SEXUALITY AND DEATH - A RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Firstly, sexuality and death are discussed as instinctual drives, specifically through Freud’s essay, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. Sexuality and death are then related through pleasurable attachment and painful severance. Next they are discussed in terms of Georges Bataille’s notions of continuity and discontinuity.

Secondly The Garden of Eden is looked at as a mythological indicator of the psychological links between sexuality and death. Sexual differentiation has a role to play as woman is seen to be a signifier of death through the writings of Julia Kristeva and Victor Burgin.

Thirdly Plato’s argument for immortality is discussed, specifically through *The Phaedo*. The argument centres on the separation of self from sexual pleasure in order to defeat death.

Fourthly the chastity of Mary and Christ is dealt with. It can be seen to be resultant of the tight connection between sexuality and death and relevant to a hope for immortality. For Christian theology there exists a necessary division for those who are immortal from their own earthly carnality.

Fifthly Julia Kristeva’s notion of Abjection is looked at through her essay, *Powers of Horror*. Abjection plays a significant role in the attempt at repression of the sexual drive and the death drive.

Lastly the reflection of Narcissus is observed. There seems a human need for a reflection of self that goes beyond notions of delusionistic beauty or reviling horror. Where sexuality and death are accepted as most essential aspects of our being. Abjection leads to a rejection then an acceptance of our own perishing carnality.
FOREWORD

Sexuality and death have been persistent themes within my paintings and drawings. Most of my works have been thematically dualistic, each theme somehow intimately connected to the other. This led me to reflect on the links between sexuality and death and then to an investigation of the relationship between them.

When one hears the words, sexuality and death, brought together in the one sentence fear and repugnance seem to be the initial reaction. Immediately the worst is imagined - what I might call the perverse extremes of what the relationship implies. This theses has little to do with perversity. It is about things we love even if we fear them. As sexual temporal beings sexuality and death are essential aspects of the nature of our being and how we feel about them directly reflects how we feel about ourselves.
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To live is to give oneself, to perpetuate oneself, and to perpetuate oneself, is to give oneself, is to die. Perhaps the supreme delight of procreation is nothing other than a foretasting and a savouring of death, the spilling of one’s own vital essence. We unite with another but it is to divide ourselves; that most intimate embrace is naught but a most intimate uprooting. In essence the delight of sexual love, the genetic spasm, is a sensation of resurrection, of resuscitation in another, for only in others can we resuscitate and perpetuate ourselves.

Miguel De Unamuno, (1864-1936)
The Tragic Sense of Life(1)
'Yes, they are carnal, both of them, love and death-
l'amour et la mort and there lies their terror and their great magic'

Thomas Mann,
The Magic Mountain (2)
INTRODUCTION

Sexuality and death are both factual realities of life. Sex marks our beginning, death our end. We do not know where we were before conception or where we go after death. The intense pleasure of sexual orgasm is the origin of our being and it is sexuality that characterises our temporary existence and death that dictates our final and inevitable dissipation.

The inevitability of death is a cause of very great sorrow for the self-loving ego. Death hurts as it takes our loved ones away. We miss them, feeling the vacancy of where they once stood. But perhaps the greatest sorrow is felt in contemplating the end of oneself, the finishing of being, that being which is "I" being given and then taken away.

Sexuality brings us life but holds us existent on earth only for enough time to sexually reproduce. That sexuality that gave us life only allows us to pass life on. It gives us the enormous pleasure of children and promises faithfully to guarantee the on-goingness of the species but it offers no protection from pain, from our physical vulnerability or from our ultimate demise. It offers survival only for a stream of perishing individuals not for those perishing individuals themselves and as a result each one of those individuals must live with the pain and fear of their own inevitable death.

Life plays this cruel trick, rendering our ego purely mortal. The ego could see itself to be betrayed by mother and by earth, by its own sexual drives or simply by the perishing organicity that is the reality of our being. Poor ego looks for protection that the organic life of earth does not offer in complex philosophies, religious belief and delusion.

We are creatures of the earth and yet the sea is throbbing with our ancestral life. Sexuality and death perpetuate and maintain the watery world of ocean, pond and stream as they do this drier world of earth and air. It is in the continuous fluid movement of the primordial ocean, that the fluidity of our minds is reflected. Within the arms of the watery waves I seek refuge. The placental ocean, other world of life; watery womb and watery tomb, mirrors earth.
Human beings may look to the sky to escape the physicality and death of earth and sea. It is a complex mental quest as we cannot easily escape being intimately a part of it. We are earth, dirt and dust.

To find eternal life in the dissipating sky we have sometimes sought to deny the sexual aspect of our being. That which supports individual death. That which binds us to earth. It is only in the upper regions of air - the illusionary sky - that sexuality would seem to have no place - but with it disappears life itself.

Earth, Sea, Sky - Three places in one Earth. Three places reflective of the pleasure and pain of this organic life.
Inside the earth
Under the sea
Burst into air
How will you bury me?

Internal skeleton of sun-tet shell
Lined with pomegranate
Wrapped in plait of golden hair
Pamphilet Boulder
Butterflies.
EARTH

'Thus from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of higher animals directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that while this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed laws of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.'

Charles Darwin (3)

Sexual Immortality

The known reality of being is the actuality of being alive; of physical existence and our psychical relationship with that physical existence. On earth it is through the act of sex that we continue to exist as a species. It is only through sexual reproduction that immortality of a kind is truly known to be achieved. It is only through sexuality that death in any way is defeated.

Sexuality is the great giver of life. It manipulates the pleasure seeking ego of the individual, pulling the strings attached to our deepest needs for love, it drives us with persistent force to bind and hold, enter and be entered. It breaks the boundary of isolated oneness. It turns two into three.

It is the sex cells involved in such sexual unions that carry the immortal genetic material. The third is made combining inherited genetic substances. The ancestral stream flows freely in the sexual fluid and ongoingness of a species almost guaranteed.

We like all animals are driven to participate, organic sexuality being the character of our being. For psychoanalytic theory the powerful inclination to have sex is understood as an instinct. The sexual instinct rewards the conscious ego with pleasure to ensure the individual performs his/her procreative function.

The individual does carry on a two fold existence; one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily. The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his ends; whereas from another point of view he is an appendage to his germ plasm, at whose disposal he puts his energies in return for a bonus of pleasure. He is the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance - like the inheritor of the entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate that survives him.'

Freud (5)
Eros - the sexual instinct

The sexual instinct, as described by Freud, could be seen to be a force that consciousness does not always manage to repress or even control. It resides deep within us - within the core of our mind and even within every cell of our body. Despite its manifest physical carnality, the sexual instinct is not just an excitor of the physical body but operates as an important psychical power broker. It plays hard to make its needs felt. Freud originally saw pleasure as the greatest director of the ego. As a principle guiding force of consciousness the seeking of pleasure performs as a very useful servant for the more deeply residing sexual instinct. (6)

The sexual instinct is what guides and rewards us to perform what is ultimately the sacrificial role of sexual reproduction. What makes us want to live but cannot stop us dying. It is the same force, libido, that drives an individual being, to find a feeling of closeness, of love, of momentary immortality in the arms of another.

Freud saw the sexual instinct as having the power to effect all cells of the body. That it could be seen as the force that bonds one cell to another - the force that holds the body together as one cohesive individualised self - as one organic whole. The libidinous power even on this simple physical level is understood by Freud almost as love - the need to bond, to hold, to unite, to form. (7)

From a Darwinian perspective the sexual instinct could be seen to be the force that has caused the development of more and more complicated organisms. (3) The making of organic life on earth. One could understand the sexual instinct as a builder or as an adhesive for parts. A force that attracts one cell to another to bond for wholeness and completeness of an individual simple or complex organism.

The Enormous Power of Sexuality

Alphonso Lingus understands Freud's Eros to be a force of achievement that strives to push forward and onward and upward. He sees the erotic impulse not to be located just
within the bounds of genital physicality but to be a far reaching energy that fuels purpose, that rewards with pleasure.

"Eros neither begins or ends as a faculty to ensure the reproduction of the species or as a craving for immediate sensual gratification. For form being a corporeal mechanism, it is activated by a telos, is purposive; its forces come from the ultimate and remote end, that of the radiance of the unending. Indeed Eros is the purposive in general. It is erotic force in every human operation that animates it with teleology, with a longing for the beyond. Then paradoxically it is philosophical dialects that is the apt method to know the true nature of sexual lust."

