After being extruded through the system of photographic representation, the body has here become “strange.” Perhaps it is because the close observation enabled by photography has caused the hand to take on a life of its own: the part has become detached from the whole. As with other technologies or techniques that represent the body, photography is deeply concerned with focus. That is to say, it is a practice that involves making decisions about the cutting and cropping of the body as part of its conversion into image. It is a practice in which the excision or omission of some parts is as critical a decision as the inclusion of others. As such, photography here produces a relationship between body and image that is based upon strangeness or alienation. While painting, drawing and printmaking are also capable of such ellipsis, photography foregrounds strangeness paradoxically through its capabilities for verisimilitude and its associations with an indexical likeness to the object that it represents.

Nowhere is this sense of alienation more pronounced than in the technologies of the clinic. In French, the term opérateur has the double meaning of both “camera person” and “surgeon;” an intersection between two disciplines that is suggestive not only of the kinds of cutting and cropping intrinsic to the making of an image, but also of the way in which the eye of the surgeon performs a type of looking that operates below the surface of things, a way of getting inside the body that can be carried over into the photographic image. Like photography, the clinical gaze also tends to isolate body

parts in order to subject them to observation and, subsequently, tests and treatment. In the clinic, a part-body is produced through this mechanism of isolation and observation, enabling it to be coded according to categories of normal/abnormal and then, if disease is found, referred to as something foreign to us, as something “not self.” But is it technology that produces this relation of strangeness, or does technology simply reveal a pre-existing uneasy relation between body and image, a demonstration that the body-image itself might be always already foreign or Other to us? This “demonstration,” with its etymological ties to monstrare, suggests that it might be a monstrous sort of showing, difficult to encounter and to reconcile with because of what it reflects back to us. And if technology is able to reveal a relation of strangeness between image and body with regards those parts that are visible to us and which we see every day, what then is the nature of this strangeness with regards the invisible internal spaces, or with pathology and disease, both of which are already unfamiliar and alien to us?

The performance and installation work of the British-Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum has often involved the transformation of familiar objects into something strange and threatening. For example, in Sous Tension (1999), Homebound (2000) and Electrified I & II (2002 and 2010), Hatoum ran an electric current through everyday domestic objects and spaces; and in Webbed (2002) and Daybed (2008), beds were transformed into spider webs or human-sized cheese graters. No longer spaces of retreat or comfort, the interior spaces of the home have here become spaces of danger and violence. Likewise, in Testimony (1995–2002), Corps étranger (1994), Deep Throat (1996) and Don’t Smile, You’re on Camera! (1980), Hatoum employed medical imaging technologies such as x-ray and endoscopy to make the body seem at odds with itself. In Don’t Smile, You’re on Camera! Hatoum trained a live video camera on an audience, panned up and down the rows, and occasionally stopped to focus on one particular person. As the camera scanned the chosen individual, the recorded image was played on a video monitor. Simultaneously, two assistants at the back of the gallery would scan the same part of their own body, in gradual stages of undress, and then mix all the images with X-rays so that the resultant film showed the body being peeled away layer by layer by the video camera: first the clothes, then the skin then the flesh.

While much has been made of the re-presentation of domestic objects as threatening and dangerous in Hatoum’s work, very little has been done on the role that technology plays in this transformation, and the way in which this plays on historical and cultural anxieties surrounding science and new technologies. In this respect, I want to pick up on the relation of strangeness between the body and its representation in Hatoum’s work, focusing specifically on the role of medical imaging technology. The following text will therefore focus in detail on Hatoum’s installation work Corps étranger, commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou in


aural, become pubic. Each time the endoscope comes across an orifice, it penetrates as far as it can go before it recedes and continues on its seemingly blind journey, as if feeling its way around the spaces of the body. We do not know what we are looking at. The recognizable surfaces of the body give way to unrecognizable depths, to voids that are within us yet are wholly strange and alien to us. Just as we are on the threshold of identifying a mouth, a vagina or an anus, the images become something else altogether again. As we enter the mouth, for example, the almost imperceptible transformation from external squamous cells to the mucous membranes of columnar cells confuses the boundary between inside and outside. Immediately just inside the lips already looks like the deeper internal parts of the body. It is at these boundary sites, or orifices – dangerous and privileged borders have historically been tied to theories of alterity – that the images almost resolve themselves into a recognizable body part, before

soundtrack of breath and a beating heart. Directly at our feet is a circular projection showing a one-take endoscopic investigation of the interior spaces of Hatoum’s body. The images on the screen move from eyes to nose to the inside of the throat, vaginal canal and anus, presenting a continuous, looping view of the interior spaces of the body of the artist. Below us, the intestines pulsate, opening and closing, sucking us into the bile, that awful yellow fluid with semi-digested bits of food floating around in it. Hairs become nasal, become

from external squamous cells to the mucous membranes of columnar cells confuses the boundary between inside and outside. Immediately just inside the lips already looks like the deeper internal parts of the body. It is at these boundary sites, or orifices – dangerous and privileged borders have historically been tied to theories of alterity – that the images almost resolve themselves into a recognizable body part, before
becoming once again a network of uncharted tunnels.\textsuperscript{4} Meaning “strange” or “foreign body,” Corps étranger is about the distance that we feel from ourselves.

