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**The Artist is Present:
Lynch, Mendieta and Creative Practices
of the
Body On-Screen**

A thesis by

Archie Porter

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Ana Mendieta

&

David Lynch

For changing how I look at the world.

Abstract

This thesis examines visualisations of the human body and investigates how specific creative practices influence body representation on screen. Utilising a mixed methodological approach, including practice-related frameworks and qualitative textual analysis, this study will present socio-cultural implications of body conceptualisation. To demonstrate contemporary creative practice of depicting the body on screen, this thesis has produced a creative output in the form of a short film entitled *Iris* (2021). The film is a central output for the research and was created in response to the analysis of selected works of artist-filmmakers, David Lynch and Ana Mendieta. Through this creative component, I demonstrate the capacity to *do* research via filmmaking, locating the influences of Lynch and Mendieta on my practice. This research draws on Laura Mulvey's influential theory of 'visual pleasure' and the male gaze, as well as Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity.

Throughout their respective careers, both Lynch and Mendieta have continuously adopted specific techniques that challenge and subvert gender representation. Using qualitative analysis, I will examine two selected works from each of these artists: *Six Figures Getting Sick* (1967), Lynch's first true experiment with moving images, and *Eraserhead* (1977), Lynch's debut feature-film. This will highlight Lynch's aesthetics of depicting gender and the body from the transition of short audio-visual practices to feature filmmaking. For Mendieta, I will analyse *Untitled: Glass on Body Imprints* (1972), a photography series and performance work that examines gender representation and female identity through self-portraiture. Lastly, I will explore *Sweating Blood* (1973), an experimental film-work in which Mendieta expands her practices and investigates the female body as a visual site of crisis and violence. Furthermore, this research is among the first to comparatively examine Lynch and Mendieta's work, thus I will generate new knowledge and heighten awareness of these specific creative practices. As a final analytical component, I present a critical exegesis of *Iris*. Through this, I discuss the various phases of production and argue the necessity for the creative component as a tool for conveying and generating knowledge.

Preface

As this thesis utilises the framework of screen production research, a practical component has been produced in the form of a short fictional film, *Iris*. This creative practice output can be viewed using the below working link:

Iris: Short Film (YouTube): <https://youtu.be/L91E3A3A0Vk>

Additionally, a short trailer for the film can be viewed using the following link:

Iris - Teaser Trailer (Vimeo): <https://vimeo.com/506388018>

It is advised that the film is viewed before Chapter Five (Exegesis), in order to better contextualise the creative output within the research.

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Introduction: The Body On-Screen

I don't necessarily love rotting bodies, but there's a texture to a rotting body that is unbelievable. Have you ever seen a little rotted animal? I love looking at those things, just as much as I like to look at a close-up of some tree bark, or a small bug, or a cup of coffee, or a piece of pie. You get in close and the textures are wonderful. (Lynch, 2006, p.121)

The screen allows creative practitioners to express and visualise the body through innovative, challenging approaches. Depictions of the human body have been a significant element of cinema since the establishment of the medium. Film is a universal language, and the camera highlights the body and its physicality in order to disseminate the human form as a means of entertainment or artistic expression. As a practice-related project, the aim of this thesis is to answer the following primary and subordinate research questions: How do specific creative practices influence body representation on screen? What are the socio-cultural implications of the body on screen in the 21st century? Lastly, how can emerging filmmakers develop a contemporary practice focused on the body? In order to do so, this study will investigate the representation and stylisation of the body on screen, focusing specifically on two artists/filmmakers: David Lynch and Ana Mendieta. A creative output has been produced in the form of a short fictional film, titled *Iris* (2021). This short film is in response to analysis of the aforementioned practitioners' screenwork. Situating my own practical component within this research is a necessary and integral element, as it allows the opportunity to contextualise new forms of practice within the analytical frameworks used to investigate Lynch and Mendieta's depiction of body representation. This is necessary for the research, as it helps to situate independent filmmaking practices within the wider context of screen-production research (SPR), which largely involves the study of the creation of audio-visual work and the use of the screen to 'do' research (Batty and Kerrigan, 2018). In doing so, the inclusion of a practical component alongside rigorous analysis of pre-existing work will unearth potential similarities, differences, and new forms of contemporary practice. Ultimately, the film was needed for this research in order to demonstrate the necessity of creative practice *as* research.

Cinema has always centralised the body as a key visual component. In the early days of cinema, Balázs (2011) highlighted that the body, specifically the face, was a site of discovery that films can explore:

The whole of mankind is now busy relearning the long-forgotten language of gestures and facial expressions. This language is not the substitute for words characteristic of the sign language of the deaf and dumb, but the visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh (p.10)

Contrary to this, Gunning (2018) argues that the invention of cinema was born out of a fascination with the human body, and that it was specifically created to record the bodily movement of humans and animals (p.13). Dahlquist et al. (2018) also discuss this seemingly inherent fascination with the human body on-screen, asserting that “screened bodies are at the crosshairs of all cinemas—whether glorious or grotesque, mundane or majestic, dressed or disrobed; impossible, improbable, or imperilled; ‘deviant,’ ‘normal,’ or spectral; and across the panoramas of ethnicities, skin colours, sexualities, and ages” (p.01). While early cinema attempted to explore narrative and character, such as silent cinema, these productions were on a very limited and stereotypical scale. In order to counter this, early cinema paid strong attention to imagery of the body in similar methods to photography practices, compelling audiences through mere shapes, shadows, traces and outlines (Auerbach, 2007, p.02). As Auerbach (2007) discusses, the early years of cinema frequently relied on the dynamic language of body movements, such as gestures, to represent a conceptual unity in place of a comprehensible story (p.02). The idea of utilising the human body in this sense is a particularly interesting and applicable method for individuals’ creative practice in a contemporary environment. Furthermore, creative practices such as independent filmmaking can incorporate these innovative elements of early cinema, in order to utilise the body as a conceptual vessel and visualise new forms of representation.

The body is an integral component in the work of Lynch and Mendieta, however, both approach representation in vastly different ways. As such, the contrasting perspectives and methods of visualising the body within their creative practice reinforces the importance of examining their work – uncovering the differences in their approach highlights the repercussions of their gender representation, as well as demonstrating new approaches for practitioners to utilise in their contemporary practice. Lynch’s work explores the body through his dreamlike, perverse, at times grotesque and conservative representations of the human form. This attention to the body has been carried throughout the entirety of Lynch’s filmography and artistic practices, such as his ‘Distorted Nudes’ photography collection, in which the female figure is distorted, manipulated and reshaped entirely into abstract forms. Discussing this series, Lee (2010) states that Lynch invents new anatomies and orifices, distorting the body by “severing or

reconstituting appendages, adding void or blur to the settings” (p.11). The result of this bodily manipulation – a common element throughout Lynch’s oeuvre – creates an uncanny, nightmarish characteristic that is frequently attributed to his work. Studlar (1989) delves deeper into the perverse representation of Lynch’s bodies, discussing an overwhelming menacing femininity that encompasses Lynch’s cinematic debut, *Eraserhead*, illustrated by the protagonist’s deformed baby – “the abhorrent product of his girlfriend’s body” (Studlar, 1989, p.04). Studlar goes on to note the underlying importance of bodies and sexuality in the film, using examples such as the dinner scene, in which an older, working class mother slips into a demented, orgasmic state whilst the carcass of an artificial chicken oozes liquid from its empty cavity. Lynch’s representation of the body in relation to sexuality is a far more perverse and unsettling depiction in comparison to other cinematic portrayals, rendering the human form and sex “a loathsome and repellent thing” (Studlar, 1989, p.05). Lynch’s warped representation of the body demonstrates themes such as a masculinist fear of the maternal body, capitalist dehumanisation of the body, and deformity and decay of the infantile body (Taylor, 2000, p.58). Additionally, a significant element of Lynch’s practice concerns textural qualities, an aspect that carries over between Lynch’s various mediums and mixed-method approaches. Corporeal elements such as the flesh, skin, and textural qualities of the body are highlighted through the screen, accentuated through his filmic techniques including specified lighting setups, or framing the subject in close-up. Through such methods, Lynch and other screen-practitioners can uncover new and distinctive ways of visualising the human body.

Where Lynch almost colonises the body, imposing his own dreamlike and heavily Westernised ideals upon his characters and representing a menacing presence of femininity, Mendieta entirely decolonises it. The work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta centred around visualising the human body, particularly the female body, through a variety of experimental creative practices. Mendieta’s work spanned performance art, photography, and short films, yet an exploration of the body and identity remained at the heart of her practice. Additionally, Mendieta’s work highlighted self-portraiture, experimenting with her own body in order to explore her identity as a Cuban woman. As Roulet (2012) proclaims, Mendieta’s art transcended boundaries of gender, geographic displacement, ethnicity, and status, yet remained profoundly Cuban and personal in its representation – bridging the gap, so to speak, between the aesthetics of North American and Cuban sources (p.22). Akin to Lynch’s representation of the body as a grotesque and abstract entity, Mendieta’s earlier works sought to depict the brutality of the body, utilising corporeal elements such as blood in her practice.

The controversial quality of this practice was typically deemed provocative “for their public staging of violence as a social problem” (Szymanek, 2016, p.900). Szymanek (2016) discusses Mendieta’s use of the body as a performative tool, arguing that the confronting and often distressing aesthetic of her creative work massively disrupted conventional spectatorship. Regarding gender, her site-specific and performance work “talked back to the issue of the female body as secreted or shrouded by representation through creating, literally, shrouds” (Schneider, 1997, p.117-119). Through her performances and installations, Mendieta explored the connections of earth and body, representing an absence or ‘loss’ of the body in order to visualise her experiences as a Cuban exile, and to combat issues of racism and colonialism (Schneider, 1997). Mendieta’s work drastically impacted not only forms of body and gender representation through artistic practice, but also principles of audience engagement when challenged with inflammatory portrayals of body violence and female identity.

The body also expresses socio-cultural contexts. Reinforcing this sentiment in their article, Poppi and Urios-Aparisi (2018) contend that “commodification, integration, dissatisfaction, beautification and idealisation, and politicisation are some of the prevalent ways how the body is conceptualised in contemporary culture and societies” (p.298). The body can signify these concepts in reality, however on-screen representation of the body is somewhat different. As Poppi and Urios-Aparisi (2018) go on to explain, the body is a multi-dimensional form in cinema, as it encompasses the physical body of the actor or actress, the actor’s body transformed into character through makeup, costume and other filmic elements, and finally the cinematography of the film (p.299). In terms of cinematographic representation of the human body, for example, an extreme close-up of a face may signify a different meaning than a wider shot, and thus different representations and identities are formed through the visualisation on-screen. Therefore, the creative practices of cinema and filmmaking allow practitioners to ‘shape’ the body, to mould the human form into configurations that are otherwise unachievable through alternate means. This demonstrates several different ways that the body is depicted on-screen, and how it is utilised as a conduit to express particular ideas or transmit affective responses in audiences. However, this thesis will not be looking at audience responses or affective strategies, rather, the research will examine aesthetic approaches and the implications this has on body representation. While there is certainly a

prominence of addressing the body in European cinema, it remains a central point of filmmaking on a worldwide scale.

The following is an outline of the thesis, chapter by chapter, in order to detail the information that each section will cover:

The subsequent chapter, Literature Review, presents an overview of the key texts surrounding body and gender representation, focusing primarily on the work of Judith Butler and Laura Mulvey. Additionally, the review will look at literature regarding the representational methods of Lynch and Mendieta in terms of their body visualisation, as well as the nature of screen-production research. Here, I will demonstrate the gaps in knowledge and discuss how I will advance the arguments further in my research.

The Methodology section will highlight and discuss my analytical methods for the thesis, illustrating the combination of qualitative analysis with practice-related frameworks. This section will also be reinforced by a discussion of the core gender representation materials to illustrate how I am defining this term and how it will be utilised in the research.

Chapters One to Four will form my analysis, beginning with Lynch's short film experiment *Six Figures Getting Sick* (1967), and following with his debut feature *Eraserhead* (1977). Mendieta's analysis will examine her mixed-method photography series *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* (1972). Subsequently, the analysis chapters will conclude with Mendieta's short film-work, *Sweating Blood* (1973).

Chapter Five presents an exegesis detailing the various production stages of my own independent fictional short-film, *Iris* (2021). This chapter will utilise the same analytical framework used in the analyses of Lynch and Mendieta, noting the parallels and contrasts between filmmaking practices and representational strategies. This chapter will be rooted within the framework of screen-production research and argue the necessity for the creative component within the thesis.

Finally, Chapter Six will conclude the thesis, summarising the dissemination of data generated from the research.

Literature Review

Beauvoir and Butler: Body and Gender Representation

Gender and sexuality are intrinsic components when analysing body representations on-screen. These concepts are interlinked and flow throughout almost all genres of film, given the centrality of the body in the medium. Thus, analysing work on gender in a wider context is essential for understanding representational strategies in creative practices. Notably, Simone de Beauvoir's (1988) notions on gender and identity suggest that one is not necessarily born a woman, but, rather, becomes one (p.301). Furthermore, Beauvoir's theories of gender and sex argue that man "grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity, whereas he considers woman's body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it" (Beauvoir, 2018, p.605). These notions of gendered hierarchies as well as the construction of gender, in the sense that one *becomes* a woman, will be advanced further within my analysis of Lynch and Mendieta. Specifically, Beauvoir's research will be essential in understanding Lynch's often conservative and oppositional representations of women juxtaposed with his men. Additionally, Beauvoir's argument will be advanced further in my discussion of Mendieta's *Untitled: Glass on Body Imprints*, in which I argue that Mendieta challenges preconceptions of beauty, gender representation and what it means to 'be a woman.' Beauvoir's theories imply a passive agent that has the capability of appropriating gender and thus formulating various identities. Beauvoir suggests the prominence of time and repetition, and the impact this has on gender relations, in her book *The Second Sex*. For instance, discussing the role of the domestic 'housewife', Beauvoir (1988) declares that "the housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present" (p.470). Beauvoir further extends this idea of repetition and time into maternal activities such as pregnancy and childrearing, key elements of Lynch's *Eraserhead* – demonstrating the marking of time upon the female body, perpetuating the present. While this core text surrounding gender does not necessarily address female representation in filmic terms, Beauvoir's book is important in that it "maps a complex landscape that shows sexual oppression to be a structure of violence undergirded by particular emotions, affects, and behaviours" (Marso, 2016, p.871). In turn, this research text aids the analytical framework particularly for Mendieta's work, in which sexual and cultural oppression led to the representation of gendered violence and provocative acts throughout her creative

practice. Examining Beauvoir's work, Deutscher (2006) declares in her article *Repetition Facility: Beauvoir on Women's Time*:

Beauvoir discusses not only the marking of time - in the sense that a child is fed but must be fed again - but also the historically unchanging forms of women's work, from day to day but also from century to century. Women's days do not progress, and neither does their place in history. (p.328)

While Beauvoir's work is certainly a key text within the realm of gender representation, there are issues in utilising all aspects of her theory within a contemporary study. For example, in regard to the discussion of the housewife or a 'historically unchanging form of women's work', one may argue that this element is not applicable to current cultural climates – as Parr (2005) argues:

The prison-house of domesticity de Beauvoir depicts, one that previously handcuffed women to the role of mother and caregiver all the while allowing men to excel in their careers, has in many respects been dismantled and, for some, completely demolished. (p.322)

This element of the research is advanced further in my analysis of *Eraserhead*, in which Lynch subverts aspect of Beauvoir's text by instead emphasizing the role of the father and male caregivers – although Lynch presents a failed attempt at 'fatherhood'. Regardless of its age, Beauvoir's work is imperative for this research due to its significant influence upon Judith Butler's exploration of gender and performativity.

Crucially, Butler proposes the idea that gender, rather than a fixed or binary attribute, is performative. In the essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, Butler (1988) declares:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p.519)

In this sense, Butler argues that without the repetition of 'acts' that demonstrate a form of 'gender', no identity can ultimately be instituted or constructed. Thus, social agents constitute a social reality in which gender is appropriated through semantic meanings and performances such as language, gesture, or various bodily movements. Drawing on Beauvoir's theory of temporality and repetition perpetuating gender roles, Butler argues that 'stylized acts' are reinforced over time, and it is these 'acts' that institute forms of gender. Advancing this

research further, Butler will be utilised for this thesis in order to provide a framework through which Lynch, Mendieta, and my own creative practice can be analysed. While Butler's article partly addresses theatrical performances of gender, there is a gap in the research in terms of cinema's capabilities. As such, the roles of gender performativity and temporality will be explored within Lynch and Mendieta's work, investigating the impact on specific representations of the body.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (2006) goes on to explain that through the construction or formulation of gender there exists an 'agent'. This agent subsequently appropriates a gender and could, in keeping with Beauvoir's writing, take on other genders. Butler points out aspects of this notion, contending that Beauvoir suggests a variable and volitional viewpoint of gender – though the 'construction' of gender in this instance cannot necessarily be reduced to a simple 'choice'. For instance, Butler highlights the paradoxical nature of this gender formulation, arguing that while one 'becomes' a woman, it is "always under a cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from 'sex'" (Butler, p.48). Thus, there is no clear guarantee in Beauvoir's presumption that 'one' who becomes a woman may specifically be female. Butler goes on to contend that "the body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But 'the body' is itself a construction, as are the myriad 'bodies' that constitute the domain of gendered subjects" (p.49). Developing this, Butler's theory is further complicated through the act of screen-production – another form of "construction", in which all aspects of the audio-visual elements are crafted and manipulated for aesthetic or thematic purposes – including the body. In this sense, gender has the potentiality of being entirely fluid within the frame – much the same as Butler's proposition. This notion will be particularly important going forward in addressing Lynch and Mendieta's visualisation of the body; for example, the ambiguous bodies of Lynch's *Six Figures Getting Sick* reinforce this potentiality – though this will be advanced further within my analysis chapters.

Additionally, Butler's argument discusses theories of gender proposed by Monique Wittig – a prominent feminist theorist and writer. Exploring her claims, Butler notes that "there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality" (Butler, 2006, p.190). With this, the distinction between *gender* and *sex* is effectively attributed to the hierarchical heterosexuality present within socio-cultural and

political norms. The term *woman* acts as a binary and oppositional relation to *man* – and this relation, as Wittig claims, is heterosexuality. However, this theory is further complicated and problematised by the insistence that, as they oppose heterosexuality, a lesbian cannot claim to be woman. According to Wittig, this is due to idea that, because of their sexuality, lesbians transcend this binary opposition and thus can neither be defined as a woman or man. This ‘transcendence’, as Changfoot (2009) contends, refers to a distinct philosophical position in which either a subject is an agent of their own becoming – thus, overcoming adversity – or a matter of relational freedom that “considers differences among subjects that may result in inequities in power and social relations and attempts to correct injustices that result from inequities by creating a symbiosis among differences that could lead to greater freedom for those involved” (p.392). Changfoot (2009) goes on to explain that throughout Beauvoir’s historical account, gender inequality largely occurs due to obstacles and culturally structured normalities that repel women against their goal of transcendence – though, nevertheless, Beauvoir implies that transcendence appears to be destiny for all humans, regardless of gender (p.395). The knowledge gained from the literature by Butler, Beauvoir, and Changfoot will be particularly useful for the qualitative analysis of Mendieta’s work – namely in her loose representation of female ‘transcendence’. As Best (2007) argues, gender plays a crucial role in Mendieta’s oeuvre, as she utilises feminised spaces in her work in order to uncover alternatives to patriarchal culture, while also demonstrating an intertwining of traditionally polarising terms such as “transcendence and objectification, presence and absence and so forth. In other words, she uses an essentialist notion (that women and nature are aligned), and an essentialist position (that there is a fundamental difference between the sexes) in a highly generative way” (p.58). Butler’s work in particular will be central for my argument, as I will discuss the aforementioned theories and constructions of gender in the context of screen-production, an aspect of research that is largely unexplored particularly within literature of Mendieta’s practice. As I have argued, gender and sexuality are intrinsic components of film due to the centrality of the body in cinema; thus, I will utilise Butler’s theory to address this gap in knowledge.

Gender On-Screen: Scopophilia and Mulvey’s Gaze

Laura Mulvey (1999) argues that one of the visual pleasures of film is scopophilia – defined as the pleasure in looking or, in the reverse formation, the pleasure in being looked at (p.835). In

her article, *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey addresses the various gender and sexual imbalances present in a large portion of mainstream cinema, looking into the methods of body visualisation and the subsequent on-screen repercussions of sexualisation, and objectification. Notably, Mulvey (1999) argues that as cinema satisfies the desire for ‘pleasurable looking’, it simultaneously develops a narcissistic form of scopophilia:

The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world. (p.836)

There are differences, however, within Mulvey’s proposition of cinematic scopophilia; on the one hand, the argument notes that scopophilia arises from the visual pleasure of watching bodies, therefore the person or character on-screen produces a kind of sexual stimulation through sight – or, rather, the voyeuristic act of ‘looking’. Contrary to this, the structure of this cinematic ‘looking’ develops a narcissistic aspect regarding viewer identification with the images they are watching. These two contrasting aspects of watching human bodies on-screen, Mulvey argues, are at once a function of sexual instinct as well as developing the ego (p.837). Both Lynch and Mendieta challenge and utilise notions of the gaze through their creative-practice, and as such Mulvey’s text will be utilised as the primary component of my analysis. While Mulvey’s essay has been widely discussed and contextualised in a variety of ways, her theory focuses specifically on mainstream Hollywood cinema, and thus avant-garde or unconventional film works represent a significant gap in the research. Additionally, Mulvey does not account for independent productions, the area in which the creative component for this research will be categorised. In order to fill this gap in knowledge, I will utilise Mulvey’s theory as an analytical framework in order to examine the selected works of Lynch and Mendieta – two artists known for their unconventional aesthetics. Further, the same approach of utilising Mulvey’s gaze and scopophilia will also be applied to my own creative-practice and film component – thus, this literature will be beneficial in generating new knowledge regarding practice and representations of the body.

The most important element of Mulvey’s text for this research is the idea of the gaze – specifically, the male gaze. With this, Mulvey refers to the sexual imbalances and methods of hierarchical gender representation discussed by Butler and Beauvoir, arguing that the visual pleasure of watching human bodies and figures is dichotomised between an active male, and

passive female perspective. This representational structure impacts the way that the female gender is portrayed on-screen, often sexualising and objectifying women in order to produce the visual pleasures of erotic male desire. Of course, this subsequently affects how bodies are visualised; gesture, posture, body language and movement are all influenced by the gaze, and as such the body is stylised and aestheticised for the camera. The article contends that the male gaze ultimately represents male desire and erotic phantasy, and thus the female figure is styled accordingly to correspond with these visual pleasures (Mulvey, 1999, p.837). Furthermore, Mulvey writes that in cinema, displayed and performing women function as an erotic object for both the characters within the film as well as the audience members viewing it. Citing a contemporary perspective, Oliver (2017) succinctly explains that this theory of the male gaze typically means that audiences identify with the ‘active’ male protagonists and desire the female actors that represent passive objects of the gaze (p.451). This subsequently results in various problematic issues concerning gender identity and audience identification, namely that women are forced to identify with a passive object that is subjected to merely being ‘looked at’. Female viewers must either associate with this passive object at the cost of losing their agency, or otherwise identify with the male protagonist – thus, there is “no place for identity with feminine activity. In this world all agents and identity are male and all objects to be desired are female” (Oliver, 2017, p.451). Although these rigid perspectives are initially proposed in Mulvey’s essay, Oliver (2017) notes that the depiction of the male gaze does not necessarily indicate that women cannot identify with the active male protagonist. Regardless of this, because of the visual fixation of the male gaze, spatiotemporal elements of the film often drift into strange new territories, in which the films narrative or general trajectory are side-lined in order to favour temporary sexual impact.

