural script were liberated from normative demands, where they were . . . betwixt and between successive lodgements in jural political systems'.³⁷

³⁵Ibid., 27.

³⁶Ibid., 28.

³⁷Ibid., 18.

If one will accept the idea of the marketplace as liminoid, then the body also constitutes the liminoid with the display of transgression through the *carnavalesque*. The images also serve to overturn the official, and to call for transformation. Thus, the video's display of *carnavalesque* images serves to reinforce the idea that it is creating a liminoid state. This state is not fully liminal, since its infusion with ambiguity and confusion caused by juxtaposition results in a loss of hope for positive transformation.

Carnavalesque Images

“The Heart’s Filthy Lesson” is saturated with images of the *carnavalesque*, primarily in the form of Bowie’s various poses and the feast. Pam Morris, in her “Introduction” to *The Bakhtin Reader*, comments on the effect of the *carnavalesque*: “it always simultaneously ridicules and celebrates, crowns and decrowns, elevates and debases. The grotesque exaggeration of the body in carnivalesque forms, and especially the persistent emphasis upon the belly and genitals, mocks Medieval religious repudiation of the flesh.”³⁸ Bakhtin states, “Minor occasions were also marked by comic protocol, as for instance the election of a king and queen to preside at a banquet ‘for laughter’s sake’ (*roi pour rire*).”³⁹ The preparation of the man, and later the mannequin (in some scenes being sawed

³⁸Pam Morris, “Introduction,” *The Bakhtin Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 21.

³⁹Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), 5.

and finally decapitated) recalls the carnival “king.” Bakhtin comments, “Debasement and interment are reflected in carnival uncrownings. . . . The king’s attributes are turned upside down in the clown; he is king of a world ‘turned inside out.’”⁴⁰ The attaching of the bull’s head to the mannequin could be thought of as a crowning of a sort, creating a minotaur, the mythic monster shaped half like a man and half like a bull, given a pacifying tribute of youths and maidens as food. This contradiction is another example of a juxtaposition contributing to a sense of ambiguity in the video.

The preparation of the man, as well as other images within the video, suggest the presence of bodily fluids. The covering with human waste or other bodily fluids is essentially degrading: “To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better.”⁴¹ Bakhtin continues, “It can be said that excrement represents bodies and matter that are mostly comic; it is the most suitable substance for the degrading of all that is exalted.”⁴² Through the degradation of an object, Bakhtin suggests that a new birth takes place. He is suggesting that debasement is a precursor to a transformative event, not unlike the loss of individuality in a rite of passage.

The pierced man could also be thought of as a *carnavalesque* figure, “crowned” both literally—with pins in his forehead—and figuratively, being

⁴⁰Ibid., 370.

⁴¹Ibid., 21.

⁴²Ibid., 151-2.

empowered and made different. The attention given to the act of piercing in the video could also suggest its intention as an act against the religious repudiation of the flesh. Reinforcing what was discussed in the first chapter, Jesse Singleton suggests a reason why piercing occurs:

Many of the people I spoke to stated that they felt that who they are is decided, not by themselves, but by the way they choose to present themselves to society. Society dictates what is correct, it also dictates what is needed and this results in a move towards social conformity. Piercing, then, is seen by many practitioners as an attack on what is seen as forced social conformity.⁴³

With the previous discussions regarding the culture of body modification, this is only one possible motivation for the behaviour, but one which supports the notion of piercing as power. Power, in this sense, stems from one's ability to choose one's own appearance, or to choose one's own expression of transgression.

Throughout the video, Bowie himself is presented as a grotesque figure, often with a gaping mouth and/or protruding eyes. Bakhtin comments:

Of all the features of the human face, the nose and mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body; the head, ears, and nose also acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate objects. . . . The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes. . . . It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside. Moreover, the bulging eyes manifest a purely bodily tension. But the most important of all human

⁴³Jesse Singleton, "Self Presentation and Identification," *Piercing and the Modern Primitive* (1997); Internet; <http://www.bme.freeq.com/pierce/articles/p&mp/self.html>; accessed December 9, 1999. Singleton cites B. S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). See Singleton's complete article at <http://www.bme.freeq.com/pierce/articles/p&mp/index.html>.

