

Sylke von der Heiden



The moment my Fear and desire met:

A (dead) (double) (male) body looking at the stage inside my womb

MA Sculpture
2021
9268 words

“Violence does not always take visible form, and not all wounds gush blood”

- Haruki Murakami, 1Q84¹

¹ Haruki Murakami, *1q84*, translated by Philip Gabriel (New York, Knopf, 2011)

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Abstract

The director (David Cronenberg), works like a surgeon, looking through the camera and adjusting the frame to his vision. His angles and chosen lenses allow for dissection, unknotting and a sense of fear. However, the more horrific moments are spoken of but stay hidden, out of sight. Fooling our eyes, triggering our imagination.

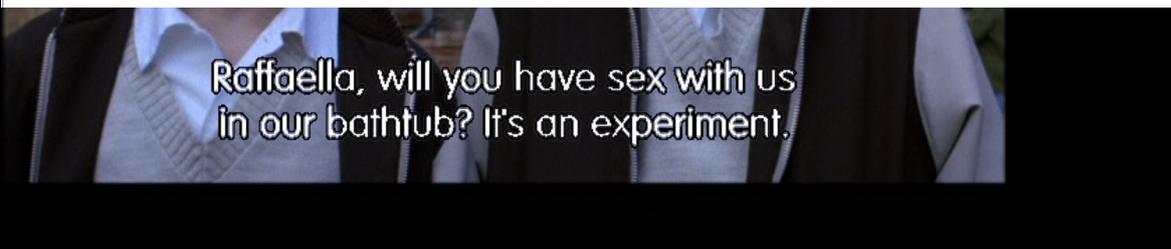
Working like a surgeon, I am watching the (gendered) body, dissecting the imagined, dreamed and drug-induced reality, tunneling my vision. My eye muscles are strained, I am zooming in and out while using words as (medical) instruments. Through a cinematic lens I am framing my own body, sexuality and memories. Stitching them to female interpretations of Cronenberg's (male) gaze. Carefully pulling the needle through the fabric that is my skin, while trying to avoid scars.

Perspectives are formed, interpretations are made: connections between fear and love. Some are visual, some are thought, some are written. Linking memories, definitions, shadows and scenes to emerge into a narrative world. And then the screen goes black and the credits start.

Keywords:

Film
Framing
(Female) Body
Dissection
Reflection

Images



1.

2.

Sections of images, shadows of my own works and elements of the film, are presented together in a joined visual world. As time moves on they follow the films progress, transforming into a blurred, chaotic and messy combination of the two worlds.

Memory is a strange thing
(Prologue)

SCENE 1: (Opening scene)

A young girl sits in a big chair made of white metal tubing next to the sink in the physiotherapist's treatment room. Her mother is sitting on the edge of the examining table. The physiotherapist, specialized in pelvic instability, is examining her lower back. The young girl holds binoculars in front of her eyes. She found them right before leaving the house, and insisted on bringing them with her to her mother's appointment.

I remember a big room, with off-white slightly see-through curtains hanging from the ceiling to the floor, making the bright sunlight from outside transform into a vibrant yellow glow, illuminating the white medical furniture in the room. I remember that there was a tree in front of the window, creating soft organic shapes that the bright yellow light was moving through. I remember the sink next to me, and the light reflecting on the silver metal right where the water was supposed to get out. I remember the large black pieces of underwear my mom was wearing, and how the white outfit of the physiotherapist seemed to be even more bright in contrast to her naked skin.

The shapes in the room were shifting - from being up close and magnified to being far away and distorted - depending on what side of the binoculars I put my eyes against. I was observing the room, its colors and movements, while my mother was being inspected. A spectator looking through both sides of the lenses.

I said something about the edge of lace on my mother's underwear. I thought it was pretty.

Later my mother told me that there was a lot of laughing involved. I do not remember that. I do however, remember feeling euphoric as I had just discovered a new distorted world through the double eyes of the binoculars. Observing. My mother also told me that the normally established professionalism and the neutral gaze of the physiotherapist was completely disrupted by having me, the small girl in the big chair, as a commenting observer.

SCENE 2: (Opening scene)

Elliot and Beverly², two young boys that look identical to each other as well as to their elder director,³ step of the porch in front of what the viewer presumes is their house. The two boys talk about sex and reproduction, comparing the way fish reproduce to the way that humans do, as fish lay their egg under water to then be fertilized.

Elliot turns to Beverly and says:

'Humans can't do that, because they don't live underwater. They have to.. internalize the water. Therefore we have sex.'⁴

The two boys speak about scuba diving when they approach the porch of a house close by. Reading each other's minds, they turn to the girl on the porch and ask her to have sex with them in their bathtub.

2 Elliot and Beverly are the main characters in the film *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988)

3 David Cronenberg casting the two young boys based on how he looked as a child. Referred to in: Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p. 138 as well as in Cronenberg on Cronenberg, ed by Chris Rodley, (London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1992) p. 8

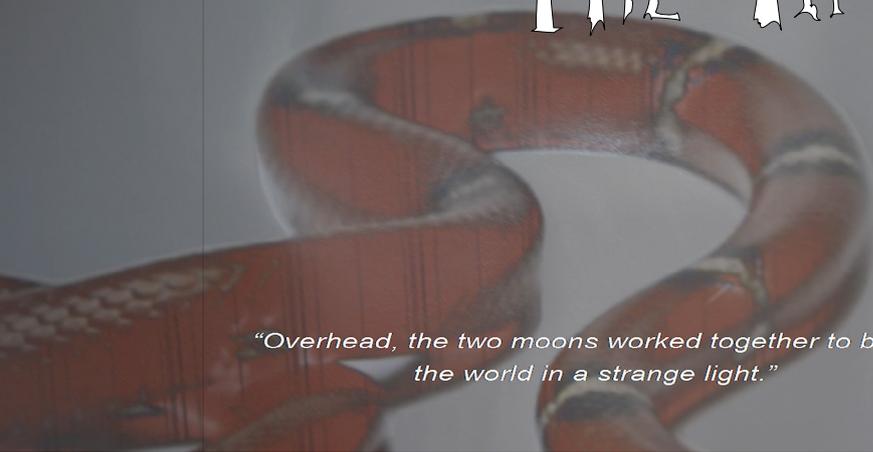
4 Opening scene of *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988)

[Time moves forward]



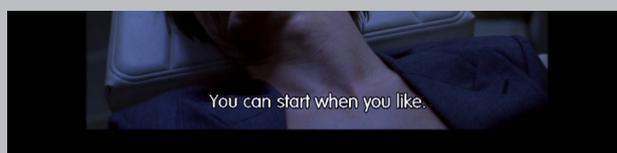
The First shade

3.



"Overhead, the two moons worked together to bathe the world in a strange light."

4.



You can start when you like.

5.



[...]

6.

Through my mother's experiences, gynecology was a part of my life when growing up. My memories of my body, my mother's body, and female bodies in general decide how I see myself and how I will shape myself. The impact of gynecology has passed through generations, the ideas of motherhood, the connections between the gynecologist, the inner workings of my body and my own sexuality. All these elements, parts of me and my life, were waiting to be connected, waiting to be framed, by the (male) (surgeon) director David Cronenberg.

*'Created by the same light, shades and shadows react differently, and both influence how one perceives space, color, and feeling.'*⁵

5 Rebecca Falzano, (Shades and Shadows), *Maine Home + Design*, <<https://mainehomedesign.com/design-theory/2467-shades-and-shadows/#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20difference%20between,space%2C%20color%2C%20and%20feeling.>> [accessed 19 April 2021]

Watching Dead Ringers the night I lost my virginity (Introduction 1)

SCENE 3:

A young woman sits on the grey sofa in her student room, waiting. The room has white walls, a yellow carpeted floor and a very high ceiling. In the back corner of the room, against the outside wall of the house, a high floating bed is built in. Underneath the bed, an old door to the house of her landlord (who mainly lives downstairs but has his bedroom next to hers) is sealed off. The landlord is already quite old and does not have the best health. Sometimes at night she can hear him swearing to adverts on his TV, or coughing in bed. It wakes her up, but it also reassures her that he is still alive.

The young woman sits on her sofa, she looks calm at first sight. But zooming in you can see that her hands are constantly touching her nose. A tick she has when she is nervous.

'I know something we can watch.' He said after giving me an awkward kiss on my cheek after an even more awkward hug. We were sitting on the grey sofa that was just not big enough for both of us to sit in without touching each other, knees touching, wrists touching, shoulders touching. He said he had octopus for dinner, I could taste it when he kissed me.

The scene with the operation and the *'instruments for working on mutant women'* started. Red suits, silverware, and blood. And all I could think about was what might happen that night, how my left knee touched his on the tiny sofa and what would happen if I would lean my head against his shoulder.