Particularly interesting in Mulvey’s (1999) argument is her description of specific cinematographic approaches of the male gaze, and the impact on the visual representation of gender:

Conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen. (p.838)

This idea of the fragmented body is carried throughout a plethora of screen practices – notably, for example, the photographic work of Lynch, depicting fragmented and dismembered female body parts that are emphasised primarily through close-ups. While photography can demonstrate the perspective of a fragmentary male gaze, Mulvey stresses the unique position

of film regarding its ability to convey identity and desire. This aspect of Mulvey's text will be utilised in my analysis of both Lynch and Mendieta, in order to reinforce my argument that both practitioners distort representations of the body through fragmentation and other modes of visual disruption.

Once again, as Oliver's (2017) article explains, the particular techniques of cinematography such as panning across women's bodies or pushing in for close-ups of the fragmented body (traditionally on the face), demonstrates the possessive nature of the camera as well as its ability to *create* the object (p.452). Essentially, then, the camera is the physical enactment of the male gaze. Oliver's summation here is an integral factor in the conceptualisation of *Iris*, in which the camera is reflexively utilised as a carrier of the gaze in order to exaggerate the flaws of these representational issues upon gender. This aspect of research feeding into practice will be developed within the exegesis. Another useful contemporary source that explores the notion of the fragmentary male gaze, Balsom's (2010) article argues that "the close-up is perhaps the greatest exemplar of the capability of the frame to sever the image from external surroundings, rendering it at once quasi-autonomous and undeniably partial" (p.26). With this in mind, it becomes clear that varying the approaches to cinematography, in terms of elements such as shot size and focal length, has a dramatic effect on the film's representational strategies. For instance, to utilise an extreme close-up on a specific part of the body serves to both highlight the chosen subject, while also concealing other elements of the figure – thus, regarding gender, this allows the filmmaker to stylise their method of representation. Reinforcing this, Balsom (2010) asserts that the close-up as a cinematic technique can "impose a limitation on spectator sovereignty, by asserting the frame *as* frame and withholding a desired outside" (p.26). Balsom's article is limited in that it focuses on filmmaker Robert Bresson, however I will advance the proposed theory of close-ups and fragmentation in order to analyse Lynch and Mendieta's visualisation. There is a considerable gap in knowledge regarding Lynch's use of close-ups, and there is an even greater lack of literature discussing Mendieta's visual approach within her film works – thus, this article is important in building my analysis. Through their visual fragmentation of the body, these filmmakers have the ability to disregard the traditional privileging of the face and instead focus on other corporeal elements. In turn, this creates a heightened awareness of the inaccessible points of the frame. By utilising or subverting these formal elements of filmmaking practices, creative practitioners can refuse or allow the spectator their 'visual pleasure' in a sense – as Mulvey theorises: the gaze may still be present,

perhaps not as a means of erotic satisfaction, but rather as an alternative method of formal aesthetic pleasure.

Similarly, in her article *Unbound bodies*, Bell-Metereau (2017) discusses the fixation of bodily details on-screen in relation to Mulvey's theories on gender and identity representation. She argues that the practice of focusing on bodily details places the individual into Mulvey's category of the 'possessive spectator', "who is fetishistically absorbed by the image of the human body" (p.395). This category is differentiated from the 'pensive spectator' which, as the article states, is more focused with the visibility of time in the cinema. Additionally, specifically focusing on images of fragmentation, transformation and distortion of the body, the article describes a dichotomised perception of both 'fear and archaic wish' that reveals several social concerns surrounding the representation of gender and the human form. According to Bell-Metereau (2017), these representations are produced by an overwhelming sense of personal and social disintegration, which is subsequently expressed through warped, distorted images of the body – however, as gender politics have been questioned over time, these initially 'frightening' portrayals have gradually shifted to represent positive transformation and growth (p.397). These arguments will be used to reinforce Mendieta's reclamation of female empowerment through her use of fragmentation and transformation, specifically within her film experiment *Sweating Blood*.

Naturally, Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze and representations of gender in cinema demonstrates "the necessity to break up patriarchal order, by opening alternative and new methods of representation. These methods are informed by feminism and avant-garde cinema" (Collins, 2017, p.416). Collins' article, *Mulvey, patriarchy and gender: expression and disruption in visual art*, goes on to explain a number of avant-garde and experimental approaches to disrupting Mulvey's patriarchal notion the male gaze, several of which incorporate the use of drag elements into their visual work. With this, the lines of identity are blurred beyond their typically heteronormative and binary categorisations of gender, and subsequently the interrelations between masculinity and femininity become increasingly abstract. As a result, this creates a gaze that blurs between genders. However, Collins concludes that the male gaze and phallogentrism is ultimately inescapable, despite the developing perspectives and social acceptances of varying gender forms (Collins, 2017). Moreover, perhaps an alternative method to subverting the predominant 'male' gaze would

be to shift attention toward the ‘female’ gaze. Of course, a plethora of feminist artists – not least the performance art and various audio-visual works of Ana Mendieta – have already altered these patriarchal perspectives. In her article, *Gender in cinematography: Female gaze (eye) behind the camera*, Dirse (2013) examines her role as a female cinematographer and suggests potential methods for restructuring the hierarchical system of the male gaze as a means of generating visual pleasure. In the article, Dirse (2013) explores the role of the female gaze by extending Mulvey’s theories of the gaze and contextualising them within her own practice. She argues that the techniques of filming such as lighting, camera angles, editing choices and shot lengths are all utilised to differentiate the presentation of men and women on-screen, and this subsequently results in sexual objectification (Dirse, 2013, p.18). However, throughout her work as a cinematographer, Dirse’s approach to the visualisation of gender has attempted to subvert the narrative of Mulvey’s seemingly omnipresent ‘male gaze’ by incorporating her female eye behind the camera. Discussing this subversion of perspective, Dirse (2013) states that in changing the gaze from male to female, “we finally have an opportunity to view ourselves as we really are, in the case of this film, not as objects of male desire but as objects of female desire” (p.21). Thus, as the article contends, the implementation of the female gaze in art is crucial in order to accurately portray the perspectives of women – as well as allowing the ability to take control of their creative work. Dirse’s discussion of the subversion of the male gaze, and notably the reclamation of the female gaze, will be imperative within my analysis of Lynch and Mendieta, as well as my critical exegesis. Here, I will advance Dirse’s perspective by outlining the differences in body representation between practitioners and the impact of gender upon their gaze. Subsequently, this literature will support my argument that the use of mixed perspectives through production in terms of the gaze has the potentiality of fairer representation.

In a similar vein, Dario Calmese – the first African American photographer to produce the cover of *Vanity Fair* – also attempts to subvert traditional notions of the ‘gaze’, albeit still from a male perspective. Calmese attempts to ‘decolonise’ the gaze through his creative practice and framing of the body in order to produce new and inclusive forms of representation. In the article, *Decolonizing the gaze: An interview with Dario Calmese*, this subversion of the gaze is further examined:

Ultimately, images are not benign, inanimate objects; they are loaded with cultural imprints that manipulate and reinforce ideas and beliefs. The only way to decolonize

the gaze is to diversify authorship. Images, like architecture, are also built environments, and we must constantly stay vigilant about who's designing our point of view. (Clark, 2020, p.958)

Calmese's goal of decolonising the gaze bears strong resemblance to Mendieta's desire of decolonising the body, both within her art and in the wider socio-cultural environment. Mendieta's oeuvre – spanning photography, performance art and film (and often blending mediums) – sought to challenge issues of gender and racial representation within her art practice, often exploring the rigidity of gender roles that are afforded to her fellow Hispanic community (Agustí, 2007, p.293). Agustí explores the topics of gender and the gaze within Mendieta's work in her article, *"I Carve Myself into My Hands": The Body Experienced from within in Ana Mendieta's Work and Migdalia Cruz's Miriam's Flowers*. In the article, Agustí (2007) argues that throughout her body art and performance work, Mendieta strived to dissociate the female body from male desire in order to separate the male-centric encodings of 'Otherness' and sexual impulse typically associated with female representations (p.293). Of course, through the subversion of the 'male gaze' and the enactment of the 'female gaze', Mendieta was able to express her agency and voice through her art, as well as her experience as a woman. Fundamental elements of her practice and body visualisation such as this would have ultimately been unattainable through a male perspective: thus, the female gaze is an essential component of the art itself.

Lynchian Techniques: Close-Ups and the Abstract Body

In terms of his bodily visualisation, Lynch's aesthetic often utilises the camera in close-up to focus on the miniscule, textural qualities of the body and to subsequently 'get under the skin' – a motif carried throughout much of Lynch's filmography, both in technical and narrative terms. Similarly, Todd (2012) contends that "Lynch's legend is built upon a juxtaposition: a childlike and personable Pacific North-Western conventionalism coupled with an interest in themes of a psychosexual and surreal nature" (p.15). Demonstrated through both his art and audio-visual work, this juxtaposition is often exhibited in his visualisation of the human body. Here, Lynch's interest in the human condition and body coincides with his tendencies for distortions and abstraction – a characteristic that marks his visualisation of the body as distinctive and quintessentially 'Lynchian'. Lynch's filmmaking practices emphasise the textural and abstract qualities of the body through his stylised visual approach. This

characteristic of his body representation will be the subject of my analysis and discussion of Lynch's filmmaking practices.

In particular, Lynch's debut feature film *Eraserhead* demonstrates heavily exaggerated and nightmarish visualisations of the body, and Crewe (2015) argues this is "thanks to Lynch's spare, intensely dark monochrome photography and unnerving sound design combining to create an impenetrable, forbidding miasma that consumes the viewer" (p.89). The cinematographic approach in the film towards visualising the body effectively lays the foundations for the later works of Lynch's filmography, emphasising texture, tone and the grotesque through his abstract painterly style. As Olivier (2020) states, the film is "less a realist portrait than an emotional meditation" (p.254). In his book, *Household horror: Cinematic fear and the secret life of everyday objects*, Olivier examines the motif of the radiator in *Eraserhead*, drawing conclusions on Lynch's aesthetics that correlate with his visualisation of the human figure. Regarding its aesthetic approach, the book discusses the concluding moments of the narrative, in which the film utilises grotesque, disturbing representations of the human body – namely, a deformed baby - heightened by the use of close-ups: "From the center, the body opens like two stage doors, offering a close-up view of abject body horror, or if you're Lynch, a view of beautiful textures" (Olivier, 2020, p.263). Lynch utilises sporadic close-ups and extreme close-ups to visualise the body in a fragmented manner, such as his use of close-ups and contrasting noir lighting in *Eraserhead*. These stylistic practices are particularly important in addressing Lynch's representation of the human body, originating within his earlier short films and work as a visual artist.

The specific practice I will be using to disseminate Lynch's work is his painterly practice – however, these characteristics translate into his screen work. For example, as declared by Lynch himself, the methods of body visualisation are heavily influenced by the artwork of Francis Bacon, and these similarities are extremely prominent in Lynch's early painterly practices. Lynch and McKenna (2018) contend in *Room to Dream*, the influence of Bacon drastically impacted Lynch's visual presentation of the body:

Startling creatures that seem to have emerged from loamy soil, they're impossible conglomerations of human limbs, animal forms, and organic growths that dissolve the boundaries customarily distinguishing one species from the next. (p.71)

This biographical account of Lynch is invaluable to this research, exploring his life from childhood to an established filmmaker. This book is incredibly useful for this research, as it provides two different in-depth perspectives on Lynch's fine-art background and practices. Here, Lynch details aspects of his practice himself and talks about influences, whereas McKenna provides a more thorough, analytical perspective. Ultimately, this text is essential as it highlights the importance of Lynch's painterly practice in visualising the body, and thus I will utilise this perspective in my research to analyse Lynch's screen work. Furthermore, examining the influence of Bacon, Robinson (2012) contends that Bacon's practice typically involved distorted and fragmented representations of the body, often painting men wrestling, struggling and grappling with one another. Thus, Bacon's portraits of the male figure evoke a sense of violence and threat due to their surrealist visualisation and manipulation of the body – an element that carries over strongly into Lynch's early animation pieces. However, Robinson also notes that Bacon's dreamlike depictions of bodies connote a “paradoxically erotic dimension, as Bacon transmuted these wrestling figures into coupling men” (Robinson, 2012, p.13). Aspects of this also carry into David Lynch's unconventional earlier works, such as *Six Figures Getting Sick*. In the film, Lynch experiments with painting and stop-motion practices to depict a looping series of disembodied heads and limbs, violently flailing and regurgitating to the wailing sound of a siren. These kinds of dysmorphic bodies are a staple of Lynch's oeuvre, perhaps best exemplified by Lynch's photography practices in which the female body is rendered an abstraction through close-up. Specifically concerning his practice throughout the production of this animation film, Mactaggart (2010) argues that Lynch's films must be interpreted and discussed within the context of his earlier artistic practices – or, to think of his screen-productions as ‘film paintings’: “The genesis of his film practice via his ‘visionary’ engagement with one of his paintings is central, I would argue, to an understanding of this body of work” (p.12). Mactaggart's book details the meticulous efforts that Lynch incorporates into his practice, in order to visualise the body through an extreme and abstract format. By analysing Lynch's processes and techniques throughout his practice, Mactaggart argues that the earlier works of Lynch's filmography gravitate towards experimental art practices as opposed to traditional filmmaking – much like the audio-visual work of Ana Mendieta. This suggests that to ‘understand’ the earlier methods of Lynch's body visualisation, one must look toward influences from art-practice rather than filmmakers in the traditional sense. This perspective will be utilised for this research, in order to address how Lynch translates his painterly approach into his film-work to both aestheticise and represent the body.

Continuing this discussion of Lynch's painterly practices, Powell (2014) analyses the similarities of Lynch and Bacon particularly regarding representation of the body and argues that Lynch's visualisations should be discussed in relation not only to cinema but also paintings. The article goes on to explore Lynch's artwork and photography, stating that in Lynch's distorted photographs of nude figures, "deformed faces and bodies vividly produce the Baconian body's intense effort to... escape through a point or through a hole that forms a part of itself or its surroundings" (Powell, 2014, p.312). Powell then goes on to declare that while Lynch's paintings and photography demonstrate significantly more unsettling tones than Bacon, even to a point of risible excess and comicality, their works share similar thematic intentions and elements of practice - as the article states, Lynch and Bacon's visualisations of the body seek "to present the actions of invisible forces upon bodies, rendered in a preintellectual sensation of intensities" (Powell, 2014, p.312). Additionally, the article goes on to note that throughout his body of work, Lynch's figures are subject to a variety of distortions in terms of size, texture, and form: from the disembodiment and remodelling present in *Six Figures Getting Sick*, his fragmented black-and-white photography of nude female bodies, or the nightmarish metamorphoses of *Lost Highway*, Lynch's bodies undergo significant textural and transformative changes with the help of his surrealist and unconventional practices. For example, in Pizzello's (2009) article *Highway to Hell*, cinematographer Peter Deming discusses the process of visualising the body in *Lost Highway*. Deming states that in certain sequences, Lynch insisted the camera's aperture was overexposed in order to highlight the dreamlike details and textural qualities of the character's figures:

David said he wanted the actors to be glowing. He didn't want to see any details except their eyes, noses, mouths and hair. We lit them with tungsten Pars which were supposed to simulate the headlights of their car, and we overexposed by about six-and-a-half stops. The final effect is very surreal. (p.177)

As well as this, Deming explains that Lynch even removed the lens from the camera entirely during particular scenes (p.178). This technical process was utilised to blur and distort the body to extreme levels, or as Powell (2014) contends, "at the limit, an art's technological apparatus must itself be mutated or assaulted in order to reach the most intense distortion of figure" (p.315). It is evident, then, that the body is utilised throughout Lynch's work as a site of investigating the visual *capabilities* of the body, upon which Lynch channels his surrealist and dysmorphic painterly influences such as Bacon. Lynch's painterly approach impacts his representation of both the body and gender – particularly, this is relevant to Butler's notions of performativity.

As McKinlay (2010) succinctly declares, “performativity is the materialisation of norms, a process that is inherently unstable, latent with the possibility of resistance. Performativity refers both to the fragility and the stubborn consistency of identity” (para. 12). Butler’s theory concerned the construction and institution of gender over time through a culturally repeated series of stylised acts. However, as McKinlay also notes, this is “not to be confused with performance. Performance suggests an actor who consciously follows – or refuses to follow – a script... Performativity is a process concept that seeks to escape – or at least to reject – the dualism of structure and agency” (McKinlay, 2010, para. 11). Applying Butler’s theory to Lynch’s work, we can see that through his painterly approach Lynch stylises and creates his own abstract representations of the body on-screen, and thus, in a sense, he constructs his own forms of gender codes. While Lynch’s later work goes on to exhibit more traditional representations of gender, these early painterly practices demonstrated an interesting sense of ambiguity and abstraction. Through exploring Lynch’s painterly practice, it is clear that he employs these aesthetic strategies to create new modes of representation for the human body. Methods such as his visual distortion and destruction of recognisable bodies are utilised in order to “transform his subject’s shape” (Mufson, 2018). Thus, as expressed in the aforementioned literature, Lynch implements the painterly practices of his early work onto the screen, forming his unique ‘Lynchian’ aesthetic and opening possibilities for abstract representations of the body within filmmaking practices.

Ana Mendieta: The Decolonised and Disappearing Body

Much of the literature surrounding Mendieta’s work discusses the centrality of the body as a result of her exile from Cuba. For instance, in her article *Ana Mendieta as cultural connector with Cuba*, Roulet (2012) argues that Mendieta’s work largely focused on negotiating and transcending boundaries as a result of her geographic displacement, as well as the boundaries imposed on the body by gender, ethnicity, and identity (p. 21). The article contends that the human form is utilised in her work to explore the relation between the body and the earth, investigating cultural and political issues surrounding the body and as such seeking to decolonise it: “While her work draws aesthetically from both North American and Cuban sources, Mendieta networked tirelessly to connect artists from the two regions” (Roulet, 2012, p.21). As the article goes on to explain, Mendieta studied art at a time of civil unrest, during which many visual artists were using their medium in order to demonstrate activism against

the escalating war in Vietnam and responding to the unrest brought on by feminist and civil rights movements. Roulet's article is important for this research, as it highlights Mendieta's various creative-practices and the way in which these shifted representations of women within her contemporary American environment. This knowledge will be used within the analysis as a means of contrasting the representational methods with Lynch, whose work focused on other aspects of gender and the body through a male perspective. Crucially, the article is important as there are significantly less studies on Mendieta's work in comparison to Lynch – and, in a general sense. Thus, my analysis aims to raise awareness of Mendieta's creative practices and representation of gender and the body, by examining the parallels to more established filmmakers such as Lynch.

Interestingly, Roulet (2012) notes that despite Mendieta playing an active role within feminist art circles, “she later grew leery of being narrowly pigeonholed as a feminist, or merely as a Latina artist” (p.22). In this sense, it is evident that Mendieta's work was designed in order to subvert audience expectations, existing outside the contemporary artistic norms and instead focusing on ways to de-label her practices by incorporating a variety of methods. This aspect, raised by Roulet, is especially important for this thesis when approaching the analysis of practice, as this research is among the few to conduct such a study.

In terms of technique, Mendieta's work encompassed a variety of different formats. As James (2017) notes, her involvement in the art scene as a painter, sculptor, performer and filmmaker propelled Mendieta into a highly prolific and prominent role as a Cuban American artist (p.570). In his article, *Ana Mendieta: Art, artist and literary afterlives*, James contends that in addition to exhibiting a ‘decolonisation’ of the body, Mendieta's performative practice emphasised disappearance and dissolution, in the sense that her visualisations of the human form were created in order to dissipate – that is, the pieces would ‘disappear’ (James, 2017). Visualised through her *Silueta* (silhouettes) series, the physical body is depicted as an invisible presence, emphasised further by the gradual decay and disappearance of the artworks themselves. Mendieta's use of carvings, earthworks, fireworks, and work with mud, water and feathers, were inherently created to be both ephemeral and eternal. The article argues that this vanishing of the visible body, labelled as ‘disappearing acts’, are utilised to demonstrate the “instability and the insecurity of the identity politics in the complex gender, racial and national contexts in which Mendieta constantly remade herself through art” (James, 2017, p.570). Similarly, in her book *The explicit body in performance*, Schneider (1997) states that Mendieta's performative works documented erasure and disembodiment, playing into the

notion of the female body as secreted or shrouded by representation (p.119). Further discussing the idea of the disappearing or ‘vanished’ body, Schneider (1997) goes on to explain:

Mendieta's pieces both illustrate and disallow the service of her body to the infinite recession of the vanishing point, or the insatiability of desire, because they are so insistently finite - shrouds of sand, mud, stone, tree, or the fertile grave-bed stuff of dirt. Here is no infinite recession: vanishing has already occurred. (p.119)

Through utilising these different materials, Mendieta was able to visualise her body as part of the natural landscape in which she created the artworks - invoking her body to the feminist Mother Goddess and simultaneously echoing her experiences as a Cuban exile. In her own statement directly showing both the disappearance and decolonisation of the female body, these experimental practices and performative works were used by Mendieta with the aim of helping to “end colonialism, racism, and exploitation” (Mendieta, as cited in del Rio & Perreault, 1987, p.33). In terms of technical visual representation, the majority of these performance pieces, such as the *Silueta* series or *Rupestres* carvings, were documented through black and white photography, 35mm slides, and Super 8 film – all of which leaned into a certain painterly aesthetic. As well as this, Roulet (2012) notes that “to convey the experience of seeing the works life-size, she printed and exhibited the series in large-format, forty-by-sixty-inch prints.” (p.24). The resulting photographs and video work that document Mendieta’s pieces have a rich, textural quality to the imagery due to the use of film stock, further enhancing the dreamlike quality of her bodily representation. I will advance this research further by discussing the impact that these elements of creative practice had upon the on-screen visualisation of the body. There is a considerable gap in knowledge regarding these processes, particularly within discussion of Mendieta’s film-works, and thus I will utilise this literature in order to fill the gap in research surrounding her films. This will be demonstrated in my analysis of Mendieta’s film experiment, *Sweating Blood*, and the impact that this painterly aesthetic has upon the representation of her body.