Alphonso Lingus(8)

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud is less sure than in earlier writings of the domination of pleasure seeking within the psyche and consequently less sure of the inevitable domination of the life forming Eros. The cells may bond together but too they are breaking apart. Not all is servile to the pleasure seeking ego. Not all is in service to the ongoingsness of self. Not all is working to obliterate pain. For too in life is evidenced the mind causing its own pain. Memory, dream or thought may torture self. Dream may turn to nightmare, anxious thought may take a painful hold. And though some instinct may build and bond to such a point as love, other forces held within break down the hold and cause decay. (9)

Thanatos

Freud saw the inevitable inclination of all life towards death as death instincts operating in opposition to the life instincts, such as the instinct to survive and the sexual instinct - Eros. Thanatos, the death instinct is the force of disintegration, of reincorporation, of assimilation. It drives us back into the earth. Cut with death's sythe and ploughed back under, we are taken from the sun's warm rays. Thanatos takes us there. Freud saw Thanatos as an explanation for natural death and the decomposing nature of life. He sees a rising tension that occurs as soon as something is animated - a tension that needs to be cancelled out. And such a cancellation inevitably occurs.

'An instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is a kind of organic elasticity... the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.(10)
Freud sees a struggle happening within the individualised self. A struggle between the intentions of verbal ego and that which it has repressed; the instinctual drives. They are always seeking for their intentions to be met. Repression could be understood as the intention of rational human thought, of the ego and the super ego, to hold down, withdraw from and deny the instinctual self. The deep primordial self that it ironically envelopes and protects from the outer world. From this the ego takes flight - from its own sexuality and its own inevitable death.

Pleasure in expression for the unconscious can cause displeasure for the ego and the ego's repressive tactics would cause similar pain for the unconscious - similar unpleasure. The psyche is thus always in permanent conflict between unconscious and conscious desires each vying for its own satisfaction and resultantly the psyche suffers a swinging state of pleasurable and painful sensation.(11)

The Pain of Death

And too their is a internal struggle amongst the instincts of the unconscious; A battle of life and death, such as when the instinct to survive is stopped from full realisation of ongoingness by the internal force of death. The survival instinct experiences inevitable dissatisfaction.

"If one is to take as truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons - becomes inorganic once again, the aim of all life is death.

Freud(12)

The survival instinct is what may cause, in its service, our great fear of death. A source of great unpleasure. If not killed by a force from the outside (unnatural death) we will die from the inside.

'One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as quickly as possible but when a particular stage has been reached, the other group jerks back to a fresh start and so to prolong the journey.'

Freud(13)
Sexual mortality

In the case of the sexual instinct it seems to find its power in dissatisfaction - in desire and in lust, getting all from temporal existence that it may. Survival works well for the sexual instinct, gaining time for procreative possibility, and at least for the sexual instinct, death does not thwart its purpose.

"It is as though the libidinous impulse is an exorbitant energy that tends to satisfy itself with its own want, feeding on its hunger."
Alphonso Lingus(14)

The sexual instincts were seen by Freud to be the 'preservers of life' as he saw them to work against those internal forces that bring about decay, that move toward death. Does Eros battle Thanatos or is it an agreement of territory - an organised balance?

One could imagine the relationship between the sexual instinct and the death instinct to be a harmonious one even though one builds up whilst the other breaks down.

'What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die in its own fashion. Thus these guardians of life, too, were originally the myrmidons of death.' (soldiers of death)
Freud(15)

For it is only a momentary immortality, this joining of the seed. Sexuality is a process of the organic being and that very organicity will guarantee death. Sex has no place in a non physical world. It could be seen to perpetuate the physical world. It is a supreme life giver, the very origin of our being but strangely it is rare that it ever stimulates worship.

We shrink in fear from its seductive pleasure as its always holding hands with death. We know we are not sexuality's darling - not its treasured diamond but simply a link in a very long chain of its making.

Sexual orgasm has often been described as a little death. Itself an experience of some ultimate physicality, a recognition of one's ultimate perishability, a recognition of one's mortality, of impermanence, of joy in life and of death. Sexuality could be said to represent our physicality and thus our mortality. We emerge alive, into the world of earth, covered in placental blood the direct effect of sexual pleasure, our mother squeezes us out of her flesh.
The pain of love

Love too has its beginning, a start and a growing like with the eye and the ear and the heart. A protective encompassing of warmth and supply is the first experience. Cells multiply and hold in unity to make the complex "I". The red pulsating tunnel writhes us out then milk and tit our only solace for primary loss of watery womb. Then breast too is taken and finally total separation from the originally bound to - the originally loved.

The Breast, giver of milk, leeking nourisher.

Erotic bond to food, to breast, to pleasure and protection, milky fluid of life, pre-verbal, pre-cultural oneness and wholeness with another. Temporal protection from pain

But severance, the cutting off, must take place

Pain and separation have their role.

"Thus psychoanalysis identifies and relates as the indispensable condition for autonomy, a series of separations...birth, weaning separation, frustration, castration."

Kristeva(16)

Between sexuality and death pleasure and pain is understood. Both involve painful severance and estatic continuities. Severance, for Kristeva is essential to the development of autonomous being - for sexual being. A suffered necessity, it is a physical and emotional cutting away.

Eros and his little bow and arrow

Eros, Greek baby god of love, son of Aphrodite, mythological ancestor of Christ. The baby boy with the piercing phallic arrow, the pointer, the interjector, the bringer of love and the bringer of death.

That which jabs my heart, the ecstasy of love, the stab of death, a long hard breath.

The arrow with its sting of love may rupture your heart open. Ruptured heart, divided heart, broken heart. Little toy of Eros is also a weapon. Bringer of pleasure, bringer of pain, of love and of death. He is libido. He is the hunter

He is the baby born - the procreated- the recently rejected.
The pain of sexuality

Sexual desire and its satisfaction too can involve painful severance somewhere within the orgasmic pleasure. The immortal seed is lost immediately by the male and though held through pregnancy by the female their does come a painful violent separation. The sperm of the man and then the baby from the woman break their way out of the individual’s bodies. Both erupt out. The uniting brings separation once again.

Death as severance

Kristeva sees death as the representative of severance within the psyche. (17) That still heavy lifelessness— that final leaving of what is being - aliveness There in the inert flesh, the character of our being is revealed, even though the being has gone. In the borderlessness of decay, the greatest separation takes place.

Death must be the saddest division. When someone you love has gone there exists, where they once stood, only an infinite nothingness. Strangely you know they are not suffering and that they now rest from all the painful tension of life. They have been severed from it.

The dead may not be experiencing pleasure but a very warm sensation fills my heart when I think of those I love resting in their fluid unboundedness, their undoubted peace.

Such is St Theresa

Bernini sculpts the ecstasy of Saint Theresa,
the breathy pleasure, the passing pain, an erotic stabbing.
His Theresa formed as if a man,
strange breathy man/woman in fractured dress,
the arrow pierces to halt all pain
Her/his breast struck to its core
The heart is savaged to a sudden halt
Suffered into the crossing over
Seeking the other - the sexual necessity

The individual is driven in service of the need for the differentiated other - the cell of focus - the one to combine with. Held within the desired other it must be sought out. Libido has its strength and drives - it drives the heart - we fall in love.

'We may regard as in the highest degree significant that this function of the germ cell is reinforced or only made possible, if it coalesces with another cell similar to itself and yet differing from itself.' Freud,(19)

We fall into estatic pleasure of oneness with another - memorable momentary - there is another breath close by;

George Bataille, locates the human being as a discontinuous being.(20) We do not continue beyond the boundary that we are. The last cells of extremities divides one clearly from all others. Discontinuous too we are in the passing of time. We come and go.

The connection between sexuality and death in the writings of Bataille is that he sees sexuality and death being aspects of ourselves through which we may find a sense of continuity. The placental oneness or the peace of pre-existent nothingness may be returned in moments of sexual ecstasy - in those bindings of one fused with another or in the final moment of death.

'As the turbulent surge of erotic feeling overwhelms all else, gloomy consideration of the fate in store for our discontinuous selves is forgotten. And then beyond the intoxication of youth, we achieve the power to look death in the face and to perceive in death the pathway into unknowable and incomprehensible continuity- that path is the secret of erotism and eroticism alone can reveal it' Bataille,(21)

The painful separations, part of the process to individualisation, are momentarily annulled in the estatic combining - in the breath sucking closeness of sexual love. The isolating boundary is broken down in the passionate intercoursing.

