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Ambiguous bodies in motion : representations of female identity in contemporary screendance

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Ambiguous Bodies in Motion:
Representations of Female Identity in Contemporary Screendance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Drama and Theatre

by

Terry Sprague

Committee in charge:

University of California, San Diego

       Professor Janet Smarr, Chair
       Professor Anthony Davis
       Professor Allyson Green
       Professor Theodore Shank

University of California, Irvine

       Professor Frank Wilderson, III

2010

The Dissertation of Terry Sprague is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

University of California, Irvine

2010

DEDICATION

To Riley and Lara, my joy, my inspirations.

To Errol, Momisse, Carmen, Peter, Stef, Kylie, Tripp, Sophia, Kate and Sam whose love

filled me up when I was running dry.

To my dancer sisters Yvonne, Kate, Jean, Terry and Terri who have been by my side and

have kept me laughing at times when I had been way too serious.

To my circle sisters without whom I may not have made it this far. Thank you all for

being patient and supportive while I was missing your concerts, circles and gatherings

because I was holed up at the Pannikin writing one more chapter.

To Nancy Rapp, whose morning calls lifted me just when and in the way I needed.

To Nancy McCaleb, who told me to keep going when I was considering not.

To Sean, Carol, the Pannikin crew and fellow "regulars" who made me feel welcome and

kept the refills coming while I almost became a permanent fixture.

*

To dear Scott who has been by my side through this long journey and supportive in so

many ways.

*

In loving memory of my father, Hall Tripp Sprague (1930-2010)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Allyson Green, Frank Wilderson, Anthony Davis and Ted Shank for all you contributed as members of my committee. I am indebted to my chair, Janet Smarr, whose timely, insightful feedback was invaluable and who maintained a saintly patience with me even as I abused the semi-colon like she has probably never seen.

Thank you to Paul Fleck for being supportive of my educational endeavors.

I am grateful to my fellow PhD students, for their support, guidance, empathy, and friendship. Thank you Aimee, Jade, Rana, Grace, Heather, Michael, Rai, Phil, Zack, Fan, Laura, Maiya, Naysan, Heather, and Julie.

Thank you to Alison Miller who reminded me to break it down into small parts and savor each success along the way.

EDUCATION:
Ph.D. Drama and Theatre
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M.A. Dance/Choreography
        San Diego State University

B.A. Experimental Dance, Music Minor
        University of California, San Diego

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:
9/04 – present, University of California, San Diego. Taught Screendance (dance &
9/90-6/91 and   technology), Dance History, Stage to Screen (TA), Theatre History &
 9/83-8/85:   Literature (TA), Play Analysis. Associate Faculty in Dance. Lecturer in
                 the Music Department. Guest choreographer in the Theatre
                 Department. Developed and taught courses in Experimental
                 Choreography, Modern and Jazz techniques.

8/09- present   California State University, San Marcos. Lecturer teaching The Human
and   Experience: Intro. to Humanities Through the Arts. Adjunct faculty in the
1/95-8/01:   Visual and Performing Arts Dept. Taught Contemporary Modern Dance,
                 Dance History, Choreography, Power and Popular Culture and General
                 Education Humanities. Directed student productions, choreographed
                 performance projects. Advised dance students. Served on departmental
                 committee. Developed curricula, including the course, Cultures in
                 Motion.

9/01- 6/02   Palomar College. Adjunct faculty in the Performing Arts Dept.
                 Taught Contemporary dance technique.

8/87-6/97   Mira Costa College. Associate Faculty in Dance. Taught Performance
                 and Production, Modern and Jazz techniques, Choreography,
                 Improvisation. Co-directed dance productions. Developed curriculum
                 in Dance History, Choreography and Improvisation. Advised students.

9/87-6/90   United States International University. Associate Professor.
                 Taught Dance History and Modern Dance. Guest Lecturer in the
                 Humanities program.

                 Mesa College. Part-time Faculty in Dance.
                 Taught Modern and Ballet techniques.

1/86-6/88   San Diego State University. Part-time faculty/graduate student.
               Taught Modern and Jazz techniques.

CHOREOGRAPHIC WORKS:
2001-present   Founding member of DROUGHT BUOY, a theatre/dance/music
               interdisciplinary performance trio with bassist, Gunnar Biggs and
               poet/vocalist, Brandon Cesmat. Developed a repertoire of more than
               twenty pieces including CALIFORNIATOWN, RIVER MURMURS,
               JITTERS, DREAMING AMERICAN, and BORN ANALOG.
               Performances include California Center for the Arts Escondido, Casa de la
               Cultura in Tijuana, Southwestern College, Seaside Park on the
               US/Mexican border, En Voz Alta, Dizzy's, Escondido and San Diego
               Public Libraries, 101 Arts, Palomar Community College and more.
               Created a Drought Buoy video.

FREEWAYS AND A BRIDGE (2005) Dance on video project.

SHADES OF IMPERMANENCE (2003) A dance/video, site-specific, piece
               addressing ephemeral aspects of dance, art, nature, and life, in
               collaboration with environmental artist Kirk Von Allen.

DANCE FOR THE CAMERA FILM FESTIVAL A SYMPOSIUM (2002). Worked
               with directors/filmmakers, Douglas Rosenberg and Ellen Bromberg to
               create a dance video at the University of Utah.

VOYAGES OF AENEAS & FIXED/NOT (2002) An Internet 2 telematic collaboration
               with dancers, musicians, and technologists at UCI and NYU, creating a
               dialogue between Aeneas (UCI) and Cassandra (NYU), directed by Lisa
               Naugle.

SONGS OF SORROW, SONGS OF HOPE (2001) In response to 9/11, dancers,
               musicians, technologists, and video artists at UCI and NYU, created works
               performed live and online using Internet 2 telematic technology, under the
               direction of Lisa Naugle.

CYBERCHOREOGRAPHY (2001) Site-specific choreography with projected digital
               images and original music, Calif. State Univ., San Marcos library
               courtyard.

TROLLEY DANCES (6/99, 9/00 and 9/01). Performed Jean Isaacs' site-specific dances
               created along the San Diego Trolley line.

ON MANGO STREET (1998) A suite of theatre-dance pieces depicting bittersweetslices of life growing up on Mango St., confronting issues of cultural identity, with text by Sandra Cisneros.

COMO MANGO (1995-6) A theatre-dance piece about a relationship between an
American woman and a man from Michoacan. Text by Sandra Cisneros
intertwined with movement and oversized soft-sculptured cockroaches and
props.

ZORA GETS BORN (1993) A theatre-dance piece about survival in the face of
poverty and sexism, with text by Zora Neale Hurston.

WATER RAGA (1993) Trio to music by Uakti integrating Bharata Natyam movement
and postmodern dance.

BUKLA SUITE (1992) Dance with Bukla Box, an early motion-tracking technology, in
collaboration with composer, George Lewis, at UCSD Mandeville
Auditorium.

IF ORPHEUS HAD DRUMSTICKS AND TAPS (1992). A theatre dance collaboration
with percussionist Daryll Pratt.

CONVERSATIONS (1991) Gestural choreography, original sound score with poetry
by Jerome Rothenberg and Octavio Paz.

DRUM DANCES (1989) Dances to music by Chicago Art Ensemble.

ChairWOman (1988) An evening length theatre dance piece about the transformation of a
man and the chair he purchases, which turns out to be a woman.

Co-directed Malashock Sprague Dance with John Malashock, '86-88.

LIQUID CURVE (1987) Postmodern dance quintet in collaboration with costume
constructionist, Sybil Rubottom and saxophonist, Tripp Sprague.

FUTURISTIC (1986) Collaboration with laser artist, Joel Heathecoate and
saxophonist/composer, Tripp Sprague.

THESE FOUR WALLS (1986) Quartet to gospel vocal music.

ROOF MOVES (1986) Site-specific dance trio performed on the roof of ARTISPACE
gallery with music by Brian Eno and David Byrne.

DICK AND JANE (1986) A theatre-dance piece about the evolution of a relationship toldwith movement and text and metaphorical objects by artist, David Keevil.

TRISTEZA (1986) Brazilian mask dance with music by Tripp Sprague.

TRILLIUM and SAXDANCE DUO (1985) Modern opera by Anthony Braxton,
        performed by UCSD Music faculty and students.

NAKED SCRIABIN (1985) Collaboration performance with pianist, Cecil Lytle.

LASER EMERALD (1985) Architectural, site-specific choreography in
        collaboration with glass artiest, Steven Correia and composer,
        Peter Sprague. (See review.)

UNDER THE DOUBLE MOON (1981) New York City and New Haven performances
        of theatre dance based on novel by Debra Davis, music by Anthony
        Davis, paintings by J. Lehmann.

'75 – '81   Choreographed over twenty-five additional dances.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND AWARDS:
Picerne Foundation Grant recipient 2010-2012. Received funding to work with teen children of immigrants who are not thriving in the public school system on video-dance-creative writing after-school projects.

Dance Films Association, NYC, since 2005.

Dance Camera West, Los Angeles, since 2005.

California Dance Educators Association member since 1995.

San Diego Area Dance Alliance member since 1985. During my tenure as a board
        member from '88-'90, I established the Performing Arts Lab (PAL).

NEA/COMBO Peer Review Panelist, 1988.

Received a grant/contract from the Public Arts Advisory Board and
        City of San Diego for choreography and performance.

Received a grant/contract from NEA/San Diego Area Dance Alliance
        Re-granting program for making *Drum Dances.*

Received an Undergraduate Students Grant to produce a thirty-minute
        Experimental Dance video, UCSD.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ambiguous Bodies in Motion:
Representations of Female Identity in Contemporary Screendance

By

Terry Sprague

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

University of California, San Diego, 2010
University of California, Irvine, 2010

Professor Janet Smarr, Chair

The female body is one of the most heavily culturally coded signifiers both
historically and in visual cultures around the world. At a time when visual media
technologies are increasingly becoming integral to our daily lives, and emergent art and
visual technology forms such as screendance circulate along global pathways with other
media objects, to what extent can screendance resist, or even transform, the pervasive
commercial representations of, and messages about, the female body? Drawing from
feminist film theory, media theory, semiotics, existential phenomenology and cultural
studies, this study comparatively analyzes representations of female identity in selected
screendances side by side with advertising, commercial Hollywood films and network
news media.

I begin by deconstructing corporeal images to discover what it is about an image
that makes it provocative in relation to representing female identity. Then I examine
different ways in which the female body is utilized in imagery that hails and shapes the

viewer. Given that screendance circulates globally, I also look closely at three transnational screendances that represent the veiled female body and demonstrate that culturally coded icons such as the veil resist abstraction when appropriated in representations by artists from another culture.

I demonstrate that given the nature of the medium, when screendance represents the female body it inherits culturally constructed meanings along with mainstream media conventions, and, indeed, some screendances repeat reductive representations prescribed by dominant patriarchal consumer ideology. Conversely, some screendance artists challenge, disturb or subvert those meanings despite the conventions of the medium.

Key to their transgressions, I argue, are two factors. One is that some screendance artists represent the female body moving with intention and embodying what Merleau-Ponty calls the "lived body." Another factor is that they all incorporate some form of visual and/or conceptual ambiguity in ways that operate productively in the representation of female identity such as challenging exclusionary stereotypes. This dissertation spotlights those artists and seeks to give momentum to the ways in which they promote alternative bodily identities and challenge the status quo.

Chapter 1 –

Introduction

Given that capitalist society thrives on the invention, production and consumption

of new technologies, especially those of visual media and communication, we have

become a culture of screens. Images on television, film, video and computer screens

infiltrate all aspects of our lives. To what extent do we scrutinize the power of those

images? While we are quick to embrace those technologies, to what extent do we

question the impact they have on ways in which we view ourselves, view the world, and

live our lives? Many of the images we encounter in our daily lives feature

representations of the female body. What messages about female bodily truths do they

prescribe? This project investigates these and other issues as they manifest themselves in

contemporary screendance.

"Screendance" is the latest term used to describe the hybrid form of visual culture

that has been emerging from the fields of postmodern dance, visual art, film and video.

As such, when postmodern dance merges with video/film and visual art, it moves from

the live stage to the screen and changes in nature from being a performing art to a media

object circulating with other media objects in the arena of contemporary, visual culture.

"The re-presentation of dance as a media object puts it firmly in the milieu of

contemporary forms of representation" (Rosenberg *Video Space* 10). By utilizing visual

technologies, screendance "places itself in the discourse of current media practice and

therefore in the discourse of popular culture and contemporary media theory" (Rosenberg

Video Space 5). Where live postmodern dance functions primarily as a "high" cultural

performing art form along with other "high" cultural forms such as fine art, design and architecture, screendance overlaps with the "low" cultural forms of media and communications. Some dance scholars claim that live, contemporary dance has the status of an art form on the fringe, and that screendance is on the fringe of that fringe. Though screendance is a "fringe media," or alternative media form, by moving to digital environments such as streaming on the Internet, I propose that, in fact, screendance also moves to a platform from which to intersect and engage with contemporary visual and popular cultural discourses more than ever and does so by way of the visual language of images.

Images in contemporary visual culture that confront us on a daily basis have powerful effects. They entice us, entertain us, pacify us and motivate us to consume. They try to convince us what desirable, "good" and "bad" look like, and suggest that we might not be good enough as we are. They contribute to the process of identity formation, prescribe gender roles, and influence our value formation. For example, Hollywood cinema often perpetuates ideological stereotyping in the casting of actors who perform predictable narratives geared towards the lowest common denominator audience for the purposes of increasing box office sales. The messages and meanings contained in those representations perpetuate consumer, capitalist, dominant ideology and heavily code the female body.

Mainstream media construct representations of female identity and an ideal female body that do not necessarily reflect women's experiences. In fact, the bodies seen in many advertisements are "impossible" bodies; flawless bodies that are manufactured with imaging techniques. Consequently, the body coded as ideal is also an unattainable

body, which fosters limiting perspectives and exclusivity. When screendance artists represent the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body, to what extent can those images be read as expressions of subject-bodies, or are they read the way mainstream media codes them, in many cases, as objectified? Given that the female body is heavily coded, to what extent can women represent themselves?

Much of mainstream visual culture utilizes provocative, visceral, attention-getting imagery featuring the female body. Huge budgets are dedicated to creating advertisement images of female bodies designed to capture our attention and slip in messages aimed at motivating us to purchase a product. By virtue of the medium, screendance inherits culturally constructed media conventions in terms of both aesthetics and semiotics. In some cases, the visual language of screendance is precariously similar to the visual language of corporate media and advertising. A critical difference between screendance/art and advertising is, of course, that one is created with the intention of selling a product and the other with the intention of making an artistic statement. However, like advertising and some other media, screendance is interested in featuring kinetic, sensuous, textural, provocative images. My questions are: what is it about an image that makes it provocative? Given that the screendances included in this project employ provocative imagery in ways that resist more than re-inscribe mainstream media ideologies, how are they employing images differently? Advertising uses provocative imagery and other devices to stir viewers' responses and motivate them to action (purchase a product). How are some screendance artists employing those same or similar strategies to construct the viewer, but for different ends?

In addition to code-swapping with media and advertising, screendance is circulating globally along with other media objects. By virtue of its digital nature, screendance performs on the Internet at websites such as YouTube, Choreographic Captures, Side-by-Side and other websites dedicated exclusively to archiving screendances. List-serves, such as *Media & Arts* facilitate discussion among screendance artists and scholars worldwide. Every month brings announcements of new screendance and related e-zines, journals, screendance premieres, websites and festivals. Eight years ago, screendance screenings and opportunities for artist exposure were limited to a few festivals in Western Europe and the United States. Today, cities worldwide are hosting screendance festivals. From the *Kinodance* festival in St. Petersberg, *Jumping Frames* festival, Hong Kong, to festivals in Turkey, Poland, Indonesia, Uruguay, Israel, Japan and other locations worldwide, screendance is evolving as a transnational cultural phenomenon. The resulting community of screendance artists and viewers is highly international. Screendances circulate regularly from one location on the globe to another. Thus, screendance is operating transnationally and engaging in a crosscultural discourse of contemporary media.

As media representations of women, such as veiled female bodies, are circulating across cultural borders, they are impacting the expression and shaping of female identity in different ways. Just as advertising and media use the female body as a symbol for sex among other things, images of the veiled female body operate transnationally as complex signifiers that are overflowing with multiple meanings. What meanings are generated when transnational screendance artists use the veil in the performance of female identity

as well as in response to media representations of veiled women? This project addresses

these and other issues surrounding screendance performances of female identity.

Argument/Hypothesis:

Given that representations of the female body are always culturally encoded, I

believe that the extent to which female screendance artists can represent themselves is

limited. If a female screendance artist wishes to express female identity by featuring the

nude, naked or sexually expressive female body, she walks a fine line between

constructing a representation that reads as an autonomous, sexually expressive, sensuous

subject-body and one that reads as an objectified sex object-body. This project explores

the nature of that fine line and ways in which screendance artists and mainstream media

are negotiating it through the construction of different kinds of imagery. For the sake of

comparative analysis, I include examples of screendances that represent female identity

in ways that re-confirm the dominant ideology perpetuated in mainstream media

however, this study is especially interested in screendance artists who are constructing

representations of female identity that challenge, disturb or subvert those conventions.

Key to their transgression, I argue, are two factors. One is that some screendance

artists represent the female body in motion, moving with intention and situated within

contexts significant to the meanings conveyed by theirs works. They perform an

embodiment of what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the "lived body." Rather than being

represented as objectified, passive and de-contextualized, the female body in motion,

moving with intention serves to construct the female body as subject while resisting

objectification. As women are performing sexually expressive, female, "lived bodies"

and negotiating the fine line, it is their movement with intention as subject that codes

them more as what Laura Mulvey calls "makers of meaning" than "bearers of meaning." This concept is explored in-depth in Chapter Two.

Another factor that distinguishes the screendance representations of female identity included in this project from those seen in mainstream media is their inclusion of some element(s) of ambiguity. Different types of ambiguity such as visual ambiguity, conceptual ambiguity and ambiguous meaning can operate in different ways such as create confusion, open up the screendance to multiple interpretations and challenge exclusionary stereotypes. I will demonstrate how the screendances discussed in this study each employ different elements of ambiguity in ways that serve to disturb mainstream media representations of female identity and, in some cases, open the possibility of a positive revisioning of the female body.

Ambiguity

I will identify some general characteristics of ambiguity here, then in the subsequent chapters construct analyses and interpretations of specific examples. Generally speaking, ambiguity can serve various functions in art. One is that neurologically, when the brain encounters ambiguous information, it tries different solutions in the process of disambiguating. This activity opens the mind to considering alternate possibilities such as considering alternate representations of female identity. Another is that ambiguity enhances the aesthetic experience of art. Theorists Myra McDonald and Marc De Mey claim that all art is ambiguous. I agree that much of dance, for example, is ambiguous since it speaks a visual language unfamiliar to many; however, I believe that ambiguity in art is relative depending on its content.

McDonald argues that art is "never one thing or another" (4). She positions art in a space located between the artist and the spectator, between subject and object, form and matter, concept and thing (McDonald 4). If viewed in psychological terms, "it is a point of mediation between the self and an 'other.' In bodily and social terms, it is a point of extension of the body and point of intercession between one living body and another, and therefore a mediator in sexual relations" (McDonald 4). For those reasons, she adds that not only is art ambiguous, it is also erotic, especially in the form of the naked female body.

In "Mastering Ambiguity," De Mey claims that art is ambiguous in that it "requires the ability to bridge different kinds of representations" (273). This process characterizes the "nature of constructive ambiguity in art" (De Mey 273). He attributes creative discovery to the mastering of ambiguity. "Ambiguity results when apparently incompatible data or constraints are perceived but a way is found to integrate them into a coherent whole or to toggle transparently between interpretations" (De Mey 271). Visual art inventions, he believes, exemplify the power of creative ambiguities (De Mey 271).

My position is that ambiguity and art exist as a continuum where generally speaking, hyper-realistic, iconic representations occupy one pole and abstract and/or conceptual art forms are located at the other. McDonald's and De Mey's claim that all art is ambiguous is overly simplified. To further complicate, I would like to distinguish between ambiguity of visual form and ambiguity of interpretation. For example, works by realist artists such as Norman Rockwell contain very little ambiguity in terms of visual form and there is also little ambiguity in the messages we take from them. By virtue of the fact that a Rockwell painting is a representation and not reality itself, one could argue

that some amount of ambiguity exists. In any case, Rockwell paintings occupy a position near the unambiguous pole of the continuum. Surrealist paintings are located closer to the ambiguous pole since many representations contain recognizable, realistic, unambiguous visual forms, yet because of unusual juxtapositions, are often ambiguous in meaning. Much of dance reads as ambiguous because of its nature as a more abstract, non-verbal visual form. In terms of ambiguity in the interpretation of dance, meanings are determined to a large part by the choreography. Mimetic-type of movement, pedestrian expressive gestures and facial expressions read as less ambiguous than dance by choreographers such as Merce Cunningham While works by Cunningham are located near the ambiguous pole of the continuum because the are abstractly ambiguous both in visual form and in meaning, a dance by Busby Berkeley reads as less ambiguous. In many Berkeley dances individual movement phrases may read as ambiguous visual forms however, in the context of the overall choreography where lines of dancers construct the design of recognizable shapes such as circles or stars, the meaning is less ambiguous. Specific, unambiguous, detailed information is conveyed more effectively with text-based art forms than with dance. I will also argue that while representations such as mainstream media and advertising, in some cases, incorporate some forms of ambiguity such as visual ambiguity, they do not construct meaning that is open for multiple interpretations.

What becomes apparent when charting representations on the ambiguity and art continuum is that there tends to be a correlation between ambiguity and abstraction. Can a visual form that is abstract convey meaning that is unambiguous? In other words, is abstract art necessarily always more ambiguous in its message? An abstract artwork is

characterized by a lack of specific, detailed references to concrete reality. Therefore,

when a representation lacks specific detailed references, it opens itself up to multiple

interpretations. Once again, I propose that different works occupy different points along

the continuum such that the more abstract the visual form and meaning, the more

ambiguous the representation.

Broadly speaking, ambiguous elements in artistic visual representations also

enhance aesthetic pleasure (Voltaire, Schopenhauer, Zeki 263).   When the viewer is

confronted with incompatible data but discovers a way either to integrate them into a

coherent whole or to toggle transparently between interpretations, a process of creative

discovery occurs (De Mey 271). The disambiguation of artistic representations, which

are largely unconscious, "is a miniature discovery, leading to unpretentious aesthetic

pleasure" (De Mey 274).   Voltaire expressed it as follows: "Le secret d'etre ennuyeux,

c'est de tout dire" [the secret of being boring is to tell everything] (Voltaire in Zeki 263).

Similarly, Schopenhauer believed that a work of art must not reveal everything, but rather

employ ambiguity and reveal:

> only so much as is demanded to lead the fancy on to the right path…But
> besides this, in art the best of all is too spiritual to be given directly to the
> senses; it must be born in the imagination of the beholder, although
> begotten to the senses. It depends upon this that the sketches of great
> masters often affect more than their finished pictures (Schopenhauer in
> Zeki 263).

Unlike Voltaire, Schopenhauer or Salvador Dali, who deliberately makes of ambiguity an

artistic form, Samir Zeki believes that it is not ambiguity in the work itself that enhances

aesthetic pleasure, rather the capacity of multiple experiences that a work of art can

stimulate, even though we may not be conscious of only one at any given moment (264).

Neurologically, when the brain encounters ambiguity, it must entertain multiple solutions to find the "correct" solution (Zeki 263). However, many artists construct work that has no one correct answer, because all the answers are correct. Artists exploit the potential of the brain to activate multiple areas, which influence what is perceived. In "The Neurology of Ambiguity," Zeki tells us that the capacity of the brain to respond to ambiguous information and give multiple interpretations is tied to a "capacity that is important for its role in acquiring knowledge. It is on this physiological basis that the prized quality of ambiguity in art is built" (Zeki 263). The fact that ambiguity in art activates the brain in ways that are tied to its capacity for acquiring knowledge holds compelling implications for the reception of alternative representations of female identity. If an artistic representation is a form of knowledge proposed, its ambiguous elements serve to encourage a learning experience.

An artwork's ambiguous elements, in some cases, also have the potential to trouble dominant ideologies. Ambiguity created through abstraction, for example, may be a way of concealing, disturbing and/or revealing ideological meanings (McDonald 89). Representations of ambiguous bodies such as exaggerated, distorted or androgynous bodies "often transform or extend beyond the ordinary as well as to their multivalent and disruptive nature" (Li 3). Additionally, representations of ambiguous bodies can create confusion, or uncertainty, and can undermine hierarchies. Screendances containing representations of female identity with some aspect(s) of ambiguity, therefore, potentially provide a scope for a "productive revisioning of the female body in representation" (McDonald 131).

"Mainstream Media"

Given that this project compares representations of female identity in selected screendances with those seen in "mainstream media," I will articulate here what I am referring to with that term and predominately from which media I am drawing examples. Mainstream media, also known as mass media, as it is referred to in this project, describe forms that promote dominant, hegemonic ideology at the expense of other ways of looking at the world and at each other. Mainstream media representations contain meanings and messages that promote the values held by what Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony refers to as "the ruling elites" (12). Gramsci broadened materialist Marxist theory into the realm of ideology to explain that hegemony exists through "…'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group…" (12). In other words, the "dominant fundamental group" uses the media to promote values and messages in order to manufacture consent to their policies as well as censoring opposing views. Hegemony's effectiveness depends on subordinated people's accepting the dominant ideology as normal, everyday reality or common sense such that they are not aware of it (Lull 33-34). As Stuart Hall puts it, the dominant class "sets the limits – mental and structural – within which subordinate classes 'live' and make sense of their subordination is such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them" (255).

As such, mainstream media representations are limiting because they depict the ruling elites' values and attributes as what constitute "good," and "normal." Normalcy in mainstream media, for example, is represented as disproportionately male, white, upper middle class, relatively young, trim and fit, heteronormative and characterized by Eurocentric definitions of beauty (Himmelstein 37). Subordinate groups and groups who

do not fit into the category of normal and good, most often are not aware of the discrepancy as such. In fact Marx's notion of *false consciousness* describe ways in which subordinate groups accept the ideology of the dominant group. False consciousness occurs, for example, when women accept the idea that they are the weaker sex, a value promoted by mainstream media and dominant ideology. Where hegemony involves consent, we are invited to consent to inequality.

While mainstream media is comprised of many forms such as newsprint, television, Internet forms and magazines, the majority of the examples in this study are taken from advertising, plus some from commercial Hollywood cinema and news media. Despite their differences, different mainstream media forms of representations are similar in that they all promote dominant ideological values, which differ from those expressed in "alternative" media, including the screendances discussed in this project. I briefly introduce each of the forms here.

Mainstream media advertisements are meticulously designed and produced to sell us not only products, but also a consumer-driven way of life. They address audiences not as humans, but as "markets." Nothing is sacred in advertising. In *Television Myth and the American Mind,* Hal Himmelstein observes, "…the institution of advertising in our advanced capitalist society appears to be continually usurping individual spiritual needs through a substitutional process that equates human worth with material goods" (Himmelstein 106). Specific examples illustrating how this is operating in contrast to selected screendances are discussed more in depth in chapters 2 and 3.

Mainstream film refers to commercial movies that are produced for the purposes of selling tickets and function more as entertainment than art. For example, they tend to

employ formulaic narratives with Freytag Pyramid-like structures rather than inventing original forms of story telling. Mainstream film producers tend to cast actors in ways that emphasize stereotyping, which affirms dominant ideology. Hollywood movies are often considered mainstream, which includes films that are produced by major film companies, have a wide release and play in first run theatres. Mainstream films do not include experimental, art films or cult films.

Mainstream news media as I am considering them here, tends to reinforces the status quo and is biased toward the power elite at the expense of the powerless (Himmelstein 247). Media news stories tend to favor the wealthy, white, established leaders and large corporations. News is presented with authority and as if it were common sense. Capitalist mass media portrays the world of corporate capitalism as a healthy world of competition in which everyone benefits. For example, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the corporate news media coverage was almost entirely one-sided, emphasizing President Bush's point of view and censoring others (Himmelstein 273). Other aspects of mainstream news media are discussed more in depth in relation to selected screendances in chapter 4.

In contrast to mainstream media, alternative, "fringe" media forms offer alternative readings of society that differ from representations featured in mainstream media. They are characterized by elements such as employing unusual narrative forms, using mainstream forms to challenge mainstream ideology, encoding alternative or oppositional messages in texts, thus they produce works in ways that reflect economic constraints, circulate through different distribution systems such as specialist festivals, speak to finely targeted, small audiences, lack popular appeal and therefore, lack

commercial success, include representations that challenge stereotypes or include groups absent from other texts. The screendances included in this study share those attributes, which are not characteristic of most mainstream media representations as far as the term is used here.

Summary of Extant work:

Despite the proliferation of innovative dance on film and video works created over the past 50 years, surprisingly little has been published about the field. Other than articles on various related topics, the total number of books specifically addressing the historic, aesthetic and/or technical concerns of screendance is almost four ("almost" because one is currently under review). I will introduce each one here, identify their contributions to the field, include them in discussion about key issues surrounding contemporary screendance, then describe what led to this project.

In 2002, Judy Mitoma along with editors Elizabeth Zimmer, Dale Ann Stieber, Nelli Heinonen and Nora Zuniga Shaw compiled what has served as one of screendance's first archives. *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* introduces 55 different screendance professionals including directors, cinematographers, choreographers and editors, who each discuss their work. Their first-person reflections include descriptions of their artistic processes. Zimmer observes that among the artists a new generation of filmmakers are beginning to realize the potential of dance on film and video. Director Michael Bay discovered that "It's strange, but when filmmakers are forced to solve the problems you need to solve to shoot dance, they really find themselves using the film medium to the fullest" (Bay in Mitoma xvi).

Additionally, many of the screendance professionals included in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* gave permission to excerpt their work for inclusion in the companion DVD, a feature unprecedented at the time. The result is a comprehensive sweep of key artists and works in the history of modern dance and screendance including filmmaker, Maya Deren, choreographers Merce Cunningham, Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey, Alwin Nikolais, Mary Wigman, George Balanchine, Donald McKayle, Bill T. Jones, Victoria Marks, Anna Halprin along with other choreographers and screendance-makers. As evidenced by this list, half of the works included in this collection were choreographed for the stage, then either adapted for film/video or documented on film/video. The other half includes works created specifically for film and video. Today, these two types of work are distinguished from each other and only works created for the camera are included in the definition of "screendance." In terms of representation, this list also reflects works that "derive from and pertain to the English-speaking world, primarily in the United States, but…include[s] a personal essay from Argentina, a critical essay on a choreographer working in Germany, and discussions of films about Japanese and Indian classical and popular forms" (Zimmer in Mitoma xvi). The excerpts of the screendances on the DVD range in duration from one to six and a half minutes, which is enough to get and an idea of the work, but does not allow for full appreciation of its entirety, obviously. Likewise, the artists' testimonials include keen observations, however; none offer "big picture" perspective, analyses, interpretation or discussion of the broader significance of the screendances they produced. Nonetheless, this publication helped define screendance as an emerging art form by offering a collection of examples and serving as a kind of proof that this field stands on its own.

On the technical level, Katrina McPherson contributed to the development of screendance with her "how-to," 2006 publication *Making Video Dance: A step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen.* Similar to the way colleges and universities serve as training and production grounds for areas such as postmodern dance, many dance departments are adding screendance to the curriculum however; up until McPherson's book, the artists and scholars teaching screendance courses were on their own as far as developing teaching materials. *Making Video Dance* moves through the entire creative and production process including identifying different sources for inspiration, writing treatments, storyboarding, shooting, directing, editing, distributing and submitting for screening the final piece. Of particular value to choreographers of live dance are her "translations" of elements such as space and time from the way they are perceived on the stage to the way they appear through the camera lens. McPherson's work is a valuable tool for creating and teaching screendance, which enhances the development of the field.

In 2001, Sherril Dodds published *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art,* the first book to begin addressing issues of context, form and history of this emergent art form. Dodds' work contributes to the field by laying down a historical foundation, examining screendance's formal elements and posing questions about the nature of screendance. Dodds' extensive, thorough research is reflected in the exhaustive, and in many cases brief, mentioning of a wide range of historical examples. Given that Dodds locates screendance at the intersection of live, postmodern dance and commercial television, those are the histories she draws upon. As the title suggests, the first few sections of the book highlight Hollywood musical-type examples rather than elaborating on early cine-dance and/ or early experimental dance

film examples. Though positioning screendance as such serves to represent one aspect of screendance history, it does not provide a scaffolding to support discussion and theorizing of contemporary, experimental screendance. In the preface, she describes the elements of the film that initially inspired her interest in screendance, which were "the primacy of formal structuring devices and compositional concerns" (Dodds xi). Indeed, much of her writing is dedicated to describing formal screendance structure and compositional elements such as color, design, costume, spatial considerations, time and technical aspects rather than analyzing the meanings those elements convey. Though in one chapter she brings in theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Jacques Lacan and eloquently summarizes their arguments, she stops short of applying their theories to screendance.

In *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art,* Dodds calls into question the ways in which the television screen is perceived. Overall, she poses more questions than she explores possible answers. She argues that screendance is rooted in the postmodern dance stage tradition and that it challenges notions of realism, linear narrative and psychologically motivated characters. Although these claims are now assumed as given, the fact that she articulates them, lists historical examples and identifies works of relevant theorists, serves as foundational for the further development of screendance scholarship.

Another noteworthy figure in the field of screendance is Douglas Rosenberg. At present, Rosenberg's forthcoming book on screendance is under review for publication. He has published as well as made available numerous insightful articles and papers addressing foundational concerns of screendance on his website. In addition to teaching

screendance at the University of Wisconsin, Rosenberg has created award-winning

screendances, directed conferences on screendance such as *Screendance: State of the Art*

(which I attended), distributes screendance DVD's and has participated in

interdisciplinary collaborations worldwide. Additionally, he is co-founding the June

2010 launching of the *Journal of Screendance*. Indeed, Rosenberg has done and is doing

much that contributes to the development of screendance scholarship. Rather than

summarizing Rosenberg's work, I will incorporate his views with the previously

mentioned author's and my own to discuss key issues surrounding the emerging field of

screendance and how my intervention contributes to the field.

Dance and Technology:

There is no debating that screendance is a hybrid art form. Exactly what

constitutes its different elements differs at different time periods and according to

different screendance artists and scholars. However, all would agree that screendance is

one part technology. Given that, screendance shares certain characteristics with other

innovative forms of technology such as its fast rate of change and development. The

innovation of technological forms over time occurs at a faster rate than that of other

cultural art forms since Western capitalist consumer society depends on the invention of

new forms and variations on technology to feed its markets. Therefore, the nature of

screendance, including how we make it, how we view it and how we conceive of it, has

changed and will continue to change at a fast rate.

This characteristic is evidenced in numerous ways. One is reflected in the terms

that have been used to describe what I am now referring to as "screendance." Over the

years and in different contexts, the terms used to refer to screendance have changed in

relation to the technology utilized to produce it. The variations on the terms serve to emphasize different elements. For example, "cine-dance" was a branch of the early American Avant-Garde Film movement (1894-1941), which included works such as the *Annabelle Butterfly* and *Serpentine Dances*, experimental works by Sergei Eisenstein and Dada-inspired screendances. Calling the form "cine-dance" brings attention to its relationship to the cinematic apparatus. Additionally, artists use different terms depending on their personal identification with the technology and the art forms. For example, "dance on screen" prioritizes the dance element. Dodds uses the term "video dance," which brings attention to the video technology used to create the work. I join screendance scholars Rosenberg, Karen Pearlman and many others in choosing "screendance" as the term of choice since it incorporates film, video, dance, new media, installation and future media. In other words, the term "screendance" de-emphasizes the exact technology that makes the work (whether video, film, other digital technology, etc.) and puts more emphasis on where the work is seen. The "screen" includes numerous possibilities such as a computer monitor, a television, a laptop, a screen in a theatre or festival venue. There is a higher likelihood that the technology we use to make screendance will evolve more radically than the screen upon which it is projected or viewed (unless technologies such as holograms come to fruition soon); therefore, this term reflects the art form as it is today and will also wear well with time.

> We are still at the dawn of screendance. While it may seem like an obscure genre today, the ranks of artists working in the form are growing, and with them will come wider audiences and recognition. The names and terminology for the form will likely change, and the distinctions will become more clear, but what is certain is that this is a separate category of its own (Nus http://movetheframe.Wordpress.com/2009/05/20/ creating-a-lexicon-for-screendance/).

Not only does the form of technology used to create and view screendance influence what it is called, it also impacts the way in which we contextualize it. Dodds contextualized screendance at the intersection of postmodern dance and commercial television. At the time Dodds published her book, British television aired numerous programs featuring screendance. The television may have been primarily where she viewed screendance. Since that time, screendance viewing venues have changed remarkably. With the advent of new computer, video and digital media technologies in addition to ever-increasing numbers of screendance festivals worldwide, screendance can be seen on computer screens and video screens as much or more than commercial television. Screendance is no longer limited to existing within the parameters of commercial television. As the technology of communication media have evolved, so has screendance. To conceive of screendance as located at the intersection of postmodern dance and commercial television today is limiting.

Rosenberg, Pearlman and others locate screendance not at the intersection of commercial television and postmodern dance but at the point where postmodern dance meets film, video and visual art. Defining screendance as such opens the door for different discourses, histories and possibilities for theorizing experimental work. Rather than a Hollywood musical model, cinematic and visual art histories and art forms such as painting and sculpture serve as models for understanding screendance elements such as mise-en-scene, lighting, texture, shape as well as the meanings conveyed by those elements. Defining screendance's hybridity in this way acknowledges the importance of experimental filmmakers such as Maya Deren and screendance artists of the 1970's such

as Amy Greenfield as contributing to the development of screendance as an art form as much or more than productions such as *West Side Story* or *Singin' in the Rain*. I elaborate on this model to add that many screendance artists construct a hybridity that is unique to their work. Some screendance artists feature pedestrian movement, world dance forms or the movement of rippling water, for example, in place of postmodern dance. Other screendances are located at the intersection of dance, film and other forms such as theatre and music, or less common sources such as the presentational conventions of newscasts. In other words, the hybrid elements constituting screendance varies depending on the artist.

In terms of screendance's relationship with commercial television, I propose that commercial television is not a constitutive element of screendance, as Dodds claims, but rather merely one mainstream, dominant cultural medium with which some screendances code-swap and/or with which they subvert. There is a growing tendency among the different media to refer to each other. Whether screendance to advertising, films to advertising, visual art and dance to advertising, advertising to film and visual art, or music video to all, different media forms are borrowing from each other. In terms of the meanings they are generating, different types of mainstream media such as commercial television, Hollywood cinema and advertising perpetuate dominant, patriarchal consumer ideology in the form of representations. Given that screendance is also a mediated form, it inherits the semiotic value of the images that make up those representations to varying degrees. Therefore, I examine the ways in which screendance code-swaps with mainstream media forms and consider the meanings and significance of those appropriations, re-presentations, inventions and subversions. In the end, not only are

commercial television (along with other forms of mainstream media) not constitutive elements of screendance, I argue, but they are positioned ideologically more in opposition to many screendances, including those discussed in this project.

Generally speaking, Dodd's work favors discussion of form over content. At the time she wrote her book, screendance was a new enough form that she and many critics were compelled to explore its constitutive elements as much as or more than the meaning screendances generated. For example, her discussion of filmmaker Busby Berkeley's Broadway-style dance routines includes mention of his famous top shot, lavish sets, geometric choreography and use of tracking shots "to move along the lines of women and sometimes [he] employed close-ups to show off each woman's face" (Dodds 6). She makes no mention of the exploitive, exclusionary ways in which he represents the female body in what screendance scholar Douglas Rosenberg calls "escapist, popular entertainment" (*Video Space* 1). Dodds' focus on form over content may have been serving a purpose at a time when the emergence of screendance was, in some cases, viewed as a threat to live dance on stage rather than as an emerging, exciting, innovative art form.

Another attribute screendance shares with other innovative forms of technology is how it is often met with skepticism, at least initially. Mitoma remembers "the introduction of new technologies at the turn of the century had a polarizing effect on the dance profession. Many believed they threatened a fundamental value of dance – direct interpersonal encounters. Isadora Duncan, for example, did not allow anyone to film her dancing (a person behind a tree recorded the only known footage of her)" (xxxi). During screendance's emergent years in the 1980's and 1990's, many critics were skeptical about

its relationship with live dance and its cultural value. Dodds cites critics such as Bayston (1987) who feared that "there is danger of the medium becoming the message and the choreography smothered with technology" (Bayston in Dodds 147). Indeed, when a new technology emerges, there is a period of time when discovering its form precedes discovering its content. However, that time is brief and is not nearly substantial enough to sustain an art form. Another critic saw a screendance presentation as "dominated by ideology and technology" (Penman in Dodds 147). I agree that screendance, like live dance or any art or cultural form, is "dominated by ideology." Our job is to discern the meanings generated by that art form and choose whether or not we want to perpetuate that ideology. Perhaps the screendance that the critic was responding to was asking to be admired simply because it was a new technological art form with little to say, in which case, I sympathize with the critic. Simply presenting the bells and whistles of a new technology is not enough. The artistic challenge, I believe, is to create something artful, whether with complex, state-of-the-art technology, or with the human body alone. When Zimmer was considering whether or not to participate in the editing of *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, she confessed she had encountered resistance. "I've always been in the phalanx of the dance world that believes dance suffers mightily in the transfer from three dimensions to two, I was actively hostile to the notion of trying to can the live experience" (Zimmer in Mitoma xv). This resistance to new technology and in some cases, technophobic perception, locates live dance and screendance at polar opposites rather than considering the symbiotic potential of dance and technology (Dodds 147). "Creating dance for the camera is a natural extension of the dance artists' skill – sensitivity to visual form, motion, space, time and light, as well as a passion to

communicate." (Mitoma xxxi). However, there are certainly differences between live and mediated dance.

