

# 7

## Recognition beyond Narcissism: Imaging the Body's Ownness and Strangeness

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### Introduction

Currently, we see a mounting theoretical interest in the notion of the body.<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising since our society faces a certain number of technological developments and innovations that radically subvert classical categories of the body. One need only think of the global use of the Internet and the increasing possibilities of organ transplants to grasp that these technologies are deeply anchored in our daily lives, and that their impact on the experience and conception of our bodies is enormous. Thanks to the Internet, we can dwell in cyberspace – a place where we no longer need our physical bodies. It frees communication and imagination from bodily presence, and as such, it seriously calls into question the idea of the body as the site of our existence, our experience and our identity. This kind of technological innovation yields new concepts of the body, both in theory and in art. The anthropologist and sociologist David le Breton, for instance, claims that the body can no longer constitute a real ego, but rather an *alter ego*; the body has become 'la prothèse d'un Moi' (Le Breton 24). From an artistic point of view, the Australian artist Stelarc declares that the body is 'obsolete'.<sup>2</sup>

In the same way, current possibilities for organ transplants invite us to conceptualize the body in another way, to formulate other ideas and criteria. The transplantation of organs that are in general regarded as strictly personal – such as the heart but also the hand with its exclusive individual finger prints – calls into question the difference between one's own body and that of a stranger.<sup>3</sup> The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who has undergone a heart transplant, argues that the fact of receiving an organ from someone else makes visible that welcoming an 'intruder' (*intrus*) is essential to the experience of one's own body. At the heart of

oneself, one finds this menacing but also beneficent stranger (Nancy). According to him, this *intrus* – for which the heart transplant is an exemplary case – always remains a radical alterity, yet at the same time, it forms the condition of oneself. Organ transplantation thus blurs the contours of one's own body, and therefore calls for a reconceptualization of the border between oneness and strangeness.

Most often, contemporary reformulations of the body are limited to the consequences of technologies that affect directly the body's matter and its biological functions: transsexualism, piercing and tattoos, body-building, medicalization, cloning, or in vitro fertilization (IVF). In this essay, I discuss another aspect of the contemporary body. My aim is to rethink the idea of 'body image' while focusing on new imaging technologies of the (inner) body. The control of the body by means of technologies implies more than the manipulation of its matter. It also implies the appropriation of unknown and invisible parts of the body. The imagination of one's inner body is radically changed since the medical gaze is capable of penetrating the skin. Since the invention of X-rays, by Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen in 1895, the interior of a living body can be exposed without dissection. And since the 1960s, possibilities of imaging the interior body have been developed in an explosive way. Thanks to ultrasound, endoscopy, positron emission photography (PET), computer tomography (CT), and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), we live the myth of the 'transparent body'.<sup>4</sup> According to Foucault, the clinical surveying gaze developed as a result of the practice of 'deciphering' at the end of the eighteenth century (Foucault 60). Now it would seem that this way of looking is currently coming to its final completion by means of an objectification and visualization of what belongs to subjective and invisible experience. For that reason, imaging technologies have an impact on the body that is comparable to technologies that manipulate its matter. Both change in a radical way the experience of one's own body.

In what follows, I would like to focus on the current issue of new images of the body. I will argue that these images can change the experience of our own body since they appeal to a specific kind of recognition. If I look at a scan of my own brain, I will not recognize myself in the same way as if I look in the mirror. Indeed, we would likely be inclined to say that we would not recognize ourselves at all from these kinds of medical pictures. My thesis, however, is that we do recognize something here, but this recognition is not exclusively based upon the visual. To found this thesis, I will dwell upon the idea of 'body image' by taking seriously the double meaning of this expression. On the one

hand, it simply refers to representations of the body or body parts, be it in a clinical or an artistic practice. On the other hand, it has the psychological meaning of a mental image that one has of one's own body. Psychologically, 'body image' refers to the body's unity, oneness and identity. Although these two meanings of 'body image' have to be distinguished, they do not exclude each other. It is through recognition that they are linked to each other. One's bodily identity comes into being by means of a process of identification with (ideal) images, and this process is only possible if one can recognize something from these images. Since images of the inner body, such as provided by MRI, PET, CT, endoscopy and ultrasound, are fragmented and hardly recognizable, they cannot easily be integrated within our own mirror image of the body. To understand what kind of recognition is at stake here, we need to go beyond the theory of narcissism that reduces the body image to a 'visual image'. I would like to make clear that the body image can also be understood in terms of an 'affective image'. To explain what I mean by the visual body image, I will draw on some aspects of Freud and Lacan. My idea of the affective body image is based upon the work of Merleau-Ponty and Klein. As I will claim, visual recognition is a form of appropriation, which therefore constitutes the body as one's own body. Affective recognition, by contrast, is a confrontation with (one's own) strangeness without appropriation.

