

Blood, sweat, and tears

Bodily inscriptions in contemporary experimental film

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NECSUS 2 (2):447–463

DOI: 10.5117/NECSUS2013.2.KNOW

Abstract

The contemporary works discussed in this article emerge from a wider desire in experimental film to (re)discover the aesthetic and critical potential of celluloid as it shifts, to employ the terminology coined by Raymond Williams, from the dominant to the residual.

Keywords: body, experimental, film, Thorsten Fleisch, Vicky Smith, waste

In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life. – Karl Marx¹

The contemporary works discussed in this article emerge from a wider desire in experimental film to (re)discover the aesthetic and critical potential of celluloid as it shifts, to employ the terminology coined by Raymond Williams, from the dominant to the residual.² This desire can be observed in the worldwide proliferation of artist-run film labs since the mid-1990s,³ where an economy of recuperation, re-use, and recycling of old materials represents a stark alternative to ‘an economy utterly dependent on disposability⁴ and a throwaway culture of constant upgrades and relentlessly ‘new’ electronic goods. Based on the model of the London Filmmakers Co-op established in 1967,⁵ these interconnected hubs of artistic experimentation foster an artisanal do-it-yourself ethos that bypasses traditional industrial processes in favour of individual hands-on experimentation.⁶ Alongside this, many filmmakers are venturing beyond conventional filmmaking techniques by using food, household products, and, in the case of the films discussed here, bodily fluids as a way of producing images. As the British artist Vicky Smith has pointed out, in the current climate of celluloid obsolescence the experimental filmmaker is now ‘forced back to their own body as a resource’⁷

I would like to explore here how such practices allow us to reconceptualise the way we think about cinematic materiality and its relationship to the body. During a period of technological transition – the rise of digital media and the subsequent gradual phasing out of celluloid film – medium-specificity has become invariably intertwined with issues of obsolescence and the outmoded, as well as questions of cultural value and waste.

We might note in this context that the increasing awareness of film's limited life-span (both materially and culturally) has led to it being discussed through a host of bodily metaphors. Paolo Cherchi Usai, for example, prophesied in 2001 that moving image preservation would become a 'science of gradual loss and the art of coping with the consequences, very much like a physician who has accepted the inevitability of death, even while he fights for the patient's life'.⁸ This is an echo of Roland Barthes' description of photography as 'mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages ... fades, weakens, vanishes ... there is nothing left to do but throw it away'.⁹ As suggested by Barthes, the process by which the subject separates him or herself from the dead or lost object calls to mind Sigmund Freud's account of mourning and melancholia. Crucially, what distinguishes mourning from the pathological state of melancholia, in Freud's view, is the ability to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. Thus, Laura Marks states that

Barthes finds that the mortality of his photographs, their blurriness, fading and decay, render them unbearably abject ... the photograph must be rejected, lest its mortality contaminate the life of the viewer. In what seems like an understandable and 'healthy' conclusion to mourning, Barthes *throws the old photograph away*.¹⁰

Is this not, in some sense, analogous to the position in which film now finds itself? It is difficult not to link such themes of mourning and melancholia to issues of obsolescence, particularly within the context of the death of film as a dominant cultural form. Acceptance of and compliance with the linear film-to-digital narrative corresponds to a 'healthy' separation from 'old' media and from the abject physical object, an observation that rings true when we consider the frequent calls for celluloid enthusiasts to 'move on', their unhealthy attachment to a dying medium considered by many as overly nostalgic, melancholic, even retrograde.¹¹ This might seem like a rather simplistic analogy but it nonetheless helps us to understand current celluloid practice as what Marks terms 'loving a disappearing image'¹² or, more specifically in this context, loving a disappearing medium.