features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss.⁴⁴

These gestures are particularly stressed when they are supported by the lyrics, as is the case toward the end of the song. Bowie repeatedly sings, "Paddy, what a fantastic death abyss," often presented with facial expressions suggesting madness or exhibiting extreme changes in emotion; these elements contribute to the grotesque in Bowie's mannerisms. Bakhtin suggests that the grotesque is concerned with that which protrudes from the body, or reaches out of the confines of the body. Bowie, exhibiting bodily tension, attempts to cross the boundary of his body and its surroundings by reaching out, whether it is through his sharp and quick movements of his arms or through his protruding eyes and exaggerated emotional faces.

The "abyss" of the open mouth is also prevalent in the feast scene.

Bakhtin states:

Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself. . . . Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is

⁴⁴Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 316-7.

joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself.⁴⁵

The video features a raucous feast scene, with a particular sequence of images consisting of a woman (again, a member of the group of “punks”) devouring a piece of meat, her gaping mouth particularly noticeable. Along with this image is that of a projected mouth on the set walls throughout the video. Around the eating woman and the other participants in the feast, her colleagues dance in a violent manner. Referring to acts such as this, Bakhtin comments:

We have shown the essential link of blows and abuses with uncrowning. In Rabelais abuse never assumes the character merely of personal invective; it is universal, and when all is said and done it always aims at the higher level.⁴⁶

Morris, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, suggests that these *carnavalesque* images bring attention to that which is material and corporeal: “The upward impulse of official ideology rejects all that is earthly and material. But the downward thrust of grotesque realism affirms the material life of the body and of the earthly world.”⁴⁷

Just as the novels of Rabelais showcase the exaggerated body, emphasis on eating and excrement, and frequent beating and debasing, the grotesque body represents all of humanity: “it is the undying body of all the people, comically debased so that it may be festively reborn.”⁴⁸ And like the novels of Rabelais, Bowie’s video is a representation of humanity through its presentation of

⁴⁵Ibid., 281.

⁴⁶Ibid., 212.

⁴⁷Morris, “The Banquet, the Body and the Underworld,” *The Bakhtin Reader*, 227.

⁴⁸Morris, “Folk Humour and Carnival Laughter,” *The Bakhtin Reader*, 195.

particular grotesque images; it is no mistake that the young people in this video are members of a subculture with an affinity for piercing and other body modification. The video is a statement against the terror of the “official” world. Bakhtin’s *carnivalesque* works against such terror:

In the sphere of imagery cosmic fear (as any other fear) is defeated by laughter. Therefore dung and urine, as cosmic matter that can be interpreted bodily, play an important part in these images. They appear in hyperbolic quantities and cosmic dimensions. Cosmic catastrophe represented in the material bodily lower stratum is degraded, humanized, and transformed into grotesque monsters. Terror is conquered by laughter.⁴⁹

The notion that “terror is conquered by laughter” is applicable also to the narrative of Nathan Adler discussed in chapter two. The presentation of the narrative in a humourous manner is a method of defeating the terror of the event being described. The notion of cosmic fear—perhaps the approach of a millennium, a boundary to be crossed—being defeated by laughter, in the form of the grotesque and the transgressive is interesting. The suggestion that this “laughter” conquers the unknown fear might support Bowie’s suggestion that the behaviour of body modification is a manifestation of tension at the end of the millennium. What the behaviour does suggest is a transgression against what society deems as normal and proper, and a crossing of societal aesthetic lines.

The combination of *carnivalesque* images with those of Christian iconography and ritual serve to establish the video as a kind of liminal space. But

⁴⁹Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 336.

through its many presentations of juxtapositions, the video also suggests a sense of overwhelming ambiguity. The video does not fit into the description of the proper liminal phase. This notion of a liminoid space does not only apply to the video or to the music and lyrics as were explored in the last chapter, but also to Bowie's live performance. Juxtaposition in his performance is notable and effective in continuing the establishment of a liminoid space.

