FOUL PERFECTION: THOUGHTS ON CARICATURE

By Mike Kelley

THE WORD "CARICATURE" calls to mind the shoddy street-corner portrait, the comic depictions of celebrities that line the walls of bars, the crude political cartoons in the opinion section of the daily newspaper—philistine images, which may provoke indifference or disgust in the educated art-lover. Yet probably in part because of this strong negative reaction, numerous artists have tried to draw caricature into the sphere of fine art. In the hot "Let's have fun" populism of funk and East Village art and in the "Let's get serious" populism of agitprop, in the cooler arena of Pop and in the post–Robert Rauschenberg formalism of painters like David Salle, caricature can be found. But throughout most of these attempts at incorporation, the low-art/high-art distinction remains firm: caricature is an alien element, meant to be tamed and transformed from its lowly status to a "higher" one

Jennifer Bolande,*Central and Mountain, 1985,* drum and mallet with chalk pastel, ca. 28" diam., 12"deep. Private collection.

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through the magic of art. At present, the cooler esthetic is the more dominant, and the more critically sanctioned. Much contemporary artwork is understandable only in reference to the history of and issues surrounding reductivist practice—especially Minimalism. But the low-art/high-art distinction becomes cloudy in some of this recent work; the *incorporation* of caricature is no longer the strategy, for the work actually *becomes* caricature. The historical referencing of reductivist paradigms here is only a legitimizing facade. This is a secret caricature—an image of low intent masquerading in heroic garb.

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Caricature as it is known today—a portrait that deliberately transforms the features of its victims so as to expose and exaggerate their faults and weaknesses—is of relatively recent origin. It did not exist before the 16th century, its development commonly being attributed to the Italian painters Ludovico and Annibale Carracci. Even in its earliest definitions, caricature—from *caricare*, to load,

as in a “loaded portrait”—was thought of as aggressive: to a writer from the circle of Gianlorenzo Bernini, for example, it already sought to discover a likeness in deformity. Yet in this way, he continued, it comes nearer to “truth” than does reality.[1] As the Carraccis themselves realized from the beginning, caricature is at root based on the idea of the essence, the inner truth.

As such, caricature has a kind of “good” twin in less discordant attempts to essentialize the human form. Ernst Kris writes,

“Art” to the age of the Carracci and of Poussin no longer meant a simple “imitation of nature.” The artist’s aim was said to be to penetrate into the innermost essence of reality, to the “Platonic idea”. . . . inspiration, the gift of vision, . . . enabled [the artist] to see the active principle at work behind the surface of appearance. Expressed in these terms the portrait painter’s task was to reveal the character, the essence of the man in an heroic sense; that of the caricaturist provided the natural counterpart—to reveal the true man behind the mask of pretense and to

show up his "essential" littleness and ugliness.[2]

As Kris points out, the caricature, which uses deformation in the service of ridicule, and the idealized, heroic, classicist portrait, though they may appear on the surface to be very different, are at root linked in essentialism. Albert Boime makes much the same point in regard to Jacques-Louis David's simultaneous production of neoclassical paintings and monstrous political cartoons.[3]

It is interesting to think of these dualities of distortion—the one to make things better, the other to make them worse—as analogous to a primary dichotomy in Modernist art. For Modernism too distorts, and predominantly in one of two modes: through expressive abstraction or through reduction. My own undergraduate art education was an endless string of assignments to perfect these binary methods of producing art objects. A pair of examples will suffice: one was a life-drawing exercise in which the hand, once comfortable with depicting the figure, was allowed to sort of roam on its own, producing an extension of the figure linked by "essence" to the original model but dissimilar enough from it to have its own life. The second had to do with drawing from reproductions of old master paintings and boiling them down to their primary forms, the essential cubes, spheres, and cones that constitute them, or, more essential yet, their squares, circles, and triangles.

This latter effort was clearly a contemporary sort of Platonism, though where once the painter built up from the forms of the ideal, we Moderns were expected to strip

back down to them. As for the first exercise, it was obviously related to the intentional distortions of caricature. Yet it was idealized, stripped of caricature's aggressive tendencies. The exercise posited Modernist expressionism as an essentialism that dispensed with the negative. This was appropriate, since "fine art," art associated with the "high" ideas of culture, is traditionally seldom confrontational or vituperative. And despite the contributions of artists like George Grosz or John Heartfield, much of Modernism was ostentatiously "high." This was as true of expressionists like Willem de Kooning as it was of reductivists like Piet Mondrian. In general, the difference for which the expressionist artist strove was situated around the split not between the "bad" and the "good" but between the orderly and the expressive. That split, however, refuses to stay clear of a whole set of intertwined dichotomies: organic/geometric, adorned/unadorned, soft/hard, personal/social, female/male. Modernism may have supposed itself "above" caricature, but it progressed unavoidably into what it was trying to avoid: bad/good, the esthetics of morality.

It seems appropriate here to bring up the old distinction between caricature and the grotesque. The word "grotesque" was initially used to describe the kind of intricately patterned fantastic decorations—pastiches of satyrs, cupids, fruit, foliage, festoons, knots, bows—that came into use after the discovery, in the 15th century, of earlier such inventions in the ruins of ancient Rome. Vasari describes the pleasure Renaissance artists and their patrons took in these newly unearthed models, and Michelangelo began his career as a painter of them. Part of the appeal of the grotesque was the notion that it was the product of pagan painters who were at liberty to invent whatever they pleased—it represented artistic freedom. Implicit in this notion was an equation of paganism with hedonism, and it is interesting to note that the blame for

pornography as well as for the grotesque has been laid at pagan feet: Walter Kendrick, in his book *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1987–88, traces the roots of modern pornography back to the discovery of the erotic murals in Pompeii.

Though initially admired, and deemed suitable for public and holy places, grotesque ornament eventually fell from grace. With the rise of Vitru-vian notions of architecture, the grotesque, which Vasari had described as "divine," "beautiful and imaginative fantasies," instead became synonymous with the "irrational," the "irregular," the "licentious," and the "immoral." To the Vitruvians, the noblest art was a classically based, mathematical, purist abstraction reflecting the perfect harmony of God's universe. They soon "discovered" that though the ornaments of Nero's Golden House were products of classical culture, they came from its decadent phase; they were manifestations of Rome in decline. Soon, the word "grotesque" became associated with the foul and ugly. By the 19th century it was closely linked to caricature, so that an image that employed distortion might be described almost interchangeably by either term. Thus the fantasticness of grotesque decoration took on an overtly negative connotation.