Of course, contemporary imaging technologies have a meaning within their clinical usage. Patients who have gone through such a treatment in the first place experience changes of bodily identity. However, since I would like to sketch a general theory of the body image, I do not limit myself to the experience of patients. Instead, I will examine the question of bodily imaging outside its clinical setting, in the public domain of art. A work of art that is based on medical images has some advantages with respect to their proper clinical usage. Such a work frees the images from the connotation of illness; it makes them accessible for a large audience, and it can provide a (theoretical) reflection on medical procedures.<sup>5</sup> In contemporary art practice, we find a large number of artists who are inspired by medical technologies. This can be explained from the fact that there is a renewed interest for the body in art or even a new wave of body art since the last decade of the twentieth century. In this paper, I will discuss, by way of example, a work by Mona Hatoum, entitled *Corps étranger* (1994). This work consists of a video-installation that shows endoscopic images of the artist's own (inner) body. Before I explore, with the help of phenomenology and psychoanalysis, how this work of

art calls for a reformulation of bodily identity, I will first describe briefly the way in which body art manifests itself within contemporary art.

### Contemporary body art

As is well known, body art is a cultural phenomenon that dates from the 1960s–1970s. It came into being in the period during which modernism was coming to a closure. Although modernism can be seen as radical and progressive with respect to conventions in art, it was still dominated by a predominantly masculine or patriarchal value system (Perry). It was only in the 1960s that emphasizing particularities has rejected the so-called neutral or universal values, meaning, in fact, masculine values. Since then, body art has provided ‘images’ of the human body as something contingent or particular. By putting her/his own body on show, the artist exposes specific particularities of a certain body (her/his own body). Whereas the body has always figured as *the body* in the history of art, in body art it became a certain specific body. Crucial to body art performances in the 1960s was the emphasis of a body’s singularity and its specific differences, such as differences in gender, race and age.

It is not surprising then that body artists from the beginning were often women who counteracted masculine domination of modernism (Pollock). A very famous example of this kind of body art is Carolee Schneeman’s performance *Interior Scroll* (1975). During this performance, the naked artist removes a long paper with a written text from her vagina. By means of this act, the artist intended to integrate the inside of the female body with its outside as a readable image of femininity.<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s, body art was essentially based on political and militant feminism. During the 1980s, however, feminist discourse shifted and this also caused a transformation in body art. Inspired by post-structuralist theories, feminists of the 1980s claimed that every representation of the (female) body was based on phallogocentric fetishism, which they rejected. According to them, body performances reduce the (naked) female body to a fetish object for the masculine gaze. As an effect of this theoretical change, we see that representations and performances of the body as a singular and sexualized entity progressively disappear in art (Jones 22–9). During this period, artists preferred to represent femininity by omitting the female body.<sup>7</sup> Without doubt, the 1980s were not the most flourishing period of body art.

Since the 1990s, however, the body has regained a central position within artistic practice. This time, it is no longer concerned with the body’s emancipation. Contemporary body art reflects, above all, the

position and the status of the body with respect to modern technologies, be they medical – such as imaging and cloning – or cultural – such as the Internet and virtual reality. These technologies seem to herald the imminent end of the body. As observed by the editors of the German art magazine *Kunstforum*, it seems to be one of the tasks of contemporary body artists to reflect on the future of the body.<sup>8</sup> Instead of putting the body on show by means of performances, contemporary body art is primarily based on multimedia technologies in order to express the fragmented and ‘technologized’ body (Jones 199). Whereas body art of the 1960s reacted against technical and industrial developments, contemporary artists are not reluctant to embrace science and technology (Duncan 2000). Very often, they work as artists-in-residence in hospitals, collaborating with doctors. Comparable to practices in the long-standing tradition of anatomy, we can observe a renewed alliance between artist and scientist.<sup>9</sup>