Dodds claims that some critics believe that live dance performance is superior to screendance because live performance carries the thrill of bodies that are subject to possible risk and failure in ways that can be edited out of screendances. Dodds proposes, however, that a sense of risk and danger could be constructed in screendance "through various televisual devices, such as fast cutting and vertiginous camera angles…sophisticated filming techniques and improved presentation skills" (Dodds 148). What Dodds is describing is a cinematic technique that constructs kinesthetic, excitement-generating images, which I believe are not necessarily risky or dangerous. I propose that taking risks in screendance has more to do with content than cinematic techniques and presentations skills. One way of taking risks in screendance involves constructing images that diverge from mainstream media's "safe," predictable, status quo-generating representations.

The differences between live dance and screendance are equal to or outweigh their similarities, and casting one as superior is unproductive. In generalized, simplified terms, no screendance can perform the presence, risk, sometimes magical, unique, vulnerability, the witnessing of bodies in motion and spontaneity of live dance. Likewise, no live dance can perform the intimacy of the ultra close-up shot the way screendance can. I propose an alternate and potentially more fruitful line of inquiry, which is to explore what happens to constitutive elements of dance such as space, time and movement, when it moves from the stage to the screen?

The nature of screendance as a media form allows for fluid definitions of time and space. As Walter Benjamin describes it, "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an even greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (226). Rosenberg observes that "dance for the camera has liberated dance from the theater and given it a new and different proscenium, that of the film screen or television monitor" (*Video Space* 10). Some choreographers of live stage dance may take issue with using the words "emancipate" and "liberate" to describe the dance element of screendance as if it were held captive in the proscenium stage space. There are certainly numerous examples of important site-specific, live dance works that are created and performed in non-proscenium stage spaces. However, the fact that the camera is so transportable and editing techniques can produce myriad effects, such as slowing down or speeding up time and motion, changes the general sense of time and space in the creation of screendance. Dodds describes this screendance phenomenon as a characteristic of the "video dance body," or the "fluid body," one that "transcends the limitations of the material body and which offers the possibility of alternative modes of dance" (170). Rosenberg describes it as a process involving the "recorporealization" of the body via screen techniques, a "literal re-construction of the dancing body via screen techniques: at times a construction of an impossible body, one not encumbered by gravity, temporal restraint or even death" (*Video Space* 10).

Democratization:

In addition to alterations in the elements of time and space, there have been references to screendance and web-performance as having a democratizing effect. I

propose that this is true in terms of the types of body and movement featured in many screendances, as well as the increasing accessibility of the technology utilized to produce screendances. However, bodies featured in screendance are as culturally encoded as they are in live dance performance or in other media representations.

Generally speaking, the bodies performing in screendances represent a broader range of types than those typically featured in stage dance traditions. "Video dance offers a more democratic body since one doesn't have to be a certain age, look or body type to become a 'spectacle body' on screen. (Dodds 80) This phenomenon is due in part to the close-up shot. "Subtle movement like a turn of the head can take on the importance of a 'grand jete'" (Dodds 82). Since most any body type can perform a turn of the head and video production techniques can transform movement in many ways, the role that virtuosity plays in screendance is different than in live professional dance. In general, screendance features highly trained dancers performing virtuosic movement less often than does professional live dance performance. "Video dance negates the aesthetic value of virtuosity since video can extend and enhance possible movement ranges of the body so…it has no physical limitations…innovation overrides virtuosity" (Dodds 80).

In some cases, screendance movement starts to look less and less like what is traditionally defined as "dance." The line between art and life becomes blurred at times. Allan Kaprow's essay *The Real Experiment* (1983) proposes a theory that holds that "Western art actually has two avant-garde histories: one of artlike art and the other of lifelike art" (Kaprow)…"artlike art looks like what we know to be art…Lifelike art is more difficult to recognize because it questions the very nature of what we know to be art and it may occur in venues that we do not associate with art…perhaps the most

efficacious screendance does not look like dance as we know it at all. I would propose that the most efficacious screendance might even discount the monolithic histories of dance, cinema and the visual arts and create a third party if you will, an independent party that infiltrates the histories of other existing artlike practices" (Rosenberg *Essay* 8). A filmmaker featured in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* began shooting with the intention of capturing dance, then realized that the dance movement could be replaced with other forms of movement. The dancers left, but they just kept shooting. "…many said you can't have a dance film without dancers. I think you can" (Lockyer in Mitoma 161). What screendance makers are capturing is movement; whether that movement is performed by dancers, clouds, cars, animals or a river, it all serves as movement.

One area in which a kind of democratization is revealing itself in screendance has to do with accessibility to the technology. In recent years, as the cost of video technology decreases, a larger number of dancers, choreographers, visual artists, video artists and filmmakers are getting access to cameras and editing equipment. Where the cost of filmmaking used to be prohibitive for many artists, screendance artists can now produce works with relatively small budgets. As a result, screendances are being created at an increasing rate and are giving voice to a broader range of socio-economic and other groups. "Formerly marginalized identity groups can now be championed within the high art and popular art sectors internationally" (Irvine 2). Screendance is serving as a vehicle for voices not typically heard in mainstream media. Though the production level of works featured at screendance festival is increasingly more professional every year, interesting work is also created by individual artists who are living marginally. Not all screendances are high-cost productions. Some important screendances notable for their artistic and

political perspectives are created on little or no budget. Though formerly marginalized identity groups are now getting more exposure in screendance and on other digital "stages" such as the Internet, to what extent are performances of difference being perceived differently or not?

A claim among many theorists is that the spaces of screendance and of the web are democratized spaces where differences are minimized. In the *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* introduction, Mitoma states, "The invention of film and video technology has had a profound impact on dance: on access to it, and on the creation, understanding, and appreciation of it. For the first time, we could see dance across boundaries of race, class and geography, a dissemination process critical to the development of the field" (Mitoma xii). If I understand this statement correctly, she is saying that when dance moves to film and video, it can cross racial, class and geographic boundaries. Though screendance most certainly circulates across geographic boundaries worldwide, by performing on the Internet or other venues, that does not necessarily serve to de-code the bodies. Rosenberg observes, "the language to describe many contemporary media-performances speak of 'the body' as if bodies are neutral, uncoded, have no ethnicity or other markings…A performing body, be it in cyberspace or otherwise is always in the process of performing its identity at least" (Rosenberg *Notes* 3-5). I share Rosenberg's concerns that "while the rhetoric surrounding cyber-culture codes it as progressive, it seems to be that it is largely politically regressive. (*Notes* 5). Where are the discussions of the politics?

My Intervention:

My intervention contributes to and fills a gap in the emerging field of screendance in a number of ways. Most obvious is the fact that so little has been published about this field, that there is room, if not a call, for more voices. Additionally, the works that have been published have privileged form over content generally speaking, and I do the opposite. My interest in theorizing the body has to do with what it represents more than defining it by the technology used to create that representation. While Dodds and Rosenberg construct notions of "the video dance body," "the fluid body," "the re-corporealized body" and "the impossible body," I build a case for "ambiguous bodies in motion." The bodies Dodds and Rosenberg discuss are referencing aspects of screendance as a form.   My interest lies in addressing the politics, the meanings, and messages conveyed by representation of bodies rather than discussing screendance's formal elements an as end in themselves. As an intervention, I contribute to the emerging genre of screendance by addressing political aspects of screendance representations in in-depth critical analyses of ambiguous elements employed in screendance representations of female identity.

In addition to privileging content over form, my work looks closely at the thin line screendance straddles "between extending the metaphors for dance art into a new hybrid form and fetishizing dance and the bodies which one frames within the purview of the camera" (Rosenberg *Essay* 2). Rosenberg cautions that "without critique from within the community as well as from outside sources, dance for camera will remain a formless, shapeless adjunct to theater dance, prided more for its entertainment value than for its contribution to culture" (*Essay* 2). My project critiques screendance and other representations, and explores the nature of that thin line. Many of the bodies that are

fetishized are female. I ask how women are representing themselves and negotiating that thin line in ways that serve as more than entertainment and contribute to culture by performing alternative possibilities for representing female identity.

Another way in which my intervention contributes to the field of screendance is by highlighting a collection of works that are making meaning culturally as much as or more than simply providing entertainment. There is an increasing trend among screendance festivals and screendance website archives to feature works that are produced with large budgets, large production crews and often include sophisticated editing techniques and special effects. In other words, screendance that "aspires to the condition of Hollywood..[rather than]…the condition of radical flux" (Rosenberg *Essay* 2). In an interesting article on curating, Rosenberg observes that "the festival model often exacerbates discussions about elitism in that it seems that often the work that dominates screenings is highly virtuosic, highly produced and linked to established choreographers and or directors" (*Curating* 15). He asks whether curating can function as a kind of critical thinking and proposes that curating "creates a foundation for criticality as it frames and groups individual works around issues of content or form or other myriad concerns" (*Curating* 29). I have "curated" a program of works for this project around feminist concerns, representations of female identity in screendance and mainstream media to make a statement about alternative possibilities. Unlike Dodds, I curate a collection of works that locate screendances firmly in opposition to the Hollywood model rather than as born from it. The works included here are what I believe to be important in different ways in terms of the meanings they generate. For example, Grace Ndiritu creates work that I argue is abundant in meaning and subversion

and asks important questions. However, technically, she describes her production

process as one that involves making "hand-crafted videos."

Finally, while the works of Mitoma, Dodds and Rosenberg serve as important

foundational contributions to the field of screendance, my work diverges from theirs in

different ways. Both Mitoma and Dodds have "curated" projects that are rich in breadth

but lean as far as in-depth critical analysis. Though I discuss far fewer screendance

artists and works than they do, I dig deeper in terms of looking at their cultural

significance. As is demonstrated by my exhaustive referencing of Rosenberg, I resonate

with many of his beliefs. On the other hand, as much as he is calling for in-depth critical

analysis of screendances, his contributions (so far) are more along the lines of surveying

the state-of-the-art. Additionally, though he mentions the word "gender" a few times and

is most likely sympathetic to feminist concerns, a feminist semiotic lens informs and is

central to my work.

<u>Methodology:</u>

Given the hybrid nature of screendance, my methodology draws upon theoretical

writings from dance, feminist film studies, phenomenology, and semiotics. The umbrella

under which I contextualize screendance is contemporary visual culture. I am interested

in screendance representations of female identity that offer alternatives to the those seen

in mainstream media, which are often exploitive, limiting, foster stereotyping and are not

reflective of women's experiences. I draw from John Berger, Kenneth Clark and Walter

Benjamin and others to look closely at representations of the female body in mainstream

media and European oil painting traditions compared to those in screendance.

Additionally, Laura Marks has informed my investigation of the power of images,

especially those close-up and haptic, and their relation to feminist strategies and transcultural cinema.

As I examine the fine line between representations of the female body in screendance and the fetishized female body in advertising, media, and mainstream Hollywood cinema, a feminist *intention* is central to my argument. Drawing from Vivian Sobchack's interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology and the concept of the "lived-body," I discover that some screendances represent an expressive, feminist screendance body empowered by its intention in movement. Many screendances feature sensuous and other bodies that move with intention in ways that read as expressive and empowered agents rather than as simply objects of desire and/or the visual means for promoting a product.

Another element that distinguishes the screendances in this project is that they include element(s) of ambiguity. I draw from Myra McDonald, Helen Macdonald and others to construct a feminist semiotic frame within which to explore ambiguous elements in screendance representations of female identity.

I also listen closely to the philosophies embedded in the works of the artists. Artists such as Grace Ndiritu and Lloyd Newson make available substantial, articulate statements about their work on their websites and in related publications. As Deleuze claims, the artist is like a philosopher whose work speaks to the state of society in ways worth considering. As well, it is fascinating to discover that works such as those created by Ndiritu and Newson often present choreographic embodiments of philosophical theories. Perhaps my job is to translate from the visual to the verbal to increase the

accessibility of their perspectives, especially for those who are not initially inclined or trained to read the body.

My research included viewing over two hundred screendances. Two thirds were created in the past ten years and the rest were made between 1975-2000. I was given access to four years of Dance Camera West's programming. (They are based in Los Angeles and host a yearly festival in June, which I attend.) The *Screendance State of the Art Symposium* held in conjunction with the American Dance Festival presented about 30 screendances. Other sources include the *Media and Arts* listserve and the Dance Film Association, both of which facilitate lively discussion and exchanges of screendance titles, as well as current screendance offerings on Internet websites such as YouTube and Choreographic Captures.

Rather than surveying a large number of examples in this project, I have selected a small collection of examples that I believe engage with popular culture discourse in interesting and subversive ways. I come at these various examples in each chapter from different angles and with different sets of questions in order to do an in-depth comparative analysis of how they are working in relation to representations constructed by different forms of mainstream media. The works I have chosen to write about contain subversive representations of female identity, include some form(s) of ambiguity and are noteworthy as much or more for their content as for their technical virtuosity. I have given equal weight to work that contains provocative feminist content, whether it was created by one artist with a hand-held video camera or a crew of professionals. These works employ ambiguity as an aesthetic strategy for challenging or subverting mainstream media representations of female bodies and stereotypes. I suggest that these

are the important ways in which screendance is contributing to constructing alternative

individual and cultural, socio-political identities, especially feminist cultural

representations.

<div align="center">Organization of the Chapters:</div>

Chapter 2: *Imaging the Female Body: A Comparative Analysis of Corporeal Images in Contemporary Screendance and Advertising.*

In chapter 2 I look closely at the power images have both to evoke corporeal

responses and to represent. Although screendance and advertising differ greatly in their

intentions, they both feature images that generate excitement, desire, intimacy,

kinesthetic empathy, stereotypes, clichés and subliminal messages as well as feature

visceral, textural, haptic and fetishistic images. Comparing representations of the female

body in selected screendances with corporate advertising imagery, I build upon and

respond to Dierdre Towers' statement that screendance artists "can play the same

subliminal games played by corporate marketers but with the goal of beauty and

excitement" (Towers in Mitoma 115).

The following questions are central to this comparative analysis: What visual and

verbal strategies are employed by both screendance and advertising? How are these

shared techniques put to different uses? How can the images and techniques of

advertising be used to counter commercial values? I begin by identifying what it is about

an image that makes it provocative. Laura Marks' insights about haptic, or very close up

images, illuminate this discussion. Haptic images emphasize the element of texture, can

evoke the sense of touch, deny contextual information, evoke intimacy and create

ambiguity. I use the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model, after which many

advertisements are structured, to examine ways in which Vaseline and Tylenol ads are employing haptic images in representations of female bodies as compared to those in Aitor Echeverria's screendance, *Aprop*. Though they all feature provocative haptic images of female bodies, I show how *Aprop* also takes advantage of haptic imagery's ability to read ambiguously, which serves to trouble the meanings generated in the screendance in subversive ways as compared to the messages conveyed by the images in the advertisements.

Another type of provocative image employed by screendance and advertising is the excitement-generating image. The opening of Paul Magnin's *Reines d'un Jour* exemplifies a performance of female identity in empowering ways by featuring visceral, close-up, excitement-generating imagery. I use Karen Pearlman's analyses of editing techniques and the notion of *kinesthetic empathy* to deconstruct that scene and then compare it to examples from mainstream media such as chase scenes in commercial Hollywood cinema and the kinetic, excitement-generating imagery in advertisements such as Nike's.

I then consider ways in which advertising, screendance and other media represent female identity by code swapping with each other. In the case of the screendances *Arising* and *Rain*, they appropriate so many commercial elements that they could almost read as advertisements themselves. I trace the representations of women in the two screendances and discuss the visual elements they share with many mainstream films and advertisements such as the commercial aesthetics, gender stereotypes, reductive, fetishistic images of nude and partially nude bodies.

Finally, I turn to Ndiritu's *Nightingale* as an example of a screendance that employs various advertising strategies for the purpose of performing a transgressive representation of female identity. Similar to many advertisements, she begins with provocative, haptic imagery that captures attention. By obscuring the person's identity with the slow-moving fabric, she creates a tension, which stirs the viewer's interest and desire to see who is behind the veil. I demonstrate how *Nightingale* employs a structure and haptic, visceral images similar to those featured in many corporate advertisements, but does so ambiguously, which troubles many corporate advertisements' representations of female identity by proposing more complex alternatives.

Chapter 3: *The Viewer's Body: Shaping the Viewer in Screendances by Ndiritu and Newson, in Three Advertisements, a Commercial Film Scene, and in Network News.*

While chapter 2 looks closely at different types of corporeal images, chapter 3 turns around to consider what kinds of meanings and effects they have on the viewer. Building on Althusser's notion of appellation and his claim that "whatever you are called, you must already be," I discuss different ways in which different media forms are hailing and shaping the viewer and, most importantly, the ideological meanings they convey. As Judith Williamson explains it, by calling out to viewers, the ideology inherent in media representations recruits the viewer as a particular kind of subject. The address contains assumptions and viewers give it meaning by watching, or "receiving" the address. In the case of many mainstream media representations, the address often contains assumptions that serve to re-enforce dominant consumer culture values. In the case of screendances by artists such as Grace Ndiritu and Lloyd Newson, I argue, the way they each appropriate mainstream media hailing strategies by integrating subversive, ambiguous

elements in their performances serves to not only bring attention to mainstream media strategies but also to trouble the assumptions and meanings they convey.

In each section of this chapter, I examine different strategies mainstream media employ to hail and shape the viewer and compare them with ways in which Ndiritu and/or Newson are employing those strategies. I show how advertisements such as Vaseline, Tylenol and Dove attempt to hook the viewer with flattery, encourage viewer identification as well as feature different types of gazes. I bring in Laura Mulvey and Jacques Lacan to analyze comparatively how the "male gaze" is operating in relation to the seductive female body in those advertisements, in Newson's *Cost of Living*, in a scene from the popular film, *Damn Yankees* and in Ndiritu's *Desert Storm*. The final sections move away from advertising and commercial film examples to look at how Ndiritu and Newson are responding to network news media's tendency to feature sensationalist journalism, to discourage acceptance of difference, and in some cases, to operate as a tool for the military by persuading the viewer of the need to go to war, which shapes the viewer as fearful of the "enemy" and as a potential victim.

Chapter 4. *Nude, Naked and Sexually Expressive Bodies in Motion: Comparing Representations of Female Identity in Selected Contemporary Screendances with Those in Advertising and Commercial Hollywood Films.*

This chapter poses the question, how can screendance artists negotiate the fine line between representing the sexually expressive female body and the cultural tendency to code those bodies in ways that are reductive and limiting? Mainstream media inundate contemporary visual culture with images of nude, or partially nude, naked, or partially naked, and sexually expressive female bodies and code those bodies as symbols for

things such as sex. While those images have powerful ideological effect in terms of shaping female identity, many of those representations do not reflect women's experiences. As Myra Macdonald sees it, "there is a difference between painting our own picture and looking at someone else's" (3). Building on Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "lived body," I investigate ways in which advertising and commercial cinema are "painting" representations of the female body and compare them with ways in which screendance artists are "painting" their own pictures. Central to my comparative analyses are Vivian Sobchack's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notion of the lived body, one that resists essentializing, moves with intention, within a context or condition, perceiving, expressing and being-in-the-world. I compare Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of the lived body and intersubjectivity with Lacan's theories of the Mirror Stage and build upon how existential phenomenology provides tools for theorizing the female screendance body.

The first half of the chapter examines advertising and commercial Hollywood cinema representations of the female body and identifies the strategies they employ. In many cases, advertisers such as Calvin Klein, Etam Lingerie and Yves Saint Laurent construct representations that code the female body as passive, erotic objects by decontextualizing and/or situating women in settings that play on male fantasies, featuring women in coy poses with an averted gaze, thus creating a sense of mystery and sexual availability. I discuss ways in which these representations construct the notion of an "ideal" female body that is exclusive and has limiting effects on female identity formation.

Conversely, screendances by van Vark, Greenfield, Ndiritu, Bookchin and Echeverria subvert mainstream media representations of the female body in numerous ways. Van Vark's *Kassenhauschen* evokes the Western European oil painting and sculpture traditions of the female nude in order to transgress them with ambiguous deformities. In *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles* and *Still Life: White Textiles*, Ndiritu also performs art historical poses assumed by nudes, however, she subverts them by Africanizing them, incorporating ambiguous elements in her performance and bringing the "still" model to life. Greenfield's *Tides* challenges ways in which mainstream media representations code the naked female body by performing it to excess. She risks the vulnerability that comes with performing nakedness and finds power in its relation to nature. Echeverria's *Aprop* hovers closely to that fine line between women artists who are representing sexually expressive female bodies and the social tendency to code those bodies as sexual objects. *Aprop's* ambiguous close-up imagery, side lighting, and vibrant performers position this screendance in the realm of art rather than pornography. Finally, while Bookchin's *Mass Ornament* captures sexually expressive female bodies as they are representing themselves on YouTube, this screendance presents them in ways that read more as an expression of humanity than of gratuitous sexuality.

Chapter 5: *The Veiled Body: Performances of Female Identity in Transnational Screendances by M. Abbasi, I. Rocamora and G. Ndiritu.*

Chapter 5 addresses screendance's transnational nature by looking at how selected screendance artists represent the veiled female body as an expression of female identity both within one's own culture and interculturally and compares them with mainstream news media representations. In order to appreciate the complexities involved in

representing the female body and the veil, two signifiers containing myriad meanings, I begin by outlining the elements of the headscarf debate. I propose that the ways in which news media's tendency to fuel fears about difference by stereotyping, sensationalizing and/or demonizing the veiled female body serves to code that body as an oppressed, victimized other.

Through the use of ambiguous performance elements, I argue, screendance artists Mohammad Abbasi, Isabel Rocamora and Grace Ndiritu construct images in their screendances that move us away from thinking about the veiled female body unequivocally. Abbasi's *I am My Mother* incorporates ambiguous, abstract as well as figurative dance to represent his mother's inner experiences. He features the veil as a partition between her public and private worlds in culturally subversive ways. The ambiguity between the title, *I am My Mother*, and Abbasi's male gender raises questions about gender and identity. Since Rocamora's *Horizon of exile* operates in multiple ways in terms of generating meaning around the veiled female body, I construct two different arguments. On one hand, *Horizon of exile* reads as re-confirming media representations of the veiled woman as exoticized other whose future holds little promise. On the other hand, Rocamora constructs ambiguous representations of the exiled female body with a conjunction of incongruent signifiers that speak eloquently about the female exilic experience. Ndiritu's *Nightingale* embodies most closely a transgressive, polyvocal representation that begins to construct a context for transformation and has the potential to narrow the gap between the way the veil is represented in many mainstream news media representations and the experiences of veiled women themselves.

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

Chapter 2 -

Imaging the Female Body:

A Comparative Analysis of Corporeal Images in Contemporary

Screendance and Advertising

 "Dance video artists can play the same subliminal games played by corporate marketers, but with the goal of beauty and excitement" (Towers in Mitoma 115).

At first glance, some postmodern, visually rich, ambiguous advertisements do not look all that different from short screendances. Both employ provocative visual imagery and in particular, visceral, textural imagery. Both feature representations of bodies, many of which are youthful, athletic, "beautiful," and female. Both exist as forms of media, which circulate nationally and transnationally along with other media representations predominant in contemporary visual culture. In some cases, both create representations that draw from similar sets of signs (Berger 135).   Looked at more closely, however, they differ in obvious, critical ways. While every element of an advertisement is meticulously designed for the purpose of selling a product, screendances are artistic statements, some of which contain messages that are political, challenging, or subversive, and some that are not. What visual and verbal strategies are employed by both screendance and advertising? How are these shared techniques put to different uses? How can the images and techniques of advertising be used to counter commercial values?

When dance moves from the stage to the screen, as it does in screendance, it enters the space of a contemporary, powerful, constantly evolving media culture. In *Video Space*, Douglas Rosenberg observes that by utilizing technology, screendance

"places itself in the discourse of current media practice and therefore in the discourse of popular culture…" (5). Currently, screendance is blossoming and flourishing within that discourse. As it does, I believe it is important to maintain a critical awareness of the meanings generated by screendances. In some cases, screendance artists are inventing new variations of filmic and corporeal visual languages, which succeed at doing what art can do: show us new ways of looking at the world and propose new perspectives. Some screendance artists are employing visual and verbal strategies employed by advertising and media in order to counter or question mainstream ideology. In other cases, screendance artists are "code swapping," appropriating advertising and media aesthetics, signs and techniques, to create work that look as professionally produced as mainstream advertising and media and also serves to re-inscribe aspects of mainstream consumer ideology.

According to Fern L. Johnson in *Imaging in Advertising: Verbal and Visual Codes of Commerce*, advertising is itself a discourse, "meaning both that it is articulated with conventions of practice and that it uses particular discourse elements to structure its meaning potential" (6). The discourse elements of contemporary screendance and advertising are circulating and exist within a global mediasphere, which, historically, has been shaped by patriarchal, capitalist, white, consumer, western European ideology. Advertising and other mainstream visual cultural representations contain "…tacitly privileged ways of framing or seeing the world around us," which reflect and perpetuate that ideology (Berger in Goldman 197). For example, it is no surprise that western, patriarchal, consumer culture, historically, has featured a proliferation of representations of youthful, attractive females in all forms of media. Many of those representations

contain corporeal imagery that is visceral, often shot close-up and sometimes fetishized. Those representations also perpetuate mainstream ideology and have an effect on ways in which we see ourselves and form values. However, as contemporary culture is impacted by factors such as globalization, cultural democratization due to the Internet, and increasing social tolerance, representations in postmodern visual culture and advertising reflect those shifts and increasingly feature images of bodies that are non-western, or non-white, and bodies that re-define values such as what "beauty" looks like. Unfortunately, despite the inclusion of a broader range of skin tones, the female bodies cast in many multi-racial advertisements are still the youthful, attractive women shot in ways that heighten reductive, fetishistic elements.

I argue that while some screendances contain corporeal imagery that perpetuates mainstream ideology as advertising does, some screendance artists such as Aitor Echeverria, Pascal Magnin and Grace Ndiritu are creating works that challenge that ideology and bring attention to ways in which the media are operating. My intention is to identify examples of screendances that are reflecting and re-cycling mainstream consumer ideology and distinguish them from examples of screendances that are challenging that ideology. By articulating how the subversive screendances are operating culturally, I hope to fuel their momentum as purveyors of alternative perspectives and contributors to social change.

Though advertising and most screendances differ in their intentions, they share the fact that they both privilege the visual. Being a visual language in its own right, dance is fluent in the communication of the non-verbal and has the potential to translate eloquently to the visual medium of film and video. Likewise, advertising employs

images to say in a picture what cannot be said as convincingly in words. In particular,

they both employ *corporeal images,* which speak of the sensual (of the senses) and/or of

the sexual. Many corporeal images are of the body, of course, but more importantly,

corporeal images evoke a bodily response. Examples of corporeal imagery which have

this evocative power include visceral, kinetic, close-up, haptic, textural and tactile

images, some of which are designed to be perceived subliminally. Depending on the

mise-en-scene and editing techniques, corporeal images can generate effects such as

excitement, ambiguity, the sense of touch and intimacy. Given corporeal images'

potential to evoke somatic responses, advertisers are keen to employ them in their work

of persuasion. In screendance, they serve as an artistic element. How are corporeal

images put to different uses in screendance as compared to advertising and media?

Advertising and media most often employ corporeal images within the context of

a narrative, a visual proposition and/or a constructed argument. While advertising takes

advantage of an image's ability to say eloquently what words cannot, images are usually

designed to support or underscore a text-based, verbal message. The message is often a

catchy one-liner that praises the virtue of the product. The corporeal image in advertising

serves as a vehicle for capturing the viewer's attention, creating interest, stirring emotion

and motivating the viewer to buying a product. The content of the images tends to re-

confirm culturally constructed gender and other stereotypes and deliver clear, distinct

messages rather than pose questions or communicate ambiguously. Some screendances

"code swap" with advertising and consumer visual culture and create representations that

feature corporeal imagery similar to that seen in advertising, or borrow commercial

aesthetics. On the other hand, some screendance artists are creating work that

transgresses mainstream consumer visual culture by employing corporeal imagery in unconventional, non-narrative-driven ways, by privileging the non-verbal, by challenging gender stereotypes, and by employing some type(s) of ambiguity.

Methodology:

This chapter explores the power of the filmic image both to evoke bodily responses and to represent bodies, specifically female bodies in motion. To begin, this study asks what it is about a visceral corporeal image that makes it provocative? What is the nature of the corporeal image and how is it featured in screendance as compared to advertising? The different types of corporeal images and imaging techniques discussed here include visceral, haptic, close-up, excitement generating, sexual/sensual, fetishistic, kinetic, stereotypical, subliminal and ambiguous.

For each of the different types of images, I comparatively analyze examples from both advertising and screendance with an increasing shift away from advertising toward art. I use the AIDA (Attention – Interest – Desire – Action) model, upon which many advertisements are constructed, to understand ways in which corporeal images are operating within the structure of advertisements. The AIDA model also serves as a tool for analyzing the role of corporeal images in some screendances as compared to advertising.

Given that much of the information conveyed in screendance and advertising is visual, examples of each are examined through a feminist semiotic lens. Drawing from Laura Marks, Karen Pearlman, Judith Williamson, Paul Messaris, Elin Diamond, Louis Althusser and others, this study delineates visual strategies advertising employs to do its work of persuasion and comparatively analyzes them with the strategies of screendances,

in particular, noting gender representations and ways in which screendances appropriate one or more of those strategies for non-conventional and/or conventional purposes.

In parallel to the discussion of the different types of corporeal images, this study also traces how these images are representing the female body in motion. I examine advertisements and screendances that contain different representations of female bodies in motion and employ corporeal imagery in different ways. Advertisements for Vaseline and Tylenol and the screendance, *Aprop (Closer)* by Aitor Echeverria, feature visceral, haptic, close up, sensual/sexual and ambiguous images of bodies. *Reines d'un Jour* (Queens for a Day) by Pascal Magnin serves as an example of visceral, excitement generating imagery and haptic sound. The screendances *Arising* (2008) by Ben Dolphin and Pontus Lidberg's *The Rain* (2007)*,* both borrow from advertising different aesthetics and representations such as visceral fetishistic imagery and images of stereotypically gendered bodies. Grace Ndiritu's *Nightingale* (2004) appropriates the tools of advertising such as employing visceral, ambiguous and subliminal corporeal imagery in order to address issues of female identity.

Though advertisements differ from each other depending on the products they are designed to sell, they all share a number of attributes. Some screendances share some of those attributes as well. In order to identify what characteristics they have in common or not, to identify possible influences one may have on the other and, most importantly, how each is generating meaning, we need to examine the different elements of advertisements. By deconstructing an advertisement's operating strategy, we can discover which aspects are also characteristic of some screendances and what is significant about that similarity.

Most advertisements are structured after one of the following designs. Dagmar is

the acronym for model a based on Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results. According to this model, an advertisement must carry a potential customer through four stages:

I. Awareness (Is the customer aware of the product?)

II. Comprehension (What is the product about?)

III. Conviction (Convince the customer of the benefits of the product.)

IV. Action (The customer takes action towards purchasing the product) (Dukta 10, George 1). Since this model is fundamentally oriented more toward the product than the structure of the advertisement itself, it is not as relevant a model for comparison with screendance.

Another advertising model goes by the acronym of AIDA, which stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (George, Dirksen and Kroeger). Since this model refers less to the product, is more reflective of the advertisement itself and speaks to ways in which it impacts the viewer, it is more similar to some screendances and, therefore, is used here to make comparisons between the two. Drawing from various sources on advertising and Paul Messaris' *Visual Persuasion: the Role of Images in Advertising,* I will discuss screendances in relation to the four elements of Attention, Interest, Desire and Action in terms of their differences and similarities to selected advertisements.

While a screendance viewer is making a conscious choice to look at a screendance, advertisements must compete for the viewer's attention. Consequently, all ads employ some of numerous possible attention-getting techniques. In some cases, ads contain attention-grabbing text, phrases or headlines, but more often they draw on the

power of the image. Images that capture attention in advertising include images that contain a violation of reality, visual metaphor, surrealism, visual parodies, and/or direct gaze of the eyes (Messaris 7-23). Screendances, however, are not necessarily constructed with the purpose of competing for attention. Screendances reflect the traditions from which they evolve, which are dance, film, visual art and performance. Though an artist may choose to begin a work with a visual impact or a compelling visual image, many begin with elements such as an introduction of visual ideas, themes, characters, locations and/or movement, which do not necessarily demand or grab attention. In general, they are not necessarily in a hurry the way advertisements are. On the other hand, both screendance and advertising employ provocative corporeal images. Advertising does so specifically for the purpose of capturing attention (A), creating interest (I), evoking desire (D) and motivating the viewer to action (A). Screendance uses many of the same techniques for representing the body but with a different ultimate aim.

Corporeal Imagery: Visceral, Haptic and Close-up Images

What is it about an image that makes it provocative? Some images evoke bodily responses due to our inherited genetic tendency to respond to visual information containing sensual and/or sexual references. Haptic images, those shot very close-up, are provocative because they accentuate texture to a great degree and can activate the sense of touch. They also break the distance of normal seeing and suggest abnormal physical proximity. Images that are shot close-up can be provocative because they accentuate the elements of texture, color and shape, create a sense of intimacy and deny context, which can also create ambiguity.

Bodily responses to particular visual images are programmed into our genetic make-up. We need food to survive as individuals and sex to survive as a species; thus, we are programmed to respond to and move towards visual information that contains promise of satisfying either or both of these appetites. For example, seeing images of food triggers the physiological salivating response. The shape of a pear, the texture of crispy crust, the silkiness of pouring milk, stimulate our senses. These types of images can activate a synesthesia effect, where through visual stimuli a sensory crossover occurs and the viewer can taste, smell or touch the object/food in the image. Images that evoke the synesthesia effect do so subliminally, which can enhance the viewer's experience of the image (Key 12).

In *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura Marks builds an argument for ways in which images which are haptic, as opposed to optic, can evoke the sense of touch. Vision itself can be tactile, "as though one were touching a film with one's eyes: I term this *haptic visuality*" (Marks xi). Haptic perception involves the combination of tactile, kinesthetic and proprioceptive processes, the way we experience "touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies" (Marks 162). It tends to move over the surface of an object rather than depending on a separation between the viewer and the object, as does optical visuality. Optical representation provides a distance between viewer and object, which allows the viewer imaginatively to project him/herself into or onto the object. The viewer's experience involves identification with the object, or figure, in optical representation while, at the same time, "with increased space and three-dimensionality the figure in a work of art is also increasingly dematerialized" (Reigl in Marks 165). While optical perception privileges

the representational power of the image and encourages identification, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image and involves the body more than is the case with optical visuality (Marks 163). It creates an image with such detail that it pulls the viewer in close. Since these types of corporeal images can evoke bodily responses, they are featured prominently in both screendance and advertising.

For example, the screendance *Aprop (Closer)* and advertisements by Vaseline and Tylenol all feature ambiguous, provocative, haptic corporeal images of textured surfaces, the skin and nude bodies in different ways. In *Aprop* (http://drooopyandthelezzie.blogspot .com/2009/04/aprop-closer.html) Echeverria's use of the close-up shot emphasizes the material presence of the body and body parts become featured subjects. Rather than encouraging identification with one or both of the women featured in *Aprop*, haptic images capture body parts shot so close up that they fill the screen to the point of functioning as subjects themselves. The opening images of *Aprop* capture a dancer's spine shot so close up that her physical form is abstracted and not immediately identifiable. A thin slice of white light skims the curve of her lower back, which is surrounded by black background and reads like a desert landscape in the moonlight. As the source of the light moves, it stretches to illuminate the soft, rippled contours of her ribs as she inhales, much like watching a fast motion sunrise over a sand dune. When shot close-up, bodies often appear as landscapes, especially those of the desert, with dunes. While the black-and-white images of the two nude women in *Aprop* feature ambiguous close-ups of body parts that appear similar to landscapes at moments, advertisements and screendance such as Vaseline's *Sea of Skin* and Isabel Rocamora's

screendance *Horizon of exile* literally cut between images of bodies and images of desert landscapes. The forms and textures of each imply bodies as landscapes and landscapes as bodies. This is the result of shooting close-up, which denies the larger picture containing context, so that textures, body parts, shapes are exaggerated to the point of abstraction, ambiguity and/or to the point of appearing as something other than what they are.

Additionally, *Aprop* represents female sensuality and sexuality in non-gratuitous ways through the use of ambiguous haptic cinematography and haptic sound. Where corporate media and advertising rely on clichéd, gratuitous corporeal imagery to evoke sensuality and sexuality such as graphic sexual images of women, Echeverria creates visceral sensuality in *Aprop* almost entirely with tactile, haptic images. By "gratuitous" corporeal imagery I mean to describe a performance of female sensuality or sexuality that is "not called for by the circumstances" (Mirriam Webster Dictionary). In other words, gratuitous corporeal imagery performs expressions of sexuality that are not called for by the circumstances. The images are introduced primarily to capture our attention and then deliver that attention to another purpose. Additionally gratuitous sexual imagery does not necessarily construct the performer as subject. Rather, gratuitous corporeal imagery serves to construct the performer as objectified. The performer is not an end but merely a means to deliver the viewer to a commercial product. Screendances such as *Aprop* do not rely on graphic images of the women's sexual body parts to create sensuality. Rather, *Aprop* evokes a sense of intimacy and sensuality with artfully executed, haptic cinematography that, due to its ambiguous nature, codes the body to be many things, not only a sexual object.

Key to disturbing the objectification of the sexually expressive women is the element of ambiguity generated by haptic imagery. "The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (Marks 163). Establishing a visual (and/or textual) context is instrumental in constructing a narrative, and given that the haptic image does neither, narrative gives way to abstraction. Without context and narrative to generate meaning, detailed, textured, abstracted haptic images open themselves up to multiple interpretations. Unlike the conventions of commercial advertising and cinema, which typically call for establishing a context, usually at the beginning of a piece with optical shots, the first optical, context-establishing long shot in screendances such as Aitor Echeverria's *Aprop*, does not occur until three minutes into the screendance. Up until that point, the ambiguity of the haptic images serves to diffuse elements such as character depiction while emphasizing the depiction of sensuality itself by employing haptic images such as skin surfaces touching, unidentifiable body parts with the accompaniment of haptic sounds. The sound score is comprised of intimate whispering, sighs of pleasure and soft, rhythmic consonants accented with occasional bells ringing. According to Marks, the whispered voice is the aural counterpart to the haptic image (11). The meaning generated by the ambiguous haptic imagery and sound in *Aprop* speaks of women who are sexually expressive subjects experiencing a performance of sensual intimacy. We are witnessing the women experiencing pleasure in the performance rather than their being objectified by a graphic performance intended for the viewer's pleasure.

Marks suggests a correlation between haptic images, the feminine and the erotic.

Given that haptic images lack context, a certain visual control is denied, which Marks

believes enhances the haptic image's erotic quality (13). Benjamin observes that "the

closer you get to the object, the more the object dissolves into formlessness and

hallucination" (8). For Naomi Schor, haptic images contain political significance. Haptic

images "are full of detail, which has been coded feminine, as negativity, and as the

repressed" (Schor in Marks 6). Marks links the haptic with "a feminist strategy, an

underground visual tradition in general rather than a feminine quality in particular" (7).

She is drawn to historians who "have supplanted phallocentric models of vision with

those that seem to be more comfortable in a female body" (Marks 7). Indeed, *Aprop*

serves as a haptic, sometimes erotic, feminist model of vision that operates comfortably

in a female body. It features haptic corporeal images of playful, flirtatious sensuality and

sexuality portraying women who are expressive, active subjects. While the images

capture female erotic sensuality, their bodies are not reduced to passive, dis-embodied,

sexual objects such as those seen in corporate media, advertising and pornography.

Echevarria achieves the effects of sensuality and intimacy by featuring close-up, haptic

corporeal images that are not manipulative, gratuitous or exploitive.

  Vaseline and Tylenol also employ visceral haptic corporeal images in their

advertisements, but do so in ways that function as elements of the AIDA model rather

than for aesthetic purposes. In Vaseline's *Sea of Skin* advertisement (http://www.youtube

.com/watch?v=YyRtlIddnmo&NR=1), a series of haptic images serves as a strategy for

capturing the viewers attention (A). Highly-textured haptic images such as forms in

nature, an ear lobe, an isolated section of an abstract painting, and a patch of skin on the

back of an elderly person's hand, are edited at a rate that increases in speed until a

climactic moment when *Sea of Skin* cuts from haptic images to a long shot of a mass of

nude bodies in a forest. In other words, the haptic images provide an attention-getting,

excitement-generating contrast to the images that follow in the ad.