It is in this sense that decoration was understood in the reductive "form follows function" school of architecture, and in the reductivist design sensibilities of Modernist groups like De Stijl. The issue was not only utilitarian but fundamentally moral; in the extremes of high Modernism, decoration was seen as "primitive" and worse. Here is the Modern architect Adolf Loos, writing in 1898:

The less civilized a people is, the more prodigal it will be with ornament and decoration. The Red Indian covers every object, every boat, every oar, every arrow over and over with ornament. To regard decoration as an

advantage is tantamount to remaining on the level of a Red Indian. But the Red Indian within us must be overcome. The Red Indian says: That woman is beautiful because she wears golden rings in her nose and in her ears. The civilized person says: This woman is beautiful because she has no rings in her nose and in her ears. To seek beauty only in form and not to make it depend on ornament, that is the aim towards which the whole of mankind is tending.

He continues:

The Papuans slaughter their enemies and eat them. They are not criminals. If, however, a man of this century slaughters and eats someone he is a criminal or a degenerate. . . . The Papuans tattoo their skin, their boats, their oars, in short everything within reach. They are not criminals. But the man of this century who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate. . . . The urge to ornament one's face and everything within reach is the very origin of visual arts. It is the babbling of painting. All art is erotic.[4]

Loos' evolutionist linking of ornament, and of eroticism, with tribal beliefs to which he perceived we were still prone in our modern incarnation brings to mind certain evolutionist tendencies of Sigmund Freud's. In his essay "The 'Uncanny,' " 1919, Freud attributes feelings of terror produced by ordinary, familiar things to a repressed belief in the "omnipotence of thoughts," a belief once held by our ancestors and that we carry in us as a kind of racial memory:

The uncanny [is] associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfillment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead. . . . We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed that these possibilities were realities and were convinced that

they actually happened. Nowadays . . . we have surmounted *these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something* actually happens *in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny; it is as though we were making a judgment something like this: "So, after all, it is* true *that one can kill a person by the mere wish!*[5]

To Freud, our tribal history accounts for our occasional feelings of uncanniness, and for our enjoyment of modes of entertainment that produce these feelings in a controlled way. To Loos, that ancestral background is "criminal." His world conception precludes any pleasure in images of sublimation, for he sees them as mirror reflections of what is being sublimated, and thus as tokens or embodiments of the continuance of such feelings in the present. For Loos, the preservation of "criminal, erotic" ornament will preserve criminality and eroticism in the world. Its erasure, on the other hand, will allow an orderly, chaste society. Thus he himself is prone to a kind of "primitive" thinking—to a belief in the magic of the image, in the notion that like effects like, that the image is in essence the same as what it shows. Hence the intensity of his iconoclasm. This belief in the equality of image and imaged is the hallmark of the censor; as Kris writes, "Wherever it is not considered a joke but rather a dangerous practice to distort a man's features, even on paper, caricature as an art cannot develop." And contrary to Loos, the action of the grotesque caricature is in some sense internal, an idea more than an event. Kris continues,

The caricaturist's secret lies in the use he makes of controlled regression. Just as his scribbling style and his blending of shapes evokes childhood pleasures, so the use of magic beliefs in the potency of his transformation constitutes a regression from rationality. . . . For this to

happen the pictorial representation had to be removed from the sphere where the image stimulates action. . . . The hostile action is confined to an alteration of the person's "likeness". . . . only this interpretation contains criticism. Aggression has remained in the aesthetic sphere and thus we react not with hostility but with laughter.[6]

The world Loos envisioned, of course, has not and could not come about. For it would demand the excision of a large part of the human persona, a part that can express itself in the ornament that Loos repressed—that can express itself in the grotesque and in caricature. For Boime, discussing David's political cartoons, caricature's use of deformation relates specifically to a Freudian model of the unconscious:

The Oedipal complex constitutes the beginnings of the forms of political and social authority, the regulation and control through the superego or conscience. On the other hand, the political caricature permits the displaced manifestation of the repressed aggressive desire to oust the father. The political enemy, or the subject of distortion, becomes the projection of the hated parent and through caricature can be struck down.

Citing Freudian theory, Boime adds,

Children bestow upon the anal product the status of their own original creation, which they now deploy to gain pleasure in play, to attain the affection of another (feces as gift), to assert personal ownership (feces as property), or to act out hostility against another (feces as weapon). Thus some of the most crucial areas of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) develop in the anal phase and retain their connection with it into adulthood. . . . By exposing the disguised (sublimated) anality behind neoclassicism (rational state, organized religion, hierarchal authority) David reaffirmed the connection

between political caricature and his "high art."[7]

Scatology abounds in caricature, and in other forms of satire. From Greek comedies through Rabelais and Swift on down to contemporary low humor, anal and fecal imagery is frequently used in a political context. (Sandor Ferenczi goes so far as to say that diarrhea is antiauthoritarian in that it reduces educational measures—toilet training—to an absurdity. It is a mockery of authority.[8]) If feces can be an agent of besmirchment, so can any foul substance—any substance associated with taboo, and thus with repression. The use of bodily fluids, entrails, garbage, and animals such as frogs, toads, and snakes to "decorate" an authority figure is a literal enactment of Loos' conception of "criminal" ornamentation.

To make an aside in this regard, a current television game show called *Double Dare* features on-the-verge-of-adolescent boy/girl teams in sports activities that often require them to cover each other in gooey foodstuffs. At certain points they must fish into tactilely suspect substances labeled "brain juice," "mashed maggots," "fish lips," "dead worms," and so on, in order to win prizes. Part of the show's attraction to youth of that age is surely their fear of their dawning sexuality, which is associated with taboo, or "disgusting," activities and substances. Bruno Bettelheim's discussion of the "frog prince" fairy tale is relevant here: a young girl must sleep with or kiss a frog, and feels revulsion at having to do so, but when the task is completed, the frog becomes a desirable prince. The story, Bettelheim remarks, "confirms the appropriateness of disgust when one is not ready for sex, and prepares for its desirability when the time is ripe."[9] *Double Dare* occasionally brings on parents, whose submersion in gunk obviously has a different meaning: this is the pure pleasure of defiling an authority figure.

