

Walking amidst a Disembodied City: Corporeal Representation and Abject Images in Charles Baudelaire's Parisian *Flânerie*

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ABSTRACT

Several of Baudelaire's poems in *Tableaux parisiens* depict the uncanny scene in which the repressed creaks through the hygienic, glittering façade of Haussmann's urban planning. The ineradicable presence of these ragged people is uncannily linked with the tropes of the body, the dangerous, the abject, the sultry or the exotic—impurities that the hygienic bourgeois ideology of Haussmann's urban planning tries to cleanse itself of, tirelessly. Informed by theorists such as Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Michel de Certeau, Victor Burgin, Martin Jay, Kristeva, Freud, and so forth, this paper analyzes the "corporeal" aspect in Baudelaire's poems and argues that by the very token of purification and rejection implicit in Haussmann's homogenizing tendency of urban transformation which aims to get rid of those unwanted and the bodily messiness, the same gesture, paradoxically, inscribes its disavowed cultural other within itself.

KEY WORDS

Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux parisiens*, the Uncanny, the abject, the body, the Other, urban representation, modernity



In the well-known article “Walking in the City,” Michel de Certeau draws attention to the distinction between the urban observer as “voyeur” and as “walker” (92–93). The former is the typical position assumed by the rational modern urban planner, for whom the “concept city” or *un espace proper* (as both “own” and “proper”) should be based on formal structures and the panoramic ideology. Space under such Cartesian schema tends to be abstract and uninhabitable, or, as Richard Sennett puts it, it is a space deprived of the sensual and the corporeal (Sennett 15–16). This “disembodied” space has a scopic nature in the sense that it valorizes the primacy of sight, of surveillance, and of the visibility as the privileged domain as manifested in our urban design, consumer culture and visual consumption. The prioritization of sight over other haptic senses is problematic, since it is the pure looking by means of the power of technical and of scientific agencies which dissolves the body into abstract images and quantifiable data. This flattening tendency is not unrelated to technocentric rationalism, the rise of bourgeoisie and the phenomenon of whole-scaled reification brought about by capitalism. With the rise of bourgeois modernity, vision becomes the master sense of our era. This is what Martin Jay terms “the scopic regime of modernity,” which privileges the Cartesian perspectivalism as the reigning visual model of modernity, entailing a number of metaphysical implications such as de-eroticization, de-narrativization, fetishization, and de-historicization as Jay details in his tracing of the hierarchy of visual subcultures in the constitution of our modern scopic regime.

As we can see, much of the critique of the Cartesian perspectivalism has to do with its “disembodied” tendency. This disembodied fantasy is rooted in the traditional Western metaphysics

which sets up a series of hierarchies based on the split of mind and body. As Jay writes, the subject under such schema is a subject that “fails to recognize its corporeality, its intersubjectivity, its embeddedness in the flesh of the world” (24). It fantasizes about transcending the world while making inquiries about it; and this “high altitude” thinking is not unlike de Certeau’s “voyeuristic” urban observer who observes the city only from afar and enjoys the fantasy of disembodiment, of “seeing the whole” without any commitment, bodily entanglement or ethical responsibilities. This Cartesian attitude proliferates, spreading out into various fields of human discourses and practices such as philosophy, science, and procedures of social normalization.¹ In city planning, for example, Le Corbusier’s aesthetic conception of a perfect modern city is supported by the rationalist ideology which ultimately valorizes universality, regularity, and measurability at the expense of other more fluid or tactile experiences. His “city of tomorrow” buttressed by Euclidean geometry is tantamount to what de Certeau calls the Icarian² vision of the voyeur-god, which intends to make the whole urban geography surveyable and therefore controllable.

Moreover, unlike de Certeau who favors the down-below walker instead of the transcendental voyeur, Le Corbusier condemns the practice of *flânerie* as non-utilitarian. For him, the ideal urbanite is not a loitering wanderer; instead, he (the gendered implication is visible here) should be rational and purposive, “keep[ing] his feelings and his instincts in check, subordinating them to the aim he has in view” (5). Not allowed to be dallying around, the urbanite envisioned by Le Corbusier should proceed directly to a preconceived destination in a highly efficient way.