Mendieta’s work extensively explored the relations between humans and nature, often visualising this through a consistent repetition of human figures pitted against natural environments. By incorporating the human body into her work as a creative tool, Mendieta’s art “represented a continual search for lost heritage, identities, and cultural traditions” (Cruz, 2005, p.225). In his chapter, *Ana Mendieta’s art: A journey through her life*, Cruz (2005) details the prominence of identity in Mendieta’s artistic work, positing that throughout her studies at university Mendieta’s practice became heavily indebted to performance and body

art despite initially studying painting (p.227). The chapter contends that the frequently experimental nature of Mendieta's work demonstrates a transformative approach in her artistic process, utilising aspects of performance, installations, photography and video in order to explore a blooming embracement of diversity and identity representation amongst her art associates. Crucially, though, Mendieta's practice largely focused on exploring "gendered identity in relation to the female body" (Cruz, 2005, p.227). Exile, displacement, and a sense of homelessness, elements that complement a lot of Lynch's protagonists, are integral parts of Mendieta's autobiographical experience – all of which fed into her artistic practices and creative outputs, often expressed through starkly feminist visualisations of the female body. For instance, as Alvarado (2015) contends, Mendieta and her sister "were marked by their Cubanness, an illegitimate otherness within a racialised society. This difference was measured against other racialised bodies that were beginning to threaten the hierarchised order of the 1960s United States" (p.68). Mendieta thus channelled her experience of exile and cultural displacement into her creative practice, corresponding with the political upheaval and influx of feminist art-practices at the time. The 1960's and 70's saw the rise of feminist art-practices and performance art, allowing women to reclaim the female body and liberate feminine sexuality from the oppressive patriarchal systems present within worldwide art-culture (Battista, 2012). Schneemann (2011), a fellow feminist artist and one of Mendieta's associates, contends that the rise of feminist art-practices was particularly prominent during Mendieta's time as a practitioner, and her work helped to drastically shift the landscape of gender representation in creative practices: "There was no vocabulary for female genital sexuality. And Ana and I used to ask each other, why has the history of the chastity belt – the chador; clitoridectomy; nunnery; silencing the female – endured?" (Schneemann, 2011, p.186).

Throughout the entirety of Mendieta's art-life, her work demonstrated ideas and aspirations such as decolonising the body, transformation, gender and identity politics, all of which are deeply interlinked and visualised through Mendieta's own body in the artworks. Laura Pérez reinforces this close bond between her common themes regarding body visualisation, arguing that Mendieta demonstrated "decoloniality, especially through her use of nature... but also, in her own insistence on thinking about much of her work, especially the work she's most well-known for (her *Silueta's*), her own insistence that these works were self-portraiture" (Berkeley Arts & Design, 2017). This idea of the self-portrait is incredibly important and will

be developed further in my analysis, as I will use Pérez's discussion as a means of investigating the role of Mendieta's own body within the two selected works. This self-portraiture is also an element of Lynch's work; for example, Lynch's body plays a key role in *Six Figures Getting Sick*. Thus, this text will be utilised to generate comparisons between the inclusion of the practitioner's body within their own work – an aspect of literature largely undiscussed in regard to Lynch. Therefore, I will be developing knowledge in this field and thus generating new methods of analysing both Lynch and Mendieta's practice. López's (2015) book, *Impossible returns: Narratives of the Cuban diaspora*, details the prominence of the 'self-portrait' in Mendieta's body of work. Here, López argues that Mendieta was interested in ideas of gender as a social construct and normativity, exploring these aspects through experimental art practices that placed her own body and identity at the forefront. Examples include warping her identity and sense of 'self' by distorting her face and body on glass, or by pasting hair on to her face to simulate male facial hair (López, 2015, p.92). López's chapter contains a rich and insightful history of Mendieta's childhood, suggesting that the roots of her fascination with the body were deeply ingrained in her earlier years: "It was there, at the beach, where Ana began to make silhouettes, arms and legs extended, in the wet sand" (López, 2015, p.95). This same concept would later be visualised through Mendieta's silhouette, or '*Siluetas*', series, demonstrating the prominence of self-portraiture in her work, as well as the deeply personal exploration of cultural identity through her own body – relating back to Mendieta's Cuban roots and her exile from the country.

In their retrospective, del Rio and Perreault (1987) quote an unpublished statement from Mendieta herself, in which she acknowledges the prominence of self-portraiture in her art - namely in its expression through the relation between the female figure and the natural environment:

I have been carrying out a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this has been a direct result of my having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. (p.10)

Here, Mendieta reifies the centrality of her own personal identity within her artistic works, particularly within her *Siluetas* series. Mendieta's visualisation of the body in this instance is heavily influenced by her Cuban ancestry, demonstrated by her connections between her silhouette and the earth – the maternal source. Although this source focuses primarily on Mendieta's renowned *Siluetas*'s, I will further extend this notion by applying the research to Mendieta's lesser-known works. Similarly, Jane Blocker (1999) argues that Mendieta's

implementation of the earth into her self-portraiture is used in order to visualise her own relationship with nature in a spiritual context. As Blocker discusses, the earth for Mendieta represented “a womb, both sexual and maternal, the fundamental source of life, a homeland, a prehistoric origin, nation, nature, a landscape, a link to ancestry, a burial site, and a sentient being” (Blocker, 1999, p.46). Mendieta employs the earth throughout her artwork based on its metaphoric associations with the female body, exploring “the idea of the earth goddess as part of a distinctly feminist strategy” (Blocker, 1999, p.47). While Blocker’s discussion is thorough, the earth was not necessarily present within all of Mendieta’s self-portraits. For instance, Mendieta still demonstrates her traditionally feminist stance in her photographic work, such as her *Glass on Body Imprints*, by warping her and distorting her own identity in order to challenge the conventions on female body representation. Furthermore, in analysing my two chosen works, I will extend Blocker’s research into new, undiscussed territories.

Exploring *Untitled: Glass on Body Imprints* in her article, Baum (2008) discusses the impact of Mendieta’s self-portraiture, contending that they provoke both revulsion and empathy through their grossly distorted visualisations of Mendieta’s own face and identity (p.81). This experimental practice was carried out through 35mm photography and bears resemblance to Lynch’s frequent distortions of the body - however Mendieta’s feminist and spiritual intent result in drastically contrasting representations. Unlike Lynch’s portrayal, Mendieta’s use of the human form demonstrated a radically feminist visualisation of the body. Baum’s article is imperative as I draw upon her research in my discussion of Mendieta, particularly to explore the role of Mendieta’s self-portraiture and exploration of female identity. Additionally, Baum’s discussion of violence as a manifest subject is also a key factor in my analysis. However, this article is limited as it only addresses Mendieta’s photographic work. Thus, I will advance this knowledge further by contextualising Baum’s research within Mendieta’s moving-image practices, through my analysis of *Sweating Blood* – a film experiment that maintains the aforementioned characteristics and themes of her photography series. The aim of this is to generate new knowledge regarding Mendieta’s filmmaking practices, a form of her work that is severely unexplored and underrepresented in literature. Schneemann (2011) discusses the use of the female body within their artistic practice, arguing that through the visualisation of their own explicit, sensual bodies, Mendieta and her associates challenged ideas of what could be exhibited and ultimately conveyed about the body itself. Examining the role of explicit self-portraiture in their work, Schneemann (2011) states that they have forgotten “the dangers of depicting the explicit sensuous female body, we have forgotten how much hatred and resistance

that inspired – rage, envy, domination. The use of the body was truly live and declared narcissistic” (p.186). Thus, Mendieta and her cohort’s exploration of self-portraiture through the body exhibited an aspiration to overcome the prejudice held against their practice. However, as evidenced by her work, visualising the body for Mendieta was not about narcissism; rather, it was a means of investigating cultural issues surrounding colonialism, gender and identity politics, and violence.

Screen-Production Research and Practice-Related Approaches

Screen-production research is a developing field in the Antipodes, defined as "the study of the creation of audio-visual work that is disseminated on/with screens and can include theory-driven practices that use the screen to 'do' research" (Batty & Kerrigan, 2018, p.01). Batty and Kerrigan’s introductory chapter of *Screen Production Research: Creative practice as a mode of enquiry*, details the nature of screen-production research and the use of practice-related approaches within a research context. Batty and Kerrigan argue that through this process, screen-production, or an aggregate of imagery and sound (for instance, a film) and academic research is utilised together under the umbrella term widely known as ‘creative-practice research’ (p.02). This process of blending practice with research can be used as a legitimate and innovative mode of enquiry in the quest for generating new knowledge. In their chapter, Batty and Kerrigan note the multiplicity of practice-related research approaches, and state that for many researchers the overarching term ‘creative practice research’ is perhaps most useful, “as it signals very clearly that the creative work (screen work) sits at the centre of the research project, regardless of how it is undertaken/made/developed” (Batty & Kerrigan, 2018, p.07).

Fundamentally, however, Batty and Kerrigan’s (2018) chapter is vital for this thesis, as it highlights the importance and potential of screen-production research, arguing:

Screen production research should make a unique contribution to the discipline through its forms and genres—through screenplays, films, television, web series, mobile works, video installations, and so forth— and also through written research, whether that is about the product itself, the process of creating it, or other contexts that underpin the creative practice methodology. (p.10)

The term ‘screen production’ itself, however, is a contested field within literature, often leading to ambiguities and underrepresentation in research enquiries. Thus, how can we define screen production for this research? In his chapter, Batty (2015) defines this term as “the conceptualisation, development, production and reception of a screen work. This definition

allows the practice of screen production to incorporate its various stages of activity and its various stakeholders” (p.112). Batty’s discussion of screen production is especially useful for this thesis, exploring the flexibility and various stages of the creative process and the knowledge that can be generated from this practice. Furthermore, the definition from this chapter will be utilised as a key-text within my exegesis, in which I will analyse what Batty refers to as the ‘conceptualisation, development and production’ of my short-film, *Iris*. However, unlike Batty’s article, I will not be exploring ‘reception’, as this research is focused on the phases of creative production and subjective representation of the body as opposed to audience engagement.

Furthermore, Barrett (2010) discusses the significant role of practice *as* research and investigates the differing forms of such methodologies. Throughout this chapter, Barrett highlights the potential that practice-related approaches have in terms of advancing methods of research, and notes that these enquiries utilise creative-components and reflection in order to contextualise the processes of creation within philosophical and academic frameworks. Discussing practice-based research, a specific methodology within the wider context of creative practice research, Barrett (2010) argues:

The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes. (p.02)

Barrett’s investigation of creative arts enquiries will be utilised further in this thesis, namely within my critical exegesis chapter, to explore my processes of creating a short film that was a direct response to the research. In doing so, drawing on the literature from Batty, Kerrigan, and Barrett, I will advance literature within this field by analysing my contemporary representational methods of the body, and I will argue for the necessity of the film in demonstrating these visualisations.

Conclusion

In terms of research, this review demonstrates that there is a significantly limited amount of literature discussing Lynch’s methods of representing the body – concerning both his representations of gender, and the visual aestheticization of the human form. Further, the literature lacks focus upon Lynch’s early experiments and short films, with most research instead discussing his surrealism or later established works. Thus, in order to address this gap,

my research focuses on the importance of Lynch's painterly background and early short films in founding his 'Lynchian' style and unique representations of the body. Additionally, this literature review illustrates that there is a substantial gap in knowledge concerning Mendieta's film-work, as the primary focus of the literature emphasises her performance-art and feminist practices. Thus, this research will fill this gap in knowledge by recognising the importance of Mendieta's filmmaking practices, and I will compare these results with both Lynch and my own creative practice to better understand her methods of representation. Ultimately, the most prominent gap in knowledge illuminated by this review, is that there appears to be no research texts comparatively analysing Lynch and Mendieta's practices and representation, despite the significance of the body in their work. Thus, this thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature by comparing selected works of both artists, in order to raise awareness of the body's significance in their creative output, as well as understanding the differences in their representation in terms of gender and the gaze.

Methodology: Body Representation and Practice-Related Research

This research utilises a mixed methodological approach, combining qualitative analysis with practice-related frameworks. In my analysis chapters, I employ qualitative textual analysis to examine selected works of Lynch and Mendieta. Within the critical exegesis, screen-production research is used a key framework in order to effectively discuss the role of practice and film production as a means of research and generating knowledge. This methodological approach is integral to the thesis and highlights the necessity for the creative component. Textual analysis is particularly useful as a central methodology for analysing film, as it allows researchers to carefully examine film texts with the “aim of understanding how meaning is generated and communicated within them. These close readings are attentive to formal patterns, historical traditions and contexts, and the wider theoretical implications of aesthetics” (Forrest, 2017). Furthermore, as McKee (2003) contends, qualitative textual analysis “is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world” (p.01). Thus, drawing on Forrests’ statement, textual analysis is used in this research to look at the formal patterns and contexts of Lynch and Mendieta’s audio-visual works in order to interpret their practices and the implications of their body representation. Additionally, discussing the use of qualitative textual analysis of film, Friedman (2010) argues that “the metaphor of film as text - and, by extension, the metaphor of reading film - locates in the visual medium of cinema the same kind of figural density and indeterminacy that, in poststructuralist literary theory, characterizes writing” (p.390). Thus, these creative artefacts are analysed as texts: “all texts are artifacts, and all artifacts are texts of some kind, which means they are open to interpretation” (Punnett, 2018, p.16). In my qualitative analysis, utilising key theories surrounding gender and the body proposed by Butler and Mulvey will be effective in answering the primary, and subordinate, research questions.

Qualitative textual analysis will be used to tackle the question of how specific creative practices influence body representation on screen, namely through my analysis of the various practices that both Lynch and Mendieta incorporate into their work. Using this textual analysis, I will discuss the impact that these varying specific practices have on both the representation of the body as well as the cultural implications of these practices. Furthermore, textual analysis will thus be used to explore the socio-cultural implications of the body on screen in the 21st century. Using this, I will discuss the socio-cultural and political context in which the works were made and the influence this has on the texts themselves – such as the rise of feminist practices within

Mendieta's environment. Lastly, I will use this qualitative textual analysis in order to reveal how emerging filmmakers can develop a contemporary practice focused on the body. Through my analysis, I will unearth the practices and representational methods used by Lynch and Mendieta, and these findings will be situated within the critical exegesis of my own practice. Thus, the methodological approach of blending qualitative textual analysis with creative-practice research will be useful in answering the final research question, concerned with contemporary practices focused on the body.

As this is a practice-related project, I will provide detail as to how the short film was integral to this research and demonstrate that qualitative analysis of selected works of Lynch and Mendieta are reflected in the creative output. Ultimately, my methodology is "within the realm of creative practice research broadly, and screen production research specifically" (Batty, 2015, p.111). It is essential to define screen production research in order to demonstrate how it is utilised in this thesis. Here, I draw on Batty's (2015) definition as "the conceptualisation, development, production and reception of a screen work. This definition allows the practice of screen production to incorporate its various stages of activity and its various stakeholders" (p.112). Screen production research is utilised as a key methodological approach, in order to situate the creative work within the findings from my qualitative textual analysis. Although screen production research is an emerging field, there are established parameters in which it can build from. Reinforcing this sentiment, Barrett (2010) states that "practice-led research is a new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research" (p.01). Screen production research is utilised as a key framework within this study in order to employ my skills as an emerging filmmaker and examine modes of independent contemporary practice. Furthermore, as Bolt (2010) argues, this framework will highlight that "the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence" (p.30). Ultimately, screen production research plays an integral role in this research through demonstrating the generative potential of practice in revealing new research insights (Bolt, 2010, p.31). This process of screen production research will be discussed in more detail in the exegesis, in which I analyse my creative practices and modes of representing the body in a visual sense. Using screen production research, the role of the exegesis offers the critical and complementary role of revealing the work of art (Bolt, 2010, p.31). Moreover, it is important to highlight that the exegesis is focusing more on the practical elements, and as such these methods will be explored in that chapter.

Crucially, the theories of gender performativity proposed by Butler, and Mulvey's notion of 'the gaze', will be adopted as key perspectives for analysing Lynch and Mendieta's approach to visualizing the body. These perspectives are the best analytical frameworks for this study, as they will provide a means of understanding the socio-cultural and political imprints associated with gender, and thus, the body. As Butler and Mulvey's theories on gender and sexuality are so prominent in this research area, their works are imperative due to their wide cultural application. As opposed to utilising a more contemporary theorist, utilising Butler and Mulvey as theoretical frameworks will be useful for understanding ideas of gender and identity construction and the implications of this for the screen. In order to answer the question of how the body can be depicted through creative screen-practices, it is essential to understand the socio-cultural and political repercussions of bodily representation – both in the cinematic world, as well as the wider historical and cultural sphere. Using the essential work of feminist and queer theorists such as Butler and Mulvey will provide deeper insight into the role of gender and body politics, and hegemonic and hierarchical structures of sexuality on-screen. Through investigating this research and understanding the gravity of gender in tandem with body visualization, creative practitioners can aim towards new and creative methods of representation, while simultaneously challenging issues surrounding the body and gender politics. It is also important to recognise the disparate nature between my chosen practitioners, Lynch and Mendieta. While Lynch is regarded as a filmmaker, he was initially an artist and remains so. Mendieta, on the other hand, is a multimedia artist who has largely evaded the wider public – though, scholars and practitioners are beginning to acknowledge her work far more within the last decade. This distinction between practitioners results in vastly different forms of gender and body representation; however, through the necessary inclusion of a practice-based component, this research can highlight parallels in the on-screen visualisation of the body and explore this in a contemporary context. These frameworks are essential for my analysis, as I will use them to unearth the specificity of creative practices and the implications these have on body visualisation. For example, in my analysis of *Six Figures Getting Sick*, I will break down specific images to reveal the intersection of animation and audio-visual practices in order to argue that even at this preliminary stage, Lynch was interested in how bodies can look on screen. This will be further argued in my qualitative analysis of *Eraserhead*, in which I will dissect several key scenes in the film that reveal a progression of Lynch's methods as he transitions further into filmmaking practices. Here, I will discuss Lynch's interrelated use of 'cinematic' film techniques and his previous painterly practices. This textual analysis will be reinforced by my incorporation of Butler and Mulvey's theories surrounding

gender, and I will argue that Lynch's film exhibits conflicting modes of representation regarding these theories. Mendieta's textual analysis will follow similar methods as Lynch's chapters. I will break down the specific images of *Untitled: Glass on Body Imprints* and *Sweating Blood* in terms of the practices involved with their creation, namely performance, photography and film, and I will argue the parallels between Lynch's texts and practices. In this instance, my qualitative analysis of Mendieta is also used to locate the intersections of practices and the effect this has on representations of bodies. Crucially, these findings will then be explored through the frameworks of Butler and Mulvey. The discussions of gender are imperative particularly for Mendieta's texts, as the works specifically deal with representations of gender and identity. Thus, these frameworks are essential for the thesis in order to explore both artists practices and representational strategies, as well as to effectively answer the research questions.

In the following section, I will highlight the key arguments proposed by Butler and Mulvey that will be used for my qualitative textual analysis. These perspectives will be imperative as a framework in answering my research questions. Qualitative analysis is especially relevant for this research, as it focuses on "the selection and rational organization of such categories as condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing pertinent assumptions and hypotheses" (Kracauer, 1952, p.637).

Performativity, Temporality, and the Gaze

This research methodology will utilise the work of Butler to analyse the body representation of Lynch and Mendieta. As Butler (1988) argues, without the repetition of 'acts' that demonstrate a form of 'gender', no identity can ultimately be instituted or constructed. Thus, social agents constitute a social reality in which gender is appropriated through semantic meanings and performances such as language, gesture or various bodily movements. Essentially, according to Butler (1988), gender is socially constructed and thus the body is rendered socially visible through the repetition of these social 'acts' – or, as Arruzza (2015) describes, "it is only through the mediation of this series of social practices that the body becomes gendered at all" (p.34). Therefore, the conceptions of gender and identity become a performative act undertaken by the individual. Butler (1988) deters gender as a fixed sign of identity and, rather, suggests a mode of thinking that acknowledges a "constituted social temporality" (p.520). This theory asserts that gender is forced to abide by a particular set of

truths and falsities, which contradicts the nature of its performative fluidity and demonstrates a social policy of gender regulation and control. Additionally, Butler (2006) succinctly declares in *Gender Trouble* that gender is not a fact and thus without the performative or social acts that ‘create’ an idea of gender, gender would not exist at all (p.190). The theories proposed by Butler surrounding gender are especially useful for this research, in understanding the ways in which it is constructed through the social presentation of the body. The repercussions of visualising the body on-screen thus demonstrate many aspects of Butler’s work, from the ways that bodies are staged to the representations of gender that they signify. This will be applied in my analysis to Lynch’s early work, for example, which indicates a certain performativity in short films such as *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970), namely through his complex depictions of sexuality and exaggerated gender codes. Similarly, Mendieta draws upon Butler’s notion in her art-practice – in a sense, all of Mendieta’s work, particularly her performance-art, were a series of gendered ‘acts’. By utilising Butler’s theory of performativity, it allows this research to look at Mendieta’s work from a new perspective and “interpret the artworks as rhetorical acts rather than as art objects” (Desmond, 2001, p.129).

The idea of temporality is crucial in Butler’s exploration and dissection of gender, as time factors into each aspect of her theory. Because Butler proposes the idea that gender is performative and instituted through a series of repeated ‘acts’, temporality – or the subjective progression of moments situated through time – must factor in order to sediment these performative gender acts as social normalities. Furthermore, Butler’s insistence of social temporality is crucial in order to understand her exploration of gender. Temporality is a vital component for the establishment of performative gender practices, as the physical enactment of these practices through the body *over time* ultimately results in the gendered self. In turn, this allows the possibility for change and new methods of representation – both in terms of the physical body, and the gendered self. Butler’s discussion of temporality also proves useful for this study and applying this knowledge to my research reveals that both Lynch and Mendieta utilise temporality within their work to different effects. Both practitioners demonstrate parallels in their work, in that Lynch uses the temporality of filmmaking practices to disturb the familiarity of his bodies, whereas Mendieta uses it to represent the impact of time upon the female body and its connection to the earth. This is useful for this research, as it demonstrates potential methods for approaching or subverting representations of gender using temporal dynamics, within the context of a creative component. Gender performativity works in tandem with the idea of temporality, which shall be defined as the subjective progression of moments

situated through time. Moreover, Butler's theory of performativity must coincide with temporality in order to institute, or 'construct', the illusion of gender. These two theories strongly relate with filmmaking practices, not least because film is inherently constructive and performative as a medium - everything within the frame, such as the set design, costume, actors, gestures, body language and the camera itself, is constructed to portray certain ideas or to elicit particular responses from the viewer. This will be applied to my qualitative analysis, as both Lynch and Mendieta play with the temporality of film, utilising spatiotemporal disjuncture's in order to destabilise the audience's perception of a gendered body.

Additionally, Lynch and Mendieta highlight the prominence of Mulvey's gaze, with each artist demonstrating differing perspectives of both the male and female gaze. In the work of Lynch, the male gaze maintains a strong sense of dominance, particularly in the representation and sexualisation of women. Within his painterly practice Lynch's frequent portrayals of distorted female bodies, as well as his sexualised and 'domesticated' women in the filmic case of *Eraserhead* (Lynch, 1977), reinforce Mulvey's theories of the male gaze in terms of objectifying the female gender on-screen – and thus losing their sense of agency. In contrast to this, the female gaze present in Mendieta's photography and film work represents a strong demonstration of her experience as a woman, utilising feminised spaces as a means of uncovering alternatives to patriarchal culture. Despite the differences in their representation of gender, however, both Lynch and Mendieta exhibit Mulvey's notion of scopophilia and gaining visual pleasure from the voyeuristic act of 'watching' bodies. Theories concerning gender proposed by Butler and Mulvey will allow me to understand the role that gender plays in the work of Lynch and Mendieta and will help to develop my analysis of their bodily aestheticisation.