Later, when I came across *Dead Ringers*⁶ again, I realized that the choice of movie could not have been worse. The representation of female genitalia in the opening sequence, the uncanny of the identical twin, the doppelganger⁷, the dreams of connected Siamese and mutated organs, the horror of the operation room, the instruments designed by one of the twins, the sexual aggression, and the twisted positions of power in the movie got mixed up with my memories of that specific night, losing my virginity. However, *Dead Ringers*, and Cronenberg's films in general still intrigue me. Their violence, horror and cruelty seem attractive.

*'[Yet] It can be argued that the horror genre has at its base a symbolic action that articulates ordinary psychological tensions – tensions resulting from a conflict between repressive social norms and the innate desires of the human animal.'*⁸ states William Beard, later referring to the human animal in relation to the dichotomy of, and relationship between mind and body in Cronenberg's films. The depiction of physical cruelty, horror and other terrorizing bodily expressions relate, according to Beard, to the untamable yet suppressed half of the human animal. Within horror movies, this suppression - that is normally kept alive by our social standards - is visualized. Ideas and acts of evil and cruelty are transformed into monsters. *'The viewer beholds what he fears but also what he desires, and together with horror he experiences a feeling of liberation.'*⁹

That night, after we moved on from the grey sofa, my fears and desires in relation to my own body met each other, just as they did - or attempted to do so - in Cronenberg's film. But the relation and contrast between the two did not occur to me at that moment. Fear and Desire, Cruelty and Compassion, Mind and Body, Life and Death. And the conflicted relation that the viewer of films like *Dead Ringers* creates to these topics.

I started to wonder, by feeding the animal in me with visual and psychological cruelty, won't it start to desire more?¹⁰

6 *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988)

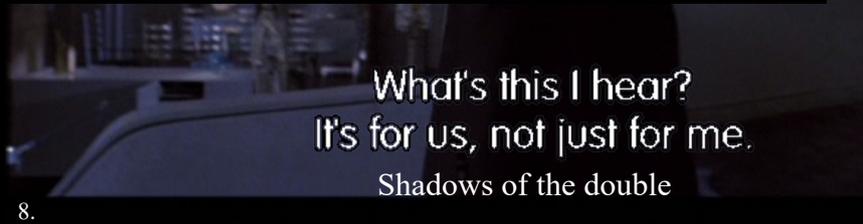
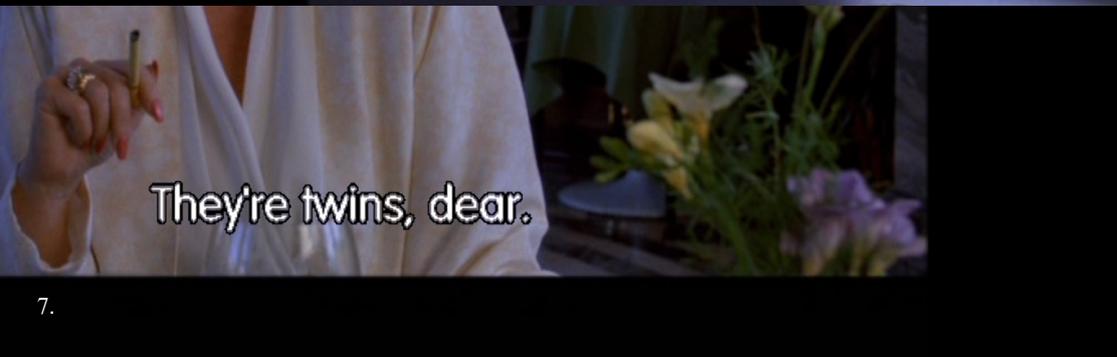
7 Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p. 13.

8 William Beard, The Visceral Mind, The Major Films Of David Cronenberg in *The shape of Rage, the films of David Cronenberg*, ed by Piers Handling (Ontario, the Academy of Canadian Cinema, 1983) p. 3

9 William Beard, The Visceral Mind, The Major Films Of David Cronenberg in *The shape of Rage, the films of David Cronenberg*, ed by Piers Handling (Ontario, the Academy of Canadian Cinema, 1983) p. 2

10 Maggie Nelson, *The art of cruelty*, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2011) p. 7

Foreshadowing 1:



The shadows must have been crazy to accomplish

Foreshadowing (noun)
[fawr-shad-oh-ing]

*An indication of something that will happen in the future, often used as a literary device to hint at or allude to future plot developments.*¹¹

Etymology: "indicate beforehand," 1570s, figurative, from fore- + shadow (v.); the notion seems to be a shadow thrown before an advancing material object as an image of something suggestive of what is to come. Related: Foreshadowed; foreshadowing. As a noun from 1831. Old English had forescywa "shadow," forescywung "overshadowing."¹²



Surely you've heard of inner beauty?

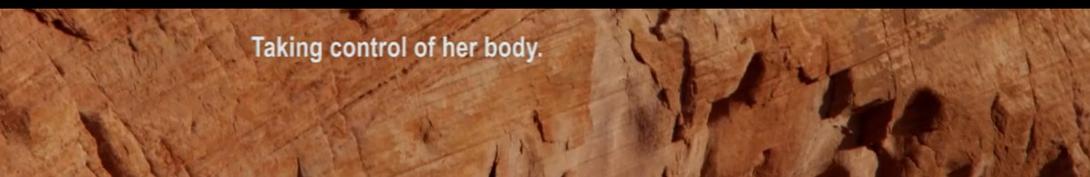
11.



12. Dissecting the imagined and dreamed



13.



Taking control of her body.

11 Dictionary.com Dictionary, s.v. "Foreshadowing," <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/foreshadowing#:~:text=an%20indication%20of%20something%20that,uses%20foreshadowing%20to%20build%20suspense.> > [accessed 30 March 2021]

12 Etymonline.com, s.v. "Foreshadow," <[https://www.etymonline.com/word/foreshadow#:~:text=foreshadow%20\(v.\),As%20a%20](https://www.etymonline.com/word/foreshadow#:~:text=foreshadow%20(v.),As%20a%20)

SCENE 4:

The liquid, moving through a transparent PVC tube connected to the large needle sticking halfway out of my right hand, gets closer and closer to being pumped inside my body and then merges into my bloodstream.

.....

As my consciousness fades the surgeon begins.

[As the slate board closes, the camera starts rolling]

By the "Baron of Blood"¹³

The body of Dead Ringers

(Introduction 2)

Horror (noun)
*hor·ror | \ 'hɔr-ər , 'här- *

Definition of horror

1: painful and intense fear, dread, or dismay
2: intense aversion or repugnance

*Ethymology: Middle English orroure, horrour, borrowed from Anglo-French horroure, horrur, borrowed from Latin horrōr-, horror "standing stiffly, bristling (of hair), shivering (from cold or fear), dread, consternation," derivative with the abstract noun suffix -ōr- (going back to *-ōs-) from the base of horrēre "to be stiffly erect, bristle (of hair, weapons, plants), shudder, shiver,"¹⁴*

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- 13 Other name for David Cronenberg:
Ernest Mathijs, 'David Cronenberg', Oxford Bibliographies, <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0086.xml?rskey=PugIGp&result=2&q=body+horror#firstMatch>> [accessed 20 November 2020]
- 14 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "horror," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/horror>> [accessed 2 February 2021]

After analyzing *Dead Ringers* I started to wonder. Why am I so convinced that this is horror? Cronenberg states in an interview about *Dead Ringers* in 1988: *'It just simply isn't.'*¹⁵ But is he right in that?

The drug-induced dreams that Beverly has about Siamese twins are the only potentially repulsive visuals the audience gets to see. Imagining horror with the objects that surround us somehow seems to be a part of being human and our fear of darkness. *'What makes horror "crucial enough to pass along" is, for critics since Freud, what has made ghost stories and fairy tales crucial enough to pass along: its engagement of repressed fears and desires and its reenactment of the residual conflict surrounding those feelings.'*¹⁶ Says Carol J. Clover in their book *Men, women and chainsaws*. Horror movies are the visualization of collective conflicts, a physicalization of our inner fear and darkness, visualized through the lens and psyche of the filmmaker.