Contrast to this decorporealized, robot-like walker who walks in a straight line, Le Corbusier shows the “pack-donkey” who “meanders along, meditates a little in his scatter-brained and distracted fashion.” A value judgment is clearly implicated when he says:

The winding road is the Pack-Donkey’s Way, the straight road is man’s way. The winding road is the result of happy-go-lucky heedlessness, of looseness, lack of concentration and animality.

The straight road is a reaction, an action, a positive deed, the result of self-mastery. It is sane and noble. (12)

What merits our attention in this paragraph is Le Corbusier's employment of the traditional metaphor of mind/body dichotomy. The corporeality of the "donkey's way" is pejoratively differentiated from the detached rationality of the mind (i.e. the I/eye conflation). Therefore, the tactile knowledges of the immersive walkers necessary for constructing a bodily space are never being recognized and have little space in Le Corbusier's conception of the utopian city. His "city of tomorrow" is like a disembodied idea predicated on the Cartesian coordinate and Euclidean geometry; its golden rule is to discourage leisured *flânerie* or loitering habits in order to facilitate speeding and smooth transportation. "Keep moving!" "No Loitering!" are slogans for Le Corbusier's modern city, which is premised on the need to accommodate traffic that must move at high speed to deposit its passengers into the heart of a city in order to begin the work of the day.³ As a result, the curved street for walking is "ruinous, difficult and dangerous;" it is "paralyzing" (10), while the straight one is the "proper" thing for his ideal city.

Outside this Corbusian type of scopic epistemology, de Certeau delineates some tactile knowledges experienced by the walkers who make use of spaces by engaging the quotidian practice of walking. The walkers experience the spaces of the city somatically; their knowledge of the spaces, he writes, is "as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms" (de Certeau 93). De Certeau's image of lovers blindly wrapped in the ecstasy of each other implicates the possibility of a "tactile" vision which refutes the exclusivity claimed by sight as the only way to apprehend universal truths. It is a more holistic knowledge that is not organized exclusively around visuality but recognizes the "amalgamative" nature of human perception as a physiological, libidinous, and socially structured compound.

In this paper, I intend to examine Baudelaire's representation of Paris which is not purely geometrical-optical but is more bound up with the haptic. Surely this corporeal representation of the city poses itself

as a counter-discourse against the official language of the Second Empire, which parades a glittering image of Paris as the "capital of modernity" whose underlying ideology is purely visual. On the contrary, Baudelaire's Parisian landscape is populated with the beggars, the ragpickers, the unsettling dwarf men, trollops, some negress, and so forth. These abject figures, hitherto used to be out of sight and enclosed hermetically in the slums, are now inadvertently brought into the streets due to Haussmann's demolition of the old neighborhoods of squalor and the layout of the boulevards. Several of Baudelaire's modern poems depict this uncanny scene in which the repressed creaks through the hygienic, spectacular façade of Haussmann's urban planning. The ineradicable presence of these ragged people is uncannily linked with the tropes of the body, the dangerous, the abject, the sultry or the exotic—impurities that the hygienic bourgeois ideology of Haussmann's urban planning tries to cleanse itself of, tirelessly.

Evidently, Haussmann's remaking of the city is based on the ideology of demarcation which differentiates what is dangerous, unclean, abnormal from what is clean and proper. If geometry is a science of demarcating boundaries and of imposing regularity, we might say that the Paris of Second Empire as envisioned by Haussmann illustrates this ultimate goal of geometry. However, as Gaston Bachelard reminds us, "simple geometrical opposition becomes tinged with aggressivity,"⁴ this exorcist impulse inherent in the demarcating geometry inevitably ushers in those unwanted ghosts which always lurk in the dark and wait for chances to return. As Baudelaire's Parisian poetry demonstrates, by the very token of purification implicit in Haussmann's homogenizing tendency of urban transformation which aims to get rid of those unwanted bodily messiness, the same gesture, paradoxically, inscribes its disavowed other within itself.