Bowie in Live Performance

Christopher Sandford describes Bowie's first appearance on David Letterman's late night television show:

The disparity showed between his dark clothes and the puce-red stage. After a perfunctory "Heart's Filthy Lesson"—shorn of the studio effects, no more than a slab of bristling art-noise—he gave a wolflike leer and bared his teeth. Bowie looked seriously ill. The lights picked out the disconcerting colours of his eyes. For the first time in twenty years, he was physically reproaching his audience, turning his back even before the song ended. His grim "Thanks" was an irony.⁵⁰

Sandford's description certainly conveys the spirit of the evening. Bowie was presented in a shiny black jacket and pants, a cream coloured T-shirt, with matching black nail polish and eye liner, appearing angry and gaunt. Sanford failed to mention that the music actually started before Bowie even appeared on stage, and he appeared highly agitated when he began to sing, with his arms flailing and his gestures extreme and sudden. The multitude of technical blunders

⁵⁰Christopher Sandford, *Bowie: Loving the Alien* (London: Warner Books, 1997), 325.

throughout the performance contributed to the overall feeling of confusion and loss of control, although it is unclear as to whether they were planned or whether they were simply early performance glitches. Sanford suggests that this performance shocked the audience into rethinking who Bowie was and what he was doing. The performance was presented like an accident, furious and volatile. Recorded the day before the release of his album, this performance of the first single was probably the first introduction of Bowie's new material to a wide American audience, and would certainly make an impression on the audience for any future performances.⁵¹ Sanford continues:

The tour took the same frequently antisocial line. On some nights concert-goers were confronted by a bare set, on others by a backdrop of torn drapes, a few chairs, a kitchen table and stark, operating-theatre lighting. Scrolls were rolled down to indicate changes in mood. The whole thing rested on Bowie's frozen presence, broken only by his ambling to the wings or slumping at the table.⁵²

Bowie presents himself, to use Sanford's words, as antisocial and also strange and frightening. Bowie sets up yet another juxtaposition of being both exposed to an audience, needing them to buy his albums or attend his concerts, but then presenting himself in an antisocial manner, as if his dependence was not an actuality. Symbolically, Bowie separates himself from his audience by the

⁵¹Refer to Appendix 1, which follows this chapter, for some comments regarding the general reception of the album and supporting tour.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 325-6. The tour consisted of primarily arena shows, although Bowie did play at the Skydome in Toronto, a large baseball stadium.

dropping of banners on stage in the live performance of the song, “A Small Plot of Land.”

“A Small Plot of Land”

The concert stage set for the *I. Outside* tour features a large scaffold-type marquee holding large letters forming the words “OPEN THE DOG” over the stage.⁵³ As Sanford mentioned, the stage itself is covered with drop cloths, with some stacked chairs and other various forms which appear to be mannequins draped in drop cloths toward the back of the stage. Toward the front of the stage is a small table surrounded by some chairs, just immediately behind and left of Bowie’s microphone position. Bowie is wearing a white/grey t-shirt and same-coloured pants with a white shirt draped around his waist, all stained with dark blotches of what appears as dark paint, or perhaps blood, yet again pointing to ambiguity. At one point in the concert, a mannequin in a foetal position, encased in circular metal bars, is positioned high above the stage as Bowie kneels at the table in a prayerful position, as if praying to this human moon.

In “A Small Plot of Land,” an event occurs which stands out among the rest of the performance. The song begins with a spotlight only on Bowie, the rest of the stage in darkness, while Bowie speaks some words accompanied by piano beginning the introduction. As the other musicians begin playing, the stage is

⁵³This description is of a performance at the Wembley Arena in London, UK, on November 15, 1995. This performance was privately captured on video tape.