In low comedy and political cartoons, reductive and distortional practices exist side by side. Here, both approaches are set up to attack false or hated authority, for in the context of caricature's distortions, the refined heroic figure becomes a comic butt. In "fine art," on the other hand, reduction tends to be associated with the revelation of the ideal. Today, geometric forms are probably the most common type of public sculpture. And fine artists tend to keep distortion and reduction apart: David's political cartoons, for example, were meant for the popular audience, and were deliberately assaultive and distortional, but his salon paintings were based on idealizing classical principles. Both reduction and distortion are rarely used aggressively in fine art. In *Dream and Lie of Franco, I,* 1937, Picasso depicts the dictator as an entraillike being who at one point gives birth to a litter of frogs and snakes, but this is an atypical work, mimicking popular political forms. More typically, Picasso moves toward essentialist reduction. In his most "bodily" period, the '30s, he subjects some of his most potentially violent images—the swooning woman, the well-hung bull, the eviscerated horse—to a reducing and crystallizing process, in works such as *Wounded Bull, Horse and Nude Woman* and *The Bull-Fight*, both 1934.

Yet reduction can express other dimensions beside the ennobled, as one can see by comparing Picasso's stylization of organic forms to the treatment of a similar theme in J. G. Ballard's science fiction novel *The Crystal World*, 1966. Where Picasso's reductions tend to accentuate the tragic, intensely emotional nature of his subjects, Ballard's are deadening, ultimately apocalyptic. *The Crystal World* and other books of Ballard's—*The Drought*, 1965, and *The Drowned World*, 1962, for example—approach the theme of world's end not as a cataclysm but as a slow process of homogenization. Time stops when things have been reduced to one essential property—crystal, earth, water. The positive aspects of this

transformation, which can be seen as a version of the mystical notion that "all is one," are here equated with a kind of addiction: in *The Crystal World*, characters previously crystallized but now revived seek to return to their former pleasant state of nonidentity. The impulse brings to mind Roger Caillois' definition of mimicry in nature as "depersonalization by assimilation to space,"[10] and, ultimately, Freud's concept of the death instinct—the desire to annihilate the ego reflecting a desire to return to the uterine existence before the ego's formation.

The death instinct is embedded in a good deal of the art production of the '60s and '70s, especially Minimalism and serial practices concerned with the objectification or freezing of time through repetition. Though the surface meaning of much of this art has to do with structure and material, the work ultimately refers back to and mirrors the bodily presence of the viewer. This thesis, the basis of Michael Fried's attack on Minimalism,[11] was borne out in the body art that developed later, which applied reductivist tendencies to complex psychological and corporeal issues. Where Minimalism was well-mannered, this work was confrontational—even "grotesque." Bruce Nauman's various films of repeated body movements and manipulations, Vito Acconci's evocation of architectural libido in *Seedbed*, 1971, Chris Burden's packaging of the fear of violence as sculpture in *Shoot*, 1971—all hit the Modernist moral schism between form and decoration head-on: this was an esthetic of sculpting with flesh. The very practices that Loos had attacked as "criminal" were in body art perversely defined as somehow essential forms—marking the body, piercing it, distorting it. And all this was approached in a removed, formal way. The difference between the distortion of the body in much body art and in expressionist performance and painting can in some ways be compared to a distinction between the grotesque and caricature: in caricature, distortion is for a specific purpose, in most cases to defame, but in the grotesque it is

done for its own sake, as a formalized displacement of parts. Its only purpose is to surprise the viewer.

From this formalist slant, the whole low-art pictorial tradition of the monster can be viewed as an expression of the pleasure of shuffling the components of a form. (Psychologically, however, the difference is great between shuffling squares on a paper, or flowers in a vase, and reordering the human figure.) The grotesque displacement of the order of the body is a mainstay of popular art. Cartoons and horror films provide numerous ex- Wolverton's work from the '40s through the '70s is the monstrous depiction of disordered, exaggerated faces, often accompanied by ludicrous explanations as to how they got that way; again, huge distended eyes are often a major feature. And the '60s images of Roth and Mouse link these same characteristics to the images of the "outlaw" biker and the car fanatic. Their work pairs the grotesque with the dirty, the criminal, and the hedonistic. The caption of a Rat Fink drawing in the *Ed "Big Daddy" Roth Monster Coloring Book* reads, " . . . What is Colored 'Rotten' to the Core, 'Garbage' and `Gore,' `Poison' in Every Pore, and 'Warped' Forevermore? . . . Yours Truly, R.F.!" Surprisingly, though, the usual order is reversed in these concerned with an "uncanny" depiction of the sexual body, a depiction in which the very parts that constitute us become frightening and unfamiliar. In his recent movie *Dead Ringers*, for example, we follow the development of two male identical twins from their youthful ignorance of the specifics of sexual difference to their adult careers as gynecologists to their double death in a black parody of sexual union and psychotic gynecological surgery.

Perhaps most disturbing, because it is a picture of "real" life, is the genre of the true crime story. Behind this literature's fixation on the mutilation murder is the attraction/repulsion of viewing the abstracted body. The description of the crime amples of it, and in many of these

the move toward abstraction is consciously erotic. The ambiguous humanity of these distorted images creates a tension between attraction and repulsion. As it is disordered, the whole comes to take on the image of its parts, and the parts that most often come to the foreground are the genitals. The figure truly becomes an erotic ornament. The dichotomy of soft and hard now becomes dominant, and animated and still cartoons are filled with jokes about various parts of the body replacing the genitals in their capacity for flaccidity or erection.

The best examples are in the work of Tex Avery, Basil Wolverton, and the ’60s car-culture monster artists Ed “Big Daddy” Roth and Mouse. Though these artists treat the whole body as erectile, the eyes and tongue are the most common genital replacements: Avery’s animated films of the ’40s—*Little Rural Riding Hood*, 1949, for instance—are nonstop visual jokes, this one about a wolf in extreme states of sexual arousal manifested by his eyes blowing out of their sockets, or his tongue rolling out of his mouth onto the floor. The forte of Wloverton’s work from the ’40s through the ’70s is the mostrous depiction of disordered, axaggerated faces, often accompanied by ludicrous explanations as to how they got that way; again, huge distended eyes are often a major feature. And the ’60s images of Roth and Mouse link these same characteristics to the images of the “outlaw” biker and the car fanatic. Their work pairs the grotesque with the dirty, the criminal, and the hedonistic. The caption of Rat Fink drawing in the *Ed “big daddy” Roth Monster Coloring Book* reads, ” . . . What is Colored ‘Rotten’ to the Core, ‘Garbage’ and ‘Gore,’ ‘Poison’ in Every Pore, and ‘Warped’ Forevermore? . . . Yours truly, R.F.!” Surprisingly, though, the usual order is reversed in these drawings; the association of the grotesque with the disgusting is here a positive one—these monstrous figures are meant to be role models.