Death as continuity

Death too is perceived by Bataille to break down the boundary of isolated oneness of a bounded individualised being. This boundary I so carefully formed is so easily broken down by death. Bataille seems to see promised in death a great pleasure in continuity - of sameness and oneness - of a becoming through combining - a release into an
unbounded ocean - an ultimate dissipation that he sees anticipated, as an experience, in sexual estatic moments. (22)
Impidicus, the Mushroom

"He was at present discussing love and death; finding occasion for observations in part subtly poetic in their nature, in part ruthlessly scientific. And thus it was, in this connexion, that the learned gentleman, speaking with his drawling, typically Eastern cadence, and his softly marked 'r' came upon the subject of Botany; that is to say upon the subject of mushrooms. These creatures of the shade, luxuriant and anomalous forms of organic life, were fleshly by nature, and closely related to the animal kingdom. The products of animal metabolism, such as allemen, glysogen, animal starch in short were present in them. And Dr Krokowski went on to speak of a mushroom, famous in classical antiquity and since on account of its form and the power ascribed to it - a fungus in whose Latin name the epithet IMPUDICUS occurred and which in its form was suggestive of LOVE, in its odour of DEATH. For it was a striking fact that the odour of the Impudicus was that of animal decay; it gave out that odour when the viscous, greenish spore bearing fluid dripped from its bell shaped top. Yet, even today, among the ignorant, the mushroom passed for an aphrodisiac."

Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain, (23)
THE GARDEN OF EDEN

'Does wisdom perhaps appear on earth as a raven which is inspired by the smell of carrion?'

Nietzsche (24)

The garden of Eden

'Fruit, flowers, animals, nakedness and shame. The tree of knowledge as lustful body - object of desire - perpetrator of death. The knowledge is held within the fruit; the apple, the pommegranate, the passionfruit, the peach. Inevitably they rot and perish. Their flesh removed to reveal their seed - its rotting pulp may serve like the breast as original nourishment.

The fruit may reflect a tendency of the tree itself to move toward death. Seed and juice both assert an erotic power. Fruit could be seen as an external manifestation of what is often kept internal.

In Love in the Time of Cholera, the heroine, Fermina Gaza, has a life long obsession with eggplant. This fruit maintains a significant role within this woman's life - for the actuality of its being; its eggplantness, its fleshiness, its foodness.(25)

Eggplant flesh has the density of mollusc meat.

Eating is the sustaining and confirming of ourselves as physical beings. It is what damns us from paradise - what allows us to live and what mythologically causes us to die. Fruit is descriptive of the origins of our being and reflective of our internal immortality - our seed.

Shame of the sexual self

Sartre saw the state of our being to be such that we are free to be or do whatever we choose but that we hide from that freedom out of fear of the nothingness of our being.(26) That is the horror of our own being. That there is something about ourselves that we cannot accept - perhaps our organicity, our sexual beastiality, our perishability, our mortality.

Sexuality causes a great deal of shame and discomfort for such a thing of procreative power and pleasure. But sexuality's pleasures are only temporary and its purpose is only
to provide for an end that supersedes the coherent ego, the individualised self, who incorporates another conflicting tension of self survival that the sexual instinct cannot help.

Sexual shame may find its origin in a need to degrade and disassociate from that which makes us so clearly linked to monkeys, molluscs and fruit. What links us to all that is organic and to all that may be devoured or decayed - our carnality.

**Sublime carnality**

Alphonso Lingus describes the erotic forms of the Khajuraho temple. Here complex organic forms come to life. The language writhes around as complexity as the composite sculpture he elucidates on.

"If the carvings of Khajuraho engrave and entirely different destiny of the Libido from what Freudianism teaches this form of sublime carnality is also not that of Platonism. What the eroticised gaze contemplates is not the splendour of the intelligible order, appropriated by a comprehensive contemplation. Here the beauty of the partner is dismembered into an unending sequence of animal and vegetative and crystalline forms, each closed in its own perfection."

Lingus.(27)

He sees sexuality here freely expressed and temporality understood in the forms of the Khajurajo temple. Indulgence in the organic creates a rhythm and a seething. Pleasure may override pain when organic origins are heralded and not denied. When rhythmic continuities are expressed.

"Here there is nothing guilty or crafty, nothing disfigured with leering and duplicity, nothing self indulgent or self ashamed. There is nothing servile. They are blissful with the freedom of Gods who have understood everything."

and

"Why carve this glandular and fluid sensuality in this rock? Why this petrification, if not out of a will to eternalize the fugitive spasm of carnal love?" Lingus(28)

Death like sexuality is carnal and similarly in western culture it elicits shame.

In biblical myth it is death and the pain of sexual procreation that are bestowed as the greatest punishment. With sexuality and death or through them or because of them, with a rustle of fig leaves, came shame.
Eve, the Mother of Death

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow though shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Genesis 3 (29)

Mother of all people, naked and living in earthly paradise, causes the mortality, the death of humanity, by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge as directed by the snake. It is Eve and the snake that are active in the loss of earthly paradise, Adam a passive victim of their association.

Kristeva draws attention to the bible where Mary is contrasted with Eve.

"Death came through Eve, but life came through Mary" Jerome. Letters 2

The dualism that separates these two mothers is created by a necessary division between that which is sexual will die and that which is non sexual may live (30). Eve as sexual mother, animal mother is giver of a life that must end - mother of death - which has come about through the choice to devour fruit, to devour self knowledge.

Badness is Eve

fear of the flesh
fear of sexuality
fear of self
fear of the beast within
fear of the beast without
running naked through paradise
listening to the snake
through the knowledge becomes the human fruit
bearer and gainer
of fruit knowledge
of good and evil
of pleasure and pain
The Snake

Essentially long, moving and headed, acute of mind, subtile, the phallic identity becomes reflected in the image of the snake. Sometimes poisonous, sometimes subterranean snakes have been seen to represent death and sexuality and no more typically than in Eden.(31)

Masculine sexuality, death and betrayal all seem present in the image of the snake. From under the world, from inside the earth and it is he that whispers into the ear of Eve. Adam does not bear guilt to the same extent as Eve for the birth of death but masculine sexuality does.

It is as though a primordial masculine sexuality - the Eros of Adam - arose out of the ground - clever and seductive, to make Adam and Eve into temporal sexual beings. The separation of Adam from what may sexually represent him may be a mythological projection. The snake certainly seems to be representative of a great force. The power of the sexual instinct, serving the ongoing survival of a species. That Adam and Eve as sexual physical beings cannot be the only immortal two but that they must be pleased into procreation and then internally willed to die from natural death.

Suddenly after eating the fruit they become ashamed of their naked bodies. They cover their genitals to hide the reality of their sexual mortal being.

The snake coming from the bowels of the earth is an abject self, fertile evil sleeper in the dust and bones, fallen angel, black and dark, big wicked worm eternal occupier of the earthly womb/tomb, great penetrator, phallic beast.

'At first no one needed to die. Then one day God wanted to see whether man or snake was worthy of immortality, and so he arranged a race between them. During the race the man met a woman. He stopped to smoke and chat with her for so long that the snake reached God first. And so God told man; The snake is worthier than you - it shall be immortal, but you will die and all your race.'

African Story, Gudji and Darasa tribes(32)
In this African myth the woman is represented as a sexual temptation that the man cannot resist. His sexual instinct takes him away from the race for immortality. Yet in the form of the snake male procreative power is asserted and does win out. The fertile snake is not distracted from his purpose. Immortality is obtained by the persistent serpent but not for he who has the phallus. He becomes the loser, the perishing holder of the immortal seed. The man, a victim of the sexual character of his being, acquires his other aspect - the perishing nature of his form - his mortality. In the shade with sexuality - there lies death.

Shade

Shade is the place of the meat like mushroom,
Shade is where the fruit lies fallen
Where blowflies buzz and flesh is cool.

"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. Job 14 (33)

Woman as death,

Inside ourselves a special memory of pleasure exists; the lost womb, the vagina, a place to somewhere good from where life came - where the temporary road begins - from where death also came.

