

Simone Hine fragment

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IMA
Institute of
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fragment

KYLE WEISE

'The referential structure of a title is always tricky'

fragment, as a title, foregrounds indeterminacy, it is referentially divided, most obviously in the sense that the word 'fragment' can be read as a noun or verb. This sense of uncertainty is immediate upon the spectator's introduction to Simone Hine's *fragment*. To take the title as a noun may seem appropriate as *fragment* presents the audience with a series of images that come to us without explicit connection, images that imply a larger narrative that the audience cannot access. The parts are not made whole, and the usually contemplative and comfortable gaze of the viewer stutters as it is denied the totalising fulfilment of an explicit narrative: the fragment dominates. However, to take the title as a verb (as in, to fragment) could also seem appropriate in relation to the work and, indeed, seems particularly relevant to the explicit temporality of performance: not only has the stage been fragmented into a series of screens, and the images into disjunctive surfaces, but the performers literally fragment the screen, pulling it apart.

The performance itself is the obvious contextual frame through which to interpret the title, and the meaning of *fragment* has begun to be circumscribed through this, but it remains referentially equivocal and certainty elusive. Furthermore, these determinations of the meaning of *fragment* (the title) are problematised by the fact that this catalogue's articulation of the performance is itself another context that remains unaccounted for. Inevitably, beyond any contextual frame, 'other contexts are delimited and opened up in their turn. They are more powerful but they are not infinitely powerful, and they inscribe effects of reference, of reality, and of truth in conventional or institutional devices'.² Any 'description' of a context is itself a context, and is, logically, grafted onto the context it describes; the frame around the 'work itself' is irrevocably fragmented.

The question of *fragment's* borders invokes another aspect of the uncertainty that inheres in its title. The title occupies a liminal position, on the border of a work, it is not part of the work (if it was it could not function as a title) yet neither can it be completely separate from the work and remain a title.³ In fact, the word 'fragment'

articulates the place of the title in general: it is an odd piece, a recognisable part of the work, but one that is detached. So, the title *fragment*, rather than just pointing to something other than itself (the performance *fragment*, for example) is involved in a type of self-naming, describing its own place as a title: *fragment is a fragment*. The boundary between the signified and the signifier dissolves.

Strangely enough, despite its indeterminacy, or more accurately *because* of it, it is the title that has lead us towards the concerns of the work, as *fragment* is a work that confronts distinctions between the signified and the signifier, and the oppositions that accompany this: between the inside and the outside; between the intelligible and the sensible (sensible, as in, that which is perceived by the senses).⁴ Historically, these oppositions have been gendered, such that the intelligible, the mind, has been associated with the masculine, and the sensible, the body, with the feminine.

fragment responds to this in a way markedly different from feminist performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, which attempted to subvert the ascendancy of body image in the construction of women by 'rediscovering' a 'natural' body, a body liberated from patriarchy and stripped of the layers of representation that have 'hidden' it.⁵ This was a continuation of a tradition of avant-garde and modernist theatre that strove to use the body as an escape from the bounds of language, as a site of expression that could, supposedly, disrupt ideology.⁶ Hine's performances are part of a more recent trend that refuses the possibility of such a pre-discursive body and, in this sense, are related to Orlan's surgical performances⁷, and to the 'image machine' of Dumb Type's multimedia performance work⁸, for example. The screened bodies in *fragment* have been altered, manipulated to form an aesthetic continuity that invokes a history of representational conventions. The live bodies on the stage are not simply distinguishable from this, they are no more natural, and they mimic, not only the look of the screened images, but also their temporality. Though not mediated by the camera and the associated apparatus of framing and editing, the live bodies are overdetermined and encoded by any number of technologies, from wigs, make-up, costuming and choreography, through to the institutional and architectural space of the theatre itself with its historically constituted viewing practices. In *fragment*, there is no true, or natural body that exposes the constructed body; the body is always a representation. Inevitably framed by contexts, the body cannot present 'itself' apart from these; the distinction between the inside (the natural body, the meaning of the body) and the outside (the constructed body, the surface of the body) is ruptured.

Medicine has often concerned itself with the discovery of the truth of the body, and, like art, is a major site for the construction of definitions of bodily norms and ideals. An image that haunts *fragment* is that of the woman on the operating table, her fate uncertain, evoking a history of such imagery. Within medicine, art and popular culture the portrayal of the figure of the woman – lying passively to be dissected or operated upon by the physician – is an enduring visual trope and source of voyeuristic fascination⁹, and examples range from the 1869 Gabriel Von Max painting, *Der Anatom* (The Anatomist), through to a scene in the recent film version of *Resident Evil* (dir. Paul Anderson, 2002).