Popular horror, crime, and pornographic film and literature all explicitly deal with the disordered sexual body. In his dystopian science fiction novel *Dr. Adder*, 1984, for example, K. W. Jeter turns Loos' utopian evolutionary development around: the society of the future, instead of moving away from the sculpting of the body, makes it a mainstay. In the world Jeter describes, plastic surgery has reached a point of refinement where bodily, and especially genital, transformation can be based directly on repressed sexual trauma; a one-to-one relationship can be created between one's unconscious and one's physical shape. The book's descriptions of genitals reworked into "baroque, pathetic convolutions of the vulva, other parts shining wet like fleshy sea plants" obviously reflect preadolescent misunderstandings of the sexual body, and playfully elaborate the connection between the ornamental and the erotic. Again, almost all of David Cronenberg's films are concerned with an "uncanny" depiction of the sexual body, a depiction in which the very parts that constitute us become frightening and unfamiliar. In his recent movie *Dead Ringers*, for example, we follow the development of two male identical twins from their youthful ignorance of the specifics of sexual difference to their adult careers as gynecologists to their double death in a back parody of sexual union and psychotic gynecological surgery.

Perhaps most disturbing, becasue it is a picture of "real" life, is the genre of the true crime story. Behind this literature's fixation on the mutilation murder is the attraction/repulsion of viewing the abstracted body. The description of the crime scene in *Killing for Company*, 1985, Brian Masters' account of the career of mass-murderer Dennis Nilsen, is almost loving in its detail, clinically informing us how the killer broke a body down to pack it into a series of shopping bags, carefully dissecting it until he came to the innards, which were "all mixed together in a disgusting, impersonal pottage."[12] Nilsen also

made drawings of his victims, sometimes in stages of dissection; these drawings are literally “still lifes,” of a genre quite other from the caricature’s harmless estheticization as discussed by Kris. The murderer has countered the frightening complexity of the body with a counterurge to package it, to break it down into controllable lumps, to find its essence—of course, unsuccessfully.

Recent horror films, called “splatter films” because of their copious blood and gore, continue the depiction of the body as grotesque. As in the original Roman decorations, the body becomes an accumulation of pieces at odds with each other—a group of parts that refuse to become whole. Though the horror film has always been concerned with the uncanny presence of the body, its recent incarnations stress the body’s composite nature increasingly intensely. The monster in James Whale’s *Frankenstein*, 1931, may be made up of components from many sources, but it is ruled by a mechanistic notion of wholeness; like a Modernist collage, it is fractured, made up of multiple scavenged pieces, but it still operates as a totality. The erectile intestine that blows out of the torso of a walking corpse to strangle its victim in the 1985 horror film *Re-Animator*, on the other hand, reflects the fetishization of the body part. Here the body is not total but corporate—a linked compilation of separate entities. *Re-Animator* and John Carpenter’s *The Thing*, 1982, both concern pastiche beings, creatures that when cut apart simply keep on existing that way—separately. What could be more horrific to an essentialist like Loos than this world as a collection of animated ornaments stripped from their primary forms?

Interestingly, pornography is organized in much the same way: it tends to be body-part-specific. Pornographic photographs and films often use close-ups, encapsulating the erotic entirety in the fragment, as if sex were a puppet

show acted out by detached members. The whole pornography-magazine field is divided by part or substance: male- or female-genital magazines, ass magazines, breast magazines, cum magazines. Where a cartoonist like Roth pictures the genitals obliquely, as distortions of other corporeal parts, pornography shows them literally, yet cut out and isolated, and thus no less metaphoric: they become objectified stand-ins and irreal substitutes for themselves. In this way they gain the distance of the fetish. Repressed into abstraction, they rise pleasurably back into consciousness in their new form.

grotesque image of the reordered body is work that seems, on the surface, to be an extension of organic abstraction, the work of such painters as Bill Komoski, Lari Pittman, and Carroll Dunham. And at this point we must return to our earlier discussion of the split between hard and soft. Clearly, the Modernist opposition of adorned to unadorned is an extension of old ideas attributing the characteristics of gender to design motifs. The association of spareness with masculinity and ornateness with femininity is long familiar. A 16th-century drawing, for example, substitutes male and female statues respectively for Doric (simple) and Corinthian (fancy) architectural columns, illustrating a Vitruvian notion of the humanization of the order; and in contemporary parlance, “hard” and “soft” are often associated with gender—hard and soft rock, for example. Continuing this division into the moral sphere, it is obvious that Loos’ “criminality” is feminine.

A variety of works from recent art history illustrate this equation of the soft and the decorative with the feminine as a negative, distortional device—a device of caricature. Salvador Dali’s softening of the Renaissance world view in the melting forms of his canvases, Claes Oldenburg’s softening of consumer products and household objects in

his malleable sculpture, and the softened forms in Peter Saul's versions of political representations and fine-art masterpieces all show male artists using supposedly feminine softness so as to attack and destabilize the hard patriarchal order. At the same time, the appropriation of hard and geometric formats by an artist like Sherrie Levine reflects a female cooption of male order. What it boils down to is a kind of artistic gender-bending. With Komoski, Pittman, and Dunham, the referents are the essentialist picturing of the blob as an icon of nature and the expressiveness of gestural painting. Yet neither of these ring true; all the signs of meaning turn in on themselves. The references to nature are obviously rooted in popular sources, and the "eroticism" of the decoration is a self-conscious construct, formalized to the point where it actually becomes unerotic. Nature, Eros, the horrific, and the body are filtered through the codes of essentialism. This is what gives the work its double edge, and what allows it to escape the bonds of Modernism's simplistic dualism.

Another contemporary camp circles around an extension of geometric reductivism, historically the more "masculine," "heroic" kind of abstraction. Here cruelty is more apparent. Perhaps softness calls for restraint—as in the prohibition against punching someone with glasses. In any case, the treatment of the Minimalist paradigm in recent work is also akin to the tradition of caricature. Reductive, "essentially" heroic primal forms lend themselves easily to the role of authority figure. Thus it is only right that we should want to defame them. Aimee Rankin, Debby Davis, and Liz Lamer are female sculptors who all pop the cherry of Minimalism to reinsert the body. On first view, Rankin's exhibitions resemble rows of Don Judd–like wall pieces, but on closer inspection these boxes reveal themselves as Pandora's—they are filled with scenes of cruelty and eroticism. Davis reveals the cruelty of the primal form itself by using it to shape casts of dead

animals—a cube of cast chicken carcasses, say. Larner makes antiseptic geometric receptacles to reveal geometry's destructive "soul": a cube is formed of the materials it takes to make a bomb, or a clear glass rectangle holds a petrie dish of bacteria. John Miller's and Meyer Vaisman's work operates similarly, Miller's by overlaying a politics of anality on geometric formalism, Vaisman's by pairing a generic stand-in for painting with references to the taboo, the infantile, the sexual—rubber nipples, toilet seats, greased holes, and, tellingly, caricatures.