washed with a blue light and Bowie proceeds to sit at the table with his back to the audience; he turns only as he begins to sing. As the performance continues, Bowie walks in a limited area slowly, often making quick but smooth gestures with his hands and arms. He then visits a lower portion of the stage, a few feet away from the audience, making slow graceful movements, although he doesn't make any physical contact with the fans only a few feet away. He walks slowly to a hanging cord and pulls on it, causing a large rectangular banner to unfold above the stage, and repeats this action three more times at various locations around the stage (see Figure 3.3). For the first banner, he reaches up to grab the cord with his right hand, while grabbing his right wrist with his left hand and then sliding it down to his elbow. He rests his head on his forearm as if in a state of sorrow, and then proceeds to pull the cord downward slowly but forcefully. The pulling of the cords occur during Gabrel's guitar solo. The first reaction this author had to this action in the performance—which is one of the only instances of Bowie doing anything other than singing and wandering within a relatively small area—was that this was Bowie acting like a person separating himself from the audience, much like a person pulling down a window blind to avoid having to see a pesky neighbour. Sanford suggests that the banners served to change mood, but here they don't seem to serve such a simple purpose.⁵⁴

⁵⁴In a personal email to the author dated 19 March 2000, Gabrels states that the practice of dropping the banners did not go on for very long, and he doesn't recall the purpose of the action. He suggests that it was simply to give Bowie something to do during the guitar solo and to change the scenery a bit—he suggests the term, "functional theatricality."



Figure 3.3. Bowie in live performance during the *1. Outside* tour (notice the banners to Bowie's left).

Bowie alienates himself from the audience by his image as Sanford suggests, but also by the literal dropping of divisive banners, which constitutes yet another example of juxtaposition. Bowie is supposedly alienating himself although he is performing in front of crowds night after night on tour. Why this constant juxtaposition? It stresses the idea of the liminoid, presenting a state of ambiguity and confusion, which is limbo-like without absolutes. It reflects both Bowie's own confusion regarding the function and results of body modification.

but also reflects some of Bowie's comments regarding society at the end of the millennium.

The video and live performance exhibit many juxtapositions. In the video, there are those who are adorning a mannequin, sawing it in half and covering it with fluids, but there is also the piercing and adornment of an actual person. The lyrics referring to "cerulean skies," the common colour of blue that a beautiful sky exhibits, is juxtaposed into a lyric that is laden with themes of infection and pollution, and a video with no sign of blue sky anywhere. In live performance, Bowie pulls down blinds for no practical reason, his clothes stained with paint or perhaps blood. Bowie pulls the blinds down to be alienated from his audience, although he is performing in front of them. He turns his back to the audience on television although his album is being released the next day. In the narrative, the idea that a horrible murder of a young girl could be investigated with such humour and nonchalance, and that this murder could be investigated as art, is an intriguing juxtaposition, as is the notion of body modification as a method of internal transformation—that through physical transformation comes a kind of spiritual rebirth. These contradictions and juxtapositions serve to surround the work with ambiguity, confusion, the unknown.

There is no multitude of positive possibilities available in this limbo state, as suggested by Turner's notion of the liminal stage of a rite of passage. Bowie

does suggest that the date of 31 December 1999 is like a great brick wall.⁵⁵

1. *Outside* is a reflection of the late 1990s as a kind of liminal state—a liminoid state because the “transformative event” at the end of it all, the turning of the clock (like some kind of grand body modification, destroying the old and bringing in the new), leads to the unknown. As is generally the case with most things that are unknown, they are responded to with fear; it is easy to be fearless of what is known or expected. There is no sense of stature or social office for the participants at the end of this grand rite of passage, but only a fear of greater disparity in society and nihilism in technology as is evident in some of the lyrics for the album. With the unknown comes fear, and fear is rarely accompanied by optimism. Generally, there is only a confusion and dread of what the future will hold. A potent example of this millennial anxiety is the societal fear that was associated with “Y2K” or the “Millennium Bug.” Many computer experts suggested that lax programming in the past had resulted in computers being able to store and recognize only two digits for the numerical representation of the year (for instance, a date of birth would be recorded as “73” rather than “1973”). With the turn of the clocks, including internal clocks in computers, in the year 2000, this number would become “00,” with unknown results. Many believed that this event would shut down electric power to major international cities, while others

⁵⁵Rowland, “The Outside Story,” 39.

believed that Western "civilization" would collapse, which prompted many to prepare elaborate shelters filled with food and other necessities for survival.