What makes *Dead Ringers* significantly horrific, is the use of sexuality, gender, and the role of authority. The gynecologist twins in *Dead Ringers* play with the professional neutrality expected of doctors while examining and operating on their patients. The professional gaze. As a patient you are having to open yourself up and surrender control of your most intimate body parts. As Terri Kapsalis reflects in the chapter dedicated to Cronenberg in her book *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum: '[But] I would contend that for many woman gynecology itself rest so precariously on the boundaries of medicine and violence that the mere suggestion that a woman would be made to suffer pain in the exam may be enough to horrify the most assured female spectator.'*¹⁷

In interviews with both Cronenberg¹⁸ and Jeremy Irons¹⁹ it is apparent that it took some time to find an actor who was willing to play both identical twins, and a drugged up deranged gynecologist who starts to see all women as mutants. In an interview in 1988 Cronenberg says: *[...]that they should choose a profession which gives them a relationship to women that is very strictly regimented, in which everything is well-defined and everything is kept at a distance is part of what's important in the movie: that their approach to sex or sexuality should be clinical.'*²⁰

Cronenberg takes this clinical aspect and uses it for the film's advantage. But he adds perversion to the twins' sexuality by letting them (both) have sex with some of their patients after 'checking them out.' as Claire says it in the film. Making them break the professional gaze expected from a medical professional. Walter Benjamin describes the director as a surgeon (and the painter as a magician) in his book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*²¹ The intimate

15 David Cronenberg: "Dead Ringers interview, Cabada 1988", online video recording, YouTube, 2 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxql_r_w1RE> [accessed 10 December 2020]

16 Carol J Clover, *Men, Woman and Chainsaws, gender in the modern horror film*. (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2015) p.11

17 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997)

18 David Cronenberg: "Dead Ringers interview, Cabada 1988", online video recording, YouTube, 2 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxql_r_w1RE> [accessed 10 December 2020]

19 Studio Q, "Jeremy Irons talks David Cronenberg in Studio Q", online video recording, YouTube, 18 November 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGv4daYay-U>> [accessed 10 December 2020]

20 David Cronenberg: "Dead Ringers interview, Cabada 1988", online video recording, YouTube, 2 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxql_r_w1RE> [accessed 10 December 2020]

21 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in *Illusions*, ed by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) found at <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf>

relationship between the surgeon and their patient lies at the core of Benjamin's comparison, as the surgeon operates: "*penetrating into the patient's body.*"²² This idea of penetration directly links to *Dead Ringers*, not just medically, but also through the twins having sex with their patients. It shows the audience how the professional and private, medical and sexual life of the twins is connected. Kapsalis: 'Cronenberg is a cinematic surgeon not only in his reconfiguring of the filmic body, but also in the sense that he stitches his film audience's subjectivity into narrative space.'²³

22 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, in Illusions*, ed by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) found at <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf>

23 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p. 138

SCENE 5:

Elliot goes into the treatment room after Beverly has alerted him that the woman he was examining is a trifurcate, meaning that she has three chambers inside of her womb, and is famous actress Claire Niveau. Claire is unaware that she is now seeing a different doctor than before. Elliot reexamines her.

“That’s fantastic.” Says the doctor (the viewer knows this is Elliot)

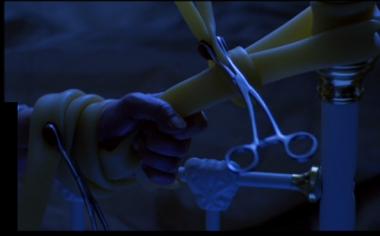
“I’ve never had anybody say that about the inside of my body before.”

“Surely you have heard of inner beauty?”

[Elliot pulls his fingers out of Claire’s vagina after the examination]

“I’ve often thought there should be beauty contests for the insides of bodies. You know... best spleen. Most perfectly developed kidneys. Why don’t we have standards of beauty for the entire human body? Inside and out.”²⁴

[The dissection of Dead Ringers begins]



14.



15.

Forshadowing 2:

Pulsating, pumping itself through her veins,
reaching her mind.



16.



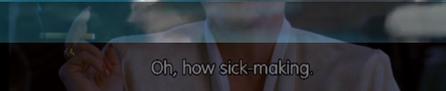
17.

The male director, the male surgeon, the male cameraman.



A woman without name in an ancient man made world

18.



Oh, how sick-making.

19.



20.



Every now and then she warned me of potential pain or strange feelings in the lower part of my belly.

It did not hurt me, I was determined not to feel pain.

21.



"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

22.



Let go!

23.

The opening of a window

Onto the rapture

Find the world

Shining in me

My senses consciously falling

- Elisabeth Fraser; *Underwater*²⁵

Her womb

was a

beautiful

garden²⁶



25 Elisabeth Fraser, *Underwater*, (2000), online video, YouTube, 23 June 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtYHlmZTFa4>> [accessed 1 February 2021]

26 *Her womb was a beautiful garden*, (2021), work in progress, Sylke van der Heiden

The (gendered) body

Speculum (noun)
spec-u-lum | \ 'spe-kyə-ləm |
plural specula \ 'spe-kyə-lə | also *speculums*

Definition of speculum

- 1: a metal instrument that is used to dilate an orifice or canal in the body to allow inspection.
- 2: a patch of color on the secondaries of most ducks and some other birds

Etymology. From Latin *speculum* ("mirror"), from *specere* ("to see; to look at") + *-ulum* ("forming tools of performing a verb").²⁷

Duck bill or beak is the commonly used word for speculum in Dutch. When first encountering the word Eendenbek (duckbill / speculum) I remember finding it particularly strange that the instrument that was supposed to allow pelvic examination was named after the front of a ducks face, as if it was some sort of joke. And I was terrified of that joke.

While I put my feet at the edge of the table, she takes the bags in which the sterilized instruments were carefully picked out of the hot water. The perfect temperature: she could feel it while she held the still packaged instruments against her skin. I told her I was moving to London, she told me she was running the London marathon. Meanwhile the metal was inside me, stretching. In my imagination I saw the tail of the duck, with its beautiful blue and green colors and patterns wiggling between my legs.

(Medical) Instrument (noun)
in-stru-ment | \ 'in(t)-strə-mənt |

Definition of instrument

- 1: a device used to produce music. Also : a singing voice
- 2: IMPLEMENT (a device used in the performance of a task : TOOL, UTENSIL)
- 3: measuring device for determining the present value of a quantity under observation

Etymology. From Old French, or from Latin *instrumentum* 'equipment, implement', from the verb *instruere* 'construct, equip'.²⁸

The instrument exaggerates subtle movements, puts thoughts into action. Cutting, dissecting, opening, vibrating. Practice lies at its core. It is the hours and hours of repeating the musical scales, or cutting into dead bodies, that will define if you are able to use the instrument as a tool for the beautiful creation you are imagining. The instrument facilitates them, takes them from your imagination, and produces an echo of that ultimate experience you are looking for.

27 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "speculum," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/speculum>> [accessed 2 February 2021]

28 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "instrument," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/instrument>> [accessed 2 February 2021]

The first encounters I had with the world outside of my mother's belly were not easy, not for me and not for my mother. None of my mother's labors were easy for that matter. After being two weeks past her due date, as she was with my brother and sister, she, we, finally went into forced labor.

*'When the thick meconium mixes into the amniotic fluid, it is swallowed and breathed into the airway of the fetus. As the baby takes the first breaths at delivery, meconium particles enter the airway and can be aspirated (inhaled) deep into the lungs.'*²⁹

My first breaths on this world were not just filled with oxygen, but also with some substances that I had taken with me from the inside the womb; the liquids that had kept me safe for all those months. I had to stay in one of those box-like assisted breathing units for new born babies for 10 days. After that, breathing has never been an issue for me. My mother however, had permanent gynecological damage, causing many pelvic surgeries and other issues. Therefore, through my mother's experiences, gynecology was a part of my life when growing up.

*"Engaging with filmic fantasies of the maternal [...] is crucial for feminist theory because all images of motherhood are conflictual, phantasmic and political. For example, in Melanie Klein's theory of artistic creation, the mother's body functions as a 'beautiful land' to be explored. And films, like all the arts, can similarly be a means of recreating the maternal body. This is the key theme of Cronenberg's Dead Ringers."*³⁰

29 'Pediatric Meconium Aspiration Syndrome', Children's national, <<https://childrensnational.org/visit/conditions-and-treatments/critical-care/meconium-aspiration-syndrome>> [accessed on 3 February 2021]

30 Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p.59

Though *Dead Ringers* was made in 1988, the subject matter of fear towards gynecologists has unfortunately not changed much within the realm of perception of the female and male psyche towards this profession. Speculums are still terrifying, and the idea and visualization of gynecological instruments designed for mutant women in *Dead Ringers* create a horrific picture for the viewer. *'On-screen the instruments for mutant women are not used on women at all. However, their mere visual presence is enough to suggest excruciating cruelty and perversion.'*³¹

In the film, Claire, a famous actress comes to see the gynecologist (unaware that they are twins) in order to find out if she will be able to have children. The twins go, one after the other, into the treatment room to find out what might be wrong with her uterus, they both put their fingers inside her, and come to the conclusion that she is a trifurcate. This is a medical condition that only exists within the film. During the examination Claire lays on the table, legs spread, a drape-sheet covering her thighs. *'Their physical privacy will be well guarded.'*³² This drape-sheet is used in *Dead Ringers* to separate the viewer of the film from the intimate image of the vagina of the actresses. Simultaneously the drape sheet is medically used as a separation of her field of vision and the part of her body the gynecologist is concerned with. In their article *Dramaturgical Desexualization: The Sociology of the Vaginal Examination*³³ by James M. Henslin and Mae A. Biggs, this drape-sheet is referred to as a prop in the theatrical set that is the medical examination. The (female) patient becomes an object in the gaze of the medical professional. In this sense the patient and their body are desexualized while the medical professional inspects the objectified body in front of them. The medical instruments become an extension of the body of the surgeon. The space around these instruments enforces the doctor-patient environment, normal life is put aside and the patient becomes the object. It is a parallel world with a boundary physicalized by the medical setting: The neutral environment of the doctor's office and treatment room, the clean and sterilized pieces of medical furniture and tools, the bright blueish light. This is the physicalization of the neutral gaze.