Through the inclusion of a creative component, the findings from my qualitative research can be explored further through a new lens. Using screen production research, I was able to create a dialogue between the findings of my analysis throughout the production of my creative artefact. This was explored by allowing a collaborative effort from my female counterparts in terms of their gender 'construction' on-screen. This ranged from elements of the *mise-en-scene* including costume design, blocking, and set-design, along with technical aspects such as shot-lengths, camera movements, and editing choices – all of which impacted the representation of gender in different ways. Performative components that may institute a certain form of gender were discussed with the female actresses, in order to ensure they were comfortable with the 'constructive' elements of the film and to develop the characters in an authentic manner. As

the narrative of the creative artefact focuses on representing and stylising gender for the screen from a female perspective, it was essential that I explore Butler's concept of performativity with the female crew members in the hopes of subverting my own male oriented perspective. Mulvey's gaze was also fed into the methodology, to subvert traditional issues of the male gaze regarding the representation of women on-screen. This was explored by encouraging collaboration between my own visual standpoint and the perspectives of the women on-set. The intention of subverting the male gaze was to deter the sense of sexualisation and objectification on the female characters, and to instead enable more nuanced and complex modes of representation that may act as a 'visual pleasure' for any form of gender. In a similar method to Lynch and Mendieta's practices, this was explored through distortions of the body. These elements could not be visualised without the creation of this artefact.

Chapter One: *Six Figures Getting Sick (1967) and the Birth of Perverse Practice*

The following qualitative analysis chapters (one to four) detail the selected works of Lynch and Mendieta. In this chapter, I will explore Lynch's transition from fine-art and painterly practices to experimental filmmaking approaches. I will then utilise Mulvey's theory of the gaze to analyse Lynch's representation of gender, followed by a discussion on the physical depiction of the body in the work. This same analytical framework will be utilised for all subsequent analysis chapters.

David Lynch: Artist / Filmmaker

Before he became widely renowned as a filmmaker, David Lynch was primarily a fine artist whose creative practice focused on paintings, drawings, and sculptures. Throughout the late 1960's and 70's, Lynch developed his practice by moving into audio-visual experiments and filmmaking. Lynch's debut animation piece, *Six Figures Getting Sick (1967)* – often referred to as *Six Men Getting Sick (Six Times)* – represents an interesting and fundamental turning point, as this was the first step toward audio-visual work. In the experiment, Lynch trials various subversive techniques that are further employed later in his filmmaking career. Constructed entirely as an experiment, the short animation was solely designed to help Lynch visualise his concept of a 'moving painting'. The experiment depicts six distorted and abstract figures, whose internal organs fill with red, yellow, and white substances. Subsequently, the heads catch fire, and the figures begin to vomit bright fluid. The experiment loops this action six times, lasting around four minutes in length, and is accompanied by a dissonant audio track of a wailing siren. Throughout the experiment, Lynch distorts the figures, heavily drawing on his art influences such as Francis Bacon. The three sculpted figures bring attention to the texture and surface of the body, accentuating the corporeal features by producing an almost metallic or chalklike texture. This technique allows Lynch to further skew our perceptions of how the body can be visualised on-screen, generating an uncanny effect in the viewer. The experiment signalled Lynch's transition into filmmaking practices and demonstrated many of the characteristics of his work that have become quintessentially 'Lynchian.' However, it is crucial to understand what is meant by these 'Lynchian' qualities. Discussing this term, Nieland (2012) argues that Lynch's "work seems "hot" and "cold," moving and artificial at once. It blurs

affective intensity with detachment and impersonality. So much depends upon the question of irony, which is always a political problem” (p.62). To clarify, drawing on Nieland’s description, I will define the term ‘Lynchian’ as the crossover of surrealist practices into the so-called mainstream. These ‘Lynchian’ qualities emphasise a juxtaposition of the surreal and mundane, and often highlight dreamlike or distorted representations of the body.

The below section of analysis will focus on *Six Figures Getting Sick*. First, I will explore the nature of Lynch’s painterly practice throughout this audio-visual experiment and his specific methods of visualising the body. The discussion of Lynch’s practice will highlight the overlapping qualities between Lynch’s fine-art background and his transition into filmmaking practices. I will then analyse the role of Mulvey’s gaze, investigating Lynch’s male perspective and the implication this has on the body in the piece. Lastly, the analysis will discuss the role of the body in the film, looking at the representation of the distorted and fragmented body on-screen.

A Moving Painting: The Transitional Practice of *Six Figures Getting Sick*

It was one of my paintings. I don’t remember which one, but it was an almost all-black painting. And it had a figure in it, and the figure was in the centre of the canvas... So, I’m looking at this figure in the painting, and I hear a little wind, and see a little movement. And I had a wish that the painting would really be able to move, you know, some little bit. And that was it. (Rodley, 1997, p.37)

This quote from Lynch, featured in Chris Rodley’s (1997) *Lynch on Lynch*, outlines the willingness of his character to experiment with his art practices, regardless of the medium or technical restrictions that may be attached to the projects. His first ‘film’, *Six Figures Getting Sick*, is a ‘film’ in the loosest sense – part film, animation, and painting, the project was simply created as an audio-visual experiment, a logical extension of Lynch’s painterly practice that had been carried out during his years at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. The experiment signalled a transitional point in his creative practice. Before enrolling at the Academy, Lynch was already a technically proficient painter, however his time as a student allowed his voice to mature and his creative practices to expand. A large portion of Lynch’s painterly works prior to his transition to film dealt with the body in typically surreal and absurdist fashion. For instance, his ‘mechanical women’, as Lynch calls them – portraits of female figures combined with mechanical instruments such as metal rods or typewriters (Lynch & McKenna, 2018). It was during his second year as an advanced painting student at PAFA that Lynch’s breakthrough idea for a moving painting emerged. Through the creation of *Six Figures Getting Sick*, Lynch

was able to test the boundaries of what was capable within his art-practice, developing a hybrid work that encompassed a multiplicity of creative formats. This ranged from traditional painting methods to aspects of animation, film, sculpture, installation art to an extent, as well as testing the newfound role of sound-design within his practice – an element that, until this moment, had not necessarily played a significant part in his work. In this sense, then, perhaps it is crucial to describe Lynch not just as a filmmaker, but as a mixed-media artist.

In order to bring his idea of a ‘moving painting’ to fruition, Lynch rented a 16mm camera from a nearby store, learning the basics of photography and stop-motion animation from the staff (Lynch, 1997, p.38). By learning the technicalities of camerawork Lynch immediately signals a transformation within his method, adapting his practice by focusing on the aesthetic capabilities of film – including complex image control such as exposure, aperture and focus methods, the role of dynamic colours on-screen, and the inclusion of movement within the frame. This shift was of course necessary to capture the ‘moving’ aspects of the piece, such as the figures’ flailing limbs and gushing vomit, as a traditional painterly approach would not allow Lynch to capture such crucial elements. Reinforcing this, as Mactaggart (2010) argues, “film allowed Lynch to add movement and sound to the muteness and static nature of his paintings as well as an opportunity to extend beyond their frame” (p.12). For the experiment, Lynch constructed a sculpture screen measuring approximately six ft by eight ft:

...the surface of which contained reliefs in the shape of heads and arms cast from Lynch’s body by his friend Jack Fisk, onto which a one-minute film loop was projected. The animated film painting appeared on the screen in such a way that the sculpted heads appeared to be transformed into stomachs which caught fire and then vomited, with a siren being used as the soundtrack to the piece. (Mactaggart, 2010, p.12)

These approaches were major changes to Lynch’s traditional painterly practice, experimenting with both old and new techniques to challenge himself. Lynch made use of sculpting practices by implementing three sculpted heads and one arm, cast from his own body by collaborator Jack Fisk – who later acted in Lynch’s debut feature, *Eraserhead*. The sculptural aspect of *Six Figures* adds three-dimensional and textural components to the bodies being displayed, allowing Lynch to experiment with the material, ‘hands-on’ approach that he had developed during his earlier fine-art years, while simultaneously expanding on filmmaking processes such as lighting, shadows and contrast – all of which are exaggerated on the sculpted figures by the projection of the animation. Furthermore, the implementation of this mixed-media approach causes the three sculpted figures to become the salient point of the image – remaining the only constant, or ‘static’, point throughout the entire film. Lynch would later continue to incorporate

similar mixed-media practices and contextualise them within his filmmaking, playing key roles in physical elements such as the production design, special effects and art-direction of *Eraserhead*. Further discussing Lynch's specific practice throughout the project, Nieland (2012) declares that the experiment is a "multimedia investigation of cinema's relationship to the plastic arts – to materials that are capable of being shaped or molded in three dimensions" (p.04). Blending film and animation processes with the tactile aspects of sculpture and painting permits Lynch to experiment with the relationship between mediums. The effect highlights the materiality of the body, contrasting the flat, two-dimensional quality of the animation alongside the sculpted heads, seemingly bursting out of the frame in surreal fashion. By developing the multi-media format of the piece, Lynch was able to implement his abstract painterly style into free-flowing images and thus developed his methods of creative practice. Here, there is equal place for a variety of creative mediums – this is largely informed by Lynch's wholistic approach, in which every element of the process is relevant and important to effectively express the overarching idea. In terms of Lynch's practice, *Six Figures* was produced during an era of significant creative upheaval, much as the work of Mendieta within emerging feminist art-practices. Furthermore, discussing transitional multimedia and the shifting landscape of filmmaking practices, Mirza and Butler (2015) state that:

Intense technological transformation leads to new situations and new conditions for making, exhibiting and distribution of artist's film and video. In the 1960s and 1970s you had the rise of new electronic media such as television and video, which had a freeing effect on artistic explorations and uses of film. (p.177)

In terms of a 'transition' to film, *Six Figures Getting Sick* utilises various cinematic techniques that are further explored throughout Lynch's later work. This includes an emphasis on visuals, mood, and atmosphere as opposed to traditional plot or narrative. Defining 'traditional' or 'conventional' film-practices, Klecker (2011) argues that the style of mainstream film "is mainly characterized by a clear and comprehensible narrative flow and a complete disguise of the film's artifice" (p.11). In contrast to this, discussing avant-garde cinema, Cardullo (2011) argues that "the art film dwells upon characters with less clearly defined and singular desires. This produces a narrative less clearly structured by explicit temporal markers like deadlines and enables the self-conscious use of style to evoke atmosphere and ambiguity" (p.03). Lynch's films operate somewhere in between these two areas. Conventionality was never the intent of Lynch's practice however, and thus, Lynch abolishes conventional structure entirely – instead, the repetition of the film's loop creates a nervous tension as it continually cycles through the same action. Regarding his visual approach, the experiment strongly exhibits Lynch's painterly practices in terms of aesthetic and technique – elements that, again, would carry into his

visualisation of the body in later works such as *Eraserhead*. For example, in *Six Figures*, the stationary position of the camera throughout the film acts as Lynch's canvas: highlighting the movement of the figures' bodies while also drawing our attention to Lynch's striking animation style. From a cinematographic perspective Lynch pays particular attention to the composition, exposure, and blocking of his frame – once again drawing on his experience as a fine-artist and painter. For instance, the film uses negative space to draw the viewer's eye toward the figures, encompassing the heads within a striking white background before the screen rapidly fills with black. This grayscale colour palette is a prominent aspect of Lynch's fine-art practice, playing a key role in a large number of his artworks to emphasise texture and tone, and would later assimilate within his filmmaking in *Eraserhead* – shot entirely in black and white. The lack of colour in the film is soon shaken up as Lynch's composition is punctuated by strong reds, vibrant purples and bursts of orange flames as the bodies become 'sick'. The creation of *Six Figures Getting Sick* demonstrates an especially important moment in Lynch's filmography, as it represents the first true experiment with filmic practices. As such, there is an interesting aesthetic overlap between Lynch's painterly practice and the visual techniques of the screen – Lynch's blends the aesthetic influences of his fine-artwork, such as Bacon, and recontextualises these into film by implementing movement and sound. Thus, the experiment was essential in the development of his 'Lynchian' style, a characteristic that would continue experimentation through his following short films, *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970). By using a mixed-media approach for *Six Figures Getting Sick*, Lynch effectively develops his creative practice and transitions from painting to film, retaining his unconventional practices as a fine-artist and blending them with new filmmaking processes.

The Lynchian Gaze

Lynch's work often explores the body, typically the female body, and as such we are subjected to his gaze. Discussing the prominence of Mulvey's gaze, Collins (2017) succinctly contends that:

The gaze concerns our act of watching or spectating. It also concerns our interpretation, our pleasure in looking, and the specifically gendered viewpoint that the film offers us. Gaze is about the eyes, desire, pleasure. Gaze is about sex and gender. (p.415)

According to Mulvey's argument, cinema is ultimately told from a dominant male perspective in which the gaze informs the director's vision. In turn this impacts the performances and representations of characters in the film, as well as the gaze of the viewer (Collins, 2017).

Applying this idea of the gaze to *Six Figures Getting Sick* provides an engaging method of understanding the role of gender in the work, and particularly Lynch's perspective in regard to visualising the human body on-screen. Of note is the title itself: initially named *Six Men Getting Sick*, the piece has since been referred to as *Six Figures Getting Sick*, thus removing the gendered signifier (Nochimson, 2013, p.159). The specific genders of the characters are not explicitly stated in the film itself, however as Olson (2008) argues the 'figures' are modelled upon Lynch's head and thus they are read as being male (p.32). In keeping with this, the film demonstrates various points of Mulvey's theory such as a focus on phallogentrism and a dismissal of female (and other genders) agency. The result is a film that somewhat reinforces the masculine order, though Lynch also subverts aspects of the traditionally dominant male gaze through his unconventional fine-art background. Lynch's modes of gender representation here would later draw parallels with his film *Blue Velvet* (1986), in which the masculine order, voyeurism and female eroticisation are extremely prominent within both the narrative and Lynch's visualisation of the body.

The film presents the audience with six 'active' male protagonists, maintaining their authoritative presence throughout the entirety of the runtime. The figures preside over the frame, particularly with the static consistency of Lynch's sculpted figures, commanding the viewer to watch them. Here, Lynch plays with the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator, utilising the disembodied heads to enact male identification with his distorted protagonists. The lack of movement in these characters suggests a lack of agency and the quality of being 'possessed', or feminised. Reinforcing this, as Oliver (2017) states in her article, while Mulvey's earlier writing on the gaze argued the unique nature of film in its ability to create a sense of movement and activity within male characters, and thus fixing female characters in the gaze, her work on the gaze is later reshaped and argues "that the stillness of the moving image essentially feminises both male and female characters by fixing them into images that can be possessed, that is to say stopped in their tracks" (p.452). Taking this into account, one could argue that Lynch's multi-media practice and the inclusion of 'static' sculptures in fact feminises the figures, and thus their agency is removed in comparison to the more 'active' animated male characters. There is no inclusion of other genders in the film, and thus we are forced to engage with the 'masculine activity' that occurs as the six men spasm and aggressively regurgitate fluids across the frame. As Sassatelli (2011) discusses in her article, *Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture*, Mulvey's theory of the gaze explored the paradox of phallogentrism. Essentially, this refers to the idea that the male gaze is co-

extensive with the camera's gaze, both of which depend "on the image of 'the castrated woman' in order to make sense of the world" (Sassatelli, 2011, p.124). Therefore, regardless of gender, the viewer is forced to take pleasure in a cinematic gaze that reinforces a dominant and 'active' male figure, and a 'passive' female that is forced to be 'seen' and looked at by the audience. In the film, Lynch exhibits aspects of a phallogentric gaze, represented through the inclusion of elongated oesophageal shafts and phallic disembodied limbs.

Lynch demonstrates aspects of Mulvey's gaze, while also subverting elements. The 'male' figures in the film exhibit a similar mode of 'being seen' commonly attributed to the female gender in Mulvey's argument. In this sense, Lynch flips the gaze, utilising his camera as a means of inviting the viewer to 'look' voyeuristically at the bodies on display, despite also being dominant male characters. Comparably, in her article *The Homosexual Male Gaze: Normalizing Homosexuality through the Use of Heteronormative Narrative Techniques in Film*, Rohrs (2019) argues that the traditional workings of the male gaze for 'passive objects' can in fact be reversed and instead apply to male characters – specifically as a means of normalising homosexuality and representing gay characters. In the article, Rohrs (2019) declares that the inherent nature of the gaze in cinema is fundamentally "a filming technique that plays into scopophilia and allows viewers to experience a film (and its female characters) through the perspective of the leading male character" (p.09). While *Six Figures Getting Sick* does not strictly fit within Rohrs' context of the homosexual gaze, it raises the question of how the gaze can be interpreted without female characters in the picture. Lynch is utilising his male bodies for scopophilia and visual pleasure, but not necessarily for clear erotic impact as Mulvey's theory of the gaze may suggest. Rather, Lynch's work appears to represent the grotesque *as* beauty – drawing heavily upon his fine-art influences such as Francis Bacon, but recontextualising this representation for the cinema. Although Lynch would go on to produce cinematic works that heavily reinforce the hierarchical nature of the male gaze, the early experiment *Six Figures* represents Lynch's gaze toward the grotesque as a 'beautiful' or visual spectacle. Perhaps due to the experimental nature of the film, drawing heavily on his unconventional painterly practices, Lynch subverts many of the representational imbalances present in cinema due to this grotesque, distorted approach.

The Distorted and Fragmented Body

It is important to ask the question of what it means to visualise the body for Lynch. Throughout Lynch's filmography and artwork, there is a strong emphasis on the textural and tactile qualities of the body, reinforced by Lynch's use of multi-media practices and his often 'surrealist' representations of the body that subsequently highlight such qualities. Lynch is interested in surfaces and textures, as well as what lies beneath them: whether it be the seedy underbelly of a seemingly idyllic town, or the grotesque innards of a mutated infant, there is a curiosity in Lynch's approach to explore these hidden realms. Using his abstract visual approach, Lynch frequently distorts and fragments the body in order to explore new forms of representation. Thus, for Lynch, visualising the human body allows an opportunity to question acceptable art practices and representations of the body, blurring the lines between the 'beautiful' and the 'grotesque'. The warped visualisation of the body throughout Lynch's painterly practice and filmmaking work demonstrates his tendency for a surreal blend of horror and comedic effect. In that regard, *Six Figures Getting Sick* is the foundation for Lynch's filmic approach to visualising the body, and the experiment exemplifies many of the characteristics of his later explorations of the human form. Discussing the role of the body in the experiment, Nochimson (2013) states:

In this sculpture, Lynch called into play a disturbing vision of blurred borders between inside and outside. As insides were regurgitated unceasingly over a series of unchanging molded heads through the nonstop loop, the work seemed to declare an uneasy, diseased, but inevitable interplay between human surfaces and "what lies beneath," an unsettling depiction of human existence as inescapably confusing and wrenching. (p.159)

Six Figures Getting Sick represents the foundations of Lynch's abstract bodies within his filmmaking practices. The figures in the piece connote a somewhat alien quality, with only the disembodied heads and disproportionate limbs being visible. Throughout the runtime, Lynch reveals the distorted internal organs of the figures: rocklike-shaped stomachs covered in black-spirals, connected to the isolated heads through inhuman, mechanical pipes. Here we see Lynch's interest in the relationship between 'human' and 'machine', a theme that would go on to be a prominent component of *Eraserhead's* ambience and narrative. Reinforcing this biomechanical representation of the body in the piece, Olson (2008) contends that "his first movie manifests his urge to explore beneath the surface of things by revealing the interior physical plumbing of his six men" (p.32). Combining this abstract visualisation of the body with the sonically dissonant soundscape (a looping siren) only serves to reiterate the distortion and fragmentation of the body.

In the experiment, Lynch's painterly approach and the display of multimedia creative practices further aid his distortion of the body. Discussing the role of the body and its ability to be 'deconstructed' for the screen, Perrott (2015) contends that "one strategy of bodily deconstruction involves estranging the familiar by juxtaposing incongruous imagery in a way that confronts the viewer with a sense of unease" (p.122). Applying this notion to *Six Figures*, we see Lynch's estrangement of the familiar in his abstract painterly style. The sculpted heads and limbs are recognisably Lynch and, most importantly, recognisably human – despite their rough textural qualities and fragmentary placement. However, Lynch's painterly practice is utilised in the experiment to juxtapose these sculpted bodies and 'deconstruct' them. The two-dimensional painted components of the experiment, moving through Lynch's animation techniques, strengthen the unfamiliarity of the bodies and thus reinforce their distortion. Lynch's painterly influences seep into his practice here and impact his representation of the body by distorting and fragmenting it. Once again, Lynch's experiment draws on the work of Bacon, whose paintings attempted to "subvert the brain's inherited concepts of what bodies and faces should look like. Thus, in addition to the lonely figures, he made use of mutilated and savaged faces and bodies, often in combination" (Zeki & Ishizu, 2013, p.02).

Ultimately Lynch's first attempt at creating a 'moving painting' is successful in its aim to distort the representation of the body. Lynch effectively develops his practice as both a filmmaker and visual artist, transitioning from his role as a painter and expanding his craft with moving images. Despite this, Lynch still retains the subversive, avant-garde characteristics of his art practices and manages to translate them to the screen. Utilising the frame as his canvas, Lynch is able to fragment and distort the human form in new and unexpected ways thanks to cinema's ability to capture movement and sound. Lynch's gaze maintains a certain ambiguity in the piece, both demonstrating aspects of hierarchical gender imbalance while also subverting elements through his surrealist visualisation. Although his filmmaking career eclipses his early work, *Six Figures Getting Sick* remains a relevant and integral constituent of Lynch's filmography and to understanding the role that the human body plays within his work.

Chapter Two: *Eraserhead* (1977): An Industrial Nightmare

In terms of Lynch's practice, *Eraserhead* is a particularly prominent example in his filmography due to its lengthy gestation period and varied influences. After the creation of *Six Figures Getting Sick*, Lynch continued his transition from painterly practices to filmmaking with several experimental short films: *Absurd Encounter With Fear* (1967), *The Alphabet* (1968), *The Grandmother* (1970), and *The Amputee* (1974). These short films, however, will not be the focus of this analysis – rather, I will examine how Lynch applies his shifting practices into his first feature-length work. His debut feature, *Eraserhead*, was the culmination of these prior experiments and solidified Lynch's move into filmmaking practices. Initially, while studying at the AFI Lynch intended to create a film known as *Gardenback*, a forty-five-page script that unfolded from one of his own paintings (Rodley, 1997, p.58). After failing to get this script funded, Lynch aimed to create a more ambitious film project than his previous work. Despite the changes to his practice, Lynch retained the aesthetic and thematic qualities of his fine-art and audio-visual work - including a fixation on the body, a juxtaposition of the surreal and the mundane, as well as blurring the lines between the 'beautiful' and the 'grotesque' (Taylor, 2000). Much like Lynch's earlier experiments, *Eraserhead* emphasised tone and atmosphere over traditional plot or structure. The film portrays a timid man named Henry Spencer (Jack Nance), and his failed attempt to nurture his new-born child amid a decaying industrial landscape. Heralded for its surrealist visualisation and dark ambient soundtrack, the film became a cult success and gained popularity through midnight-movie screenings – becoming one of the most “persistent and successful cult films on the midnight and art-house circuits” (Godwin, 1985, p.37).

Notably, the film depicts the body through Lynch's abstract painterly style, influenced by artists such as Bacon and defined by his surreal emphasis on texture and tone. Reinforcing the characteristics of this painterly style, Lynch states “the textures in those things are really incredible -- when things pop open and fester in a dance of organic phenomenon, the textures and the mood, the way they are shaped” (Appleford, 2018, para.14). Ultimately, this painterly style is exhibited through Lynch's visual approach and animation practices that draw on his experience as a fine artist, allowing Lynch to alter the limitations of the human body on-screen by manipulating shape, movements, and textural qualities. Developing his painterly practices for the screen, Lynch is aware of film's capability of widening the scope for various forms of representation. For example, Lynch's short film *The Alphabet* (1968) utilises surreal painted

animation to depict the body as an abstract and distorted figure. Lynch then incorporates his camera, using live-action footage as the film declares “please remember, you are dealing with the human form” (Lynch, 1968). Here, it is as though Lynch outright expresses the necessity of cinema to explore the human form and its representation on-screen.