One of the initial attractions of the caricature was the speed with which it could be executed, as if its spontaneity set it closer to the original workings of the mind than a more considered drawing. This esthetic of haste contributed to the adoration once lavished on Michelangelo's unfinished "slave" carvings, in which the figure is barely freed from the stone, and appears to be receding back into the Platonic archetype that gave it birth. In 1981, Charles Ray made a sculpture called *Memory of Sadat*. A rectangular steel box lies on the floor; from it extend a human arm and leg. These organic marks on the geometric primal form are a distortion. A fouled primal form is a caricature of the very *notion* of perfection . . . and when we see this, like the children on *Double Dare* when they see their parents and teachers covered in a disgusting mess, we cannot hold back a shout of glee.

Mike Kelley is an artist who lives in Los Angeles.

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NOTES

1. See Ernst Kris, Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, 1952, reprint ed. New York: International Universities Press, Inc./Schocken Books, 1964, p. 190.

2. Ibid.

3. See Albert Boime, “Jacques-Louis David, Scatological Discourse in the French Revolution, and the Art of Caricature,” *Arts Magazine* 62 no. 6, February 1988, pp. 72–81.

4. Quoted in E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, Oxford: Phaidon Press Limited, 1979, pp. 60–61.

5. Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” 1919, in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955, pp. 247–48.

6. Kris, pp. 202–3.

7. Boime, p. 72.

8. See Sandor Ferenczi, *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1963.

9. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, New York: Vintage Books. 1977, p. 290.

10. Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” *October* no. 31, Winter 1984, p. 30.

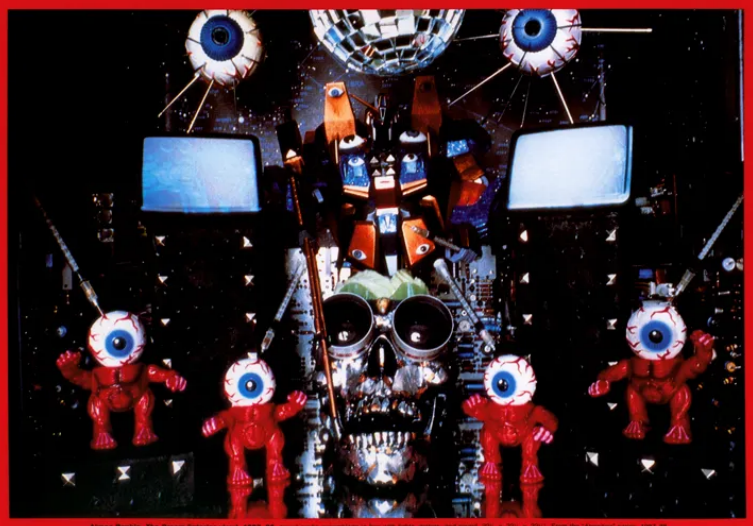
11. See Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* V no. 10, Summer 1967.

12. Brian Masters, *Killing for Company*, New York: Stein & Day, 1985, p. 16.

FOUL PERFECTION

Thoughts on Caricature

MIKE KELLEY



Aimee Rankin, The Dream (interior view), 1987–88, mixed media assemblage in box with lights, motors, and sound, 7'1½" × 20½" × 20½". From the "Atrocities" series, 1987–88.

The word "caricature" calls to mind the shoddy street-corner portrait, the comic depictions of celebrities that line the walls of bars, the crude political cartoons in the opinion section of the daily newspaper—philistine images, which may provoke indifference or disgust in the educated art-lover. Yet probably in part because of this strong negative reaction, numerous artists have tried to draw caricature into the sphere of fine art. In the hot "Let's have fun" populism of funk and East Village art and in the "Let's get serious" populism of agitprop, in the cooler arena of Pop and in the post-Robert Rauschenberg formalism of painters like David Salle, caricature can be found. But throughout most of these attempts at incorporation, the low-art/high-art distinction remains firm: caricature is an alien element, meant to be tamed and transformed from its lowly status to a "higher" one through the magic of art. At present, the cooler esthetic is the more dominant, and the more critically sanctioned. Much contemporary artwork is understandable only in reference to the history of and issues surrounding reductivist practice—especially Minimalism. But the low-art/high-art distinction becomes cloudy in some of this recent work; the *incorporation* of caricature is no longer the strategy, for the work actually *becomes* caricature. The historical referencing of reductivist paradigms here is only a legitimizing facade. This is a secret caricature—an image of low intent masquerading in heroic garb.

Caricature as it is known today—a portrait that deliberately transforms the features of its victims so as to expose and exaggerate their faults and weaknesses—is of relatively recent origin. It did not exist before the 16th century, its development commonly being attributed to the Italian painters Ludovico and Annibale Carracci. Even in its earliest definitions, caricature—from *caricare*, to load, as in a "loaded portrait"—was thought of as aggressive: to a writer from the circle of Gianlorenzo Bernini, for example, it already sought to discover a likeness in deformity. Yet in this way, he continued, it comes nearer to "truth" than does reality.[1] As the Carraccis themselves realized from the beginning, caricature is at root based on the idea of the essence, the inner truth.

As such, caricature has a kind of "good" twin in less discordant attempts to essentialize the human form. Ernst Kris writes,

> "Art" to the age of the Carracci and of Poussin no longer meant a simple "imitation of nature." The artist's aim was said to be to penetrate into the innermost essence of reality, to the "Platonic idea"....inspiration, the gift of vision,...enabled [the artist] to see the active principle at work behind the surface of appearance. Expressed in these terms the portrait painter's task was to reveal the character, the essence of the man in an heroic sense; that of the caricaturist provided the natural counterpart—to reveal the true man behind the mask of pretense and to show up his "essential" littleness and ugliness.[2]

As Kris points out, the caricature, which uses deformation in the service of ridicule, and the idealized, heroic, classicist portrait, though they may appear on the surface to be very different, are at root linked in essentialism. Albert Boime makes much the same point in regard to Jacques-Louis David's simultaneous production of neoclassical paintings and monstrous political cartoons.[3]

Aimee Rankin, 5 boxes (exterior view) from the "Ecstasy" series, 1986–87,
mixed media, installation view.

John Miller, *Untitled*, 1985,
acrylic on plaster and wood dowel, 18 × 4 × 4".