Is it possible to say that Bowie, through *I. Outside*, is constructing a true reflection of society (or at least some part of it) at the end of the millennium? It is difficult to say, especially when time has in fact gone on and midnight on 31 December wasn't so much of a brick wall as some people thought. What this discussion does support is that Bowie and his creation of a sense of the liminoid is a metaphor for the despair of some portion of society at this period of time. The liminoid not only reflects Bowie's own confusion regarding the act of body modification, but perhaps the confusion of a segment of Western society at a point in time when their own future was unclear.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has attempted to analyse David Bowie's *I. Outside* by exploring some of the subject matter that Bowie evokes through the music and lyrics of the album, as well as through the narrative that accompanies it. Of particular interest are Bowie's comments to the press, specifically to Ian Penman of *Esquire* magazine, in which he suggests that the behaviour of body modification has become a substitute for the Judeo-Christian ethic. By also analysing some selected lyrics and album art, as well as a track from the album, this paper has argued that Bowie is creating a liminoid space, which in turn is a reflection of a segment of society at the end of the twentieth century. This notion is further reinforced by an exploration of the music video for the first single released from the album, "The Heart's Filthy Lesson," and by a brief look at Bowie on the *I. Outside* tour.

In an interview with *Musician* magazine, Bowie shares a fascinating personal reflection:

Imagine what a wonderful optimistic freeing experience January the first 2000 is gonna [*sic*] be, psychologically. . . . One has to remain optimistic. And I do; even though the album is seemingly very dark, it actually pleads for an understanding that there is a through road to the next century.¹

¹Rowland, "The Outside Story," 39.

Of course, these comments are terribly problematic in light of this thesis (or certainly problematizes what this thesis suggests). Throughout this study, what has been made clear to this author is the complexity of Bowie's album. There are many other elements which contribute to the album, including the play of the musicians and those involved in recording and engineering the music.

In a further study of *I. Outside*, a more comprehensive analysis of the album art, including the cover image, should be attempted. Also, lyrically, there are many other track which perhaps would have been more fruitful to this present study, such as "The Voyeur of Utter Destruction (as Beauty)" and "We Prick You." These tracks would be a priority in a further study of the album. Bowie's second video from the album, "Strangers When We Meet," is undeniably similar in atmosphere to "The Heart's Filthy Lesson," and a comparison of the two videos would prove enlightening in clarifying the notion of a constructed liminoid space.

Also, there is the potential of an entire chapter studying Bowie's place within the greater musical *milieu* of this time period, and his place in relation to groups such as Nine Inch Nails, Skinny Puppy and Ministry to name but a few of the artists employing similar techniques, imagery and subject matter. Feature films such as *Seven* and David Lynch's *Lost Highway* deal with violence in the role of art and pessimistic themes. All of these cultural artefacts serve to define a societal attitude at the end of the twentieth century. The context within which Bowie is working deserves a greater analysis than the cursory one found at the beginning of this paper.

Furthermore, the issue of “murder as art” has been engaged with since Thomas de Quincey’s essay, “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts,” a satirical view into a society formed to decide on such matters (not unlike Adler’s employer, Art-Crime). Bowie mentions this work in an interview with Damien Hirst, while discussing “confrontational” artworks of undisclosed gruesomeness.² In addition, Bowie has also mentioned that a large inspiration for the album was a visit with Eno to the Gugging psychiatric hospital near Vienna, where they interviewed and photographed many of the patients, who are also celebrated artists.³ Besides their “massively free and improvised” nature, the links between the art displayed in the hospital and the finished album are unclear.

Finally, what can ultimately be made of Bowie’s comments to the press? Could his album be seriously considered as a proper reflection of a segment of society at this period in history? And what are his conclusions regarding the behaviour of body modification and its ritual nature? Does every song or video which contains instances of juxtaposition qualify as creating a liminoid space? These questions serve as a basis for further study.

It would seem that the realm of body modification is presently outside of Bowie’s lyrical and musical focus. In 1997, he released *Earthling*, which moved into new musical areas, leaving the industrial vein of *I. Outside* for “jungle” and

²David Bowie, “Time of the Signs”; <http://www.outside-org.co.uk/artists/bowieart2.html>; Internet; accessed 10 October 1998.