This chapter will further explore Lynch’s practice toward visualising the body. Additionally, there will be discussion of the representation of the human form and gender in *Eraserhead*. First, I will analyse Lynch’s film practices as he transitions from fine-art practices into the techniques of filmmaking by presenting an overview of his short film work. Second, there will be discussion of how Lynch employs – and is guilty of – Mulvey’s gaze, which in turn affects his representation of gender in the film. Finally, the chapter will explore Lynch’s ‘grotesque’ and ‘beautiful’ bodies in the film, investigating how his surrealist tendencies impact the visual depictions of the human – or ‘inhuman’ – body.

Lynch’s Practice: From Painting to Film

Lynch’s experimentation with short film production resulted in work such as *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970). These films were a steppingstone for Lynch to develop a refined approach and process that both solidified his role as a filmmaker, as well as helping to establish his widely renowned ‘Lynchian’ aesthetic. In these films, Lynch went a step beyond his practices with *Six Figures*. For example, in *The Alphabet*, Lynch incorporates live action footage as opposed to solely using painted animation yet retains his abstract aesthetic qualities through techniques such as isolating the lighting of the frame and manipulating the footage to stutter in a similar manner to stop-motion. His following short, *The Grandmother* continued to develop this approach, and “marked a shift from Lynch’s earlier experimental work towards a greater emphasis on live action tied with elements of a loose but tangible narrative development” (Todd, 2012, p.16). *The Grandmother* signalled the end of animation and move into live action for Lynch. Although the film still utilised animated sequences in a similar fashion to *Six Figures* and his painterly practices, these segments were sparse. Instead, Lynch focused on the traditional filmmaking practice of live action. Ultimately this short film demonstrates that even as an emerging filmmaker, Lynch was fashioning a style that would feature in a lot (if not all) of his later work – that is to say, a crossover of surrealist practices into the mainstream, in order to juxtapose the surreal and mundane.

The practices that Lynch explored within the creation of *Eraserhead* served as an extension of his artistic style, while also laying the groundwork of his aesthetic qualities that would later be carried into films such as *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Blue Velvet* (1986). Inspired largely by his experience of Philadelphia, the film contextualised Lynch's early painterly fascination with mechanical, industrial landscapes and reimagined this aesthetic to provide a nightmarish setting for the film. The city reinforced Lynch's painterly fascination with texture and decay: "it all started for me in Philadelphia because it's old enough, and it's got enough things in the air so that it can really go to work on itself. It's decaying, but it's fantastically beautiful. It gives you ideas" (Rodley, 1997, p.43). Throughout his transition from painterly practices to filmmaking, Lynch's work acts on instinctual and subconscious processes that subsequently feed into his surrealist visualisation. As Johnson (2003) argues, these early audio-visual experiments demonstrate that "Lynch is coming to terms with his medium while staking out ontological parameters and exploring psychological quirks, testing, refining his signature" (p.08). It is important to recognise the impact that these transitional stepping-stones had upon Lynch's creative practice. Furthermore, in order to effectively explore Lynch's filmmaking practice with *Eraserhead*, it is necessary to situate the film amongst his previous audio-visual 'experiments' and painterly practices, as many of the aesthetic elements and technical processes correlate – particularly regarding Lynch's visualisation of the body.

Throughout the film Lynch builds upon the preciseness and cinematic quality of his camera, previously tested in his short films, by paying particular attention to the composition and movement of the frame, thus utilising the lens as his newfound 'canvas'. We see this through his use of strong shadows and heavy contrast lighting, mirroring the aesthetic qualities of his moody black and white paintings. Shot in monochrome, *Eraserhead* uses this restrained palette to convey a darkly oppressive mood, and to heighten the film's dreamlike qualities – as Lynch states in Rodley's (1997) book, "colour to me is too real. It's limiting. It doesn't allow too much of a dream. The more you throw black into a colour, the more dreamy it gets" (p.20). While this notion certainly applies to Lynch's painterly practice and early film work, colour would go on to play significant roles in works such as *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-91). Perhaps most interesting about Lynch is his ability to adapt his practices across a multiplicity of art and media, while still retaining his defining aesthetic and characteristics. As discussed in the previous chapter, 'Lynchian' aesthetics are characterised by an uncanny or surrealist tone, a juxtaposed fixation on industrial factories and organic body matter, and an emphasis on the beautiful and grotesque. These elements play key roles in his artwork and

carry over into *Eraserhead*. Lynch's filmmaking process demonstrates a heavily visual focus akin to his painting work – less inspired by story, but rather imagery, mood and feeling. This process of emphasising painterly visuals in tandem with sound rather than a traditional narrative form translated into *Eraserhead*. Notably, Lynch employs planimetric composition throughout the film, such as the early sequences of Henry walking home through the industrial landscape. During these scenes, Lynch's painterly composition highlights the static nature of the camera, acting as his 'canvas', drawing the audience's gaze toward the emphasised movement of his subjects within the frame. Lynch's script for the film was merely twenty-two pages long and was born from the idea of a "single unprecedented image: A man's head bouncing on the ground, being picked up by a boy and taken to a pencil factory" (Olson, 2008, p. 60). Of course, this imagery may well have been simply expressed through painting, but Lynch's desire for movement and sound-design (the latter of which was helmed by core collaborator Alan Splet) led him to utilise filmmaking practices to capture his vision. Furthermore, much like *Six Figures Getting Sick*, we see Lynch's desire to bridge the gap between his painting and filmmaking practices – he acknowledges the capabilities that cinema has in terms of breathing life and giving depth to still-image formats, such as painting, by allowing them to move. Thus, Lynch overcame the limitations of painting through the production of *Eraserhead*, which granted newfound freedom for his creative practice.

Regarding *Eraserhead*, there are parallels to the imagery of *Six Figures Getting Sick* and his following shorts. By expanding upon his cinematic style and visual language, Lynch was slowly devising carefully considered cinematography, sound-design, and editing choices. In terms of his visual process, the film employs a plethora of simple film techniques, yet they are utilised to powerful effect. For example, now working within the longer form of a feature-length, Lynch's editing operates in a unique fashion that is somewhere between slow-cinema and conventional film. The film is relatively light on cuts, allowing Lynch's painterly frames to linger and for the actors to hold the audience's attention through their physical performances. Another example is the film's opening sequence, in which Lynch implements an uninterrupted superimposed image of protagonist Henry Spencer's face floating in front of a planet. Instantly this indicates the film's dreamlike quality, the psychological state of the main character, and the ambiguous nature of the narrative content – all of which is communicated through Lynch's editing technique. Akin to the static nature of painting, it is evident that Lynch is still exploring similar aesthetics as his fine art through his visual approach, making use of planimetric compositions, wide shots and long-takes. However, the ability to edit and manipulate the

imagery on-screen, through techniques such as superimposition, allow Lynch to explore new creative possibilities. Again, Lynch uses the frame as his canvas, however he now incorporates sound and movement into his practice, thus exploring fluidity, temporality, and conjuring a deeper emotive engagement with his spectators. As with *Six Figures Getting Sick*, Lynch's practice not only evolved regarding his visual process, but also his implementation of sound into his creative practice. In both *Six Figures* and *The Grandmother*, Lynch demonstrates the growing strength of his soundscapes through dissonant noises such as sirens and animal noises. Similarly, *Eraserhead* builds on this by using dark industrial soundscapes to re-emphasise the otherworldly atmosphere throughout almost the entirety of its duration, conjuring both an atmospheric framework demonstrated through the incessant whirring and hissing of machinery, as well as unnerving the viewer with its off-kilter tone and constant repetition. The addition of sound-design into his filmmaking practice gives Lynch new creative avenues to explore, and as such, Lynch uses the churning, machine-like drone to contrast his distorted, dysmorphic bodies and the decaying sense of organic life in the film. Discussing this contrast and relating back to Lynch's evolution from fine-art practices, Godwin (1985) notes the reminiscence of H.R. Giger's paintings, and argues that the parallel between *Eraserhead* and other art practices allows a means of deciphering the ambiguity of the film thanks to its internal form of dream images (p.38). Moreover, Godwin's suggestion reaffirms the importance of contextualising the film within Lynch's previous art practices, as it shows a clear development in terms of overcoming creative restrictions as well as advancing his practice as a filmmaker.

In terms of the film's cinematographic approach, *Eraserhead* demonstrates the "cinematic" Lynch coming through that is far apart from his preceding short films and thus representing an evolution in his filmmaking practices. For example, in one scene Henry sits on his bed and stares at the radiator. Lynch begins on a wide angle, capturing the bedroom and Henry's character, and lingers on this shot for over a minute and a half before cutting to a tighter mid-shot of Henry perched on the mattress. Here the camera tracks forward slowly and dramatically into a close-up of Henry's face, staring at his radiator. The whirring and hissing audio builds exponentially, as Lynch pans across the radiator – visually depicting it as a monolithic structure. *Eraserhead* is far 'cleaner' regarding its smoothness and texture, as opposed to an earlier work such as *Six Figures* – in which the image almost appears to pulsate with grain, dust and scratches on the film stock. Once again, this cleaner visual style aids Lynch's cinematic aesthetic. These developments of Lynch's filmmaking practice represent a drastic

change from his early experiments with the medium, demonstrating Lynch's command and vision as an auteur.

The Gaze in *Eraserhead*

Due to the sexual undertones of the film, highlighting the dark consequences of adultery, sex, and forced marriage, *Eraserhead* features a particularly strong gaze from Lynch's male perspective. Although themes of sexuality were not significant in all of Lynch's fine-art, the majority of which focused on surreal imagery through a childlike absurdist lens, bodies – particularly female ones – were still explored by Lynch throughout his creative practice. For example, Lynch's student paintings of 'mechanical people', his dominant gaze upon the bodies in *Six Figures Getting Sick*, or the surrealist animation sequences in *The Grandmother* depicting the act of procreation. Thus, Lynch's gaze certainly seeps into his creative work and film practice. As Sassatelli (2011) notes, Mulvey's theory of the gaze concerns the paradox of phallogentrism, in which the camera's gaze correlates with the dominant male gaze – this focuses on the image of the 'castrated woman' and thus the female gender is specifically coded for visual and erotic impact in the viewer (p.124). Analysing *Eraserhead* through this lens reveals Lynch's occasionally problematic modes of representing hierarchical gender structures – however, given the wider narrative of the film, Lynch's film practices and representational methods work in his favour, reinforcing his dreamlike exploration of gender relationships, sexuality, and the body.

In terms of visual phallogentrism and sexual connotation, for example, the film's opening sequence proves to be a particular sight of interest. Here, Lynch commands the gaze by highlighting the film's intermediality. Discussing Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999), Kendall (2010) argues:

The emphasis on moments of stillness in *Ratcatcher* brings photography's 'deathly' stasis into dialogue with cinema's propensity for the illusion of lifelike movement, breaking down the divisions between the two. *Ratcatcher*'s intermediality creates a liminal, in-between space in which time appears both as that which can be touched and inhabited. (p.195)

Applying this to *Eraserhead* reveals that Lynch's painterly approach, in utilising the screen as his canvas and thus emphasising both moments of stillness and movement, creates a conversation between the forces of film, photography and painting. Through this intermediality, as Kendall's article points out, Lynch's film creates this 'in-between' space in which time appears both as that which can be touched and inhabited. Thus, in the film's opening

scene, this effect re-emphasises the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator and their sensory engagement with the film's character Henry. As noted previously, the film opens on a horizontally superimposed image of the male protagonist, Henry Spencer, staring blankly – his gaze occasionally meets the camera's perspective as he drifts around the frame. Lynch instantly shows us that this is a male-centric story, and that his gaze will play an integral part in the representation of his characters. Next, Lynch's camera pushes in on a planet, and we drift across its surface. Here Lynch's gaze exhibits his fetishistic fascination with textural qualities, further employed within his visualisation of the body as the film continues. The camera tracks into a hole in a tin roof and we emerge in a dark, grimy room, where a decaying male figure (Jack Fisk) sits idly next to a smashed window frame. Lynch's composition and lighting constructs the male figure as the salient point of the image, with the noir inspired rich-contrast lighting drawing the viewer's gaze toward the characters face and deformed body. Lynch uses this to draw our gaze toward the 'dominant' and 'active' male presence, while also using this lighting technique to highlight the textural qualities of the man's lacerated skin. With this, we see aspects of Lynch's interest in the body and scopophilia, and as Manlove (2007) contends "according to Mulvey, scopophilia is one of several drives making up the patriarchal sexual order" (p.88). Shortly after, Lynch presents us with phallic imagery, as a large sperm-like creature emerges from Henry's gaping mouth and the 'Man in the Planet' begins to pull on large phallic levers, almost resembling rifle barrels. It is likely that Lynch is metaphorically visualizing intercourse here given the nature of the film's overall narrative. Furthermore, it is particularly interesting to note that although this introductory scene appears to represent the act of sexual intercourse and the 'creation' of Henry's child, no female characters are featured in the sequence. Rather, Lynch portrays the act with an exaggerated male-dominance, in which an otherworldly male figure appears to 'pull the strings.' This both reinforces a sense of nightmarish anxiety that Spencer's character suffers from, as well as demonstrating the position of Lynch's male gaze – as Collins (2017) argues, "the man exists first, then Mulvey posits the woman in society as 'castrated', thus, only existing in relation to the dominant male gaze. The woman is a secondary creature, defined by her lack of penis" (p.415). In the film, women are represented in a variety of ways. Several female characters such as Mary X and Mrs X (Jeanne Bates) are depicted in a very conservative manner without sexualisation or erotic pleasure. However, their presence in the film is relatively limited outside of their male counterparts.

Among the most prominent examples of Lynch's male gaze in *Eraserhead* is the character of the 'Lady in the Radiator' (Laurel Near) - this character's introduction in the film encapsulates

Mulvey's theory. In the scene, Lynch's camera emerges from darkness and pans up to a lightbulb nestled at the edge of a stage. In one smooth take, Lynch tracks to the right along the stage and shows a row of lightbulbs, all of which light up as they enter the frame, before revealing the Lady in the Radiator. Her introductory shot is fragmented, focusing on her legs and dainty shoes, before the camera pans up and tracks backward into a wide-angle, revealing the character's entire body. The Lady's gaze meets the viewer as the character smiles and slowly dances onstage; her face is illuminated by diffused top lighting that highlights the character while softening shadows and contrast. Lynch's careful lighting in the sequence is used to reinforce the gaze, giving the character a youthful and 'desirable' complexion that directly contrasts the figure's strangely malformed facial structure. The effect of this contradiction is a sense of unease; as an audience, Lynch draws us into his gaze and then destabilises the 'visual pleasure' through uncomfortable close-ups and grotesquery. In a sense, Lynch subverts Mulvey's theory of the gaze by finding beauty in the grotesque, as opposed to finding beauty or erotic pleasure in the sexualisation of women – rather, Lynch's fascination with texture and surrealism are the focus here.

This is further complicated as the Lady begins to crush elongated sperm-like creatures onstage, while maintaining her exaggerated smile and direct address with the camera. Here, the camera assumes the role not only of Lynch, but also Henry's character, and thus the gaze mirrors his perspective. Lynch's representation of gender and the gaze in the film is particularly interesting because of its duality: women are depicted simultaneously as both subjects of erotic desire and conflict. This is demonstrated through Lynch's eroticised portrayal of the 'Beautiful Girl across the hall' (Judith Roberts), whose character is in line with the male gaze in a conventional sense. This character is featured to be an object of lust for Henry, and this desire culminates in a sex-scene which subverts the fetishised representation by portraying the act as threatening and uncomfortable – with Henry's character quite literally sinking into a pool of liquid. Lynch's eroticised representation of the female gender is juxtaposed with his conservative – yet threatening – depiction of Mary X and Mrs. X. Ultimately, Lynch's gaze is much more prominent and developed in *Eraserhead* than his previous art-practice and short films, though one could argue that it is more misogynistic. Where Lynch's earlier creative practices were more ambiguous in terms of their representation of gender and the body, *Eraserhead* demonstrates a strong representational shift and largely reinforces Mulvey's male-dominant theory of the gaze.

Grotesque Beauty: The Bodies of *Eraserhead*

One of the most striking elements of *Eraserhead* is Lynch's juxtaposition of a cold, industrial landscape alongside an emphasis on the textural, organic qualities of the body. As demonstrated within his painterly practices, Lynch is fascinated with texture and this fascination carries into his on-screen depictions of the body. *Eraserhead* utilises Lynch's emphasis on texture and contextualises it within surrealist representations of the body – namely, it manifests as a juxtaposition of the grotesque and beautiful. In the film, Lynch depicts this in a variety of ways: for instance, the Lady in the Radiator's malformed facial appearance and her simultaneous eroticisation, or Lynch's depiction of the Man in the Planet's mutilated skin and an emphasis on the textural elements of his body. However, this is perhaps best demonstrated through the character of Henry's child – often referred to simply as 'The Baby' or 'The Infant', the grotesque nature of this character is preceded by the manufactured chickens earlier in the film. Through this disfigured child, Lynch subverts aspects of the performativity that Butler discusses in reference to masculinity, such as heterosexual fatherhood traits. In terms of this performativity, Nentwich (2008) asserts that "parenthood is still constructed along the heterosexual gender binary that equates women with mothers and men with fathers" (p.207). Lynch subverts this tradition as, ultimately, Henry is not a provider nor is Mary willing to be a mother. The infant is among the most overtly surrealist elements of *Eraserhead*, with the child's body lacking any identifiable qualities and appearing genderless. The visualisation of the body here displays a complete opposition to any humanistic qualities: the infant has no limbs, ears, or expressive capability aside from its persistent crying, and resembles a reptilian or spermatozoon-like creature as opposed to a human being. The sperm-like characteristics of the baby is a consistent motif throughout the film, and Lynch uses this to represent the anxieties surrounding paternal responsibility and sexuality. The alien, grotesque appearance of the infant subsequently creates a disturbing, nightmarish characteristic in Lynch's visualisation of its body – all recognisable aspects are gone; we see merely a disturbing combination of textures and inhuman movements. As Taylor (2000) argues, the symbol of the grotesque infant is "a pure creature of the Imaginary and representative of unadulterated difference. Not yet taken up into the symbolic order, the infant is not malformed so much as it is mysteriously *unformed*" (p.57). While Lynch introduces the film with wider angles, settling viewers into the world and creating physical comedy through body language and movement, he later uses tighter mid-shots and close-up framing to emphasise the grotesque and textural qualities of the infant's body.

Lynch also exhibits his juxtaposition of the grotesque and beautiful through the infant's death. In this sequence of the film, as Joseph (2015) argues:

Lynch obsesses over the arresting nature of the body in death through his many representations of corpses in his films that are made into beautiful fantasy images designed to provoke desire as well as horror at the sight of the body as abject object. (p.491)

Lynch challenges the spectacle of the body on display, placing the voyeuristic nature of spectatorship in tandem with the scopophilic gaze – thus, presenting a strange paradox within the film. The infant's body is represented as a 'spectacle' to be focused on, yet its grotesque visualisation and crude distortion almost seem to repel this idea, encouraging the viewer to 'look away'. It is because of this paradox that we understand the ambiguity in Lynch's visualisation – from his perspective, the child is a beautiful concoction of tones and textures. Thus, Lynch is finding 'beauty' in the grotesque.

Ultimately, *Eraserhead* demonstrates Lynch's fascination with warped representations of beauty and the body, sharing characteristics of both desire and the grotesque – thus, his bodies are rendered an abstract distortion, wholly inhuman. With *Eraserhead*, Lynch was able to significantly develop his practices and translate his painterly aesthetic to the screen. Incorporating his fine-art background, stylistic tendencies as a painter, along with the knowledge gained from his previous film experiments, *Eraserhead* was an unconventional success and remains distinctive due to its unforgettable aesthetic. The subversive nature of the film, in terms of its narrative, imagery, sound-design and representation, render it timeless and suggests why the film remains pertinent in a contemporary context. However, Lynch's prominent male gaze and scopophilia impact his representations of gender on-screen, spotlighting his male characters and side-lining women as a visual and erotic spectacle - this problematic form of representation also carries into later works in his filmography, such as *Lost Highway* (1997). Regardless, Lynch's surrealist and painterly aesthetic allow his visualisation of the body to take on subversive and expressive qualities, thus widening the scope for newfound modes of bodily representation.

Chapter Three: Body I Am -
Ana Mendieta's *Glass on Body Imprints* (1972)

Pain of Cuba
body I am
my orphanhood I live

In Cuba when you die
the earth that covers us
speaks.

But here,
covered by the earth whose prisoner I am
I feel death palpitating underneath
the earth.

And so,
As my whole body is filled with want of Cuba
I go on to make my work upon the earth,
to go on is victory. (Mendieta, 1981, as cited in Spero, 1992, p.75)

The work of Ana Mendieta ranks among the most prominent Cuban American art of the twentieth century. Mendieta's art explored the politics of the female body and cultural identity through various practices, such as painting, photography, film experiments and performance art – often blending mediums to create newfound methods of representation. In 1961, shortly after the Cuban Revolution, Mendieta was exiled from Cuba and spent the following years living in Iowa with her sister, Raquel (James, 2017, p.570). As a result of this, her artwork captured her ingrained love of Cuba and the trauma of being separated from her homeland. Mendieta's work investigated the cultural and political imprints on the body, utilising it as a means of understanding her Cuban heritage as well as challenging the limited representation of women in her contemporary art-scene. As such, the body played an integral component within all her creative practices up until Mendieta's tragic death in 1985.

The following chapter will analyse Mendieta's *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* (1972), a performance and photography series produced during her time as a student at the University of Iowa. Much as the preceding analysis of Lynch's work, this chapter will explore Mendieta's creative practice and her mixed-method approach in order to visualise the female body in the piece. In contrast to Lynch's 'male gaze', the chapter will then look at Mendieta's 'female gaze' and her methods of destabilising male voyeurism and authority. Lastly, the analysis will investigate Mendieta's stylistic portrayal of the body, exploring her distortions of the female figure and identity.

Mendieta's Practice: From Painting to Performance

Initially, not unlike Lynch, Mendieta studied painting and received both a bachelors and master's degree in the subject from the University of Iowa (Cruz, 2005, p.226). Mendieta's early inclination towards visual practices suggests her skill in crafting striking and powerful imagery without the inclusion of sound. It was here, however, that her creative practices began to shift, and Mendieta started to incorporate other mediums into her work. As Cruz (2005) discusses in his retrospective chapter, *Ana Mendieta's art: A journey through her life*, Mendieta studied at a time when the University of Iowa's arts discipline, namely the multimedia and video-art programs, were largely spearheading "experimental, transformative changes in the traditional standards of gallery exhibitions and artistic expression" (p.227). Furthermore, the work of her peers and surrounding creative practitioners seemingly encouraged Mendieta to challenge her practice by experimenting with new approaches. In effect, the program's incentive for experimentation and transformative methods of expression allowed Mendieta the freedom to test new practices in her work. Such practices included photography, filmmaking, installations and performative pieces, all of which would go on to become fundamental elements of Mendieta's later works. However, rather than simply utilising one medium, Mendieta diversified her work by blending aspects of various practices in order to create unique, challenging and multi-dimensional pieces. As Cruz (2005) goes on to state, these experimental practices formed a rich creative canvas "where representation began as an investigation of the artist's own body and how the surroundings affected it" (p.227). This theme established the framework for Mendieta's *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* in 1972.