In his *Memoires*, Haussmann described how he intended to "cut a cross, north to south and east to west, through the center of Paris, bringing the city's cardinal points into direct communication."⁵ This radical cutting of wide boulevards was to provide access to railroad stations and commercial centers and to link the separate neighborhoods. Yet the construction of the new Paris displaced thousands of people

and demolished whole old quarters that had lived for centuries. Where have all these people gone? Those denizens of the night or demons in the dark? Of course for those in charge of demolition and reconstruction, these twilight people were never their concern. It is only in Baudelaire's Parisian landscape that we can glimpse the phantasms of these ghostly presences, interrogating the otherwise transparent and exorcized modern city. They constitute the threshold of Haussmann's rational world and become an overglutted sign resistant to be vanquished or subsumed. In Baudelaire's poetry, they continue to beckon and to haunt the rational subject, forcing the subject to face its necessary relation to animality, to corporeality, and to what is unclean, improper, and disorder.

"Le Cygne" (The Swan) (1859) is the famous poem depicting the obduracy of bodily presences that the dominant ideology of transcendence tends or desires to ignore. Thinking of Andromache while crossing the "nouveau Carrousel," Baudelaire remembers the old Carrousel (now disappeared but which the poet can still see in his "mind's eye") in which the swan made its caricatural appearance. The evocation of the old Carrousel is significant here; according to Robert Burton, this slum area (located between the Louvre and the Palais des Tuileries) "appears . . . as a 'mock city', 'a kind of city within a city', a labyrinth of narrow streets frequented by criminals, street tradesmen and entertainers, prostitutes and dissident artists. The area was at once market, fair-ground and popular theatre—precisely the kind of district in which a menagerie could expect to do good business" (Burton 34). In other words, this isolated quarter was like a pastoral right in the city's belly. Moreover, local inhabitants' vitality and their variegated composition added a charming flavor to this isolated quarter, which, before its razing in 1852, had been a well-known hangout of the Bohème. Baudelaire himself had quite personal associations with this slum area (Terdiman 115). Although the demolition of parts of the area was taking place as early as the 1830, it was not until 1852 that the area, under the direction of Napoleon III who had seized power in December 1851, was completely razed. Work on building the new Carrousel begun and it was completed in 1857.

The erasure of the Old Carousel is only part of a whole radical program of urban transformation, which, as observed by many scholars, was “motivated by a desire to prevent any repeat of proletarian insurrection” (Terdiman 117–18)⁶ and often involved working-class removal. In other words, the whole process of urban renewal means the exclusion of the poor and the segregation of distinct class zones: “from 1852 onwards, rising rents and demolition work forced more and more lower class Parisians to ‘emigrate’ to the periphery” (Burton 37). Class differentiation under Haussmannisation became more and more severe; the pre-1848 socially heterogeneous city was transformed into a city with two distinct entities: “a predominantly bourgeois west confronting an overwhelmingly working-class east” (Burton 36).

In Baudelaire’s “Le Cygne,” modernity is portrayed as a catastrophe which wrecks people’s ontological order and destroys the authentic experience. Walking in this unreal city, Baudelaire suffers from the sense of dispossession and the losses that the new city can never give him any comfort. He laments: “Paris changes. . . . But in sadness like mine/nothing stirs—new buildings, old/neighborhoods turn to allegory, /and memories weigh more than stone.” Historical progress is unable to eliminate the overwhelming sense of nostalgia. Instead, uncanny memories keep flooding in; traces of other temporal scraps are brought back, altering the existing spatial organization. The proliferation of intertextualities catalogues instances of classical and contemporary exiles in order to expose the Second Empire’s sham politics. By dedicating this poem to Victor Hugo, the regime’s most notorious antagonist, Baudelaire’s stance as a dissident artist is undoubtedly obvious. For Baudelaire, as for Hugo (and Marx), Napoleon III is a phony, parodic version of his illustrious uncle (Burton 25; Terdiman 129, 144). His regime, embodied by Haussmann’s Paris, is no more than stylized masquerade, pure glitz without any substance. This theme of degeneration from the original authenticity to a counterfeit simulacrum also coheres with the overall preoccupations of the poem. Thus Andromache bewails her late husband Hector beside an empty grave that she has built beside the river of a “mock Simois,” a miniature replica of the “authentic” river that flowed into the

Scamander by her native Troy.⁷ When her husband was killed by Achilles and Troy was finally destroyed, she was forced into exile, becoming the booty first handed over to Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, and then to Helenus. As Burton writes, "dwelling in a 'little Troy', married to a 'little Hector', no better than the slave of a slave, Andromache is no more than a debased parody of her former self" (56).