³Rick Moody, “Returning to the Sound of Those Golden Years,” *The New York Times*, 10 September 1995, sec. 2, p. 54.

other electronica styles. Most recently, Bowie has released '*...Hours*' as a kind of "concept retrospective"; it is a collection of songs by a character from the same generation as Bowie who is looking back upon his life with some regret of missed opportunities. In the future is the possibility of further releases following the narrative of *I. Outside*, as was the original intention. Until then, the killer of Baby Grace Blue remains at large, and the question of murder and art remains.

APPENDIX: THE DIARY OF NATHAN ADLER


THE DIARY OF NATHAN ADLER

OR THE ART-RITUAL MURDER OF BABY GRACE BLUE



A non-linear Gothic
Drama Hyper-cycle.

It was at precisely 8.15AM on the morning of Friday 31 of December 1999 that a dark spirited pluralist began the dissection of 14-year-old "Baby Grace". The arms of the victim were pain cushioned with 16 hypodermic needles, pumping in four major preservatives, colouring agents, sensory information transport fluids and some kind of green stuff. From the last and 17th, all blood and liquid was extracted. The stomach area was carefully flapped open and the intestines removed, disentangled and re-attached as it were, into a small net or web and hung between the pillars of the murder location, the grand damp floorway of Oxford Town Museum of Modern Parts, New Jersey. The limbs of Baby were then severed from the torso. Each limb was implanted with a small, highly sophisticated, binary-code translator which in turn was connected to small speakers attached to far ends of each limb. The self-contained mind amplifiers were then activated, amplifying the decoded memory info-transport substances, revealing themselves as little clue balloons, small verses detailing memories



of other brutal acts, well-documented by the ROMbioids. The limbs and their components were then hung upon the splayed web, slug-like prey of some unimaginable creature. The torso, by means of its bottom-most orifice, had been placed on a small support fastened to a marble base. It was shown to varying degrees of success depending upon where one stood from behind the web but in front of the Museum door itself, acting as both signifier and guardian to the act. It was definitely murder - but was it art? All this was to be the lead-up to the most provocative event in the whole sequence of serial-events that had started around November of that same year, plunging me into the most portentous chaos-abyss that a quiet lone-hacker like myself could comprehend. My name is Nathan Adler, or Detective Professor Adler in go circuit. I'm attached to the division of Art-Crime Inc., the recently instigated corporation funded by an endowment from the Arts Protectorate of London, it being felt that the investigation of art-crimes was in itself inseparable from other forms of expression and therefore worthy of support from this significant body. Nicolas Serota himself had deemed us, the small-fry of the division, worthy of an exhibit at last year's Biennale in Venice, three rooms of evidence and comparative study work which conclusively proved that the cow in Mark Tansey's "The Innocent Eye Test" could not differentiate between Paulus Potter's "The Young Bull" of 1647 (exactly 300 years before I was born, incidentally) and one of Monet's grain stack paintings of the 1890's. The traditional art press deemed this extrapolation "bullshit" and removed itself to study the more formal ideas contained in Damien Hirst's "Sheep In A Box". Art's a farmyard. It's my job to pick thru the manure heap looking for peppercorns.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1999, 10.15AM

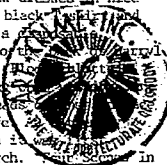
As in any crime, my first position is to peruse the motive gag. The recent spate, thru '98-'99, of concept-muggings pretty much had me pulling breath for an art-murder. It was a crime whose time was now. The precedents were all there. It had probably its beginnings in the '70s with the Viennese castrationists and the blood-rituals of Hirsch. Public revulsion put the lid on that episode, but you can't keep a good ghoul down. Spurred on by Chris Burden's having himself shot by his collaborator in a gallery, tied up in a bag, thrown on a highway and then crucified upon the top of a Volkswagen, stories circulated thru the nasty-noon of NY night that a young Korean artist was the self-declared patient of wee-hours surgery in cut and run operations at not-so-secret locations in the city. If you found out about it, you could go and watch this guy having bits and pieces removed under anaesthetic.