Mona Hatoum’s work can be situated within this contemporary tradition of body art. Coming from a culture (Lebanon) in which the separation between body and soul is not so strict, she was very surprised by the exclusion of the physical dimension within English culture (Archer 141). Because of this cultural background, the body has always played an important role in her work. Another recurrent theme for her is the question of camera surveillance. In 1980, for instance, during her performance of the work *Don’t Smile, You’re on Camera*, she filmed her audience with a video camera and mixed these video images with other images of bodies. Images of clothed people were mixed with images of naked bodies or X-ray images. These mixed images, projected on a big screen, gave the impression that the gaze of the camera slid under clothes, under the skin, penetrating the intimacy of one’s own body. This idea of profound voyeurism found its ultimate completion in the eye of the camera that actually penetrates the inner body in *Corps étranger* (1994). Both fascination and fear of the invasive gaze seem to be at stake here. On the one hand, this work expresses astonishment with respect to the unknown parts of the body, but on the other, it refers to the violent appropriation of contemporary imaging technologies. *Corps étranger* consists of a booth that one needs to enter in order to watch (and feel) the work. On the floor of the booth, which is rather small and which, as observed by some interpreters, resembles the set-up of a peep-show (Lajer-Burcharth), is a round video screen that projects enormously enlarged endoscopic images of the artist’s body in an ongoing loop. We can follow the endoscopic camera that first strokes the skin, and subsequently penetrates the orifices, such as the anus and vagina, to

film the body's inside. The movement of the camera is combined with the amplified sound of respiration and heart pulse: when the camera is outside the body, we hear the artist's respiration; the moment the camera enters the interior body we hear her heart beat. Imprisoned within the narrow booth and virtually unable to avoid walking over the screen, the beholder has the feeling of being absorbed within the artist's body. The beholder is trapped in a 'strange intimate circle' between the body's interiority and its exteriority (Philippi).

The title of this work is significant. First, *corps étranger* means strange or foreign body, something that does not belong to one's own body. What is put on show in this artwork is the artist's body; yet, even for her, the body that is projected on the screen is not something really familiar to her. From these kinds of images, one could hardly recognize one's own body. Images of the interior of the body do not correspond to images we have of its exterior. In an interview, the artist explains that for her *corps étranger* refers to the intrusion of something strange in her body, which is the camera.<sup>10</sup> But only the artist herself can feel this strange and penetrating instrument. We, the beholders, experience only the strangeness that results from the video recording, the visible manifestation of the artist's felt experience.

It is precisely on the strangeness of the presented images that I would like to focus here. The beholder is confronted with images of a human body, but since they are barely recognizable, it is not self-evident that one would link them to images of his/her own body. However, although the screen of *Corps étranger* smashes the mirror of narcissism, there is still a sort of recognition. We do indeed experience that what is at stake in these images is an aspect of our bodily existence that, despite its profound strangeness, is not something entirely strange for us. As such, *Corps étranger* challenges the relation between one's own body (*corps propre*) and a strange body (*corps étranger*). Yet, this does not mean that the latter replaces the first. I would say that this artwork is the manifestation of a shifting from a narcissistic perspective, which excludes every form of alienation, to an affective dimension in which strangeness can be sensed.

### ***Corps propre: the narcissistic image***

In philosophy, the idea of the *corps propre* – one's own body – is notably developed by Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. According to him, one's own body is not simply the body as an object or a mere biological organism; rather, it indicates the body's subjectivity.

It stands for the experience of an 'I' that precedes the reflective 'I' of the 'I think' (*cogito*). One could say that it forms the most fundamental level at which I can recognize myself, and at which I constitute myself as an ego. This identity is not something fixed, but is rather an open process. It is based on motor possibilities – the most profound form of intentionality: it is the 'I can' (*je peux*). In thus describing a bodily subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty draws heavily on neurological and psychological studies. Effectively, his notion of *corps propre* is a philosophical translation of the notion of the 'body schema' developed by the British neurologist Henry Head in the 1920s. Head introduced this term to describe an 'unconscious' standard against which changes of posture are measured (Head 605). The body schema forms our experience of being a bodily unity.

Since the 1930s, psychologists have assimilated the term 'body schema' into their theories to explain discrepancies between the 'real body' and its subjective experience as, for example, in the case of the phantom limb. Within this perspective, the study of Paul Schilder *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* has been decisive. He subsumes all aspects of the experience of one's own body under the heading of 'body image'. This is rather typical since Head explicitly explained that the body schema should not be considered to be an image.<sup>11</sup> According to Schilder, however, (unconscious) knowledge of one's bodily posture is like a 'tri-dimensional image' – renouncing the difference between body schema and body image.<sup>12</sup> It is primarily after this study, that the notion of 'image' became predominant within psychological theories concerning the body. If we look more closely at Schilder's analysis, we see that his description of the body in terms of body image is deeply influenced by psychoanalysis, especially Freud's theory of narcissism. Although Freud never developed explicitly a theory of the body image, it is not difficult to understand that such a theory has been elaborated on the basis of some aspects of psychoanalysis. Indeed, it is essential to psychoanalysis that it seeks to surpass the body's physical dimension by opening up an imaginary, phantasmal dimension (Tiemersma 168). Images, imagination and representation form the pillars of psychoanalytical theory.