Similar to Andromache's fallen state, the swan in Baudelaire's poem is far removed from the elegant and graceful creature of classical tradition. Exiled from its own lovely lake, the swan is reduced to a performing animal exposed to public humiliation and ridicule in a menagerie. Now escaping from its cage and "drenching its enormous wings in the filth," the swan wanders helplessly in this alien city, straining its neck and beak "as if the swan were castigating God!" Like Andromache, the swan is burdened with an ironic freedom which makes it at once slave and not-slave (Burton 79). Baudelaire's chain of intertextuality becomes a memory model conjuring up a series of alienated souls. This memory model is peculiarly "corporeal" in the sense that, in recollection, these images are not purely mental but are evoked as "embodiments of passions and suffering."⁸ In addition to Andromache, Hugo and the swan, the poet also reminisces about the dire fate of the black woman, orphans, prisoners, and so forth.⁹ These figures become essential parts of the poem's structure and significance; their traits of marginality and aimlessness are the reason why the poet in his own alienated era can relate to.

Essentially, the language of the Second Empire is that of capitalism. As some critics have noted, the economy of Second Empire society was relied on the newly invented fiduciary systems in order to facilitate the flow of capitals and to accelerate the economic expansion.¹⁰ The gradual tendency toward abstraction caused a conceptual perplexity among people because "the signifiers of fiduciary and scriptural wealth began increasingly to distance themselves from the palpable referent—specie, cash money—upon which they were notionally founded and for which they had been supposed to stand" (Terdiman 131). In this process toward a whole-scaled abstraction, Marx's famous elaboration on the

phenomenon of reification is inevitably recalled: reification is closely related to the processes of alienation and the fetishism of commodities, in which “the definite social relation between men themselves assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx 165). Commodity produced in this system of abstraction acquires a “phantom objectivity,” a de-historicized autonomy which is divorced from the history of its own production. Different from those memory-laden objects produced in the age of craftsmanship (namely, the product still bears the birth-marks of its origin), commodities are traces-free; any qualitative, human and individual attributes are obliterated in this standardized universalism.

Reification as reflected in this gradual abstraction of monetary systems also appears in the epistemic order of urban representation. Haussmann’s urban renewal was centered on the fanfare of the visual display; it created an exaggerated sense of “théâtralisation” in terms of the urban environment and architecture in general. The old Paris was being put to death in order to prepare for a new ground for building up a consumer society. In contrast to the essentially “introverted” city of the first half of the nineteenth-century, the theatrical character of the city became gradually pronounced after 1848. The underlying logic of the new bourgeois architecture, with its wanton display and theatric flamboyance, was to turn the casual spectator into a consumer. The split between surface and substance became increasingly acute as the society became more and more like the “spectacle,” and the old social relations were being atomized. As Henri Lefebvre notes, society that privileges the visual is usually anti-body.¹¹ The separation of the visual and the haptic results in an overemphasis on the former. Simmel has also observed that, as opposed to the more holistic knowledge of individuals based on intimacy and oral tradition in a small community, urban social relations are predominantly ocular: “Social life in the large city as compared with the towns shows a great preponderance of occasions to *see* rather than to *hear* people” (Simmel 360). The omnipresence of sight can also be said to be the political ideology of the State power, whose dream of seeing without being seen can be traced back to Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic device, an ideal form of

surveillance and spectacle central to the maintenance of disciplinary power in the modern world.