Inherent in the work and writings of many contemporary analogue practitioners is the acceptance and embracing of film's physical nature – its relationship with time, death, and decay. Framing Usai's bodily metaphors in more constructive terms, the American artist Bradley Eros refers to the dark room as 'a theater of operations, where each patient's breath and blood rhymes with the heaving of the motor and the circulation of a coiled skein through the system'. We might draw a parallel here with the early theorisations of artists such as Hans Richter, who, in an attempt to isolate film's medium-specific properties, referred to its 'rhythms of breath and heart-beat'.¹³ These anthropomorphic analogies are re-employed and reimagined in order to emphasise film's medium-specific properties from a contemporary perspective, where the reference to life is inseparable from an awareness of death. In his poetic defence of analogue film, Eros reverses Barthes' rejection of mortality as a frightful reminder of our own fragile bodies, framing corporeality and transience as venerable properties of this now cherished medium:

[t]rans-film, analogous to a human life, a presence that comes into being, decays and dies, it could be embraced as anima incarnate, that is, conscious of its own mortality and celebrated for its precious existence of material vulnerability.¹⁴

This cycle of life and death and the process of 'becoming' to which Eros refers brings to mind Henry Miller's famous lines from *Tropic of Cancer*, that here serve as a useful transition for thinking about the relationship between film, materiality, death, and waste:

I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end ... all that is fluid, melting, dissolute and dissolvent, all the pus and dirt that in flowing is purified, that loses its sense of origin, that makes the great circuit toward death and dissolution.¹⁵

Miller's words take Eros' anthropomorphic eulogising one step further, for in embracing organic time Miller shifts the emphasis from outside to inside, and from solid to liquid – a body dissolving, deteriorating, becoming nothing. The fluids to which Miller refers – those disgusting secretions – are reframed and revalued as *containing* time and as representing the passage from one state to another. The flowing deteriorating film as it passes through and is then ejected from the projector can provide a useful bodily analogy here. These interconnected perspectives offer a springboard for

considering the relatively recent turn to the use of bodily fluids in film. In these works, Usai's 'art of coping' with obsolescence involves not Barthes' throwing away of the abject aging object but rather a confrontation with and examination of that object in relation to our organic temporal existence.

Contemporary film practices that move these metaphors of the body into the direct employment of the body as primary visual material have been referred to by Vicky Smith as the 'full body film', or, in her recent series of curated film programmes, 'living film': 'film as object that is activated through physical contact and film as an ongoing mode of material practice that shapes the consciousness of, animates and enlivens its makers'.¹⁶ Her own 16mm cameraless works have frequently taken the form of investigations into celluloid as a tactile surface – a register of bodily experience, as well as the staging of psychological states, and what she describes as the 'struggle with matter'. In her article on this field of practice entitled 'Full Body Film', Smith draws explicitly on sensuous film theory, particularly Vivian Sobchack's notion of 'full-bodied vision', with its emphasis on the 'carnal foundations of cinematic intelligibility',¹⁷ – but she shifts the register from the process of viewing to that of making. In *sobbingspittingscratching* (2012), Smith uses bodily fluids such as spit and tears as the material basis for the film's imagery, interspersed with animated scratches on the surface of the celluloid. Unlike Stan Brakhage's utilitarian use of his own spit to loosen the 'skin' of the film in *Chinese Series* (2003)¹⁸ – the only other notable example, along with Carolee Schneeman's earlier *Fuses* (1967), of the use of actual body fluid in experimental film – Smith invites an almost clinical engagement with these internal fluids. Enlarged on the screen, they resemble scientific microscopic images that bring us into an uncanny physical proximity with the artist's body. The choice of material support – clear leader rather than negative stock – bestows on the film an ethereal quality that elicits both fascination and discomfort.

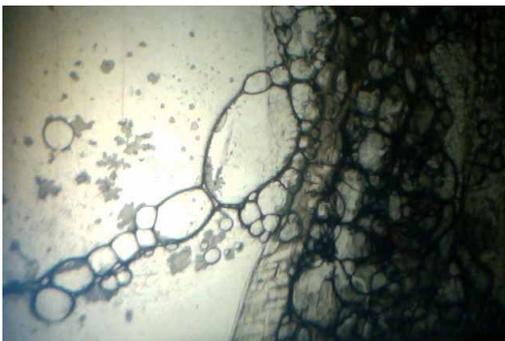


Fig. 1: Saliva in Smith's *sobbingspittingscratching*.