Victor Burgin sees the woman’s body to be abjected - to be reviled against - for two fold reasons. (One could understand "abjected to mean that which has been made abject by the projections of the subjective view of the other.) Firstly the woman’s body is perceived by Burgin to cause revulsion due to the aging of a woman’s body reminding us of the perishability of us all but the woman’s body is not alone in its perishability. A male projecting away from his own ego may find the body of the other the least fearful place to locate death. That the woman’s body may be loaded up by phallocentric culture with those aspects of ourselves that cause us difficulty - that threaten sustainable identity.

"The transient matter of the woman’s body is doubly abjected, in that it is chronically organised to remind us of our common condition as brief events in the life of the species. By the same token, however, the woman also signifies precisely the desired state where
everything is the same; the pre-oedipal bliss of the fusion of bodies in which infant and mother are inextricately mixed; the absence of the pain of differing, condition of identity and meaning, whose extinction is deferred until death."

Burgin(34)

There is a second reason that Burgin locates for the woman's body as being made abject and that is that it symbolises the lost mother of pre-Oedipal comfort, protection and pleasure. A state of bliss that may be returned to in death. The woman represents a great and painful loss but also the dark, primordial nothingness out of which we grew. What is desired and what is feared. We have been non existent once before - when before our mother took the seed.

"It proves finally not to be woman as such who is abjected, but rather woman as privileged signifier of that which man both fears and desires; the extinction of identity itself."

Burgin(35)

As Kristeva sees the repression of animalism and the severance from the mother body as both occurring in the pre-ego ego formation one could understand the two becoming fused and deeply associated. The mother Eve embodies the drives that ego seeks to hold down. The procreative sexuality of our being as well as the representation of death of the desintegrating nature of life.

Woman becomes death as masculine ego and super ego articulate the abjection to human as animal through projection onto the mother body.

"The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits which in order to be the ego has broken away - it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive and death." (36)
"The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato downwards is pathologically conditioned: likewise their estimation of dialectics. Reason = virtue = happiness means merely: one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight - the daylight of reason. One must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost: every yielding to the instincts, to the unconscious leads downwards ..."
Nietzsche,(37)
THE ETERNAL SKY

'Along the horizon, the bank of cloud divided, silver in grey. Far out on the waves, a ship was speeding toward the southwest. Long, Marc gazed at the swelling sail.
    They have wasted their lives he thought; they have burned themselves out; yet they live not in vain. They were flame, that the earth grow not cold by their burning...
    I sought to teach men to live, he thought with bitterness, but what they seek is to transcend their death.
    Hannah Closs, Tristan,1940 (38)

An Imagined place

The sky does not have residents; those that fly must rest. In this sense the air is not occupied. It is just everywhere where there is nothing else. Everywhere, invisible - a bit like God.

Air takes up the space where there is nothing else. A negative space - it occupies space.

It holds nothing in decay. All decay falls onto earth and into the sea.

The sky is seen as occupied when it represents heaven.

Heaven could be the sky’s imagined self.

Heaven is a place where not evil nor death nor sexuality exists,

Nor pleasure, nor pain.

The sky is elusive. It gives us a upper surface, a boundary, a protection from infinity.

Place of clouds and place of stars One element floats within another and when down comes night we look into a starry otherness.

The big expanse, the stuff that Mary’s skirts are made of - pool.

performing....

as water takes on its flying form and lightning flashes.

Immortality

There is a large void that surrounds our being, like that which surrounds the earth; an unknown universe of non-existence that is a focus of fear, melancholy and regret.

Though we see ourselves along with all living things decay and perish, we have often lived in hope for the ephemeral sense of ourselves, that which constitutes the "I" that I
am, to go on. Desirably there is such a place as Heaven, a place where the physical ravages of earth do not exist, a place where one goes home to the protective bosom of a all loving God. It seems to be a primary notion within Platonic philosophy as in Christian belief that in order to defeat death we must also defeat sexuality. That the death of death means the death of sexuality and of pleasure and of pain. That the death of death means the death of life.

The Death of Socrates

On reading The Phaedo one is presented with a most beautiful death.(39) Socrates talks of life and death with his devoted and loving pupils on the day he is to take poison, as directed by the state. On this, his appointed day of death, (It be not a natural death), Socrates argues for the immortality of the soul - wishing for and largely convincing his pupils of death as a passage; a gate that opens to another world where life for the soul goes on unhindered by the physical demands of the body - that characterise the body's life and its inevitable death. Death is understood by Socrates as the necessary parting of the physical body from the non-physical soul. Such a notion of separation is essential to the Platonist philosophy where a belief in immortality only can be sufficed through a separation of the individualised self from that which will decay; the flesh, the bone, the hair, the sexual organs, all doomed to pass back to where they came from; the dirt, the earth, the mother, the organic.

The essential self

The essential self, the "I" that we identify our singular and unified self to be, for Plato, is the soul and death in this way is the great separation of the self from its own body. Such a cataclysmic separation, such a division of the whole can only be countenanced if one can imagine the human being as a combination of two conflicting parts.

The soul is not sexual

The soul-self does not reside in the sexual organs. For Plato it can choose to free itself from the lust of flesh and food. The intellect, the mind is not carnal or rather in a Platonic
dialogue seeks to separate itself from the carnality of its physical being, in order to identify itself with what will not perish.

"The lovers of learning understand" said he that philosophy found their soul simply imprisoned in the body and welded to it, and compelled to survey through this as if through prison bars the things that are, not by itself through itself, but wallowing in all ignorance; and they saw that the danger of the prison came through ignorance; and they saw that the danger of this prison came through desire so that the prisoner himself could be chief helper in his own imprisonment" Plato(40)

When the soul can fly

So how does Socrates manage to convince his pupils that the soul, the self, the psyche is essentially different from and alien to the intentions of the body? The soul is seen to be non physical and therefore not perishable. High mindedness centred on rational thought and the persuit of truth characterises its abstractness, its airiness, its link to the purity ,imperishability of invisible air. In death the soul is seen to be released, as if a prisoner released, it flies away into the air, into its own world forever, a world especially worthy of the soul, necessarily non physical and non organic, because the soul is without a body. It is a place without death, without flesh, without drives, without desires. There abides no carnality, no sexuality, no pain.(41)

The desires of the body hold us to earth

It is difficult to imagine a self that has no fear, no pain, no pleasure. Plato’s ephemral soul marked by rationality articulates a part of self that is in a deep denial of the central core of itself; that which will die. Its body, its sexuality, its fears , its pleasures and pains, its tensions and releaeses. Desires of the body, the pleasure of sex and of food, that which drives and sustains us in this life no longer sustains us in death. In order to see the possibility of continuity for oneself one must deny the estatic pleasures of the body. Carnality or erotic pleasure are not to be countenanced by those wishing for themselves to enter the world of souls.

Sexuality itself proclaims our place amongst the beings of flesh. Sexuality links us
inexorably to all organic life. It testifies to our organicity, our essential sameness to all that lives but also to all that dies. The sexual drive could be seen to drive our behavior deep from the core of our minds, just as it does with animals and though less explicable, the plants too. How closely similar are the stamen and the penis, the vulva and the centre of the flower. What drives us to deny that which we are clearly so much apart?

Is it fear of death? The great sadness, the great grief of separation. Like with Plato the human mind has spent a great deal of energy asserting itself separate from the organic grip of nature to create structures, inventions of the rational mind, that deny and/or seek to control the chaotic, the irrational, the primordial, the organic.

**Held on earth**

'...each pleasure and pain seems to have a nail and nails the soul to the body and pins it on and makes it bodily and so it thinks the same things are true which the body say are true. For by having the same opinion as the body and liking the same things it is compelled, I believe to adopt the same ways.' Plato(42).

Seeking to gratify sexual desires, seeking to give pleasure to one's body, is what for Plato holds us down here on earth - that which clips our angel wings.

**The Classical - The Inorganic**

Platonian notions can be reflected in the power of the geometric unnatural purity of Classical architecture. It stands rigidly in opposition to the organic, the carnal, the passionate. The supremely beautiful inorganic. Its resultant psychology is to represent earthly order.

The God characters become manifest as immaculate in their eternal form. They occupy the human psyche. Multitudinous Grecian godheads, no longer believed in as occupiers of the actual, they live immortal as the divisions of our selves. Greek mythologies are used to characterise our own internal divisions such as Eros, Thanatos, Narcissus and Dyonisus. The psychological drama needs its players.

Columns stand huge and round and straight to a mathematical precision and there is the stage. The Parthenon may stand purely made from the flying cleverness of the
rational mind - what nature did not do - pure geometry. Geometry could seem to be an answer to fear of the organic.