Formally, Corps étranger references the representation of the body in both science and sci-fi, such as Arthur Lidov’s fantastical illustrations Down a Long Canal and Digestive Journey, produced for LIFE magazine in 1962, or the film Fantastic Voyage (1966), and its later remake Inner Space (1987). Historically, this kind of imagery developed out of then-emergent scientific imaging technologies, from electron microscopy in the 1930s, to ultrasound in the 1940s and scanning tunneling microscopy in the 1980s, in which previously unseen aspects of the world, including the body, could be made visible. Through the infinitesimally minute detail that some of these technologies produced, notions of scale and space were destabilized, and the relationship to our bodies fundamentally transformed.\textsuperscript{5} The feminist media studies scholar Kim Sawchuk, who has written widely on the representation of gender and/in science, has suggested that these developments in imaging technology actually produced a visual economy in which the body came to be understood as the new frontier for exploration. These technologies, she argues, produced a fantasy of “biotourism” in which one can travel through the “inner space” of the body and determine its workings.\textsuperscript{6} This is significant because what Sawchuk’s model of biotourism speaks to, and what we see reproduced in films such as Fantastic Voyage, is a sense in which new imaging technologies have encouraged a way of reading the body – in both science and popular culture – as a navigable, quantifiable subject of analysis and colonization that is comprised of legible parts and systems.

Nowhere is this process more evident than in medical imaging and images, since the narrow visual field that they employ focuses only ever on specific parts or systems, feeding in to clinical interpretations of the body as an assemblage of parts – an idea that was widely theorized in the medical literature around the time that Hatoum made Corps étranger. For example, in the 1992 essay The body of the future, Eric J. Cassell, a Clinical Professor in Public Health at Cornell University Medical College, argued that:

“Twentieth century medicine is characterized by a trend which Pedro Lain-Entralgo has called ‘molecularisation.’ In this view all processes of normal or abnormal physiology are described in molecular terms. Proteins are proteins, genes are genes etc, no matter where you find them (plant or animal). They are best studied in isolation, causing a tendency to see these systems as closed: systems in which everything necessary for their completion exists within the system itself. If the system is enzymatic, genetic, neural (impulse transmitting) or muscular (contractile), it must be abstracted from the organ in which it operates and the organism in which the organ is found.”\textsuperscript{7}

For Cassell, the clinical gaze is premised on a continual re-focusing to allow for greater detail, reducing the visual field so that organs, parts and systems of the body become categorised according to smaller and smaller units. By stratifying the body into a sort of navigable terrain (and I would argue that both scientific and non-scientific visual cultures feed into the continuing production of this form of representation) the system or part under analysis is not only made less complex in its modeling – by removing interactions between them – but also makes any transgression or failure easier to identify and contain.

Following from the work of Michel Foucault, the philosopher Rosi Braidotti has questioned the politics of this visual logic of the part-body, particularly in relation to women. For Braidotti, the part-body represents the point of commensurability between the visual economies of medicine and pornography. At around the same time that Corps étranger was first shown, Braidotti made the case that medicine always strived for forms of representation that would standardize and quantify the body, arguing that there is an analogy between the mathematisation of the body perceived by writers like Foucault – a sort of exposure of the subject to numerical or statistical analysis – and the realm of pornographic representation. As such, the standardization of the body in clinical practice was described by Braidotti as “medical pornography,” in which pornography was defined as “a system of representation


\textsuperscript{5} See Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), especially p. 54.


that reinforces the commercial logic of the market economy. The whole body becomes a visual surface of changeable parts, offered as exchange objects. In other words medicine, like pornography, seeks to standardize the body in order that it can be rendered into an economy, able to be prostheticised along lines that make flesh (re)productive within the terms of a biopolitical order. Inverting a framework established by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari several decades earlier, Braidotti referred to this as a system that produces “organs without bodies,” or “de/re/tachable parts” that can circulate across bodily, cultural and national borders. Crucially, both pornography and the clinical gaze work in this way by visually isolating body parts so that they might be inserted into regimes of looking, such as analysis or scopophilia. In other words, the part body becomes an object of scopic consumption and circulation which, for Braidotti, has far reaching implications, including the sale or regeneration of organs and other body parts, as well as the problematic perception that because we can see at the atomic level that biomedical interventions on the body must be straightforward and well understood.