The hypertrophy of the visual means the triumph of the ideology of transparency, the very epitome of bourgeois modernity and of the universal Self. Opacity is a taboo in this Cartesian city of transparency, darkness the enemy of enlightenment. Nevertheless, in "Les Sept Vieillards" (The Seven Old Men), Baudelaire begins with an evocation of a city which steeps in an abnormal, foggy, dreamy atmosphere—the atmosphere beyond the control of transparency. It is a city "gorged with dreams, /where ghosts by day accost the passer-by, where secrets run in these defiled canals/like blood that gushes through a giant's vein!" The chthonic elements of the city have evidently found their vivid representation here, as the poet implies that their "secret presences" are lurking behind the façade of the city.

As Benjamin notes, the original title of "Les Sept Vieillards" is "Fantômes parisiens" (386). The poem illustrates a form of ego-disturbance which gives the impression of uncanniness. One morning the poet steps out into the rainy streets, wandering listlessly "as if in search of stern resolve/and arguments to steel my flagging soul." Suddenly a repulsive-looking old man comes into view:

And out of nowhere came a wretch in rags
 The very color of the dripping sky—
 Surely *this* deserved some charity!
 But then I saw the malice in his eyes

. . . .

He wasn't bent, he was *broken*, and his spine
 formed so sharp an angle with his legs
 that his stick, as if to add a finishing touch,
 gave him the carriage and the clumsy gait

of some lame animal or a three-legged Jew!
 He pounded past in the mud and slush as if
 his shabby boots were crushing dead men's bones—
 hostile, rather than indifferent. . . .

This horrid old man makes his second appearance with “the same eyes and beard and backbone, stick and rags.” Nothing distinguishes this second one from the first one, as if they are “centenarian twins.” What is most creepy-crawly is that this scandalous reincarnation occurs seven times, as Baudelaire writes: “To the seventh power—I counted every one—/this sinister ancient reproduced himself!” Such infernal repetition is so horrifying that Baudelaire doubts if he can survive an eighth: “such apparition, father and son of himself, /inexorable Phoenix, loathsome avatar!”

It is inevitable to be reminded of Freud’s article on the Uncanny. In this famous essay, he explained the repetition of the uncanny as a form of ego disturbance, which means that the Self regresses “to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people” (236). What is particularly illuminating in his elucidation is the “proximity” between reality and imagination, between Self and the Other—a series of hierarchical dualism our culture takes it unquestioned. The Uncanny bears the marks of the frailty of the subject’s rational system. The “double” induced by the impression of uncanniness in fact can be traced back to a very early mental stage, a stage our Cartesian ego thought to be surmounted but still exerts its dark power in our psyche. As Freud puts it, “the ‘double’ has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons” (236).

Therefore, the otherness of the other is not entirely alien; the ego illusorily sees itself as autonomous and self-determined, independent of otherness. It feels itself to be its own origin, unified by nature. According to Lacan, “This illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started; it hangs over the abyss of a dizzy Assent in which one can perhaps see the very essence of Anxiety” (15). In Baudelaire’s late 1850s context, Haussmann’s bourgeois modernity is in full swing and Paris is a big theater parading images of joy, moneymaking, and debauchery. Yet, these glittering images are constructed out of the suppression of

capitalism's inner contradictions: material progress masks its anarchic irrationality. As Lefebvre suggests, the space in bourgeois society is an abstract space which is also a contradictory space.¹² The reason resides in the fact that the logic of abstract space with its seemingly significance and coherence, actually conceals the **violence** inherent in abstraction.

In Baudelaire's uncanny landscape, the "other side" of Haussmann's modernity overruns its carefully established borders and undermines the myth of stability and coherence fabricated by the official ideology. The attempt to mask the contradictions only results in the return of the repressed. Modernity's ideology of transcendence is dismantled by Baudelaire when he suggests that which is excluded is not eradicated altogether but continually "erupts" and therefore disrupts the privileged sites of inclusion.