"Pride, victory over weight and gravity, the will to power, seek to render themselves visible in a building: architecture is a kind of rhetoric of power, now persuasive, even cajoling in form, now bluntly imperious."

Nietzsche (43)

Geometry, A Science of Boundaries.

Victor Burgin in his essay Geometry and Abjection questions whether Kristeva may consider that the origin of geometry may be in abjection (44) That an internal revulsion to chaos, to fusion and borderlessness may accumulate in the development of a science based on clear precise divisions and essentially predictable borders. That the wishing for order and clarity may take on an architectural form. That circles and squares never naturally existent may be an answer to the sometimes nauseating disorder of the organic.

"Pre modern space is bounded, things within it are assigned a place along a predominantly vertical axis- 'heaven-earth-hell' or the chain of being extending from God down to stones."

In as far as Geometry is a science of boundaries, and in a certain interpretation of Kristeva, we might say that the origin of Geometry is in abjection' (45)

Kristeva answers Burgin's question and says that 'abjection is to geometry as intonation is to speech', (46) which may be understood to mean that abjection may be the emotion behind geometry and its manifestations. It may be that the geometric is identifying a need in humanity to cleanse away the organic - a need for clear divisions that defy destruction - or the need for opposition to that which pulls inward and downward.

Fear of the organic

Fear of the organic may make us fear ourselves. It is fear of ourselves or for ourselves as perishing organic beings. It may be fear of the death that will carry us to what we will become. From flesh to dust we fear ourselves.
In Platonic dialogue death may be escaped if one manages to escape the almost
contaminating influence of the physical pleasures of life. Beauty is separated from
organicity and natural decay.

*For Plato precisely what is natural is that the erotic craving is teleological, that
something in it never to be satisfied with the particular and with immediate gratification,
that it always contains the urge to go further. What it seeks from the beginning Plato will
name with words "beauty" and "immortality" - immortal beauty and beautiful immortality.
For there is beauty that looks immortal, that is the very vision of immortality-beauty made
of proportion, harmony, equilibrium, form of which of itself has no longer any inner lacks
or irresolutions, classical beauty*

Lingus (47)

Socrates takes a bath

When Socrates finally takes a bath he seeks physical and emotional comfort. He brings
back the women who were previously sent away to answer his physical and emotional
needs. He wishes to clean himself of dirt - to rid himself of the grime of earth though that
is what his body will return to. He lies in those warm waters, Waters like the womb.

Comfort, safety and protection is found there, within the bath like within the body of the
mother. Preverbal, prerational, a gorgeous state to return to - soon the earth will en-
womb, en-tomb the man who is about to die. It is the soft water that finally prepares him
for death.

'Socrates was a misunderstanding: the entire morality of improvement, Christian
included, has been a misunderstanding....The harshest daylight, rationality at any cost,
life bright, cold, circumspect, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts, has
itself been no more than a form of sickness, another form of sickness - and by no means
a way back to 'virtue, to 'health', to happiness...To have to combat ones instincts - that is
the formula for decadence; as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one. -
Nietzsche, (48)
"Through Mary the snake becomes a dove and we are freed from the chaos of death."
Irenaeus (49)

The Tower and the Steeple

Repunzal is locked in the phallic tower. Locked, imprisoned in the shooting rocket - held there - the desired object, ensnared, encased in a masculine presentation - in masculine sexuality. She escapes through the erotic power of her serpentine hair. She draws him up and slides him down. He obtains her in defeat of the abject mother who could be seen to signify death. Sexuality and death may here struggle but the seeking of the other here outplays death.

Reaching to the Sky is the aspiring steeple. Gothic tower with pointed hat. Soaring upward in flight from carnality they still exude erotic power.

Flowers

Roses, Lillies, Waratahs, Flannel Flowers.

Rose bud, then round, soft, cyclically unfolding, curtains, open and welcome, petal skirts coyly opening and closing to reveal the sexual organ, to seduce the bees. The flower that seduces, lifts and opens to lay bare its sex.

Aesthetics serve the quest for the two differentiated cells to come together.

Waratah, heart, red or white

Lillies, flowers of death, white and black,

Stamen, Ova.

Symbols of love and death,

Wreaths,

Flowers come first,
to bloom, to flower, to expand,
to achieve ones form.
Where there is sex there is death

Kristeva in her essay on the Stabat Mater sees that Christian theology persistently links sexuality and death. It seems that in theology one cannot be separated from the other. (50) One could understand this to mean that a sexual being is sexual due to the impermanance and vulnerability of the organic body. That sexual procreative power is not in opposition to death but works as a co-operative partner with death. That one does not exist without the other.

That death may only be conquered and immortality obtained if sexuality too is conquered or at least controlled. For Christianity, immortality of the self, or more precisely the soul, can only be understood through a denial or defeat of the sexual self. It is the controlling of the sexual instinct - the achievement of chastity - the proof of defeat of the primordial instinct - that is looked for when seeking eternal life. A severance or dislocation from that which identifies us as the perishably organic. If one is to separate from death one must separate from the pleasures of carnality - sever from the sexual flesh.

"Fourth century ascetism developed by the fathers of the church, was grafted in the apocryphal shoot in order to bring out and rationalise the immaculate conception postulate. The demonstration was based on a simple logical relation; the intertwining of sexuality and death. Since they are mutually implicated with each other, one cannot avoid one without fleeing the other. The ascetism, applicable to both sexes, was vigorously expresses by John Chrysostom (On Virginity; 'For where there is death there is also sexual copulation and where there is no death there is no sexual copulation either). Thus Augustine condemned 'concupiscence and posited that Mary's virginity is in fact a logical pre condition of Christ's chastity.'

Kristeva, (50)

'Those that lead us to heaven must be seen to have defeated the carnality of their being, as with Christ and then also with Mary. And it is only a non-sexual mother that is countenanced as icon. Only such a contradiction allows the abject mother to rise from earth, from Eden, to sky, to heaven, ascending in a glorious assumption to the status of the sublime.

With Mary comes a strange peace. That of the dove - a strange and melancholic peace of sexual denial.
'It was only Christianity, with resentment against life in its foundations, which made of sexuality something impure: it threw filth on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life...'

Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (51)

Mary, the non-sexual being

A virgin Mary mothers Christ through an immaculate conception. Christ was conceived inside that which can only be pure, non carnal, immortal. That which has never been touched by the rising desire or injecting physical fluids that erotically bring about life. As with Plato, Christianity must deny sexuality in order to deny death, as sexuality promises only limited life. Christian belief seeks to separate one from one's instinctual behaviors, from one's deeper aspect of being, from the mystery of the primordial ocean. Such a severance would have us fly, unearthed above and around the cerebral outer core.

When Kristeva refers to 'the extinguished libido of the maternal body 'a sad image is invoked.(52) A woman with the candle of her erotic feeling snuffed out. A death within the one who cannot die. Her death the great non-death. This virgin body, her candle snuffed, she now is saved.

Kristeva describes The mater Delorosa and what she terms as the controlled libido of the maternal body.

"The ordering of the maternal libido reached its apotheosis when centred in the theme of death. The Mater Delorosa knows no masculine body save that of her dead son, and her only pathos (which contrasts with the somewhat vacant, gentle serenity of the nursing madonnas is her shedding tears over a corpse"

Kristeva, The Stabat Mater (53)

Returning to the womb

A strange irony takes place in the imaging of the virgin holding the body of her dead son in her lap. The masculine body is allowed to be reunited with the mother in death. Pain and severance here is expressed and yet libido and death come together in the potent symbol of eternal mother and son.

Their must be a need for a maternal icon, to potentially indulge the psychical possibility of returning to the protection, comfort and darkness of the womb. Who would not want their ravaged body, vulnerable in death to be held on the statuesque, maternal lap, as
powerful as the throne it resides on. To be held once again in the loving arms of the mother; The Pieta.

'It is likely that all beliefs in resurrection are rooted in mythologies marked by the strong dominance of a mother goddess. Christianity, it is true, finds its calling in the displacement of the bio-determinism through the postulate that immortality is mainly that in the name of the father. But it does not succeed imposing its symbolic revolution without relying on a female representation of an immortal biology.'

Kristeva, The Stabat Mater (54)

Christ in pain

Christ, the sexual being is seen as a dying being when Kristeva observes The Man of Sorrows in a state of eroticised suffering. An expression of pain is such upon the face of this image of Christ she wonders whether it is not the recognition of his own sexuality that makes him feel/fear death lingering.