It is interesting to think of these dualities of distortion—the one to make things better, the other to make them worse—as analogous to a primary dichotomy in Modernist art. For Modernism too distorts, and predominantly in one of two modes: through expressive abstraction or through reduction. My own undergraduate art education was an endless string of assignments to perfect these binary methods of producing art objects. A pair of examples will suffice: one was a life-drawing exercise in which the hand, once comfortable with depicting the figure, was allowed to sort of roam on its own, producing an extension of the figure linked by "essence" to the original model but dissimilar enough from it to have its own life. The second had to do with drawing from reproductions of old master paintings and boiling them down to their primary forms, the essential cubes, spheres, and cones that constitute them, or, more essential yet, their squares, circles, and triangles.

This latter effort was clearly a contemporary sort of Platonism, though where once the painter built up from the forms of the ideal, we Moderns were expected to strip back down to them. As for the first exercise, it was obviously related to the intentional distortions of caricature. Yet it was idealized, stripped of caricature's aggressive tendencies. The exercise posited Modernist expressionism as an essentialism that dispensed with the negative. This was appropriate, since "fine art," art associated with the "high" ideas of culture, is traditionally seldom confrontational or vituperative. And despite the contributions of artists like George Grosz or John Heartfield, much of Modernism was ostentatiously "high." This was as true of expressionists like Willem de Kooning as it was of reductivists like Piet Mondrian. In general, the difference for which the expressionist artist strove was situated around the split not between the "bad" and the "good" but between the orderly and the expressive. That split, however, refuses to stay clear of a whole set of intertwined dichotomies: organic/geometric, adorned/unadorned, soft/hard, personal/social, female/male. Modernism may have supposed itself "above" caricature, but it progressed unavoidably into what it was trying to avoid: bad/good, the esthetics of morality.

It seems appropriate here to bring up the old distinction between caricature and the grotesque. The word "grotesque" was initially used to describe the kind of intricately patterned fantastic decorations—pastiches of satyrs, cupids, fruit, foliage, festoons, knots, bows—that came into use after the discovery, in the 15th century, of earlier such inventions in the ruins of ancient Rome. Vasari describes the pleasure Renaissance artists

and their patrons took in these newly unearthed models, and Michelangelo began his career as a painter of them. Part of the appeal of the grotesque was the notion that it was the product of pagan painters who were at liberty to invent whatever they pleased—it represented artistic freedom. Implicit in this notion was an equation of paganism with hedonism, and it is interesting to note that the blame for pornography as well as for the grotesque has been laid at pagan feet: Walter Kendrick, in his book *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1987–88, traces the roots of modern pornography back to the discovery of the erotic murals in Pompeii.

Though initially admired, and deemed suitable for public and holy places, grotesque ornament eventually fell from grace. With the rise of Vitruvian notions of architecture, the grotesque, which Vasari had described as "divine," "beautiful and imaginative fantasies," instead became synonymous with the "irrational," the "irregular," the "licentious," and the "immoral." To the Vitruvians, the noblest art was a classically based, mathematical, purist abstraction reflecting the perfect harmony of God's universe. They soon "discovered" that though the ornaments of Nero's Golden House were products of classical culture, they came from its decadent phase; they were manifestations of Rome in decline. Soon, the word "grotesque" became associated with the foul and ugly. By the 19th century it was closely linked to caricature, so that an image that employed distortion might be described almost interchangeably by either term. Thus the fantasticness of grotesque decoration took on an overtly negative connotation.

It is in this sense that decoration was understood in the reductive "form follows function" school of architecture, and in the reductivist design sensibilities of Modernist groups like De Stijl. The issue was not only utilitarian but fundamentally moral; in the extremes of high Modernism, decoration was seen as "primitive" and worse. Here is the Modern architect Adolf Loos, writing in 1898:

The less civilized a people is, the more prodigal it will be with ornament and decoration. The Red Indian covers every object, every boat, every oar, every arrow over and over with ornament. To regard decoration as an advantage is tantamount to remaining on the level of a Red Indian. But the Red Indian within us must be overcome. The Red Indian says: That woman is beautiful because she wears golden rings in her nose and in her ears. The civilized person says: This woman is beautiful because she has no rings in her nose and in her ears. To seek beauty only in form and not to make it depend on ornament, that is the aim towards which the whole of mankind is tending.

He continues:

The Papuans slaughter their enemies and eat them. They are not criminals. If, however, a man of this century slaughters and eats someone he is a criminal or a degenerate....The Papuans tattoo their skin, their boats, their oars, in short everything within reach. They are not criminals. But the man of this century who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate....The urge to ornament one's face and everything within reach is the very origin of visual arts. It is the babbling of painting. All art is erotic.[4]

Carroll Dunham, Green, 1985–86, mixed media on wallnut, 66 × 42".

Opposite: **Bill Komoski, Untitled, 1987,** acrylic and modeling paste on linen, 84 × 50".

Lari Pittman, Thanksgiving, 1985, acrylic and oil on panel, 80 × 82".

Loos' evolutionist linking of ornament, and of eroticism, with tribal beliefs to which he perceived we were still prône in our modern incarnation brings to mind certain evolutionist tendencies of Sigmund Freud's. In his essay "The 'Uncanny,' " 1919, Freud attributes feelings of terror produced by ordinary, familiar things to a repressed belief in the "omnipotence of thoughts," a belief once held by our ancestors and that we carry in us as a kind of racial memory:

The uncanny [is] associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfillment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead....We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed that these possibilities were realities and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays...we have *surmounted* these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny; it is as though we were making a judgment something like this: "So, after all, it is *true* that one can kill a person by the mere wish!"