At once a performance and photographic work, *Untitled* was created shortly after Mendieta's enrolment in her second master's degree, studying Intermedia as opposed to painting – a "cross-disciplinary program in film, video and performance" (Baum, 2008, p.81). In the piece, Mendieta transforms and distorts her body in order to challenge the limitations of female representation and identity. This is achieved through Mendieta's violent manipulation of her own body using practical materials, in this case glass, and captured through her use of photography. In a similar vein to her contemporaries, Mendieta's performance is reinforced by her use of these materials. Discussing the role of performance-art largely in the 1960's and 70's, Elwes (2015) notes:

The performer was guided by a series of self-generated instructions or intentions supported by a pre-determined collection of materials - flour, milk and rotting food in the case of Stuart Brisley in the UK, musical instruments, lights and film projections

in the case of Laurie Anderson in the USA, and knives, Are and a handgun in that of the Serbian Marina Abramovic. (p.54)

Thus, the use of performance allowed Mendieta and other practitioners, particularly female artists, to differ from the established notions of interactivity in art-practices. Through her intermedia practices, Mendieta's piece took on both an immediately visceral quality as a result of her performative method, while also capturing a static photography series documenting the event. Subsequently, this mixture of practices translated the work into a different format (photography), and thus it took on new meanings with the interplay of the 'gaze' and other screen-based repercussions.

As Baum (2008) contends, *Untitled* represents "one of Mendieta's earliest forays into the genre of body art" (p.81). Body art began to emerge as a mode of practice largely in the 70's and allowed artist practitioners to utilise their bodies and identities at the forefront of their creative practices. Naturally, this genre correlated with practices of performativity and, as such, identities are often constructed in body artworks through Butler's notion of gendered 'acts.' Discussing the practices of body art and performance, Jones (2000) states:

It is the *act*, then, that has the potential to produce a gap between the identity assumed to be attached to a particular type of body/self (for example, as displayed by the artist in body art) and the way in which that body/self actually comes to mean in the social arena – or between the work of art (as a manifestation of the artist) and its cultural meaning as determined through interpretation. (p.12)

In order to create *Untitled*, Mendieta's practice underwent a notable transformation, leaving behind her previous painterly practices and instead producing body art through performance and photographs. In this context, performance art can be defined as the use of the artists own body in their work through which it converts from object to subject, thus altering the dynamics of creator and spectator participation by focusing on the body's "energetic activity" (Wark, 2006, p.29). In the piece, Mendieta holds a glass pane against various parts of her body, pressing the glass against her face, breasts, back and flesh, in order to distort the recognisability and identity of her female figure. These actions were performed and simultaneously captured in thirty-six colour slides, several of which were then sent to a lab and printed as photographs (Baum, 2008, p.81). Despite her artistic practices originating in painting, however, Mendieta's visual sense translates onto the screen. Like Lynch's transition into filmmaking with *Six Figures Getting Sick*, Mendieta uses the camera lens as her newfound canvas, upon which she displays her body with a strikingly unflinching visual style. Utilising fragmentary close-ups and mid-shots, Mendieta frames her body in ways that reinforce the piece's overall themes of

understanding female identity, bodily detachment, and the juxtaposition of beauty and violence.

Given Mendieta's consistent motif of traces throughout her oeuvre – such as transience, bodily and environmental traces - it is unsurprising that photography would become such an integral element of her practice, as photography is a form of creating literal 'traces'. For instance, as Sontag (1990) writes, a photograph is “not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (p.154). Thus, in the case of *Untitled*, Mendieta's focus was on the cultural traces of the body and its representational limits, and this was visualised through her mixed-method approach of performance art and photography. Furthermore, by utilising photography practices within the piece, Mendieta was able to develop her on-screen visual aesthetic that would later be expanded within her film work. For example, Mendieta's use of fragmentary shot-composition would be further employed in her film experiment *Sweating Blood* (1973) – this development of her practice will form the discussion of the following chapter.

Regarding her mixed-method approach in terms of performativity, Mendieta's performance art allowed her to place her own identity and body as the subject of the piece – thus, becoming a canvas in itself. This was a particularly important element of her practice and was evident throughout all her work, notably her famous *Silueta* photography series, as it allowed Mendieta to challenge hierarchical art-practices in a male-dominated community. In the case of *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)*, given Mendieta's feminist standpoint (despite her refusal to be acknowledged solely as a 'feminist artist'), performance allowed a means of reclaiming the female body through the creative output. As Battista (2012) argues, performance was an important practice for artists concerned with female liberation, as it gave women the opportunity to transcend objectivity - and objectification – by maintaining their role as the creator as well as, or instead of, the model (p.59). Additionally, discussing this element of creative practice, Battista (2012) goes on to state:

Performance also provided a means of breaking down what many female (and male for that matter) artists saw as a patriarchal gallery system based on the traffic of objects. Performance also accommodated a celebration of previously taboo subjects related to women, such as menstruation, sexual desire and the boundaries of the female body. (p.59)

Due to the nature of Mendieta's subject matter, exploring themes surrounding the female body and her individual identity, incorporating a mixed-method approach of performance and

photography allowed Mendieta to challenge the boundaries of acceptable art practice. This mixture of art practices bears resemblance to Lynch's transition from painting to film – however, where Lynch employed animation practices in conjunction with filmmaking, Mendieta instead blended performance and photography. This indicates that practitioners who explore various approaches when transitioning creative mediums – testing the waters, so to speak – reveal hidden depths to their practice.

Subverting Perspective: Mendieta's 'Female Gaze'

Throughout her time as an artist, Mendieta challenged the limitations of acceptable art practice by reshaping representations of the female body and its cultural imprints. In order to do this, Mendieta centralised herself throughout almost the entirety of her creative work and, in doing so, repositioned traditional conventions of the gaze to instead demonstrate her 'female gaze'. As I have explored Mulvey's gaze with Lynch's films, I will apply this perspective to Mendieta's work in order to examine the differences in their approach. However, I acknowledge that Mendieta's approach is very much rooted in arts practice exclusively, and therefore there are contrasts between the artists perspective given this distinction of practices. As Mulvey's theory of the gaze notes, film consists of a deeply hierarchical system in which the male gender controls the gaze whereas the female gender is the object of the gaze – further, the woman is specifically coded for 'visual and erotic pleasure' in the spectator. Over time, Mulvey's theory has created rich discursive engagement and alternatives despite her discussion of binary genders becoming outdated. For instance, discussing the role of the gaze in conventional Hollywood narratives, Halberstam (2015) states that "even transgender narratives depend upon these markers of progress, change, acceptance, and victory and defeat" (para. 9). Halberstam argues that aspects of Mulvey's theory are outdated, such as the opposed gender binary, but claims that the system of the gaze remains pertinent and thus Mulvey's argument is still relevant in a contemporary context. Mulvey's ingrained visual system leads to all manner of problematic representations of gender, though there are of course alternatives to diversify forms of the gaze: as Dirse (2013) asks, "what happens when the bearer of the look is female and the object is female?" (p.18). In answer to this question, the effect of Mendieta's female gaze grants her the ability to act as both the subject and object of her creative practice, thus reclaiming ownership of her body. Similarly, discussing the role of female-led creative practice and reclaiming the gaze, Hershberg (2020) contends:

Through re-possessing her subjectivity, her physical and psychological shape and self, the woman artist changes and challenges the artistic images of her female body in the world and creates her own self-representations, bringing something new to the aesthetic discourse. (p.83)

This sentiment was arguably among the driving forces of Mendieta's artistic practice and plays a prominent role in *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)*. In the piece, Mendieta employs a variety of visual techniques: throughout the photographs, Mendieta fragments her nude female body and avoids 'direct address' with the viewer. Mendieta's disconnected visualisation of the body in the piece is especially effective in subverting the male gaze, as Gonzenbach (2011) states "the fragmenting of the female body frustrates the pleasure derived from viewing" (p.31). However, within the images focusing on her face, it appears that Mendieta is specifically coding her representational methods to challenge the spectator's gaze and engagement with the photographs. For example, one such method plays upon the representational stereotypes of people of colour. As Alvarado (2015) notes, Mendieta's portraits in the piece "create an image of plump lips, broad nose, and a spectator meeting gaze. Here Mendieta activates what Matthew Guterl calls racial sightlines – popularly produced and accessible visual tropes through which we believe to see evidence of race" (p.73). Thus, not only is Mendieta exploring conceptions of gender in the work, but also the racial imprints upon the body – an aspect of her practice that would be further developed by her exploration of Cuban identity. Explorations of her Cuban heritage were an integral aspect of her work, as Mendieta utilised her experiences as a Cuban exile to decolonise the body and thus identity. Additionally, Mendieta's performances channelled this decolonisation of the body through her physical representations of gender and beauty. For instance, as Cruz (2005) notes, "perhaps without realizing it, she was interrogating Cuban manifestations of machismo, male domination as represented by the authoritarian figure of Fidel Castro himself, who was responsible for her family's separation" (Cruz, 2005, p.227). The depiction of masculinity that Cruz discusses remains relatively unexplored in analyses of Mendieta's work, namely as her practice often focused on her own female body and feminine experience. However, Mendieta's exaggerated portrayals of masculinity through her body contrast with Lynch's perspective who, in the case of *Eraserhead*, almost represents a narrative of 'masculinity-gone-wrong'. In Lynch's film, we are presented with a timid, frail character who lacks many masculine traits, and this representation is contrary to Mendieta's portrayal of masculinity as an oppressive, dominant force.

Mendieta places emphasis on forcing the viewers gaze to 'look' at otherwise conservative subjects – in this case, her nude body and the representation of her subjective identity.

Operating within a creative scene largely dominated by male figures, presenting her nude body – particularly through live performance – would prove to be a challenging practice for Mendieta if not for the growing popularity of feminised body-art in the 60's and 70's. For instance, Sepúlveda (2019) uses the example of feminist-artist Mónica Mayer, whose 1978 interactive art-installation “articulated how the participants’ experience of the city was mediated by the sexualisation of their female bodies” (p.03). Feminist driven artistic practices such as this gave Mendieta the platform to express her voice as a creative practitioner, and to challenge the hierarchical restraints present in her experience as a woman.

Though, perhaps the most crucial aspect of *Untitled* is Mendieta’s gaze as ‘self-portrait’, and the placement of her own body within the photographs. This is an especially important element of Mendieta’s practice, as it is used to destabilise the authoritative male gaze and rather place emphasis on empowering female control. Discussing this reversal of the gaze in her own cinematographic work, Dirse (2013) states that when the male gaze is “subverted from the male to the female, we finally have an opportunity to view ourselves as we really are, in the case of this film, not as objects of male desire but as objects of female desire” (p.21). Interestingly, unlike the majority of Mendieta’s bodyworks which focused on ‘traces’ of the female body, *Untitled* appears to directly address the role of the camera and the gaze to challenge the viewer. In the photographs of her body, Mendieta fragments the gaze and minimises address with the spectator, disrupting visual serenity and ‘pleasure’ by removing a sense of identification – this is heightened further by the physical distortion of her body using the glass pane. Yet, Mendieta’s photographs focusing on her face entirely shift the focus of the gaze. These particular images, framed in close-up and thus mimicking traditional ‘head shots’, disembody Mendieta’s face from the rest of her body and intentionally draw the gaze toward her. Not only does this composition reinforce the claustrophobia and unease in the piece, as Baum (2008) contends, “these changes also focus the gaze almost fetishistically on the artist's face, as in a typical head shot. If Mendieta mimics the look of the head shot, however, it is only in order to more effectively parody it” (Baum, 2008, p.84).

Mendieta’s direct address of the camera’s gaze in several of the images represents a distinctive change in aesthetic when compared to her later work, as this element of her practice was ultimately lost in favour of exploring environmental and body traces. Ultimately, Mendieta’s subversion of the male gaze to portray her ‘female gaze’ allows *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* to “question and defy the traditional conceptions of decency and ‘female properness.’ By finally breaking these borders, discursive possibilities arise” (Gonzenbach, 2011, p.45).

Mendieta's Visual Portrayal of the Body

The central element of Mendieta's visualisation of her body in this series depicts violence and the distortion of female identity – themes that would go on to be expanded in her following work. In the photographs, Mendieta's bodily features are stretched and warped by the sheet of glass, skewing the recognisability of her figure. As Baum (2008) declares, the visual representation of the body in the photographs is “grossly distorted. What was beautiful is now warped. What was rounded is now flattened, squashed. Just as Mendieta's face is deformed, so too is it rendered illegible-abstract, even-with most of its attributes reduced to constellations of lines and forms” (p.81). Baum's analysis of the piece correlates strongly with Lynch's representation of the body, and his fascination with finding beauty in the grotesque. However, as Baum points out, Mendieta's approach reverses Lynch's method by instead altering the ‘beautiful’ to become the warped ‘grotesque’. Mendieta plays with perspective and point-of-view in the images focusing on her physical body - turning away from the camera, facing it directly, and standing with her body as a side profile. When viewing the images together as a cohesive whole, this variation in perspective further distorts the visual representation of the body, becoming a mishmash of textures, leading lines and oddly scaled features. In Mendieta's face photographs, her presentation of the body is used to explore her experiences with racism and cultural displacement, ‘decolonising’ her facial features in order to disassociate herself from whiteness (Mendieta identified as ‘non-white’). Reinforcing this decolonisation of the body, Lagos (2017) argues that it is evident “especially in *Glass on Body Imprints, Faces* where Mendieta presents distorted facial features with her face pressing against a glass, she emphasizes the ‘Other's’ appearance” (p.119). As well as this, there is a violent quality to the images, particularly in Mendieta's head shots, which adds to the overall uncomfortable nature of the piece. Her body is deformed and contorted throughout the photographs; her breasts bent sideways and twisting in opposite directions. In other images, Mendieta flattens her stomach with the glass, squeezing her navel into a pin-sized opening. In another, Mendieta turns away from the camera entirely and holds the glass to her lower back; curving her arms out of shape as the corners of the pane dig into her biceps.

Despite Mendieta's female gaze, the misshapen and warped nature of her body conveys a strong sense of threat and violence due to the grotesquery of her visualisation. In this sense, Mendieta's visual portrayal of the body as grotesque, or a site of violence, draws comparison to Lynch's grotesque representation of the body. Mendieta's presentation of the body is far more direct and less ‘surreal’ than Lynch's visualisation, for example in a film such as

Eraserhead, though they both utilise the human body to explore violence and grotesque abstractions. Although almost the entirety of Mendieta's practice involved the body, this exploration of violence was significantly lost towards the later years of her life: as Gonzenbach (2011) contends, "while in later works the viewer is presented with the traces of Mendieta's body, her earlier works incorporate and display the body as a central element of the performance" (p.37). Yet, what is the intention of Mendieta's grotesquery? In this instance, I believe, Mendieta is continuing to push the boundaries of acceptable art practice and representation of the female body. In addition to this, Baum (2008) argues that by utilising the grotesque and distorting the body, Mendieta "appropriates the stereotypes that adhere to women of color and exaggerates them to the point of absurdity, thereby calling attention to that which usually goes unnoticed and, by extension, uncontested" (p.86). Mendieta's grotesque visualisation of the female body, then, is used not only for its subversive aesthetic qualities, but also as a tool for political questioning and confrontation.

Ultimately, *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)* encapsulates a variety of themes that traced throughout Mendieta's oeuvre: as Bryan-Wilson (2013) declares, the photographs demonstrate "Mendieta's interest in intersectionality, the multiplicity of bodies, the unfixed qualities of identity, and the performativity of gender and race" (p.30). While this work draws parallels with Lynch in terms of its distortion of the body, it is important to illustrate that the role of the camera for Mendieta is vastly different to Lynch. Although both artists utilise the body in their creative-practice, and both have similar backgrounds rooted in fine-art, they are chasing different things in terms of their representation of the body. Where Lynch investigates juxtapositions of beauty and the grotesque through his emphasis on texture and tone, Mendieta instead utilises these juxtapositions to explore ideas surrounding decolonisation and the politics of the female body.

Chapter Four: Tracing the Body - *Sweating Blood* (1973)

Throughout the 1970's, Mendieta drastically expanded her creative practice to incorporate a wide variety of mediums, genres and techniques. During her time as a postgraduate student, Mendieta produced a plethora of short films – or ‘filmworks’ as Mendieta titled them - such as *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973), *Mirage* (1974), and *Energy Charge* (1975). While there has been recognition of Mendieta's performative and photographic work, there has been significantly less attention paid to her filmmaking practices despite exploring overlapping subjects and themes. Furthermore, between the years of 1971 and 1981 Mendieta created precisely 104 films, reaffirming her position as a key role in the expanding movement of multidisciplinary art at the time. Among Mendieta's earliest experiments with filmmaking practices, her short film *Sweating Blood* (1973) is undoubtedly one of Mendieta's most overtly unsettling and memorable images produced for the screen. Somewhat mirroring Lynch's transition to filmmaking, Mendieta utilises a distinctive approach to visualising the body in the film, and thus develops her representations of gender and identity within her screen practices.

This section of analysis will look at *Sweating Blood*, exploring the ways in which Mendieta develops her practice by transitioning to film, as well as the overlapping qualities between her photography practices and the moving image. The analysis will then further examine the role of Mendieta's female gaze in the film, how this is utilised to both invert and ‘decolonise’ the gaze. Following on from the preceding chapters, the analysis will additionally investigate Mendieta's visualisation of the body, looking at her representation of bodily violence, distortions of the female figure, and her emphasis on the textural and organic qualities of material elements such as blood. The analysis will then conclude with a synthesis of the information, comparing Lynch's and Mendieta's practices and their approach to visualising the body on-screen.

Mendieta's Performativity and Filmmaking Practices

Much like Lynch's shift in the creative process with *Six Figures Getting Sick*, moving from painterly practices to that of animation and filmmaking, Mendieta's practice underwent similar changes throughout the 1970's. For instance, as Alvarado (2015) notes, “Mendieta's oeuvre is marked by shifts in media and aesthetic strategies from painting to performance, to earthwork”

(p.66). In the case of *Sweating Blood*, one of her earliest moving image works, Mendieta transitioned from her established blend of performance and photography to instead experiment with filmmaking practices. Discussing her development of practices, Mendieta (as cited in Rio & Perreault, 1987) succinctly declares:

The turning point in my art was in 1972 when I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I wanted the image to convey— and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic. (p.28)

This quote is particularly useful in understanding Mendieta's rapid development of multidisciplinary practices, as it highlights her artistic intentions both in terms of the work itself and its impact on the audience. Although Mendieta's practice developed from photography to film, *Sweating Blood* still demonstrates her traditional multidisciplinary approach through the combined use of performance. Shot in colour using Super 8mm film, the film frames Mendieta in a static close-up focusing on her face, bearing similarities to the visual techniques in several of the photographic headshots in *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)*. Her head, visible from the neck up, is shrouded in darkness and produces a disembodied effect. The film lasts for over three minutes and is comprised of the single stationary image of Mendieta's face. Her expression maintains an emotionless, almost trancelike quality throughout the runtime, as blood begins to 'sweat' from the top of her skull and forehead, before subsequently running down towards her brow. Mendieta's performance in the film is distinctive from an 'actors' performance in that it is silent and is not used to carry a narrative. However, in terms of gesture and expression, the performance is as much a crucial constituent of her practice as the use of the camera. As with her previous photographic work, Mendieta is again utilising a mixed-method approach in the film, blending performance-art with her filmmaking practices. Discussing Mendieta's performance, along with the ritualistic and spiritual nature of *Sweating Blood*, Cabañas (1999) states:

Mendieta's trancelike state in *Sweating Blood* resembles a state of possession common to Santeria practice. Mendieta claimed connection with the 'goddess of sweetwater,' the Oricha Ochun in the Santeria pantheon. Ochun, a symbol of female sexuality, owns the rivers and rules the blood, and it is from her that the saying 'The blood that runs through the veins' is derived.' By linking herself to and perhaps being possessed by Ochun, Mendieta presented a female subject in control of her own representation and sexuality. (p.13)

Unlike Lynch's development of his filmmaking practice with *Six Figures*, Mendieta's film does not utilise any audio to accompany the visuals, forcing the viewer to engage solely with its striking imagery. Interestingly, comparing the film in relation to Lynch's *Six Figures*, Mendieta adopts a somewhat painterly approach to her visual practice – reminiscent of what

Lynch refers to as a ‘moving painting’. Like Lynch’s early film experiments, Mendieta utilises a simplistic stationary camera setup; however, differing from Lynch’s planimetric composition, Mendieta instead focuses on a spotlighted close-up of her face without any background details in the frame. This allows Mendieta to capture a ‘long take’ that reinforces the appearance of blood seeping from her body – reminiscent of Martin Scorsese’s short film, *The Big Shave* (1967). Despite this, several jump-cuts are noticeable in the film, and assumingly these gaps in the sequence allowed Mendieta to apply gradual increases of blood upon her head. Given the choppy nature of the 8mm film stock, however, the cuts are easily missed to the untrained eye. The implementation of simple editing techniques by Mendieta, in order to create the illusion of passing time, reveals a noteworthy development of her practice and demonstrates her experimentation with filmmaking methods. These techniques differ from cinematic uses, such as Jean-Luc Godard pioneering use of jump-cuts with *Breathless* (1960) in order to create a kinetic energy. Rather, Mendieta utilises these same techniques in a different fashion that is not strictly ‘cinema’ or film-production. Jump-cuts here are masked, unlike Godard who drew attention them, and they are utilised specifically to reinforce the body’s role in the piece – that is, to create the illusion of blood ‘sweating’ from Mendieta’s body. In this film, time becomes a vital aspect, as we witness the organic element of blood materialise before our very eyes. Thus, the temporal capabilities of film as a medium grant Mendieta the opportunity to sufficiently explore the theme of time and its effects on the female body – a component that would go on to become integral to works such as her *Silueta* series.

Aesthetically, *Sweating Blood* was unlike anything Mendieta had created – and, ultimately, unlike anything she went on to create in the following years. In a body of work that embraced such a wide variety of practices and techniques, the film remains prominent due to its distinct aesthetic. For example, despite the multitude of moving image works that Mendieta produced, it is the only film to exclusively feature a close-up of her face – drawing the viewer toward her performance. Regarding creative practices at the time, video-art was beginning to emerge as a new form of expression. For example, Tamblyn (1991) argues:

Three major genres of video art coalesced in the 1970s, channelling the earlier anarchic experiments into more predictable formats. Video installations extended traditional sculptural formats through the use of video technology. ‘Body artists’ (artists who use their own bodies as the site of their artwork) and feminist artists utilised video as an element of performance. A third video art format was often referred to as ‘image processing’. This term describes work in which the video signal has been altered through processes such as colorizing, keying, switching, fading and sequencing. (p.304)

Video-art is distinguished from short film or cinema in that it is created, as other art practices, for aesthetic or thematic experimentation – whereas a majority of film-production is narrative driven or for commercial purposes. Mendieta’s work does not necessarily fit into either of these categories, however, she may have been influenced by surrounding video-art practitioners to utilise moving image formats within her practice. As Birringer (1991) notes, a large amount of early video work correlated with “performance art and dance experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially with their participatory ideals and their overriding emphasis on the physical body, on real-life presence in real time, and on the breaking up of theatrical illusion” (p.63). Mendieta’s *Sweating Blood* contains similarities to the visual functions within Lynch’s shorts and *Eraserhead*. Crucially however, it is important to note that Mendieta’s work is not a feature film as *Eraserhead* is. Despite this, although they are different forms of audio-visual works there are parallels that expand the two practitioners’ practices. For instance, Mendieta uses the static frame as her canvas, through which she can represent not only her performance capabilities, but also her painterly vision. Mendieta utilises the close-up as the primary focus of the camera’s perspective, reinforcing the subjectivity she wants the viewer to adopt. *Sweating Blood* represents a rapid progression in Mendieta’s practice through her process of mixing performance art with experimental filmmaking techniques, and the resulting work allows Mendieta to visualise the body in new and distinct ways.