Detached from their proper place *inside* the body, these fluids transcend the boundary between the inside and outside, the clean and the unclean, claiming for themselves a position of artistic value. Once they transgress the safe confines of the subject, bodily fluids are conventionally conceived as waste products that, unless disposed of, lead to contamination (to return to Barthes) or social embarrassment. Tears, signifiers of emotional excess – the use of the term ‘sobbing’ rather than ‘crying’ in the title relates specifically to an uncontrollable emotional outpouring – are to be wiped away (‘dry your eyes’), whilst spittle carries with it more negative connotations of loss of bodily control, even madness (‘frothing at the mouth’).¹⁹ The clear leader as a signifier of nothingness and as a low-status waste product connects with the excess of these bodily secretions and their colourless, formless nature, creating an intricate dialogue between material and bodily economies.

Spit is not only the base product in the hierarchy of organic matter, it is also characteristic of what Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as *visqueux* (slimy): ‘neither liquid nor solid, but somewhere midway between the two’.²⁰ To quote Rosalind Krauss in her discussion of ‘*l’informe*’, ‘the slimy, in the form of the gagging suction of a leech-like past that will not release its grip, seems to contain its own form of possessiveness’.²¹ Georges Bataille’s short definition of ‘*l’informe*’ or the formless in the critical dictionary section of his journal *Documents* in 1929 is accompanied by two entries by Marcel Griaule and Michel Leiris, which directly address the subject of ‘le crachat’ (spit or spittle) and its status as the lowest form of base matter. Griaule’s ‘Crachat d’âme’ seems particularly resonant in relation to the body fluid film and its attempt to move beyond language (and here I also mean, in relation to film, the figurative image) as the privileged site of meaning. Spit, he observes,

accompagne le souffle, qui ne peut sortir de la bouche sans s’en imprégner.
Or, le souffle est l’âme’ [‘accompanies the breath, which cannot leave the mouth without being impregnated by it. Yet, the breath is the soul’].

This paradoxical conflation of the high and the low, the elevated and the base (as Leiris states in ‘Leau à la bouche’, saliva drags the divine status of the mouth to the lowest rang in the hierarchy of organic matter to ‘une grotte tiède et mouillée’ – ‘a wet and warm cave’) is overcome or consolidated by elevating the status of spit or saliva. In which case, suggests Griaule, if ‘la salive est de l’âme déposée’, then ‘le crachat est de l’âme en mouvement’ [if saliva is the soul at rest, then spit is the soul in movement]. This chain of associations that takes us from spit to the soul by way of the breath leads,

ultimately, to death, as Giraule makes clear when he evokes the phrase ‘rendre le dernier soupir’ – to breathe one’s last breath.

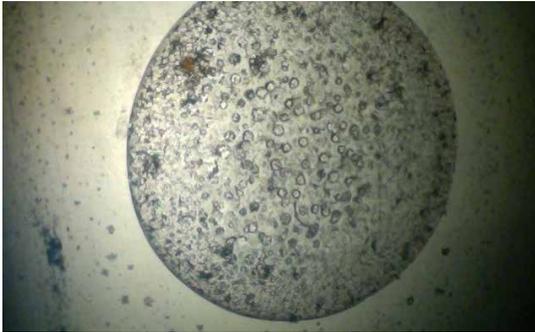


Fig. 2: A magnified tear in sobbingspittingscratching.