Psychoanalysis teaches us that our identity is not something innate. We have to acquire our ego, our body image, and this is an ongoing process. Freud explains the constitution of the ego in terms of libido cathexis (*Besetzung*) in oneself, which occurs, initially, during the stage of primary narcissism. This narcissism is a 'new psychical action' that must be understood against the background of Freud's early distinction between two types of instincts (*Triebe*): ego-instincts and libido or sexual

instincts. Whereas the first is an instinct of self-preservation motivated by hunger, the second, motivated by love, concerns the preservation of the species, and thus transcends individual life (Freud 70). Narcissism comes into being when the infant becomes more than just the site of self-preservation. This happens when it takes itself as a love-object in which its sexual libido can be cathected. The cathexis of libido is only possible if a certain representation of oneself is defended. It is at this point that the infant is no longer just a functional, biological organism but has become a psychological instance (Moyaert). Now we can speak of a genuine 'ego', and this 'ego' consists first of all of a representation of oneself in which the libido is cathected. So here we see the importance of something imaginary for the constitution of (psychological) subjectivity: the libido is not cathected in the body as a biological organism, but in its representation, its image. The psychoanalytical theory of narcissism emphasizes that one could not accomplish wholeness or unity without one's own image.

Jacques Lacan's analysis of ego formation brings further to light this significance of imagery. He describes the 'new psychological action' of primary narcissism in terms of the mirror stage. The mirror stage is a phase in the development of the young child that takes place between 6 and 18 months. This stage is characterized by the fact that the infant can recognize her/himself in a mirror. The new psychological action of the mirror stage consists of the experience of unity through an identification with the specular image. Before the mirror stage, in the autoerotic phase, the infant lacks the feeling of unity and only experiences specific parts of his/her body as, for instance, the mouth in thumb sucking. Lacan describes this as an experience of a *corps morcelé*, a scattered, disjointed or fragmented body. The recognition of one's own specular image heals this fragmentation and constitutes the body as a *Gestalt*. Lacan stresses the fact that this recognition in the mirror is not a genuine recognition. The infant recognizes his/herself in the mirror, but s/he is not capable of recognizing the difference between her/himself and her/his image. Therefore, Lacan speaks of *méconnaissance* (Lacan 6). The infant does not yet recognize the otherness of the image; s/he confuses her/himself with the other (*je est un autre*). It thus becomes evident that, for Lacan, narcissistic identification is an imaginary identification, an identification based on an illusion, a fiction. It is only during a later phase in the child's development that the identification process finds its completion, and in which the importance of others and otherness is acknowledged. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, this happens when the infant forms an ego ideal or a super-ego upon resolution of



the Oedipus complex. Lacan describes this stage as the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order.

The ego ideal is a standard against which the infant measures his/her actual ego. This measurement is a way of mirroring him/herself, yet the mirror implies another type of libido cathexis. In the narcissistic phase the infant cathects libido in her/himself, since s/he is her/his own ideal. In constituting a new 'special psychical agency', that Freud later calls the super-ego, the infant cathects libido in an ideal that s/he projects before her/him. As such, this ideal 'is the substitute for the lost narcissism of her/his childhood in which s/he was her/his own ideal' (Freud 88). The super-ego is characterized by both the precept 'you ought to be like this' and the prohibition 'you may not be like this' (Freud 374). It is a psychical agency that constantly 'watches the actual ego and measures it by that ideal' and thus forms the basis for our conscience (Freud 89). What is interesting here is that the unity of the self is no longer based on one's own image, on one's own narcissistic ideal. Lacan makes a distinction that might be helpful here. In the mirror stage, we identify with an imaginary ideal, which is called the ideal ego (*moi idéal*). The ego-ideal (*idéal du moi*), by contrast, is a symbolic ideal. It is an ideal imposed by others to which the ego is subjected.