This uncanny eruption or intrusion indeed produces moments of unease as Baudelaire writes: "Indignant as a drunk who sees the world/double, I staggered home and locked my door, /scared and sick at heart and scandalized/that so much mystery could be absurd!" To "see" the world properly is not equated with the will to render everything "visible" in front of the static overseeing eye; instead, this ocularcentric, Cartesian mode of seeing is to condemn oneself to see nothing. Baudelaire shows us a way of seeing which contests the dominant mode of seeing in which a facile transparency proves to be reductive, non-reflexive, and noxious to human agency. To see things clearly, as demonstrated by Baudelaire, needs to "wander" outside the Cartesian single perspective, to somehow adopt a paranoid position in order to discern the certainty of the symbolic as dupery. This is what Žižek calls a "skewed" perspective, a "paranoid" slant which unsettles the apathetic gaze of the disembodied Cartesian viewer. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek urges us to take a shift in perspective that allows us to perceive an uncanny, alien presence in the field of vision. Using Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) to illustrate his point, Žižek writes:

At the bottom of the picture, under the figures of the two ambassadors, a viewer catches sight of an amorphous, extended,

“erected” spot. It is only when, on the very threshold of the room in which the picture is exposed, the visitor casts a final lateral glance at it that this spot acquires the contours of a skull, disclosing thus the true meaning of the picture—the nullity of all terrestrial goods, objects of art and knowledge that fill out the rest of the picture. (90)

The protrusion of the skull denatures the facile perception of the painting as a harmony or as a eulogy to the accomplishments of Renaissance Man. Thus we can say that in order to see Holbein’s painting clearly, we need to assume a paranoid position to peer from a lateral vantage point, since “nothing is what it seems to be, everything is to be interpreted, everything is supposed to possess some supplementary meaning” (91).

Taking cues from Žižek’s discussion of anamorphic vision, I want to argue that Baudelaire indeed sees clearly, paradoxically, by looking askance, by stepping aside to occupy the space of the Other in the Self’s filed of vision. Thus he can see those threshold figures such as the swan, Andromache, the withering black woman, the eerie beggars, etc; whose uncanny presence persists and refuses to be fantasized away. It is a return of the body, as Jay avers in his discussion of the baroque scopic regime, that “dethrone the disinterested gaze of the disincarnated Cartesian spectator” (18). This “entry of the body” marks the baroque vision as an alterity against the rationalized or analytic Cartesian perspective, as Jay puts it: “baroque visual experience has a strongly tactile or haptic quality, which prevents it from turning into the absolute ocularcentrism of its Cartesian perspectivalist rival” (17).

In fact, Jay’s lengthy exploration of the explosive effects or the “ocular madness” produced by baroque vision derives from the work of the French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann. In *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetic of Modernity*, Buci-Glucksmann designates Baudelaire’s representation of Parisian landscape as a “modern baroque.”¹³ As an alternative epistemic regime, the baroque is an “aesthetics of otherness” which shows the “incommensurability of the heterogeneous Other” (133). Put in Baudelaire’s historical context, his peculiar baroque aesthetic appears in an uncanny and horrifying form, a

protest against the hegemonic idea of “progress” in modernity. What should be “kept from sight” makes their terrifying return. Henceforth poems in *Tableux parisiens* record some bodily excess/abscess that the dominant ideology of moral hygiene and bourgeois asepticism endeavors to eradicate but fails to resist its infiltration. It continues to insinuate itself into the hegemonic space as an undeletable trace or as a disturbing return. The result is what Buci-Glucksmann terms the “baroque space,” in which the display of the obscene body and of naked misery marks how the dominant space replete with cold images and signs is actually an abstract, disembodied corpus, lifeless and inhuman.

The body, the humanist notion bound up with empathy, passion, and affects, is pulverized and transformed into cold signs and visual commodities. To see otherwise, to refuse to be duped by the heaped proliferation of cold images is to adopt a baroque vision to see through the otherwise vigilantly defined boundaries of exterior/interior, visible/invisible, self/other, and so forth. This entails entering and being tainted by the smudge of the Other, putting the Self in the Other’s place, recognizing the Other is indeed inside my Self.

Traditional conception of the “other” usually assumes a binary system in which the other is opposed to the term “self,” with self understood as accessible and even transparent in a way that the other can never legitimately be. This “self” is the modern subject of capitalism who dreams of being a jubilant entrepreneur free to pursue its mercantile ambitions, unmoored from traditions and the burden of the past. However, Baudelaire’s modern poetry complicates this dichotomy by creating accounts of the self who is not so breezy sprightly, of the self in some way seeing itself as other to itself, of the self feeling alienated from itself, of the self being haunted by the non-self which is somehow uncannily familiar to the self.