If spit connects us in this sense with film’s dying breath, then the tears in Smith’s film direct us to a very explicit mourning of this death, both personal and collective. In the use of film as a register of emotion, tears are left to dry on the surface of the celluloid, creating their own very unique trace in the visible chemical alteration of the material. In bringing together material and psychic economies of loss and waste, Smith thus develops a unique methodology and approach that speaks to and through the contemporary cultural status of celluloid film, itself a material trace of the past that threatens to pollute the present in its decaying, deteriorating excess. There is clearly a connection to be made here between our relationship to bodily waste, death, and the social position of ‘residual’ cultural forms that represent the ‘leech-like’ past of which Krauss speaks. We might turn to Julia Kristeva’s discussion of abjection to provide a (more embodied) analogy for the relationship between capitalism’s insatiable desire for renewal and the waste products it leaves behind.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.²²

It is precisely this sense of *cultural* inbetween-ness (film as undead or living-dead) that collides with, and is expressed through, the explicit body that transgresses the boundary between inside and outside.

More directly related to themes of life and death, and the possibilities of *staging* corporeality through cinematic materiality, are the works of

the German filmmaker Thorsten Fleisch.²³ Again, these films raise questions about the re(use) and recycling of bodily matter that, once ejected or removed from the body, loses its specific organic function as sustaining (blood) or protecting (skin) the human body. An early piece *Bluttausch* (Bloodlust, 1998) is an attempt to, in Fleisch's own words, 'constitute a human/machine dialogue' by cutting into his own flesh and pressing 16mm film leader into the wound, then adding additional blood to the film with a syringe (although the performative aspect of Fleisch's process is invisible to the viewer, we might see this as a materialist film equivalent of the extreme performances of Ron Athey, in which the artist publicly submits his own body to explicit acts of cutting and bloodletting²⁴).



Fig. 3: Film strips of Fleisch's Bluttausch (Bloodlust).

Because it transgresses the boundary between image track and soundtrack, the viewer, upon experiencing Fleisch's film, not only sees but also *hears* the blood in a compelling example of cinematic synesthesia. As smears and specks of blood rush down and across the screen, the continuous sounds of rubbing and scratching on the soundtrack undermine the potential pictorial beauty of the image and emphasise an internal experience over an external one. The viewer is positioning in some 'sense' within the body of the filmmaker, and, crucially, the body of the film. The marks made on the film thus not only testify to the hand of the artist, the trace of a physical connection with the material, but also, more profoundly, they represent a fusion of two organic bodies.

The influence of the Viennese Actionist performances and body art on Fleisch's work is evident here, and the artist explicitly references Hermann Nitsch's blood paintings as a key source of inspiration for *Bloodlust*.²⁵ Otto Muehl's controversial staged performances, many of which were documented by the experimental filmmaker Kurt Kren, frequently featured male and female bodies in erotic positions and sexually charged movements, which are then covered in various food substances. In Kren's film documents, close-ups of body parts flash across the screen in quick succession, not unlike the frantic editing of Fleisch's own body films. Having studied with a contemporary of Kren's, Peter Kubelka, Fleisch's film concept is clearly informed by questions of form, the challenges of representation, and the tension between abstraction and figuration. Rather than using film as (objective) photographic record of a performance, Fleisch turns the film itself into a *site* of performance, transgressing the traditional boundary between film and the body, just as Muehl used the body to break with the conventions of painting over 40 years earlier. The latter's 1964 'Material Action Manifesto' includes a passage that states the following:

[t]he human body, a laid table or a room becomes the picture surface. Time is added to the dimension of the body and space.²⁶

Fleisch reverses this scenario, turning the surface of the film into a repository for the body's own fluids, and transforming an organic notion of time (the continuous flowing of blood through the body) into a mechanical one (the flowing of film through the projector).