*'If we consider the gynecological practitioner to be spectator and woman patient to be actress, the description of cinematic spectatorship is a more fitting model for considering those women who are rendered absent during an exam. It is as though the drape sheet is the screen, dividing the woman's pelvic region from the rest of her body; anything behind the screen can then be treated as nonexistent.'*³⁴

Elliot, speaking about the professional doctor-patient relationship and the psychological connections related to it states that this relationship is *"A philosophy which mixes compassionate curiosity with social responsibility."*³⁵ The lack of social responsibility is what initiates the twins' failure, madness and inevitable decay. As soon as they start to see Claire Nivau as not just their patient, object, but as a sensual and sexual human body. *'Bev you've got to try the movie star. She's unbelievable.'*³⁶ Claire becomes a sensual body that both will have sexual encounters with.

31 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997)

32 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988 01:14:00)

33 *Dramaturgical Desexualization: The Sociology of the Vaginal Examination* by James M. Henslin and Mae A. Biggs in Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997)

34 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.21

35 *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:52:10

36 *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:13:20

*'The sexualized role of the physician admires the beauty of his patient's anatomy, and the medicalized role of the lover demands that he understands the physiological state of his love object.'*³⁷

The combined role of physician and lover create a shift in the once carefully placed props of the operating room. Medical instruments and PVC tubes that once existed only in the neutral treatment rooms now appear in the bedroom. Sexuality and potential motherhood are directly linked as gynecologist and patient discuss Claire's medical condition right after having sex. We see Claire, paralyzed by the thought of her own mortality and the eternal decay of her personal set of genes if she does not manage to reproduce herself. Cronenberg gives her the lines: *"When I'm dead... I'll just be dead... I'll really never have been a woman at all. Just a girl."*³⁸

The sensation that the life of the woman is not fulfilled without having children is not just addressed here, but comes up earlier in the film. Elliot implies that the life of the (famous) woman is empty and incomplete without the opportunity to reproduce. Gynecology and motherhood are inevitably connected, and therefore motherhood (inevitably) plays an important role in *Dead Ringers*. The fact that the twins are male gynecologists means that they are not only able to cure whatever is wrong with their female patients, but they also have the power and ability to impregnate them.³⁹ Therefore, it is not just the twins' sexual desire towards objectified female patients that creates a controversy, it is their perverse masculine desire towards the maternal,⁴⁰ the womb, the inner workings of the female body - that originally created them: identical twins, reflections of each other.

A deranged Beverly creates a set of medical instruments, a combination between existing medical instruments designed for standardized bodies that never exist in reality, and the bones and organs of the human anatomy.⁴¹ The fact that Beverly gets them made by a sculptor, an artist, who later ends up using them as part of an exhibition, shows the thin line Cronenberg created between medical reality and artistic expression. *'That art (or, for Aristotle, tragedy in particular) is a place where spectators can come to experience pain as both enjoyable and purgative.'*⁴² The instruments are a physicalization of Beverly's deranged and drug-induced inner psyche⁴³ and a way to understand or deal with the - by him- twisted reality of his relationship with Claire. (And through her, all women) *"Trying to come to grips with the world by dissecting it, by analyzing it, not to come to an emotional understanding, but to come to it from the rational aspect."*⁴⁴ Beverly starts to believe that it is not the instruments that do not fit the female body, but the female body that is inherently wrong.

37 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.151

38 *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:22:07

39 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p. 156

40 Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p.60

41 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:35:54

42 Maggie Nelson, *The art of cruelty*, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2011) p. 10/11

43 Maggie Nelson, *The art of cruelty*, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2011) p. 10/11

44 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:39:00

SCENE 6:

[It has been four months since she last had her period]

*Lazy (adjective)⁴⁵
la·zi·er, la·zi·est.*

Definition of Lazy:

- 1. averse or disinclined to work, activity, or exertion; indolent*
- 2. causing idleness or indolence*
- 3. slow-moving; sluggish*

I have always considered 'lazy' as an attitude, something that when desired could be changed, not a way to describe the functioning of a part of my body.

After the ultrasound, the (male) doctor welcomed me back into his office. He sat down, I sat down. There was my nervous tick again, touching my nose without realizing. He started speaking. It was a bit of a blur for me, the words in this moment. However, I do recall the following lines: 'You have a lazy egg tube.' And 'Come back when you want children, then we can see how bad it actually is.'

He stood up, I stood up. He shook my hand. The meeting was over, clear gestures by the (male) doctor told me that. I left his office not quite sure if I understood anything he had just said to me, or knew any of the medical terms connected to what seemed to be the problem inside my uterus so that I could look it up at home. Lazy was the only word that stuck.

As I was unlocking my bike that was parked outside, I promised myself that next time I would go and see the female doctor in the practice.

45 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Lazy," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lazy>> [accessed 12 April 2021]

SCENE 7:

At night I dream of medical instruments:

Hinged caterpillar crawling around, forms perfection inside, seductive as it is.

*I know reality when the hard cold metal touch of sterilized reflecting silver is reaching within.
Dissecting the imagined dream of its competitive and realistic twin, transforms, high on
expectations, external substances under the skin.*

*Creaking hinges, caterpillars spreading, moving through liquids, unlocalized, until the expected
yet unannounced encounter occurs. I am now a prisoner of my own pulsating heartbeat.
Channeled and amplified, mirrored by the hard cold touch of sterilized reflecting silver.*

SCENE 8:

At night I dream of Siamese twins:

Beverly lies in bed with Claire. In his dreams, he wakes up, and Elliot is in the bed with them.

The room is filled with blue light. They are Siamese twins. An external organ looking like pulsating abdominals, blue and pink, is connecting them around their stomachs. Claire bows over and bites their external abdominal-like connecting organ into two pieces. Both twins moan.

Beverly wakes up screaming. Claire comforts him, and offers him another sleeping pill.⁴⁶



I-I'm afraid I'm not familiar...

24.

Foreshadowing 3:

A game of seducing and being seduced.



25.



[Woman eats fruit]

26.



I'm taking them.
He's made another copy!

27.



Just do me.

28.



their bones the ashes that remain.

29.

WHO IS THIS?



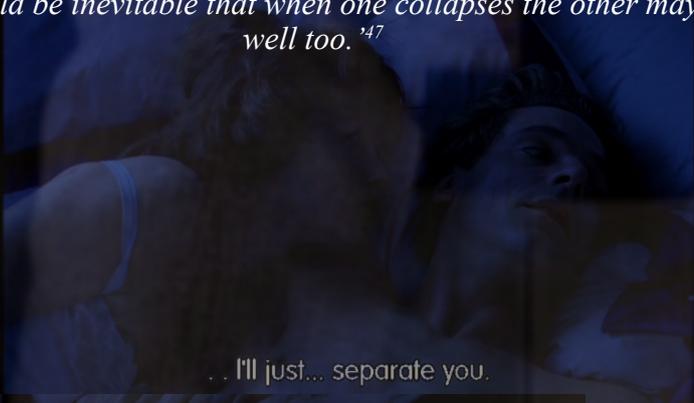
30.



31.

are asked to fuck or die.

*'I guess if you think about twins being two parts of the same being, then it could be inevitable that when one collapses the other may very well too.'*⁴⁷



... I'll just... separate you.

Don't let me dream that again.

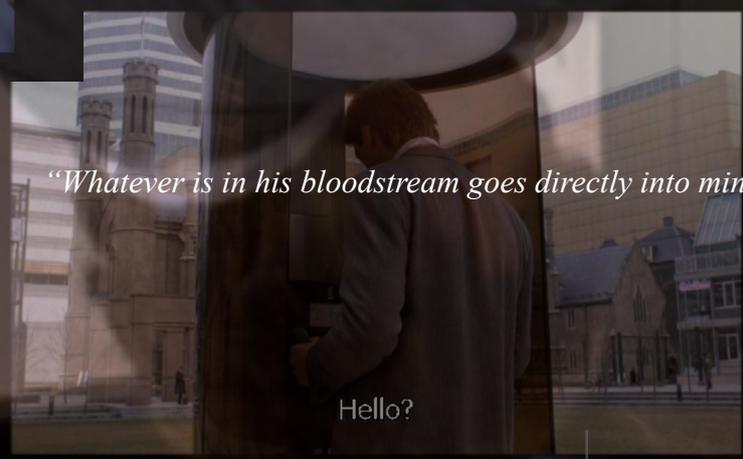
32.