According to psychoanalysis, the first significant others, responsible for the constitution of the ideal of the ego, are usually the mother and father, hence the importance of the Oedipus complex. However, after the resolution of this complex, the existence of ideals remains vital; for, the ego is never totally accomplished. It continually mirrors itself in certain ideals as an ongoing self-constitution. As Gail Weiss observes in her book *Body Images*, this ideal of the ego very often manifests itself by way of ideal images of the body. She claims that the construction of an ideal image of the body is the primary material effect of the ego-ideal (Weiss 23). Whereas the ego-ideal could be a mere projection or phantasm, the body image ideal refers to a more material aspect of the ideal. Like the super-ego, the body image ideal provides a standard against which we measure and mirror our own body image. The notion of 'body image ideal' clearly expresses that the body image is not something strictly individual or personal. One could thus say that one's body image, the way one experiences one's own body, depends largely on ideal images that are provided by others, by society, or by culture. The never-ending process of forming one's ego, one's body image, is based on the reflection of given ideal images. To be more precise, it is founded on an identification with these images. Identification does not necessarily mean that one tries to match one's own body image with the ideal

image; it may also imply that one explicitly does not want to match such an ideal. Both negative and positive identifications, however, presuppose a recognition of the ideal image as something in relation to which one's own body image can be compared and evaluated.

In accordance with Weiss's theory of the 'ideal body image', we could thus argue that the ego comes fully into being through contact with a variety of images. Culture and society provide a multiplicity of images that may function as mirrors in which we look at and measure ourselves: a slim body, a muscled body, a suntanned body, a white body, a black body, a strong body, a sick body, a tattooed body, a pierced body etcetera. All these 'ideal' images, which dominate different (sub)cultures, can be either affirmed or rejected, but both attitudes are based upon the same presupposition. To either reject or affirm an image, one needs to be capable of making a comparison between the image and oneself. A certain form of recognition is thereby necessitated. In that sense, we could say that images in which we cannot recognize something of ourselves, like images of our interior body, cannot be seen as images that are constructive for the constitution of an ideal body image that forms the basis for the ego (or the 'body image'). This would mean that the images of *Corps étranger* remain outside the domain of the body image. However, I think that it is possible to enlarge the idea of recognition beyond its visual representation. For this we need to radicalize narcissistic psychoanalysis and bring it back to its sensory origins.

*Corps étranger* exhibits bodily aspects that we cannot simply add on to our visual knowledge of the body; for these images make visible parts of the body that are 'invisible'. At this visual level, there is indeed no recognition at all. As we are facing parts of the body we might rather not want to face, the strangeness of these images is even more highlighted. The inside of the body is not necessarily something one wants to be reminded of all the time. It is a dark, smelly, bloody and slimy place. Even if one knows that these are images of a human body (it requires some medical knowledge), one cannot identify oneself with these types of images since they do not bear personal or individual marks. Of course, the interior body belongs to the body, but does it really belong to one's own body, *le corps propre*? Hardly recognizable, the interior is excluded from the feeling of oneness. It represents an area that is always there but never really present during ordinary bodily experience: it features the 'absent body' (Leder). Apparently, 'ideal body images' always presuppose an intact and recognizable body. This concurs with psychoanalytical theory that does not account for the interior body. Psychoanalysis is only interested in the surfaces of bodies, which is explicitly affirmed

in Freud's famous saying that the ego is 'a mental projection of the surface of the body' (Freud 364–5). Without a doubt, one can hardly imagine a psychoanalytical ego without skin (Anzieu). Psychoanalysis pays attention to the body's surface and orifices since it is interested in the communication between inside and outside. It is primarily a theory used to explain the relation between the interior life of the instincts and the exterior reality of social and cultural norms, which makes it understandable that it has a specific interest in the body's surface and not in what is under the skin.

Also, for Lacan, the interior body remains outside imaginary and symbolic identification. Images of the interior body, and images of disjointed organs, belong to the fragmented body (*corps morcelé*), which precedes the imaginary unity of the mirror stage. According to him, in adult life a regression of this fragmented body can occur, for instance, in dreams 'when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual', and in the case of hysteria. In these dreams, the fragmented body manifests itself 'in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecution', comparable to paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (Lacan 4). We may ask here how this *exoscopy* of disjointed limbs and organs can be related to the *endoscopic* images in *Corps étranger*.

At first sight, it seems that the strangeness of *Corps étranger*, represented by the inner body's images, cannot be integrated in the body image. The work alludes to a transgression of the experience of one's own bodily limits. And yet, I believe that it might add something to the experience of ourselves. By capturing us, the beholders, in the strange world of the interior body, this video-installation makes us familiar with something unfamiliar, something *étrange*. Whereas the images of disjointed organs that appear in our dreams might refer to the hysteric status of disintegration and the falling apart of the body image, as suggested by Lacan, the images provided in this work of art might function as a certain 'body image ideal'. Of course, we do not identify ourselves with images of someone's interior organs, but still, this work of art offers us the possibility of some kind of recognition. Aesthetic pictures of the interior body might encourage us to integrate the disjointed inside in the body image. While penetrating the skin, the invasive gaze of the endoscopic camera turns the interior into a surface. Both the body's skin and its physical outline seem to have lost their privileged status with respect to the ego as a projection of the body. The projection screen of the ego now includes newly visible body parts. My hypothesis is that

although they are hardly recognizable, we do recognize something in these images. Beyond the narcissistic image we may encounter our own strangeness.