"From what passion did such pain arise? Would the man god be distressed, that is haunted by death, because he is sexual and prey to a sexual passion?"

Kristeva, Holbien’s Dead Christ, (56)

Kristeva sees a revolution in thinking articulated through the savage realism of Holbien’s dead Christ. Here the poor tortured Jesus is not portrayed to have defeated death. Too real, too carnal are his bruises. The crypt he lies in seems beyond penetration - a firm enholder, the inanimate stone - a hard contraster to the vulnerable blooded body.

"always heedful of the Gothic spirit, Holbien maintains grief while humanising it, without following the Italian path of negating pain and glorifying the arrogance of the flesh or the beauty of the beyond." (57)

Kristeva sees Holbien’s dead Christ as a visual metaphor for severance. An immortalised image of death is made by Holbien. A real dead jew is painted with a shocking realism. Christ is there in all brutal, suffered reality as described by Kristeva. This Christ will never rise. Too dank his tortured flesh, to savage his staring eyes. He lies stiff unressurectable in a stark and savage tension.

"Is it still possible to paint when one identifies not with desire but with severence which is the truth of human psychic life, a severance which is represented by death in the imagination and which melancholia conveys as a symptom? Holbien’s answer is
affirmative. Between classicism and mannerism, his minalism is the metaphor of severance: between life and death, meaning and non-meaning, it is an intimate, slender response to our melancholia"

Kristeva on Holbien’s Dead Christ (18)

The very presence of death defies all remission, all resurrection, for Kristeva. Here there is no possibility of flight. Here Jesus in the aftermath of a torturing pain is seen to be a being of the earth. No sky here could penetrate the defeating earth, the carnal flesh.

Kristeva sees a truth here stated in Holbien’s Christ of the discontinuous nature of being. And with it too the deepest melancholy - a painful knowledge.

“A new idea was born in Europe, a paradoxical painterly idea - the idea that truth is severe, sometimes sad, often melancholy. Can such a truth also constitute beauty? Holbien’s wager, beyond melancholy, is to answer yes, it can.” (58)

Christ - A Flower

Red Primula in the Spring
‘Indicating the Italian by a sidewise nod, he said, with a deliberate enunciation: “Hark to the Voitarian, the rationalist! He praises nature because even when she has the chance she doesn’t fog us with mystic vapours, but preserves a dry and classic clarity. And yet what is the Latin for humility?”

‘Humour’, cried Settembrini, over his shoulder, ‘And the humour in the professor’s nature observations lies in the fact that like St. Catherine of Siena he thinks of the wounds of Christ when he sees a red primula in the Spring’

Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain.(59)

The red primula and the gauging wound. Red in nature occurs rarely but with violence. It’s strength is magnified by its rarity. Flowers, fire and blood are linked by redness, by sexuality and by death.
"He went down like an octopus, with slow slinky strokes of his arms. Tobias, who was trying hard not to loose sight of him, thought that it must be the way that rich people swam. Little by little they were leaving the sea of common catastrophes and entering the sea of the dead.

There were so many of them that Tobias thought that he had never seen so many people on earth. They were floating motionless, face up on different levels, and they all had the look of forgotten souls.

"They're very old dead," Mr Hubert said "It's taken them centuries to reach this state of repose."

Further down in the waters of the more recent dead, Mr Herbert stopped. Tobias caught up with him at the instant that a very young woman passed in front of them. She was floating on her side, her eyes open, followed by a current of flowers."

Garcia Marquez, The Sea of Lost Time (60)
"Here pleasure is not being conceived in the psychoanalytic way, as the immediacy of sense gratification and tension release. On all the tableaux of Khajuraho, the intensity of the serpent change is being maintained. It is sustained because what is immediately disclosed in carnal contact is the most remote and strange things, scorpion, sea anemone, comet in oneself."

Does not this serpentine embrace hold the briny composition of the sea in blood with its strange glands and polyps? Do not these gauzy garments ripple over coral reefs and dark waters, behind the eyes of the beloved, flash of silver, play of fish?

Alphonso Lingus, Excesses (61)

"Poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism - to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity. It leads us to death, to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea."

Georges Bataille, Erotism (62).

Two fish

Two fish

Two breasts, two ovaries, two eyes.

One vagina, one womb one brain, one self.

One body easily symmetrically divided; dissected, like the world there is symmetry.

The piscean age. Time of the 'fish-son' God. Eternal duality; Two fish form one aspect - one whole but a dualism - division is its character. One fish swims upward, realisation its goal, life its object; the other swims downward, shunning the light the surface; that point when one element becomes another, the enigmatic surface - shunning the water air transition, it moves toward the bottom of the sea where water meets sand. Drawn with stars, it resides in the sky.

The piscean character could be seen to articulate the struggle of life with its partner death, between life instincts and death instincts, between procreative sexuality and the tendency to degenerate.

Inevitably round and round the piscean motif rolls. Detached or attached, a halving or a joining, one self in duality, inextricably linked The aspect seeking inertia will eventually win. Both selves will sink to the darkening centre - caught in the inevitable drawing down.

"The so called fish constellation is composed of two fish: one is pointing up towards the heavens, the other towards the earth, the sea. It seems through reading these myths that
the one orientated to the sky is given over to the masculine, the other to the feminine. Descent toward the sea is interpreted as ‘fabulous’, then ‘diabolical’ but it also means the faithfulness to primal fertility.”

Luce Irigaray, Divine Women (63)

The sea is felt as desirable, repugnant and female. Though it has its borders, its sandy beaches, yet too it is an endless mass. Full of life, a succulent ancestry, yet like woman it seems to represent the mysterious oneness of death.

Molluscs

When looking at a shell one is looking at a skeleton. There is more variety in the external form of shells than those like us with internal skeletons. We are flesh covered. Mollusc bone is placed externally to protect the vulnerable flesh of that which resides within. Amorphous flesh held inside its bone case. We place the divided body on our shelves - One is not stirred to abjection at the sight of mollusc bones. Even our own skeletons have a non horrific sameness, a cleanliness that does not horrify. Not the whitening bone but the perishing flesh that frightens.

Is not our brain like a mollusc within its shell?

The giant octopus

The biggest mollusc has no shell. Big frightening creature. Highly intelligent, the giant octopus learns faster than a human being. Highly sensitive, the giant octopus expresses thought and emotion through the power of its body - through the changing of skin texture and colour, either rapidly within seconds or slowly over minutes. Skin texture may be smoothed or rapidly raised to a menacing bumpiness. In such complex blushings is reflected the way in which the octopus’s brain is extended through its body. Down into the long and sucking tentacles extends the octopus’s mind. The centre of itself may be all of itself, rather than just within its head.

The female octopus chooses death after procreation.

Giant octopus live alone and die alone. (64)
The sea as consciousness

Fluid like the mind is the deep sea. In Solaris, the Russian science fiction film of the 1950's, there is an ocean that becomes recognised as an individualised being - a thinking, feeling self. A fluid amorphous entity.

The shadow of carnality

Kristeva's notion of abjection, as articulated in Powers of Horror, is relevant to the role of sexuality and death within the psyche. (65) The sexual instinct and the death instinct could be understood as instigators of that feeling of revulsion that rises up in our bodies and in our minds. Nausea, fear and deepest melancholia may accompany thought when reflecting on our intrinsic carnality and the resultant temporality of our being.

The essentially carnal aspect of ourselves is then what we may seek to avoid. Sexuality and death cannot be totally repressed or even forgotten as they are amongst those aspects of ourselves that cause the greatest challenge to the coherent ego, the outer core. The external self that may wish to remain separate from the holding power of the inner self. For there in that most delicate centre operates the primordial directors of our being, the sexual instinct and the death instinct. Predetermined, unstoppable, the carnality that is the condition of life takes us to death. We do not always gain pleasure from such a carnality. We do not always love it. It is within us. We do not always love ourselves.

Kristeva identifies abjection as 'a dark revolt of being'. What may be understood as an intense, sometimes violent disgust that results from anything that challenges the boundary of individualised self. (66)

The abject according to the Westminster dictionary is that which is "low in estimation, mean and worthless" (67)

Abjection refers to a state of psychological feeling of repulsion, almost physical nausea. It seems reminiscent of existential nausea which Sartre saw to be a state brought about by the reflective fear of the nothingness at the centre of our being. (68)
SHELL TOWER

SPINY HEMISPHERE

SPINY OYSTER (RAW)

TURRET SHells (RAW)

PRECIOUS MEMENTO (CREME)

FRILLED VENUS

PAPER NAUTILUS CREME

NEURAL RIBBON

FRIED TUNA

SNAKESHELL

HEART COCKLE

FAN SCALLOP
Further it could be seen that Nietzsche was writing of the abject when he wrote on what would be judged as ugly.