Fixing the Gaze: Mendieta’s Patriarchal Inversion and Decolonisation

Drawing on a similar visual approach to Mendieta’s previous photographic work, such as *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)*, Mendieta turns the camera on herself in *Sweating Blood* and subsequently forces the gaze upon her. In the film, Mendieta’s female gaze carries over from her photography practices and is translated into a cinematic format. Despite the film’s simplistic approach, Mendieta’s representation and exploration of gender in the film is rife with ideas and charged with socio-political undercurrents – as with all her creative work. In terms of the gaze, despite its often-problematic effect on gender roles, Collins (2017) notes that Mulvey’s theory is useful in that it helps us to understand how cinema’s inherently patriarchal structure impacts on-screen representation. Further, criticising the typical male gaze thus demonstrates how men dominate vision, gender and power (p.419). In turn this allows practitioners to express gender in more fluid and dynamic ways through screen practices – such as Mendieta’s work. Despite this, however, Collins (2017) maintains that “patriarchy, phallogocentrism remains. The binary of genders, their hierarchy (male over female), and the

consequent deflection of power still accords to Mulvey's cinematic logos. The male gaze is inescapable" (Collins, 2017, p.419). If this is the case, then, how can artist-practitioners alter their methods of gender representation? I would argue that, although Collins' argument rings true to a degree, there are in fact alternatives to the male gaze that disrupt Mulvey's hierarchal and phallogocentric logos. For example, Ritland (2018) discusses the method of a female artist who "was able to 'fix' the male gaze and become 'an agent capable of action, rather than a fetish' by being both model and photographer" (p.1285). Moreover, in her article, *Cindy Sherman: Recapturing the rhetoric of female identity*, Saks (1992) contends that by assuming the role of both a model and photographer, female artists are then capable of inverting the objectifying male gaze:

Since she is both subject and object, both model and photographer, she is both the object and origin of the gaze. By locating both of these in one place, Sherman fixes the (male) gaze (rather than fixing the identity), and becomes an agent capable of action, rather than a fetish. (p.22)

In the case of *Sweating Blood*, Mendieta inverts the male gaze by overthrowing the dominance of patriarchal control: the camera is determined by her vision, as well as the on-screen representation of her female body, and thus her body is reclaimed from fetishisation and 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Therefore, Mendieta uses the film to enact her perspective and challenge the patriarchal status quo (Ritland, 2018, p.1284). We see this, for example, through Mendieta's avoidance of direct address with the viewer - with her eyes firmly closed, spectators are unsure where to 'gaze' in the image, separating her from the viewer and thus removing their privilege of 'visual pleasure.' Mendieta's experimentation with filmmaking practices also reinforces her inversion of the gaze to a female perspective. As opposed to Lynch's eroticised lighting techniques in *Eraserhead* with the 'Lady in the Radiator', Mendieta instead simply lights the frame using front-lighting to expose her face and contrast her skin against the empty-space in the background. This contrast highlights Mendieta's face, showing her importance and affirming her position as both the subject and object of the gaze. Deconstructing the film further, Mendieta's trancelike state may initially imply qualities of the male gaze, portraying her body as a seemingly passive, inactive object to connote Mulvey's 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. However, this illusion is thereupon disrupted by the inclusion of blood in order to signify violence and, most importantly, violence against women. This element of Mendieta's female gaze is accentuated by the film's visual composition, fragmenting her head and disassociating it from the rest of her body. According to Bell-Metereau (2017), "critics have associated images of fragmentation, slashing, dismemberment, and transformation with gender inequity and female subjugation to the sadistic phallic gaze" (p.398). In this sense, Mendieta's female gaze

in *Sweating Blood* reclaims this association and exploits it, in order to discuss female subjugation not as a vehicle of male desire, but as a site of female empowerment.

Additionally, Mendieta's film practices sought to 'decolonise' the gaze, as a result of her cultural displacement and experiences of racism whilst living in the United States. Jansen and Osterhammel (2017) succinctly define decolonisation as "the disappearance of empire as a political form, and the end of racial hierarchy as a widely accepted political ideology and structuring principle of world order" (p.01). Furthermore, Cowans (2017) argues that decolonisation can imply "the remaking of race relations; the dismantling of the political, economic, and cultural domination of one people by another; and a rejection of colonial mentalities by both coloniser and colonised" (Cowans, 2017, p.34). Regarding the political context in which Mendieta's work was created, her work draws upon her multi-cultural experiences as both a Cuban exile and American citizen – and, ultimately, her displacement from both cultures. As a result, her work "spans cultures and shores, impugning a strictly nationalist approach" (López, 2015, p.98). In the article, *Ana Mendieta as cultural connector with Cuba*, Roulet (2012) contends that Mendieta's practice emphasised negotiating and transcending boundaries as a result of her geographic displacement, as well as the boundaries imposed on the body by gender, ethnicity, and identity (p. 21). Similarly, in Hazel Clark's (2020) article *Decolonising the Gaze*, interviewee and fashion photographer Dario Calmese declares:

Ultimately, images are not benign, inanimate objects; they are loaded with cultural imprints that manipulate and reinforce ideas and beliefs. The only way to decolonize the gaze is to diversify authorship. Images, like architecture, are also built environments, and we must constantly stay vigilant about who's designing our point of view. (Clark, 2020, p.956)

Mendieta's inversion of the gaze in the film (and the entirety of her following practices), becoming both subject and object of her own gaze, allows her to decolonise her screen-practices by diversifying authorship – as, of course, Mendieta is both female and comes from a Cuban background. Through this, Mendieta is both decolonising the gaze as well as expanding feminist and racial practice. Additionally, the reversal and exploitation of the male gaze and patriarchal filmmaking techniques, such as exaggerated lighting or eroticised female nudity, allows Mendieta to reclaim control of her representation and overthrow the masculine 'colonising' gaze.

Body Violence: Blood, Fragmentation & Gender Inequity.

Mendieta's exploration of the female body is one of the defining characteristics of her work. Through investigating the relationship between the body and the earth, Mendieta's art was able to explore themes regarding the passage of time, cultural displacement, and political imprints on the human body. Among these themes, Mendieta also examined the role of violence upon the body – namely, the female body – and this subject is particularly prominent in *Sweating Blood*. After the shift of Mendieta's practice to a multidisciplinary, intermedia approach, the on-screen portrayal of her body adapted to the capabilities of the screen. As Alvarado (2015) notes, "inspired by a new aesthetic methodology, Mendieta's intermedia performance would explore different vectors of oppression as they come to bear on her own body and its abject avatars in a Midwestern community" (p.71). For example, in 1973 Mendieta produced *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, a mixture of performance and photography that was staged in her apartment, showing her nude body bound to a table and covered in blood - "this staged presentation of the aftermath of violent rape was her response to a series of rapes on campus" (Cabañas, 1999, p.12). That same year, Mendieta also produced *Sweating Blood* as a response; however, her representation of violence upon the female body demonstrated a far more restrained visual approach. In the film, Mendieta's use of the close-up framing commands the spectator to focus on Mendieta's face. As her head appears to seep blood, we notice Mendieta's fascination with organic and material elements within her practice – in the case of this film, the use of blood. As Lagos (2017) argues, Mendieta's use of bodily materials such as blood "indicates a preference for rituals normally considered primitive in Western societies and most probably frowned upon by the Cuban Catholic upper-classes to which her family belonged" (p.117). Similarly, Mendieta's performance piece the year beforehand, *Untitled (Death of a Chicken)*, explored her childhood impressions of Santería practice and was among the first of her works to utilise blood "as a symbolically potent material... Mendieta found that ritualistic and material aspects of the religion, which she remembered as culturally pervasive in Cuba, connected her with her former life on the island." (Roulet, 2012, p.21). In *Sweating Blood*, Mendieta instead utilises blood on her body as a reaction to the violence and sexual assault against women in her environment – the controlled female gaze of the camera, along with its tight framing, further commands our attention to her body. In contrast, Lynch's uses violence against the female body to depict the consistent evil that men enact upon women. However, Mendieta is creating responses to this in her own unique way and expresses this through her explorations of violence and the fragmented body.

In accordance with Mendieta's visualisation of the body in *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)*, the film once again distorts the female body in order to challenge spectators and disrupt the patriarchal viewing systems. In terms of the physical elements of Mendieta's form, the film uses the techniques of screen-practices to alter the capabilities of her body – allowing her to figuratively 'sweat blood', and thus expressing the connotation of female bodily violence. Regarding Mendieta's visual depiction of the body, the film again implements fragmentation through close-ups. Mendieta's head is still, her face with a calm expression, disconnected from the rest of her figure. One may ask, then, how the film corresponds with the rest of Mendieta's clearer visualisations of the female body, such as her performances and *Silueta's* – if Mendieta's full body is not on-screen, how can the film demonstrate it? I would argue that the film is distinctive in Mendieta's oeuvre *because* of this restraint - in that, by choosing to utilise the cinematic capacity of the close-up, Mendieta draws attention to her face and the materiality of blood to express the issues of gender inequity and violence – quite literally by bringing them 'to the surface' by sweating them out of the pores in her skin. Fundamentally, Mendieta's visualisation of the body generally correlates with her command of the gaze. As Cabañas (1999) states, the film reaffirms Mendieta's body and self as subject. As well as this, the usage of filmmaking practices connotes television and its social function as a source of information – furthermore, because of this association, the film “underscores how representations are used to construct the female body as an object. Thus, Mendieta attempts to decentre the cultural hegemony of dominant representation” (Cabañas, 1999, p.12). By retaking the gaze, Mendieta can visualise her body and explore violence against women without problematic representation strategies.

In Summary: Lynch & Mendieta's Creative Practice

From the preceding chapters of analysis, one can establish several comparative traits between both Lynch and Mendieta's forms of practice, as well as their approach to visualising the body on-screen. Regarding their artistic backgrounds, both Lynch and Mendieta began their creative practices in painting before transitioning to film – in Lynch's case, painting evolved into experimenting with animation and aspects of filmic processes before eventually transitioning to filmmaking. This resulted in Lynch's subversive painterly style becoming an integral part of his screen aesthetic. Mendieta, however, started in painting before developing her creative practice to incorporate performance art, photography, and gradually filmmaking. Although Lynch and Mendieta's films are vastly different – Lynch's work is very much in-tune with

cinematic conventions whereas Mendieta's approach is more avant-garde and focused on creating 'vignettes' – in both instances, the pair show similarities in that they exhibit multidisciplinary creative practices and, as a result, their films take on dynamic and striking characteristics.

Both artists/filmmakers use violence in their work as well as distorting the body. Lynch utilises grotesque distortions of the body to express his surrealistic tendencies, notably the case of the infant in *Eraserhead*, while Mendieta uses these deformations of self and the female body as a tool for cultural and political confrontation – namely, investigating the representation of women in art and challenging acceptable art-practice at the time. Examining their visual representation of the body also reveals interesting contrasts: where Lynch focuses far more on capturing textural details on-screen, such as his use of close-ups in *Eraserhead* focusing on grotesquery, Mendieta instead uses these material elements as part of her performative practice. For example, Mendieta's application of blood in *Sweating Blood*.

Ultimately, the crucial distinction between Lynch and Mendieta's approach to visualising the body is evident in the role of the gaze. Lynch operates largely on instinct, emphasizing images and his subconscious ideas, seemingly naïve of the potential representational impacts, though Mendieta is concerned with inverting the gaze to represent her female perspective as well as seeking to 'decolonise' the gaze. Mendieta utilises her female gaze to explore gender and racial issues such as the patriarchal nature of cinematic representation and cultural displacement. As Agustí (2007) argues, Mendieta's practice not only deconstructed the role of the male gaze and its cultural significations on the body, but she also aimed at "creating a new form of expression, as well as at reconfiguring the way in which we have culturally been taught to perceive and understand subjectivity" (p.293). On the contrary, Lynch's gaze is almost misogynistic at times – failing to escape the problematic effects of Mulvey's theory. Both Lynch and Mendieta, I would argue, are still relevant and important figures to examine. Investigating their creative practice allows emerging practitioners to uncover new methods of visualizing the body on-screen, new techniques to experiment with, and ways of understanding the socio-cultural and political repercussions of such techniques. In an ever-evolving social climate that highlights progressive representation and bold thinking, Mendieta's work is more relevant and important than ever – and should be remembered.

Chapter Five: Exegesis *Iris* (2021); A Screen-Practice Study

This chapter discusses the production stages of the creative component that was produced as part of this research. The inclusion of this film was imperative for this research in demonstrating contemporary representations of the body through creative practice. Ultimately, the film *is* the response to the analysis of Lynch and Mendieta. However, it is its own entity – one that is a creative artefact that can be consumed by various audiences and thus interpreted in a variety of ways.

The short film, *Iris*, focuses on two characters, Mica (Phoebe Chan) and Iris (Amy Grace), who are conducting a photoshoot. As the narrative progresses, the film explores exaggerated approaches to visualising the body and the implications this has on individuals. The following exegesis will contextualise this creative component within the framework established in the previous chapters focusing on the works of Lynch and Mendieta. I will explore the short film by analysing my practice and the creative processes throughout each phase of production: pre-production, principal photography, and post-production. Further, the exegesis will examine the role of my gaze and approach toward visualising the body. The aim of this is to situate my filmmaking practices within the wider context of screen-production research (SPR), defined by Berkeley (2018) as “an activity where the filmmaker seeks to gain knowledge about something through the creative use of moving images and sound” (p.30). This methodological approach remains an emerging field, one that Berkeley argues requires further examination and development (p.30). Reinforcing Berkeley’s sentiment, this exegesis will generate new insights into the nature of SPR and will thus benefit the discussion of using film as a means of discovering new knowledge.

I will compare the results with that of Lynch and Mendieta in order to uncover potential similarities, differences, and new forms of contemporary practice. Subsequently, the exegesis will demonstrate the necessity of creative practice *as* research and thus I will argue the need for the film to demonstrate these areas. As this exegesis is an analysis of my own practices and creative output, I acknowledge that subjectivity is unavoidable. However, the practices that I have previously analysed through Lynch and Mendieta will be re-applied here to maintain a consistent analytical framework.

Pre-Production: Conceptualisation and Development

This project is a culmination of my numerous film experiments produced throughout my undergraduate degree. As my background is in filmmaking practices, utilising screen production research was thus the most effective methodological approach for this study. Barrett (2010) discusses the wider areas of creative-practice research, arguing that “practice-led research is a new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research” (p.01). Although my previous practices have often subconsciously explored the body, this project sought to engage with the body and its representation from the outset – thus, it is fundamentally practice as research. Pre-production can be defined as the stage in which an initial concept is developed into a script, that is then subsequently rewritten, and thus becomes a blueprint for the creation of the film. This is also the phase of production when “cast and crew are hired, locations scouted and selected, and sets built... and the director possibly rehearses with the cast” (Oumano, 2011, p.93). Pre-production went through several transitional phases. The initial incarnation of the project was a documentary that would explore what the body means to a variety of interview subjects – whether it be in a spiritual sense, aesthetically, or otherwise. This concept was discarded however, as I wanted to focus my attention on creating a fictional film. Despite this, several elements remained such as an exploration of the body’s creative capacity, demonstrated in the final film through a character documenting a model’s body for aesthetic purposes. This documentary concept transitioned into a short fictional film that granted full creative freedom and the ability to explore the body on-screen in a variety of ways. The decision was made to focus on two female characters, in order to cement a particular feminine perspective within the narrative. My previous filmmaking work has consistently explored female protagonists, and thus, this project was an extension of this aspect of my practice.

After changing approach from documentary to short fiction film, the first stage was creating a rough outline of ideas and devising them into a treatment. Defining treatment, Gottlieb (1995) states:

This is a prose narrative, written in the present tense, in greater or less detail, that reads like a description of what will finally appear on the screen. This treatment is broken down into screenplay form, which like its stage counterpart, sets out the dialogue, describes the movements and reactions of the actors, and at the same time gives the breakdown of the individual scenes, with some indication of the role, in each scene, of the camera and the sound. (p.211)

As I began developing ideas, I wanted to utilise the opposing ends of the gaze as traits for the two characters. This was inspired by Mulvey (1989) who contends women on-screen have ultimately “functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (p.19). I wanted to utilise this idea and exaggerate it in the film. In this sense, Mica’s character would represent the ‘passive’ female, and Iris’ character, despite her female gender, would represent the dominant male gaze asserting power over Mica. Here, the research fed into the development of the project as the gaze played an essential role in the film’s conceptualisation – I planned to exaggerate the dominance of the gaze with my representation of gender. The aim of this was ultimately to critique the male gaze and highlight its repercussions. However, despite this intention during pre-production, the final film may well simply reinforce the gaze in its established hierarchical state – supporting both Mulvey’s argument and Collins’ (2017) contention that the male gaze is inescapable.

To begin development of the script, I created an abstract beat-sheet that would allow me to note any ideas for images, sounds or scenes. This was an especially useful method for developing the script, as I was struggling to conceptualise an entire narrative in a traditional sense. As Brüttsch (2015) notes, most narrative feature film structures are divided into three ‘acts’ that serve distinct functions, though this can still apply to short films. For example, the first act should set up the film’s world and the dramatic premise, the second must develop this by incorporating conflict and obstacles to overcome, whereas the third and final act should resolve the conflict and solve the dramatic premise (p.302). This conventional approach during the pre-production stage is an aspect that I wanted to avoid – I wanted the script to be more fluid, rather than constructing the narrative within the confines of this rigid structure, at least not consciously. Further, I wanted the script to be open to improvisation from the actors as well as the unpredictable nature of principal photography. I was thinking more in visual than in literary terms, and thus the beat-sheet was fundamental to establishing the project. From here, I wrote a ‘stream of consciousness’ script over a number of weeks that blended the abstract, non-linear qualities of my previous work and contextualised this within a character-driven narrative piece. Using the beat-sheet as a creative springboard, I started to thread together the disparate audio-visual ideas into a wider narrative, developing scenes from the ideas and arranging them in sequences that felt emotionally cogent for the film. Contextualising this aspect of pre-production within the framework of SPR, it was important that the script was written coherently in terms of communicating a narrative or emotional thread, as Batty and Baker (2018) note “a

screenplay can exist as an artefact in its own right: it can be read and enjoyed for the story it tells and, technical formatting aside, can convey its meaning without reference to production” (p.75). After this initial draft of the script was finished, I created a treatment document that could be provided to potential actors. This document featured a logline, a synopsis, an outline of the film’s two central characters, a summary of the film’s musical approach, and the key stylistic influences for the project. As well as this, the treatment presented a mood-board of various images that could provide cast and crew members with a sense of the film’s aesthetic.

Prior to this project, sound-design in my work has primarily consisted of personal experimentation and happy accidents, however I enlisted a composer for this project in order to expand my collaborative practices as a filmmaker. One of the key components of the pre-production stage was the conceptualisation of sound and its role within the film. This aspect resembles a direct link to the work of Lynch, particularly his soundscapes in *Six Figures* and *Eraserhead*, and their role of conveying certain atmospheres or emotions. Several of my previous film experiments have paid particular attention to sound-design and its ability to represent the body on-screen, though these soundscapes were created entirely by myself. As mentioned, however, for this project I collaborated extensively with a sound designer/musician rather than doing everything independently. Of course, as Whittington (2007) argues, sound is an integral component of cinema as it is half the picture (p.02). Further, Whittington (2007) declares that “in contrast to the classical period of Hollywood cinema, filmmakers and filmgoers today do not just hear movies in a new way; they listen to movies in a new way, and what they are listening to is sound design” (p.02). Pre-production for this project was largely founded on sound rather than imagery – ideas for visuals often came as a direct result of audio segments and musical tracks. In turn, this process encouraged me to develop the film from a new approach that de-emphasised narrative and instead attempted to rebalance the positions of sound and image. This was useful because, as Rogers (2017) argues, “when sonic elements do form an integral part of a film’s discursive strategy in the form of radical sounds or shocking audiovisual relationships, they can be extraordinarily powerful forces in the creation of an experimental aesthetic” (p.02). Because of this approach, a composer for the film was brought in very early, before the script was written, to score the project and control the overall sound-mixing later during post-production. Through many discussions with my composer and a number of trials with musical experiments, we were able to develop a specific sound that I felt would work within the film. It was crucial that the sound-design would be used as a means of representing the body, as well as to stimulate emotional responses in the spectator. Sound-

design and music are particularly useful techniques for eliciting such responses, as Underwood (2008) argues “music is a sort of mental short cut, a very efficient way of conveying emotion, or allowing the expression of emotion or the extrapolation of thought by inference” (p.197). Thus, I instructed the composer to score the film as though it was science-fiction – Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* (2013) was a key influence here. This aesthetic choice could be achieved, for example, through the manipulation of vocal recordings from the actors and implementing these processed samples into a soundscape. The intense nature of the sound-design would be used to reinforce my intentionally warped representation of the body and the oppressive hierarchical structure of the characters’ gaze – fundamentally, the harsh nature of the music was designed to be oppressive and inescapable, much as the male gaze. Emphasising the role of sound and music in the project during this pre-production stage demonstrated a significant shift in my filmmaking practices, as this element had typically been an afterthought in my previous film experiments.

Pre-Production: Casting and Rehearsals

Following the completion of a rough-draft script, along with the treatment, I put out a casting-call for the film’s central characters, Mica and Iris. Regarding desired appearances or traits for the characters, I purposely wrote the script to avoid specifics so as to allow a diversity of potential actors for the roles. Subsequently, I received a number of emails from actors showing interest in the project. From this point I arranged a meeting with two of the candidates, Phoebe Chan and Amy Grace; the actors expressed enthusiasm for the rough draft script and made suggestions as to how they could play these characters. This was a particularly useful interaction, as it allowed the actors to feel more comfortable with me and ensure they were on-board with the project. During this meeting, I provided them with copies of the script along with the treatment and mood-board. From here, the two actors had the opportunity to study the script and treatment before the first acting rehearsal.