Fig. 4: *Blood surfaces.*

Fleisch develops his bodily practice further in *Hautnah* (Skinflick, 2002), this time switching the emphasis from bodily fluids to bodily surfaces. Using a similar process to *Bloodlust*, *Skinflick* involves different imprints of human skin on the celluloid strip, including fingerprints on clear leader and successive skin prints from various parts of the filmmaker's body. These are interspersed with traditionally filmed images of bodily surfaces reminiscent of Willard Maas' *Geography of the Body* (1943), in which extreme close-ups turn the familiar topography of the body into a strange and disorientating landscape of textures and curves.²⁷ The film is meticulously edited to produce a rapid onslaught of extreme close-ups that flash unceasingly before the eyes of the spectator, at times giving the impression of dissolving into and then falling away from the body. The soundtrack, more menacing than *Bloodlust*, heightens this sense of chaos and entropy as the body breaks down into an unfathomable series of abstract landscapes that move back and forth between the strange and the familiar in a synthesis of surfaces – skin, film, and light. This is flesh dissolving itself to become pure energy, a form of bodily communication beyond words that approaches Artaud's theatre of cruelty in its emphasis on primal experience and tactile preverbal knowledge. The film's oscillation between conventional photographic imagery of skin and these direct material inscriptions seems to stage an inside-outside topography – the body as seen and the body as experienced.



Fig. 5: Skin imprints in *Hautnah* (*Skinflick*).

A more literal mapping of the body can be seen in Emma Hart's *Skin Film* (2004). To quote her description:

[b]y sticking sellotape to my skin and then peeling it off, I took off the top surface of my skin. I then stuck the tape and the skin to clear 16mm film. It is my actual skin that goes through the projector. It is a film of my total surface area, from head to toe.²⁸

Here, we have not simply the trace of the body (usually a work copy is turned into a screening copy) but the *actual* body running through a projector. Space is translated into the time of projection – an entire body reduced to 11 minutes. What is interesting here in relation to the questions of death and materiality, waste and recycling, is the transition from life to death and back to life. The skin, once removed from the living body, immediately loses its function and proper place in the order of things and becomes 'dead' matter. However, the (after)life-giving force of the projector resuscitates this bodily matter in the moment of viewing, bestowing on it a revitalised form. At the same time, Hart emphasises film as an 'autodestructive medium', in the words of D. N. Rodowick. 'Each passage of frames through a projector – the very machine that gives filmophanic/projected life to the moving image – advances a process of erosion that will eventually reduce the image to

nothing.²⁹ The body itself – in the form of the artist's skin on the surface of the film – progressively flakes and falls away with each screening. It would be hard to find a more complex and more literal reference to film as skin (and we should remember here that the French word for film – 'pellicule' – derives from the Latin 'little skin') and as a living and dying body.

If these films draw attention to the creative appropriation of bodily excess and waste, it is another unrealised (and, perhaps *unrealisable*) film project that demonstrates the extremes to which contemporary interest in the possible relationship between film and the body might go. For the Zoo Art Fair in 2007, the London-based film collective No.w.here initiated a new project entitled *Instruction for Films*, an investigation into the different ways in which films could be made using only celluloid. 40 international artists were invited to respond, including Fleisch. His project, *Peristaltic Fantasy*, 'unravels' as follows:

[a] human specimen is administered a looped dosage of clear film leader. The film enters his organism through the mouth travelling through the oesophagus until it reaches the stomach. From there it goes on through the small intestine and finally through the colon until it exits his organism through the rectum. Depending on the specimen's diet several bodily processes will have severely stained the clear leader which is then going through a projector which screens the manipulated film to an audience. After running through the projector the film re-enters the specimen to let him work his bowel magic on the film once more. This is repeated until the film disintegrates from the digestive acid or the specimen ceases to function.³⁰

Here, bodily waste in its more literal form becomes the central fascination for Fleisch. Whilst blood, spit, tears, and skin are somewhat ambiguous in terms of their status as waste products, the bowel and rectum make the connection more than explicit. The 'fantasy' is clearly that of an ultimate fusion of bodies – not simply to use the body as a creative resource (such as the emerging practice of developing film in urine), but to turn the body into an image-producing, as well as waste-producing, *machine*.