### ***Corps étranger*: the affective image**

Images of the fragmented body can be reintegrated within the 'body image' if we restore the distinction between body image and body schema. We have seen that in psychology this distinction was blurred, first of all in the work of Paul Schilder, and that the emphasis was put on the body's unity in the sense of *image*. Also psychoanalytic discourse focuses on the imaginary of the ego's unity, which is considered to be a represented unity. Still, we might ask whether a bodily unity manifests itself always as a (visual) represented unity. Freud and Lacan have never posed such a question since they were primarily interested in the psychic apparatus and not in the body. To answer this question it seems to be helpful to turn here from psychoanalysis to phenomenology. According to Merleau-Ponty, one's own body (*corps propre*) is not merely the body *image*, but rather the body *schema*, which is neither simply the result of our bodily experience, nor a general awareness of our posture. The term body schema refers to the fact that 'my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task' (Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* 100). It stands for the body's unity related to the body's 'spatiality of situation' instead of its 'spatiality of position'. As such, this unity is not necessarily a represented unity, but is rather a lived-through unity. The body schema is that which is felt and lived-through prior to any represented knowledge of the body. Shaun Gallagher, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's analysis, criticizes psychological discourse that, since Paul Schilder, has neglected the difference between body image and body schema. According to him, it is crucial to make this distinction since both terms indicate a different aspect of the body. Body image refers to the body as an intentional object, that is, as an object that one can consciously perceive; whereas, body schema is the body's intentionality, which is foremost, its motor capacity and is usually realized at a prereflective level (Gallagher). This conceptual difference may help us to further analyse Mona Hatoum's work, and to find a deeper level of visuality beneath the narcissistic imagery.

It would be too easy to conclude that the images of the interior body in *Corps étranger*, which apparently cannot be assimilated to an image as representation of the body, are the manifestation of a body schema; for, the body schema is already a bodily unity whereas these images still

represent the fragmented body. Yet, it is true that these images, instead of providing a recognizable representation, appeal to sensory experiences of pleasantness and unpleasantness, not just to vision. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, I argue that the imaginary in this work leads us to a stage that precedes the imaginary of narcissism. In psychoanalysis, this stage is notably described by Melanie Klein. Already Merleau-Ponty has observed this when he claims that the work of Klein gives a bodily meaning to Freud's psychoanalysis: 'she has demonstrated that Freudian instances and operations are phenomena which are anchored in the body's structure' (Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature* 347). As we have seen, libidinal cathexis in an image or representation of oneself is crucial for the formation of the ego, and thus for the establishment of a dividing line between the psychic and the biological. Klein does not contradict the importance of imagery, but she does claim that there are other psychic mechanisms which precede the mirror stage and which are based on bodily sensibility without being just biological. According to her, during the infant's first year we have to make a distinction between two stages: 1. the paranoid-schizoid position (0–4 months); and 2. the infantile depressive position (from 4 months onwards) (Klein 'Some Theoretical Conclusions'). The first stage is characterized by aggressive impulses and an intense anxiety with respect to one's own destruction. Behaviour during these stages can be explained on the basis of object relations, and more particularly according to the relation with the mother's breast, which is the most important object for the young child. However, during the first stage, this object is not yet experienced as a total object, but rather as a partial object, split into two parts: the 'good' and the 'bad' breast. In the later stage, during the depressive position, the child succeeds in conceiving of the mother('s breast) as a total object. Henceforth, the child's anxiety concerns the loss of the loved object instead of his/her own destruction. Like the mirror stage, the depressive stage marks the beginning of visual representation on the basis of which the child can form a unity of objects as well as a unity of her/himself. Let us now look more closely at the first stage in Klein's theory, which precedes imagination and visualization.

Before visualization, the relation with the object is constituted by sensory experiences, either pleasurable or frustrating. This explains the cleavage during the schizoid position between the good and the bad breast. These experiences already have a meaning which surpasses the level of the biological body. The good breast is introjected by the child and as such becomes the 'prototype of all helpful and gratifying objects'. The bad breast, on the other hand, becomes 'the prototype of all external

and internal persecutory objects' (Klein, 'Some Theoretical Conclusions' 63). Conversely, the child projects her/his love impulses to the gratifying breast and her/his destructive impulses to the frustrating breast. These processes of introjection and projection are based upon bodily experiences in which the body already transcends itself by giving meaning to its world. Merleau-Ponty claims that this dialectics between projection and introjection, as a 'general and universal power (*pouvoir*) of incorporation', constitutes primordial bodily intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature* 380). This 'intentional' relation is not yet characterized by a representation of the object. In fact, this type of intentionality is not based on a clear-cut distinction between subject and object, or between 'body' and 'meaning'. At this primordial level of *Sinnggebung*, they coincide.