The Tylenol advertisement (http://jezebel.com/354313/tylenol-loves-our-

wrinkled-saggy-un+photoshopped-skin) also features haptic images of nude bodies,

however, for the purposes of generating interest (I), evoking desire for intimacy and pain

relief (D) and transferring those affects to the product. Similar to *Aprop*, the Tylenol ad

opens with close-up images of body parts. The bodies featured in this series of images

are those of the elderly, a population most likely targeted as candidates for users of

products such as Tylenol. Like the Vaseline ad, the Tylenol ad also takes advantage of

the impact of the visual contrast between the series of haptic images and the first long-

shot image. After seeing haptic and close-up images of non-glamorous, aging bodies that

are slightly bulging, skin that is weathered and wrinkled, close-up shots capturing a

screen-full of crow's feet skin around a woman's eye, folds of skin above an elbow, all of

which serve as a vehicle for creating intimacy by inviting the viewer to come in a little

closer and identify with the bodies, the ad moves to a brief long shot before showing a

picture of the Tylenol container. In contrast to the haptic shots of aging bodies, the long-

shot of a more youthful, nude female body viewed from the back in silhouette as she

slides seductively to the floor, registers just long enough to generate excitement, which is

encouraged to spill into the image of the Tylenol bottle. This ad is a blatant example of

the use of evocative corporeal imagery for the purpose of arousing desire, which is then

transferred to the product. Geared for the aging baby boomer generation, the ad also

encourages the viewers to see themselves in the ad. The ad is selling us ourselves, in part, by employing haptic and close-up imagery and suggesting that Tylenol can make our bodies young again.

Excitement-generating, kinetic corporeal images:

Another aesthetic shared by screendance and advertising is the use of excitement-generating corporeal imagery. When Towers states that screendance artists "can play the same subliminal games played by corporate marketers, but with the goal of beauty and excitement," what does "excitement" look like in terms of imagery (Towers in Mitoma 115). Merriam Webster defines the different types of excitement to include "to arouse (as a strong emotional response), to energize, to increase activity of…" Compared to haptic visceral corporeal imagery, excitement-generating imagery is similar in that it evokes a visceral bodily response; however, it does so, in part, by means of energized movement and activity. Where haptic images are often shot using stillness, a slow pan or slow motion, shooting energized movement and/or fast-paced editing create kinetic, excitement-generating images. To create excitation, the rate of movement within and between shots can be "dazzlingly" high (Pearlman 240).

Generating excitement in screendance and advertising imagery involves a particular treatment of the movement flow within and between shots. In *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Film Edit*, Karen Pearlman uses the term *trajectory phrasing* to describe the energy movement trajectories flowing in different shots and between shots (52). Trajectory phrasing possibilities include linking and colliding trajectories. She reminds us of the argument that went on between Soviet montage theorists Eisenstein and

Pudovkin about whether edits should create *linkages* or *shocks* by making *smooth cuts* or *unmatched cuts* (55). The smooth cut is one in which the screen movement, for example, travels from right to left in one shot and is matched with the same direction of movement in the next shot. Hollywood-style coverage also refers to this as a *match cut* or a *match on action* (Pearlman 55). Many screendances employ the smooth cut, which matches action from one shot to the next to create an uninterrupted trajectory phrasing of movement flow.

  To generate excitement, other editing techniques are employed. One is to alter the rhythm of the cinematic flow of energy by inserting cuts that collide or "shock." A colliding cut contains a screen direction of movement opposite that of the preceding screen image. Another editing technique used to generate excitement is to juxtapose images that are unmatched in ways such as spatial organization, energy, lighting, shot angles and depths and scales (Pearlman 55). The length of the cut also contributes to generating excitement. Cutting before the peak of the *content curve*, or the time it takes to recognize and understand the information contained in an image, can increase excitation (Pearlman 55). Pearlman bases her editing practice and theory upon ways in which a video/film is comprised of varying rhythms and the process of editing involves the construction of different rhythms by "shaping of the flow of energy found in various shots into the single flow of movement and energy over time" (57). To create effects such as excitement, the rhythm of possible cuts include colliding images and unmatched cuts, interspersed with smooth and/or matched cuts, cuts that vary in duration, all of which construct a particularly energized trajectory phrasing of movement.

In addition to the visual means for generating excitement, haptic sound is also used. As we saw in the screendance, *Aprop*, haptic sound evokes a sense of intimacy, viscerality and sensuality. In conjunction with excitement-generating imagery, haptic sound functions in similar ways and adds intensity since the speed and pacing of the imagery are increased. The opening of the Pascal Magnin's screendance, *Reines d'un Jour* (Queens for a Day), serves as an excellent example of excitement-generating imagery and haptic sound.

In *Reines d'un Jour,* Magnin employs excitement-generating imagery and haptic sound in ways we have discussed in order to create representations that resemble aspects of advertising imagery and AIDA model strategies; however, it codes the women as being active, expressive and sensuous in ways unlike representations seen in corporate advertising. *Reines d'un Jour* opens with a close-up shot of a female dancer's profile as she runs up a mountainside with other dancers. We hear haptic sounds of heavy breathing and feet shuffling. An abrupt, colliding cut takes us to a close up on the dancers' feet running up the mountain followed by another colliding cut to a medium shot of the dancers dashing uphill. The next series of shots show one dancer then another diving to the ground and rolling fervently downhill so that the others have to leap over their bodies.

Different elements contribute to generating excitement in these opening shots. Ascending a mountain is coded with anticipation about what one will find at the top. The quick pacing and abrupt cuts depict a sense of urgency; however, no information is communicated as to why these dancers are in such a hurry. The haptic sound tells us that something intense is happening yet the images are cut either just before or right at the

peak of the content curve. A sense of urgency is communicated but we do not have enough information to know why. We are being asked to move quickly to mentally grasp the available information and/or fill in missing details with our imagination about motivation and context. All of these elements work together to construct a provocative sense of excitement

Additionally, *Reines d'un Jour* features feminist representations. Pearlman identifies three types of rhythm in editing: physical, emotional and event (249). Of the physical rhythms seen in screendance, film and advertising, the three most common include dance, fight and chase. The opening shots of *Reines d'un Jour* contain some of the elements of a chase scene. They communicate high intensity and fast paced action, which are most often coded as masculine characteristics. Though there are an equal number of male and female dancers cast in *Reines d'un Jour*, Magnin forefronts the *reines* over the *rois* (kings). By opening the screendance with a high-action shot of a woman running up a mountainside, Magnin is characterizing her as determined, highly active (rather than passive) and capable of "conquering" a mountain. This discussion will be continued more in depth in Chapter 3, but now we will return to looking at how excitement-generating, kinetic imagery operates in screendances such as in *Reines d'un Jour,* compared to that seen in advertising and media such as in a chase scene.

As we have discussed, screendance, advertising and media employ both visceral and excitement-generating corporeal imagery because they evoke bodily and emotional responses. However, there are some differences between the ways in which these images are operating in screendance compared to advertising and media. Given that excitement-

generating imagery stirs emotional responses such as the "feeling of lively and cheerful joy, exhilaration and enthusiasm" or, in other cases, the states of being "disturbed and agitated," (Merriam Webster Visual Thesaurus) and that visceral imagery evokes the sense of touch and other responses, these types of corporeal imagery are effective at providing texture and enhancing visual experience in screendance as well as fulfilling aspects of the AIDA advertising model. After excitement-generating and visceral corporeal images, for example, function to capture viewers' attention (A), they can stir interest (I) and evoke desire (D), which is then transferred to and identified with the product, thereby motivating the viewer to consider purchasing the product and, hopefully, taking action (A). In screendance, they serve to create kinesthetic texture and excitement and stand in for some of the visceral, kinetic presence generated by live dance performance.

Mimesis and Diegesis

Messaris reminds us that images in advertisements such as visceral and excitement-generating corporeal images are also designed to be "visual propositions," often in the service of constructing an argument and/or relating "to the descriptive or narrative aspects of visual syntax" (180). A chase scene is an example of excitement-generating corporeal imagery operating within the context of a narrative. Pearlman refers to the chase as "pure cinema because it is a scenario in which the conflict is always made manifest in visible and audible action" (232). In addition to featuring excitement-generating corporeal imagery, a chase scene must make the viewer care about the pursuer and the pursued. The excitement of a chase scene is generated in part by the tension

created though the unfolding of the narrative. The narrative provides details about the character such as his or her goals, personality, hopes and desires. This information encourages the viewer to identify with the character, which contributes to the excitement of the chase scene. Advertising and other media often employ visceral and excitement-generating imagery with narrative elements in order to tell a story or construct an argument.

Examples of employing visceral and excitement-generating imagery within a narrative in film and advertising abound. Action-packed chase scenes are a mainstay in commercial Hollywood films such as *The French Connection* (William Freidkin, 1971) and *Terminator 2* (James Cameron, 1991). In advertising, Nike has created numerous commercials featuring bodies running, racing and chasing. Nike employs excitement-generating imagery and haptic sound in an advertisement that constructs a narrative about a man and a woman trying to out splash each other as they run through a city park and streets in the rain (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG_UDYtNXUo). Similar to *Reines d'un Jour*, the Nike ad employs close-up shots, fast-paced edits and provocative haptic sounds such as breathing and water splashing. However, unlike *Reines d'un Jour,* the close-up shots linger on images such as the woman's running shoe in the puddle and details of the runners' stylish running outfits. Rather than constructing a message about kinesthetic, visceral experience, the Nike ad, obviously, uses excitement-generating imagery and haptic sound to showcase Nike products.

In the opening scenes of *Reines d'un Jour*, the excitement-generating imagery stirs a visceral bodily response that is not related to or dependent upon a narrative.

Rather, the imagery is corporeal and visceral and it evokes a bodily response by virtue of the fact that it contains elements such as close-up images of bodies in motion, evocative lighting, textures and haptic breathing sounds. The visual and aural elements evoke viewers' corporeal excitement for itself rather than asking the viewer to transfer and associate the feeling of excitement with a product.

Pearlman refers to this phenomenon as *kinesthetic empathy*, which is the felt recognition or physical participation in the movement that is seen or heard, even when sitting still (12). Kinesthetic empathy occurs as a result of a neurological feature of our advanced brains called *mirror neurons*. According to neurologist, Richard Restak, studies have shown that when monkeys perform certain movements or observe other monkeys performing the movement, mirror neurons are discharged (Restak in Pearlman 11). Evidence suggests that a similar process happens in humans. "Moving with intention lights up certain neurons in our brains, and watching someone do the same movement lights up the same neurons. So watching is really a physical thing…" (Pearlman 12). Since visceral and excitement-generating corporeal imagery conveys information on a physical, tactile level, it resembles a physical contact, more than a model of vision.

Compared to symbolic representation, tactile epistemology involves a relationship to the world of mimesis (Marks 138). Michael Davis, a translator and commentator of Aristotle writes:

> At first glance, mimesis seems to be a stylizing of reality in which the
> ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain
> exaggeration, the relationship of the imitation to the object it imitates
> being something like the relationship of dancing to walking. Imitation

always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. *Mimêsis* involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real (3).

Shooting close-up accentuates the process of mimesis by also stylizing reality in a way that brings ordinary features of our world into focus by a certain exaggeration. In the process of the exaggeration, the video image (imitation) is in relationship to the live dancer (object it imitates) like the relationship of dancing to walking. By being shot close-up, a body part, such as a hand in *Reines d'un Jour* becomes the subject and fills the filmic frame with its performance of the choreography.

Plato and Aristotle contrasted mimesis with diegesis. Mimesis shows rather than tells, by means of directly represented action that is enacted, where diegesis is the telling of the story by a narrator. Mimesis represents while diegesis reports. One embodies while the other narrates; one transforms and the other indicates; one knows a continuous present while the other looks back on a past (Jowett 5). Mimesis is activated in many cases by the use of the close-up shot as opposed to diegesis, which requires some amount of context in order to tell the story.

Code Swapping

In contrast to the sensual and sexual representations of the active, expressive women in *Aprop*, some screendances feature corporeal images of women that are coded similarly to those seen in advertising and media. In fact, the differences between how different media such as screendance and advertising represent elements such as gender, sexuality and "excitement" is becoming harder to distinguish. "The growing tendency of

the media to refer to each other (whether advertisements to films, television to radio, or music videos to all and sundry) makes it increasingly artificial to draw medium boundaries too tightly" (Macdonald 2). The aesthetics, representations, and the visual and verbal strategies employed by screendance can be seen in some advertising imagery and vice versa. From a semiotic perspective, we live in a world of cross-mediation where "culturally meaningful visual content appears in multiple forms, and visual content and codes migrate from one form to another" (Irvine 1). As spectators, we learn the codes for each form and code switch among the media. As image-makers, some advertisers design images that reference codes established in art, for example, and some screendance artists and filmmakers code swap or appropriate codes from advertising in their imagery. Some screendances create imagery with a commercial aesthetic that resembles corporate advertising to such a great extent that it is not hard to imagine a voice being heard or text appearing that says, "don't get caught in the rain (or whatever the situation is), sign up with Verizon today!" One such screendance is titled *Arising*.

Ben Dolphin's *Arising* (United States, 2008), a five-minute screendance presented as part of Dance On Camera's festival screening of new shorts, borrows from advertising an aesthetic that features visceral, sometimes fetishistic, imagery of liquid, light and corporeal imagery including stereotypically gendered bodies. Representations in *Arising* reduce the dancers to be characterized by their sexualized body parts. The International Film Guild website features a two-minute excerpt and an article about the making of *Arising* in which eight topless dancers interact with an eight-foot wide, simulated waterfall (http://icgmagazine.com/2008/june/dancing.html).

Featuring reductive corporeal imagery is one way in which *Arising* is code swapping with representations seen in commercial advertising. The excerpt begins with different shots of indiscernible, flesh-colored shapes as seen through flashes of color reflected on a sheet of flowing water. The first recognizable shape is that of a young woman's breast shot close-up and cradled next to her arm. The shot appears, then disappears so quickly that it hardly has time to register. The image appears just long enough to evoke a visceral response. "Advertising has historically signified the commodity self by the visual abstraction of body parts. We are accustomed to equating persona with unblemished components of the human body – most notable the expressive surfaces of the eyes, mouth…" hands, and often, other female body parts (Goldman 158). *Arising* introduces the characters/dancers in terms of their external physical features and conveys very little information about their internal aspects. Who they are as people is equated with their physical features, especially their sexual features.

The next section of *Arising* features stereotypical gendered representations. A series of shots captures female faces seen through the sheet of water. Some are motionless, like portraits. Others feature movement such as one young woman turning to the woman next to her as if she were going to brush her lips on the woman's cheek. Since the dancers are shot through the sheet of water, all details are slightly blurred and sometimes distorted. Then a woman is shot from above. We see the top of her drenched head of hair slowly rotating from right to left as it passes over her breasts. The camera goes back to female faces looking at their hands as they interact with the waterfall by gently skimming the water's surface. The women are characterized as being sexual, gentle, on display and more passive than active.

In contrast to the women, *Arising* characterizes the men as being active, if not violent, in the way they interact with the waterfall and with each other. The following series of shots features a chorus of four, bare-chested men shot from the waist up facing the camera. One makes a fist and punches through the sheet of water causing visually provocative splashes and a disruption of the flow. These shots of the men are interspersed with close ups of a woman lingering next to the water. Then we switch to the men moving as if they were young boys pretending they have just gotten shot or punched. Their heads roll around in slow motion with mouths open. *Arising* cuts to the women, then back to the men: this time their bodies are slightly more distorted through the water. The woman in the next shot also breaks the water's flow, but with her fingertips and more gently than the man's punch. Reducing the characters to gender stereotypes in *Arising* serves to de-subjectify them.

After pursuing careers in dance and lighting design, Ben Dolphin turned to directing and cinematography. He is known for shooting liquids and high-speed. He has developed lighting schemes using a Vision Research Phantom Camera with which he can combine 35mm film elements with high-speed features. He is in fact a photographer for advertising. Last year he shot spots for Black Cherry Vanilla Coke in Chicago and Golden Beer Bubbles in Prague. Dolphin employs particular photographic and lighting techniques, which are also used in advertising production, for the purpose of enriching the visual experience and communicating subliminally. He has developed specific lighting schemes using a high-speed Phantom camera, which can shoot at high speeds and is effective for shooting liquid. He creates lighting effects such as "crystalline sharpness" with strobes, while preventing images from becoming medical-looking by

introducing "some degree of motion blur for appetite appeal" (Dolphin in Martin 2). To capture the water with the dancers in *Arising*, he needed both hard and soft light to get sharp definition for the water, "but a beauty look for the dancers" (Dolphin in Martin 2). He also used various colored lights while shooting the water. As the water undulates and moves through various planes, it picks up different colors, "which enriches the visual experience" (Dolphin in Martin 3). Dolphin has a predilection for color and uses it for its emotional impact. He believes we are influenced by color on a "sub-intellectual level" (Dolphin in Martin 4). In *Arising*, his visual arc goes from low, dark and red to high, light and violet, which serves to create aesthetic dynamics, such as a climax, on a subliminal level. Overall, the aesthetics and representations Dolphin creates in *Arising* read more as commercialized advertising than as non-conventional screendance that might contribute to alternate visual traditions.

The flowing water is presented as provocatively as the dancers. *Arising* features the waterfall as another character, if not the central character, of this screendance. Reflected light dances in undulating patterns on the water's surface. A flash of red reflected light appears as if taking a brief solo. The undulations continue to change color and take on patterns similar to dancing flames. Dolphin demonstrates his mastery of photographing water in a sequence of images that begins with a sheet of water flowing downward. The water flows upward in the next shot, then occasionally stops all together, and finally resumes its flow. One begins to wonder if the dancers are simply serving as a backdrop, or an excuse to shoot the water in virtuosic ways.

The following shots emphasize surfaces with fetishized shots of liquid and wet-skinned bodies. The dancers perform a series of leaps, dives and lifts through the sheet of

water from different angles. Men leap one by one. Then the women leap or are lifted,

mostly in slow motion, lit from the side so as to emphasize their glistening skin and

shapes of their breasts. In fact, this section could be described as breasts-in-motion, flying

breasts, or super-breasts! *Arising* features corporeal images similar to those seen in

American advertising and media culture, which, according to Goldman, "has abstracted

female breasts so relentlessly that they are often treated as if independent of the person

who bears or 'wears' them (158). The excerpt ends the same way it begins with abstract

light-reflections undulating on the water's surface.

The visual imagery in *Arising* includes exceptional, striking photography of

water, light and sensuous bodies, and employs techniques and representation of bodies

seen in corporate advertising. Similar to representations in advertising, all the bodies in

Arising are youthful, athletic, and attractive. With the exception of one young man

featured briefly in a few shots, all the bodies are white. Rather than being presented as

subjects with a reason of their own for what they are doing, the dancers are presented as

aesthetic objects posing, occasionally interacting with the water and lifting each other.

There is no apparent motivation for the movement, nor any clues as to the title of the

screendance. In the end, no particular meaning is conveyed other than that flowing water

can reflect light in exquisite ways, that young, athletic bodies are sensuous, that the

women's breasts resemble those seen in mainstream, soft-core pornography and Ben

Dolphin's filming techniques are masterful. It is not hard to imagine this screendance

ending with a pitch for a product such as shampoo or deodorant. After seeing *Arising*,

New York Times dance reviewer, Alastair Macaulay, wanted to shout, "Oh, put your

clothes back on and dance!" (1). *Arising* is an example of a screendance that features

representations of bodies including the gratuitous fetishizing of bodies, or body parts, which serve to reconfirm more than challenge mainstream consumer ideology.

<u>Fetishistic Images</u>

As humans, we have the tendency to fetishize that which we desire, and visual media, especially advertising, plays on that tendency by employing fetishized imagery. Fetishism, the psychological process wherein human relations are replaced with commodified object relations (Schroeder and Borgerson 66), often involves particular visual elements such as textures and colors. In the Tylenol advertisement (<u>http://jezebel.com/354313/tylenol-loves-our-wrinkled-saggy-un+photoshopped-skin</u>) for example, the Tylenol bottle slips into the place of the young female body. A similar process occurs in human attraction as well. There is a tendency to fetishize the person for whom we feel passion. Advertising and art draw on these innate human tendencies by employing fetishized imagery and encouraging fetish-like relationships in general (Schroeder and Borgerson 82). Dolphin borrows this aspect of advertising aesthetics in the making of *Arising*.

Visual representations of liminality, decontextualization, close-up shooting and cropping are design strategies that encourage fetishized viewing. Liminality, in this case, involves imagery that straddles between culture and nature such as leather, which comes from an animal, a natural source and is characterized by a shininess that resulted from a technological process. In the case of *Arising*, an argument can be made for the liminal imagery resulting from the natural element of water and the cultural/technological simulation of the waterfall.   The undulating, shiny, wet surfaces of the water and the

dancers' bodies serve to accentuate shape and visceral sensuality. Denying a person's or object's context also promotes fetishization. Shooting close-up creates that very effect. In *Arising*, dancers are shot topless, close-up and are featured more for their physical, nude, outer appearance than for any acknowledgement of their individuality or character.

Dolphin's stated concept for *Arising* (originally titled *Making the Invisible Visible*), includes a setting "in a kind of prehistoric time, when people are undifferentiated; the group of dancers is like a landscape of bodies. Through movement, they start to make inquiry into themselves. Each dancer arises to confront a truth, with the element of a water barrier challenging them" (Dolphin in Martin 3). There is no literal visual reference in *Arising* that suggests a prehistoric time. One could argue that the people in *Arising* are undifferentiated from each other since their individuality is supplanted by fetishized objectification. The dancers are represented as erotic objects, which indeed together form a landscape of bodies. Though they are undifferentiated in terms of their unique identities, they are starkly differentiated in terms of gender. Additionally, there is nothing communicated in the dancers' movement that implies "inquiry into themselves" and arising "to confront a truth." In fact, Dolphin is contradicting himself when he mentions these elements since inquiring into the self and confronting a truth are deeply individual, subjective processes, and the representations in *Arising* are those of fetishized, objectified, bodies featured with an emphasis on their external, surface appearances and denied their internal uniqueness. Rather than being a "barrier challenging" the dancers, the waterfall is featured in different ways. There is nothing in the dancers' performances that implies any kind of struggle, which comes with overcoming a barrier. For some of the female dancers, it serves as a sensuous surface

upon which they skim their fingers. The men show off their virility by punching through the wall of water with ease. Rather than dancers "arising to confront a truth," the dancers arise, or are lifted in a way that puts them more prominently on erotic display while their bodies are covered with water that glistens.

Stereotyping Corporeal Imagery

Contemporary advertising and media and some screendances employ corporeal images that feature stereotypical representations. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argues that advertising relies on the visual language of oil painting, which dominated the European way of seeing for four centuries before the invention of the camera (Berger 135). He claims that advertising "speaks in the same voice about the same things as oil painting. Sometimes the visual correspondences are so close…[one can put] almost identical images side by side" (Berger 135).   In particular, they both use similar sets of signs. Examples include:

- the use of dancing bodies, especially female bodies,

- the romantic use of nature,

- poses and gestures to denote stereotypes of women (such as serene mother, Madonna, sex object, hostess, secretary),

- sexual emphasis given to women's legs and other body parts,

- gestures and embraces of lovers,

- physical stance of men conveying wealth and virility,

- the man as knight (horseman), motorist and other controlling, powerful, dynamic figures.   (Berger 138).

These signs have been used to such a great extent over the years that they now read as stereotypes and clichés. Though the contemporary postmodern way of seeing has evolved since the invention of the camera, the European way of seeing is integral to the dominant western European, patriarchal ideology that prevails and is reflected in contemporary visual culture. Advertising and some screendances continue to feature clichéd and stereotypical corporeal images such as those listed above.

Like Dolphin, Pontus Lidberg code swaps with corporate advertising and media in his screendance *The Rain* (2007). Despite a potentially political message, he creates a visual vocabulary that speaks in terms of stereotypes, clichés, and fetishized bodies. Structurally, Lidberg takes advantage of what screendance can do through the editing process, which is to construct parallel visual narratives by crosscutting between different lovers and couples. *The Rain* crosscuts between a heterosexual couple and a gay couple to make the point that there is no difference between same-sex love and heterosexual love. However, *The Rain* goes out of its way to feature stereotypical representations of sensuous lovers in stereotypical, sensuous settings dampened by stereotypical, sensuous rain that never stops. Rather than resisting or challenging corporate advertising and media's tendency to fetishize, stereotype and employ clichéd corporeal images, Lidberg embraces them heavy-handedly and asks that same-sex relationships be included in that representation.

Of the signs mentioned earlier, which Berger identified as being shared by advertising and European oil painting, Lidberg features almost all of them in the opening images of *The Rain*. The screendance begins with a solo by a youthful, white, athletic, attractive young woman dancing alone in a meadow surrounded by trees in the afternoon

rain. This location and dancer exemplify a stereotypical romantic use of nature. The dancer arches, stretches, sweeps her lean, ballerina-type body in yearning as her wet clothing clings to her body and drops of water spill down her face. Her movement speaks of classical European ballet, which reads as generic, stereotypical and clichéd. Like the wet surfaces and visceral corporeal images seen in *Arising*, the rain serves to heighten the erotic visual appeal of the young woman, which codes her as the sexual love-object and emphasizes a sense of the exterior rather than her interior. After a few minutes, a man's hand appears in the frame and touches the woman's shoulder (her imagination/love interest), then *The Rain* cuts to the man himself in a street setting at night that could have been taken right out of *Singin' in the Rain*, where the man performs the hetero-normative, clichéd, stereotypical male-lover counterpart performance of yearning. He is dressed in a suit and all the wet surfaces glisten with the exquisite lighting. His dress, stance, movement and gestures speak of a virile, heteronormative "knight."

Lidberg crosscuts and juxtaposes scenes of this heterosexual couple with equally fetishized and clichéd representations of a same-sex couple, which serves to create the effect of normalizing same-sex love. He also employs excitement-generating images such as the male lovers' hands caressing their wet skin, bodies rolling on top of each other, shot from above. The close-up images of sensuous, wet bodies in *The Rain* evoke tactile responses, not unlike those seen in advertisements such as the Pepsi ad featuring actor Eva Longoria (http://www.metacafe.com/watch/150460/eva_wet_in_the_rain/), which was created with the AIDA model where visceral corporeal images are employed to capture attention (A), create interest (I), evoke desire (D) and call to action (A). Lidberg

draws from mainstream visual culture to extend to the homosexual couple corporeal images that are coded as stereotypical, clichéd and heterosexual.

Of the screendances included in this discussion so far, none of them employs the advertising strategies described in the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model as closely as does screendance artist Grace Ndiritu. At the same time, none contains representations that challenge those in advertising and media as much as those seen in her work. In other words, Ndiritu uses the tools of advertising and media to critique advertising and media. She utilizes elements of advertising such as employing visceral, haptic and subliminal corporeal imagery, creating ambiguity and featuring other attention-capturing devices such as the direct gaze. However, in terms of representation, her work is unlike advertising. She challenges rather than perpetuates gender stereotypes and critiques consumer cultural values. These various elements are exemplified in her screendance *The Nightingale*.

In *The Nightingale*, Ndiritu constructs an opening scene with evocative corporeal imagery that captures the viewer's attention (A). In the opening image, we see a fabric hanging, which fills the entire screen and is shot in sepia tone. The fabric billows and bulges with the air, but what draws our attention is the barely visible silhouette of Ndiritu behind the fabric. Like the opening image in many advertisements, this ambiguous image presents information that is familiar and easily processed at first glance; however, it is juxtaposed with other information that requires a closer look. The fabric serves to create mystery by obscuring the identity and detailed characteristics of the person behind it. The obscured silhouette creates interest (I), evokes a desire (D) to solve the mystery, and

therefore hooks us into watching what happens. As many advertisements aim to do, this opening image functions as a way to capture the viewer's attention (A).

Similarly, the next section of *Nightingale* presents a sensuous fabric choreography created by Ndiritu as she slowly pulls the fabric over her head. This is not fabric coded as a window curtain or a sheet hanging out to dry, but it is distinguished by its pattern of small, geometric flowers arranged in circle formations, reminiscent of wallpaper such as Matisse featured in some of his paintings. The visceral sensuality of the fabric undulating in and out of the folds as it spills over her head is accentuated by the texture of the flower pattern and the fact that it is shot or edited in slow motion. Visceral, textured haptic imagery such as this is highly prevalent in advertising photography as we saw in the Tylenol and Vaseline advertisements. Other examples include slow motion, close-up shots of milk pouring into a bowl of cereal for a cereal ad, silky, white lotion spilling out of a bottle for a body lotion ad, or extreme close-ups of juices oozing out of a hamburger for a fast food ad. In Ndiritu's case, the slow motion unveiling also builds on the mystery established in the opening shot. Tension increases as we wait to see who is under the fabric. Once an advertisement captures the viewer's attention, devices are employed to create interest for the viewer.

<u>Ambiguous Images</u>

Advertising often creates interest (I) by including images that are generally familiar yet strange in some way. Images that contain dissonance, a violation of reality or ambiguity are effective at capturing attention and asking for a closer look. Ambiguous images defy reality, most often in subtle, if not subliminal ways. For example, a model's face is constructed with one feature disproportionate to the rest of the face. According to

Messaris, "the human perceptual system is finely tuned to pay special attention to unfamiliar objects when they are only slightly different from our expectations" (7). This is one reason advertisers include dissonant or ambiguous information in an image. A study by Roger Shepard found that "an object that is novel yet similar to an already significant object may warrant our close attention" (Shepard in Messaris 7). Advertising creates this effect by manipulating photographic images. For example, by enlarging one of the model's eyes in a close-up, or removing a model's arm in a group shot, the advertiser induces viewers to linger longer with an image because the image is familiar, yet something is not quite "normal" and exactly what is transgressive is not immediately obvious. Information such as this often registers on a subliminal level.

Another strategy employed by advertisers is to include ambiguity in models' gender signifiers. For example, a clothing advertisement features three couples. Some of the models are coded as heterosexual and others have sexually ambiguous or cross-gendered characteristics. By including ambiguous gender representations, advertisers believe they can reach both heterosexual and homosexual populations as well as detain viewers as they attempt to disambiguate.

Similar to advertising, Ndiritu also employs gender ambiguity in *The Nightingale*. However, the way she does it and her motivation for doing so differ from what corporate marketers are doing with ambiguity in imagery. Advertisements most often create ambiguity during the production process through editing and/or with image-altering software such as Photoshop. Ndiritu, however, generates ambiguous elements in her performance. She creates ambiguity of affect and gender, to some extent, with her facial expressions and body language. In *The Nightingale,* once the fabric sliding over

Ndiritu's head finally reaches its edge, it pauses to reveal half of her face. Her eyes are closed; the sidelight highlights the elegant contours of her half-face, her mouth still, all which read as a veiled woman in stillness. After nearly a minute of stillness, she moves her arm across her body, slips the lower section of the fabric through her fingertips, opens her eyes and the filmic image shifts from sepia to color. The music shifts from the quiet, soothing kora music of the beginning section to a more driving, upbeat rhythmic piece, (both by African musician Baaba Maal). Ndiritu sets the fabric in motion and transforms it into a bandana, a headscarf, a shawl, a veil, a gag, and more. The intensity with which she performs these actions, along with her stern mouth, strong arms, and lack of hair, reads as more masculine. Ndiritu performs ambiguity in her facial expressions as well.

Ndiritu looks directly into the camera for the duration of her performance in *Nightingale*. At times her eyes are inviting, at other times they look with intent and intensity. While her eyes generally read as warmer and feminine, her mouth reads as more stern and unyielding. In other words, she projects different affects with different parts of her face. In an interview, she is told, "your eyes actually seem very distinct from your mouth…when your mouth is revealed it's so stern and unforgiving. Your eyes look like they're smiling" (White 7). Though advertising sometimes includes mixed messages such as Ndiritu's to evoke the viewer's curiosity, rarely do screendance artists employ such intriguing subtleties.

In addition to performing ambiguity, Ndiritu also borrows from advertising the strategy of performing the direct gaze to capture attention, create interest and communicate subliminally. Studies show that when someone looks at us directly, we have a tendency to look back (Messaris 136). There is some controversy about whether

this is an innate behavioral tendency: that we are "predisposed to look in the eyes" (Messaris 23). However, there is evidence indicating that when people are interacting with each other, they spend more time focusing on the face than any other part of the body" (Messaris 23). Ndiritu not only looks directly into the camera, she does so with compelling intensity. She makes clear to us that she is a subject as well as an object of gaze. This performance suggests her desire as much or more than ours.

Unlike corporate media and advertising's tendency to feature stereotypical representations of women, Ndiritu is presenting images of herself, a woman, in ways that challenge mainstream corporate norms by blurring gender differences. She is not performing the normative female, or a distinctly butch female. The element of ambiguity serves to interrupt gender stereotyping and presents information that is open ended.

The intensity of Ndiritu's gaze and performance quality is motivated in part by her interest in generating subliminal messages and transformative energy. Before shooting her video, she engages in trance-inducing preparations including meditation and yoga. Then she turns on the camera and captures her performance in a trance state. While some advertising and media employ subliminal imagery and information for the purposes of selling a product even generating fear, as Ndiritu believes, she attempts to do the opposite (Ndiritu in White 5). "What I learnt about video is it's such a blank canvas, and actually you use the energy within the material of video to transcend and transmit different energies, like you can use it to transmit negative energies or you can transmit positive energies…I decided to, while performing, give out certain subliminal positive information, so…it's more a strategy of enlightening people, to change their minds about certain things…"(Ndiritu in White 5). While advertisements attempt to change viewers'

minds, or encourage them to make up their minds, about purchasing their product, Ndiritu "plays the same subliminal games played by corporate marketers, but with the goal of…" transmitting positive information and opening viewers' minds about issues such as those surrounding female identity (Towers in Mitoma 115).

Conclusion

Of the increasing number of screendances that share global "stages" such as the Internet and television with commercial advertising and media, some code swap and mimic representations seen in advertising and perpetuate mainstream consumer visual culture while others operate similarly to Ndiritu's work, which contains representations that seek to "change minds." If the screendances discussed here were charted on a visual culture and ideology continuum, mainstream media and advertising representations such as the Vaseline and Tylenol ads would be located at one pole. Ndiritu's work would take up the other pole given her inclination to use advertising strategies ambiguously to critique consumerism ideology such as the perpetuation of gender stereotyping. *Arising* would be charted next to advertising and mainstream media given its commercial aesthetics and fetishized representations of female bodies. Lidberg went to great effort to code the same sex couple in *The Rain* with stereotypes and clichés associated with the heterosexual couple in order to normalize same sex love, which would situate *The Rain* next to *Arising* in the middle of this continuum. *Aprop* and *Reines d'un Jour* would be located closer to Ndiritu given their use of ambiguous images and coding the females as active subjects.

We have explored the power of the image to generate meaning and identified various types of corporeal imagery, which are employed by both screendance and

advertising. As well, we analyzed how they each feature corporeal imagery in different ways. Advertising and mainstream media tend to feature corporeal imagery as a visual strategy for capturing attention (A), creating interest (I), evoking desire (D) and motivating action to purchase a product (A). Though haptic imagery is used to evoke bodily responses in advertising, it is usually featured diegetically within the context of a text-driven narrative and/or for the purpose of constructing an argument. The majority of the images in advertising and some screendance are usually optical with the haptic imagery serving as a contrast. Gender representations include fetishized images and stereotypes. Though some advertisements are designed to withhold certain details for the purpose of encouraging repeated viewings, there is no ambiguity in the final meaning or message.

In terms of the AIDA model, some screendance artists might begin a piece with imagery that captures attention (A), though screendances are not necessarily in a hurry to do so compared to advertisements. Screendances most certainly generate interest (I) in visual and other terms, especially by creating visceral, ambiguous, corporeal imagery, as we have discussed. Screendances differ as far as evoking desire (D). In *Aprop*, evoking the viewer's desire is secondary to the performance of the dancers' desire. Ndiritu performs ambiguously for the purpose of stirring questions about who and what we define as desirable. Finally, rather than stirring the viewer to an action (A) such as purchasing a product, the screendances discussed here use ambiguity of meaning to encourage viewers to actively question, re-consider and/or reflect.

In order to generate ambiguity in meaning, screendances feature visceral, ambiguous, haptic corporeal imagery that draws the viewer close, disturbs literal

representation and evokes the sense of touch in a way that emphasizes the materiality of the body. Screendance privileges the non-verbal, visual languages of film and of the body, which sometimes read as abstract and ambiguous. Unlike optical visuality, which is prevalent in dominant mainstream consumer visual culture, haptic visuality denies context, emphasizes texture and operates more in terms of mimesis than diegesis. Pearlman builds on this notion by distinguishing between cinematic representations that encourage viewer identification within a narrative and those that activate kinesthetic empathy not necessarily dependent upon narrative elements. Rather than representing the female body with fetishized imagery, some screendances contain representations of active, expressive women and depict sensuality as playful and non-gratuitous so that we identity with the dancer as a subject (feeling our own bodies mirror their movements) rather than viewing them as objects for our potential use.

Marks suggests a correlation between the haptic, the erotic and the feminine. Rather than claiming that haptic, visceral, ambiguous, excitement-generating imagery and the other visual strategies discussed here are a feminine visuality in particular, I prefer when Marks sees them as ways to "describe alternate visual traditions, including women's and feminist practices…" which can "supplant phallocentric models of vision with a vision that is more ambient and intimate," and I would add, sometimes ambiguous (170). The models of vision generated by advertising might include ambiguity in imagery, but never in meaning. Key to disturbing phallocentric models of vision and representations of female identity, I suggest, is the ambiguity of meanings generated by haptic corporeal images.

Chapter 3 -

The Viewer's Body:

Shaping the Viewer in Screendance and Mainstream Media

"…whatever you are called, you must already be" (Louis Althusser 44).

A powerful yet often subtle or unidentifiable way of affecting others is through address. Many advertisements and other forms of mainstream media, for example, manipulate our thoughts and feelings by speaking to us in ways that contain assumptions, values and affective visual and verbal language, often without our awareness. Mainstream media representations are ubiquitous and operating in ways that are inescapable, influential and often unrecognizable. In particular, the pervasive influence of advertising within society "…constitutes a powerful ideological force within consumer culture" (Williamson 11). Representations generated by popular culture media are some of the most important factors shaping as well as reflecting our lives today. "Advertising has developed into a potent 'cultural system,' which shapes and reflects consumers' sense of social reality " (Kelly, Lawlor, O'Donohoe 2). How are screendance artists responding to and/ or shaping our "sense of social reality?" To what extent can screendance representations propose alternative perspectives?

While the last chapter looked closely at the power certain images have to evoke bodily responses and generate meaning, this chapter turns around to consider ways in which advertising, media and some screendances seek to shape the viewer as a subject through address. By calling out to viewers, the ideology inherent in media representations recruits the viewer as a particular kind of subject. Louis Althusser refers to this process as

appellation**,** "hailing" or "interpolating" and uses as an example to illustrate his point a scenario where a policeman on the street calls out to an individual, who turns around when he hears the call. "By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he had recognized that the hail was really addressed to him, and that it was really him who was hailed (and not someone else)" (Althusser 44).

Different media forms tend to employ different types of hailing, or viewer address. Since advertising exists for the purpose of motivating viewers into actions such as consuming products, it employs more varied and aggressive types of hailing than other forms of media. Advertisements employ hailing strategies such as the direct gaze, seducing with the female body and encouraging viewer identification. Hollywood cinema also has a tradition of featuring the seductive female who hails the spectator (assumed to be a heteronormative male) in ways that encourage identifications and voyeuristic gazing. Another media form, network news media, shape the viewer as voyeur, or encourage voyeuristic viewing, by presenting sensationalized accounts of people and events. Given the news media's journalistic practice of featuring a large quantity of disturbing representations such as those containing violence, acts of terrorism and other fatal occurrences, the viewer is also encouraged to be fearful, or shaped as a potential victim.

In *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, Judith Williamson argues that in addition to selling us things, by addressing us with assumptions, which serves to perpetuate dominant ideology, media representations are functioning in ways traditionally fulfilled by art and/or religion, which is to create structures of meanings. "In the process of taking into account the inherent qualities and

attributes of the products they are trying to sell, advertisements also succeed in making those properties mean something to us" (Williamson 12). As a result, advertising and other mainstream media forms are firmly located at the center of contemporary consumer culture's meaning-making machine. Given this tradition whereby advertising and other media generate structures of meaning, what role can screendance play, an art form that shares attributes with advertising and media yet does not necessarily share the ideological space of consumerism?

Argument

By code swapping with advertising and other media forms, on one hand, many screendances construct representations that reconfirm aspects of mainstream consumer culture ideology; however, I argue that screendance artists such as Lloyd Newson and Grace Ndiritu play important roles in regard to contemporary culture's meaning making. They each appropriate strategies traditionally employed by mainstream media forms including hailing the viewer through different types of address such as the direct gaze, the seductive female, or evoking the discourse around the seductive female, encouraging voyeuristic gazing, shaping the viewer alternately as a lover and as an aggressor for the purpose of drawing attention to ways in which mainstream media are employing those strategies.

The way in which they each transgress the conventional operations of these strategies is by incorporating different forms of ambiguity. Ndidritu's *Desert Storm* and Newson's *Cost of Living* each construct representations that draw us in, set up our expectations, then disturb the performance-situation such that we become aware of the assumptions we were about to make. Their ambiguous performances reveal the fact that

many media representations shape us as viewers and encourage us to make assumptions unknowingly and to accept those assumptions as already true. *Desert Storm* and *Cost of Living* employ those strategies in ways that challenge our assumptions and put them on the line.

<u>Methodology</u>

Using Althusser's claim, "…whatever you are called, you must already be" as a springboard, this chapter identifies different strategies advertising, commercial Hollywood film and network news media practices employ to hail and shape the viewer and comparatively analyzes them with ways in which Ndiritu and Newson are hailing and shaping the viewer. I draw from Althusser, Paul Messaris, Judith Williamson, Jacques Lacan, Laura Mulvey and others, to examine how Allstate Insurance, Vaseline, Tylenol, Dove and Calvin Klein advertisements, the Hollywood film *Damn Yankees,* and the network news media are hailing and shaping the viewer in relation to screendances by Newson and Ndiritu.