To Freud, our tribal history accounts for our occasional feelings of uncanniness, and for our enjoyment of modes of entertainment that produce these feelings in a controlled way. To Loos, that ancestral background is "criminal." His world conception precludes any pleasure in images of sublimation, for he sees them as mirror reflections of what is being sublimated, and thus as tokens or embodiments of the continuance of such feelings in the present. For Loos, the preservation of "criminal, erotic" ornament will preserve criminality and eroticism in the world. Its erasure, on the other hand, will allow an orderly, chaste society. Thus he himself is prone to a kind of "primitive" thinking—to a belief in the magic of the image, in the notion that like effects like, that the image is in essence the same as what it shows. Hence the intensity of his iconoclasm. This belief in the equality of image and imaged is the hallmark of the censor; as Kris writes, "Wherever it is not considered a joke but rather a dangerous practice to distort a man's features, even on paper, caricature as an art cannot develop." And contrary to Loos, the action of the grotesque caricature is in some sense internal, an idea more than an event. Kris continues,

The caricaturist's secret lies in the use he makes of controlled regression. Just as his scribbling style and his blending of shapes evokes childhood pleasures, so the use of magic beliefs in the potency of his transformation constitutes a regression from rationality....For this to happen the pictorial representation had to be removed from the sphere where the image stimulates action.....The hostile action is confined to an alteration

of the person's "likeness"....only this interpretation contains criticism. Aggression has remained in the aesthetic sphere and thus we react not with hostility but with laughter.[6]

The world Loos envisioned, of course, has not and could not come about. For it would demand the excision of a large part of the human persona, a part that can express itself in the ornament that Loos repressed—that can express itself in the grotesque and in caricature. For Boime, discussing David's political cartoons, caricature's use of deformation relates specifically to a Freudian model of the unconscious:

The Oedipal complex constitutes the beginnings of the forms of political and social authority, the regulation and control through the superego or conscience. On the other hand, the political caricature permits the displaced manifestation of the repressed aggressive desire to oust the father. The political enemy, or the subject of distortion, becomes the projection of the hated parent and through caricature can be struck down.

Citing Freudian theory, Boime adds,

Children bestow upon the anal product the status of their own original creation, which they now deploy to gain pleasure in play, to attain the affection of another (feces as gift), to assert personal ownership (feces as property), or to act out hostility against another (feces as weapon). Thus some of the most crucial areas of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) develop in the anal phase and retain their connection with it into adulthood....By exposing the disguised (sublimated) anality behind neoclassicism (rational state, organized religion, hierarchal authority) David reaffirmed the connection between political caricature and his "high art."

Scatology abounds in caricature, and in other forms of satire. From Greek comedies through Rabelais and Swift on down to contemporary low humor, anal and fecal imagery is frequently used in a political context. (Sandor Ferenczi goes so far as to say that diarrhea is antiauthoritarian in that it reduces educational measures—toilet training—to an absurdity. It is a mockery of authority.[7]) If feces can be an agent of besmirchment, so can any foul substance—any substance associated with taboo, and thus with repression. The use of bodily fluids, entrails, garbage, and animals such as frogs, toads, and snakes to "decorate" an authority figure is a literal enactment of Loos' conception of "criminal" ornamentation.

To make an aside in this regard, a current television game show called *Double Dare* features on-the-verge-of-adolescent boy/girl teams in sports activities that often require them to cover each other in gooey foodstuffs. At certain points they must fish into tactilely suspect substances labeled "brain juice," "mashed maggots," "fish lips," "dead worms," and so on, in order to win prizes. Part of the show's attraction to youth of that age is surely their fear of their dawning sexuality, which is associated with taboo, or "disgusting," activities and substances. Bruno Bettelheim's discussion of the "frog prince" fairy tale is relevant here: a young girl must sleep with or kiss a frog, and feels revulsion at having to do so, but when the task is completed, the frog becomes a desirable prince. The story, Bettelheim remarks, "confirms the appropriateness of disgust when one is not ready for sex, and prepares for its desirability when the time is ripe."[8] *Double Dare* occasionally brings on parents, whose submersion in gunk obviously has a different meaning: this is the pure pleasure of defiling an authority figure.

In low comedy and political cartoons, reductive and distortional practices exist side by side. Here, both approaches are set up to attack false or hated authority, for in the context of caricature's distor-

tions, the refined heroic figure becomes a comic butt. In "fine art," on the other hand, reduction tends to be associated with the revelation of the ideal. Today, geometric forms are probably the most common type of public sculpture. And fine artists tend to keep distortion and reduction apart: David's political cartoons, for example, were meant for the popular audience, and were deliberately assaultive and distortional, but his salon paintings were based on idealizing classical principles. Both reduction and distortion are rarely used aggressively in fine art. In *Dream and Lie of Franco, I*, 1937, Picasso depicts the dictator as an entraillike being who at one point gives birth to a litter of frogs and snakes, but this is an atypical work, mimicking popular political forms. More typically, Picasso moves toward essentialist reduction. In his most "bodily" period, the '30s, he subjects some of his most potentially violent images—the swooning woman, the well-hung bull, the eviscerated horse—to a reducing and crystallizing process, in works such as *Wounded Bull, Horse and Nude Woman* and *The Bull-Fight*, both 1934.

Yet reduction can express other dimensions beside the ennobled, as one can see by comparing Picasso's stylization of organic forms to the treatment of a similar theme in J. G. Ballard's science fiction novel *The Crystal World*, 1966. Where Picasso's reductions tend to accentuate the tragic, intensely emotional nature of his subjects, Ballard's are deadening, ultimately apocalyptic. *The Crystal World* and other books of Ballard's—*The Drought*, 1965, and *The Drowned World*, 1962, for example—approach the theme of world's end not as a cataclysm but as a slow process of homogenization. Time stops when things have been reduced to one essential property—crystal, earth, water. The positive aspects of this transformation, which can be seen as a version of the mystical notion that "all is one," are here equated with a kind of addiction: in *The Crystal World*, characters previously crystallized but now revived seek to return to their former pleasant state of nonidentity. The impulse brings to mind Roger Caillois' definition of mimicry in nature as "depersonalization by assimilation to space,"[10] and, ultimately, Freud's concept of the death instinct—the desire to annihilate the ego reflecting a desire to return to the uterine existence before the ego's formation.

The death instinct is embedded in a good deal of the art production of the '60s and '70s, especially Minimalism and serial practices concerned with the objectification or freezing of time through repetition. Though the surface meaning of much of this art has to do with structure and material, the work ultimately refers back to and mirrors the bodily presence of the viewer. This thesis, the basis of Michael Fried's attack on Minimalism,[11] was borne out in the body art that developed later, which applied reductivist tendencies to complex psychological and corporeal issues. Where Minimalism was well-mannered, this work was confrontational—even "grotesque." Bruce Nauman's various films of repeated body movements and manipulations, Vito Acconci's evocation of architectural libido in *Seedbed*, 1971, Chris Burden's packaging of the fear of violence as sculpture in *Shoot*, 1971—all hit the Modernist moral schism between form and decoration head-on: this was an esthetic of sculpting with flesh. The very practices that Loos had attacked as "criminal" were in body art perversely defined as somehow essential forms—marking the body, piercing it, distorting it. And all this was approached in a removed, formal way. The difference between the distortion of the body in much body art and in expressionist performance and painting can in some ways be

compared to a distinction between the grotesque and caricature: in caricature, distortion is for a specific purpose, in most cases to defame, but in the grotesque it is done for its own sake, as a formalized displacement of parts. Its only purpose is to surprise the viewer.