33.



... I think there's something wrong with you.

34.



*"Whatever is in his bloodstream goes directly into mine."*⁴⁸

Hello?

35.

36.

47 Dead Ringers, the director's cut, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:29:55
48 Dead Ringers, the director's cut, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:30:43

“Inhabiting a kind of amniotic darkness of the womb, the images occupy a perceptual realm – a fragmented world of part-objects where fears of annihilation and chaotic perceptions merge reality and fantasy, self and other.”

- Roger Ballen – The theatre of Apparitions⁴⁹

Reality, Fantasy, Self, Other.
The spectrum created in-between these four words:
Speculations. Hallucinations, Dreamed connections, Dissections

49 Roger Ballen, *The theatre of Apparitions*, in collaboration with Marguerite Rossouw (London, Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2016), p.8

SCENE 9:

The blue light behind the mirror, illuminating his face while he shaves.⁵⁰

Staring through the reflective glass, a replication of yourself. Look into your own eyes, follow every movement you make. The glass reflects it all: there is nowhere you can hide.

50 Dead Ringers, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:32:51

The (drugged) mind

SCENE 10:

Beverly comes home, and finds a drugged Elliot underneath the running shower.

“Hey, welcome home kid.”

A strange few shots: While listing whatever shots or pills they have to take, confirmed with a simple: “right”, the twins walk behind each other from room to room in the clinic while the camera captures them through open doors and pans along. The clinic is a mess, the twins are walking through remains of half eaten meals, paper, and medical equipment. The twin’s movement is synchronized. It is almost comic.

The twins are sitting in their office, surrounded by books and litter. Beverly finds a big half eaten cake sitting in-between the books on a shelf, breaks it into two and gives Elliot half. “Happy birthday.” And again, in a different setting perhaps, it is almost comic.

The twins find themselves in an office surrounded by decay.⁵¹

51 Dead Ringers, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:41:02

*Mirror (noun)*⁵²

mir-ror | \ 'mir-ər , 'mi-rər \

Definition of mirror (noun)

- 1: a polished or smooth surface (as of glass) that forms images by reflection
- 2: something that gives a true representation
- 3: an exemplary model (She is the mirror of feminine beauty).

Etymology

Middle English *mirour* “object with a reflective surface, reflection, model of conduct,” borrowed from Anglo-French *mirur*; *mireour*; from *mirer* “to look at” (going back to Latin *mīrārī* “to be surprised, look with wonder at”) + *-ur*, *-eour* –OR

‘Both categories, the male twin and the mutant woman, are “staples of the iconography of the grotesque.” And therein lies the source of Claire’s beauty and repulsion. The twins identify with Claire, with her multiplicitous abnormality that mirrors and even exceeds theirs.’⁵³ It is with wonder that the twins look at Claire and her mutant uterus.

*Love (noun)*⁵⁴

| 'ləv |

Definition of love

- 1: strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties
- 2: attraction based on sexual desire : affection and tenderness felt by lovers
- 3: affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests

Etymology

Middle English, from Old English *lufu*; akin to Old High German *luba* love, Old English *lēof* dear, Latin *lubēre*, *libēre* to please

Love: ‘Which some have called transference. Which some have called reading. Which some have called writing. Which some have called écriture. Which some have called displacement, slippage, gap. Which some have called the unconscious. Which some have called the discourse of the Other. Which, if it can be spoken (of), written (of), at all, produces knots.’⁵⁵

52 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “Mirror,” <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mirror>> [accessed 12 April 2021]

53 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.151

54 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “Love,” <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>> [accessed 12 April 2021]

55 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent, Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Gard*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1990) p.88

The film starts off with the young twins, identical both physically as well as in dress. Their physical appearance, as well as the street they are growing up on, is based on Cronenberg's own childhood. It is clear from the start that the twins share everything: living, profession, sexuality, personality. They take each other's roles when needed, ensuring they are able to share every experience. Like an octopus: one organism with multiple brains. This goes well for the twins, they are seemingly successful in their profession and are receiving awards for their research within the (gynecological) field. However, the film's turning point is when this impersonation starts to affect Beverly and Elliot's relationship. Mark Browning states in *David Cronenberg, Author or filmmaker?*: 'As Elliot has been impersonating Beverly in Claire's bed, by the time the real Beverly consummates his relationship with her, he has the impossible task of outperforming what he perceives as Elliot's sexual prowess. Elliot's advice to 'just do me' means that Beverly is acting out a subjective fantasy of his brother just as Elliot was, in relation to Beverly earlier.'⁵⁶

Jeremy Irons embodies both twins in the film.⁵⁷ Even though there are no clear visual indicators of their difference, Irons manages to create two individual energies for the twins. Because of this, whenever he plays one of the twins impersonating the other, the physical energy seems off, creating the uncanny representation of the exact physical double, but the separate individual.

In order to perform the scenes on set where both twins appear in one frame, there was another actor, playing the part of the second twin. This 'double' actor, a literal body double, only appears as silhouettes or shadows in the film. This makes the interactions between Irons and Irons more natural in the edited scenes where he appears twice, as he had an opposite actor to perform with. This actor's appearance and presence is of incredible value to the technical creation of the identical twins in *Dead Ringers*. He becomes the invisible twin, the shadow following Irons around but who never shows his face, the actor that played the opposition but is never seen. There is no sensation of twins in the film without the use of special effects. 'Jean Baudrillard's⁵⁸ notion of simulation is at play here. The simulation replaces the signified, the representation is taken for what is real.'⁵⁹ The illusion of twins suddenly comes to life in the few scenes where actual twins appear - for instance when the female twins fulfill Elliott's fantasy of sexual intimacy with his own twin brother. 'The day the twins were on set, gave it a kind of reality that until this point was just cinematic'⁶⁰

Elliot claims that Beverly would have never had sex if it wasn't for their shared sexual experiences, and is the one who initiates the relationship between Beverly and Claire. This relationship was however, like everything else in their lives, supposed to be something they shared. After Elliot points it out, Claire's profession as an actress, makes Beverly doubt the nature of his relationship with her, as it is immediately implied that Claire is capable of becoming multiple characters.

When Elliot comes and visits her while her makeup is done for a film she is playing in, half of her face transforms into a character, a different personality. As an actress she is pushing her own personality to the background whilst performing, as the twins are trying to do with each other. However, they are so connected that they cannot seem to lose each other. They are intertwined.

56 Mark Browning, *David Cronenberg, author or film-maker?* (Bristol, Intellect Books, 2007) p. 86

57 *Cronenberg's choice of the same actor to play both twins in dead ringers means that the viewer is forced to pay minute attention as to who is on screen at any one time – quote from Mark Browning, David Cronenberg, author or film-maker?* (Bristol, Intellect Books, 2007) p.88

58 Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p.13

59 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.136

60 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:53:36

*'Most of the time this twinship remains obscure and symbolic, but whenever it materializes, it illuminates the mystery of the symbolic separation, of the invisible division found at the heart of each of us.'*⁶¹

It is Claire who becomes a physicalization of that invisible division, she bites apart the repulsive external and pulsating organ that is connecting the two twins in Beverly's dream. Her *"tripleness is in excess of the twins' doubleness."*⁶² She is making Beverly realize that they have elements of their lives that they are not willing to share, to replicate for each other. He wants Claire just for himself. As much as Elliot tries to keep his 'little brother' close to him, the ties, like umbilical cords, that once kept them together, are slowly unraveled. To then appear stuck in a knot that they can only seem to escape through death. *'Knots between desire and frustration, mastery and loss, madness and reason, illness and cure, men and women. In a word, love.[...] Which some have called the discourse of the Other.'*⁶³

It is the ending scenes, with a panning camera following the twins as they stumble in perfectly synchronized steps through their trashed practice, where they seem to merge. The twins become one person with two bodies. The only way to escape this double body is through death. Beverly's vision has shifted: it is no longer the mutant woman that his instruments are supposed to heal. It is Elliot and himself that are now playing the role of the Siamese mutant that needs to be separated: the sculptural instruments are finally gaining purpose. Doctor becomes patient. Drugged minds objectifying each other's bodies. They use the Siamese twins as the metaphor of inevitable, unbearable and unescapable closeness. *'Through Cronenberg's lens, the Mantles are like specimens in a Petri dish, coagulating and splitting apart and finally fusing together again in death.'*⁶⁴ The filmic interpretation of the microscope, following their lives in close up, zooming in and out of their existence.