"Every token of exhaustion, of heaviness, of age, of weariness, every kind of unfreedom, whether convulsive or paralytic, above all the smell, colour and shape of dissolution, of decomposition, though it be attenuated to the point of being no more than a symbol - all this calls forth the same reaction, the value judgement 'ugly'.

Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols. (69)

The dark and boundless centre

The individualised self suffers abjection from that which draws it infinitely inward - to a dark and boundless centre. To where instinctual drives may have dominant force. Ego and super-ego, for Kristeva are the servant and the master and work hard to keep the abject downwards. (70). Sexuality and death could be seen to be extradited to such dark depths.

Abjection is seen by Kristeva as a "brutish suffering" for the one that is "I". A terrible feeling of horror may result from that looking inward to the vulnerability, carnality and ultimate nothingness at the core of our being.

"Not me, Not that. But not nothing either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a "thing". 'Kristeva, Powers of Horror (71)

The feeling of abjection, for Kristeva, may act as protection for the self loving ego.

Repelling the ego away from that which threatens self definition, solidarity and permanence.

The abject dead

Kristeva describes the experience of seeing a corpse as the greatest experience of abjection. (72) Abjection happens as one living self can not feel separate enough from that broken boundary. Reviling backwards, the living are confronted with the carnal reality of being - the inevitable outcome of life, when seeing the dead. The still, the inanimate, the self as flesh, the dispensed self, the disappeared ego of the other. The witness of the dead encounters the awful physicality and resultant temporality that is at the core of life - the bell is tolling. In seeing the corpse death is evidenced. It does not need language. It is there, mute, signifying nothing and yet it is everything.
HAT, SHELL, ROSE, EYE

HEART, COCKLE, HEART (SPLIT)

NARROW, POMPEIIUS

S Amy Oyster

UNEQUAL, RIBBED TUSK

TOWER (SHells WITH HAIR)
"The corpse seen without God, and outside of science is the utmost of abjection It is death infecting life." (73)

Kristeva sees religion and science as giving protection from the deepest abjection. God with his promise of immortality and science with its promise of understood order.

"It is not the lack of cleanliness and or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (74)

Primary repression and abjection

Kristeva understands the Freudian notion of "primal repression", as to be what is sublimated before the development of the ego - the repression of instinctual drives. What is sublimated is precisely what is abject.

The abject would be the "object" of primal repression. Kristeva sees primary repression of the instinctual drives as enabled to take place because of the ability of the verbal being, only newly rejected from the original mother object to "divide, reject and repeat". (75) But what is it that the yet unformed forming ego wants to or needs to repress? What is that identified as abject? Kristeva sees it to be two things. Firstly animalism within the self is abject. Secondly the maternal body becomes abject in the service of the incest taboo.

Animalism

Kristeva sees animalism as repressed in culture because of what she sees as its association with sex and murder. (76) In philosophy and religion great efforts have been made to deny or repress the obvious; that of our animalism, of our unmistakable relationship to all other species. That we are animals with the same drives to live, to eat, to copulate. That like the animals we are carnal. That as animals we are sexual and mortal and potentially murderous.

The greatest consequence of human beings persistent in the flight from the animality of themselves is the terrible destruction of animal life.

The repression of animalism is a primary repression and in its service an individual is fleeing from fundamental aspects of their being. That is ones deepest internal carnality is the object of repression, is abject, is held back and reviled from.
Abjection and the mother body

The second primary source of abjection Kristeva sees as resultant of the mother/child severance. That abjection is what aids autonomous development. That abjection serves the incest taboo, by the maternal body becoming repellent. Kristeva sees the origin of the mother as abject in the severance that takes place between mother and child. The suffered ego learns to sever through the pain of developing autonomy; through the pain of birth, weaning and rejection.

"The abject is the violence of mourning for an "object", that has always, already been lost." Kristeva. (77)

Abjection is seen to act as a tool to bring about separation - the mother body becomes abject through the need for severance - for autonomous being.

There is a necessity to enforce the incest taboo. One's desire for the maternal body must be broken from the mother body or rather postponed until the mother body is replaced by the beloved - the differentiated other - the new object of desire. (78)

"The ultimate metaphysical oneness and wholeness the erotically driven life seeks is the unavoidable intimacy of the infantile condition prior to all culture."

Alphonso Lingus (79)

Abjection for the mother body may serve the incest taboo and the aims of the sexual instinct. The individual to be forced to relocate their focus of love to a lover and away from mother.

The new beloved

I may say that throughout the whole of this year my life remained fully occupied with an affair, a veritable liason. And she who was its object was dead. It is often said that something may survive of a person after his death, if that person was an artist and put a little of himself into his work. It is perhaps in the same way that a sort of cutting taken from one person and grafted onto the heart of another continues to carry on its existence even when the person from whom it had been detached has perished.

Proust, Remembrance of Things Past (80)

The other, the externally apparent separate being, unlike the maternal body is not abject. Kristeva sees the other as having only one thing in common with the abject which
is that it is in opposition to the individualised self. In opposition to what Kristeva signifies as 'I' - the one I know is me. The thing I am where there is no other. The differentiated other may threaten the individual boundary but the other must be sought. (81) The other must to be taken inward, to break the boundary of isolated oneness, for procreative ecstasy. This desire to take in or enter into the other, makes the other 'not the abject but the object of desire', for Kristeva. The other is an answer to abjection. Love for the other is often felt to over ride death.

"For here the standing Asparas, tense and languid, contemplates herself in a mirror of one another's eyes, seeing what the adjacent couple sees in the mirror of one another's eyes-not oneself but series of the universe, not forms but flach of silver in the drak waters of delight"

Alphonso Lingus(82)

In our most impassioned blushing,
in our closest bonding
in momentary but orgasmic release,
there we may hear the beating of a heart
our own, our mothers
once or closer still
within the gentle rising of the lover pillow chest
under my ear I hear his heart
that gorous engorged centre
beating like a clock
THE POOL

"The more or less beautiful image in which I behold myself rests upon an abjection that sundered it as soon as repression, the constant watchman is relaxed."  
Kristeva, The Powers of Horror (83)

Kristeva sees the self loving ego as in a desperate conflict. It is tossed around by conflicting drives. The drives themselves refuse to be ordered or systemised. The bond of mother love has fruited into pain. The pre-ego reeling becomes the ego through such suffering. Self love centres the newly formed autonomous self. But self love may serve survival but it does not serve the procreative purpose of the sexual instinct. Self focused love must be left behind in the development of a appropriate love object - the differentiated other.

Narcissus is narcissistic because he does not make the transition from self love to love for the other. He does not hear the call of Echo. He does not escape his feeling of abjection but centres his focus on his peripheral being, his differentiated ego, his external self. It is this self his gaze is fixed on. (84)

'Man really mirrors himself in things, that which gives him back his own reflection he considers beautiful: the judgement 'beautiful' is his 'conceit of his species .',"  
Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (85)

Life - A Fever of Matter

"What then was Life? It was warmth, the warmth generated by a form preserving instability, a fever of matter, which accompanied the process ceaseless decay and repair of albumen molecules that were too impossibly ingenious in structure. It was the existence of the actually impossible-to-exist, of a half sweet, half painful balancing, or scarcely balancing, in this restricted and feverish process of decay and renewal, upon the point of existence. It was not matter and it was not spirit, but something between the two, a phenomenon conveyed by matter, like the rainbow on the waterfall, and like the flame. Yet why not material - it was sentient to desire and to disgust, the shamelessness of matter become sensible of itself, the incontinent form of being. For this form and beauty were not spirit borne; nor, like the form and beauty of sculpture, conveyed by a neutral and spirit consumed substance, which could in all purity make beauty perceptable to the senses. Rather was it conveyed and shaped by the somehow awakened voluptuousness of matter, of the organic, dying-living substance itself, the reeking flesh."  
Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain (86)
The pool

Look into the pool beyond our own reflection,
sexuality and death are there evident.