In Baudelaire’s uncanny landscape, the Self keeps bumping into its double with an eerie sense of déjà-vu. Elaborating on Freud’s theory of the Uncanny, Kristeva writes: “Strange indeed is the encounter with the other” (187). This uncanny strangeness is linked by Kristeva to the abject, the feminine. The (m)other was once familiar to the Self, who needs to alienate itself from its former attachment to the (m)other in

order to constitute itself as an autonomous subject. Paradoxically, alienation is the precondition for the constitution of the coherent subject. Our modern condition as alienation and the sense of being in the world which is “unhomely” may be said to be linked to the separation with the (m)other. Freud writes that there is a saying that “Love is home-sickness” which may see as human beings’ desire to return to their former *Heim*, the place “where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning,” which is mother’s body (245): the pre-oedipal bliss of the fusion with the mother without the pain of differing and lacking.

At the core of the modern unhomely is the question of how the self can acknowledge its “conflictual bond” with the other (Kristeva 188). And in so far as this “self” is constituted in the matrix of modernity, and in a certain interpretation of Lefebvre, we might say that the alterity of the “other” is implicated with negativity and temporality (192, 356). Baudelaire’s obsession with the detritus of history brought back to the view those abject figures such as beggars, widows, clowns, the derelict, blind men—an endless list of the disenfranchised that our modern buoyant self thought to have been left behind but resurfaced as uncanny resurrections. The ego’s bond to the other makes the official ideology of transcendence itself a metaphysical delusion. In the poems such as “Rêve parisien” (Parisian Dream) and “La chambre double” (The Double Room), questions doubting the validity of such transcendence over corporeality arise whenever the poet indulges in his reveries. Awakening from the blissful dreamland and falling into the abject reality, the poet questions the permanence of such boundless, disembodied transcendence. In the prose poem “Le Fou et la vénus” (Venus and the Motley Fool), the poet’s utopian reverie in a park is destroyed by the intrusion of a scandalous body: “Yet, in the midst of all this universal joy I caught sight of a grief-stricken soul.” This sentence brings Baudelaire’s ethical presuppositions to the surface in the sense that disembodied idealization is debunked as not viable when confronting the radical existence of the suffering body:

At the feet of a colossal Venus, all of a heap against the pedestal, one of those so-called fools, those voluntary buffoons who, with cap and bells and tricked out in a ridiculous and gaudy costume, are called upon to make kings laugh when they are beset by Boredom or Remorse, raises his tear-filled eyes toward the immortal Goddess. (*Paris Spleen* 10)

Thus, transcendence makes way for an ethics that recognizes the insurmountable corporeality, the materiality of our existence, and our relationships with other human and non-human bodies.

As Kristeva notes, Freud's observation on the Uncanny teaches us an ethical lesson of "how to detect foreignness in ourselves." She writes, "After Stoic cosmopolitanism, after religious universalist integration, Freud brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours" (191–92). Indeed, the strange is "within" us. The recognition of the intersubjective relationship with the other implies an ethics. Unlike the Kantian definition of the moral subject that requires the subject dismisses its bodily impulses and inclinations as irrelevant to the subject's attainment of rational freedom, an intersubjective ethics insists that we attribute moral significance not to a "disembodied" reason which transcends bodily messiness, but instead to the subject's corporeal and emotional relationships with other existences. We might interpret Kristeva's idea of abjection¹⁴ as an ethics which acknowledges these ghostly hauntings incarnated in flesh, blood, vomit, feces, pus, urine, and other bodily dregs. Evoking legions of abject corporeality in his Parisian landscape, Baudelaire persistently brings one back to the reality of the body that the dominant ideology of modernity desperately aims to transcend and to exorcise. As Kristeva suggests, the possibility of founding solidarity among humankind might be thinkable when we recognize our being "with" others:

To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that "demon," that threat, that apprehension

generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid "us." By recognizing *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners. (192)