From this formalist slant, the whole low-art pictorial tradition of the monster can be viewed as an expression of the pleasure of shuffling the components of a form. (Psychologically, however, the difference is great between shuffling squares on a paper, or flowers in a vase, and reordering the human figure.) The grotesque displacement of the order of the body is a mainstay of popular art. Cartoons and horror films provide numerous examples of it, and in many of these the move toward abstraction is consciously erotic. The ambiguous humanity of these distorted images creates a tension between attraction and repulsion. As it is disordered, the whole comes to take on the image of its parts, and the parts that most often come to the foreground are the genitals. The figure truly becomes an erotic ornament. The dichotomy of soft and hard now becomes dominant, and animated and still cartoons are filled with jokes about various parts of the body replacing the genitals in their capacity for flaccidity or erection.

The best examples are in the work of Tex Avery, Basil Wolverton, and the '60s car-culture monster artists Ed "Big Daddy" Roth and Mouse. Though these artists treat the whole body as erectile, the eyes and tongue are the most common genital replacements: Avery's animated films of the '40s—*Little Rural Riding Hood*, 1949, for instance—are nonstop visual jokes, this one about a wolf in extreme states of sexual arousal manifested by his eyes blowing out of their sockets, or his tongue rolling out of his mouth onto the floor. The forte of Wolverton's work from the '40s through the '70s is the monstrous depiction of disordered, exaggerated faces, often accompanied by ludicrous explanations as to how they got that way; again, huge distended eyes are often a major feature. And the '60s images of Roth and Mouse link these same characteristics to the images of the "outlaw" biker and the car fanatic. Their work pairs the grotesque with the dirty, the criminal, and the hedonistic. The caption of a Rat Fink drawing in the *Ed "Big Daddy" Roth Monster Coloring Book* reads, "...What is Colored 'Rotten' to the Core, 'Garbage' and 'Gore,' 'Poison' in Every Pore, and 'Warped' Forevermore?...Yours Truly, R. F.!" Surprisingly, though, the usual order is reversed in these drawings; the association of the grotesque with the disgusting is here a positive one—these monstrous figures are meant to be role models.

Left: **Basil Wolverton, "Dr. Spocktor Proctor," ca. 1971.** ©Wolverton. Center: **Peter Saul, *The Government of California*, 1969,** oil on canvas, 68 × 96". Right: **Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, *Wild Child*, 1964.**
Opposite: **Stuart Gordon, *Re-Animator*, 1985,** still from color film in 35 mm., 86 mins., showing Dr. Carl Hill (David Gale). Photo: Photofest.

Popular horror, crime, and pornographic film and literature all explicitly deal with the disordered sexual body. In his dystopian science fiction novel *Dr. Adder*, 1984, for example, K. W. Jeter turns Loos' utopian evolutionary development around: the society of the future, instead of moving away from the sculpting of the body, makes it a mainstay. In the world Jeter describes, plastic surgery has reached a point of refinement where bodily, and especially genital, transformation can be based directly on repressed sexual trauma; a one-to-one relationship can be created between one's unconscious and one's physical shape. The book's descriptions of genitals reworked into "baroque, pathetic convolutions of the vulva, other parts shining wet like fleshy sea plants" obviously reflect preadolescent misunderstandings of the sexual body, and playfully elaborate the connection between the ornamental and the erotic. Again, almost all of David Cronenberg's films are concerned with an "uncanny" depiction of the sexual body, a depiction in which the very parts that constitute us become frightening and unfamiliar. In his recent movie *Dead Ringers*, for example, we follow the development of two male identical twins from their youthful ignorance of the specifics of sexual difference to their adult careers as gynecologists to their double death in a black parody of sexual union and psychotic gynecological surgery.

Perhaps most disturbing, because it is a picture of "real" life, is the genre of the true crime story. Behind this literature's fixation on the mutilation murder is the attraction/repulsion of viewing the abstracted body. The description of the crime scene in *Killing for Company*, 1985, Brian Masters' account of the career of mass-murderer Dennis Nilsen, is almost loving in its detail, clinically informing us how the killer broke a body down to pack it into a series of shopping bags, carefully dissecting it until he came to the innards, which were "all mixed together in a disgusting, impersonal pottage."[12] Nilsen also made drawings of his victims, sometimes in stages of dissection; these drawings are literally "still lifes," of a genre quite other from the caricature's harmless estheticization as discussed by Kris. The murderer has countered the frightening complexity of the body with a counterurge to package it, to break it down into controllable lumps, to find its essence—of course, unsuccessfully.

Recent horror films, called "splatter films" because of their copious blood and gore, continue the depiction of the body as grotesque. As in the original Roman decorations, the body becomes an accumulation of pieces at odds with each other—a group of parts that refuse to become whole. Though the horror film has always been concerned with the uncanny presence of the body, its recent incarnations stress the body's composite nature increasingly intensely. The monster in James Whale's *Frankenstein*, 1931, may be made up of components from many sources, but it is ruled by a mechanistic notion of wholeness; like a Modernist collage, it is fractured, made up of multiple scavenged pieces, but it still operates as a totality. The erectile intestine that blows out of the torso of a walking corpse to strangle its victim in the 1985 horror film *Re-Animator*, on the other hand, reflects the fetishization of the body part. Here the body is not total but corporate—a linked compilation of separate entities. *Re-Animator* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*, 1982, both concern pastiche beings, creatures that when cut apart simply keep on existing that way—separately. What could be more horrific to an essentialist like Loos than this world as a collection of animated ornaments stripped from their primary forms?

Interestingly, pornography is organized in much the same way: it tends to be body-part-specific. Pornographic photographs and films often use close-ups, encapsulating the erotic entirety in the fragment, as if sex were a puppet show acted out by detached members. The whole pornography-magazine field is divided by part or substance: male- or female-genital magazines, ass magazines, breast magazines, cum magazines. Where a cartoonist like Roth pictures the genitals obliquely, as distortions of other corporeal parts, pornography shows them literally, yet cut out and isolated, and thus no less metaphoric: they become objectified stand-ins and irreal substitutes for themselves. In this way they gain the distance of the fetish. Repressed into abstraction, they rise pleasurably back into consciousness in their new form.

The contemporary "high" art most obviously related to the grotesque image of the reordered body is work that seems, on the surface, to be an extension of organic abstraction, the work of such painters as Bill Komoski, Lari Pittman, and Carroll Dunham. And at this point we must return to our earlier discussion of the split between hard and soft. Clearly, the Modernist opposition of

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