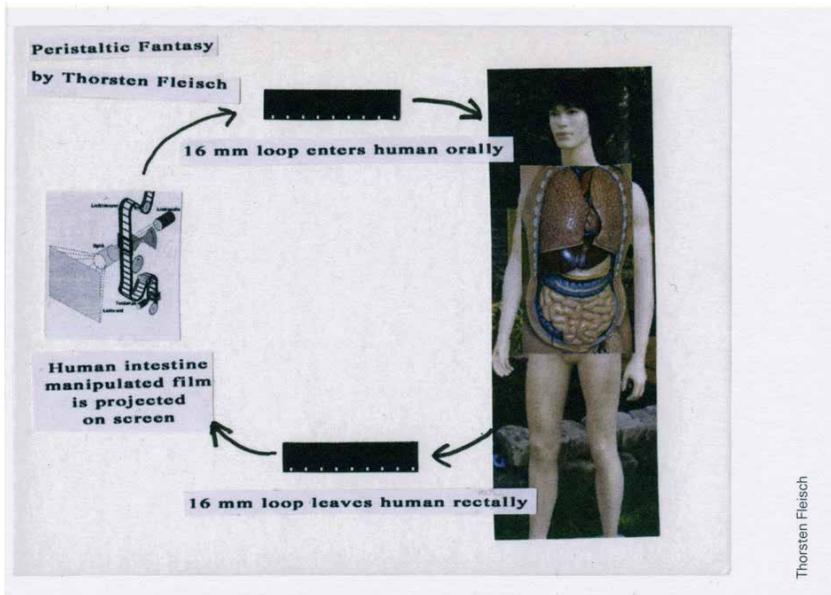


Fig. 6: Instructions for a film: *Peristaltic Fantasy*.

It is from this perspective that Fleisch's imagined scenario can be seen to connect with some wider and more serious considerations of obsolescence and waste in late capitalist value systems. Obsolescence does not only affect material objects, but also the position of people in contemporary consumer culture. Interestingly, Fleisch places the film strip and the human 'specimen' on an equal footing; neither seems to hold more value than the other. Either the film disintegrates or the specimen 'ceases to function' – both, in other words, are perishable. Underlying this humorous scenario is the notion that the human being itself is simply another waste product, an expendable cog in the capitalist wheel of consumption and disposal. 'Consuming culture' is in this case an endless process of waste production,³¹ but Fleisch simultaneously, and perhaps unwittingly, moves beyond this dead-end conclusion by disturbing the most basic subject-waste and subject-object relations. *Peristaltic Fantasy* also imagines a different relationship to our own bodily waste – quite simply, a case of eating one's own shit. As Gay Hawkins argues in *The Ethics of Waste*, 'negatively valued waste like shit challenges boundaries and symbolic order, hence its potential to be extremely disturbing'.³² Although Fleisch's film instructions make no mention of shit itself (which, to confuse matters, may be read precisely as the collective cultural denial of its presence to which Hawkins draws attention

in her book), we might see this creative reframing of waste-making *processes* as opening up new ways of engaging with waste in society more generally.

A similar association of film with food and bodily functions, as well as the performative staging of a film 'event' or 'happening', can also be found in the works of American filmmaker Jennifer West, whose practice involves various interventions (both individual and collective) on 16mm, 35mm, and 70mm film. *Whatever Film* (2007), to choose one example, bears the elaborate subtitle *16mm film leader soaked in lots of coffee and espresso, taken on a power walk, rubbed with sweat and inscribed with the word "whatever" written in purple metallic eyeliner*. West's approach clearly references earlier artists such as Tony Conrad, who, during the 1960s and 1970s, subjected the film material to a range of chemical processes including pickling and cooking, often acted out in live performances.³³ However, what sets her work apart from these historical precedents is the emphasis on experiential transference – the staging not simply of a process or intervention, but of bodily experience itself (this film drinks coffee, goes on a power walk, sweats, and wears eyeliner!). In other words, like Fleish, West seeks out new ways to produce a direct connection between the two forms of living (and dying) organic matter. What is interesting about *Whatever Film* is the slightly incongruous combination of sweat and eyeliner, both of which are 'worn' by the film. Again, we might see West's title as disrupting the hierarchical order of things, where eyeliner conventionally signifies beauty and sweat is associated with the smelly, the unfeminine, and the unclean. Here, sweat as bodily waste is not simply to be disposed of, but rather enters into a different value system when reframed, alongside eyeliner and coffee, as artistic material. It has, as is the case with all the films described so far, an afterlife that aligns it with but ultimately takes it beyond death.