Here is a call for the self's ethical relation with the other, an inexpugnable alterity, as revealed in Baudelaire haunting evocation of the human/non-human dregs, that keeps returning perpetually and disrupts the Cartesian self. While the self experiences the image of the other as a phobic object, a stimulus to anxiety and repulsion insofar as the uncanny other is a corporeal reminder of how precarious is the illusion that sustains the autonomy of the self's perfect idealization, an interpersonal ethics is implicated here. Instead of fighting against or eliminating these messy impurities to safeguard our "own and proper," we might need them to sustain our existence, which is in fact a "cohabitation" with other animate or inanimate bodies. Only by acknowledging this "otherness" as a necessary constituent of the "self" can we imagine a more holistic way of dwelling in today's modern condition.

NOTES

¹ As Jonathan Crary points out (via citing Georges Canguilhem's observation), the process of normalization coincides with modernization in the nineteenth century. He says: "the assessment of 'normality' in medicine, psychology, and other fields became an essential part of the shaping of the individual to the requirements of institutional power in the nineteenth century, and it was through these disciplines that the subject in a sense became *visible*" (16). It is obvious that this process of normalization overlaps with Foucault's idea of panopticon, which involves regulations of bodies, codifications of human behaviors into manageable, docile subjects.

² This metaphor derives from the famous mythological figure Icarus, who, while escaping King Minos with his father Daedalus, ignores his father's warning, flies too close to the sun that the wax in his artificial wings melted. As

a result, he falls into the sea and drowns. As de Certeau puts it, this elevation transfigures Icarus into a “voyeur.” He writes: “It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (92).

³ As Jane Jacobs delineates Le Corbusier’s dream city, “He attempted to make planning for the automobile an integral part of his scheme, and this was, in the 1920’s and early 1930’s, a new, exciting idea. He included great arterial roads for express one-way traffic. He cut the number of streets because ‘cross-roads are an enemy to traffic’. He proposed underground streets for heavy vehicles and deliveries . . . he kept the pedestrians off the streets and in the parks. His city was like a wonderful mechanical toy” (23). It is evident that Le Corbusier’s concept city has had a great impact on the following urban planning.

⁴ *The Poetics of Space* 212. This quotation also appears as the epigraph in Victor Burgin’s article “Geometry and Abjection” which, through Kristeva’s theory of abjection, investigates the psychic investments in the history of visual–geometric space. My paper in some way is inspired by Burgin’s illuminating explication.

⁵ Cited in Françoise Choay’s *The Modern City: Planning in the 19th Century* 18.

⁶ See also Robert Burton’s *The Context of Baudelaire’s Le Cygne* 36–7.

⁷ As Burton notes, ‘falsi Simoentis ad undam’ is the epigraph of the first published version of “The Swan,” 31.

⁸ This is quoted from Sigrid Weigel’s discussion of the “corporeal memory” in *Body-and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin* 151.

⁹ Baudelaire describes these desolate souls as follows:

I think of some black woman, starving
and consumptive in the muddy streets.
peering through a wall of fog for those
missing palms of splendid Africa;

I think of orphans withering like flowers;

of those who lose what never can be found
again—never! Swallowing their tears
and nursing at the she-wolf Sorrow's dugs;

and in the forest of my mind's exile
a merciless memory winds its horn:
I hear it and I think of prisoners,
of the shipwrecked, the beaten—and so many more!

¹⁰ As Terdiman writes in *Present Past*: "The Comptoir d'Escompte had instituted the use of personal checks in 1848. Paper money, discounted bills, loans on securities, letters of credit were all available mechanisms by the early years of Napoleon III's reign" (131).

¹¹ "The rise of the visual realm entails a series of substitutions and displacements by means of which it overwhelms the whole body and usurps its role" (Lefebvre 286).

¹² As he writes: "Abstract space thus simultaneously embraces the hypertrophied analytic intellect; the state and bureaucratic *raison d'état*; 'pure' knowledge; and the discourse of power. Implying a 'logic' which misrepresents it and masks its contradictions, this space, which is that of bureaucracy, embodies a successful integration of spectacle and violence" (Lefebvre 308).

¹³ In her *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* 74–81.

¹⁴ See her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

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