In line with the analysis of Susan Isaac, Melanie's Klein disciple, this incarnated meaning may be understood in terms of 'phantasy'. Although it is a psychic phenomenon, in its primordial form – in the first position – phantasy is built upon oral impulses that are 'bound up with taste, smell, touch (of the lips and the mouth), kinaesthetic, visceral, and other somatic sensations'. The earliest phantasies are based upon bodily sensations that constitute 'a concrete bodily quality, a "me-ness", experienced *in* the body' (Isaacs 104–5). An example of a phantasy, based on anal impulses, is when excreta are transformed into dangerous weapons (Klein 'The Importance of Symbol-Formation' 219). Needless to say, in this case, the child does not possess a conceptual representation of the perniciousness of the excreta. More likely, he or she has disagreeable, frustrating bodily sensations and these cannot be separated from unpleasantness as such. In this stage, we cannot make a distinction between image or idea, on the one hand, and actual sensations and external perceptions, on the other.<sup>13</sup> This is the reason why Julia Kristeva explains phantasy in Klein's psychoanalysis in terms of an 'incarnated metaphor' or a '*représentant* before representation' (Kristeva 225–36). In the process of signification, phantasy as metaphor signifies what is bodily experienced. As is well-known, the term 'phantasy' stems from the Greek *phantasia*, which refers initially to the domain of imagination and visualization. Klein and Isaac, however, dissociate the term from its etymological origins and reinterpret it as the sensation of primary impulses (Kristeva 232). I am inclined to say that we can understand kleinian phantasy as a 'body image' that does not represent the body. It is an image that is not seen, but an image that is felt.

If we now compare Klein's theory to Lacan's, we see that both agree that the body is fragmented in the initial stage. However, according to

Klein this fragmented body already possesses a certain 'me-ness'. This is not the ego who recognizes her/himself in the mirror image, but rather the ego who is affected and who feels her/himself without being able to make a distinction between what is inside and what is outside her/his body. This fragmented ego is, above all, characterized by the fact that there is no distance or difference between feeling and being felt, between the body's presentation and its representation. We thus see that the difference between the visual body image and the affective body image implies a difference between distance and proximity. Only by means of a distance-based image are we able to master and appropriate (parts of) our own body. It is therefore, I claim, that it is the visual and narcissistic body image that constitutes our own body – *le corps propre*, i.e. the body that we own. The affective body image may constitute a feeling of 'me-ness', but because of its proximity, we are not able to really grasp it. This kind of image, therefore, offers us something that we may recognize as being part of me, but also something that cannot be owned and thus remains strange.

The relation between visibility and sensibility, distance and proximity, and between ownness and strangeness can now be further explored in Mona Hatoum's work. It seems to me that *Corps étranger* demonstrates a tension between the narcissistic image's distance and the affective image's proximity. It is especially in a work of art that such a tension comes to the fore. There is indeed an important difference between the imaging of the body within a clinical situation and imaging applied in a work of art; for, medical imaging puts at a distance what is invariably close to us. This process drastically metamorphoses our idea of the body since it implies a (visual) appropriation of the innerbody's strangeness. By making visible the body's strangeness, it seizes it. The inner body's strangeness is neutralized or, as is often said, it is colonized. As I see it, *Corps étranger* resists stubbornly this appropriation or colonization, since we, the beholders, are taken by its images, not being able to distance ourselves from them. To translate distance and proximity to the domain of images, it might be useful to adhere to Laura Marks' vocabulary, in which a distinction is made between 'optic images' and 'haptic images'. Optic visibility is based on the distance between subject and object which as such creates an illusory depth, whereas the haptic gaze skims the object's surface. Effectively, this distinction is based upon two forms of looking: gazing and grazing (Marks 162). Marks argues that another work by Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988), is a good example of haptic visibility. This work consists of a video where the camera strokes the naked and middle-aged body of the artist's mother

while she is taking a shower. The camera skims the body of a beloved person, recording the intimacy between mother and daughter however far they are separated from one another.<sup>14</sup> According to Marks, instead of being a haptic image, *Corps étranger* constitutes an optic image, since the penetrating gaze of the endoscopic camera transforms the body into an object (Marks 190). On this point I do not agree with her since she does not make a distinction between body imaging in clinical and artistic practice. We should not forget that the images in *Corps étranger* are *manipulated* medical images. The endoscopic images are enormously enlarged; we cannot really observe or examine them since there is not enough distance between us and them. This work restores the immediacy of sensing which was damaged by the penetrating medical gaze; and as such it is a haptic rather than an optic image.