A finger-joint one night, a limb another. By the dawning of the '90s, rumour had it that he was down to a torso and one arm. He'd asked to be left in a cave in the Catskills, fed every so often by his acolytes. He didn't do much after that. I guess he read a lot. Maybe wrote a whole bunch. I suppose you can never tell what an artist will do once he's peaked. Round mid-90s same time, Bowie the singer remarked on a couple goons who frequented the Berlin bars wearing full surgery regalia: caps, aprons, rubber gloves and masks. The cutting edge. Then came Damien Hirst with the Shark-Cow-Sheep thing. No humans, palatable ritual for the worldwide public. The acceptable face of gore. Meanwhile in the US, 1994, I was in New York on the night of the Arhey sacrifices.

**THURSDAY,
OCTOBER 27, 1994
122 EAST VILLAGE,
MANHATTAN**

Ron Arhey, performance artist not for the squeamish - former heroin addict-HIV positive, pushes what looks like a knitting needle repeatedly into his forehead, a crown of blood, must hurt like hell. Stream red dribble-dribble. No screams. Face moves in pain. Carried upstage and scrubbed down in his own

blood. Then water. New dresses in nice suit and tie. Now in black jeans, carving, with a scalpel, patterns, into paper towels then hung suspended over the heads. Blood-prints from life limited edition. When performed back in March, "A Harsh Life" exploded controversy through-out the National Endowment For the Arts. "We have taken every precaution with our disposal systems," an Arhey spokes-person said. "The towels containing the blood are immediately deposited in hazardous-waste bags. Each evening, the material will be driven to a hospital for final disposal". Arhey says he is dealing with issues of self-loathing, suffering, healing and redemption.



**FRIDAY DECEMBER
31, 1999, 10.30AM
MUSEUM OF MODERN
PARTS**

I'm drinking up the Oxford Town. New Jersey tune. Salty and acid. Maybe I can get a handle on this thing back in Soho at the bureau. It used to be Rothko's studio, now the playground for all us Art-Crime folk. AC's or "the daubers" as

we're dubbed. Rothko himself, in a deep-dark-drunk one night, carefully removed his clothes, folded them up neatly, placing them upon a chair, lay upon the floor in a crucified position and after several attempts, found the soft blue pump of his wrists and checked out. He'd held the razor blades between wads of tissue paper so that he wouldn't cut his fingers. Deep thinker. Always was.

**11.00AM
"DAUBER"
HQ, SOHO**

The only names the Data bank can associate with Baby Grace are Leon Blank, Ramona A. Stone and Algeria Touchshriek. The rundowns are brief but not to the point:

Ramona A. Stone: Female. Caucasian. Mid-40s. Assertive maintenance interest-drug dealer and Tyrannical Futurist. No convictions. Contacts: Leon Blank,

Baby Grace Blue, Algeria Touchshriek

Leon Blank: Male. Mixed race. 22 years. Outsider. Three convictions for petty theft, appropriation and plagiarism without license. Contacts: Baby Grace Blue, Algeria Touchshriek

Algeria Touchshriek: Male. Caucasian. 75 years. Owner of small establishment on Rail Yard, Oxford town. No. Deals in art, drugs and DNA prints. Fence for all apparitions of any medium. Hairless. Lonely.

Small cog, no wheels. Not much to go on but R.A.Stone weighs heavy on my memory. No problem, it'll come back. Best thing to do now is feed all relevant pieces into the Mack-Verbasiser, the Metarandom programme that re strings real life facts as im probable virtual-fact. I may get a lead or two from that.

11.15 AM

Jesus Who. I hate typing. Anyhow, we've got some

real interesting solvents from Mack-random. How about this! Verbasiser down-load, first block:

No convictions of assertive saints believed Caucasian way-out tyrannical evoked no images described Christian saints questions no female christian machine believed no work is caucasian assertive saints believed female described christian tyrannical questions R.A.Stone convictions martyrs and tyrannicals are evoked Female described sado-masochist questions I am suicide described the fabric machine Slashing way out saints and martyrs and thrown downstairs

Now the swirl begins. Now the image stack backs up and takes center stage. Ramona A. Stone. I remember this thickneck. This treacly liquid thought. But wait. I'm ahead of myself.