Little worlds exist,
encupped in water sculptured rock,
sweet little pools are theatres for the savagery of life
the crab pinching menace
the succulent molluscs.

Here in the pool borders are established.
Breathy carnality almost picturesque,
the clean white sand,
the sun lit colour
defies revulsion.

Reflecting Self

'No space of representation without a subject, and no space without a space it is not. No subject therefore without a boundary. This, of course is precisely the import of the mirror stage: the founding Gestalt, the matrix within which the ego will take place.'

Victor Burgin(87)

A woman walks down the street. As she walks she worries. Her body feels tense. All effort she makes to look relaxed. She says it to herself. Just look relaxed. Suffer or rather endure that feeling with your body. Just be relaxed is what someone would say and this woman more than agrees. But today it is difficult. It is the tightness within her body that she can’t control, within her frame, within herself.

She catches a glimpse of her reflection in a shop window. There are actually quite a few along this part of the street. She hopes that no one saw her look but today she does not really care. She’s looking for solace in that reflected image. With the briefest glance, perhaps it was only her eyes that moved, she has seen something.

Certainly an arrangement of black and grey and creme had strided past.
It has been a few minutes since she passed the first window and now thought has taken her over. Her body is relaxed, left alone, enjoying remission as the woman begins to think about mirrors. She questions why she looks and why some look for hours, as though they were looking for something that only looking more and more may find. The thing they cannot find. And some may look to avoid seeing what is really there or what they believe is there. Something awful.

Like she had just done, taking refuge in a glance - an imagined vision or rather a vision that was simple, abbreviated, almost abstract. Like she had sought and obtained herself as a neutral pattern. No details. It was in the details, she thought, where the danger lay. The thing she really feared.

The Power of abjection

For Kristeva there is power through horror. She sees abjection to play a powerful role in the development of the psyche and of the representative culture. The need for boundary and order creates Law. The carnal being abject supports the foundations of complex philosophy such as Platonism and Christianity. And answering abjection may be a function of art.

Within the psyche the abjectness of death stirs the ego to fight its own death drive.

The abjectness of the mother body serves the incest taboo. Woman becomes a casualty being assigned to signify the carnal temporality of being but too she holds the power for oneness and wholeness that sexuality and death provide.

Cleansing the unclean

Dealing with the abject, dealing with that which we flee and shrink from and even gag at, takes the form of cleansing the unclean for Kristeva. Eve is cleansed of her sexual being to become Mary and then Mary is cleansed of death but such cleansing has left a scratched and suffered surface through which to understand self. Giving solace through delusionistic philosophy has been a function of religion but expressing the difficulty that
we have with our own being has characterised art. Kristeva sees art to cleanse the abject
by articulating the abject and more successfully than historical religion.

'The various means of purifying the abject - the various cartharses- make up the history
of religions, and end up with that carthasis par excellence called art, both on the far and
the near side of religions. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience which is
rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential
component of religiosilty. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the
historical forms of religion.' (88)

Art is seen to grow out of the experience of revulsion for inner being - out of abjection -
for Kristeva. Out of a need to examine the horror provoking beauty of ourselves. Art
could be seen to articulate human beingness, animality, intrinsic death and sexuality. For
Kristeva art is at the top of the mountain as far as dealing with the abject is concerned.
Perhaps because art will reveal whether it be the desirous or the fearful that it examines.
The attractive and the repellent, the reality and the delusion, may together in art
combine and neutralise.

"Abjection is a ressurection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy
that transfers death drive into a start of life, of new significance." (89)

A liquid oneness

Abjection may be a path to rebirth if one is willing to sacrifice ego's borders. Deep within
a blending unity with ancestry, animality, sexuality, dirtness and dustness is already
achieved. It is obtainable beyond the illusionistic surface of the reflective pool.

Death, The Cradle of Life

Octavio Paz refers to the modern Mexican as someone who no longer believes in
immortality - who no longer believes in denying death. Mexican culture embraces death
as a companion to self/within self - as something to be nurtured and never forgotten -
never repressed. - never sublimated, denied or rejected. Death is given its role in the light
- incorporated, made visible, played with and laughed at. It would seem that in Mexico
death does not hide in shadows but shamelessly, stark and white, dances in the sun.

(90)
On 'The Magic Mountain', Settembrini emphasises the importance of accepting death and sexual life as a unity not to be separated or played in opposition to each other. That death and sexuality are owed respect as most important participants in this beautiful carnal life.

"Permit me, permit me, engineer, to say to you, that the only sane, noble - and I will expressly add, the only religious way to think of death is as part and parcel of life. It is the very opposite of sane, noble, reasonable, or religious to divorce it in any way from life, or to play life off against it. The ancients adorned their sarcophagi with the emblems of life and procreation, and even with obscene symbols; in the religions of antiquity the sacred and the obscene lay very close together. Those men knew how to pay homage to death. For death is worthy of homage, as the cradle of life, as the womb of palengenesis.

Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain, (91)

Sexuality and death identify the canality and temporality of our being. Notions of immortality, the bad or the beautiful, reveal sad delusions and hostile projections.

It may be that contemplation of our own procreative perishability causes fear, abjection and grief but then acceptance of our fragile flesh may lead to infinite peace.

"For it is only in the Dionysian mysteries in the psychology of the Dionisian condition, that the fundamental fact of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself - it's will to life'. What did the Hellene guarantee to himself with these mysteries? Eternal life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; true life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality. It was for this reason that the sexual symbol was to the Greeks the symbol venerable as such, the intrinsic profound meaning of all antique piety.

Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (92)
4. THE PAINTINGS

Heaven’s Gate
Pastel on paper,

Reddichio lettuce stripped to its heart
to a bare and ruddy centre
draws in the focus
pressured
just a little hill
veins cover its lumpy surface
flowers fly behind in darkness
something without, something within
small and potent, drawn together
the wall impermanent.

The Pool
Pastel on Paper

Classic Flight
Watercolour on paper

Eve
Watercolour on paper

The Fruit of Eden
Oil on canvas

The Ascending Virgin
Oil on canvas

The Placental Ocean
Oil on canvas
FOOTNOTES

1 Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life,
2 Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain
3 Charles Darwin, The Origin of The Species
4 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle.
5 Freud, On Narcissism
6 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
7 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
8 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
9 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
10 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
11 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
12 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
13 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
14 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
15 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
16 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror
17 Julis Kristeva, Powers of Horror
18 Julia Kristeva, Holbien's Dead Christ
19 Freud, Beyond The Pleasure Principle
20 Georges Bataille, Erotism, Death and Sensuality
21 Georges Bataille, Erotism, Death and Sensuality
22 Georges Bataille, Erotism, Death and Sensuality
23 Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain
24 Nietzsche, Twilight of The Idols
25 Garcia Marquez, Love in The Time of Cholera
26 Jean Paul Sartre. Being and Nothingness
27 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
28 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
29 Genesis, King James Bible
30 Julia Kristeva, The Stabat Mater
31 Genesis, King James Bible
32 D.J. Enright, The Oxford Book of Death
33 Job, King James Bible
34 Victor Burgin, Geometry and Abjection
35 Victor Burgin, Geometry and Abjection
36 Julia Kristeva, The Powers of Horror
37 Nietzsche, Twilight of The Idols
38 D.J. Enright, The Oxford Book of Death
39 Plato, The Phaedo
40 Plato, The Phaedo
41 Plato, The Phaedo
42 Plato, The Phaedo
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47 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
48 Nietzsche, Twilight of The Idols
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51 Nietzsche, Twilight of The Idols
52 Julia Kristeva, The Stabat Mater
53 Julia Kristeva, The Stabat Mater
54 Julia Kristeva, The Stabat Mater
55 Julia Kristeva, Holbien's Dead Christ
56 Julia Kristeva, Holbien's Dead Christ
57 Julia Kristeva, Holbien's Dead Christ
58 Julia Kristeva, Holbien's Dead Christ
59 Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain
60 García Márquez, Innocent Eríndira
61 Alphonso Lingus, Excesses
62 Georges Bataille, Erotism. Death and Sensuality
63 Luce Irigaray, Divine Women
64 BBC wildlife documentary, Devilfish
65 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror
66 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror
67 Westminster Dictionary
68 Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness
69 Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols
70 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror
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73 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror
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88 Julia Kristeva, The Powers of Horror
89 Julia Kristeva, The Powers of Horror
90 Octavio Paz, Images of Mexico
91 Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain
92 Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols
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