In some respects, Corps étranger would appear to challenge the logic of the clinical gaze. Afterall, it rejects a model of the body as comprised of discrete parts in favour of a continuous looping view of the body. In Corps étranger, the body is not presented schematically but rather as a difficult, messy thing in which one might have trouble identifying inside from outside, let alone specific organs and systems. But in other respects, it can also be read as buying into the regime of visibility established by the clinical gaze, and at times even emphasizes the commensurability of medicine and pornography by depicting extreme close ups of the artist’s genitalia. These passages of the video are, of course, more than an extreme close-up: they are the ultimate close-up; the view that goes beneath the surface, to show what the camera usually cannot see. By showing both the vulva (external anatomy) as well as the vagina and the cervix (internal anatomy) in this way, Cor ans étranger references the visual practices of both pornography and gynaecology, presenting us with a body that has been subjected to a penetrating gaze.

As the performer and critic Terri Kapsalis has argued in the book Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum, the isolated female genitalia (a.k.a. the “beaver-shot”) is an image that re-occurs across medical, artistic and pornographic imagery, producing a form of over-exposure that male genitalia are rarely subject to. While Kapsalis focuses on material from contemporary pornography and live performance art, such as the work of Annie Sprinkle, there are also relevant links to be made to historical artistic practices that center on the depiction of female genitalia in extreme close-up, including Gustave Courbet’s L’Origine du Monde (1886) and Marcel Duchamp’s Étant Donnés: 1° La Chute d’Eau / 2° Le Gaz d’Eclairage (1946–66). Crucially, at the heart of this latter work is a confluence between the visual penetration of the female body and the enlightenment theories of sight and light that provided the foundations of science and medicine. This is significant because it suggests a framework for how and why medicine and pornography have become yoked together through the mode of seeing that they engender. At stake in this, and

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10 Braidotti, 47.

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as Sawchuk’s discussion of “biotourism” points toward, is the question of the production of knowledge.

Indeed, theories of pornography from this period have picked up on this link between science and pornography and their mutual desire for knowledge, in which the secret depths of the mysterious female body must be probed or opened up. This argument has perhaps been most notably made by Linda Williams in *Hard Core* (1990), her early history of pornography. For Williams, both pornography and medicine were founded on an economy of maximum visibility, which she positions in relation to Michel Foucault’s distinction between the science of sexuality, *scientia sexualis*, and older forms of *ars erotica*. Pornography, Williams argues, evolves not out of ancient traditions of erotic art, but the nineteenth-century “frenzy of the visible” in which surveillance mechanisms started to see in place of the naked eye: a technologic in which the eye of the camera offered new “truths” about the body.¹¹ For Williams, the intersection between pleasure and power – as described by Foucault – is conceived in terms of technology, arguing that the power exerted over bodies in technology is rendered pleasurable through technology.¹² Which is maybe another way of saying that power itself is pleasurable if you are the one wielding it, and technology is one way in which that can be done.

Thus, *Corps étranger* might be read as provocatively playing into this logic of hyper-visibility through a strategy of explicit self-representation, in which nothing is hidden and everything is shown. Yet it is precisely through this hyper-visibility, or use of extreme close up, that *Corps étranger* in fact performs an excess of representation that obliterates pornography’s particular emphasis on showing just enough. As Williams has argued, pornography requires a mode of vision that rests on the edge between concealing and revealing, so that there is always a frustrated desire to see. In this, pornography ultimately reinstates the failure of any project adequately to represent female sexualities, invoking the historical formulation of the female body as dark and mysterious against the quest for disclosure brought


¹² Ibid., 39.
about by over-lit close-ups of genitals. Thus, Hatoum largely exceeds pornographic readings by turning the body inside out so thoroughly as to perform it as emetic rather than erotic, destroying the tension between concealing and revealing.

_Corps étranger_ not only prompts us to think critically about the ways in which women’s bodies have been represented by various institutions, but also to re-think the use of technology in self-imaging as a potential site of resistance to these systems. As Ella Shohat argues in _Lasers for ladies_ (1992) “feminist critique cannot afford to surrender the interior body to the curtained authority of the medical office.” Through forms of technological mediation, _Corps étranger_ draws together the medical and the pornographic gaze as related systems of looking. Yet, far from producing a relation of strangeness that isolates body parts and offers them up for analysis or scopic consumption, the endoscope produces a relation of strangeness that undermines and subverts the penetrating drive of the medical gaze.

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