Although self-consciously playful in their film-body associations, Fleisch's techno-human fantasy and West's eccentric convoluted titles – that may or may not refer to the *actual* process employed – nonetheless constitute vital meditations on the still-unexplored potential of celluloid and the possibilities of social critique through material practice. The film-makers discussed above emphasise analogue film as alchemy, a science of transformation that offers seemingly limitless possibilities. However, this is more than a straightforward childlike 'what if?' curiosity, where dabbling with chemicals, foodstuffs, and bodily residues creates 'interesting' visual effects. Through an engagement with materials and matter, these bodily inscriptions propose new ways of confronting mortality on two interconnected levels by fusing the politics of the body with the politics of obsolescence. They also open up avenues for thinking about economies of

waste from both a material and a social perspective. What role does and can the obsolete, discarded, and outmoded object play in the construction and deconstruction of value systems, and what forces are in operation in its passage from the dominant to the residual? How might our relationship with waste be reconceptualised through a medium that is itself now ‘fit for the rubbish bin’?

Film, in its transitional state, seems to relate to Gillian Pye’s assertion that

at its nadir in a cycle of consumption and production, rubbish is both ready for disappearance and yet ripe for reinvestment, reinterpretation or revaluing ... operating apparently outside the world of the useful, functioning or valued, the discarded thing may appear as autonomous, existing in and for itself.³⁴

As Walter Benjamin famously observed, it is only at the point of becoming obsolete or value-less that an object takes on critical power, releases ‘revolutionary energies’.³⁵

In this article I have tried to show how these contemporary experimental works demonstrate interconnected value systems, where the coming together of ‘discarded things’ – analogue film and bodily fluids (or matter) – opens up critical perspectives on both. Rather than turn away from that which signifies death, these films embrace death as a generative artistic metaphor.

As the body is increasingly brought into celluloid practice as a ‘politics of resistance’,³⁶ a new experimental aesthetic can be seen to emerge, one that offers the potential for renewal and for the revitalisation of experimental film theory in the realms of materialist practice. These new developments demonstrate that the formal and critical potential of materialist filmmaking was not exhausted during the 1960s and 1970s, and that studying these new forms also offers a way of thinking through the history of experimental cinema, particularly in terms of engagements with the body. Film’s current in-between position at the threshold of change also allows broader reflections on our own contemporary states of anxiety-inducing liminality – between the human and machine, life and death. In an age of ‘posthumanism’ and excessive waste culture, these celluloid inscriptions make visible our material existence and the flow of time that constitutes us.