**JUNE 15, 1977
KREUTZBURG,
BERLIN**

It's two in the morning. I can't sleep for the screaming of some poor out-raced Turkish immigrant screaming his guts out from over the street. His hawking shriek sounds semi-stifled like he's got a pillow over his mouth. But the desperation comes through the spongy rubber like a knife. It cuts the breeze and bangs my eardrums. I take a walk past the fabric machine, turn left onto a street with no name. The caucasian suicide center, naked and grimy, silhouetted by fungus yellow street lamps female slashing way-out suits for a dollar a time thrown downstairs if you can't take any more. Pure joy of retreat into death, led by the shepherdes. Anti mixed-race posters pasted upon their altar of pop-death icons party people. A zero with no name looks dully-eyed to Ms. Stone, the drone that says "in the future, everything was up to itself". Yea, I remember Ramona. She sat herself up as the no-future priestess of the Caucasian Suicide Temple, vomiting out her doctrine of death-as-eternal party into the empty vessels of Berlin



youth. The top floor rooms were the gateways to giving up to the holy ghost. She must have overseen more than 30 or 41 check-outs before the local squad triggered what was going down.

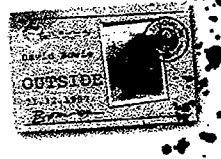
OCTOBER 28, 1994

New Yorker magazine, advance copy, celebrating fashion. It's a first of its kind since Tina Brown took over as editor. One look is all it took. It took the look and wrote a new book on what sophi-scapes would take and bake. Our Bourdain featured heavily in this new edition. Since the advent of AIDS and the new morality, and, of course his death, his dark sexy fatal style had fallen out of Vogue. An uncompromising photographer, he had found a twisty avenue through desire and death. A white female leg sticking gloomily out of a bath of black liquid unsex. Two glass up babes covered in tiny pearls. The glue prevented their skins from breathing and they pass out. "Oh it would be beautiful," he is to have said, "no photograph them dead in bed." He was a french Guy, he had known Man Ray, Loved Louis Carroll. His first gig was doing hats for Vogue. He'd place dead flies of bees on the faces of the models, or female head wears hat crushed between three skinned calves heads, tongues lolling. What was this? Fine Arts? The surrealists might even think his work passed. Well, it was the '50s, that's what

It was. The tight coils '90s seen through unrecognizable hostility. He wanted but he couldn't paint. So he threw globs of revengeful hatred at his mobile subjects. He would systematically pull the phone cord out of the wall. He was never to be disturbed. Disturbed. Never. Everything and everyone died around him. One shoot focusing upon a woman lying in bed was said to be a reconstruction of his estranged wife's death. Another picture has a woman in a phone booth making some frantic call. Her hand is pressed whitely against the glass. Behind her and outside are two female bodies partially covered by the autumn leaves. His dream, so he told friends, was to do shoots in the morgue, with the skulls as mannequins. I don't know, I just read this stuff. Now his spirit was being resurrected. We're mystified by blood. It's our enemy now. We don't understand it. Can't live with it. Can't well... y'know?

**FRIDAY
DECEMBER
31, 1999,
11.30AM**

After surgery and investment in a bullet-proof mask, Ramona turned up in London, Canada as owner of a string of body-parts jewellery stores. Lamb penis necklaces, goat scrotum purses, nipple earrings, that sort of thing. The word on the street, however, suggested that it was not in the best of interests to become one of her clients as occasionally, a customer would step into her shop and not come out again. The whistle blew after a much-loved and highly respected celebrity, known for being known, failed to show for a gallery-hanging of her mirrors. Other celebrities, equally known for being known, some only to each other, thought it



the most profound exhibit in years and couldn't take their eyes off the works. All the pieces sold within an hour. Many for record prices. When the critic for Tate magazine asked for an interview with the celebrity-artist, the gallery owner recalled that he hadn't seen her since earlier that day. She'd mentioned that she would be going shopping for a diamond-encrusted umbilical cord as a celebratory thing to announce her pregnancy. She would be back in an hour. Just a quick stop at the "Gallstone", 1986. That pregnancy would have produced a being that would be around 14 years of age.

If it was still alive.
To be continued...



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