Different sections of this chapter look at different forms of hailing and shaping the viewer as they are employed by the different media forms as well as by Ndiritu and Newson. Using an Allstate Insurance advertisement as an example, the first section explores the power the direct gaze has to hail and shape the viewer. In order to further appreciate its power, I also look at its opposite, the downward gaze, as it is featured in Bill Viola's video installation *Dolorosa.* Additionally, I discuss a scene from *Cost of Living* in which Newson creates a dance of glances. The next section analyzes different advertisement examples of hailing the viewer with the seductive female body followed by an examination of how Ndiritu subverts the discourse around the seductive female body

in *Desert Storm*. Then I compare a performance of the quintessential conventional seductive female in "What Lola Wants" in *Damn Yankees* with a scene from *Cost of Living* in which Newson reverses the genders of the gazer and the object of the gaze. The third section examines different strategies advertising and other media employ to encourage viewer identification including flattery, the power of iconicity and presenting many individuals, which increases the odds that we will identify with at least one. In contrast, I then examine a scene from *Cost of Living* which disturbs viewer identification in unsettling ways and also brings our attention to ways in which network news media practice sensationalistic journalism and promote an intolerance of difference. The final section looks at different ways in which mainstream media and screendances by Newson and Ndiritu capitalize on the stage in the process of identification in which the viewer becomes alienated from her/himself and experiences ego fragmentation.

Finally, I examine ways in which advertisements employ the element of ambiguity as compared to representations seen in *Desert Storm and Cost of Living*. Advertisements feature ambiguous elements in ways that always ultimately point to one message or one argument, whereas Ndiritu and Newson employ ambiguity to ask questions and leave the solution up to the viewer to decide.

Hailing With the Direct Gaze

The direct gaze is one of the most widely utilized strategies the media and some screendances employ to hail and shape the viewer. Much of human communication is expressed non-verbally, and the gaze is an especially rich communicator of information. Through gazes we communicate a range of expressions including invitation, proposition, challenge, rejection and surveillance. Studies have shown that humans have a tendency

to linger on the face when presented with an image of another human as well as to look back when looked at (Messaris p #). Consequently, many advertisements and other media forms such as network news employ the direct gaze for the purposes of capturing and holding viewers' attention.

For example, an Allstate Insurance advertisement features a performance of a man hailing the viewer with direct address and the direct gaze (http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=Ww8R1-FoOI8). The advertisement begins with a medium shot of a man on the street who looks directly into the camera and says, "You probably have a deductible of $500 on your car insurance." By looking directly at us and addressing us as "you," he commands our attention and shapes us as the ones with the $500 deductible. After telling us that Allstate thinks our deductible should go down to nothing, the camera moves in for a close-up shot of his direct gaze, which serves to underscore the final words of the advertisement; "can you afford not to be in good hands?" The combination of his direct gaze and direct address triggers the human tendency to look back when spoken to and to linger until the final message is conveyed.

Since the direct gaze is featured so often and we may take it for granted, we can gain insight into the way it is operating by looking at its opposite. Video installation artist Bill Viola's series of twelve works titled *The Passions* includes a diptych called *Dolorosa* (2000), which features the faces of a man and a woman with downward gazes. Viola is interested in the artistic conventions of expression and how to depict ambiguous or mixed human emotions. Indeed, the gazes of the woman and man read as indictors of
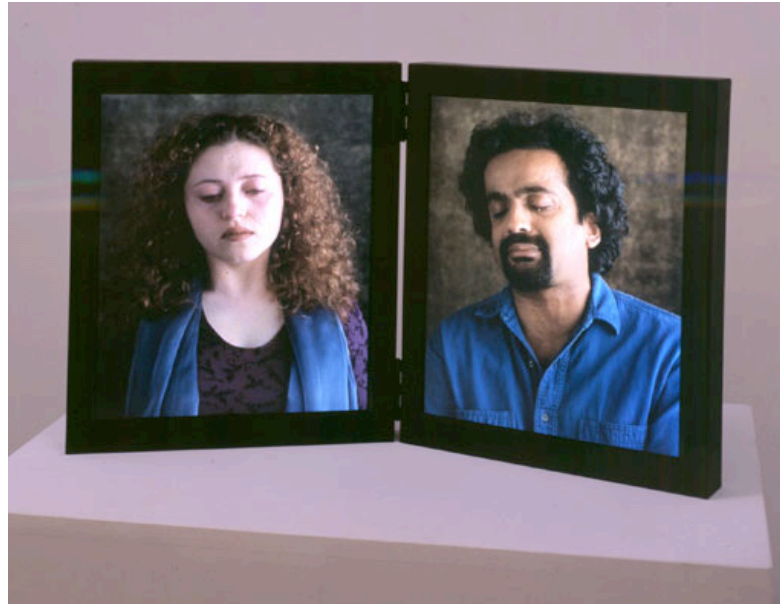
Image 1: *Dolorosa* (2000) by Bill Viola.
http://nga.gov.au/viola/

emotional and/or physical states such as sadness, fatigue and inner reflection. Their

attention is inward. As viewers, we might ponder their inwardness, look for clues as to

why they are looking down, perhaps imagine or project reasons for their inner focus, then

possibly become disinterested and move on. This gaze in itself does not serve to capture

and hold our attention. In fact, it shuts us out. What may capture our attention is the fact

that human portraits in family-style frames such as these rarely feature a face with a

downward gaze. This image is compelling because it presents an unconventional gaze in

a conventional frame. Nonetheless, once we process that fact, we are not encouraged to

indentify with the individuals or linger on the image. Therefore, the downward gaze is

rarely utilized for the purposes of encouraging identification in advertising and other

media representations.

In a scene from *Cost of Living,* Newson capitalizes on the human tendency to

communicate so much information non-verbally through different forms of gazing to construct a narrative with "choreography" comprised of gazes. After much tension has come between Eddie, one of the protagonists, and the female character Beth, who is getting fed up with Eddie's obnoxious, chauvinistic behavior, Eddie, Beth and David (the other protagonist) stop to rest at benches on the pier. The camera shoots Eddie's face close-up as he glances over to Beth, who is seated next to David. She catches his eye, then looks down. There is an attractive woman seated behind Beth on another bench, who catches Eddie's attention after Beth looks down. When Beth looks up at Eddie, she sees him looking at something behind her with interest. Beth turns to see what he is looking at and realizes he is gazing at the attractive woman. The woman quickly looks down. Beth glances back at Eddie accusingly.

"What's wrong?" he protests. After Beth looks back at the woman, she gets discouraged, turns to Eddie, gets up to leave, and says, "You are. David, are you coming?" The scene ends with Eddie watching Beth and David leave, then gazing back at the woman, as if to see if there is any possibility of connection. She quickly looks down, indicating the negative. Discouraged, he looks back at Beth and David, and then walks away.

In this scene, Newson demonstrates the extent to which we communicate with facial expressions and the gaze. He evokes the discourse around the "male gaze" (discussed in the next section) and performs it in ways that also read ambiguously. When Beth looks behind her at the attractive woman, she assumes Eddie is interested in the woman by the way he is gazing. He may or may not be interested, but the male gaze has

been so culturally encoded that we read the man who is looking at a woman to mean he is objectifying her and may pursue her. When Beth and David leave, Eddie's despondent expression may mean he is discouraged in general, that things were not working out for him. Or, it might indicate that he was not interested in the attractive woman and frustrated that Beth made that assumption. In any case, Newson is asking us to appreciate the power the gaze has to communicate and how, as viewers, we are able to read the non-verbal messages.

<u>Hailing with the Seductive Female Body</u>

Another widely utilized form of hailing which mainstream media and some screendances employ is that of the seductive female body. In the discourse of contemporary consumer culture, the female body has come to symbolize sex, above all, and as is proven by numerous studies, sex attracts attention, evokes emotions, and most importantly for advertisers, sells products. In addition to evoking multiple viewer responses, representations that feature the seductive female body also construct the viewer as voyeur.

Of the myriad representations in advertising that utilize the seductive female body to capture viewers' attention and to invite identification; this Tylenol advertisement (<u>http://jezebel.com/354313/tylenol-loves-our-wrinkled-saggy-un+photoshopped-skin</u>) serves as an exceptionally clear example. The ad begins with a series of close-up images of parts of elderly bodies (most likely a population targeted as candidates for users of products such as Tylenol). We see images that are coded as aging; an elbow with folded skin, a wrinkled hand massaging a lower back and the profile of an eye encircled with crow's feet. However, right before we see the image of the Tylenol product, the

advertisement features an image of a youthful, nude woman. In contrast to the previous

images, this is a medium long shot, which captures her whole body rather than a close-up

of a body part. She is stretched out on the floor, legs extended, and propped up on her

hip. We see her as she sensuously slides her hand along the floor to a reclined position.

Unlike the preceding, fully, side-lit close-up images in this advertisement, the soft, low

light in this image creates a silhouette effect, which encourages subliminal perception and

obscures the details of the woman's features. This type of imagery invites the viewer to

project fantasies, fill in the details of her identity with his/her imagination and/or read the

silhouetted seductive female body as a symbol of sensuality or sexuality, then make an

exchange between that image-experience and the product, which appears immediately

after this image. We are being asked to identify ourselves as aging bodies unless we take

Tylenol, in which case, we will either acquire the lithe, pain-free sensuous body of the

seductive woman or have her as a lover.

     An advertisement for Dove soap (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=

vilUhBhNnQc) evokes the discourse around the seductive female body by featuring

bodies that contain some elements that are signifiers of the seductive female body along

with elements that are not. The female bodies in this advertisement perform naked and

assume cover-girl-like poses, elements typically associated with the stereotypical

seductive female. However, due to their age, they do not fall into the category of the

stereotypical youthful, fit, body typically coded as the object of the male gaze. The

camera captures the women up close looking directly at the camera. Their direct gazes

read as slightly embarrassed, sometimes pleasant, and at times, apologetic. Why are they

apologetic?

The text in the ad reads, "Beauty has no age limit," the point being that even these naked women over 50 years old can be categorized as "beautiful." Their gazes also reveal vulnerability, friendliness, "cuteness" at times, as in a cute grandmother, and sweetness. The combination of their endearing pleasantness and their naked bodies, which do not reflect stereotypical, young, objectified bodies, communicates to the viewer a message such as, "I am older, I am not perfect, so it's ok to identify with me, be vulnerable and buy Dove soap in order to remain beautiful as you age."

However, the women seem to be apologizing for the fact that they do not exactly fit the stereotypical seductive female body. If the bodies of these women fit into the category of youthful, fit, stereotypically attractive body-objects of the male gaze, would they be performing apologetically? This advertisement illustrates the point that mainstream media representations code the youthful, seductive female body as "good" and "normal;" therefore, bodies that do not fit that category have reason to perform apologetically. In other words, they are apologizing for not having the "desirable" seductive female body.

In *Desert Storm,* Ndiritu also evokes the discourse around the seductive female body, though she does so in ways that subvert convention. She begins the screendance with an exposed female nude body, which serves to capture viewers' attention, invites identification and establishes nudity as part of the performance. However, as the piece unfolds, she becomes less nude rather than more.

Desert Storm begins with an image of Ndiritu shot from above. The camera's angle positions us so that we are looking down on her veiled body sprawled across a map of the world (which I will discuss later in more detail). A sheer fabric is draped over her face, torso and one thigh, leaving her right hip and crotch exposed. She undulates back and forth, writhing and twisting. Her groping hands clutch, caress and brush the fabric.

Image 2: Grace Ndiritu in *Desert Storm* (2004).
http://ww.axisweb.org/seCVWK.aspx?ARTISTID=9891

In the convention of the veiled seductive female body, the performer would likely use the veil to tease the viewer while slowly unveiling or stripping, as the character Lola does in *Damn Yankees* (http://en.kendincos.net/video-lvfhnjn-damn-yankees-whatever-lola-wants-gwen-verdon.html). However, Ndiritu challenges this convention. By beginning the piece with partial nudity, she sets up an expectation that nudity is an element of this piece and therefore may occur again. As a result, a tension builds as we watch her movement with curious expectation. Like a reverse strip tease, Ndiritu performs with the sheer fabric so that nudity does not occur again; in fact, she slowly covers her body more and more as the piece progresses until the end when she is completely covered similar to the way a burka covers the body.

Ndiritu capitalizes on the way mainstream media representations code the nude female body as an invitation to look. At the beginning of this screendance, her body is exposed and the veil covers her face, two elements that construct the viewer as voyeur. Her nudity encourages us to look while she is not looking back. However, once we give in to looking, she disturbs voyeuristic viewing by covering her body, then abruptly ending the piece fully covered. Rather than objectifying and fetishizing the nude female body, as many mainstream media representations encourage us to do, Ndiritu's subversion serves to make us aware of our tendency to watch in this way.

Conventional Hollywood cinema has historically featured the seductive female body as an invitation to identify as well as a means for constructing the spectator not only as a voyeur but also as male. In her pivotal article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey develops the notion of the "male gaze" and claims that in patriarchal society, the "pleasure of looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (27). Many mainstream narrative films in the classical Hollywood tradition assume a male spectator. In the cases where the protagonist is also male, the image of the seductive female body encourages the spectator to identify with and project his look onto his screen surrogate. The male is constructed as active subject and the female as the object of his gaze/desire. In some cases, the female character performs as an active subject, but often her subjectivity is constructed as the erotic object of his desire.

A film that features a quintessential performance of the seductive female and the onlooking male is *Damn Yankees* (1958). The scene "Whatever Lola Wants" epitomizes the gender dynamics featured in many mainstream media representations between the

female seducer and the gazing male (http://en.kendincos.net/video-lvfhnjn-damn-yankees-whatever-lola-wants-gwen-verdon.html). In this scene, the male character is seated screen left in a locker room as Gwen Verdon, playing the role of Lola, sings flirtatiously and performs seductive movement while slowly undressing. Scenes such as this objectify "women as image" or "spectacle" and man as "bearer of the look…" (Mulvey, 27). Men do the looking; women are there to be looked at. Though the character Lola is actively performing, in this context her power lies in the fact that she possesses the object of his desire. He is vulnerable to her power over him to the extent that she has something he wants. At the same time, that power is limiting and reductive since it is predicated on her continuing performance of the erotic female body-object. In terms of identification, Lola's performance of the seductive female body operates as an invitation for the (male) viewer to identify with the man whom Lola is seducing. We are positioned as the male, who, like us is sitting and watching.

In *Cost of Living,* Lloyd Newson evokes the discourse around the seductive female and the male gaze only to turn the tables in terms of gender. By casting the seducer as a male as well as performing signifiers that construct the gaze as feminine, he subverts mainstream popular culture conventions in terms of who is objectifying whom. Newson created a scene in *Cost of Living* with a structure much like that of "Whatever Lola Wants" in *Damn Yankees*. However, the seductive female body in *Cost of Living* is performed by a legless male, and Newson cleverly re-casts the male gaze as that of what would be conventionally described as the seductive female. The scene begins with a close-up of a woman's silver, spiked heels as she walks across a room. Her stride is slow and sensuous. She passes by and then walks smoothly toward David, the male seducer;

however, the camera is framed in such a way that we don't see her individual features other than her long, blonde hair. The camera moves in to situate its perspective behind and over her shoulder at her eye level, from her point of view. Then the camera goes in close on David who is moving on a bar-like table/stage, also at eye level. Who is she? Who wears silver spike heels and has blonde hair? Newson positions the stereotypical, seductive female object-body behind the camera. Unlike classical Hollywood cinema that assumes a male spectator, Newson indiscreetly aligns the spectator's perspective with that of the seductive female. The male gaze is disturbed and re-cast as feminine.

Furthermore, Newson casts the object of desire as male. After our perspective is aligned with the blonde-wearing-spike-heel's perspective by positioning the camera over her shoulder, we meet David, who is moving seductively on a bar top. He pivots slowly and gracefully on his hands and performs a sensuous, heartfelt invitation. He lures with occasional pauses and direct gaze into the camera. He lingers on making eye contact with us. David is seducing us. He introduces himself, then asks her/us to dance, or maybe "you'd like to have a drink first to relax?" By addressing us this way, he puts us in the position of the seduced. Another turn, then he melts onto his back, rolls back up and pauses. David's body language references seduction clichés such as those performed by Gwen Verndon in "Whatever Lola Wants." He minces away from us, as much as a man with no legs can, shifting from arm to arm. Then he turns and speaks directly to the camera, "I caught you watching." He asks us if we want to dance, or do we want something else? That something else is implied by his sultry melt to the floor and rolling onto his back with arms stretched out. Newson is not only re-casting the conventional seduction scene as performed by Lola, he is using it to make his point about our notions

of what and who is desirable.

Image 3: David in *Cost of Living* (2004).
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=images%20Cost%20of%20Livi
ng%20DV8&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-
8&source=og&sa=N&hl=en&tab=wi&biw=975&bih=637

Newson's construction of this scene forces the questions; what would sex with

this man be like? At one point, the character David seems to assume we are wondering

how it all works out and candidly offers in a warm tone of voice, "It's small, but it's

peachy." To what extent is my definition of who/what is desirable being challenged

here? Who is in a more vulnerable position, he or I? How is this scene forcing me to look

at *my* limitations and limitations prescribed by popular culture? This man does not reflect

the stereotype prescribed by classical Hollywood cinema where the male is represented as

able-bodied, often muscular, masculine, domineering and seduced by the erotic female.

By casting the seducer as a legless male, Newson proposes we consider other

possibilities. Newson illuminates the extent to which mainstream society's definitions of

beauty and sensuality are limited. "Unfortunately, most dance is often about a very

limited notion of beauty…Can't something that comes across the stage twisted and

contorted be beautiful?" (Newson in Boden 3). In fact, David's voice is warm and inviting. His movements are smooth, and his long, muscular arms promise a warm embrace. Unlike conventional Hollywood cinema that presents the erotic object as vulnerable, Newson succeeds in turning the tables of vulnerability onto the viewer as well.

By establishing the viewer/gaze as female and the seducer as male, on one hand, Newson is implying a normative heterosexuality. However, if one were to ask, who else would be seduced by a man, the answer would include a man in drag dressed in spike heels and a blonde wig. Given that Newson himself is gay and has created a body of work addressing issues of homosexuality, it seems reasonable to consider the possibility of a gay male spectator. Theorist Ramsay Burt claims that, in fact, the codification of men by way of the gay male discourse enables a female erotic gaze. Kaja Silverman goes along with this theory up to a point. She claims that the mainstream situates both women and gay men on the side of the spectacle. However, according to Laura Marks, accepting Silverman's argument that lack is at the foundation of male subjectivity would make it seem that there is no erotic way to look at the male body, "since to make it the object of the gaze is simultaneously to deflate it, castrate it, make it undesirable…"(75). Nonetheless, Marks condones the "fag hag gaze" as an avenue for enjoying men on full erotic display. In any case, this compelling scene asks us to consider the limitations of conventional representations and asks us to ask ourselves who is included in the category of the "desirable," and who is doing the desiring.

<u>Shaping the Viewer by Encouraging Identification</u>

While hailing the viewer with the seductive female body serves as an invitation to look as well as to identify, advertising and some screendances employ other strategies to encourage viewer identification. Many advertisements address the viewer with compliments, which shapes the viewer as the one who is bestowed with the characteristics referenced by the compliments. Most humans respond favorably to being complimented, therefore, many advertisement employ flattery as a way to open a space and begin the process of viewer identification.

For example, a Vaseline advertisement, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= YyRtlIddnmo&NR=1), employs flattery and addresses the viewer as "you." It begins by saying "your skin is amazing." We are being spoken to as individuals and asked to focus our attention on our own skin. By asking us to consider that our skin might be amazing, the advertisement constructs us as subjects with amazing attributes. Similarly, the opening words in the Tylenol ad, "nobody knows your body like you do" (<u>http://jezebel.com/354313/tylenol-loves-our-wrinkled-saggy-un+photoshopped-skin</u>) puts us in the receiving space of the ad. It addresses us as knowers as well as being special because we know something that nobody else knows, thus creating us as active subjects.

Whether or not we agree with the ad's compliments, the moment we receive and interpret the images and words, they are creating meaning. Meaning is generated as a result of "a complex social interaction among images, viewers and context" (Sturken and Cartwright 47). In semiotic terms, the work of advertising involves an exchange of signs

(Williamson 60). By reading the ad, we give it significance. Those meaning-making

moments also serve to re-create ideology. In ideology, we do not question assumptions

that are made about us because we see them as already true. In some cases, those

assumptions are false. Advertisements operate by situating the viewer in constructed and

false relationships to real phenomena (Williamson 162). "Ads create an 'alreadyness' of

'facts' about ourselves as individuals…that we have certain values, that we will freely

buy things, consume, on the basis of those values" (Williamson 42).

In a scene in *Cost of Living*, Newson shows how watching gives performances

meaning. He sets up a performance within the screendance "performance," where the

characters are presenting a clown show on a pier. Soon after it begins, Eddie (the male

protagonist) calls out, "Are we being watched?" He looks out at the empty seats and

down the pier. "Nah, I don't think so." He tells the other performers to take a break.

This scene brings to our attention our own participation and makes us aware that a

performance is a performance because the performer is being watched by an audience.

Without the watchers watching, is it still a performance? When the audience watches,

he/she gives meaning by receiving the performance, just as viewers give meaning to

messages in advertising and Hollywood cinema by receiving them.

Another strategy many advertisements employ to invite identification is to feature

images of appealing people and objects. According to Paul Messaris in *Visual*

Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising, photographic images of objects of desire

serve to invite identification. He argues that the power of advertising lies in the iconicity

(the extent to which a photograph appears to be a true representation of the "real" world)

of photographic imagery. In the real world, he claims, vision is intimately linked with emotion; thus by simulating the appearance of the real world, "pictures can become surrogate objects of desire or emotions which ads subsequently associate with products…photographic images can serve as proof of advertising claims" (Messaris 302). He also believes that we are predisposed to respond to certain objects and situations in certain ways that are indeed influenced by culture but also are the result of human evolution (Messaris 4). Ads capitalize both on our tendencies to respond to photographic images and on the power of the image to encourage identification. Ultimately, it is identification with the people in the images that Messaris believes is the most common way ads "exploit their iconic relationship to our visual and psychological experiences" (Messaris 44).

To increase the odds that the viewer will identify with a person or people in an advertisement, many ads feature a wide range of individuals, which serves numerous functions. The more variations of bodies, humans, faces, etc., presented in an advertisement, the higher the likelihood that we will identify with one of them. Constituting subjects in terms of a group allows the ad the ability to cope with the idea of differences among the "you's" being addressed (Williamson 42). Additionally, Williamson claims, humans have a need for social meanings. Identifying with someone in an image, then seeing that individual as one of a group, serves to address the viewer's need for social meaning. Furthermore, hooking the viewer and encouraging identification, then representing many people in a group choosing the product, serves to activate a bandwagon effect. The advertisers hope the viewer will conclude that "if so

many people, including some who are like me, choose this product, it must be good. Maybe I should choose it as well."

Having established the viewer as a member of a group, Williamson suggests that the advertisement then constitutes the subject/viewer as an individual. This serves numerous functions. One is that the ad strives to meet the need we have to feel like unique individuals. Without our having awareness of this process, advertisements assure us that we are separate individuals and that we choose what we do. We are led to believe that we are making individual choices, which are in accordance with our individual beliefs. This is also where ideology comes into play. "The idea of freedom is essential to the maintenance of ideology" (Williamson 42).

The Vaseline, Dove and Tylenol advertisements all begin by speaking to the viewer as a member of a group of naked and nude bodies, then shaping the subject as an individual. In particular, the Vaseline ad (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyRtlI ddnmo&NR=1), does so in a way that distinctly illustrates Williamson's theories by first presenting a range of different bodies in the context of a group, and then featuring a series of images one by one that serve to encourage viewer identification by first showing the bodies as members of a group and then, through a subsequent series of images, re-shaping the viewer as an individual. The first image captures a mass of naked bodies swaying in a forest, seen from behind in a long-long shot. Then the ad cuts to a medium-long shot of the same bodies, followed by a medium close up image of the bodies' faces looking at us, facing the camera. Moving from a mass of naked bodies shot at a distance to close up shots of the faces of those bodies serves to activate a sense of intimacy and draw us in, shot by shot, encouraging identification. By moving in closer to the bodies,

whose nakedness puts them in a position of vulnerability, we are made more vulnerable, which in turn encourages us to be empathetic and identify with one or more of the faces.

After encouraging us to identify with one or more of the various faces and hooking us in, the Vaseline advertisement then proceeds to shape us as individuals, thereby giving us the illusion that we are freely making choices as individuals (such as purchasing Vaseline). After the series of shots moving in closer to the naked bodies, the next cut takes us to a long shot angled above looking down on the naked bodies, which are each curled in a fetal position. The subsequent edits brilliantly cut from the pattern of many fetus bodies to a similar pattern of many highly magnified cells circulating in what look like the veins of a single organism. Through the use of visual metaphor, we move from being shaped as one among many in a group to individual separate organisms who are free to make our individual choices, such as purchasing products. As Williamson reminds us, the idea of freedom is critical to the perpetuation of ideology. (Williamson 42). This advertisement leaves us feeling as if we are free to purchase Vaseline so that we can maintain our "amazing" skin. By accepting the invitation to identify and receiving the messages in this advertisement, without our awareness, we have also engaged in perpetuating its ideological meanings.

Disturbing identification in Cost of Living

Newson keys into the fact that ideology is perpetuated, in part, when viewers identify with people and objects in mainstream media representations and responds by disturbing such identification in an unsettling scene in *Cost of Living*. This scene addresses ways in which network news media invite identification, not for the purposes of selling a product as do advertisements, but for the purposes of engaging us in

voyeuristic viewing and witnessing sensational images and stories featured in news reports. Newson builds on the theme of performing the power of the gaze by aligning the viewer's perspective with that of an aggressive voyeur, a man with a camera, who is filming David. Unlike network news media convention however, Newson's camera also hones in on the man behind the camera in a way that interrupts the process of viewer identification with him or with David, the object of the gaze. Additionally, the cameraman's relentless, invasive curiosity about David's body raises questions about the impact network news media has on the way we see others and ourselves in terms of desirability and difference. Newson brings our attention to the power of news media's gaze, its entitlement to look and its discomfort with the notion of difference, by shooting close-up and by performing the camera as assaulting and almost weapon-like. In the end, Newson troubles our habitual inclination to identify with either the gazer (the cameraman) or the object of the gaze (David) and brings our awareness to the fact that the media have "trained" us watch in these ways.

This scene in *Cost of Living* takes place on the grassy field in front of David's apartment complex where a man is hounding David aggressively with a large camera that looks like an extension of his head. While maintaining the camera glued to his eye, the man talks from behind the camera and ruthlessly interrogates David about his disability. "What happened to your legs? Were they cut off, or were you born that way? Do you have an asshole? Can you masturbate? If I hit you, would you would you hit me back, because you're a MAN?" The cameraman is imposing his definition of what it is to be a man on David by asking these questions. He is uncomfortable with David's difference

and not sure how to categorize him. The sarcastic implication is that manhood is measured by having an asshole, the ability to masturbate and to hit someone.

The predatory tone of this scene is also reflected in the visual, filmic image and serves to convey messages about the cameraman's discomfort with difference. What we see besides the photographer is the image shot through the viewfinder of his camera, which is distinguished by being in black and white. The absence of color creates a cold objectivity. The man with the camera continues to follow David and pursues him as if hunting a small animal. This relationship is underscored when the film cuts to David, who ends up on his back dwarfed by the tall, imposing man. This scene is suggestive of ways in which society and media are uncomfortable with difference. David is treated as an outcast, a freak. Newson is commenting on news media's insatiable appetite for intimate details and the sensational without regard for the human being. Yet not only David's but also the photographer's discomfort escalates. "I don't trust you," he says without even knowing David. The underlying message is that if you are not like me, I do not trust you. Newson is asking us to question our trust in news media representations as well.

In this scene, Newson characterizes the cameraman as aggressively seeking sensational, intimate details about David and as uncomfortable with their differences, both of which are characteristics of mainstream news media. In *The Media and Cultural Production*, Eric Louw tells us that news media's use of sensationalism and portraying differences as "bad" or "abnormal" has emerged during the twentieth century as the result of capitalist ventures' interest in attracting large audiences. The larger the audience, or "consumers" as they see them, the easier it is to attract advertisers and make a profit.

Consequently, instead of catering to specialized, niche groups, media production features

stories laced with sensationalism, "a form of exaggerated and generalized meaning

designed to appeal to everybody (and hence nobody in particular)" (Louw 47-8). Louw

claims that with sensationalism comes a "formulaic focus on crime, violence, sports, sex

and entertainment, while opinion, debate and dialogue were deemed counter-productive

to producing profit" (48). In addition to providing sensationalistic news, journalistic

practices are designed to offend as few people as possible and to attract the people

advertisers are most interested in, which are people with disposable incomes (Louw 49).

Thus, a form of market censorship occurs wherein meaning-making is skewed in favor of

the middle/upper classes, "while shunning meanings that would appeal to disadvantaged

sectors or groups on the margins of the mainstream. So privately-owned media tend to

produce discourses that are appropriate for a middle-class hegemony" (Louw 49).

Therefore, news media representations generate meanings that code bodies such as the

non-fully-abled, non-heterosexual, non-male, non-white, and non-middle/upper class as

different, not "normal," and as *Cost of Living* has it in the case of David, freakish and not

worthy of respectful treatment.

     Additionally, Newson positions us, the viewers, as surveyors looking down

through the camera at David as he squirms to get away, which generates meaning in other

ways. By having our perspective aligned with the cameraman's, we are shaped as

aggressors. On one hand, the way Newson is shaping the viewer is disturbing. On

another hand, he is constructing a performance that simply exaggerates what news media

and much of society do on a regular basis. By putting us in the shoes of the aggressor, he

forces us to look at how we look at and deal with difference. Similar to David's

seduction scene, where Newson shapes the viewer as prospective lover, this scene shapes

the viewer as predator. Both roles involve questioning both our own expectations as

viewers and our level of acceptance of David's body. By disrupting our process of

identification with either the gazer or the object of the gaze, Newson succeeds in

stripping away the layer of unawareness of the identification process that mainstream

media ideology works to keep firmly in place.

Shaping the Viewer with Different Forms of Ego Fragmentation

During the process of identification, the point at which ideology intervenes and

where advertising attempts to shape us is the moment when we identify with an image of

someone or something, which also serves to alienate us from ourselves. Different

theorists look at this process from various but similar perspectives. Williamson draws

from Jacques Lacan's *mirror stage* to explain how this process unfolds, though she refers

to it as the *mirror-phase* (so named because she believes we see ourselves in many

images, not just in a mirror's reflection). Rene Girard's theory of triangulated desire

describes the "double bind" we find ourselves in when an advertisement or other

representation stirs a desire that cannot be fulfilled. According to Kenneth Burke's

theories of symbol use, that desire is fueled by interplay between appeal and

"standoffishness" projected by the advertisement. I will briefly discuss each of these

theorists' notions here, then examine an advertisement in which these theories are

operating and, finally, how Ndiritu addresses these aspects of the identification process

only to subvert ways in which they are operating.

According to Williamson, the theory of the mirror-phase is based on observations

of children in front of mirrors. When the child confronts her image in a mirror, she

recognizes the image as being herself, yet the reflection is also perceived as *another* and as *different* from her since it is outside her and has a unity that she lacks, according to the theory. It is at this point that the child "is required to place [her] identity in separation" (Williamson 62). The mirror reflection, the *imaged-I*, has the status of a totality, as an object, which "provides the subject with the permanent capacity to place himself in a similar relation to an object; this capacity is exploited by the forms of ideology," such as advertising (Williamson 62). Once the subject acknowledges the separate but similar reflection in the mirror, the mirrored image becomes the symbolic, an empty signifier, and the *Social-I*, with which the subject can never become reunited.

Because the desire to be re-united with the mirror image can never be fulfilled, it serves as the point where ideology in advertising can intervene. According to Lacan, by identifying with an image, the subject alienates "him from himself, so that the ego is forever irreducible to his lived identity" (Lacan 94). Williamson believes this is similar to the process in advertising where, as viewers, we are presented with images of ourselves that are appealing but unachievable. We become alienated from ourselves and are encouraged to make a value exchange with the product. The ad hails us, addresses us as "you," (as in the Vaseline ad; "your skin is amazing"). We give the product value and then by buying the product, we have the illusion that we receive the value back. This process can be understood as an exchange between the viewer as an individual and the imaginary subject addressed by the ad. In order for the process to be perpetuated, advertisements must continuously present the object of desire as both obtainable and unobtainable. If unity were achieved after all, there would be no further appeal between the viewer and the advertisers.

The alienation from self as described by Lacan and Williamson here is similar to Rene Girard's theory of triangulated desire and Kenneth Burke's understanding of human symbol use. Girard constructs a mimetic theory based on a communication triangle wherein A (the actor/model) desires C (the product, object or individual) and B (the viewer) mimics the desire of A while believing it is her/his own desire rather than something that is mediated (Girard 33-44). Additionally, Girard claims that humans do not merely wish to imitate each other; they wish to become one another (Girard 33-44). In the case of an advertisement, Girard's theory suggests that a viewer does not actually desire to be *like* the actor/model, but she/he desires to *be* that person and often mistakenly believes that purchasing the product will effect this transformation. However, since it is impossible ever to become the other person, or as Lacan and Williamson would have it, be reunited with the *Social-I,* the metaphysical desire to be the other person creates what Girard calls a "double bind:" the situation where the advertisement conveys both invitation and the message, "Try to be like me even though you can never become me because I am always superior."

Similarly, Burke's theories of sociological propaganda are based on issues of motivation, identification and symbol use whereby humans use verbal symbols in communication, which "splits formally in the three elements of speaker, speech, and spoken-to" (271). Not unlike Girard's theory of triangulated desire, Burke argues that the process of identification involves the element of persuasion and that inherent in pure persuasion in any activity is an element of "standoffishness" (269). It is this element, he suggests, that is responsible for the maintenance of any appeal. After all, in the model of the triangle, the flow of persuasive messages could be maintained "insofar as the plea

remained unanswered" (274). If the plea were fulfilled, there would be no incentive for

further appeal because unity would have been achieved. As Burke puts it: "Rhetorically,

there can be courtship only insofar as there is division" (271). Consequently, consumers'

desire is motivated and perpetuated in the interplay between Burke's "standoffishness"

and identification.

The following Calvin Klein advertisement employs interplay between an

invitation to identify and "standoffishness" as well as ambiguity. This ad appeared on

billboards and in magazines in 1997 to promote Calvin Klein's perfume, "Be"

(Vandenberg 7). Celebrity photographer Richard Avedon took the black and white

Image 4: Calvin Klein advertisement for "Be" perfume (1997).
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&oe=UTF-
8&q=bryan+key+subliminal+advertising+images&um=1&ie=UTF-
8&source=univ&ei=YVFoTK2FFYXUtQOo1pySDQ&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&c
t=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCQQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=646

photographs of the three sullen, underdressed models whose gaze of superiority, thinness,

glamour and beauty resemble other Calvin Klein advertisements and serve as an

invitation to identify, especially to consumers familiar with the Calvin Klein image and

products. The white text on black background reads "be hot. be cool. just be." On one

hand, the ad conveys the message, "Try to be hot and/or cool, like me" (by buying the

Calvin Klein perfume). On the other hand, the models' insolent gaze communicates that

"you can not possibly become me because I am always superior," thus activating Girard's

"double bind." Additionally, the viewer's desire is fueled by a Burkean interplay between

invitation to identify while maintaining "standoffishness." The implication is that the

only way out of the "double bind" or ego fragmentation is to seek reunification by

purchasing the product, which, of course, is an illusion.

Like the Calvin Klein advertisement, Ndiritu's *Desert Storm* interplays between

invitation and repulsion, disturbs conventional notions of subject and object gendering

and employs ambiguity. She performs the female nude and the direct gaze as an

invitation to identify at certain times, and as a challenge at others. By performing these

strategies, Ndiritu is evoking the discourse around the seductive female body and the

male gaze. However, she does so by also disturbing assumptions inherent in that

discourse by performing ambiguous, mixed messages and a surprise ending that reverses

the gaze. Ndiritu employs strategies used in advertising to bring attention to how we are

encouraged to objectify and identify, to become alienated from ourselves and

consequently, participate in the perpetuation of dominant consumer ideology, often

without our awareness.

Ndiritu's performance at the beginning of *Desert Storm* features a curious blend

of mixed messages. Her undulating body movement and partial nudity speak of

sexuality, yet her frozen facial expression conveys emotions such as fear, trauma and

defensiveness as if she were being taken advantage of. At times, her head appears

disconnected from her body while she clutches her neck with her left hand and rests her

right hand on her right breast. The disconnectedness reads as if someone is clutching her

neck threateningly. She rocks her hips then releases her arms passively to the side. At

moments, she thrusts her hips, stretches her arms up and worms her lower body back and

forth until her torso is upside down and her hips are off the screen. Since the thin veil

covers her face, we are denied the ability to read the details of her facial expressions.

What we can see are the whites of her teeth, the whites of her eyes, but no hair. Her

movement constructs the appearance of a female body with an androgynous, almost

haunted mask-like expression on a disconnected head.

The perplexing element of Ndiritu's performance is the way in which her

twisting, swaying and undulating torso shot in slow motion reads as sensuous invitation

while her head and facial expression speak of fear and accusation. Ndiritu stares intently

through the veil, but her facial expression fails to reveal whether her movement speaks of

something erotic or abusive.   At times, her face appears frozen like a deer who is being

attacked or confronted with threatening danger. The music adds a raw intensity.

Repetitive, rhythmic music by Adrar Des Iforas includes driving hand drum rhythms

layered over male chanters. They repeat a drone and a call-and-response between what

sounds like a woman's voice and a child's voice. These sounds build tension and

dramatize what we are witnessing visually.

By positioning the camera so that we look down on her partially nude body, she is

positioning herself as a vulnerable receiver or victim and putting us in a power position

above her. By hailing us as such, Ndiritu constitutes us as a sexual aggressor who is frightening her. We are torn between fascination with her apparently sexual movements and the discomfort of being aware that we might be committing a rape.

In the next section, she closes her eyes and allows her body movement to travel through her spine and involve her head. There is more connection between the body and the head, which reads as more pleasurable than painful. In this section, we are implicated more as a lover than aggressor/rapist. However, her performance continuously shifts between conveying different messages.

Ndiritu employs strategies used in the Calvin Klein advertisement such as alternating between invitation and "standoffishness," which serves to alienate the viewer from her/himself; however, unlike the advertisement, *Desert Storm* does not offer the illusion of a reunification by purchasing a product. Similar to the Calvin Klein models, who are underdressed and perform body language coded as "hot," "cool," and appealing to consumers of Calvin Klein products, Ndiritu performs a partially nude body and sensuous movement, which are culturally coded as invitations. Additionally, like the Calvin Klein models, she also conveys what Burke calls "standoffishness" through her insolent gaze. The conflicting messages are confusing. At one moment, the message Ndiritu conveys is "Come to me." At another moment, her gaze tells us, "Go away! Don't come near me." As Girard would have it, her conflicting messages put us in a "double bind:" we are unsure as to whether we are being invited into her work and should proceed forward, or whether she sees us as perpetrators of violence, and we should leave immediately. In an interview with Ndiritu, art critic Ian White eloquently describes his ambivalent responses to *Desert Storm*, which also imply a kind of "double bind:"

> Because I respond to your work as political work and I think it's quite tricky to locate exactly where the politics are and I also feel often that it's my assumptions which are being, not exactly exploited, but my assumptions are on the line in the work. And the kind of reading that I start to have about the work, I feel very unsure about. So I feel like I'm simultaneously being encouraged to read assumptions into the work whilst sensing that they are being undermined (White 3).

In advertising, Williamson observes "our uniqueness as the ad's subject allows us to be nothing but that subject..." (54). In *Desert Storm*, Ndiritu hails the viewer in multiple ways, which constitutes the viewer as multiple subjects. In advertising, the viewer-subject is deconstructed, "only to be rebuilt in a unity within the ad via the purchase of a product, and with the presupposition of a basic unity within himself..." (Williamson 53). However, unlike advertising, Ndiritu's performance does not pre-suppose any kind of re-uniting; in fact, the ending does much the opposite.

In the last section of *Desert Storm,* Ndiritu's performance continues to shift between performing pleasure and pain ambiguously until the final surprising shot. Ndiritu performs this section by unfolding the fabric from her crotch and stretching it out to cover her thighs until her entire body is covered except her arms. She writhes like a snake until the last minute in the screendance. She slips the fabric down suddenly to reveal her hair and eyes. To heighten the effect of this moment, the film action freezes on this image. The stillness gives us time to take in her face unveiled. Compared to the haunted, mask-like look of her veiled face, Ndiritu's face unveiled reveals a striking, defiant, powerful, beautiful woman. Additionally, the quickness of her unveiling catches us by surprise. Suddenly we are made vulnerable and the power relation is reversed. As in Newson's piece, we are made uncomfortably aware of our own watching. After watching her as the object, we are made the object of her gaze with her sudden stare.