After Elliot dies, Beverly wakes up as if from a dream. He realizes that his dream has become reality, both the one where he kills Elliot, as well as the moment he dreamed of before where the twins are portrayed as actual Siamese twins. *'Put the two sides together and you get a fairly rounded person. But apart they lack each other.'*⁶⁵ He returns once again to the mirror, lit with blue lights from behind, as he looks himself in the eyes while shaving, and shaping himself, finally an individual to go out and face Claire.

61 Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p.13

62 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p. 151

63 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent, Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Gard*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1990) p.88

64 'Dead Ringers', *AV Club, Pop culture obsessives writing for the pop culture obsessed*, <<https://film.avclub.com/dead-ringers-1798217373>> [accessed 10 January 2021]

65 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:06:25



37.



38.



39.

Watching through the window, observing the operating room, looking into the space that is the inner body.



42.

... it is possible to...
modify several other organs;

41.

... had a chance to...

Foreshadowing 4:

I'm not sure I know everything.

40.



43.

Hello?



44.

How about some cake?



... for myself.

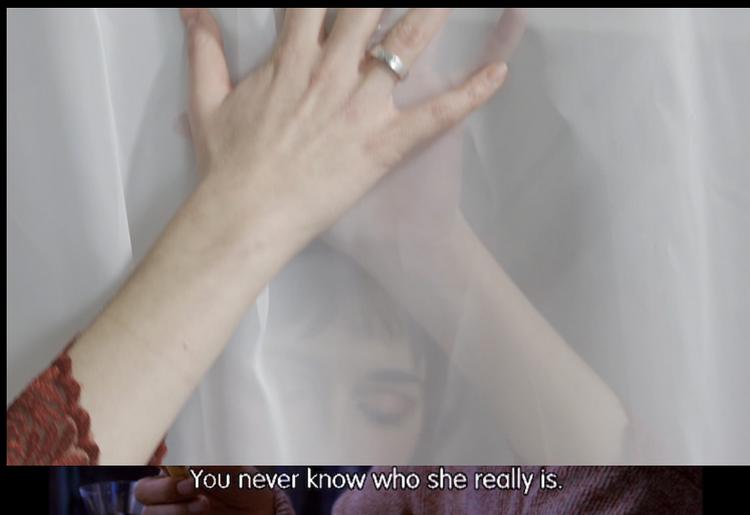
45.

A spider is slowly weaving its web. Its eight eyes are focused on the little fly that zooms around right in front of their web. Eight different perspectives, eight different ways of framing. Eight depictions of that small zooming fly.



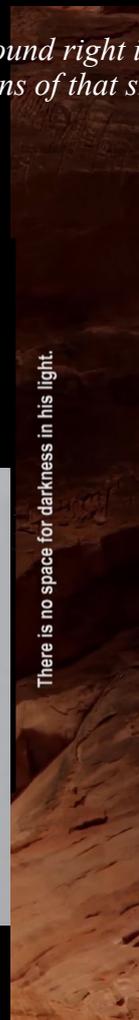
This... hurts?

46.



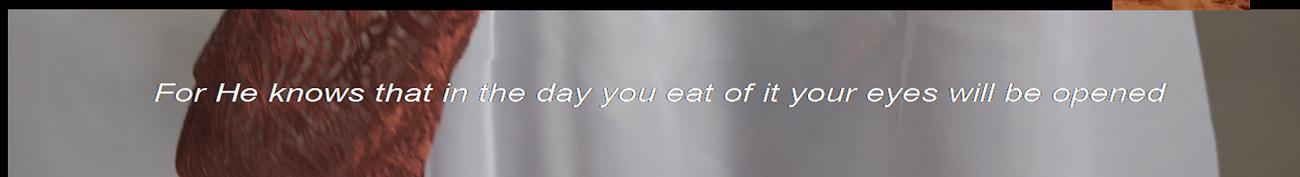
You never know who she really is.

47.



There is no space for darkness in his light.

49.



For He knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened

48.

**- Ethical.
- No.**

A briefcase stands alone, abandoned, in a phone booth in Toronto. Waiting for its owner who never finished his phone call after the actress asked him who he is.⁶⁶

50.

SCENE 11:

Man (Beverly) raises his arms. He is wearing a terrifying yet fascinating and beautiful red surgical robe, that a female assistant is closing up properly for him. Everybody in the operating room is wearing red. The operation room almost looks sacred, connecting life and death through the bright red fabric.⁶⁷

The twins are high priests of gynecology, so the costumes are appropriate.⁶⁸

67 Dead Ringers, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:20:01

68 Dead Ringers, *the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 1:20:06

*'And just as attacker and attacked are expressions of the same self in nightmares, so they are expressions of the same viewer in horror film. We are both Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; the force of the experience, in horror, comes from "knowing" both sides of the story.'*⁶⁹

69 Carol J Clover, *Men, Woman and Chainsaws, gender in the modern horror film*. (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2015)

The (Fooled) eyes

*To see (verb)*⁷⁰
| 'sē | saw | 'sô |; seen | 'sēn |; seeing | 'sē-ij |

Definition of see

- 1: to perceive by the eye
- 2: to be aware of : recognize
- 3: to imagine as a possibility : suppose
- 4: to form a mental picture of : visualize
- 5: to perceive the meaning or importance of : understand
- 6: examine, watch
- 7: to attend as a spectator

Etymology

Middle English, from Old English *gesiht* faculty or act of sight, thing seen; akin to Old High German *gisiht* sight, Old English *sēon* to see

*'Not only does the clinician look at the patient, but the patient can also look back at the clinician.'*⁷¹

*To Know (verb)*⁷²
knew | 'nü also 'nyü |; *known* | 'nōn |; *knowing*

Definition of know

- 1: to perceive directly : have direct cognition of
- 2: to have understanding of
- 3: to recognize as being the same as something previously known
- 4: to be acquainted or familiar with
- 5: to have experience of
- 6: to be aware of the truth or factuality of : be convinced or certain of

Etymology

Middle English, from Old English *cnāwan*; akin to Old High German *bichnāan* to recognize, Latin *gnoscere, noscere* to come to know, Greek *gignōskein*

*'The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.'*⁷³

70 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "See," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/see>> [accessed 12 April 2021]

71 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.26

72 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Know," <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/know>> [accessed 12 April 2021]

73 John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, (London, Penguin books, 1972) p. 7

Walter Benjamin describes the director as the surgeon (see *The body of Dead Ringers*). Even though this description seems a perfect fit for Cronenberg and *Dead Ringers*, I can't help but think about spiders with their eight big shiny eyes and hairy legs. Composing a web, connecting sections, creating pathways, catching characters. Observing the world through eight channeled vision, each eye, lens, zoomed in to a different detail. Tracking the prey, the other, the character through its frame of vision. Watching the victorious tragedy unfold in front of them as their prey flies into their carefully constructed web. The director as an eight eyed spider, creating a web with narrative, character, actors, and spectatorship. Framing the story through their own eight eyes, lenses, perspectives. Film: a living organism, that much like spiders has mutable eyes, lenses, to observe the world from different angles. The director enforces his own vision onto the viewer. Adjusting the frame, vision, and narrative to their own perception of the world. This is when the male gaze enters the screen, allowing for the objectification of the female character within the film.

*'Feminism has no single vision, although it is a visionary way of seeing.'*⁷⁴

SCENE 12:

In both upper corners of the frame TV screens are attached on the wall. The TV screens show microscopic images of intestines whilst being operated on. Elliot is standing, facing the spectator, in this case both the film's audience, but also the audience consisting of what seem to be students in the lecture that he is giving. Behind Elliot is a wall completely made of glass, separating him, the TV screens and his audience from an operating room. We, the audience, and the audience within the film are looking through the window. Beverly, dressed in full red gown⁷⁵ is operating in the carefully staged operating room.⁷⁶ He is bending over, looking into what appears to be a microscope, and is probably seeing the same image as the one that appears on the TV screens on the top corners on both sides in the frame.

Two TVs, two brothers, two sets of eyes, two rooms, one frame within the film.

74 Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p.3

75 Cardinal like operating gowns – *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:55:07

76 In the directors *Cut*, David Cronenberg speaks about the 'Mundane and bankrupt looks' of the existing operating room / theatre. He therefore decides to create his own operating room on set, allowing for a more cinematic and dramatic look.