Notes

1. Marx, quoted in Krauss 1996, p. 100.
2. Williams 1977.
3. See <http://www.filmlabs.org> for a full list of artist-run film labs worldwide.
4. Hawkins 2006, p. 2.
5. Following the closure of the LFMC in 1999, much of the technical equipment was used to set up the No.w.here lab in 2004.
6. A number of publications have emerged in recent years that offer DIY instructions for filmmakers wanting to experiment with unconventional handmade techniques. See Woloshen 2010 and Ramey 2014. The filmmaker Ken Paul Rosenthal's website also contains a number of articles on homemade film practices and organic processes such as marinating film in urine and developing in various food products: <http://www.kenpaulrosenthal.com/writings.htm> (accessed on 19 September 2013).
7. Smith 2012.
8. Cherchi Usai 2001, p. 105.
9. Barthes 2000.
10. Marks 2002, p. 105.
11. Tacita Dean states the following in the accompanying catalogue to her installation at the Tate Modern: 'I have heard in these last few months more versions of the "Get real, darling" mantra than I care to recount.' Dean 2011, p. 16.
12. Marks 2002, pp. 91-110.
13. Richter 1989, p. 106.
14. Eros 2012. In the same issue of the journal, Janis Crystal Lipzin draws attention to the 'sur-reptitious conspiracy between artist, materials, and photochemical occurrences'. Lipzin 2012.
15. Miller 2005, p. 259.
16. See <http://www.no-w-here.org.uk/index.php?cat=1&subCat=docdetail&&id=391> (accessed on 16 October 2013).
17. Sobchack 1991, p. 59.
18. This was in fact circumstantial rather than wholly intentional. Physically weakened and rendered vulnerable by illness, Brakhage was no longer able to employ the kind of bodily control, concentration, and precision that his painted films of the previous two decades had required. Rather, he used his own saliva to facilitate surface hieroglyphic inscriptions on the body of the film material. 'It's made with my fingernails, with my spit', he says in one of his last interviews with Pip Chodorov. 'I spit upon this and loosen the emulsion and that gives me just enough so I can get in there with the fingernails.' <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/03/express/stan-brakhage-with-pip-chodorov> (accessed on 15 October 2013). What is interesting in relation to this article is that Brakhage's increased awareness of his own mortality, the feeling of being on the edge of death, led to the most intimate bodily intervention: the artist's own bodily fluid.
19. Michael Thompson provides an interesting account of the changing social status of bodily secretions such as spittle in *Rubbish Theory*.
20. Krauss 1996.
21. Ibid.
22. Kristeva 1982, p. 4.
23. Fleisch has consistently shifted between film and digital in his moving image works. Unlike artists such as Vicky Smith, he is by no means a militant defender of celluloid practice; rather, his films aim to draw out the specific properties of each medium, even in the case

- of the film-digital hybrid *Wound Footage* (2003/2009), bringing them into a dialogue with each other within the same work. See <http://fleischfilm.com>.
24. A central and notorious figure of the live art scene since the early 1980s, American artist Ron Athey is perhaps the clearest reference point for the performative use of body fluids such as blood. Like Bob Flanagan before him, Athey's visceral performances see him submitting his own body to various forms of ritualised pain and torture, involving cutting, penetrating, and other extreme acts of physical manipulation. As Dominic Johnson points out in a recent study of the artist, '[t]o watch Athey perform is to witness him turn his body inside out in performance, up to the brink of disaster, from which he manages to withdraw more or less intact.' Johnson 2013, p. 10. Although very different as forms of artistic practice, there are clearly some connections to be made between the 'explicit body' in performance art (see Schneider 1997) and the body fluid films discussed here, particularly in terms of transgressing the boundary between inside and outside.
 25. Enns 2010, <http://www.incite-online.net/fleisch.html> (accessed on 19 September 2013).
 26. Green 1999, p. 87.
 27. For a fuller description of this film see Elder 1997.
 28. <http://www.emmahart.info/skin.html> (accessed on 20 September 2013).
 29. Rodowick 2007, p. 125.
 30. <http://www.no-w-here.org.uk/index.php?cat=2&subCat=docdetail&id=31> (accessed 20 September 2013).
 31. The continuous cycle of ingestion and expulsion brings to mind the first episode in Jan Švankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), where Archimboldo-like heads consume each other only to spew forth ad infinitum other identical heads.
 32. Hawkins 2006, p. 76.
 33. Jonathan Walley notes that this kind of expanded practice has been termed 'paracinema'. See Walley 2007, p. 355-382, and 2003.
 34. Quoted in Pye 2010, p. 6.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Eros 2012.

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