During the nineteenth century, many texts celebrated 'the dissection of the female form as a powerful route to the 'truth' of the feminine enigma.¹⁰ This relentless search for an ultimate meaning (a disturbing literalisation of the binary logic of inside and outside, depth and surface inscribed, not a truth, but another set of surfaces, of representations. The public dissection of wax models of the female body was a popular spectacle and one whose visual and epistemological paradigms and techniques of observation, would be transferred into the cinema. This is evident: in cinema's analytic techniques of editing and framing, the language of 'suture' and 'cutting' that have developed, and which continue to concentrate in particular way around the female body.¹¹

Lisa Cartwright has extensively detailed the way that medical techniques of observation and imaging technologies, since the cinema, have not just recorded the body, but have disciplined and constructed it, forcing the body to fit the paradigms of visibility they have imposed.¹² On several occasions in Cartwright's study, it is made clear that women are constructed as inherently pathological through these techniques; they are imaged in specific ways, and these images are interpreted by physicians in ways that differ from the reception of images of men, to the detriment of women. As in the history of artistic representation, certain tropes recur as part of this, as the supposed desire of women to be looked at is presumed, and their eyes turned away, and denied a return gaze.¹³ Yet, these techniques could not always exert total control, and the involuntary movements of the body would occasionally elude discipline and confound the physicians' comprehension.¹⁴ In *fragment*, the breathing of the performers, emphasised by visible microphones, reinscribes the materiality of the body, and its involuntary motions. However, the artifice of the microphones, no less obvious than the wigs, accentuates the fact that even these aspects of the body, seemingly beyond discipline, can be aestheticised and made part of a strategy of representation. The body cannot simply 'speak for itself', it is always already spoken for, as it is inscribed in contexts of representation and observation. One cannot simply start again, and invent their own language and modes of visibility. The fragmentation of traditional concepts of the sign, mentioned above, could not have proceeded without using the very terms of the sign that were under question (the signifier and the signified). *fragment* does not invent a new visual language, but by pushing this language to its limits, its surfaces become visible as just and only that: surfaces, without absolute determination or inevitability.

The haunting uncertainty of *fragment*, as it provides no graspable narrative referent for the images that confront us, forces concentration on the operation of the image itself. It evokes a sense of a history of images of women, from painting to the modern horror film, and the expansion of the image into the digital. 'Sense' is of particular importance here, as it implies, not just a rational relation to the image, but a corporeal, bodily reaction. This discussion about *fragment* must avoid reinscribing the binary of the inside and the outside, the intelligible and the sensible that the performance disrupts. The body should not, and cannot, be ignored, as Jennifer M. Bean makes clear in her 'investment in altering a feminist politics that up to now has presumed the need to rescue 'woman' from the intractability of the body.'¹⁵ In the reception of images, the mental processes of viewing, the rationality of the gaze,

should not be privileged at the expense of the observer's corporeality and their bodily, non-rational reactions.¹⁶ *fragment* emphasises the inseparability of the mind and the body, the intelligible and the sensible. In its visceral and kinetic imagery, a history of representation is evoked rather than stated, and our affective, bodily, sense of the aesthetic, the beautiful, and the terrifying, is activated, and implicated in this history, a history that is lived, not just conceptualised. The immediacy of the body, and its instinctual sense, should not be ignored, but neither should it be naturalised and separated from its historical construction and its imbrication in dynamics of power: 'Affect is not outside power, because it expresses relations between bodies that can increase or decrease the power of a body. An affective approach to images requires a close understanding of the different layers through which a body operates as an image among other images.'¹⁷

NOTES

- Jacques Derrida. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) p.84.
- ibid.*, pp. 153-54. For an expansive discussion on this topic see Jacques Derrida. *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988) pp.1-23.
- Jacques Derrida. 'Title (to be specified).' *Sub-stance* 31 (1981) p.8.
- Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) p.13; Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, trans Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978) pp.280-81.
- Imogen Ashby. 'The Mutant Woman: The Use and Abuse of the Female Body in Performance Art.' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 10.3 (2000) pp.42-43; Lynda Hart. Introduction. *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, eds. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993) p.5.
- Philip Auslander. *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1997) pp.28-38, 91-92, 105; Helen Spackman. 'Minding the Matter of Representation: Staging the Body (Politic).' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 10.3 (2000) pp.8-9, 11.
- Ashby, pp.43-49; Auslander, pp.128-36.
- Yukiko Shikata. 'White-out: Dumb Type's Image Machine.' *ArtAsiaPacific* 27 (2000) see esp. p.42.
- For detailed descriptions of the history of this visual theme, see: Giuliana Bruno. 'Spectatorial Embodiments: Anatomies of the Visible and the Female Bodyscape.' *Camera Obscura* 28 (1992) pp.239-61; and Tabitha Goode. 'Abstract Representational Space: Uncanny Aliens and Others (Pandora, or Prometheus's Return):' *Camera Obscura* 40-41 (1997) pp.245-74.
- Goode, p.251.
- Bruno, pp.240-50.
- Lisa Cartwright. *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995).
- ibid.*, pp.65-70, 154-59.
- ibid.*, ch.3.
- Jennifer M. Bean. 'Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body.' *Camera Obscura* 48 (2001) p.14.
- ibid.*, p.47.
- Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova. 'A Matter of Affect: Digital Images and the Cybernetic Re-Wiring of Vision.' *Parallax* 7.4 (2001) p.125. Emphasis in original.

FRONT COVER: **Simone Hine, *fragment*, 2002.** Digital performance still, duration 30 minutes.

INSIDE IMAGES: **Simone Hine, *fragment*, 2002.** Digital performance still, duration 30 minutes.

BACK COVER: **Simone Hine, *fragment*, 2002.** Video still, duration 30 minutes.

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INSTITUTE OF MODERN ART
420 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
PO Box 2176 Fortitude Valley BC QLD 4006
Brisbane Australia
Tel +61 7 3252 5750 Fax +61 7 3252 5072
im@ima.org.au www.ima.org.au

MICHAEL SNELLING, DIRECTOR
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