Contemporary imaging technologies of the interior body have profoundly changed the body image. At first sight they seem to have enlarged this image by inserting the inner body's strangeness within it. But we have seen that even when the inner body's invisibility is made visible this does not mean that these hardly recognizable images can constitute a mirror image or an ideal body image. Instead they appeal to the dimension of affection; they bring us back to sensory 'phantasies' in kleinian sense. We could thus say that these images, in a rather paradoxical way, confront us with a 'me-ness' that nonetheless is not owned. They give a visual meaning to a sensed phantasy. The scientific gaze circumvents this paradox by completely ignoring the bodily, sensory dimension which forms the primordial underpinning of every body image. *Corps étranger*, by contrast, shows that the idea of a 'transparent' body always remains a myth. It is not possible to completely neutralize the body's strangeness: alterity always subsists. Instead of deactivating it, this work invites us to sense our own body's strangeness. In conclusion, then, contemporary technologies reveal the phenomenon – and this can be emphasized by an art work – that the body's ownness is conditioned by a strangeness or alterity that cannot be captured by reflection. While mirroring the interior body, we thus face reflection's very limits.

## Notes

1. An earlier (French) version of this paper has been published in the online journal *Methodos* (2004). I would like to thank Helen Fielding and Dorothea Olkowski for their effective comments and suggestions.



2. According to this artist, the human body needs to be improved by means of all kind of technologies and prostheses since it is biologically no longer an adequate organism. For some examples of his works and ideas, see his authorized website: [www.stelarc.va.com.au](http://www.stelarc.va.com.au).
3. In January 2000, an international surgery team has succeeded in transplanting two (dead) donor hands to the body of a man who had lost both his hands during an accident. This was a world première (Gandin). Although this kind of surgery is still rare, more and more patients benefit from it.
4. For an overview and history of imaging technologies, see Wolbarst. The expression 'transparent body' is borrowed from Van Dijk.
5. Popular medical television programmes also disseminate medical technologies amongst a large audience. However, these programmes hardly ever reflect on medical practice. They rather uncritically sound medical science's praises.
6. For other examples of body art since the 1960s, see Jones and Warr as well as Ardenne.
7. An example of this kind of art is Mary Kelly's work *Extase* (1984).
8. 'Die Zukunft des Körpers I', and 'Die Zukunft des Körpers II'.
9. That several artists express an increasing interest for anatomy is evident judging by the amount of important recent art shows: *The Quick and the Dead* (1997–1998); *New Anatomists* (1999); *Spectacular Bodies* (2000–2001) and *Unter der Haut/Under the Skin* (2001). See for the catalogues Petherbridge and Jordanova; Kemp and Wallace, and Heller. Inversely, we also see that anatomists are more and more inspired by aesthetic categories. An example of this is the controversial exposition by the work of the anatomist Gunther von Hagens *Körperwelten* (Hagens and Whalley).
10. 'I felt that introducing the camera, which is a "foreign body", inside the body would be the ultimate violation of human being, not leaving a single corner unprobed' (Archer 138).
11. As he claims: 'We have been able to show that the standard against which a change in posture is estimated is not an image either visual or motor; it lies outside consciousness. Every recognisable change in posture enters consciousness already charged with its relation to something which has gone before, and the final product is directly perceived as a measured postural change. For this combined standard, against which all subsequent changes in posture are estimated, before they enter consciousness, we have proposed the word "schema" ' (Head 669).
12. 'The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves ... Beyond that there is the immediate experience that there is a unity of the body. This unity is perceived, yet is more than a perception. We call it a schema of our body or bodily schema, or, following Head, who emphasizes the importance of the knowledge of the position of the body, postural model of the body. The body schema is the tri-dimensional image everybody has about himself. We may call it "body-image" ' (Schilder 11).
13. '[Sensations] give the phantasy a concrete bodily quality, a "me-ness", experienced *in* the body. On this level, images are scarcely if at all distinguishable from actual sensations and external perceptions. The skin is not yet felt to be a boundary between inner and outer reality' (Isaacs 105).

14. Mona Hatoum was born in Lebanon, but has lived since the 1970s in London, far from her family, in 'exile'.

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