Jean-Paul Sartre describes a similar situation in "The Look" from *Being and Nothingness*. He asks us to imagine a man outside kneeling down peering through a keyhole in order to eavesdrop or spy on the activities/people inside a room. While his concentration and consciousness is focused intently on what he is seeing, he fails to perceive the sound of approaching footsteps. After it is too late, he hears a sound, looks up and realizes he has been caught. The other stands watching him. According to Sartre, in the "gaze" of this other I become aware of myself as an "object" of another consciousness as subject (347). In an almost violent sense, said Sartre, "the other's consciousness invades mine; I experience the other as a free subject making me into an object for another…Caught by the gaze of the other, I am confined within the being-in-itself" (347). People who look through keyholes most likely prefer doing so in secret. Thus the man is made vulnerable, perhaps shamed, by the gaze of the other, which is a defining gaze. In the case of Ndiritu's *Desert Storm*, the original object of our gaze suddenly looks back. Additionally, since her performance of the sensuous nude female body evokes the discourse around the seductive female, her reversal of the gaze disturbs conventional gendering of subject and object. Performing the female body in a way that is culturally coded as the object of desire, which consequently defines our gaze as male, Ndiritu's gaze becomes the male gaze when she stares back and we, who were shaped as the male gaze, become the implied female object. Ndiritu invites voyeuristic viewing; then, by her sudden unveiling, her Look catches us unawares. Her consciousness "invades" ours and we are made vulnerable by her defining gaze.

Shaping the Viewer With Ambiguity

Another element both the Calvin Klein advertisement and *Desert Storm* employ is that of ambiguity. With no product in sight, the ad generates ambiguity as to what product is being advertised. Many advertisements employ this strategy for different reasons. Initially, the ambiguity captures our curiosity and motivates us to ponder the advertisement with increased interest (Messaris 178). Additionally, when the product or meaning of an advertisement is not clearly evident upon first viewing, the viewer is encouraged to interpret that as a compliment. The message the ad conveys is, "You, the viewer, are so sophisticated in reading visual culture that you can decipher our message without our having to spell it out." In the case of the Calvin Klein advertisement, there is no need to mention the product or offer an argument in support of its desirability because the assumption is that the consumer is "cool" enough to recognize the Calvin Klein image and thus the product. Advertisements such as this one create an absence of information that requires us to decipher, but the process is restricted to "carefully defined channels provided by the ad for its own decipherment" (Williamson 72). Indeed, the magazine version of the Calvin Klein ad included an image of the perfume product on the next page, often with a scented envelope (Vandenberg 7). In other words, the ambiguity functions as a kind of puzzle; however, it is a puzzle for which there is only one solution and, in some fashion, the ad contains the clues leading to that solution.

Conversely, Ndiritu employs ambiguity in ways that do not create a kind of puzzle for which there is only one solution. Ndiritu keys into the aspect of transformation that involves questioning assumptions in order to make way for considering other possibilities. She employs open-endedness to stir the viewer's imagination, so that the

viewer is prompted to ponder rather than be told. This is counter to the ideological

meanings typically perpetuated in media and advertising.

Ndiritu is shaping the viewer in a way that troubles assumptions and expectations,

which is the opposite of the way ideological meanings are reinforced in advertising and

media. Ideology is activated when meanings are accepted as already true and done so

without the viewer's awareness. Ndiritu sets the stage to invite the viewer in, as do many

advertisements, with sexual imagery, but then she interrupts us in the process of

identification or voyeurism by performing ambiguously in a way that makes us conscious

about the assumptions we were about to make.

Given the ambiguity of her performance, Ndiritu has received a range of

responses to *Desert Storm,* which also resonate with the ways in which she was

performing psychologically. The interpretations of *Desert Storm* differ by gender: she has

heard from some men that she looks as if she is enjoying herself while women have

interpreted her performance as that of a rape (White 3). To achieve the effect of

ambiguity, Ndiritu gave the camera a male perspective while she performed. She told

herself "that's a man looking at me. So he can be looking at me in different ways, like

we said erotic or because sometimes in the movement you don't know if I'm being

dragged off the camera…I don't blink…I'm looking dead straight, but my eyes don't

really give anything away" (Ndiritu in White 7). The effect is unsettling. Such ambiguity

"introduces a subtlety that is both seductive and disarming" (Kent 3). Even Ndiritu has a

hard time viewing *Desert Storm* because she sees herself as a victim. "…some people

have told me…that no, I look powerful. But to see one's own body moving in that way

and because it's so ambiguous, it looks, it feels like something bad is happening to me…I

don't like to see myself in that position" (Ndiritu 5-6). It seems that Ndiritu imagines a

man viewing but sees herself with the woman's perspective.

<u>Shaping the Viewer and News Media Representations</u>

In addition to employing strategies used by advertisements, *Desert Storm* mimics

aspects of network news media in order to draw attention to their role in perpetuating

ideological operations. What becomes evident in *Desert Storm* as Ndiritu writhes, is that

the floor upon which she is undulating is a large map of the world. White text scrolls

slowly from right to left on a black strip at the bottom of the screen listing countries such

as Sudan, East Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kashmir, Tibet, Eritrea,

Kosovo, Chiapas, Algeria, Congo, Sri Lanka and others. The scrolling text along the

lower edge of the frame resembles the way network news display the up-to-the-minute

news reports, emergencies and catastrophic events. Networks are known to broadcast in

this fashion even during non-news programs. *Desert Storm's* final message also features

white text, which appears on a black screen and reads, "Today's news is tomorrow's

war." Between the screendance's title, *Desert Storm*, the news media-styled scrolling text

and the final words, Ndiritu is most certainly asking us to consider news media

operations and the role they played in Desert Storm, the operational name for the military

response in the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991). To what extent is today's news

tomorrow's war?

The critical role the news media played in the development of the Persian Gulf

War was in part the result of lessons learned from the news media's influence on the

course of events during the Vietnam War. During the Vietnam War, television news

broadcasts were filled with images of human carnage from the front line. One of the most

nightmarish stories reported during this time involved a couple whose son was fighting in Vietnam. They were watching the war news report at home and recognized one of the soldiers as their son. An explosion occurred and they watched as their son was killed (Louw). Footage such as this fueled mass resistance to the war and spurred peace protests. Some critics believe that the relentless television news reports caused the defeat of the Vietnam War (Hrycyszyn 5). Others say that is an exaggeration (Louw 175). Whether or not the media did in fact contribute to the growing unpopularity of the war, "it became an article of faith in military circles that the media was largely responsible for the loss in Vietnam" (Hrycyszyn 5). Consequently, despite advances in technology that make pictures from the battle front easier to obtain and deliver, no such images of human carnage were shown during the Gulf War. Instead, television news reports showed images of "smart missiles' hitting military targets with precise accuracy, accompanied by play –by –play explanations from Pentagon officials (Ryan and Wentworth 4). Journalists were kept away from the front, obtaining their information from carefully orchestrated briefings. A lesson had been learned from the Vietnam experience.

Twenty years after the Vietnam incident, globalization and other factors also influenced the new kind of warfare the Persian Gulf War exemplifies. One is that since globalization requires a new form of hegemony building, it is generating this new genre of warfare - "one conducted by a 'dispersed' elite that has networked itself globally, an elite which is building a global economy, culture and hegemony that is highly information-ized and media-ized" (Louw 171). Another characteristic of this new warfare genre, also known as the New World Order wars, is that it is fought against enemies who pose no real threat to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development) populations; however, these populations need to be persuaded to support the coercion being used (Young and Jesser in Louw 173). Therefore, the New World Order warfare becomes highly "'PR-ized' because it is seen to be imperative to keep media images positive; or at least prevent them from becoming negative" (Louw 174).

Strategies the news media employ to public relation-ize war include demonizing the enemy and manufacturing victims who need to be rescued from the enemy (Louw 174). The process of demonization involves identifying a villain such as Saddam Hussein and in many cases, associating that person with Hitler. Additionally, the logic of binary opposition necessitates creating 'victims' who are to be saved from the villain (MacArthur 1). One of the public relations successes of the Gulf War was staged by the CFK/H&H public relations firm, which was hired by the Kuwaiti government. The firm arranged for a 15-year old Kuwaiti girl to lie to a US Congressional Committee that she had witnessed Iraqi troops throwing babies out of incubators. (MacArthur 1-2). The story was meant to promote the Saddam-as-Hitler image and to activate the need for "victims" to be rescued.

Other public relation-izing strategies include capitalizing on the televisual image's iconicity as well as on censoring. The immediacy of the televisual image makes images appear unmanipulated. News media viewers get the impression that they are actually privy to what is going on because the televisual images seem so real. But the images are manufactured. Viewers only see what the camera was pointed at, not what was behind the camera, or what was edited out, or the other countless "gate-keeping" decisions involved in scrutinizing news media reports before they are broadcast, including the military censorship process (Strong 2). "It is an inescapable fact that much

of what Americans saw on their news broadcasts, especially leading up to the Allied

offensive against Iraqi-occupied Kuwait, was in large measure the contrivance of a public

relations firm" (Strong 2). "Images of warfare (or other news for that matter) do not

portray 'reality' or a 'fair,' unbiased perspective on the war, they just seem to convey

such a 'reality'" (Louw 175). CBS anchor Dan Rather criticized the press coverage of the

Gulf and other wars and traced the roots of the problem to the increasingly corporate

nature of the press: "we begin to think less in terms of responsibility and integrity, which

get you in trouble…and more in terms of power and money..." (Rather in MacArthur

216).

Though warfare has always been accompanied by some elements of propaganda,

the military grew increasingly concerned with the news media's impact on waging war

from the Vietnam War onwards.

> Every war involving Anglo-Americans since Vietnam – the Falklands
> (1982), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), the Persian Gulf (1990), Somalia
> (1992-93), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1992-95), Kosovo (1999) and Timor
> (1999) – has seen the military become increasingly sophisticated as agents
> of hegemonic coercion. The   military has become skilled at not only
> killing people, but using the media (especially television) as a powerful
> tool of warfare (Louw 174-175).

Perhaps not so co-incidentally, many of the countries listed here are also listed in

Desert Storm's scrolling text, which Ndiritu explains are the countries in which rape has

been used as a weapon of war (Ndiritu in White 6). *Desert Storm* came out of a time

when British engineer Ken Bigley had been kidnapped and executed in Iraq, which

prompted the news media to fixate on stories of that region. Numerous reports contained

information about women getting raped in Iraqi prisons. Ndiritu observed that many of

the writers were male and that may affect ways in which the stories were told. "So then I

started to think, actually, this whole war is being put about in a male perspective – what is the other side, a woman's perspective?...What happens when these things happen to a woman? And with rape, it's such an ambiguous thing anyway…You know, there are all these different arguments within women themselves and with society as well" (Ndiritu in White 6).

Ultimately, Ndiritu appropriates elements of advertising and news media strategies as well as inventing her own in an effort to be transformative (Kent 1). While advertising draws us in, provokes our desire, then seeks to motivate us to take action and purchase a product, *Desert Storm* draws us in, then seeks transformation of a different kind. By performing partially nude, she sets up an invitation to identify and encourages us to be a voyeur, then she disrupts the identification process in a way that makes us aware of our potentially threatening position. Ndiritu hails us with the nude female body and direct gaze, but disturbs the moment of identification and the voyeuristic gaze by looking back so intently, and thus by performing mixed messages: invitational then confrontational, pleasure then struggle, vulnerability then power and defiance, androgyny then femininity. While advertisements encourage identification, and we give the advertising images meaning by receiving them, they evoke our desire, we make an exchange with the product and purchase the product/ourselves back. Ndiritu sets the process in motion only to interrupt, confront and disturb further identification. In this process we are made aware of how we normally participate in the perpetuation of mainstream ideology without awareness. Ndiritu interrupts us at the moment when we are about to assume. She provokes us to ask questions rather than to make assumptions.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Screendances such as *Cost of Living* and *Desert Storm* are circulating within the discourse of popular culture, which at the same time includes a proliferation of representations seen in media and advertising. Those representations are central to the construction of advertising's ideological power (Kelly, Lawlor, O'Donohoe 645). Cultural meanings are filtered and encoded through the advertising process, which is structured with corporate strategic goals. Newson and Ndiritu employ corporate strategies such as hailing the viewer with the female nude body or evoking the discourse around the seductive female, employing the direct gaze and incorporating elements of ambiguity. However, they do so in ways that disrupt the perpetuation of mainstream ideology.

Williamson and Althusser tell us that advertising has no subject and that by being hailed in a particular way, we must already be that way. The advertisement speaks to an imaginary individual that becomes us. We hear the advertisement's voice as familiar but unidentifiable. In many cases, "this is because advertising has no 'subject'…there is a space, a gap where the speaker should be…we are drawn in to fill that gap, so that we become both listener and speaker, subject and object…"(Williamson 13-14).

Similarly, both Newson and Ndiritu, shape the viewer to be both subjects and objects. In the *Cost of Living,* the structure of David's solo mimics the structure of "Whatever Lola Wants" where Lola seduces the male spectator, which situates David as the object and the viewer as the subject. However, as the solo unfolds, the tables turn, David becomes the subject and the viewer the object as he challenges our definitions of desirability. This reversal of our position, rather than assuming us to be ideologically

complicit, startles us into recognizing how we are being manipulated. Ndiritu too troubles the subject-object dynamics as she shapes the viewer as both a lover and a rapist, and ends with an accusatory stare which positions her as subject and the viewer as object. We have been invited to assume and enjoy a position of power only to be abruptly made aware of our complicity with violent and aggressive power relationships.

The significance of Newson's and Ndiritu's subversions is that they employ the very strategies of corporate media and advertising in the service of questioning them. Additionally, they reveal ideological operations used by mainstream media and advertising by employing ambiguity and interrupting the moment when assumptions are made without our awareness. Although advertising employs forms of ambiguity such as visual and perceptual ambiguity, the meaning of an advertisement is never ambiguous. On the other hand, Newson and Ndiritu employ conceptual ambiguity, which serves to shape viewers ambiguously in ways that leave them with questions. "Ideology is the meaning made necessary by the conditions of society while helping to perpetuate those conditions" (Williamson 13). Newson and Ndiritu, by disrupting the smooth "necessity" of meaning, are proposing alternate conditions.

Chapter 4 -

Nude, Naked and Sexually Expressive Bodies in Motion:
Comparing Representations of Female Identity in Selected Contemporary
Screendances with Those in Advertisements and Commercial Hollywood Films.

"…there is a difference between painting our own picture and looking at someone else's
- Myra Macdonald

Screendance is coming into its own during a time when daily, postmodern life is
inundated with visual imagery. In no other form of society in history has there been such
a dense concentration of visual messages (Berger 129). Mainstream media, especially
corporate advertising, operate as image-making machines producing images which are
more sophisticated, insidious and reflective of the pulse of culture than ever. Many of
these images are filled with representations of the nude or partially nude, naked and/or
sexually expressive female body. Advertisement images of the female body have a
powerful effect as they operate ideologically to construct representations of female
identity. Judith Butler tells us that gender identity is performed and that repeated
representations of female identity, for example, contribute to constructing values and
forming identity. Repeated media representations of women serve to normalize the values
contained in those images and foster the notion of an ideal female body.

However, the ideal proposed by advertising representations does not necessarily reflect
the experiences of women themselves. Advertisement representations tend to correlate
female identity with elements such as passivity, sexuality, mystery and consumerism.
Images of the female body are often de-contextualized, which is a visual strategy marketers
employ to aid in the coding of the female body as an erotic object and symbol for sex.

Advertisement representations foster a definition of the "ideal" female body in ways that are exclusive and limiting rather than inclusive of difference. In *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, Myra Macdonald claims that "women have been given insufficient chance to formulate their own thoughts and ideas about themselves, and to express these through popular media forms" (6).

While mainstream media forms (commercial Hollywood cinema, advertising, magazines, news media, commercial television) have historically been dominated by patriarchal, Western discourse, women are increasingly inventing ways to express themselves and assert their identities on their own terms. As popular forms of media, culture and art-making evolve in ways that women and other marginal groups can utilize as vehicles for self-expression, mainstream media is ceasing to have full control of female identity (Macdonald 221). For example, in contemporary visual culture, marginal groups are using "visual languages" such as body language, fashion and bodily adornment to perform identity.

Other examples of alternative performances of female identity include those expressed in forms of art such as screendance. "Art is one of the cultural, ideological practices which constitute the discourse of a social system and its mechanisms of power" (Pollock 115). Judith Butler proposes that alternative representations can "trouble" those generated by mainstream media and cultivate alternative values surrounding gender and identity.

Though some screendance artists are making work that confirms ideological practices of mainstream media culture, screendance artists such as Grace Ndiritu, Amy Greenfield, Be Van Vark, Aitor Echevarria/Carolina Alejos/Silvia Marín and Natalie

Bookchin perform the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body in ways that indeed "trouble" mainstream, patriarchal notions of female identity, sexuality and corporeality. Their work simultaneously acknowledges the dominant patriarchal discourse around the female nude body while troubling the very way that discourse operates. Given that contemporary screendance circulates and performs on the same global platforms as advertising and other forms of media, it positions itself within popular cultural discourse and has the potential to offer alternative representations of female identity. How do the images featured in these screendances differ, or not, with those seen in advertising? What is screendance doing differently, or not, from those representations? To what extent is screendance a vehicle for female artists to represent themselves and "paint their own pictures" in ways that foster alternative representations of female identity? This chapter asks whether, in the end, women can represent themselves in a way that escapes from or helps re-shape the pervasive and normalizing image of "female."

I propose that the screendance artists named above are creating alternative representations of female identity. Because the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body is always culturally encoded, the image of the female body does not speak only of itself. It necessarily speaks in dialogue with or in reference to dominant cultural media representations, especially advertising, before or in addition to speaking of itself. Nonetheless, these artists are utilizing screendance as an autobiographical medium to challenge the simplicity of "the correlation between bodily image and identity that prevails elsewhere in culture" (Macdonald 197). These artists are engaged in a process of reclaiming women's bodies and expressing women's own experiences.

Key to these screendance artists' political power and "troubling," I argue, are six elements. One is that they are representing themselves. They are responsible for the artistic choices involved in the creation of their works and the construction of the images, from the lighting to the camera angle, from the body movement to the sound/musical accompaniment, from the mise-en-scène to the editing process. Each of these elements contains meaning, has semiotic value and contributes to the "visual messages" conveyed in the screendances.

Secondly, they each feature the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body in motion, moving with intention and consciousness. Thirdly, the female bodies represented in these screendances are situated in contexts significant to their works. These factors serve to bring subjectivity to the fore while resisting objectification. Their representations resemble physical embodiments of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "lived body."

Additionally, they each employ different elements of ambiguity as part of a productive feminist visual strategy to revision the female body in representation. Ambiguous representations have the potential to trouble or resist dominant representations of female identity (McDonald 10). These screendance artists employ elements such as visual ambiguity, conceptual ambiguity, ambiguous meaning and/or ambiguous production elements. The ambiguity functions in different ways in the different screendances such as opening the screendance up to multiple interpretations, creating confusion, challenging exclusionary stereotypes and opening the possibility of a positive feminist visuality.

Finally, the works discussed in this project resist both the notion of the idealized female body and the performance of the female body as the surveyed, both of which are fostered by many representations of female identity in corporate advertising.

Methodology:

This chapter begins by drawing from Butler' *Gender Trouble* to underscore ways in which mediated representations are powerful perpetuators of ideology and the shaping of female identity. Given that the five works by the screendance artists discussed here, Grace Ndiritu's *Still Life,* Amy Greenfield's *Tides*, Be Van Vark's *Kassenhauschen,* Aitor Echevarria/Carolina Alejos/Silvia Marín's *Aprop/Closer* and Natalie Bookchin's *Mass Ornament,* represent aspects of female identity by performing the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive body and that those bodies are also heavily coded historically, in contemporary visual culture and advertising. I examine them as signs. How is the nude body distinguished from the naked body as a signifier? To distinguish the semiotic differences between images of the "nude" female body and those considered to be "naked," I draw from Kenneth Clark, Lynda Nead and John Berger. That discussion leads us to the point that much of the Western European oil painting tradition revolves around and is created for the male spectator.

I then draw from feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey's *Visual and Other Pleasures* and Berger's notion of the surveyor and the surveyed to discuss how the tradition of constructing visual representations to appeal to the male spectator prevails in corporate advertising and commercial Hollywood cinema. I consider Mulvey's notions of the male gaze in cinema and "split subjectivities" as conceived of in Lacan's discussion of the Mirror Stage and how these theories cast female subjectivity in limiting ways.

Since advertising is a form of mainstream media that profusely features and heavily codes the female body, I examine examples that demonstrate ways in which the female body is coded as a passive, erotic object, as a symbol for sex and as de-contextualized and re-contextualized for the sake of stirring fantasies.

In contrast, the screendance artists discussed here represent the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body differently than many representations of the female body in corporate advertising. One difference is that they embody aspects of what Merleau-Ponty calls "the lived body," a body that moves with intention, bears meaning, is becoming, perceiving, situated and conscious. I draw from Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* to examine ways in which Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body and intersubjectivity differs from Lacan's theories of the Mirror Stage and how existential Phenomenology offers tools for theorizing the female screendance body.

A fundamental way in which the lived body serves as a model for conceiving the screendance female body is through the power of movement. I look at the active, expressive female body and compare it with ways in which many advertisements associate the female body with passivity. With the body in motion comes continuous change, which serves to underscore the diverse possibilities of the present and diffuse oppressive traditions of the past.

Another important element characteristic of the lived body is that it is situated. I explore the importance of context in the representation of female identity in screendance and turn to Helen McDonald's *Erotic Ambiguities: the Female Nude in Art* to look at examples of ways in which de-contextualization in many advertisements plays a role in

coding the female body as a symbol, often a symbol for sex. Denying the female body a context also contributes to representing female identity as mysterious, as an enigma and as a repository for male fantasies.

I then address Butler's question to Merleau-Ponty: whose body is the "lived body?" I bring in the feminist perspectives of Iris M. Young, Johanna Oksala and Sondra Fraleigh to discuss existential phenomenology and female identity. Drawing from McDonald, I compare representations of the "ideal" nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body in selected advertisements with those in the screendances discussed here. I consider historical examples of the ideal body, its relation to the fashion industry, how it fosters exclusivity and how the screendances resist exclusivity.

Employing some element(s) of ambiguity is another strategy these screendance artists use to represent female identity. Myra Macdonald's *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* provides a foundation for discussion of the different ways in which ambiguity is used to reveal/conceal ideological meanings, challenge the simplicity of representations of female identity in many advertisements, and re-vision the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body.

Finally, using the concepts discussed so far as guidelines for analysis, I look at how five screendances are representing female identity and compare them with how the advertisement examples and scenes from two commercial Hollywood films; *Chloe* (2010) and *Body Double* (1984) represent female identity. For each screendance, I assess whether it is performing the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body and what is significant about that. Then I demonstrate ways in which each screendance is subverting mainstream corporate media representations of female identity by refusing to

play the role of the surveyed for the pleasure of the surveyor, by employing some

aspect(s) of ambiguity and performing an embodiment of some aspect(s) of Merleau-

Ponty's lived body. In particular, I discuss how each screendance performs the female

body in motion, moving with intention, as an active, perceptive, subject and how that

serves to "trouble" mainstream media representations. Additionally, I underscore the

importance of self-representation and the powerful role that context or "situated-ness"

plays in the representation of female identity.

<u>The Power of Representation</u>

Of the various factors influencing the shaping of female identity formation,

mainstream media representations are some of the most powerful. Representation refers

to both politics and culture. "The concept of representation, however outmoded in

cultural criticism, is still of crucial political importance" (Macdonald 2). Given their

ubiquitous presence, representations receive high exposure; therefore, the meanings,

values and messages contained in those representations have a privileged access and

transmission to all corners of society. Representations can be seen as "complex forms of

visual rhetoric, which may be seen to function in the articulation of power" (Pointon in

McDonald 9-10). According to Butler, the meanings, values and messages generated by

mainstream media and consumer society have traditionally reflected the dominant "power

regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism," and the media serve to facilitate "a

constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysics, and their naturalized ontologies"

(Butler 42). In the case of representing female identity, Butler believes that gender

identity is effected by the repetition of gender "performances." She tells us that gender is

a social construct, a performance of signs we wear or we act, as we interact, rather than

an essence. Through repeated performances, gender identities gain power to the point of being presumed to be natural. "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 43-44). The more we are exposed to images that "perform" culturally defined values such as what it is to be female, the more they become identified with what is natural. Whether we subscribe to the values prescribed by the representations or not, they become familiar nonetheless. For this reason, in this chapter, I demonstrate how the screendances discussed here are significant in that they construct alternative representations of female identity in which women are representing themselves.

Another way in which media representations exert power is by virtue of the fact that they are usually photographic, iconic or in a style that highly resembles reality and therefore gives the illusion of containing truth or evidence of something real. The media play an ideological role by inviting our consent to talk about media representations as if they were normal or real. In fact, the media do not necessarily deal with reality, and reality is not necessarily knowable. Representations are always, by their very nature, mediated. Thus one way of resisting their "reality effect" is to draw attention to their mediated nature and to emphasize that the representation in an artifice rather than reality.

The Nude, Naked and/or Sexually Expressive Female Body

One of the traditions that has influenced the semiotic values of the nude, naked and sexually expressive female bodies in representation is Western European oil painting tradition. This section looks first at distinctions between the nude and naked bodies as

represented in traditional European art, followed by ways in which those values are

reflected in examples from corporate advertising, especially from the fashion industry.

In *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art,* Kenneth Clark discusses distinctions between

representations of the nude and naked female bodies. According to Clark, naked is simply

to be without clothes and usually describes representation of a particular body. Art that

represents an ideal body is categorized as a nude. In Western art historical tradition, the

nude is a category of oil painting. Clark conceives of the nude as not only the starting

point of a painting, but also a way of seeing that the painting achieves. The nude is

always conventionalized, and the authority for its conventions derives from art traditions

(Clark 6).

In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Lynda Nead takes issue with

assumptions made by Clark and his treatment of his material. As Clark's subtitle, *A

Study of Ideal Art*, suggests, he is concerned with a specific classical and idealizing

tradition of representation, "but within his book this particularity gains the force of a

general cultural norm against which all other modes of representation of the nude

(Gothic, Baroque, non-European) are categorized as transgressive as a cultural 'other'

(Nead 12). Over the years, Clark's text has gained the status of a classic survey of the

subject and, as Nead points out, "there have been curiously few scholarly attempts to

revise it" (12). Another fact that becomes obvious in Clarks' discussions of the nude is

that he assumes a female nude and a male viewer. Nead does not make this assumption

and specifies as such in her title; *The Female Nude*. Additionally, in setting up a dualistic

construction of the nude and the naked, Clark categorizes the nude as the body in

representation, the body produced by culture, and the naked body as somehow outside of

representation. Nead is disturbed by the evaluative judgment that these notions promote

and how the nude/naked opposition demonstrates the passion for binary oppositions that

dominates western philosophical history (14). "Clark's category of the naked belongs to

the inferior, female set of the *body*, whereas the nude is an extension of the elevated male

attributes associated with the *mind*" (Nead 14, my emphasis).

In *Ways of Seeing,* John Berger challenges Clark's account of the nude, but does

so in a way that almost inverts the nude/naked opposition (Nead 15). Berger

distinguishes naked as being oneself, without disguise, while to be nude is to be seen

naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself (54). In this regard, nudity is like a

form of dress where the skin and hair of the body are "turned into a disguise which, in

that situation, can never be discarded" (Berger 54). To be placed on display characterizes

nudity while nakedness reveals itself. In lived sexual experience, nakedness is more a

process than a fixed state. "A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a

nude and the sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object" (Berger 54).

Distinguishing nude from naked in Clark's definition assumes that a body in a

painting or sculpture can somehow be outside of representation. Berger also implies that

the naked is freer from mediation than the nude (57). However, by virtue of the fact that

art and screendances are constructing representations, the body is always already in

representation (Nead 16). "Within social, cultural and psychic formations, the body is

rendered dense with meaning and significance, and the claim that the body can ever be

outside of representation is itself inscribed with symbolic value" (Nead 16).

Given that the mediated body is never semiotically innocent, this project adopts

the following variation of Berger's naked/nude discussions and integrates aspects of non-

European representational traditions. Berger distinguishes naked as "being oneself, without disguise" and nude being "seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself (54). This study will work with the notion that the "naked" is performing oneself in ways that do not read as self-consciously sexual. "Nude" denotes performing the body on display, often with some form of sexual expression.

Additionally, the screendances discussed in this project align themselves with non-European traditions that do not necessarily associate nudity with passivity. In terms of representation, the nude in Western European culture is often associated with passivity. For example, King Charles the Second secretly commissioned Lely (1618-1680) to paint a portrait of one of his mistresses, Nell Gwynne. In it, Gwynne is seen passively resting back on white, sensuously folded, fabric and pillow while a cherub-like toddler peeks over her right hip and stares intently at her crotch. The expression on her face speaks of coy submission and invitation. According to Berger, Gwynne's nakedness is not an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the King's feelings or demands. The King is the owner of both the woman and the painting. When the King showed it to others, the painting "demonstrated this submission and his guests envied him" (Berger 52). However, nudity is rarely depicted with figures lying back in a supine position in art traditions of Persia, Africa and Pre-Columbia. If the theme of the art works from these cultures is sexual attraction, they are likely to show sexual love as active between two people where the woman is as active as the man and the actions of each reveal their engagement with each other.

Berger tells us that in the average European oil painting of the nude, the spectator is, in fact, the central protagonist. He is a man and stands in front of the picture.

Everything is addressed to him and appears to be the result of his being there. "It is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. But he, by definition is a stranger – with his clothes still on" (Berger 54). The relation between the male spectator and the female body in representation described in this scenario is at the core of feminist film theorist, Mulvey's theories of the male gaze and is central to mainstream consumer culture representations of female identity. Both Mulvey and Berger make associations between activity/looking/masculinity and passivity/being looked at/femininity. According to Berger, Western art poses women, nude or partially clothed, for the benefit of a masculine spectator. He claims "women have internalized those ways of looking at themselves that permeate this tradition" (Berger 46). This observation is also widely recognized, especially by feminist film theorists, as the "split subjectivity" of the female as spectator and as the object of the male gaze. (Sobchack 154). For women, "the body frequently is both subject and object for itself at the same time and in reference to the same act," (Young 60-61). The experience of split subjectivity is "heightened in a culture in which a woman's body is regarded as a thing which exists as looked at and acted upon" (Sobchack 154).

Berger describes women's experience of split subjectivity in terms the *surveyor* and the *surveyed*, which is predicated upon ways in which mainstream media represents gender. According to Berger, visual culture conventions represent the male body as one that possesses power, which he exercises on others (46). His social presence is dependent upon the power he embodies (Berger 45). "The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual – but its object is always exterior to the man" (Berger 45). His presence speaks of his capacity to do to you or for you.

> Conversely, a woman's presence is intrinsic to her person. Berger writes, …a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot *be done to her* [my emphasis]. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surrounding, taste – indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence (46).

This is significant, according to Berger, because "men survey women before treating them" (46). Consequently, how a woman appears to a man influences the way in which she will be treated. From an early age, she has been taught to survey herself continually. Much like being split into two, a woman is accompanied by her own image of herself, the surveyor and the surveyed become two distinct elements that constitute her identity. This determines not only relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. "The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object…" (Berger 47).

While many mainstream media representations, especially advertisements, unabashedly promote the roles of woman as surveyed or self-surveyor, I propose that the screendances in this study promote the notion that women have a choice about the extent to which they buy into and perform those roles. In the following discussions, I first demonstrate different ways in which corporate advertising represents the female body as the surveyed body, and then build upon Merleau Ponty's notion of the lived body to show that the screendances included in this collection propose alternatives to playing that role. Advertisements from sources such as *Vogue Magazine*, Calvin Klein and Urban Outfitters exemplify ways in which many ads code the female body as a passive, erotic object, as a symbol for sex and therefore, a marketing tool, and as a repository for fantasies constructed through a process of re-contextualizing and de-contextualizing the

female body. Conversely, the selected screendances offer more complex and libratory

representations of female identity.

Representations of the Female Body in Advertising

The way the female body has been associated with passivity in the Western

European oil painting tradition persists today. Corporate advertising continues to feature

images that code the female body as "a thing which exists as looked at and acted upon,"

(Sobchack 154). For example, this advertisement for Calvin Klein jeans codes the female

body as passive erotic object in numerous ways. One is the position of her body. She is

Image 5: Calvin Klein jeans advertisement image (2007).
http://www.acephotos.org/c15230921/natalia-vodianova-calvin-klein-ads-photo.html

lying down and inactive. As Erving Goffman puts it in *Gender Advertising,* "A

recumbent position is one from which physical defense of one's self can least well be

initiated and therefore one which renders one very dependent on the benignness of the

surround" (Goffman, 41). Indeed, this body posture speaks of dependence more than

independence. The "surround" includes the seaweed on the beach and the viewer, with

whom she acknowledges or calls into being with her gaze and with whom she makes

herself defenseless or vulnerable by assuming this position. Additionally, the way her

hair is stringy like the seaweed suggests that she was washed onto the shore by the force

of the waves along with the seaweed, again, a situation that speaks of passivity.

The model's gestures and the lighting serve to emphasize her body as an erotic object. The placement of her right hand brings attention to the sensuality of her hips. The position of her left arm and the shadow on her face both create the effect that her torso is offset from her head as well as call attention to her belly and breasts, which are more brightly lit. The shadow on her face also obscures the specifics of her identity, which enhances the image's ability to stir fantasies as well as operate symbolically. One of the messages conveyed by this image is an invitation to the viewer to partake in the pleasures of her passive, available body.

In the mainstream, consumer culture, patriarchal, heteronormative world, this ad would appear to be speaking to a male viewer. However, since the purpose of the ad is to sell Calvin Klein jeans to women, perhaps it is addressed to what Berger was referring to as the surveyor of a woman in herself, which is male (47). In that case, the message implied is that, if you wear jeans like these, you will have this erotic body. In any case, this model is performing the role of the surveyed.

Another advertisement performs the role of the surveyed female body in stereotypical ways including the performance of gestures such as the averted gaze and finger sucking. The model in this Etam Lingerie ad assumes the classic position of the reclined nude, which reads more as passivity than activity. Additionally, her averted gaze and finger sucking are signifiers that speak of sexual availability and desire. Goffman

Image 6: Etam Lingerie advertisement image. (Spring-summer 2010). http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=ETAM&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=dflNTIKrAozQsAPTxKFJ&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CD4QsAQwAw&biw=999&bih=624

tells us that "Turning one's gaze away from another's can be seen as having the consequence of withdrawing from the current thrust of communication, allowing… some sort of submission to and trust in the source of stimulus seems to be implied" (Goffman, 62). This model is performing submission by looking away, which reads as an invitation to the viewer to gaze upon her body. She also performs an embodiment of what Goffman refers to as "common ritualizations" such as finger sucking, which reads as "child-like, distracted and possibly as desirous" (60). Indeed, finger-sucking is also clearly a metaphor for sexual acts, with the finger as phallic and the mouth as orifice, emphasizing openness to invasion. These gestures code the model's body as that of the surveyed, which consumer culture also associates with the female body.

As Berger and Mulvey have shown, the female body is coded differently than the male body: the former associated with passivity and as the seen, the later as the active one who sees. As a way of testing this notion, Laura Murray staged an experiment as part of her research on gender images in advertising and their contribution to the hegemonic notion of femininity. She asked a male model to assume poses typically

assumed by female models featured in advertisements, then solicited responses to the images from both men and women. Below is a male model in the classic female nude reclining position who is sucking his finger and averting his gaze. If this were an advertisement for Calvin Klein jeans for men,

Image 7: Male model in stereotypically female reclining position. (2010). http://www.willowcabinstudio.com/women_in_advertising.htm

how would it be received? If this were an image on a billboard or in a magazine, how would it read? Would this image encourage viewers to buy the product? Murray summarized the responses she received in a sentence: "He looks effeminate, and/or silly, and/or stupid" (6). In other words, some feminine behavior, such as performing the role of the surveyed, is associated with silliness and/or stupidity. By Observing a male body perform gestures associated with the role of the surveyed, a role most often performed by the female body, allows us to see how differently the male body is coded.

Another way in which male and female bodies are represented differently in many advertising images has to do with setting, context or situation. Women inhabit all different locations from tropical fantasy islands to warehouse basements. Though advertising certainly represents men in fantasy settings, the settings tend to be based more in "reality" such as a locker room, a jet plane or a bar-b-que. A man would appear out of place in many of the types of unreal, fantasy settings advertisers feature in the

construction of images of women. What is significant about these differences in representational practices is that context/situation/background serve to generate meanings around the performance and definition of identity.

<u>(De)contextualized Bodies</u>

Merleau Ponty's existential phenomenology focuses on the correlation of the lived body and the lived-world. He uses the term *etre-au-monde* to describe both a being-present-in-the-world and a being-alive-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the significance of the lived-body's *situation*, condition or context. "Our being-in-the-world is conditioned by the existence of others…Self and other are terms that take on meaning in relation to each other. Individual subjectivity is therefore understood in view of its intersection with a surrounding world, constituted by other objects, natural phenomena and other human beings" (Fraleigh 136). Certain modalities of feminine existence are located not in an essence, anatomy or physiology, but in the particular context/condition/situation of women in their "surrounding world" (Fraleigh 136).

Context/situation also generates meaning in mediated representations. In semiotic terms, meaning is generated by every element of an image, whether it is the foreground, the subject(s) or the background. Many mainstream media images, especially those constructed by corporate advertising, de-contextualize and/or re-contextualize the female body so that it operates semiotically in ways that function as a market strategy. Given that consumer culture representations code the female body as a symbol for sex and sex sells, images of idealized female bodies are featured profusely for the purpose of selling products. In order to function most effectively as a symbol, the woman is removed from lived history, or context/situation, to signify something beyond herself. This "emptying of

selfhood" allows values such as consumerism, sexuality or, in the case of the Statue of Liberty, liberty and justice, to be communicated through the female form (Macdonald 106). Depriving the female bodies of a context/situation, or re-contextualizing the female body enables the viewer to admire the woman as an aesthetic or erotic object rather than perceiving her as what Merleau-Ponty refers to as being-in-the-world.

Examples of decontextualized female bodies in advertising images abound, but the following are particularly illustrative. The Yves Saint Laurent advertisement below demonstrates how depriving the female body of a context or re-contextualizing the body serves to encourage the viewer to admire her as an erotic object. At first glance, it appears that this image has no background information, or what little is revealed is not easily recognizable as an everyday setting. Looking closer, we see that the dim light

Image 8: Yves Saint Laurent Billboard advertisement (2000).
http://www.bwgreyscale.com/ads/yves_saint_laurent.html

reveals what looks like folds of blue velvet, a fabric used for lining jewel cases or for clothing such as an evening gown. If the background is a jewel case, the implication is that the female body is a jewel on display, which further codes her as an aesthetic object.

The folds under her body resemble bedding material, which situates her in the space where sex takes place, a reading strongly reinforced by her position. Along with the gold lettering, the background is coding the context as elegant. In addition to implying that she is an aesthetic, erotic object, the high contrast between her washed out, whitened body and the dark background removes details about her individual features. Other than the bright synthetic green eye shadow, purple lipstick and lively red hair, the lack of encoders of individual traits encourages this female body to read primarily as a symbol of sexuality.

Advertisements for cars and beer provide quintessential examples of the female body featured as a symbol for sex. Additionally, the models in the examples shown here are performing the role of the surveyed. In this Finest Motor Sports advertisement, the

Image 9: Finest Motor Sports advertising image. (2010).
http://www.finestmotorsports.com/blog/?p=7

model is posed and dressed to appeal to the heteronormative male gaze. The female body is re-contextualized on the hood of a car, a situation in which one would realistically not

see a woman. The advertisement communicates to the viewer that if you purchase this automobile, it comes with a blonde woman in a bikini and high heels.

Fashion magazines frequently construct images of women in indeterminate locations. In some cases, fashion magazines construct an aesthetic that produces a timeless feel. Women are reincarnated as pure fantasy symbols, extrapolated from reality by the absence of location, or represented as mysterious. Boundaries of time or place are easily crossed (McDonald 110). In the case of this advertisement from Vogue Magazine, the combination of signifiers represented in the background/context/situation and her body language code her as a passive, sexualized, disempowered, possibly victimized, female body-object. The green vegetation and darkness behind her suggests that she is

Image 10: *Vogue Magazine* advertisement image (2010).
http://www.willowcabinstudio.com/women_in_advertising.htm.

lying down in a forest. The four doves next to her disturb a sense of reality and function

visually in terms of the compositional design. Given that doves do not linger next to a

live human suggests that either her body appears to the doves as dead, or the doves are

behaving like vultures or other predatory creatures/insects. In terms of design, the dove

on the right is positioned parallel to the model's forearm. Her darkened arm reads as if it

were bruised. The brighter white dove, parallel to the left arm and with its tail echoing the

left hand, stands out and registers as if it were her right arm disconnected from her body.

Her purse lies next to her as if she had been on her way somewhere, was interrupted and

ended up on the ground. Similar to the Etam advertisement, she looks as if she is about to

suck her finger, or perhaps she is hiding or nursing her cheek as if it were hurting. She

wears a short dress revealing her legs and her body resembles that of the idealized model-

body. In total, the messages conveyed in this image speak of a woman who is performing

the role of the surveyed, who is disempowered, passively lying on the ground, perhaps

from having been victimized. Representations such as these serve to code women in

ways that are not empowering and do not necessarily reflect the experiences of many

women.

Another way in which many advertisements utilize the background

settings/context to represent female identity is to portray them as exotically mysterious.

The model in this Urban Outfitters advertisement is captured behind a palm frond looking

directly at the viewer. Her direct gaze invites engagement; her hands are resting near her

Image 11: Urban Outfitters advertisement image (2010).
http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&q=urban+outfitters+advert
isements&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=r-
lNTLGWN43CsAPz2tVI&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0C
B0QsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

crotch a way that draws attention to that area and she sits in shadowed light, which serves

to cast her as somewhat mysterious. The messages implied by this advertisement is that

the woman is in a partially private, mysterious, possibly fantasy space, with eyes that

convey availability. Advertisements such as this one create representations that invite us

to impose on women as empty signs the fantasy stirred by the products and brand names.