In *Dead Ringers* framing plays a key element: we see the doctor looking towards the (according to the deranged Beverly) mutant private parts of their female patients, the spectator, however, never gets to see any of this because of the carefully framed shots and the placement of drape-sheets.⁷⁷ The spectator is purely observing the observations, rather than experiencing them first hand. “[...] in gynecological textbooks it is necessary that viewers “see of themselves.” In *Dead Ringers*, however, genitalia never enter the camera’s frame, maintaining the idea that the on-screen physicians have sole viewing rights.”⁷⁸ Kapsalis also adds that the fact that it is only the twins that see (or feel) the evidence of Claire’s inner ‘mutation’ adds to the idea of the monstrous and mutant woman who first catches the twins’ interest and desire, allowing for Beverly’s madness.⁷⁹ In my own metaphor: the spider has woven a part of the web, created this connection between madness and desire. But the silk used by the spider to make this connection is transparent, and therefore the prey, the viewer or the spectator, is not able to see it. We just have to believe when the spider says that it is there and try to not get caught in it.

The sexualized male spectatorship that occurs behind the drape-sheets in the Mantle twins’ clinic can be linked to one of the three (male) gazes within Cinema,⁸⁰ according to Laura Mulvey’s theory in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.⁸¹ Building on Freud’s and Lacan’s ideas, Mulvey defines scopophilia as: ‘*The pleasure involved in looking at other people’s bodies as (particularly, erotic) objects without being seen either by those on screen or by other members of the audience.*’⁸² Claire, however, changes her role as object by looking back.⁸³ She sees the man that has examined her, his twin, and a relationship starts to take shape.

The use of one actor for both twins makes the spectator, whenever Irons enters the screen, look for clues about the identity of that twin. To discern one from the other you have focus. Intensify your vision. Narrow your eyes to take in every detail. Cronenberg uses it to create an alienated or observing relationship between the spectator and the characters - either Beverly or Elliot - on screen. The twins are a rare, separated species, a spectacle that Cronenberg has framed for us to witness and observe. The apartment of the twins; an open space spread over several floors with large windows, stylized Italian furniture and lots of blue light, functions almost as an aquarium.⁸⁴

77 ‘The drape-sheet curtain rises at the hands of the physician, dividing front stage from backstage, while the exam spotlight shines on the spectacle. The physician spectator inserts a speculum and props open a little makeshift stage within a stage. In this space, a parallel drama occurs.’ Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p.15

78 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p 150

79 Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p 150

80 According to Mulvey, mainstream cinema appeals to the scopophilic instinct (a term Freud chose for the activity of looking at another as an erotic object). Mulvey concludes that this gaze is male, and that cinema relies on three kinds of gaze: the camera, usually operated by a man, looking at woman as objects; the look of male actors within the film which is structured to make their gaze powerful; and the gaze of the spectator, who is presumed to be male, voyeuristically identifying with the camera/actor gazing at women represented in fetishistic and stereotypical ways. Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p. 14

81 Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Cited in Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997)

82 OxfordReference.com, s.v. “scopophilia” <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authori-ty.20110803100448183>> [Accessed 16 April 2021]

83 ‘Not only does the clinician look at the patient, but the patient can also look back at the clinician.’ Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates, Performing Gynaecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 1997) p26

84 *Dead Ringers, the director’s cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 00:11:48

In the final scenes of the film, the trashed practice of the twins functions as a zoo: the high and deranged twins caged with their own waste, slowly rotting. The viewer, sucked into the cage by the camera movement, gets closer and closer to the twins, following them through a tunnel vision. We have blinders on so as to focus on nothing but the details of the characters in front of us. We get so close, that slowly the twins are becoming one. *'Cronenberg focuses on existential dilemmas of what it is to be human, rather than how these conflicts are played out in wider society [...] the environments in which Cronenberg's protagonists move are largely enclosed, private, and mostly highly subjective.'*⁸⁵

The climactic penetration of the instruments (for mutants) entering Elliotts body, is transformed in a gentle stream of blood slowly dripping from the side of the treatment table. The expected climax is left out of the frame, leaving it to our own imagination what the penetration of the instrument into Elliotts guts must have looked like. *'It is all suggested, which can be, obviously, even more effective than seeing.'*⁸⁶

John Berger claims that the relationship between what we see and what we know is never set.⁸⁷ It is this relationship, combined with the audience's imagination that can make horror films as horrific and beautiful as some manage to be. Without the spectator to add their imagination to the implied (yet non-visual) scenes in the movie, the complete narrative of the film would not exist. *'Horror films thus respond to interpretation, as Robin Wood puts it, as "at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences – the fusion made possible by the shared structures of a common ideology.'*⁸⁸ It is the common understanding that, within film, acting is a resemblance of real life which usually allows us to fill in the blanks, and use our interpretation.

*"We give you license to show us people fucking and dying. And we know they are not. And you know they are not. And we know that you know that we know that they are not. It's all to prove we are alive twice over: First as an affirmation and then as a challenge to death itself. The willing and very necessary suspension of disbelief."*⁸⁹

– Eisenstein in Guanajuato

85 Mark Browning, *David Cronenberg, author or film-maker?* (Bristol, Intellect Books, 2007) p. 11

86 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:45:59

87 John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, (London, Penguin books, 1972) p. 7

88 Robin Wood, *Return to the Repressed* (Film comment, 1980) p.26 cited in Carol J Clover, *Man woman and chainsaws, gender in the modern horror film*. (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2015) p. 12

89 Eisenstein in Guanajuato dir. by Peter Greenaway (FU Works, 2015)

SCENE 13:

Yellow, Blue, Red. Yellow, Blue, Red, Yellow.

Yellow bead, Blue bead, Red bead.

*Girl, around 6 or 7 years old, holding a piece of thread from her nose to the wall in front of it.
Placed on the piece of thread are colorful beads.*

Putting colorful beads on a piece of thread is a good tool to train the muscles behind your eyes.

You put the piece of thread on your nose and hold it there with one hand, while you hold the other side of the thread in front of you. Then you switch from bead to bead, color to color, and you try to make sure that you stare at the little beads and only see one of each bead, instead of two. In the beginning, the bead that is closest to your nose can be placed quite far away on the thread; as far away as needed for you to only see the bead one time. As you train your eye muscles, the bead can come closer and closer to your nose. Allowing you a clear, single, close-up vision of the colorful bead in front of you.

This is called the brock string. It helps people whose eyes don't work together properly, and trains them to see the world in singular, instead of double.



51.



This is unknown territory
we're moving into.



52.

Foresadowing 5:

53.



5:

The glass, touch of the illusion



54.

Water running uphill,

55.

Windows reflecting light.



She used to be looking for his love,
the light from the heavens.

56.

Elly... Elly... Elly...



We haven't got any ice cream, Elly.

58.



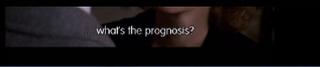
59.

57.



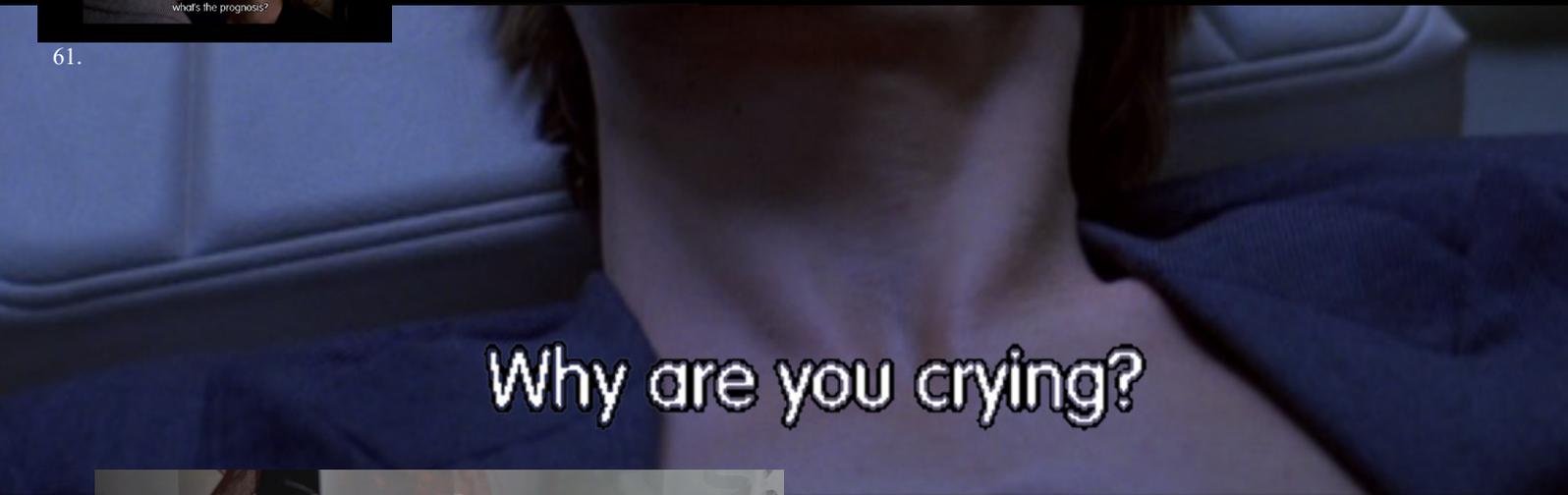
I had a terrible dream.

60.

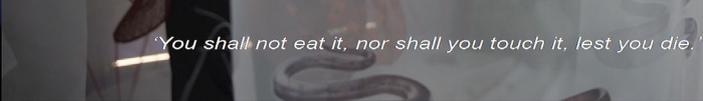


what's the prognosis?

61.



Why are you crying?



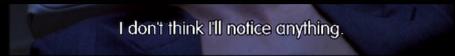
"You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die."

62.



What sort of terrible things?

63.



I don't think I'll notice anything.

64.

65.



Get him the hell outta here!

66.



now there's only love for the dark.

*"I think the clues were there to be seen beforehand."*⁹⁰

67.

The stitching up (Conclusion)

The surgery is over. The sound of metal touching metal as the used surgical instruments are placed back onto their silver tray. Needles and thread are passed over to the one responsible for the stitching. Precision, detail, concentration. An attempt to return to the once seamless fabric of the body. An attempt to return our insides back into their natural place of hiding.

However, Cronenberg used his camera, his ability to create spectatorship, as a mirror to those insides. Once you have seen something it is hard to forget what it looks like, even when it is in hiding.

Though *Dead Ringers* was made in 1988, the fear of gynecologists has unfortunately not changed much within the realm of perception of both the female and male psyche. Speculums are still terrifying, and using the camera angles and framing to suggest their presence, still conveys a terrifying image. Similarly, the idea of a presumed male spectator within cinema has changed, despite the fact that cameras within cinema are mainly directed and operated by men.⁹¹

My mother however, had permanent gynecological damage, causing many pelvic surgeries. Through my mother's experiences, gynecology was a part of my life when growing up. My memories of my body, my mother's body, and female bodies in general decide how I see myself and how I will shape myself. The impact of gynecology has passed through generations, the ideas of motherhood, the connections between the gynecologist, the inner workings of my body and my own sexuality. All these elements, parts of me and my life, were waiting to be connected, waiting to be framed, by the surgeon director David Cronenberg. If only he knew.

91 *'According to Mulvey, mainstream cinema appeals to the scopophilic instinct (a term Freud chose for the activity of looking at another as an erotic object). Mulvey concludes that this gaze is male, and that cinema relies on three kinds of gaze: the camera, usually operated by a man, looking at women as objects; the look of male actors within the film which is structured to make their gaze powerful; and the gaze of the spectator, who is presumed to be male, voyeuristically identifying with the camera/actor gazing at women represented in fetishistic and stereotypical ways.'* Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p. 14

THE RECOVERY ROOM

*Loved through expectations
I really
really love you.
Connecting.
My body: Your giant heart
Joined.
It is a love hate letter
Bringing out
The horror and madness
Inside my body
Reflecting on the other
I know you exist
The identical twin:
I don't know their name
But it was beautiful.
My world is framed,
But in your garden I am free.
I imagine.
The sky is a mirror.
Meeting with water:
Translucent water carries
The weight of memories
Portals to pieces of earth
Flesh and body
Internal evil: snakes and insects,
Killing octopus.
Drowning,
Filling,
Frying
Dissecting the imagined and dreamed
With the hard cold touch of metal
Silver
All the blood and love that was not directed to me
But to someone else
I am now:
Drinking the blood through a giant straw.
How it will shape me,
Reaching within.
Chasing heart shaped balloons,
Filled with helium
Resembling the other.*

*I know you exist but I can't feel you
Empty space as human vessels
transparent
I want to watch, to be a spectator,
I want to watch, to feel.
My lonely heart longs for more*



Final SCENE 14:

[The next morning the camera pans slowly through the room]

After killing his identical older twin on their shared birthday, the murder weapon being a medical instrument he designed to use on mutant women -, and whilst on an extreme high from a cocktail of prescription drugs, and while awakening from the illusion that they were in fact Siamese twins and one of them had to sacrifice himself in order for the other to move on with life; this is what he attempts to do: move on. After a messy shave, he goes out and tries. Rings the phone. But before the woman on the other end of the line even says hello he drops the phone, and leaves it hanging off the hook. He returns to his annihilated practice.

Both twins on the floor, one alive though mentally slowly decaying, one cut open and already in a different reality. A moment of intimacy, as life holds on to death.

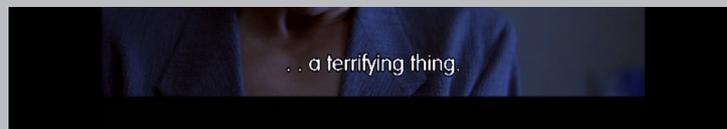
The screen goes black and the credits start.⁹²

‘Their deaths, not quite suicide, not quite murder’⁹³

92 *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) 01:47:05

93 *Dead Ringers, the director's cut*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988)

Final shades and shadows (Postscript)



A teenage girl walks into a large room on the second floor of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao.⁹⁴ It is 2011, and the room she just walked into had the piece Palms (2007)⁹⁵ by John Bock on display.

When I was 13 we went on a summer holiday to the north of Spain. It was one of the first holidays after my parents had split up, we also had, very evenly, split this holiday up. One week with one parent, one week with the other. The campsite we were staying at was somehow close to Bilbao, and on our trip to the city we visited the Guggenheim Museum. That is when it happened.

I remember the big, high ceiling room, with the walls seeming grey because of the lack of lighting. I remember the car in the middle of the room, exploded with a giant lobster-like body, octopus tentacles coming out of the hood. Perhaps they were veins. I remember a screen, playing a film which was set in the American desert. The same car driving around. Bloody scenes, metal wire, cactuses and palms. I remember staying in this room for a very long time. Every time I let my eyes go around the room I would become more and more amazed, each time finding something new, a detail I had not noticed before. It was like entering a parallel universe. The film was, or seemed to be - when compared to horror films by directors such as Cronenberg - very low budget. Grainy images and clearly handmade slightly awkward props and effects. But in combination with the shiny lobster like shapes arising from the car it was perfect.

I did not realize it then, but this was the moment I decided that I wanted to become an artist.

Looking back, I think that this moment in the Guggenheim can be related to my later obsession with cruelty, darkness, evil and their representation within my practice as an artist. The impulse to realize the feared and yet desired. While examining horror, cruelty, darkness and evil, it became apparent to me that these stories are mainly told from a male perspective, imagined by men, and produced by men. Both in the art world as well as in the film industry, Dead Ringers being a perfect example. This brings me back directly to biblical stories and the role that men have within these stories, the foundation of my practice as an artist.

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will surely not die. For He knows that the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing of good and evil."⁹⁶ (Genesis 3:1–5)

Open eyes in an ancient man made world ruled by a male God looking down upon us from above.⁹⁷

Ancient myths made the primal couple not a Goddess and a God, but a Goddess and a Serpent. The Goddesses womb was a garden of paradise in which the serpent lived.⁹⁸

94 *The Luminous Interval* (exhibition) Guggenheim, Bilbao: April 12, 2011 - October 16, 2011.

95 John Bock, *Palms*, 2007, video installation.

96 Genesis 3:1–5, *The Holy Bible*

97 Excerpt of: Sylke van der Heiden, *Turn around Bright eyes*, (2020), video installation.

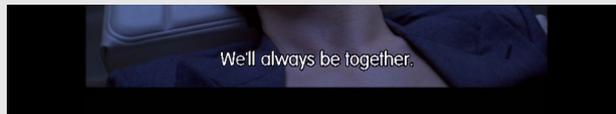
<<https://www.sylkevanderheiden.com/turn-around-bright-eyes>>

98 Barbara G Walker, *The woman's encyclopedia of myths and secrets*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1983) p.642

Credits

Thank you Stan Martin and Thea Christy-Parker for our discussions and for your proofreading.
Thank you Gemma Blackshaw for you amazing support.
Thank you Henriëtte Meijer for being the best mother.

Before the light disappears



69.

Twins run in my family.

(List of)

Images

Sections of images, shadows of my own works and elements of the film, are presented together in a joined visual world. As time moves on they follow the films progress, transforming into a blurred, chaotic and messy combination of the two worlds.

Cover image: *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) Screenshot

1. *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) Screenshot
2. *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) Screenshot
3. *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) Screenshot
4. Sylke van der Heiden, *Dust all the Days*, London, 2021, Screenshot
5. *Dead Ringers*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Morgan Creek Productions, 1988) Screenshot
6. Sylke van der Heiden, *Dust all the Days*, London, 2021, Screenshot

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The moment my fear and desire met:
A (dead) (double) (male) body looking at the stage inside my womb

Sylke van der Heiden

2021