Representations of women that code their bodies as aesthetic, passive or erotic objects by

denying them a context and individualized characteristics also serve to deny women

spectators access to their own views of themselves. Rather, they are called upon to

envision themselves fulfilling male fantasies about them.

The Ideal Body

Another similar way in which the advertising industry and other forms of

mainstream media represent the female body to limiting effects is to idealize it. As

evidenced by the image examples on the preceding pages, many advertisements

characterize the ideal female body as sexually desirable and exclusive of difference

according to a narrowly defined image. This encourages women to view their bodies as intrinsically related to their sexual desirability within a firmly heteronormative masculine point of view (Macdonald 194). Female consumers are invited to strive to emulate the ideal, which is virtually impossible because, in many cases, it does not even exist since it was constructed with visual alteration tools such as Photoshop. Despite the fact that the ideal body is unattainable, women are nevertheless continuously encouraged to purchase myriad products in the effort to emulate the ideal, as if that were a high aim.

One of the most profoundly limiting effects resulting from exposure to representations of the ideal female body is that it fosters exclusivity. The physical traits included in the definition of the ideal or desirable female body are limited to particular types, shapes, colors, sizes, styles of dress, movement, etc. The ideal body represented in mainstream media consumer culture evolves with the fashion industry (Macdonald 198). Historically, the full, well-rounded female body was considered ideal at the time of the Renaissance. The Victorian period favored the hourglass figure. The flapper, boyish figure was ideal during the 1920's. The curvaceous body became popular during the 1950's. Partly in response to the maternal iconography seen in the 1950's, the thin, "Twiggy" figure clad in a short skirt became all the rage during the 1960's (Macdonald 198). At any given time, there is a defined ideal to which women are bidden to conform.

Unfortunately, the ideal body defined by consumer culture does not always reflect the experiences and values held by some women or, ironically, some men. Rather, the process by which an ideal representation is established is more complex. For example, the thin female body still sits on the ideal body pedestal. While a fundamental concern for feminists has been that media representations have been designed for the pleasure of

male spectators, the two fashion industry designers who were influential in the promotion of the thin female body as ideal were women (Macdonald 198)! Studies have shown that, in fact, many men would choose or take pleasure in looking at fuller-figured women, though that figure is not necessarily represented in mainstream media representations as the ideal. What becomes evident in this situation is that although the fashion designers who promoted the thin female body as ideal were female, they were not necessarily feminist, nor were they necessarily driven by feminists concerns. Their concerns were market and sales-driven: their ideal has to create a need for products. Additionally, although patriarchal consumer culture representations promote the objectification of the female body in general, women are the primary consumers of women's clothing. If female consumers embrace consumer culture definitions of the ideal female body, they are motivated to strive for that ideal by purchasing the fashions designed for that body. Aesthetically, some designers also believe that the thin body shows off their clothing more prominently than a fuller-figured body; therefore, they are motivated to promote the ideal body as thin. In many cases, the ideal female body is defined by consumer values rather than the values held by individual men and women.

The Seen Body and the Seeing Body

While many advertisements code the female body in reductive, limiting ways, as the advertisement examples demonstrate, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body serves as a model for conceiving the female body as an expressive, situated, perceptive, conscious, choice-making body-subject.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the issues surrounding subjectivity and objectivity differs from those constructed in many mainstream media representations of

the nude, naked and sexually expressive body. Mainstream media often represent the

man as an active, expressive subject while of the female body in many advertisements

often reduce the female body to an aesthetic, erotic object. The examples discussed on the

previous pages confirm Berger's claim that many advertisements construct

representations in which "Men act. Women appear" (47). Additionally, Mulvey's notion

of the male gaze positions the male as spectator, the one who sees, or the surveyor, who

objectifies the female, the seen, the object of desire or the surveyed. On the other hand,

Merleau-Ponty defines subjectivity as related to the lived body that perceives, with an

emphasis on vision or the act of seeing, in particular. The emergence and distinction of

the lived body/ self occurs within the realm of the intrapersonal, or as the distinction

between myself and other selves, which he refers to as intersubjectivity. We recognize

the other as "another myself" (Ponty 140). The visible body of another "acting in my

vision is thus understood as having an 'inside' or 'other side' of being-for-itself"

(Sobchack 136). The seen body becomes the seeing body. Or, as Berger would have it,

"women appear," they are being seen, and as Merleau-Ponty would add, they are also

seeing beings.

Though Merleau-Ponty acknowledged the importance of the infant's perceptual

encounter with its own image and the Other to the formation of the ego-subject as an "I"

in what Lacan called the "mirror phase," Merleau-Ponty formed a different analysis of

that moment. For him, there is reciprocity, a dialectic at work in vision between the infant

and the image, between the Self and the Other Self, between the seer and the seen.

Unlike Lacan's vision, Merleau-Ponty's is not considered "deceptive" in its emergence as

visibility. According to Lacan, the "hommelette" is not self-contained until he gains a

sense of his bodily limits and meets the resistance of the image that is the Other through

an act of *méconnaissance*, a perceptual "mistake." Merleau-Ponty takes a more positive

view. He claims the body is subjectively centered. "The body is a 'perceiving thing,' a

subject-object" (Merleau-Ponty 166). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty contextualizes the

alienation of the mirror encounter-moment with a primordial knowledge the infant

always already possesses – a knowledge of the subject body lived perceptively from

within as "mine." Therefore, the mirror encounter –moment is less an act of

méconnaissance (mistaken knowledge) than of *re-connaissance* or what Merleau-Ponty

calls "reflective knowledge."   This reflective knowledge "is the infant's awareness that

the subjective body can be perceived from without as well as within" (Sobchack 119).

While Merleau-Ponty casts the infant body as capable and potent, Lacan, for the most

part, overlooks the bodily presence in front of the mirror for the most part. At best, he

notes that body's impotence and incapacities. While Lacan identifies the Self with the

"being seen" in the mirror, Merleau-Ponty claims that subjectivity originates in the

"seeing being" in the mirror, in the infant's lived knowledge of the intentional activity of

the subjective body, centered and situated in the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, it

is this primordial knowledge of the body and the primacy of perception that contextualize

the visible (352).

　　　　While mainstream media construct representations of female identity that are

limiting, existential phenomenology, as interpreted by Merleau-Ponty and philosophers

and theorists such as Vivian Sobchack and Simone de Beauvoir, shares concerns

consistent with feminists and offers tools for re-conceiving the female nude, naked and/or

sexually expressive screendance body in a number of ways. Obviously, the body figures

hugely for dance since the body is the dancer's instrument. The body is also a central theme in existential phenomenology. Though the body had been ignored and denigrated by much of traditional philosophy, Merleau-Ponty theorizes it differently. "My body is my point of view upon the world." (Merleau-Ponty 70). One of the fundamental ways in which screendance and other bodies express meaning is through movement. For Merleau-Ponty, the "lived body" is a body in motion, moving with intention, consciousness and, therefore, subjectivity. He insists that existence is the "lived, situated, always in motion, always unfinished character that is intentionality" (Sobchack 39). Continuous motion also denotes a state of becoming, which allows for ushering in change and "troubling" the limitations of historical traditions, such as sexist oppression. I suggest that the screendance artists named earlier are creating works that resonate with aspects associated with the lived body.

I argue that through self-representation, screendance artists can construct expressions of female identity in which the information in the background operates as an extension, reflection and/or expression of that identity. The screendances discussed at the end of this chapter demonstrate ways in which the space in screendance representations becomes the context/situation of existence. When women artists are constructing those representations for themselves, they create backgrounds as context/situations that are more reflective of women's experiences than many of the representations of female identity seen in advertising and other mainstream media. Self-representation operates as a form of empowerment as these artists reclaim control of the female body in their work and formulate a pictorial language, including representations of context/situation/background, to represent alternative notions of female identity.

The Body in Motion

Compared to photographic representations of female identity, where the body is still, screendance bodies express values and aesthetics through movement. By representing the female body in motion, screendance artists are inserting woman's subjectivity back into the frame along with and/or in place of representations of the body as object.

According to Merleau-Ponty, movement is a significant factor in the expression of intentionality and the manifestation of consciousness. Choosing to move is a movement toward some kind of object of consciousness, which also implies a movement away from another. Thus, a choice is made and a value is expressed. The lived body, for Merleau-Ponty, is the signifier of intentionality, and action is the activity of signifying. (Therefore, a dead body is a signifier that has lost its power to signify) (Sobchack 65). The body as a conscious, choice-making subject and moving with intention are central to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body.

The difference between intentionality in dance and other movement lies in the fact that dance is performed with qualitative attention toward the movement. Unlike habitual, functional or accidental movement, dance's values are aesthetic or affective. "Aesthetic intent implicates intrinsic values which inhere in actions, be they appreciated for their beauty or for some other affective quality" (Fraleigh 141). The performance of dance movement can be understood as the performance of values expressed in motion. According to David Carr: "Through the gesture the body becomes the bearer of meaning into the world" (395-396). Rather than reflecting pre-existing truths, Merleau-Ponty

holds that one of phenomenology's functions, like that of art or dance, is the "act of bringing truth into being (xxi).

The body in motion is also a bearer of meaning that is constantly self-displacing. In particular, the screendance body is "always presenting as well as representing the coming into being of being and representation" (Sobchack 61). Given that the body in motion is a bearer of meaning and that movement is an expression of values, Jeffner Allen observes: "I am what I become through my choices" (71). Rather than being defined by an essence, these notions speak more of dynamic existence. "Central to phenomenology is the understanding that we never perceive phenomena in static unchanging perspectives, but rather as existing through time. Time and motion are ever-present conditions influencing attention and perspective" (Fraleigh 137).

Feminist philosophers and artists resonate with these aspects of existential phenomenology. As Jeffner Allen summarizes:

> The excitement of existentialism, for a feminist philosopher such as myself, is its unwavering affirmation of change. Existential emphasis on the primacy of existence over essence shows that I have no 'nature': I am not destined to enact the dictates of biology, social custom, or political institutions. I am what I become through my choices to resist fixity and to create a new freedom…change is effected through an intense focus on the possibilities which lie, albeit ambiguously, in my worlds of experience (71).

By bearing new meaning into the world, the act of becoming functions as a potential shedding of past oppression. Rather than reflecting historical, pre-existing sexist perspectives, for example, the body in motion is the body in the act of bearing truths about female identity into being. Existential phenomenology is present-centered; every act is informed by the past but does not have to repeat it.

The Female Body and Phenomenology

As promising as Merleau-Ponty's notions of the lived body are for theorizing the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body in motion, critics have noted that he does not explicitly address gender within the theory of phenomenology. Judith Butler's question after considering his work was: "whose sexuality and whose bodies are being described, for 'sexuality' and 'bodies' remain abstractions without first being situated in concrete social and cultural context" (16). Vivian Sobchack also purposefully avoids discussing in depth the lived body in terms of gender in her book, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience.* She chooses instead to introduce the lived body in terms of its essential ontological functions in a way that provides "the ground for, the marking of and discrimination against the lived-body and its excessive, ambiguous, and over-running semiosis" (144). She acknowledges that the kind of subject Merleau-Ponty implicated as being the culture's normative lived-body is "latently marked as the 'unmarked' and masculine" (145). Sobchack does, however, introduce a variety of examples of marked or "disfigured" bodies so that the "female" body can contextualize and be contextualized within a broader range of culturally significant bodily discriminations. She also hopes that "the models of phenomenological inquiry used by certain feminist philosophers to describe the lived-body experience of 'women' in a culture that marks or 'disfigures' lived-bodies as 'female' might be suggestive for film theory and its descriptions of other discriminate lived-body experience…"(Sobchack 145-146).

In her article, "A Phenomenology of Gender," Johanna Oksala asks how phenomenology can account for gender. She investigates four different understandings of phenomenology for their potential in terms of theorizing gender including a classical reading, a corporeal reading, an intersubjective reading and a post-phenomenological reading. Nonetheless, her conclusion is that phenomenology, because of its refusal to acknowledge gender difference, can "extend its analysis to the question of gender only if its method is radically revised" (Oksala 1).

Dance scholar Sondra Fraleigh praises existential phenomenology's interest in the body and in "deconstructing a Western hierarchy;" however, taking up the "risky position of experiential description" leaves it vulnerable because it admits a "level of subjectivity" (142-143). With the exception of Simone de Beauvoir, existential phenomenology originated primarily in the thinking of men and developed as a revolt against traditional Western philosophy. Fraleigh notes that traditional philosophy had ignored and denied interest in the body, which was mythically associated with women and the mystery of birth (136). Unlike much of male-dominated philosophy, which has avoided vulnerability through logic and reason, existential phenomenology "owes more to insight…and allows for irrationality and accident as human concerns" (Fraleigh 139-140). Additionally, experiential description does not have appropriate or inappropriate topics.

Feminist philosopher, Iris M. Young's "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" does indeed use phenomenological description to trace "certain observable and rather ordinary ways in which women in our society typically comport themselves and move differently from the

ways that men do" (Young 53). She concludes that in the performance of certain

intentional movements, the female body-subject has often "lived her body tentatively and

in heightened consciousness of it as an object" (51). Young insists that the differences in

movement between men and women are not due to differences in anatomy or physiology

or some female 'essence,' but in "the particular situation of women as conditioned by

their sexist oppression in contemporary society" which entails "living the ever present

possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents

itself as the potential object of another subject's intention and manipulations, rather than

as a living manifestation of action and intention" (65-66). Though Young is overlooking

many examples of how male anatomy and physiology account for ways in which men

move differently than women, she emphasizes an important aspect of existential

phenomenology, which is the impact of context, situation and/or conditioning on the

lived-body.

Even though Merleau-Ponty's devaluation of gender is an issue of concern for

many feminist philosophers, Butler calls for a "feminist appropriation of Merleau-Ponty"

(Butler in Jeffner 98). Butler commends his emphasis on the body as expressions and

dramatizations of existential themes. Additionally, she perceives that phenomenological

reflection allows access to and description of "a scene of cultural struggle, improvisation,

and innovation, a domain in which the intimated and the political converge…a dramatic

opportunity for expression, analysis, and the change. The terms of this inquiry, however,

will not be found in the texts of Merleau-Ponty, but in the works of philosophical

feminism" (Butler in Jeffner 99) Butler's implication here is that we can turn to Butler

herself to shed light upon this subject.

The Body and Female Identity

Given that social and media constructions of female identity often lack diversity in portraying women's lives and desires, they are often out of step with the lived experiences and anatomies of actual women. What it means to be 'feminine,' for many women, includes more than what is reflected in cultural representations of the female body codified as ideal. For example, a range of female bodily experiences such as puberty, pregnancy, child-bearing, abortion, menopause, physical activity, etc., are significant constituents of female identity, yet are not reflected in mainstream media representations of the ideal. At the same time, bodily appearance is closely associated with identity for many women. The tension between male fantasies as they are manifested in representations of the female body and women's experiences evokes Foucault's identification of the "body as a central location in the contest for power" (201).

In order to challenge limiting notions of female identity, Butler calls for subversive action, or "gender trouble." She argues that we all put on gender performances, traditional and not, and we have a choice about what we perform. By choosing to be different, we might contribute to changing gender norms and what she perceives to be a normative, binary understanding of masculinity and femininity.

Feminists have been challenging normative, binary understandings of gender roles in various ways at different times. In the 1970's women experimented with the use of male dress to perform a type of stylistic androgyny. Radical feminists went as far as avoiding contact with men, taking anti-male positions on issues and making personal attacks on heterosexual women (Madonald169). bell hooks, on the other hand, proposes

shifting the focus of criticism to heterosexuality as an institution rather than to individual

women (hooks 245). For radical feminists, performing what resembled role-reversals

meant that women lost the freedom to be feminine. Politically, radical feminists

demonstrated anti-male sentiments by performing an identity that was anti-feminine.

The tone shifted in the 1980's and 1990's. The media took full advantage of the

evolving feminist positions, as was evidenced in an article entitled: "Feminism Now. It's

not about dungarees and hating men. Feminism is…relevant. Positive. Powerful. Sexy.

Strong" (*Cosmopolitan* October 1993). Advertisers promoted "Postfeminism" as a

"utopia where women could do whatever they pleased, provided they had sufficient will

and enthusiasm…[and] cultivated the joys, burdens, juggling of the New woman

superwoman…'freedom,' independence and pleasure" (Macdonald 90-92).

In many cases, media representations of postfeminist identity convey mixed

messages. Images of women pose elements such as sexuality against innocence, fragility

against strength, and vulnerability against self-confident indifference. Janice Winship

argues that the combination of sensuality and streetwise bravado visible in fashion

spreads in the 1980's can be positively construed. The influence of postfeminism on the

readers of these publications allows them to enjoy and even poke fun at images that older

feminists might regard as indisputably pornographic or offensive" (Macdonald 109). In

fact, a case can be made that these aspects of youth culture are breaking down old

oppositions between femininity and feminism. Other magazine articles encourage

readers to 'strut your funky stuff'" (Macdonald 109). Nevertheless, the teasing quality of

some of these texts is also disturbing. If the way to show 'attitude' or to revolt is to buy

girlish frocks or cashmere sweaters, postfeminist discourse repeats rather than resolves

contradiction (MacDonald 110). On the other hand, participating and indulging in fashion as a wacky form of self-expression denies the mere passivity invited by the ads in high fashion magazines.

I join Macdonald and others in acknowledging various positive aspects as well as challenges of the postfeminist position. One is that the characteristics of a postfeminist position include the notion of a woman who is "aware, self-reliant, and taking responsibility for her own future and well-being" (Macdonald 195). Another carry-over from early feminists is about having a choice: "That's what women's rights are all about, you know: the right to make your own choices and to take responsibility for the results" (*Cosmopolitan*, November 1978, 40). With these choices comes the challenge of negotiating the fine line between representing the sexually expressive female body-subject and the social tendency to code that body as a sexual object.

Rather than striving for equality by appropriating culturally constructed surface indicators of masculinity such as dress, the artists included in the following discussions are embracing femininity in their performances of nude, naked and/or sexually expressive bodies by incorporating ambiguous elements and by representing themselves, while embodying characteristics of the lived body such as expressiveness, activity and vibrancy. Additionally, while these artists perform the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body, they subvert mainstream media representations of that body, such as we say in the advertisement examples discussed earlier, by refusing to perform signifiers such as passive body language, coy poses and averted gaze, which code that body as the surveyed body. I propose that by representing themselves, the following screendance artists are conceptualizing a feminist ideal that is inclusive and encompasses

difference while acknowledging the ambiguity in visual images of the body and the female body's positive erotic appeal.

Kassenhauschen by Be Van Vark

Be van Vark evokes Western European oil painting and sculpture traditions of the female nude only to transgress them with ambiguous deformities and defacement in her screendance *Kassenhauschen* (2008). Van Vark submitted this one-minute piece to the Choreographic Captures Competition 2008, which is archived online (http://www. choreographiccaptures.org). *Kassenhauschen* begins with classical violin music and an image of dancer Barbara Gamper's nude body behind the glass of a window. The window frames Gamper's torso such that her head and legs are cut off, which gives her the appearance of classical statuary. She arches and twists her hips, which are wrapped in white fabric. The combination of the classical music, the sensuous nude female torso wrapped and framed in white, and the lush green trees in the background are reminiscent of a classical oil painting of a bucolic garden with a female nude.

The tone shifts, however, as Gamper presses her breasts against the glass with a bouncing movement. Rather than performing movement that resembles classical dance in any way, Gamper's movement gives the illusion that her breasts are two eyes widening and then looking around. She rocks side to side and descends in a way that looks as if her breasts are walking down the glass. She continues to drop down and reveals her face, which she proceeds to press and roll against the glass. The deformation stretches her nose and creates the appearance of a disfigured face. The beautiful white nude female refuses to play her culturally-determined role by performing what appears to be making faces at

us.Van Vark invokes the Western European tradition of classical statuary, then performs a repudiation of that tradition.

In semiotic terms, van Vark is employing what McDonald calls a "technique of erotic boundary crossing aimed ultimately at political reform" (101-102). On one hand, *Kassenhauschen* offers up an image of the female nude body, which is the most potent visual sign that a body is available for sexual encounter with another body. On the other hand, Gamper's performance of grotesque distortions serves to abort the process of fetishizing. By squishing and deforming her breasts, she makes them unavailable to be fetishized. She performs a nude female body seen through a window, which is coded as invitation to voyeuristic pleasure, but her movement contradicts that message. Her body resembles that of the surveyed female body seen in many advertisement images however, she refuses to play the role of the ideal body passively surveyed. In fact, her breasts resemble eyes that look back at the surveyor. She performs a nude female body that refuses to play the part as defined by either traditional art or consumer-culture ideology.

Still Life: Lying Down Textiles and Still Life: White Textiles by Grace Ndiritu

Like van Vark, Grace Ndiritu also performs art historical poses assumed by nudes in Western European painting traditions in two "video paintings." However, she subverts them by Africanizing them, incorporating ambiguous elements in her performances, and reclaiming female identity by bringing the "still" model to "life." *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles* (2006) (http://www.axisweb.org/seWork.aspx?WORKID=49547& VISUALID=81679) and *Still Life: White Textiles* (2006) (http://luxvideo.org/media/clips /grace_ndiritu/white_textiles.html) were inspired, in part, by the work of impressionist painter, Henri Matisse. In 1911, Matisse took a trip to Morocco, fell in love with African

textiles, and then painted a series of nudes surrounded by impressionistic vibrant patterns. Ndiritu performs the poses seen in Matisse's paintings with distinctly African fabrics and her distinctly African body.

In *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles,* Ndiritu mimics the art historical reclined nude pose of classical oil paintings, of many advertisements, and of Matisse's *Odalisque* as one element of the overall composition. Rather than lounging on folds of velvet or white sheets typical of advertisements and classical portraits of nudes, Ndiritu is enveloped in and surrounded by African fabrics. They cover the wall behind her, the surfaces she lies upon and her entire body including her head, except one arm, which she drapes over her hip. She shoots with a static camera, which emphasizes the stillness and "formal, painterly element" of the video (Ndirtu in White 10). However, unlike the "languorous delight" conveyed by Matisse's paintings, Ndiritu interrupts the stillness with an obscured face and her heavy breathing under the fabric (Kent 4).

Image 12: Grace Ndiritu's *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles* (2006)
http://ww.axisweb.org/seCVWK.aspx?ARTISTID=9891.

While many corporate advertisers feature the reclined female body that performs the role of the surveyed with signifiers such as the averted gaze, finger sucking and coy expressions, as seen in the Etam lingerie advertisement, Ndiritu assumes the position of that body but refuses to play the role of the surveyed. Instead of performing the averted gaze, which functions as an invitation to look freely upon the female body, Ndiritu obscures her gaze entirely. Rather than performing a suggestive gesture such as finger sucking, she also covers one arm with the fabric and centrally features the other arm as the sole portion of exposed body. Additionally, the fabric covers parts of the body that the Etam lingerie and many advertisements tend to sexualize. Most disturbingly of all, rather than present us with a still image, Ndiritu makes us aware of her breathing. In other words, Ndiritu makes us aware of how visual culture traditions have codified particular gestures to accompany the reclined female body as the passive surveyed and how she rejects that tradition in favor of bringing our attention to her active breathing movement.

Still Life: Lying Down Textiles' visual composition and Ndiritu's breathing movements operate semiotically to re-cast the decorative female nude body-object model as a subject and bring attention to her human-ness. Arts critic Sarah Kent interprets the heavy breathing as suggestive of anxiety or claustrophobia. "This state may be induced by the stillness required of a model or be indicative of the repressive circumstances imposed on many women…the shallow space in which she is confined and the silence of the piece make her seem stifled and muzzled and…invert the colonial gaze, as it were; so that from the model's viewpoint, reality is revealed to be more constrained" (Kent 4). Paradoxically, the cloth-covered face makes us more aware of the human underneath; she

is not just one more pretty thing to see among the cloths. In terms of Merleau-Ponty's notions of the lived body, it is the model's movement that distinguishes her body as lived, life-full, rather than as a still object. Breathing is the minimal movement necessary to achieve this indication. Additionally, rather than representing the female body as a symbol by decontextualizing her or placing her in a context that caters to male fantasy, as do many advertisements, Ndiritu is representing herself in a context or 'situation' that she herself constructed. Rather than operating semiotically to de-subjectify, *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles'* background/context serves as an extension of Ndiritu's expression of her African female identity and subjectivity. We are aware of the image as her response to previous images.

In *Still Life: White Textiles,* Ndiritu asserts her subjectivity by performing a seduction rich with ambiguities. Where *Still Life: Lying Down Textiles* speaks of confinement, repression, sensuality, color and provocative patterns, *Still Life: White Textiles* is teasing and promiscuous. Ndiritu directs the seduction at us in ways that are both inviting and perplexing.

Leaving her arms and legs exposed, fabrics hang behind and in front of Ndiritu, who is seated with her legs splayed. Her hands glide down the edges of the hanging fabric, across her exposed thighs and around her hips "as though invoking an absent lover" (Kent 4). Then her hands slip behind the fabric, so where they go next is left up to the imagination. The fabric creates provocative visual ambiguity with its amoeba-like circle patterns that are positioned near where her crotch and breasts would be if the fabric were removed. The spiky edged pattern reminds critic Sarah Kent of the "vagina dentata of Freudian fears and fantasies" (4).

Image 13: Grace Ndiritu's *Still Life: White Textiles* (2006).
http://ww.axisweb.org/seCVWK.aspx?ARTISTID=9891.

Ndiritu performs intriguing, ambiguous messages. Her slow hands exploring her body and the cloth erotically speak of invitation and pleasure. We are being invited to her body. The sexual parts of her body are replaced with African fabric. She is inviting us to an African-ness. Yet in addition to looking like sexual body parts, the amoeba-like circle pattern also resembles a deranged face with spiky teeth and crooked eyes. One could imagine the face saying; come if you dare.

Ndiritu is performing seduction on her own terms. She uses the power the female nude body has to draw viewers in, and then plays with that power. By inviting us to fetishize, peaking our curiosity and sparking our imagination, she is taking control and has us in the palms of her exploring hands. She is in full control of the extent to which she is exposed. Ndiritu seduces and asserts her female subjectivity in a way that does not compromise herself.

<u>*Tides*</u> <u>by Amy Greenfield</u>

While Ndiritu's and van Vark's performances play on the power the female nude body has to seduce and be fetishized, Greenfield subverts those culturally-coded responses by risking the vulnerability that comes with performing female naked-ness, performing it to excess and finding its power in its relation to nature. *Tides* (1982) begins with a quote by Isadora Duncan; "Movement peculiar to its nature is eternal to its nature" (get source from film credits). Indeed, Greenfield pays homage to the natural rhythm, shape, force, liquid texture, reflective light and motion of ocean waves by casting them as co-choreographers. By doing so, she also embodies key concepts central to existential phenomenology and Merleau Ponty's notions of the lived body.

While Ndiritu references voyeuristic viewing by performing ambiguous, seductive, teasing glimpses of her nude body behind the fabric, Greenfield leaves nothing to the imagination and yet makes no reference in her movement to the seductive powers that a stark naked body can hold. Rather, the camera follows her body as it rolls onto the shore, then back to the water with the ocean's repetitive surging and retreating. For the duration of the 12-minute screendance, Greenfield's naked body fills the frame and is shot from many angles. In fact, the long exposure to her body operates as a performance of nakedness to excess. *Tides* reads as if Greenfield were responding to contemporary visual culture's obsession with female nudity by saying, "You say you want it? Well, here it is, and here is more, and more…" In other words, performing entirely exposed for a duration of time serves to normalize the naked body. Greenfield allows us time to work through ways in which we are trained to view the naked female body such as fetishizing and scrutinizing, and then her continued performance proposes that we look at the body

differently. Her performance defines the female body not as an object of desire but as one of many beautiful forms found in nature.

In "The Cognitive Body: The Films of Amy Greenfield," Bruce Elder discusses Greenfield's linking of female identity with nature in ways that that emphasize female submission, lack of self-assertion and lack of control. According to Elder, Greenfield's performance in *Tides* demonstrates attributes of bodily cognition, or what he calls "primal cognition," which are based on elements such as touch, sensuality and the preverbal (294). He argues that her performance of primal cognition relates to her beliefs about a "distinct, specifically female sensibility" (294). *Tides* relates "the female to earth and water and even suggests that the female spirit does not insist upon the upright position with its connotations of aggression, control and self-assertion, but can accept entering into and being controlled by earthly forces or marine rhythms and can tolerate submitting the self to forces that lie beyond it" (306). Elder is evoking gender stereotypes in this interpretation. He associates the "upright position" with attributes stereotypically associated with male identity; aggression, control and self-assertion, and female identity with attributes such as submission, acceptance and non-insistence (passivity). Elder is obviously drawing these conclusions based on the sequences in *Tides* when Greenfield is allowing her movement to be propelled by the force of the waves. I suggest that her performance when considered as a whole links female sensibility and spirit with earth and water in more complex ways such as performing the 'lived body' in context, and generates other meanings with other types of movement such as running and spinning.

Existential phenomenology and Merleau Ponty's concept of the lived body hold that individual subjectivity is "understood in view of its intersection with a surrounding world, constituted by other objects, natural phenomena and other human beings" (Fraleigh 136). Greenfield performs an embodiment of the lived body as she asserts her subjectivity within the context/situation/condition of the ocean waves in different ways. In some cases, she surrenders to its motion by allowing her rolling-on-the-shore movement to be determined by the movement of the waves. But in another sequence of shots, Greenfield spins and falls into the water's "arms." She experiments with the way the ocean water catches her body as she falls into one wave after another. Heidegger (1962: 164) chose the image of falling to describe the lived dimension of present time. He viewed falling as both a movement and a symbol of our existential mode of being-in-the-world (Fraleigh 135). By performing these different movements, Greenfield asserts her subjectivity as it intersects with the surrounding world and the natural phenomena of the sea. Thus rather than performing a submission or lack of insistence, as Elder suggests, I view Greenfields' surrendering to the waves force more as a riding on the waves' motion, as one would do when surfing or when being lifted by a dance partner.

One of the most striking and subversive sequences in *Tides* features shots of Greenfield rising to an upright position and surging through the heavy water with running movement that is distinctly self-asserting and unsubmissive. In fact, Greenfield performs a combination of semiotic elements rarely seen in mainstream media or other representations of female identity. On one hand, she performs the naked female body, shot close up so that her exposed hips and thighs fill the frame, which are typically coded as symbols for sexuality of some kind. In fact, Greenfield is performing with a body that

falls within the realm of what advertising codes as an idealized female body to be surveyed. On the other hand, she makes no reference to any of the signifiers such as gestures and expressions that would code her body as the surveyed. The slowed film speed emphasizes the force of her pelvis, her body's center of gravity, and her strong legs as they plough through the water straight toward the camera by capturing the muscular exertion of her body and the water she displaces. In this sequence, Greenfield epitomizes the female, lived body moving with intention. In contrast to the sequences when the force of the waves made her movement, in this sequence she is the one making waves with the force of her movement.

Image 14: Amy Greenfield performing in *Tides* (#1). (1982).
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=Amy+Greenfield+TIDES+imag
es&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-
8&source=univ&ei=p_9NTIW3OorWtQPc7v3XDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct
=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCEQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

Greenfield also captures the "lived dimension of present time" by slowing down the camera when filming. In "Filmdance: Space, Time, and Energy" Greenfield describes how shooting in slow motion serves to "thicken" the filmic action (295-296). Greenfield's use of the term "thicken" resonates with the phenomenological term "thick

description," which refers to a research method that privileges sensitivity to detail and the multiple significations that an activity, event or symbol may bear and as well as its relationship with context (Geertz 2). The slowed motion also heightens the beauty of the water: *Tides* performs exquisite visuals of water rushing, waves tumbling, kinetic, liquid, wet shininess. Indeed, the slowed motion in *Tides* reads like an Image of lived dimension of present time as well as a sense of always becoming.

Image 15: Amy Greenfield performing in *Tides* (#2). (1982).
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=Amy+Greenfield+TIDES+imag
es&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-
8&source=univ&ei=p_9NTIW3OorWtQPc7v3XDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct
=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCEQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

Greenfield also performs an embodiment of a notion central to phenomenology, which is that we never perceive phenomena in static unchanging perspectives. Phenomena exist through time. The tidal cycles, movement and repetition featured in *Tides* are apt metaphors for the way in which time and motion are ever-present conditions, and their continuous motion also denotes a state of becoming. Likewise, Greenfield's body in motion is a body bearing meaning that is constantly self-displacing.

Her performance of different movements, which arise out of her interaction with the condition of waves repeatedly surging onto shore, personifies a body always "presenting as well as representing the coming into being and of being and representation" (Sobchak 61). Greenfield performs identity as fluid and always undergoing change.

Rather than re-confirming advertising and consumer culture's coding of the female body as an erotic object, *Tides*' conceptually ambiguous representation links female identity with nakedness, nature, cognition and spirituality. Greenfield draws inspiration from dancer Isadora Duncan, whom she quotes on her website, "a new nakedness no longer at war with spirituality and intelligence" ("Dance of the Future" in *Art of Dance*). Greenfield performs the naked body as another form of nature, which is always becoming. "I'm willing to expose myself nakedly, literally and figuratively in new ways…it is so frightening…For me, this is learning through the body, through human motion. We respond, discover, move through video externalizing the language of human motion we all have inside us but which we tend to put down, or deny-those things people might feel momentarily but don't confront bodily" (Greenfield in Elder 298). Where Merleau-Ponty's lived body is one that moves with intention, thus reflecting consciousness, Greenfield performs nakedness and movement as a vehicle for expanding consciousness.

APROP/Closer by Aitor Echeverria, Carolina Alejos, Silvia Marin

Of the screendances included in this project, *Aprop* (2007) (http://www.youtube .com/watch?v=MUd0wu92syQ) hovers closest to the fine line between women artists who are representing female identity with sexually expressive female bodies and the social tendency to code those bodies as sexual objects. While *Tides* features a highly

coded sign, the female body, it disturbs convention by performing it in highly ambiguous ways. *Aprop* moves yet closer to the fine line by not only featuring similarly highly coded female bodies, but capturing them engaging in sexual activity. Echeverria, Alejos and Marin are forcing recognition of the ambiguities that occur at points where female sexuality, art, feminism and pornography intersect. The elements that distinguish *Aprop* as unquestionably artful are its use of visually ambiguous representations of women who perform as expressive, vibrant subjects.

Image 16: Close up shot in *Aprop* (2007) by Aitor Echeverria.
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=APROP+images&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=HAFOTMrcNoa-sQOzxbzHDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCIQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

This six-and-a-half minute screendance opens with an image of a slice of curved light surrounded by blackness. The light fades up like a fast motion sunrise to illuminate a patch of rippled surface screen left. Subsequent cuts feature fleshy, unidentifiable body parts lit so that their shadows form curvaceous shapes within the blackness. The abstract shots give way to reveal parts of two women's bodies as they perform sensuous

movements such as skin to skin caresses, fingers brushing across a lower back, spooning

hips and thighs, lips whispering, sounds of breathing and sighing. *Aprop* evokes an

orgasmic experience with its sensuously erotic sounds and imagery along with its A-B-A

structure, where the B section occurs near the end and performs the climax, quite

literally. Given that *Aprop* features two naked women engaging in sexual activity,

Echeverria, Alejos and Marin are forcing us to look at where art ends and pornographic

representations begins.

Image 17: Side lighting in *Aprop* (2007) by Aitor Echeverria.
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=APROP+images&oe=UTF-
8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=HAFOTMrcNoa-
sQOzxbzHDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCIQsAQw
AA&biw=999&bih=624

Though *Aprop* shares attributes with pornographic representations such as the sex

scene in the commercial film *Chloe* (2010), its use of ambiguity positions it firmly as a

work of art. Like *Aprop*, a scene in *Chloe* (http://www.onemorelesbian.com/chloe-

amanda-seyfried-and-julianne-moore-sex-scene.html) features two women engaged with

each other sexually. The scene is comprised of graphic shots of their bodies and explicitly sexual activity where one is giving the other pleasure. The imagery is literal and unmetaphoric unlike that of *Aprop* and other screendances, which are rich with metaphors and ambiguity. While the actors' bodies in *Chloe* are fully lit so you can see exactly what is going on, in *Aprop*, the minimal side lighting accentuates the bodies' forms aesthetically, which encourages overall contemplation of the image as something beautiful. In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Lynda Nead tells us that pornography falls into the same category as propaganda and advertising. "Both forms of cultural production are intent on selling and persuading to 'spend'…If the pleasures of pornography are defined in terms of motivation, promiscuity and commoditization, then the pleasures of art are seen to lie in their opposing values, in contemplation, discrimination and transcendent value" (Nead 89). Where pornography's aims are simple, art and screendances such as *Aprop* speak with more complexity. Art is characterized by a multiplicity of intentions, while pornography's sole concern is arousal (Nead 104).

Where pornography and many mainstream media representations code the sexually expressive, nude female body as just one thing, an erotic object, *Aprop* employs ambiguous imagery that portrays the female body as not only one thing. As the description of the opening shots suggests, the lighting and close-ups in *Aprop* perform the body as landscape. The ripple pattern of dancers' ribs appears as rippled sand formations. Light cast across a back looks like the sun rising over an expanse of desert. Body parts are abstracted to reveal their curved, organic shapes that evoke other shapes found in nature. Echeverria, Alejos and Marin invite us to consider that the female body

is many things. *Aprop* does not stir the viewer to action, as pornography aims to do. Rather, the viewer is offered imagery that encourages contemplation.

Not only is the sexually expressive female body an erotic object in *Aprop*, it is also a subject. The dancers are taking pleasure in their own and each other's "natural" sensualities. Their actions and expressions code them as subjects experiencing as much or more pleasure than the viewer. Rather than performing sexuality passively, these women are participating fully as active subjects in sexual activity, not unlike Lakshmi in the Indian representation of sexual activity.

Image 18: Two dancers performing in *Aprop* (2007) by Aitor Echeverria.
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=APROP+images&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=HAFOTMrcNoa-sQOzxbzHDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCIQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

Representing sexually expressive female bodies as subjects, and as resembling multiple forms, serves as a metaphor for the multiple complexities that *Aprop* is proposing constitute female identity. *Aprop* reclaims these women's sexual expression for themselves as opposed to the way the sex scene in *Chloe* is operating, which is to

entertain the viewer/the surveyor by performing "eye candy" or gratuitous sex. In terms of the narrative, this scene could have been implied or suggested or referenced in the script rather than depicted graphically. However, in keeping with commercial Hollywood film tradition, scenes such as these encourage box office sales. Conversely, *Aprop* resists this type of simplistic, reductive representation of female identity. Most importantly, *Aprop* reclaims the sexually expressive female body-subject without denying her female attributes.

<u>*Mass Ornament* by Natalie Bookchin</u>

Mass Ornament (2009) (http://vimeo.com/5403546) engages with media representations of sexually expressive female bodies in motion such as the scene from the commercial film *Body Double* (1984) where a woman is dancing alone in her room, yet distinguishes itself from those representations in a number of critical ways. Natalie Bookchin appropriates "found" YouTube clips of people (mostly women) dancing alone in their rooms and edits them together according to particular movements and particular themes. Unlike the scene in *Body Double* where the stereotypical, culturally encoded "ideal" female body performs provocatively as the surveyed body specifically for the surveyor, or male gaze, *Mass Ornament* features a range of bodies that reflects an inclusiveness of difference. In addition to the scene from *Body Double*, Bookchin's representations evoke the dance routines of Busby Berkeley, The Tiller Girls and Leni Riefenstahl in that they are grouped together based on performed gestures, which they perform in unison, and many of which are sexually expressive. By re-presenting hundreds of YouTube dancers' self-representations, she validates them and they appear as

something larger than their separate selves. In the end, *Mass Ornament* brings attention to

their humanity more than their sexuality.

     Mass Ornament opens with a series of empty rooms, the individual dancers'

private domestic spaces, which by virtue of their display online are transformed into

public stages. The things in their rooms appear as "props," and generate meaning in

terms of their reflection and extension of each dancer's identity. Bookchin views the

things in the rooms as other "characters" in the dances, and she captures the dancers

dancing to their objects – to their mirrors, television sets, paintings, and of course, to their

computers (Bookchin *Dancing Machines* 2). Rather than performing as the surveyed

body for the surveyor, the *Mass Ornament* dancers' movements read more as expressions

of their individual identities, as experimentation, as showing off and, in some cases, as

celebration.

Image 19: Dancers performing in *Mass Ornament* (2009) by Natalie Bookchin.
http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=images+Mass+Ornament+natal
ie+bookchin+images&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-
8&source=univ&ei=LQVOTJfVKoH48AbQovmUDA&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&
ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CB8QsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

     Conversely, a scene from *Body Double* features the female body performing

explicitly for the voyeur. The scene entails a man in an apartment building looking

through a telescope at a woman in the neighboring building who can be seen dancing

alone in her room. The way the camera captures the woman's apartment building with multiple rooms lined up side by side as seen from outside resembles the way a series of dancers framed in *Mass Ornament* are also lined up side by side. Unlike *Mass Ornament,* however, *Body Double* features the stereotypical, surveyed female body performing all the signifiers that code her explicitly as the object of the surveyor's desire. Her body resembles those of the advertisements discussed earlier. She moves provocatively, dressed in bikini bottoms and topless. Her intent is single minded: to arouse, seduce and ultimately manipulate the man who is watching her. Indeed, cutaway shots capture him reveling in his newfound "discovery." Compared to the *Mass Ornament* dancers, who are dancing as much for themselves, sometimes innocently, as for the viewers, the dancer in *Body Double* lacks innocence and exemplifies the quintessential female, surveyed body-object featured in many commercial films and advertisements.

The arrangement of multiple clips of dancers performing the same movement, lined up in a single row across the screen in *Mass Ornament,* also evokes the chorus line-style and unison choreography seen in works such as Berkeley's and The Tiller Girls.' Bookchin named this piece *Mass Ornament* after the theory Siegfried Kracauer developed in 1927. He argued that "synchronized acts, such as the Tiller Girls, reflect the mechanized gestures involved in the industrial factory work of a mass society" (Kane 1). He analyzed popular dance genres of the 1920's through the Depression era that were comprised of rows of choreographed bodies moving in synchronicity. The works of Berkley, The Tiller Girls and Riefenstahl all depict masses of moving bodies that are controlled, efficient and rationalized. The image of the Tiller Girls' movement reminded Kracauer of "a lifeless monster" that he termed *Mass Ornament* (Kracauer in Kane 1).

The Tiller Girls' precise, machine-like movement and geometric choreography embodied aspects of Taylorism and Fordism, which were characterized by social and economic systems that focused on large-scale factory production.

Image 20: Dancers performing in Busby Berkeley's *Footlight Parade* (1933). http://www.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=Busby+Berkeley+images&oe=UTF-8&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=lQ1XTIXLGofGsAOMuJTbAg&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CCcQsAQwAA&biw=999&bih=624

While critics saw The Tiller Girls' choreography as an apt expression of the time, Bookchin is proposing a post-Fordism that describes a "shift away from the masses of workers in the same space, to smaller scale production by workers scattered around the world" (Bookchin in Kane 2). The "workers" today are linked by technology and often work from home, rather than being linked by assembly lines and conveyor belts.

> The YouTube dancer alone in her room, performing a dance routine that is both extremely private, and extraordinarily public is, in its own way, a perfect expression of our age. Just as rows of spectators in the 1920' and 1930's sat in movie theaters and stadiums watching rows of bodies moving in formation, with YouTube videos, single viewers sit alone in front of computer screens watching   individual dancers voluntarily moving in formation, alone in their rooms (Bookchin in Kane1).

Though Bookchin evokes the works of Berkeley and The Tiller Girls in terms of design, she subverts them in terms of meaning and practice. Berkeley and The Tiller Girls were exclusive in their casting. Individuality was discouraged in favor of uniformity. They hired dancers based on their attractiveness and physical attributes such as height and weight. Like the female body in *Body Double,* the bodies chosen for their productions fit a particular ideal mold pre-determined by the directors, which also reflected the popular cultural dictates of the time. As well, the dancers in Berkeley and The Tiller Girls wore matching, uniform costumes and were placed in the performance space as one would arrange sculptural objects in a composition. "Individual dancers had no say in its form and the choreography held no value for the dancers. In its formation, they lost their individuality, humanity, and sexuality" (Bookchin in Kane 1).

Conversely, Bookchin selects the dancers based on their movement and gestures. In other words, they are recognized for their action, which is typically coded as a male attribute in mainstream media representations. Movement for Merleau-Ponty's lived body is also what signifies intention and consciousness, thus denoting subjectivity. Bookchin identifies the dancers by their gestures, the vehicle by which they are bearing meaning in the world, according to existential phenomenologist David Carr. With this focus on the action rather than on an ideal body type, and with each dancer seen in her own space rather than as a collective group in a shared space, *Mass Ornament* reflects an inclusiveness of difference by featuring a range of bodies that vary in shape, color, size, age and dress.

In *Mass Ornament,* Bookchin creates a doubly mediated performance of female identity that features the active, expressive female body-subject who is acknowledged for

her particular movement and is representing herself within a context/situation/condition she determined. Bookchin constructed *Mass Ornament* with clips of women representing themselves. In many cases, the dancers perform "utterly conventional gender roles," revealing ways in which popular culture is embodied (Bookchin in *Dancing Machines* 2). When these women choose to express themselves, they draw from the body language they know, which in many cases, comes from their exposure to mainstream media representations. Many of these dancers are turning themselves into spectacles. They are having fun putting themselves on display. For the most part, these are not trained dancers. Consequently, what comes through with Bookchin's intervention is the human spirit behind the movement. As critic David Pagel describes it, *Mass Ornament* reads like an "everyday parade of vulnerable human beings" (3). The sheer number of bodies performing similar movement in *Mass Ornament* is also a powerful demonstration of collective self-identity. It forefronts the dancers who are making a claim for embodiment and publicness "in the face of their glaring disappearance in the disembodied, isolated, screen-based virtual environment of the web' (Bookchin in *Dancing Machine* 2-3).

Additionally, unlike the Berkeley and Tiller Girls dancers, whose individuality was denied, the dancers in *Mass Ornament* are the directors of their own spectacle. They express their identities through their choices of context and movement. They hold authority over the way in which they represent themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the question of whether women, screendance artists in particular, can represent themselves in a way which avoids or resists mainstream coding. We see that nude, naked and sexually expressive female bodies are deeply

culturally encoded in ways that do not necessarily reflect the experiences of women. Mainstream media representations such as corporate advertising and commercial Hollywood cinema, promote the concept of an idealized female body, which also demotes a tolerance of difference. They tend to encourage a voyeuristic gaze and foster notions of the male as surveyor and female as the surveyed, which has limiting effects on the development of female identity. However, "while the female body remains an active battlefield, fashion and bodily adornment are now at least languages over which the media have lost full control" (Macdonald 221). I would add screendance to that list since artists such as those included in this discussion are performing the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive body to make statements about female identity in more complex ways.

The screendance artists discussed here subvert advertising and commercial cinema discourses around the female body by performing nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female bodies in motion, moving with intention, with conscious subjectivity, by incorporating ambiguities and by creating their own representations, situated in a context of their own choosing. They each negotiate the fine line between representing the sensuous, sexually expressive body and the social tendency to code that body as a sexual object. The closer the performance is to being sexually expressive, the finer the line becomes. Nonetheless, rather than employing images of female sexuality as a strategy to encourage viewers to "spend," as do advertising and pornography, these screendance artists are exploring expressions of female identity through their artistic practices.

Screendance artists are "painting their own pictures" as a way to discover themselves. Bookchin was intrigued by how the YouTube dancers were using dance

practice as a way of exploring identity (Bookchin in Willis 2). In *Mass Ornament* she is making collective what is an intimate process. Greenfield also finds video and recorded dance as valuable catalysts for personal discovery (Elder 298) "Video as communication can be the process of how people learn about themselves…we respond, discover, move through video" (Greenfield in Elder 298). As well, Ndiritu feels strongly about the power of self-representation to lead to self-discovery and therefore about doing all the production jobs involved in creating her screendances herself. "My personal belief is that the magic and beauty of art is…about doing it yourself…Taking full responsibility as the maker also means I have to go deeper into my own self, challenge my personal boundaries and adapt by learning new skills…And hopefully learn something valuable about myself in the process" (Ndiritu *Artist Statement* 1).

The female body does not speak only of itself, however, "in the arts, women have more scope to explore new relationships between artifact and spectator" (Macdonald 196). As Nead put it, "as well as being a metaphor for art itself…the represented female nude can be understood as a discourse on the subject. Through the procedure of art, women can become culture" (Nead 58). I would add that by representing themselves in artful ways such as the screendances artists in this study have done, culture begins to reflect their voices and who they are rather than them becoming culture entirely. Screendance artists such those discussed in this study are engaged in the process of investigating new ways in which women's bodies are represented, which serves to promote bodily alternative images and identities.

Chapter 5 -

The Veiled Body:
Performing Female Identity, Ambiguity and the Veil in
Screendances by G. Ndiritu, M. Abbasi and I. Rocamora

"…if the secret imagined to lie behind the veil reveals one thing, it is that it cannot be contained within a single truth, experience or understanding" (Bailey and Tawadros 2).

In a transnational world characterized by the global circulation of images, sounds, goods and populations, media representations such as those of veiled women impact complexly on the expressions of and shaping of female identity. Between the events surrounding 9/11 and the conflicts stirred by the United States' interest in Middle Eastern oil, the media has been saturated with images of the veiled Islamic woman over the past few decades. In some cases, the media representations of veiled woman re-confirm valid aspects of female identity as defined by some women. For others, those media representations are reductive, misleading, and perpetuate stereotypes. For many, the representations are operating in both ways and more.

The inherent complexity of representations of veiled women is due in part to the fact that as signifiers, both the female body and the veil contain myriad meanings. Chapter 4 includes discussions about the profusion of ways in which the media profusely construct representations of the female body. The headscarf also overflows with a wide range of meanings. In Arabic, there is no single word for the veil (Bailey and Tawadros 18). In fact, it qualifies as what Kaja Silverman coins a "rich" signifier: one that contains symbolic, iconic and indexical elements (*Subjectivity* 22). To complicate further, what the headscarf symbolizes varies according to personal, geographic, social, religious and

political factors, all of which change over time and many of which people feel strongly about. Cultural battles are fought through the bodies of women, and the veiled female body is no exception.

Unfortunately, there exists a profound gap between the experiences and beliefs of many veiled women whose bodies are the sites of the debates and the ways in which they are being represented. Contemporary western media codes the headscarf as a symbol for things such as the oppression of Muslim women by their religion. However, many veiled women and critics argue that this perception "is often linked to stereotypes and prejudice, and that the media often try to read too much into the headscarf" (Schiffer 1). The image of the veil so easily translates into the visual vocabulary of oppression that it diverts attention away from the more pressing issues for many Muslim women, such as their legal status in issues relating to custody inheritance, testimony, education and access to healthcare (Mohanty 73, Donnell 124). Additionally, the veiled woman has become one of the "universal images of the third world woman…setting in motion a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining existing first/third world connections" (Mohanty 73). Recurring images of the veiled female body have also been central to Orientalist imagery, which activates the ideological conditioning of the Muslim woman's body as a site for voyeurism and as an object coded as otherness and difference (Sedira 70).

For example, in 1985, of all the images featured on the cover of *National Geographic,* the image of the "Afghan Girl," finally identified as Sharbat Gula, was named as "the most recognized photograph" in the history of the magazine (Denker 2).

What is it about this image that captured the attention of so many? How is it operating
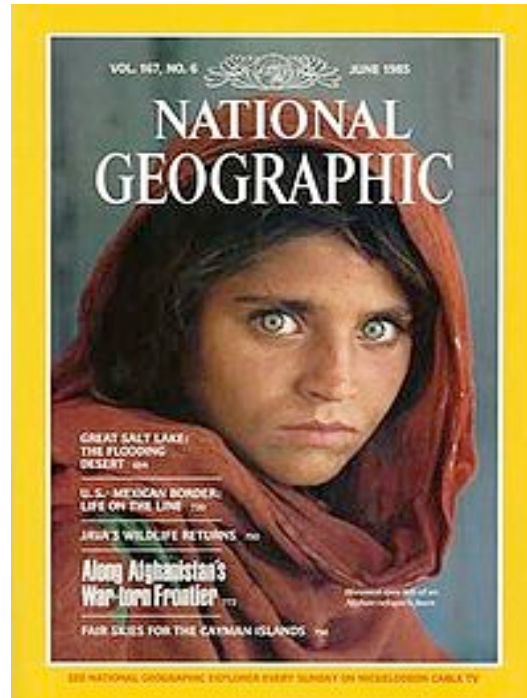
ideologically?

Image 21: *National Geographic* cover image of Sharbat Gula (June 1985).
http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://qippy.com/blog/wp-
content%255Cuploads/2010/03/sharbat_gula1.jpg&imgrefurl=http://qippy.com/blog/%3
Fp%3D1824&h=443&w=311&sz=46&tbnid=ylLVI9YIBrzOxM:&tbnh=127&tbnw=89
&prev=/images%3Fq%3DSharbat%2BGula%2BNational%2BGeographic%2Bcover%2
Bimage&zoom=1&q=Sharbat+Gula+National+Geographic+cover+image&usg=__4Hs5k
0g5JadX6kOH1zWccOg-
Ido=&sa=X&ei=fYjUTM7WLIP2tgPBwNWOCw&ved=0CB0Q9QEwAw

In semiotic terms, this image contains narrative signifiers the media often use to

produce representations that sensationalize and fetishize. In particular, it juxtaposes

oppositional signifiers, which generate interest, conflict and intrigue. Gula's eyes are one

of the first elements that capture attention. On one hand, they are a soothing tone of

watery green. On the other hand, they speak of elements such vigilant alarm, wildness,

fierceness and vulnerability. Her features are classically proportioned in ways Western

aesthetics code as youthful female beauty. Conversely, her face is dirty and draped with

a torn veil, which is coded as a symbol of elements such as violence, war, oppression,

sexism, sexual abuse, poverty, foreign-ness, exoticism and religious fundamentalism.

Juxtaposing conflicting signifiers is one of the ways this image of the veiled female

captured the attention of so many.

　　　This image also re-confirms the construction of the veiled Muslim female as

mapped by the Western mind. It represents the Muslim woman's body in ways that are

central to Orientalist imagery such as coding Gula as anonymous, passive, exotic and as

an ideological object shrouded in fantasy and mystery (Sedira 70). In terms of the veil, it

reads as a symbol of culture and the related conflict between colonized and colonizer – a

site of contestations (Sedira 70). This image of Gula also demonstrates that the much-

analyzed Orientalist gaze, "through which the veil is viewed as an object of mystique,

exoticism and eroticism and the veiled woman as an object of fantasy, excitement and

desire," is not entirely replaced by the xenophobic, Islamophobic gaze (Bailey and

Tawadros 122-123). The veil has come to represent both the alluring and the hostile and

more.

　　　Given that the veil has become an item of clothing "drastically overburdened with

competing symbolism" and that recurring images of veiled female bodies repeatedly

indent themselves on our consciousness, how can screendance and other visual artists

contend with such representations? (Bailey and Tawadros 10). Additionally, given the

gap between individual experiences of veiling and the complex and conflicting status of

the veil in a range of public arenas, to what extent can screendance and other visual

artists create representations that narrow the gap and move the debate forward? What are the ideological repercussions of appropriating the image of the veiled female body?

I resonate with bell hooks who, in *Black Looks,* tells us that in order to move the debate forward, visual artists must create a context for transformation by creating transformative imagery.

> [It] is not just a question of critiquing the status quo. It is also about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what type of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad. Making a space for the transgressive image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create a context for transformation (hooks *Black Looks* 3).

I argue that works by screendances artists such as Grace Ndiritu, Mohammad Abbasi and Isabel Rocamora do indeed serve to create a context for transformation by constructing images that move us away from thinking about the veiled female body unequivocally. Key to their transgression are ways in which they feature visual, conceptual and perceptual ambiguity. The ambiguous elements in their screendances make a space for multiple interpretations, which serve to perpetuate more plural and complex viewpoints about the veil and female identity. Ndiritu's conceptually ambiguous *Time* responds to news media's tendency to fuel fears about difference by stereotyping, sensationalizing and/or demonizing veiled Islamic bodies and coding the veiled female body as an oppressed, victimized other. Abbasi's *I am My Mother* incorporates ambiguous, abstract as well as figurative dance to represent his mother's inner experiences. The headscarf becomes a partition between her public and private worlds. The ambiguity between the title*, I am My Mother*, and Abbasi's male gender raises questions about gender and identity. Though Rocamora's *Horizon of exile* hovers

precariously close to re-confirming media representations of the veiled woman as exoticized other whose future holds little promise, she employs ambiguity to perform the veiled female body in exile by constructing a conjunction of incongruent signifiers. She constructs metaphoric and literal representations of the veiled female body in exile with ambiguous elements such as suspended bodies rolling in slow motion and abstracted representations of violent acts. These screendance artists are each performing representations of the veiled female body in ways that contribute to moving the headscarf debate forward.

Methodology

In order to appreciate the complexities involved in representing the veiled female body as an expression of female identity, I begin by examining elements of the headscarf debate. Given that the debate is complex and far-reaching enough to be the subject of an entire dissertation, I limit my discussions to highlighting the key elements relevant to this study. Frantz Fanon provides historical and political perspectives, particularly surrounding issues of veiling in Algeria. I turn to Nazira Zain al-din and others to identify issues of concern for women who do not want to wear the veil. Bailey and Tawadros and others in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* provide poignant examples of women for whom veiling is a profound expression of their identity.

Since representing the veiled female body operates ideologically in different ways depending on who is representing that body, I begin with the work of Iranian screendance artist Abbasi's *I Am My Mother.* Though Abbasi is not female, he is representing female identity with the veil, a piece of clothing worn by women in his native culture. I draw

from Mernissi Fatima's *Women and Islam* to shed light on different ways the veil defines

space in the analysis of *I Am My Mother*.

Since neither Ndiritu nor Rocamora are Muslim, yet they both straddle more than

one culture, their representations of the veil are fetishistic to an extent, and their works

share attributes with many intercultural films. Additionally, since Ndiritu employs

strategies used by mainstream media representations for her own ends, I begin

discussions of her work with a semiotic comparative analysis of examples of media

representations as seen in a few issues of TIME magazine with Ndiritu's short

screendance, *TIME*. Laura Marks' *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema,*

Embodiment and the Senses is illuminating in the analysis of how the veil, an object of

one culture, "translates" when it is featured by an artist from another culture.

Rocamora's longer, more elaborately produced screendance, *Horizon of exile* also

features the veil to represent female identity but does so complexly. Therefore, I dedicate

a large portion of this chapter to construct two lines of argument about this piece. First, I

draw from Marks, Hamid Naficy's *Accented Cinema* and others to examine ways in

which *Horizon of exile* performs the exiled female body. Then I address how it represents

the veiled female body by bringing in E. Patrick Johnson, Gayartri Chakravory Spivak,

Linda Alcoff, Zineb Sedira and others.

I save discussion of Ndiritu's *Nightingale* for last since it embodies most closely

the transgressive, polyvocal representation, which I propose can begin to "create a

context for transformation" and narrow the gap between how the veil is represented by

many mainstream news media representations and the experiences of veiled women

themselves (hooks *Black Looks* 3). Marks, Sedira, Ian White and others inform

discussions about the fluid, continually changing veiled female identity Ndiritu performs in *Nightingale*.

<u>Elements of the Headscarf Debate</u>

One of the factors that fuels the controversy over the veil is that, as a symbol, its meaning is constantly shifting according to different time periods, political contexts and according to different individuals. Additionally, since the veil represents female identity for women and men of opposing beliefs, the figure of the veiled woman becomes symbolic for all sides of the political debate. During the early part of the twentieth century in Egypt, for example, removing the veil in public "was a sign of defiance and feminist resistance" (Al-Ani 103). Conversely, in Algeria during the 1950's and 1960's, wearing the veil in public was seen as a symbol of Arab resistance to French Colonial oppression (Fanon 49, Al-Ani 103). During that time period, political differences were being played out through the veiled female body where on one hand, Algerian tradition demanded that she wear the veil to maintain a "rigid separation of the sexes," while on the other hand, "*the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria*" (emphasis in the original) (Fanon *A Dying Colonialism* 49). While wearing the veil during one historical political context reads as defiant resistance, at another time and political context the same act reads as conformist. Wearing the veil also holds different meanings for different women.

Women like Amina Said perceive the veil to be "the biggest obstacle in the way of progress of the Muslim Arab woman" (181). She associates the veil with reactionaries who prevent women from being educated and participating in public life. "…veiling is the greatest enemy of civilization and advancement, and that nationalism cannot be worthy of mention nor respect if it does not exist in the form of courageous, constructive

acts based on belief in values and morals" (Said in Bailey and Tawadros 181). The

implication is that veiling is not a courageous, constructive act based on values and

morals. Nazira Zain al-Din also believes that the veil does not demonstrate morality.

She asserts that "it is inconceivable that we claim to be defenders of honour while the veil

is our strongest shield…honour is rooted in the heart and chastity comes from within and

not from a piece of transparent material lowered over the face" (al-Din 2). While some

believe the veil keeps "evil" away from women, al-Din does not and points to a "sound

upbringing in noble principles and virtues" as the way to encourage "good behavior and

honour" (al Din 2). Again, implied here is that women need to protect themselves against

"evil," behave well and maintain a sense of honor and chastity, all of which are being

associated with the veil. Al-Din also observes that many of the intellectuals of the nations

where women are still veiled are advocating unveiling, but she hasn't seen the reverse;

where unveiled nations are advocating or preferring the veil. In other words, she has not

seen anyone who has tried unveiling and then prefers the veil (al-Din 2). "We are

shortsighted if we think… that those in the rest of the world exceeding one and a half

billion are all in the wrong while we are in the right" (al-Din 2).

Conversely, many women feel strongly in favor of wearing the veil. Rather than

the issue of veiling being a matter of wrong or right, as al-Din frames it above, veiling for

many women serves as an expression of identity, sanctity, it functions as a form of

privacy, protection, as an extension of the body; not unlike a kind of skin and for some, a

declaration of difference. For many women, the veil is a marker of identity. As British-

Asian medical student who goes by the name of Nadia and who adopted the veil at the

age of sixteen puts it,

> My choice of the veil was one of the most important decisions of my
> life…I would feel completely exposed without my veil. It is liberating to
> have the freedom of movement and to be able to communicate with people
> without being on show…At the same time wearing the veil makes me feel
> special, it's a kind of badge of identity and a sign that my religion is
> important to me" (Nadia in Bailey and Tawadros 186).

Not only is the veil a marker of identity for some women, it also constitutes a part of the

female body or what Meyda Yegenoglu calls an "interweaving of cloth and skin"

(Yegenoglu 118). In *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*,

Yegenoglu suggests that the veil is part of the female's being in the world, therefore, "it

defers from a simple cover that has an inside and outside…In the ambiguous position it

occupies, the veil is not outside the woman's body. Nor is she the interior that needs to

be protected or penetrated. Her body is not simple inside of the veil: it is of it; she is

constituted in and by the fabrication of the veil" (Yegenoglu 118-119). If that is the case,

asking a woman who sees the veil as such to remove it, is like asking her to remove a part

of herself.

Indeed, in "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon describes the profoundly intimate

relationship some women have with the veil and how that relationship is violated when

situations ask that they remove it. For these women, the veil demarcates inner space

from outer, as skin does, and influences ways in which the veiled woman moves her body

and negotiates space. Fanon summarizes the "confessions" of recently unveiled Algerian

women he interviewed who spoke of their experiences in European cities.

> The veil covers the body and disciplines it, tempers it…The veil protects,
> reassures, isolates…Without the veil she has an impression of her body
> being cut up into bits, put adrift; the limbs seem to lengthen
> indefinitely…The unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve. She has an
> impression of being improperly dressed, even of being naked. She
> experiences a sense of incompleteness with great intensity. She has the

anxious feeling that something is unfinished, and along with this a frightful sensation of disintegrating. The absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman's corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control. She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside. (Fanon in Bailey and Tawadros 82-83).

For a woman who experiences the veil as Fanon describes it here, asking her to remove it is like asking her to remove her skin and a part of her identity. Fanon portrays the veil as something that keeps the woman together. Without it, she will disintegrate; lose control of her self-discipline and her muscularity. She will feel incomplete, uncomfortable, lost and in need of a new attitude with which she can deal with the outside world. As Fanon has it, given the profound relationship these women have with the veil, those who ask her to remove it are committing an act of violence. No doubt, some women are intimately tied to the veil as Fanon suggests; however, one cannot help but consider that he may also be using the issue of forced unveiling as a way to vent his frustrations with French colonial oppression.

Though veiling is intended in part to provide women a kind of visual immunity, since the events of 9/11, western news media representations have continually coded the veiled female body as a symbol of Islam and oppression, and subsequently, a conspicuous and easy target of hate violence. Consequently, different groups and individuals have responded to the way this kind of exposure puts the veiled woman at risk. Islamic Law states that the Muslim woman is allowed to "adjust her attire" if she senses possible danger (Muslim Women's League http://www.mwlusa.org/topics/Sept11/hijab_dangerous_times.htm). Therefore, if a woman is faced with adverse reactions to her veil, she is instructed to remove it.

Unfortunately, many women resent having to unveil for these reasons and perceive the pressure to do so as a loss of freedom (Donnell 123). In her article, "The Veil in my Handbag," Aisha Khan laments that being British and being Muslim "are virtually exclusive identities" (Khan in Donnell 123). She advises other Muslim women to "stay silent when your religion is being lambasted in the press…Stuff your veil in your handbag because you'll never get that job if you cover your head. Sacrifice prayer times and fasting to keep up with the crowd and stay in with the boss" (Khan in Donnell 124). In 2001, a British interfaith group was sympathetic to women like Khan and took issue with the way the news media were constructing representations demonizing the veiled woman as a symbol of Islam. In support of those women, the group established a "Scarves for Solidarity" campaign and asked non-Muslim women to wear scarves on October 4, 2001 and warned them to expect hostility (Donnell 123). In this context, the veiled women were using the veil to resist being targets for hate violence by asking that it serve as a declaration of difference; yet one more example of how the meaning of the veil differs according to factors such as context and the individual.

Of the myriad representations of veiled female bodies in contemporary visual culture, few are constructed by veiled/Islamic women themselves. On one hand, so many non-Muslim and/or non-female entities feature representations of the veiled female body, perhaps because both the female body and the veil are such heavily coded signifiers. On the other hand, no doubt, the Muslim culture does not encourage women to speak out about their lives. For example, in the case of the recently unveiled Algerian women Fanon interviewed, how many of them wrote about their experiences or produced a documentary about their own lives? Of the hundreds of screendances included in the

research for this project, not one was created by a Muslim woman. In addition to the cultural factors that discourage, if not threaten and punish, a Muslim woman for expressing herself in the public space, acquiring access to video/film equipment and technical production expertise is often difficult as well.

In *Veil: Veiling, Representations and Contemporary Art*, Bailey and Tawadros argue that as a result of representations of the veiled female body being constructed by non-female, non-veiled bodies, many representations of veiled women are narrow and simplistic and do not necessarily reflect the perspectives of veiled women themselves. Of the screendance artists discussed in this chapter, Ndiritu, Rocamora are female but not Muslim. Abbasi is Muslim though not female. Despite these screendance artists not being Muslim females, their work differs from many news media and other representations of the veiled female body by performing the veil from more plural, complex and sometimes transgressive viewpoints.

The Veil as a Partition Between Public and Private Space in Abbasi's *I Am My Mother*

Despite Abbasi not being female, he grew and witnessed life within a culture characterized in part by veiled women and created a screendance that represents veiled female identity in transgressive and ambiguous ways. Abbasi shot *I Am My Mother* on the city streets of Shiraz, his birthplace, "an enterprise that's not so simple in Iran" (Abbasi, Choreographic Captures website). Abbasi entered this one-minute film in the 2008 Choreographic Captures Competition. Though the film was not prize winning, it is included in the Choreographic Captures archive online (see http://www.choreographic

captures.de/). *I Am My Mother* differs from many mainstream media representations of veiled female bodies in that Abbasi raises questions about gender identity and gender politics by setting up a series of oppositions with ambiguity, which serves to open up the screendance to multiple interpretations.

The first opposition Abbasi sets up is awake-ness and dream-state or sub-consciousness. *I Am My Mother* begins with a medium shot of a young Middle Eastern woman standing against a black background with her arms stretched upward in a v-formation such that her hands are out of the frame. She closes her eyes, and then *I Am My Mother* cuts to a medium shot of a young Middle Eastern man (performed by Abbasi) moving and gesturing also in front of a black background. This sequence of shots implies that the woman is going to sleep and in her dream, she sees the man dancing. Or, she closes her eyes and he is in her thoughts. At the end of his performance, *I Am My Mother* cuts back to the woman's face as she opens her eyes, as if waking up from a dream.

Abbasi represents the woman's dream or inner world by setting up an opposition between aggressive and submissive, postmodern dance movements, which are ambiguous and also point to a cross-cultural identification. *I Am My Mother* crosscuts between the dancing man, who is wearing a western-style dress shirt and slacks, and close-ups of the woman's face. The man performs forceful gestures, one of which is a hand-swipe. When juxtaposed with the woman's face, this image sequence reads as if he is slapping her face. The man then performs what looks like a silent scream, reaching upward and calling out. Then he twists around and arches upward as if hanging by his neck or lying back in submission. Some of the movements are vague and abstract while others speak of aggression and submission. Additionally, the way *I Am My Mother* features Abbasi

dressed in western clothes and performing western, postmodern dance with stylized, dramatic gestures juxtaposed with images of the female body wrapped in a veil, which is coded as Middle Eastern, implies a cross-cultural identification.

Perhaps the most compelling opposition in this screendance has to do with the ways in which Abbasi represents public and private space in relationship to the veil. After the man dances, a close up shot captures the woman opening her eyes and waking from her "dream." She lowers her arms to reveal that the black background was actually her veil, which she proceeds to drape over her head and wrap around to cover her body. Then she looks at the camera before turning away. The camera lingers on her as she walks away, moves between cars and crosses the city streets into the urban, public space. Abbasi performs the veil as a demarcation of private and public space. *I Am My Mother* offers a glimpse at the woman's inner world, and then ends as she walks into the public space. Given that this screendance is about identity, as the title indicates, the last scene raises questions about the differences between her private identity behind the veil and the woman who appears in public.

According to Fatima Mernissi in *Women and Islam: an Historical and Theological Enquiry*, the concept of the veil, or *hijab*, is three-dimensional and the dimensions often blend together (185). The first dimension is reflected in the root of the verb *hajaba*, which means 'to hide.' The *hijab* hides something from sight. "The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden" (Mernissi 185). So the dimensions include the visual, the spatial and the abstract idea of the forbidden. "The space hidden by a *hijab* is a forbidden space" (Mernissi 185).

In *I Am My Mother,* Abbasi conforms to the *hijab's* culturally encoded dimensions in some ways and transgresses them in others. He most certainly performs the veil as a border between private and public space. However, rather than establishing the space hidden by the *hijab* as forbidden, he brings us into that space and hides from us the unforbidden public space until the end of the screendance when we realize where we have been. What happens in the space behind the veil is culturally sanctioned as private or secretive. Rather than keeping what Abbasi witnesses behind the veil a secret, he tells his secret in his screendance, which by virtue of its streaming video nature, is broadcast to the very public, global stage of the Internet as well as any screendance festivals that might present his work. In a sense, by telling us his secret, he no longer carries the burden of its being only his or only hers. The dance even unshown is already his sharing of a presumably private female space.

Abbasi transgresses other cultural traditions by setting up oppositions related to male-ness and female-ness. His title tells us that he identifies with his mother, a person of the opposite sex. If the woman in *I Am My Mother* represents Abbasi's mother, the man in her dream/thoughts/subconscious could be her husband, or Abbasi himself, or another man, or a male part of herself. The aggressive and submissive movement Abbasi performs suggests that he may be portraying two different people; someone like his father as aggressor and then someone like his mother as a victim. Perhaps Abbasi is suggesting that his mother identifies herself as male on the inside and female on the outside. In any case, the inner male in *I Am My Mother* performs movement that is agitated and violent while the outer female is quiet and still. Abbasi may be commenting on cultural traditions

that discourage women from expressing personal, inner feelings such as conflict, aggression and submission in public.

    I Am My Mother is also raises questions about the relationship between the veil, the female body and mind, and the public space. As Yegenoglu suggests, for many women, the veil is part of the female body like an "interweaving of cloth and skin" (118). If that were the case in *I Am My Mother*, the veil would operate as a partition not between the female body and the public space, but between her mind and the public. We are being asked to consider the many cases in which the veiling of the body functions culturally as a veiling of the mind.

    Performing the veil as *I Am My Mother* does with ambiguous mediations across multiple oppositions, Abbasi is creating a space for more complex representations of female identity in relation to the veil. By raising more questions than he answers, he activates a strategy for undoing simple readings of the gender identity and gender politics in relation to the veiled female body.

The Veil as a Symbol of Islam, Foreign-ness and Violence in Ndiritu's *TIME*

    While Abbasi performs the veil from the perspective of a man who is within the culture of veiled women but not one himself, screendance artists Ndiritu and Rocamora are women who perform the veil from within and in response to western culture and media representations of the veiled female body. In the case of the screendance, *TIME* (2005), Ndiritu responds to ways in which the media emphasize cultural differences between the West and the Middle East and fuel sentiments of Islamophobia by constructing representations that stereotype, demonize and sensationalize.
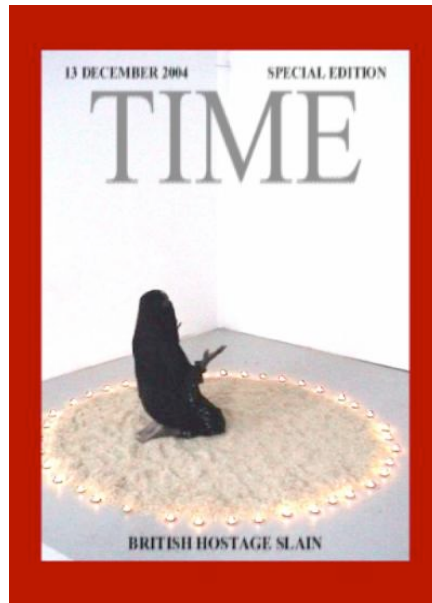
Image 22: Grace Ndiritu in *TIME* (2004).
http://www.axisweb.org/ofSARF.aspx?SELECTIONID=146

TIME is a short screendance Ndiritu created as part of a series of works she calls *New Global Performance*, which also includes *Nightingale* and *Absolute Native*. At first glance, this piece looks like a cover of *Time Magazine*. Underneath the familiar *Time* heading, we see a woman (performed by Ndiritu), veiled in black and shot in profile such that we do not see her face. She is kneeling on sand and encircled by votive candles much like images of Islamic bodies seen in the media such as the one below from *Time Magazine*:

Image 23: *Time Magazine* "The Struggle Within Islam" image. (September 13, 2004).
http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101040913/

In Ndiritu's *TIME*, the veiled woman sits in stillness appearing as "a tabloid," an effect

Ndiritu strives to achieve (Ndiritu in White 6). Then the "tabloid" becomes animated and

performs the only movement in this piece: slow, prayer-like bowing and rising. The

palms of her hands face upward as if receiving from Allah. The words along the bottom

of the cover read, "British Hostage Slain." *TIME* begins like an epic film or great drama,

then suddenly ends before any narrative action occurs and does not offer any resolution to

the conflict implied by the words and images. Ndiritu constructed this piece in response

to visual strategies often employed by mainstream news media.

One such strategy is the juxtaposition of images of the veiled female body with

disturbing text, which serves to code that body as a symbol of cultural difference and of

Islam, a terrifying force to be feared. The *Time Magazine* cover below features a veiled

person shot from behind so as to obscure her individual features. Inscribed on the veiled

figure is the headline: "Life in Hell: A Baghdad Diary" (*Time Magazine* Aug. 6, 2006).

The combination of the image and the text implies that life inside the veil is like Hell.

The black smoke, flames and destruction in the distance underscore that message, which

is sensational, overly simplified and terrorizing.

Image 24: *Time Magazine* (August 6, 2006) "Life In Hell: A Bagdad Diary" cover.
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/europe/0,9263,901060828,00.html

Image 25: *Time Magazine* (December 3, 2001) "Lifting the Veil" cover.
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601011203,00.html

The "Lifting the Veil" *Time Magazine* cover also features a veiled figure and a

sensational headline that together generate sensational messages. Not only are the

woman's features visible in this photo, her face is carefully lit with golden light from below and it exudes an expression that can be read as open, self-contained, knowing, peaceful, pleasant, slightly amused or about to smile. Though there may be a segment of the Middle Eastern female population that looks like this woman, she most certainly could be western European. Her facial features resemble those of women in classical European paintings such as *Mona Lisa* and Dutch classical pieces. In other words, for a westerner, this image resonates as being familiar. In contrast, the text reads: "Lifting the Veil: The shocking story of how the Taliban brutalized the women of Afghanistan. How much better will their lives be now?" If the image of the woman who looks familiar and appealing serves to draw us in, and encourages us to identify with her or empathize, the words "shocking," and "brutalized women" are alarming and serve to generate anger. The narrative implied is that this woman could be me and that she is in great danger because of the Taliban and being a woman of Islam. Additionally, the text and image associate the veil with the Taliban and imply that when the veil is lifted, the woman is freed to a more western mode of life.

Media representations such as these foster stereotypes that generate fear and simplify events and situations that are inherently more complex by utilizing elements that are familiar in combination with others that are alarming. As mentioned earlier, western visual culture now codes the veiled female body as the "predominant image of Islam" (Muslim Women's League www.mwlusa.org/hijab_dangerous_times.htm). In terms of western media representations, "no single item has had more influence on the Western images of Middle Eastern and North African women than the veil" (Bailey and Tawadros 10). In recent years, the veil has become "synonymous with culture and religious

differences that have been presented to us repeatedly as unbridgeable, alien and terrifying" (Bailey and Tawadros 10).

In *TIME*, Ndiritu appropriates meaning-generating strategies employed by news media; however, she does so with ambiguity and by making the familiar strange, which leaves the piece open for multiple interpretations. While the *Time* logo is a familiar, global signifier, Ndiritu also includes signifiers that media representations utilize to foster stereotypes of foreign cultures. We see the veiled woman in the private space of praying surrounded by candles, both of which speak of ritual. She is kneeling on sand, an element suggestive of the desert and often used to characterize the Middle East. To further complicate, the headline, "British Hostage Slain" evokes a sensational, violent image, as media representations are known to do; however, the words do not directly explain the image, or vice-versa. "It should be a simple relationship – but it's not" (White 4). Because "there is no written, journalistic explanation, you have to read into (imagine) what the journalist would have written" (Ndiritu in White 6-7). Ndiritu's *TIME* feeds us familiar imagery, encourages stereotyping, but leaves us perplexed by denying the full story. As she does in some of her other works, Ndiritu cuts the piece short by ending abruptly in a way that brings our attention self-consciously to the interpretive process with which we are engaged.

Another element Ndiritu keys into in her screendance, *TIME*, is the intercultural, fetishistic nature of the veil as a signifier and its relationship to female identity. When a cultural/religious object of one culture, such as the veil, is appropriated in the representation of female identity by another culture, what happens in the translation? According to Laura Marks, "intercultural relationships are necessarily fetishistic."(80). A

costume or object appropriated in intercultural relationships, such as the headscarf, is a

"transnational object" and is not neutral (Marks 80). The transnational object is like a

fetish or a fossil that encodes "both the discursive shifts and the material conditions of

displacement" (Marks 80). These objects tell stories and describe histories. Walter

Benjamin attributes this effect to the object's aura, or the power it gains from the human

contact and material practices that constructed it (188). Marks asserts that aura is what

makes a fetish volatile or "radioactive." When a fetish is radioactive, "it hints that the

past it represents is not over, it beckons the viewer to excavate the past, even at his or her

peril" (Marks 80).

If indeed the headscarf is a transcultural and sometimes-radioactive fetish, rather

than attempting to de-activate its radioactivity by performing non-specific, "universal"

representations, Ndiritu capitalizes on its radioactivity. She recognizes the fact that the

headscarf has been seen by the media and in public debate as a symbol of the oppression

of women and as a symbol of repression and violence often associated with Islam

(Schiffer 2). After the events of September 11, there has been an increasingly stereotyped

perception regarding the veil and other visual signs such the beard worn by many Muslim

men. "Muslim women in *hijab* (veil, headscarf)…and other Muslim-style clothing are

often the first and easiest targets of hate violence" (Muslim women's League. "Women's

Dress in Dangerous Times." www.mwlusa.org/hijab_dangerous_times.htm). During the

heightened state of airport security, which was in effect after 9/11, Ndiritu tested the

public's tendency to stereotype by wearing a headscarf while traveling and then

observing people's responses. She realized she could appear as anything from a

housewife to a terrorist (Ndiritu in White 7). With *TIME,* she remarks, "you can assume

that I must be Muslim to make that piece as an artist, but I'm not. I like the idea that

there is no stability, because I really believe that there is no right answer to anything"

(Ndiritu in White 3). Indeed, Ndiritu is challenging the stability of the public's definition

of "right-ness" with her performance.

If we, as artists and writers in the West, are barraged with representations of the

veiled female body as exoticized, victimized and/or oppressed other, to what extent does

our work on the subject subvert or re-confirm those representations? In her article,

"Mapping the Illusive," writer/photographer Zineb Sedira asks, "How do I write about

the subject of the veil in the West without worrying that the writing reinforces Orientalist

fetishes, commodifying experience?...Can the artist escape the burden or cultural

responsibility of representation?...Do the interpretations and writings about artists' work

instead serve to reinforce the limiting assumptions we are trying to subvert?" (63-64). As

mentioned earlier, Sedira, bell hooks and others inform this project by pointing to not

only mapping out an environment and creating a context for change, but also

transforming the image and "providing new strategies and readings – if we are to move

the debate forward" (Sedira 64). Indeed, for visual artists re-presenting the veil and the

female body, two such heavily coded signifiers, this endeavor comes with substantial

challenges. While the screendances in this study contribute to moving the debate forward

in different ways, Isabel Rocamora's *Horizon of exile* operates complexly and yet at the

same time also hovers precariously close to reinforcing limiting assumptions about the

veiled female body.

The Veiled, Exiled Female Body in Rocamora's *Horizon of exile*

Rocamora's *Horizon of exile* (2007) performs the exiled female body in transgressive, inventive ways that do indeed "transform the image" and subvert mainstream Hollywood cinema conventions; however, it performs the veiled body in various scenes that can be read as re-confirming reductive, mainstream news media representations. Given the complex ways in which *Horizon of exile* is operating, I construct the following two distinct arguments: one in relation to *Horizon of exile's* representation of the exiled female body and the other in relation to its representation of the veiled female body. More emphasis is given to the discussions of the veiled body since that is the focus of this chapter.

In terms of the exiled body, *Horizon of exile* performs the exilic experience by featuring haptic sounds and images, performing quotidian activities in ritualistic ways, developing the notion of two-ness in multiple ways and constructing a confusion of identity, all of which reflect the exilic experience of straddling between two worlds. Similar to many intercultural films, *Horizon of exile* also constructs an aesthetic Hamid Naficy identifies as feminine and counter-hegemonic, which includes elements such as the female voice-over, time slowed down, use of silence, stillness, and featuring movement that is abstract and ambiguous.

As for the veil, Rocamora features it both as a visual design element and as a signifier. For example, when composing shots, Rocamora takes advantage of the veil's visual qualities such as its dark black color, which dramatically contrasts light-toned desert landscapes, and the way it undulates in desert wind or floats on water surfaces. Semiotically, she codes the veil as Muslim, effacing, oppressive, and symbolic of

physical abuse of women, not unlike ways in which mainstream media represent the veil. Of particular concern is *Horizon of exile's* ambiguous ending. One interpretation suggests that the veiled female's future holds little promise. For women who feel strongly about wearing the veil, this interpretation is disempowering.

The opening scene of the 22-minute long *Horizon of exile* introduces the protagonist and the veil. Before any image appears, we see a black screen and hear a woman's heavily accented voice. She tells us, "I didn't make a decision to go out. I thought I'm going to die there." Then the protagonist appears in her bedroom. The camera frames her body from the shoulders down as she wraps black fabric around her waist over a black skirt. She reaches for a black veil on the bed then *Horizon of exile* cuts to an establishing shot of hills outlined in the distance and a mosque shrouded in fog. A man is chanting the Muslim *Call to Prayer*. The screendance cuts back to the woman slipping the headscarf over her head in a way that never reveals her face. A momentary pause asks us to ponder her image, which looks like a faceless black ghost. Then *Horizon of exile* cuts to another urban cityscape with the sound of the *Call to Prayer* again. Back in the bedroom, the woman slips on bracelets and shoes while we hear the voice-over, "And then my mom took me from one basement to another basement. I never thought I would cross the border because…everybody knew about it."

In terms of performing the exiled, female body, the opening scene features an accented voice, haptic sounds and images, and quotidian rituals, all of which are characteristic of what Marks calls "intercultural cinema" and Naficy calls "accented cinema." These terms refer to films by filmmakers who straddle more than one culture. Indeed, Rocamora was born and raised in Spain until the age of 18, moved to Britain and

has felt in a kind of exile there (Interview). According to Naficy, many "accented" filmmakers create works in opposition to dominant cinema, which is "considered universal and without accent…the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented," not only because of the accented voices heard in these films, but also because of the filmmakers' displacement, and their independent, artisanal modes of production (Naficy 4).

Horizon of exile also features haptic sounds and images, which Marks argues are important "to the feeling of embodied experience they produce" (Marks xvi). The opening scene captures "close-up" rustling sounds of fabric brushing against fabric when the protagonist wraps the black fabric around her waist; then later, close up images such as textured, rippled dunes, all evoke visceral responses. I discuss haptic images and sounds more in depth in Chapter Two but they are applicable here since they evoke responses in the body, which is where Marks claims memories are stored; therefore, they comprise an important component in the representation of exilic experience.

Another characteristic *Horizon of exile* shares with many intercultural and accented films is the way in which attention is given to objects and details of everyday life and to their ritualistic or ceremonial qualities. In the opening scene of *Horizon of Exile,* the headscarf is carefully folded upon the bed like a ceremonial fetish. The protagonist reaches for it slowly, then with deliberation drapes it over her head so it spills over her face. Her movements are not rushed or careless, but fully present, implying ritual and ceremony. Naficy claims that individuals in exile experience a kind of "weightlessness of liminality," and attention to objects and rituals of everyday life serves to counteract the feelings of weightlessness (47). Additionally, ritual connects individual

experience with collective experience, which can activate "collective memory" in the body (Marks 76).

After the opening scene, Rocamora activates another expression of collective experience by introducing a "multiplication" of the protagonist, or a double, which is also one of multiple ways in which *Horizon of exile* develops a performative strategy based on twoness (Naficy 270). The double appears in the second scene wearing the same headscarf and black dress as the protagonist. Rather than interacting as friends or foes, they roll side by side like two tumbleweeds orbiting in slow motion. Seeing another figure in this state suggests that whatever the first protagonist experienced, it is shared by another. Adding another woman gives the impression that the distressing experience described by the voice-overs was not an individual experience, but perhaps a condition experienced by veiled women more generally. The doubled apparently identical figure also suggests a divided self, expressive of the exilic experience.

Additionally, *Horizon of exile* performs dualities in its representations of space, movement, time and genre, which reflect the exilic experience of living between two worlds or living in the space between two worlds. While the opening scene takes place in the realistic interior space of a bedroom and the narrative speaks of harsh elements surrounding the exilic experience, *Horizon of exile* then follows the protagonist to the exterior space of surrealistic, travelogue desert dunes, springs bubbling in misty fog, and finally, a body of water. Similar to many accented and intercultural films, *Horizon of exile* performs the landscapes as visually fetishized. One response to the rupture of displacement experienced by exiles is to emphasize territoriality and engage in reterritorializing journeys in "utopian," fetishized landscapes (Naficy 5, 152). The

protagonist's physical movement also changes from pedestrian walking and gestures in the first scene to abstracted, suspended reaching and slowly rolling movement in the desert. Rather than giving into gravity, she, and eventually her double, stretch their limbs upward, as if being stretched between two worlds while in a suspended state of weightlessness and liminality. Similarly, *Horizon of exile* features a performance of two different kinds of time. A pedestrian, "natural" sense of time in the first scene gives way to a sense of time slowed down. Reminiscent of Japanese Noh traditions, attention is given to every step and gesture, which enhances a sense of presence and speaks of the ritualistic and ceremonial body. The unnaturally slow movement and timing are also counter-hegemonic. While many commercial Hollywood films, video games and network television representations are constructed with fast-paced editing, which encourages short attention spans, *Horizon of exile* asks the viewer to slow down and settle into the present. Finally, because of these multiple kinds of performative elements, *Horizon of exile* reads like a documentary or docu-drama in the first scene, then shifts to reading like abstract fiction. On one hand, performing these dualities as such, *Horizon of exile* constructs a representation the exilic experience of straddling between two worlds.

On the other hand, the conjunction of disparate signifiers in *Horizon of exile* serves to construct female identity as ambiguous and, in some cases, confusing. The DVD cover calls *Horizon of exile* a "meditation," which disassociates it from a performance of a specific, fixed identity and instead makes it speak of female identity in more ambiguous, generalized terms. Constructing female identity with a conjunction of disparate signifiers also creates ambiguity. For example, the sound of the voice in the voice-over in *Horizon of exile* is deep, textured, heavily accented and speaks with

minimal mastery of the English language. The woman we see is white-skinned, green-eyed and has a face that projects youthful, innocent beauty. The voice-over and the headscarf costume speak of religious, cultural and personal identities that do not bear resemblance to the identity expressed in the protagonist's and her double's highly trained, Western, post-modern/Noh fusion body movement. The story implied by the voice-over and the headscarf does not fit with the story told visually in *Horizon of exile*, which is that of fetishized landscapes, soft, rose-colored sunset lighting and representations of nature as being exquisite.

Image 26: *Horizon of exile* (2007) Camila Venezuela as the protagonist.
http://www.google.com/images?um=1&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&biw=975&bih=637
&tbs=isch%3A1&sa=1&q=images+Horizon+of+Exile&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&oq=&gs_rfai
=

Constructing a character with disparate signifiers generates meanings in different ways. It brings attention to the confusion of identity that can come with the experience of exile. It can also imply the lack of a unified identity, which runs counter to mainstream cinema conventions. Naficy tells us that many accented filmmakers are engaged in the performance of the self; however, "because of their interstitiality, exilic authors tend to

create ambiguity regarding their own real, fictive, or discursive identities, thus

problematizing Phillipe Lejuene's 'autobiographical pact,' which requires that the author,

the narrator, and the protagonist be identical" (35). In the case of *Horizon of exile*,

Rocamora is the author/director, the voice-overs/narrators are Iraqi women exiles who

were interviewed by Rocamora, and the protagonist is a performer from Argentina.

Marks observes that the "intentional obliqueness" of films such as this indicates the

filmmakers' "opposition to dominant, univocal histories…" (xiv).

Though Rocamora's conjoining of disparate signifiers performs identity confusion

and ambiguity, the individual signifiers themselves are not ambiguous. For example,

performing the veil in conjunction with abstract, post-modern suspended, anti-gravity

dance movement creates ambiguity, but the veil as a signifier contains specific meanings

at each moment that are coded throughout the screendance and are not ambiguous. As

Horizon of exile moves from the more realistic, narrative format at the beginning to more

abstraction in the subsequent scenes, the veil does not read as abstract. As mentioned

earlier, the veil is a transnational object and, like a fetish, it resists abstraction and is

always charged with power. It is not "a neutral ground where meanings can be remade

with impunity" (Marks 91). Therefore, the next section looks at ways in which *Horizon

of exile* performs the veiled female body separate from the way it performs the exiled

body.

The Veiled Female Body in *Horizon of exile*

Between three scenes in *Horizon of exile* that code the veil as a symbol of

elements such as Islam, oppression, sexism and female abuse and some of the ways in

which the ambiguous ending can be interpreted, this screendance's performance of the

veiled female body is disconcerting. One interpretation of the ending speaks of the veiled

female body's death or suicide, which serves to re-confirm mainstream media

representations such as coding the veil as a symbol of erasure of female identity and other

forms of disempowerment. First, we will look at ways in which *Horizon of exile* codes

the veil in three scenes: the opening, the effacing scene and the emotive duet.   Then we

will consider three interpretations of how *Horizon of exile's* ending codes the veiled

female body.

The opening scene in *Horizon of exile* codes the veil as Muslim, oppressive and

disempowering. The woman's voice speaks of a predicament that is desperate, life

threatening, and therefore, one that she is attempting to escape. She says she did not

decide "to go out," which is ambiguously awkward English. However, the implication is

that she may not have a choice, or may not be able to make a decision, neither of which

speaks of control or empowerment. The juxtaposition of lingering, close-up shots of the

veil with a Muslim mosque and the sound of the *Call To Prayer* suggests that this woman

is Muslim and, perhaps, that her motivation for leaving has to do with her

religious/cultural circumstances. Additionally, while we see the veil in detail, we never

see the protagonist's face. Does the oppressive Muslim circumstance leave her without

individual identity? Or, perhaps, by denying individual characteristics, Rocamora wishes

to speak universally of all Muslim women, which operates as a simplifying, stereotyping

move.

Later, the protagonist performs another scene that characterizes the headscarf as

effacing female identity. A close-up brings us face to face with the protagonist who is slowly wrapping the headscarf around her head. As is characteristic of the aesthetics in *Horizon of exile*, the protagonist takes her time and moves slowly with ritualistic wrapping over her hair. Then *Horizon of exile* cuts to a long shot of the desert dunes and back to the protagonist. This time, she covers more of her head with the headscarf. The alternating pattern of headscarf-wrapping shots with cut-aways continues until she has covered everything but her eyes. She holds the headscarf and lingers, emphasizing the drama of the moment, then covers her eyes and her hand slowly slides down out of the frame. The camera pauses on this image of the faceless woman whose identity is obscured by the veil. The combination of her staring continuously into the camera with the ritualized slowness of her wrapping movement reads as someone performing mechanical movement, as something she does habitually; therefore, she is able to maintain eye contact with us while wrapping the veil instead of occasionally focusing her eyes on the task of wrapping. Critic Ferran Mateo describes this scene as a moment of "confrontation with 'the other,' the direct gaze into the camera, which allows for self-recognition…Rocamora situates that 'erasure of identity…outside the city…"(Mateo 2008). Though this scene takes place outside the city, I disagree with Mateo that it is the sole location of the erasure of identity. In the opening scene in the city, Rocamora constructs a narrative that associates the veil with oppression, which contributes to the meaning the wrapping generates in this scene. Rather than a "confrontation with 'the other,'" this scene reads as a performance about the way the protagonist is feeling. She performs as if she is being wrapped, does not have a choice in the matter and is being obliterated.

Image 27: *Horizon of exile* (2007).Camila Venezuela in the erasure scene.
http://www.google.com/images?um=1&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&biw=975&bih=637
&tbs=isch%3A1&sa=1&q=images+Horizon+of+Exile&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&oq=&gs_rfai
=

A third scene performs signifiers that link the headscarf with physical abuse,

possibly female circumcision, or rape and the devaluation of female existence in general.

Midway through the desert, the protagonist and her double pose side by side facing the

camera, which frames them as would a theatrical proscenium, and perform a series of

gasps, moans, fainting-like movement, coiling, hands covering the crotch, curling over,

reaching out. Similar to Abbasi, Rocamora depicts violence through movement; however,

while his contortions are centered around the head, neck and torso, the *Horizon of exile*

dancers perform the violence in the pelvic area, with hand gestures and facial

expressions. After the previous meditative, abstracted scenes of desert landscapes and

slow-motion suspended movement, this display of drama seems to come out of nowhere,

is not entirely convincing and comes off as melodramatic at times. However, the dancers

successfully depict what arts critic Marek Bartelik describes as "vessels of memory that

carry traces of violence, such as female circumcision, which is 'reenacted' through the

contorted motions of their bodies" (1). At one point during their "reenactment," the

silence is broken with the voice-over's observation that "Our existence is wrong, being a

woman is wrong." Between the jerking violent movement, the vocal crying out and the profoundly discouraging words, this scene codes the space of veil as one that is intolerant of women's existence, and it implies that being a man is "right," or that it is a man's world. As mentioned earlier, the way the dancers perform as doubles, side by side, this scene also reads as a generalization about all veiled women, as a statement about the condition of veiled females' existence.

In order to interpret these scenes and the screendance as a whole, it is necessary to find confirmation or resolution in the ending, but that too is ambiguous. After journeying in the desert, the protagonist comes upon a body of water. *Horizon of exile* captures the rippled patterns of the water's surface laced with rose-colored light from the setting sun. The camera cuts to a close-up of the protagonist's face as her fingers slide down her cheeks with drops of water as if tracing where tears were shed earlier. Haptic sounds of her footsteps and the lapping water accompany the next shot of her lifting the fabric of her dress, and backing up into the water. Rather than walking "naturally" into the water, she slowly steps backwards while slowly unwrapping her headscarf and waist scarf, entering deeper into the water. With a dreamlike quality, she falls back into the water.

The next shot looks down on the protagonist's body, the black fabric dress and headscarf floating in aqua-green water in brighter daylight. We hear a sigh, then silence. The camera then cuts to a medium-long shot of the protagonist's floating body later at sunset such that the portions of the body above water level appear in silhouette and more obscured. Given the changing light from the first floating body shot in daylight to the next at sunset implies a passage of time, and yet there is still no sign of life in the body, nor any other person around to notice, and the film ends.

One possible interpretation of the ending is to read the lifelessness of the protagonist's body floating in the water as death by suicide, or drowning. This sequence of images in conjunction with information conveyed earlier constructs a narrative: the female Muslim woman escapes a threatening situation, journeys across a desert, and decides to end her life. Given Rocamora's choice to omit the details of the protagonist's situation and her inclusion of the voiced comment about "our existence," *Horizon of exile* reads less as a profile about a particular individual's condition and more as a universal statement about the condition of the female Muslim exile. If that is the case, Rocamora's representation points to bleak options for women who are in that condition. One interpretation of *Horizon of exile's* message is that female Muslim exiles are disempowered victims of oppression, helpless, and that suicide is the only way out.

In an interview, Rocamora explained that this was not the message she intended to convey (Interview). She acknowledges that others had interpreted her film as ending with a suicide and some assumed she was re-creating the myth of Ophelia (Interview). (The Ophelia myth tells of a young woman who goes mad and drowns in a river; some say she "embodies female suffering caused not by love, but by larger sociopolitical forces") (Owen 2007). For example, dance critic Mateo interpreted the screendance as such: "It is possible that the unconscious of the work [*Horizon of exile*], practically invisibly, may reflect the female anxiety in times of war – a landscape which appertains more to a masculine psyche, as Virginia Woolf would claim. And this is why the final image in *Horizon...* offers such clairvoyance, reminding us of Millais' *Ophelia*; it is the image of feminine despair by the hands of a man" (Mateo 2009). Conversely, Rocamora claims explicitly that her intentioan was to represent the protagonist at a "moment of total letting

go; a moment when everything has happened, where this one woman had these stories, had this life, experiences that are universal as well as particular, allowing the Iraqi voices to live" (Rocamora Interview).

If indeed, the floating, still body could be interpreted as a "moment of letting go," the narrative would suggest that the Islamic woman escapes a repressive situation, embarks on a journey of exile, then arrives at a place of "letting go." "Letting go" is ambiguous. It could imply a moment of exhaustion, a moment of peaceful resolution, of defeat, or something positive. In an artist's statement about *Horizon of exile*, Rocamora writes that the film "particularly looks at the female condition echoing contexts where woman is forced to leave her country in order to salvage her sense of self" (*Horizon*). Does a body floating lifeless suggest a "salvaging of her sense of self"? On the contrary, the ending suggests a tragic sense of self. If the self were salvaged at the end, the film might offer some signs indicating life such as the floating body in motion, or a close-up on the protagonist's face revealing an expression conveying having salvaged her sense of self.

Dance critic Deborah Jowitt proposed a less ambiguous interpretation of the ending that contains elements of mainstream Hollywood cinema. "…Wearing heavy, black-cotton dresses, whose rustling is almost the only sound, the two face a great expanse of desert to reach the border and rest in a hellish gray landscape of bubbling hot springs. Slowly rolling and twisting in the barrenness, they express with great economy both the pain of leaving and the pain of staying" (Jowitt 2008). By interpreting the ending as having reached a border, Jowitt implies that the protagonist reaches a goal, a

place of potential safety, unambiguously. A border is a concrete reality that is potentially significant in terms of the protagonist's future.

The ways in which *Horizon of exile* represents the veiled female body is problematic for a number of reasons. One is that it assigns specific meanings to the veiled female body, yet neither Rocamora nor any of the cast and crew are exilic Muslim women. Her solution to that problem is to speak for them in particular ways that do not necessarily reflect their concerns or serve to empower them. "Faced with issues of first person representation (Middle Eastern woman from a Western perspective)…I have chosen to construct a fictive character and environment…" (Rocamora *Horizon*).

One of the ways in which Rocamora constructs a fictive character is to remove contextualizing and individualizing details from the stories of the exilic Muslim females whose voices are heard throughout the screendance. For example, in an interview, Rocamora explained that one of the women she interviewed came from Iraq, where she lived with her husband who beat her regularly. The woman became pregnant and the husband continued to beat her. When the woman's mother heard that the men in their family were preparing to kill her pregnant daughter, the mother hid her in a cellar, found a car, and got her out of the country. The woman gave birth to the baby in the trunk of the car. Her mother was able to get her to England with a passport, where she is today (Interview). Rather than communicating this information, which includes specific cultural, historical, political and other contextual information, we hear sparsely placed edited sentence fragments in conjunction with images of the veiled protagonist, which serve to create generalized meanings about their condition. Rocamora is using some of their words but not conveying what they said. She explains, "I purposely didn't bring

details into the piece because it was meant to be universal" (Rocamora Interview). Her

intention was "to present an essence rather than a given cultural context" (Rocamora

Horizon). This statement is disconcerting in that Rocamora is using edited speech and the

veil, a Muslim cultural item, in a performance by Westerners and most likely for Western

audiences while claiming to be interested in universals. Does she mean to speak for the

condition of *all* women by denying the identification of a "given cultural context?"

E. Patrick Johnson addresses similar issues involving appropriation and

essentializing in his book *Appropriating Blackness.* Though there are differences between

Horizon of exile examples and his particular examples, as these also include issues

surrounding race, representation, performativity, and appropriation, some of his insights

are worth considering. Rocamora chose to appropriate the image of the veiled Islamic

woman as a vehicle for expressing her own experience of always feeling like an exile in

Britain after the age 18, which is when she moved there from her birthplace in Spain

(Interview). However, representing the veiled, Muslim female body as essentially

oppressed, victimized, helpless and hopeless re-enforces the stereotypes constructed by

mainstream media. Not all veiled, female Muslim bodies possess those characteristics.

Yet, Rocamora speaks in "universal" terms. Johnson tells us that essentializing serves to

reinforce discourses of otherness. For example, in the United States, when white

Americans essentialize blackness, "they often do so in ways that maintain 'whiteness' as

the master trope of purity, supremacy, and entitlement, as a ubiquitous, fixed, unifying

signifier that seems invisible" (4). Indeed, the master trope is often invisible, or operating

subconsciously or ideologically without one's awareness.

While Rocamora and many others may have well-meaning intentions in terms of representing others, the result is not always empowering or reflective of the concerns of those being represented. For example, Rocamora describes her motivation for creating *Horizon of exile*:

> Today recurring images of covered or endangered Middle Eastern women indent themselves in our consciousness daily. Framed by the media, these images are presented to the West as 'icons' of otherness. *Horizon* is born out of the impulse to get close to the human behind the icon" (*Horizon).*

While this impulse is well intentioned, the ways in which the veiled female body is represented in *Horizon of exile* speak of victim more than voice, which reinforces the way the media is framing the image-icons of otherness. Perhaps a more subversive and productive representation would include imagery that changes or questions the frame. Rocamora seems to be implying that by getting close to the human behind the icon in *Horizon of exile*, we will see that human as something/someone other than the 'other.' That human is necessarily an individual with a particular situation; however, Rocamora chooses to represent her by abstracting to a universal essence.

Similarly, when whites perform black signifiers, Johnson observes that "the effect is always already entangled in the discourse of otherness; the historical weight of white skin privilege necessarily engenders a tense relationship with its Others" (4). As Linda Alcoff puts it in her article "The Problem of Speaking for Others," "where one speaks from affects both the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's own location" (2). ("Location" refers to a social location or social identity.) Of similar concern to the power differential in Whites performing Blackness is when a privileged, First-world person, like Rocamora, is

speaking for or on behalf of a less privileged, marginalized or Third-world person such as some veiled woman. Even if the speaker is well intentioned, in many cases, it results in "increasing or reinforcing the hierarchies of oppression of the group spoken for" (Alcoff 2,16).

Another problematic element involved in representing others includes the discrepancy between the representation and the actual experiences and concerns of those being represented. In her controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayartri Chakravory Spivak describes the repercussions of and the circumstances relating to the suicide of a young Bengali woman who was supposedly incapable of or not allowed to represent herself. "The subaltern in general, and the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman in particular, was inevitably consigned to being either misunderstood or misrepresented through the self-interest of those with the power to represent" (Spivak 1988b: 295). Rocamora, and certainly the media, have the power to represent, and many of those representations "foster stereotypes and prejudice that are linked with the perception of the headscarf as a symbol of oppression," a symbol of Islam (Schiffer 3). They thus reinforce "the idea that Islam is foreign" (Schiffer 1). Muslim women who are fighting to re-inscribe the headscarf as a symbol of empowerment or trying to integrate themselves into Western society "often feel misunderstood rather than 'rescued'" (Schiffer 3).

While it is not always the case that others are worse off for being spoken for since there are times when they/we "need a messenger to advocate for our needs," Alcoff reminds us that representations "are always mediated in complex ways by discourse, power, and location" (19, 5). Given that, she challenges us to ask further questions about

the representation's effects. In particular, "will it enable the empowerment of oppressed peoples?" (Alcoff 19).

Horizon of exile performs the exiled female body with images that open a space for transformation by representing aspects of the exilic experience in insightful ways including experiences of liminality, living between two worlds, altered sense of time and space, confusion of identity and feelings of weightlessness. Bringing these experiences to our attention serves to challenge mainstream representations and pave a path for empowerment of marginalized exiles. In terms of the veiled female body, however, while *Horizon of exile* may be trying to improve the situation of that body, one of the effects of its representation is that it reinforces reductive conceptions about the veil rather than encouraging a fuller discussion.

A limiting factor operating in *Horizon of exile* is that on one hand, Rocamora wishes to speak of an "essence" or a "universal" (her words) in regard to the veiled, exiled female body; however, the veil is too charged an element to serve as a universal, essential or even neutral signifier of women. Coding the veil by removing contextual details in the interest of representing an "essence" creates a fixity that does not allow for active change. While *Horizon of exile* performs different kinds of ambiguity and abstraction such as featuring non-literal movement, sequence of events and sense of time, the veil defies abstraction and ambiguity. While the inventive, suspended, anti-gravity movement brilliantly expresses the corporeal experience of exile, Rocamora cannot assume that the veil will serve as a sign of her own exilic experience in the same way. If the veil could have been performed as multiple veiled female identities, for example, *Horizon of exile* could have broadened its range of different possible meanings in regard

to identity and the veiled female body. Indeed, that is one of the elements Ndiritu features in *Nightingale*.

The Veil as a Signifier of Multiple Identities in Ndiritu's *Nightingale*

Ndiritu's short screendance *Nightingale,* sets the stage for fuller discussions about the veiled female body. Of the four screendances representing the veiled female body in this chapter, *Nightingale* comes closest to creating what Sedira calls a "greater space" to explore and understand veiling and all its multilayered, complex guises (Bailey and Tawadros 71). Rather than attempting to dilute the veil's fetishistic "radioactivity" with abstraction or ambiguity, as does *Horizon of exile*, Ndiritu performs its signifying power to excess. By performing the veil as a signifier of multiple meanings, she disrupts its representation as an unequivocal symbol.

Nightingale is comprised of two sections. The first section is shot in sepia tones and features a close-up of the veil, which is draped over and fully covering a person's head (performed by Ndiritu herself). The words, "He stood East of my Childhood and West of my future" are superimposed over this image. The words fade and she pulls the fabric very slowly so that the patterns undulate in its folds (this section is described in detail in Chapter 2). Between the slow moving fabric and the peaceful but commanding rawness of African musician, Baaba Maal's voice with kora, this section is calm, almost hypnotizing and builds suspense while we wait to see who is under the fabric. At the veil's end, it pauses to reveal half of Ndiritu's face. Sidelight accentuates her features and we see her eyes closed for a long time, which suggests sleep, trance or meditation.

The second section is marked by a shift in music dynamics, color, and movement. Drums and other voices join Maal as they break into an up-tempo rhythm pattern with a

driving beat. The screen goes from sepia to color and Ndiritu performs headscarf choreography in which she transforms the red veil with white flowers into a burka, a turban, a shawl, a gag, a blindfold and more (Doherty 1). Then images of nightingales are superimposed over the headscarfed woman. Slowly, the image of the woman fades and we watch the birds fly out of the frame except one, on which the camera lingers to the end.

While many representations of the veiled female body contain political meanings that support one side of the headscarf debate or another, *Nightingale* touches on both sides and more. Rather than signifying the veil as one thing, Ndiritu proposes that the relationship between women and the veil can be many things; "it can be a weapon of oppression, it can preserve modesty, it's something to hide behind" (Doherty 1). *Nightingale* performs multiple identities in a way that serves to defy the categorization of any one.

Other compelling aspects of Ndiritu's performance are the ways in which she maintains an intensely focused, commanding, direct gaze at the camera throughout the piece and the effect it produces. The gaze operates to continually remind us that she is an active agent in control of representing female identity. *Horizon of exile* and *I Am My Mother* suggest that, at times, the veiled female body is a passive, victimized body. Conversely, even when Ndiritu performs the veil as a "weapon of oppression," her commanding gaze speaks of empowerment. She is looking at us, almost putting us on the spot, rather than the reverse. Rather than being represented and categorized by others, Ndiritu is doing the representing all while returning the viewer's gaze.

Image 28.:Grace Ndiritu in *Nightingale* (2004).
http://ww.axisweb.org/seCVWK.aspx?ARTISTID=9891.

Though the still shots of Ndiritu in *Nightingale* and the protagonist in the *Horizon of exile* (performed by Camila Venezuela) both capture them looking out from the veil, they convey strikingly different affect. While Ndiritu's gaze is commanding, Venezuela's eyes speak of emotions such as sadness, loss, resentment, helplessness and resignation. Venezuela looks as if the veil is doing *to* her; as if the hands maneuvering the veil in a ritualized, habitual manner were not hers, but the hands of a force that victimizes her. The veil is effacing her, denying her her identity. In contrast, Ndiritu's eyes are almost confrontational. The hands wrapping, twisting and stretching the veil are most definitely hers. Rather than the veil denying her something, this image appears as if she is purposefully using the veil as a disguise as would a bandit. She is using partial veiling for her own means to perform as an active, transgressive subject who is preparing to rob (us!). Venezuela, on the other hand, performs a veil that appears to be robbing her. Indeed, these two performances of the veil resemble each other structurally but differ substantially in regard to the way they each perform veiled female identity.

Ndiritu's gaze also reads as hypnotic or what one might look like when in a trance, which is consistent with her interest in shamanistic practices. Ndiritu sees herself as a "transnational/transcultural kind of person, an artist who is more on a Shamanistic path" (Ndiritu in White 7). She was born and raised in London but her heritage is Kenyan. She was raised in the west; however, in her work and her life, she draws from non-western traditions that look to a Shaman as a medicine person, a healer or a guide for the community. Balancing these two worlds is challenging for her and her response is to continuously shift between the two.

> I don't feel I'm totally English and I don't feel totally African. So I'm in the middle space, which means that I can live everywhere, and live nowhere, because I don't belong anywhere. So I think that's why my work can be ambiguous or shifting because that's the way I am (Ndiritu in White 7).

While Rocamora represents female identity and the state of exile as a suspended body rolling in slow motion, Ndiritu represents the state of exile as a space where she is actively shifting among identities. *Nightingale* looks as if it could be a performance of what it is like living in the "middle space" (Ndiritu in White 7). Naficy claims that exilic identities are highly fluid (Naficy 5-6). *Nightingale,* like many accented films, performs identity not as a fixed essence, but as a process of becoming, even of self-fashioning.

The final images of nightingales in flight metaphorically underscore Ndiritu's message about the fluidity of female identity. Rather than being grounded or rooted in one definition of female identity or another, Ndiritu is shifting between multiple possibilities in ways that serve to raise her sense of herself above categorization and stereotyping.

Ndiritu's work contains both elements shared with the works of Abassi and Rocamora and elements that differ. Like Abassi and Rocamora, Ndiritu brings transcultural perspectives such as the experience of living between two or more worlds, Like Abassi, she performs in her own work and prefers a production mode she calls "handcrafted video," which allows her to be responsible for every aspect of the production. Additionally, the way she represents female identity challenges the recurrent reductionism seen in many representations and works toward what Sedira calls for: "a more critical, polyvocal dialogue" (Sedira 71).

Conclusion

While many mainstream news media representations code the veiled female body in reductive ways such as a symbol of foreign-ness, mystery, exoticism, Islam, oppression, terrorism and more, the screendances in this chapter propose alternative meanings. While mainstream media and cinema have historically been dominated by patriarchal practices, Naficy reminds us that "… all accented films are feminine texts. They destabilize schemes of gender and spatiality because the boundaries of gender, genre and sexuality are blurred and continually negotiated" (Naficy 155). I would add that in addition to blurring and re-negotiating boundaries, these screendances trouble conventional representations by incorporating ambiguous elements. In *I Am My Mother*, Abbasi reveals "secrets" from the space behind the veil with ambiguous movement and raises questions about gender identity by merging his identity with his mother's. Ndiritu's screendance, *TIME*, begins by performing controversial signifiers such as the veiled body and a sensational headline that reads ambiguously in relation to the image. The piece ends before answering the questions it raises, leaving the implications up to the viewer to

imagine. *Horizon of exile* blurs boundaries between genres, challenges the separateness of cultures with its performance of the exiled female body, and yet performs an ambiguous ending that can be read as limiting as far as representing the veiled female body. *Nightingale* destabilizes schemes of veiled female identity by performing identity as not one fixed essence, but continuously changing.

Though *Horizon of exile* is important in that it ventures into controversial, transnational territory, it serves as a warning of the pitfalls and complexities involved in transnational representations such as that of the veiled female body. A concern central to this project is the gap between the way veiled female bodies are represented and the experiences of veiled women themselves. While *Horizon of exile* and many media representations code the veil as a symbol of elements such as oppression and female abuse, the veil holds different meanings for many women who veil. For example, when *National Geographic* sent a team to Afghanistan to find Sharbat Gula and interview her about issues such as the veil, she commented, "It is a beautiful thing to wear…not a curse" (Gula in Newman). Given the multiple and conflicting views around the practice of veiling, in order to speak for others, it is important to obtain a "very specific location" that is not "taken as universal" (Alcoff 16). Additionally, Marks claims that representing an intercultural, fetishized object such as the veil "involves a tremendous amount of translation, decipherment, and excavation. And ultimately there is no possibility of getting to a truth about either culture, for the fetish is produced only in the movement between cultures" (Marks 115). This may account for the limiting way in which *Horizon of exile* is representing the veil in regard to female identity.

Conversely, Ndiritu's and Abbasi's screendances begin to "create a context for

transformation" by incorporating ambiguity in ways that pose questions, transgress

limiting representations and trouble unequivocal meanings of the veiled female body

(hooks in Veil 64). Their polyvocal representations of the veil help to broaden the debate

on the veil and its representation by acknowledging "multiple gazes that filter through,

slide off and remake the veil" (Bailey and Tawadros 18). More than re-confirming

conventional practices, these screendances operate by transgressing and deconstructing

mediated images, which hopefully will serve to strip away culturally reinforced

prejudices about difference and limiting conceptions of the veiled female body.

Chapter 6 -

Conclusion

The past year's screendance festivals demonstrate that screendance is evolving in a number of directions. As some screendance artists are increasingly gaining more skill and access to professional-level video production technology utilized by mainstream media forms such as commercial Hollywood cinema and advertising, many are also embracing the commercialized aesthetic and reductive representations of female identity constructed by those forms. In other cases, screendance artists are using either high-budget equipment and/or low-budget equipment to construct representations that counter commercial values, propose alternate representations of female identity and contribute to creating a space for what bell hooks calls a "context for transformation" (hooks in Bailey and Tawadros 64). This project has followed the latter of these two directions and was inspired by a few events that occurred a few years ago.

May 2008 marked a moment when I realized that I was witnessing a formative shift in the emergence of screendance as a genre. A lively debate about elitism, curating and screendance festival politics was ensuing on the Media Arts & Dance list serve. Karen Pearlman was writing from Australia, Doug Rosenberg from Wisconsin and Johannes Birringer and Pascale Moyse from the United Kingdom. Screendance artist Jeanette Ginslov chimed in from South Africa with some interesting comments, then invited us to view and give her feedback on her new work, *Freedom* (http://www.youtube .com/WalkingGusto#p/c/796AD4CCF7582CCC/3/FqmOHXc1Gb0).

Freedom appears to have been shot with a single camera in various studios and street locations around Johannesburg. The 10-minute screendance intersperses short dance segments with testimonials by an interracial cast of five young women who reflect on issues related to gender in relation to freedom, authenticity and democracy. Elements that differentiate *Freedom's* "talking head" format from commercial mainstream media forms such as network news broadcasting are its ambiguous image and sound construction and ambiguous meanings. One testimonial is shot from the side and the speaker never looks at the camera. An unconventionally long silence interrupts the rhythm of the edits in another testimonial, which creates tension. Ginslov shoots the dance segments in different lighting environments such as in silhouette in front of a grid window that casts interesting shadows and obscures the dancer. *Freedom* conveys messages about female identity and an acceptance of difference. It speaks visually as well as verbally by featuring the expressive female body-subject in motion and performing abstract, ambiguous movement with intention.

The nature of the list serve debate and the meanings Ginslov's screendance is generating sparked the inspiration and helped define the focus of this study. The list serve discussion and constituency showed me that the screendance community is multi-national, that important issues are beginning to be addressed and that there is a need for more discussion, theorizing and analysis. Additionally, while many screendances are re-confirming dominant culture representations, *Freedom* and most of the screendances included in this project are transgressing conventions in part by creating imagery that contains ambiguous elements as well as gives voice to women artists whose perspectives

are not often represented in mainstream media. By constructing this project around those elements, my intention has been to highlight and give momentum to the more subversive of the various directions in which screendance is evolving.

My concerns have revolved around the representation of female identity, the power the image has to represent and how imagery can be constructed to evoke bodily responses as well as activate socio-political transformation. Since both advertising and screendance construct corporeal images that are highly provocative, I comparatively analyzed examples from both and asked: what is it about an image that makes it provocative, or not, and what meaning(s) does it convey about female identity? I discovered that advertising employs provocative, corporeal imagery including visceral images, kinetic and excitement-generating images, many of which are shot very close-up and are obviously operating as a strategy for selling products. Some screendance artists appropriate commercial aesthetics and construct provocative corporeal imagery that serves to re-confirm the reductive representations of the female body featured in many advertisements. Ben Dolphin's *Arising,* for example, constructs visceral imagery with wet, partially nude bodies that read as fetishistic. In *Rain*, Pontus Lidberg creates images of the female body that re-confirm gender stereotypes. Conversely, some screendance artists employ similarly provocative corporeal imagery but for the purpose of constructing alternative representations of the female body. In *Nightingale*, Grace Ndiritu performs gender ambiguously and features visceral, haptic images that bring our attention to how mainstream media such as advertising feeds our tendency to stereotype and make assumptions about gender identity.

I investigated further into the power the image exerts in the representation of female identity by using Althusser's claim that "whatever you are called, you must already be" to examine ways in which the viewer is shaped by the image's address (44). Since advertisements exist for the purpose of motivating viewers into actions such as consuming products, I comparatively analyzed ways in which images hail the viewer in selected screendances with advertisements and a scene from *Damn Yankees*. I found that advertisements employ hailing strategies such as the direct gaze, seducing with the female body, inviting viewer identification and encouraging voyeuristic viewing. The moment we receive the address is also the moment when we buy into the assumptions being made and the meanings that address contains, often without awareness. For advertising and other forms of mainstream media, hailing the viewer in these ways operates as a key component in the perpetuation of dominant consumer culture ideology. Screendance artists Lloyd Newson and Grace Ndiritu not only appropriate different hailing strategies employed in advertising and some Hollywood films, they do so in subversive ways such as performing ambiguously and creating ambiguous meanings which creates the effect of bringing our attention to the very process of our viewing, interpreting and the assumptions we are making.

Another question central to my research has been; to what extent can screendance artists represent the nude, naked and/or sexually expressive female body in ways that are not culturally coded as reductive and limiting? I found that the line is very fine indeed between images that represent the sexually expressive body-subject and the erotic body-object. Certain screendance artists hover close to that line but manage to maintain an empowered subjectivity by featuring elements such as the female body in motion,

moving with intention, performing activity rather than passivity, by employing some visual strategies employed by advertising, news media and Hollywood film such as the direct gaze, but for different ends, and generating imagery and meanings that read ambiguously.

While I discovered that ambiguity in screendance and other representations is, in many cases, a productive factor in the positive revisioning of female identity, I explored further to investigate how ambiguous representations of female identity are operating across cultures. Given the abstract nature of contemporary postmodern dance, many screendance artists create ambiguous meanings through abstraction. However, in semiotic terms, I found that, in some cases, aspects of transnational representations of female identity resist abstraction. Such is the case with Rocamora's *Horizon of exile*. Though *Horizon of exile* performs the exiled female body with poignant aesthetics and insight into the exilic experience, the way Rocamora uses specific signifiers to code the veiled female body as the oppressed other and the way the screendance moves from literal, realistic story-telling at the beginning to abstraction and surrealism in an attempt to speak of the universal, the piece reads as re-confirming limiting, reductive representations of the veiled female body similar to those seen in many mainstream media representations. On the other hand, Ndiritu's *Nightingale* and Abassi's *I Am My Mother* perform elements of abstraction and ambiguity in ways that construct polyvocal, complex, transnational representations of veiled female identity.

Indeed, this project has sought to highlight and give momentum to screendances that construct alternative, non-limiting, non-reductive representations of female identity for a number of reasons. Since screendance has relatively few historical examples to

serve as aesthetic models, there appears to be a tendency among some screendance artists to turn to and imitate both mainstream commercial media aesthetics and the meanings they convey. I have proposed that whether a screendance artist is producing a single camera, "handcrafted" video such as Ginslov's and Ndiritu's or a professionally produced video such as Newson's, they are each constructing images and representations that are challenging conventions and asking us to question our habitual ways of seeing. These are some of the screendance artists who are employing visual techniques of advertising to counter commercial values, which consequently contributes to constructing a "context for transformation" (hooks in Bailey and Tawadros 64). Key to activating that transformation, I have argued, is that we need to discover what kinds of images pose critical alternatives and move us away from thinking about the female body in limiting and reductive ways.

I found that screendance artists who represent female identity by constructing images and meanings that contain some form of ambiguity do indeed disturb our habitual ways of seeing and ask us to consider alternate possibilities. Neurologically, ambiguity in art can activate the part of the brain that acquires new knowledge since the brain must entertain multiple solutions when faced with ambiguity. Since an artistic representations function like forms of knowledge proposed, ambiguous elements serve to encourage the learning experience, which is critical to the process of expanding worldviews. Rather than serving as an exhaustive survey of screendance, my hope is that this study contributes to the field by putting center stage a selection of screendance artists who are proposing alternative representations of female identity, and encourages them and others to continue constructing images that challenge our thinking about the status quo.

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