The rehearsal stage during pre-production played an integral role in the shaping of the film. In my previous films, I had worked with actors who had no formal training, whereas for this project I was collaborating with upcomers. As such, the rehearsal required careful thought and planning. For the first rehearsal, I conducted a relaxed in-person workshop, which allowed the actors and I to discuss character roles as well as their first impressions of the script. Here, the script shifted drastically, as the actors declared that they wanted to play different parts to those

that I had envisioned. For instance, I anticipated that Amy would play the role of Mica, whereas Phoebe would play Iris – however, the opposite occurred. This discussion entirely altered my perception of the script and therefore challenged me to rewrite several scenes and dialogue passages in the second draft – an obstruction that would not have been raised were it not for this rehearsal process. From here, I conducted a read-through of the script with Phoebe and Amy; during this, I read the action while the actors spoke their lines, allowing me to get a sense of their tonal interpretations of the dialogue. Subsequently, I made notes based on delivery issues with specific lines, the chronology of events in the script, and underlying themes of the characters and narrative – all of which was collaboratively discussed with the actors, as I wanted them to be part of the script's development. Throughout this discussion, I kept a research diary in order to document the events and note reflections on my practice. Doing this proved especially useful, as it helped to address pre-production issues and guide the project in the right direction. This was influenced by the chapter, *Lights, camera, research: The specificity of research in screen production*, in which Berkeley (2018) contends that utilising a research diary or documented reflection is particularly useful within screen production research, as it allows practitioners to capture data regarding their experience throughout their creative process – “data that can be subsequently examined to identify knowledge that has emerged from the research process. However, the more immediate this reflection is and the more sensitive it is to the specificity of practice the better” (Berkeley, 2018, p.34). After briefly discussing production details, we carried out a series of performative exercises and ran through various scenes in the script.

Kingdon (2001) notes that the rehearsal stage is a fundamental practice during pre-production for filmmakers, as “this is their first opportunity to practice communicating with actors and to begin judging performances for themselves” (Kingdon, 2001, p.57). This was my first time directing a rehearsal session with actors, but in doing so I was able to visualise the script as it manifested through the performances of my actors. Throughout this exercise, I ran through various elements with the actors, namely what Kingdon describes as reality, subtext and emotions. In his article, *Directing actors for the screen*, Kingdon (2001) points out the value of external stimuli during this stage of practice – that is, “the heightened level of realism provided by the sets and locations of most films. Subtext (the deeper, emotional reality to which the writing refers) is a harder concept for most students to grasp and requires further exercises and improv” (p.56). In order to incorporate this technique, I provided the actors with a camera to utilise as a prop and encouraged them to improvise dialogue, gestures, and blocking methods

that could potentially feed back into subsequent drafts of the script. Thus, the rehearsal was not only allowing me to develop the performances and relationship with my actors, but also the script itself – each element of my practice built off one another. Furthermore, I filmed the entire exercise using my own camera, which gave me the opportunity to see the actors screen-presence and how their physical performance translates on camera. Consequently, this screen-test helped me to confirm the acting roles and I agreed with my actors preferred choices for their characters: Phoebe was cast as Mica, and Amy as Iris.

The final preparation of pre-production was another rehearsal, however this time the session was conducted over a Zoom meeting. This form of rehearsal represented a stark contrast to the in-person workshops, and thus required a vastly different approach. The use of online communication platforms such as Zoom allowed the project to come to fruition, as this research project was conducted throughout the Coronavirus pandemic. Naturally, this drastically altered restrictions upon social gatherings and physical interaction, and as such Zoom allowed the actors and I to safely communicate throughout a variety of national alert levels. Ultimately, this is a film made during the pandemic and therefore this limitation forced my practice to utilise creative workarounds such as online workshops. During the online rehearsal, I briefly discussed changes in the second-draft and other production elements such as costume ideas, before rehearsing the revised script with the actors. Throughout this rehearsal session, I trialled multiple methods of testing the actor's performance. Initially, the script was read through altogether, and both Phoebe and Amy delivered their dialogue passages in-character. Here, their rehearsal performances stuck closely to the written script. We then tested a number of improvisational experiments, in which I proposed hypothetical situations involving the characters and allowed the actors to perform on the spot – extending the fake 'scene' as far as possible. Conducting a rehearsal session via online communication proved a useful, albeit strange practice, as it helped me to understand how the pair's performances are shaped through the screen, as well as being able to experience their improvisational ability first-hand – especially when they are limited in terms of physical connection. Similarly investigating this method of rehearsal, Gorman et al. (2019) declare:

When training in a digital environment, the lack of immediate touch must be replaced by other sensory means. The use of the screen meant that actors had to take a more experimental approach to rehearsal. This process redefines how participants use the space, as proxemics are replaced with visual representation on the screen. (p.208)

Therefore, the restriction of physical, face-to-face rehearsing encouraged me to unearth this new form of practice. Interestingly, Comey (2012) argues that “not rehearsing does not mean

not preparing or not understanding the story. When a film director says she never rehearses, she is referring to dialogue and emotional relationships” (p.13). Rather, the book declares that actors and directors rehearse elements such as blocking or camera positioning and movement, however the “real performance comes when dialogue, emotions, and reactions are fresh and unrehearsed and the actors face each other with the camera running” (Comey, 2012, p.13). I would argue, however, that this spontaneity is still achievable through rehearsal practices – naturally, the performances in my final product differed from those of the script and rehearsals. However, the in-person and Zoom workshops ensured that my actors and I were on the same page with their performances, and that we were collectively aiming to achieve a cohesive vision.

Ultimately, over the pre-production stages of conceptualising, casting and rehearsals, I incorporated new methods within my filmmaking practice in order to develop the project. This aspect of pre-production was crucial in shaping my representation of the body on-screen. Of course, a character on the page of a script does not necessarily have a body, at least in the physical sense. However, this element is created by the performance of the actors. Drawing on Schell’s (2016) argument, the actors have a toolbox through which the two-dimensionality of the character in the script is translated into a physical performance. This ‘toolbox’ is comprised of their voice, body and the immediate space around them. Crucially, as Schell (2016) notes, “the body changes through stillness or movement, gesture, energy level, time of day, sense of urgency or sense of relaxation, how weight is carried, whether costumed for period or contemporary stories” (p.54). Thus, through the casting and rehearsal stages, a process was formulated whereby the body was physically manifested and stylised for the film. For example, judging the actors screen presence, specific costuming decisions, rehearsing gestures and bodily expressions, and altering character roles initially written for the script. Therefore, the body transitioned from the page to screen, manifesting itself physically for aesthetic and thematic purposes informed by the practitioner. This process in turn has a dramatic impact for the final project in terms of representing both gender and the body, as this is the turning point in the pre-production phase when such elements are solidified for principal photography.

Principal Photography: The Shoot – Capturing the Gaze

The film was shot in a small, empty studio-space that could easily be set-dressed and would accommodate a simplistic lighting setup. For various reasons, the space could only be rented

for one week. Subsequently, this restriction helped to reflect a professional atmosphere and reiterated the importance of pre-production – because of it, I was prepared with a schedule so that my actors and I could work within the limited timeframe. A thorough shot-list was created prior to filming to effectively manage time during the shoot, and to ensure the most important images were captured for the scenes. During principal photography, I was acting as the cinematographer both as a necessity (to visualise my style and demonstrate reflection of research on the project) and to enhance practice. Studio scenes were not filmed in chronological order; instead, sequences involving the two actors together were prioritised – as the cast were only available for limited times throughout the filming week. Throughout principal photography, the body and the gaze factored subconsciously in terms of the narrative and my visual aesthetic. For example, the first sequence that I shot is the introductory photoshoot scene. Initially, this was intended to be an on-set rehearsal practicing lighting setups and blocking methods – however, I was pleased with the performances and thus the footage was incorporated into the film. Here, the camera played a vital part in demonstrating the gaze: the opening shot of the scene shows Phoebe’s character, Mica, staring into the lens, initiating a direct address with the viewer. Although not yet at the post-production stage, I intended that this image would open the scene, and thus I was blending the different phases of my practice by consciously thinking about editing choices while filming. The reason this would be utilised as an opening shot for the scene is due to its striking and confrontational nature, as a result of Phoebe’s direct address with the camera. Discussing the visual technique of direct address in cinema, Pressley-Sanon (2014) notes:

Moments of direct address add a socio-political dimension to the films in having the viewer not only face the social world depicted on screen, but also being faced by it. As a result, society is reflected and implicated in its perceptions rather than simply displayed objectively before them. The technique disrupts the voyeuristic-scopophilic look that is in itself, multidimensional. (p.597)

On reflection, my use of directly addressing the gaze in this scene appears to disrupt the voyeurism of the spectator, as Pressley-Sanon suggests. Furthermore, my cinematographic approach intended to visualise the character of Mica from the perspective of Iris’ camera – trapped by her lens. With this, my male gaze was imitating that of a female gaze, and I wanted this direct address to be a recurring motif throughout the film in order to disrupt the voyeurism exhibited by the character of Iris, as well as the audience. Throughout the production, I was aware of Mulvey’s hierarchical notions of the gaze, as she states, “a woman performs within the narrative; the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude” (Mulvey, 1989, p.19). Here, the research

was feeding into my practice: I often pondered throughout filming how I, a cis male filmmaker, can visualise the body on-screen without exhibiting this hierarchical gaze – or, if this is even possible at all. This thought process, particularly examining the role of myself as a cis male filmmaker, forced me to contextualise my practices within a contemporary socio-cultural environment. It is likely that this aspect depends on the script itself; what the filmmaker is *trying* to articulate through a visual medium and how can it be interpreted. As the short film features no male characters, what impact does this have on my gaze and representation of gender? In order to confront a potentially objectifying gaze, throughout the course of principal photography I frequently allowed my cast and crew – who were all female – to help visualise the sequences. For example, later in the production during a photoshoot sequence, Iris photographs Mica in a variety of flailing motions and stances. With this scene, building upon Kingdon's (2001) discussion of external stimuli and my rehearsal exercises, the actor Amy was provided with a digital SLR as a prop (and tool) to photograph Phoebe performing for the camera. This technique was discussed beforehand and was briefly trialled during the physical workshop in pre-production. I instructed Amy to entirely direct Phoebe's posture and body-movement for the photos – and simply filmed the pair's improvised interaction. By encouraging this collaborative visual control, the production was incorporating a female gaze, thus complicating and disrupting the film's representational strategies. In doing so, I believe that the gaze – while still of course predominantly male – during principal photography demonstrated a more balanced and collaborative dynamic between myself and the crew members. This mixture of gaze perspectives is an aspect of my practice that can be further employed in later projects to potentially minimise issues of representation.

Principal Photography: Visualising the Body – Texture, Tone & Physicality

Naturally, principal photography was the phase of the project in which I determined the visual element of the film. From the lighting, movement, or the lenses focal length, all of these elements in my approach would impact my aestheticisation of the body. Lighting was an integral part of the body's visualisation in the film. Due to the low budget of the production, the availability of lighting equipment was limited. Despite this, however, I overcame this limitation during principal photography by utilising equipment that was easily accessible. I wanted to light the film in a way that would effectively balance the contrast and softness of the image – this would ensure a 'cinematic' image quality while also retaining softness on the skin-

tones. This was essential for my visual approach, as I wanted to maintain an authenticity in the character's appearance in order to avoid misrepresenting their bodies. This was achieved by primarily using backlighting and placing soft boxes over the equipment to bounce and soften the light sources. In terms of the film's visual style, I wanted to juxtapose sweeping wide angles with intense close-ups. The majority of my previous film experiments have focused on close-ups, and thus I wanted to expand my aesthetic capabilities. During production, I utilised a mixture of 50mm and 85mm lenses to capture rich close-ups of the actors, whereas an 18mm lens was used for wider angles such as establishing shots of the studio space. Through the incorporation of mixed focal lengths, I aimed to highlight the tonal and textural qualities of the body through close-up, such as the actor's complexion, blemishes, or substances, as well as capturing subtle expressions and body language. This focal length is a common characteristic of my filmmaking practice, because as Balsom (2010) writes, "the close-up is perhaps the greatest exemplar of the capability of the frame to sever the image from external surroundings, rendering it at once quasi-autonomous and undeniably partial" (p.26). Close-ups are cinema's greatest achievement, allowing filmmakers to emphasise details and focus on elements in a fashion that is not possible in other mediums. This shot-type is used heavily in the film not only to capture expression and body gestures, but also for the filmic language itself to visually emphasise the subject – forcing the spectator to focus on a particular character or detail. These closer focal lengths were subsequently juxtaposed with wide angles to visualise the physicality and movement in their performances. A prime example of this during production was the scene in which Iris instructs Mica to crawl on the floor. Here, I utilised an intense and unbroken close-up focused entirely on Phoebe's face, and then switched to the 18mm lens to capture the actress's performances in relation to their environment. It was vital that the film visualised the physical performance of the actors, primarily Phoebe, as her character is prioritised in the narrative and has far more physical action in the film. Not only did I wish to capture the physicality of Phoebe's literal 'performance', but the production was also influenced by Butler's notions of performativity. As Butler's (1988) theory notes:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p.519)

Further, Maclaran (2017) contends that Butler "develops her theory of performativity whereby gender identity is constructed by performing (and repeating) specific acts within a culture"

(p.228). Butler is referring to the construction of gender through a normalisation of codes or gendered acts. For example, Butler discusses the institution of gender through a stylisation of the body, meaning a repetition of actions such as imitating gender through the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, the facial or body gestures we use in everyday conversation: all of these ‘acts’ in turn stylise the body and reinforce a version of a gendered self. In the case of my film, I wanted to exaggerate these socially constructed ‘acts’ in my representation, such as using costume-design and makeup for the characters. Thus, my research was heavily informing my methods of creative practice – a process that differed from any of my previous filmmaking experiences. For example, in the film’s opening scene, Mica prepares for the photoshoot by applying makeup in a bathroom mirror. With this scene, I wanted to directly engage with Butler’s ‘stylisation of the body’, demonstrated through the character quite literally stylising her body in preparation for the photoshoot – in which the construction of her gendered self would be visualised by Iris’ camera. This sequence is shot entirely using close-ups and mid-shots, forcing the viewer to focus on the character, and this is reinforced by the moody high-contrast lighting in the room, accentuating Phoebe’s face and body. The incorporation of red lipstick here, often associated with representations of beauty and gender, also provides a renewal and stability of identity (McCabe et al., 2020, p.669). Furthermore, this is used to foreshadow the conclusion of the film in which the red lipstick is replaced with blood – a quite literal visualisation showing the potentially damaging repercussions of Butler’s gendered acts.

Post-Production: Structuring the Body – Specificity in Editing Practices

Post-production was a lengthy process in which the film went through various stages of transition: editing took several months and as a result the film was consistently evolving and adapting as I delved into research. This was the longest time I had ever spent editing a singular project, and thus I had to reassess my practices and approach the film differently. The length of time spent in the editing stage is unusual in the traditional sense of independent filmmaking – often, editors have weeks if not days to edit work, typically those of a commercial nature. However, this extended period gave me the opportunity to focus on the importance of shaping and structuring the film at this phase of production (Berkeley et al., 2016, p.11). To begin the editing process, all the footage was organised into a timeline and arranged scene-by-scene chronologically. Each scene was edited individually, as though they were small chapters of a larger whole, in order to ensure each sequence felt as refined as possible. Discussing the

production of his own film, Berkeley (2018) notes that the various influences on his own practice such as previous work, available resources and the crew members he worked with, all helped to affirm his position and identity as a practitioner (p.37). These influences subsequently inform decision making within filmmaking practices, as they affect the plethora of creative decisions that occur throughout the different stages of production. For example, Berkeley (2018) asks:

Do I want to emphasize performances or camera-work? Will that shot cut with this one? Do I want to do another take to focus on clarity of dialogue or go with the naturalistic but muddy delivery of the last one? (p.37)

In the case of my film, Berkeley's sentiment relates particularly to my editing experience. During this, every choice was carefully considered from broader aspects such as the film's chronology, to smaller details like the frequency of audio cues or the length of certain shots. All these specific choices, however, would in turn affect my representation of the body. For example, cuts are used throughout the film in a variety of ways, such as jump-cuts, cross-cuts, and hard-cuts, all of which differ in their intent. Namely, towards the start of the film, the character of Mica applies makeup before smudging her lipstick. While editing this sequence, I chose to linger on a close-up of Mica's face, drawing the gaze of the viewer toward her as a voyeur, before abruptly match-cutting to another close-up of her face – this time in the photoshoot, and from the perspective of Iris' camera. As noted previously in my discussion of direct address, I wanted this shot to disrupt the audience's voyeurism. Without establishing the perspective of a dominant gaze beforehand, however, there would be nothing to destabilise. Hence, the simple yet specific attachment of these two shots, linked by a mere cutting technique, was an effective method of subverting perspective. Therefore, this cut signals a shift in time, location, costume, gesture, and above all, a shift in the body's stylisation for the screen. The capabilities of film as a medium for visualising ideas and investigating modes of representation is paramount to my practice, as techniques such as the aforementioned editing methods allow myself and fellow practitioners to explore narratives and research areas through an expressive creative format.

Later in the film, the rhythm shifts into a sequence driven by music, that draws comparisons between the two lead characters as well as the body and the environment. This is achieved through montage editing techniques, such as the use of transitions including cuts and slow fades. To define this particular use of montage-editing, Thompson and Bowen (2009) state that the common grammar of montage in a contemporary environment involves a series of quick cuts, "usually accompanied by music, that show a condensed version of action over time"

(p.162). In this sense, the montage-editing in the film serves the purpose of condensing narrative points into a digestible timeframe. Upon reflection, my editing choices in this sequence seem to reaffirm my gaze. Discussing the visual representation of women of colour by independent filmmaker Julie Dash, Gaither (1996) notes that “Dash intentionally slows time and movement, creating time for audiences to study the subjects” (p.103). Taking this notion further, Wöllner et al. (2018) contend that “there is reason to argue that SloMo affects viewers in their attentional gaze behaviour” (p.11). Therefore, in a similar sense the use of slow-motion in *Iris* upsets the film's temporal rhythm, drawing attention to the body on display and as such creating a visual spectacle out of it. A series of tracking mid-shots and close-ups, focusing on the fragmented body of the actor, reinforces Mulvey's (1989) discussion of scopophilia and the fascination with the human form (p.16). This analysis may also be reinforced by production elements such as the costume-design, intended to have feminine qualities and look visually striking. Despite this however, the intention in this sequence was not to demonstrate visual or erotic spectacle, but rather I wanted to emphasise the cinematographic and musical elements of the film. Again, as Berkeley (2018) contends:

There is a musical side to filmmaking, related to visual and aural rhythms created within the frame through the movement of people, things or the camera itself, added to the rhythms created through joining shots together at the editing stage. (p.38)

Similarly, my creative practice during post-production tends to focus on camerawork and rhythm first, and typically the performances of actors are secondary. Despite working with a larger crew and expanding my filmmaking practices with this project, this emphasis on imagery as opposed to performance is an area of my practice that still translates into the film and may be improved for further projects.

Post-Production: Distorting the Body

Throughout post-production, my practice involved creative methods of distorting the body – in terms of both my visual and aural approach. The conceptualisation of music and sound-design were essential aspects of pre-production, and post-production allowed these creative ideas to come to fruition. During principal photography, atmospheric sound of the studio space was recorded in order to provide a backing track for dialogue scenes in the film. This consisted of multiple takes of silence in the room, lasting approximately five minutes in length, which would produce an ambient background noise. The practice of recording sound on-set and incorporating it within post is explored by Chattopadhyay (2017), who notes that atmospheric

sound can impact the embodied experience of presence, depending on the practitioner's attention to the visual and sonic details of the site during the process of the making. Moreover, Chattopadhyay (2017) argues that "we believe in the constructed world when resonance of the site reverberates in our ears and to our sonic sensibilities even long after the medial experience" (p.353). While I did incorporate the recorded atmospheric sound within the editing process, my filmmaking practice differed greatly from Chattopadhyay's assertion. Instead, the recorded audio was distorted by the film's composer and I, in order to warp the 'constructed world' and disorient the audience.

This distortion of audio also applied to the distortion of the body, such as the film's opening title sequence: during this, I assembled a seemingly disjointed sequence of warped bodies, blurring into a mess of colours, textures and indiscernible shapes. A variety of these clips were subsequently intercut throughout the course of the film, in turn affecting the overall narrative and representation of the characters. The body thus takes on a dreamlike quality, or as though the protagonists are distracted by hallucinatory visions of the distorted body. This manipulation and distortion of the body through post-production techniques allowed me to visualise the body in a similar vein to Lynch and Mendieta's 'grotesque' and 'beautiful' representations. Through my editing practices, the body in this scene becomes a grotesque image that is reflective of "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growing and becoming" (Čurda, 2016, p.90).

Post-production was the chance for me to emphasise and distort the body through a plethora of filmic methods: close-ups, camera movement, montage-editing, romanticising through musical cues, and many others. Such techniques were then reinforced by the film's hellish soundscape; distorting the organic vocal qualities of the body and warping my representation – in a similar vein to both Lynch and Mendieta's portrayals of violence and their grotesque or politically charged distortions. In terms of practice, post-production was the stage in which my singular creative vision largely came into play, as there were no other external distractions or influences to impact my representation and visualisation of the body. In utilising the visual capabilities of film as a medium, I was able to explore ideas surrounding the body through a creative format – thus, the film was essential for conducting the research.

Ultimately, post-production was a site of reflection. Examining his own creative-practice research approach, Goddard (2010) notes "this approach suggested that both the practice and the exegesis are creative research practices— both separately and together. In my research, the

relationship between the practice and the exegesis also developed as a correspondence between practices” (p.113). Applying Goddard’s argument to this research, the reflection process provided the opportunity to examine the various practices and methods that I had utilised throughout production, but in doing so opened a newfound form of creative practice – that is, the reflection itself. Furthermore, reflection allowed me to examine the role of screen production research and the constraints within the practice itself. These limitations in production subsequently generated unexpected results and ‘happy accidents’, much the same as Lynch’s practices. Additionally, examining the limitations present within independent screen production research, John and Joyce (2020) argue that:

Creative practice in screen production typically exists within clearly defined constraints which can be broken down into two main types; constraints determined by content and constraints determined by resources. Content forms the creative basis of the project and resources provide the means by which it can be realised. (p.134)

During reflection, there were several specific images and sequences that I did not envision during principal photography. For instance, the film’s opening sequence was a particularly surprising element of my process. This scene was not in the script, yet it came to fruition during post-production by pure experimentation. Initially, these images were test-footage gathered while practicing with my camera setup. Despite this, upon placing them into the film’s timeline, I felt that they could be incorporated effectively in order to set the film’s overall tone and to reinforce the theme of bodily distortion. Another unexpected element of the film came from Mica’s first appearance. In the script, this scene was written to take place in the same room as the photoshoot, however due to issues with lighting I was unhappy with the visual component. The decision to film in the nearby bathroom was improvised by the actor Phoebe – this spur of the moment idea proved especially effective during post-production, as the dark, high-contrast lighting and different location provided an intriguing distinction between the rest of the sequences. Additionally, other unexpected visual elements included the lingering close-up on Phoebe’s face, during the scene in which her character crawls for Iris. Initially, this was envisioned as a wide-angle encompassing the whole room; however, during the edit I instead chose to utilise a long take of the scene that I had filmed for additional footage. This close-up, I felt, functioned more effectively in the scene in terms of capturing Phoebe’s facial performance and conveying a desired tone. These ‘happy accidents’, correlating with Lynch’s filmmaking practices, continually surprised me throughout post-production and challenged my process as the film kept evolving and adapting in unexpected ways.

Elements that worked well, subjectively speaking, include the additional opening scene involving the distorted bodies and strobing projection. This sequence was utilised as a recurring motif throughout the film in order to juxtapose the sterile studio location, and to act as a jarring visual cutaway to disorient the viewer. As well as this, the physical presence and performance of Phoebe Chan as Mica works especially well, and I feel ties the film together. Her performance was the result of careful direction and clear communication, as well as the collaborative effort of my practice allowing creative freedom for the actors. Regardless of the film's strengths, aspects that do not work as efficiently are the dialogue exchanges. Several of the dialogue exchanges are not quite where I envisioned them in the script, due to a lack of coverage both in terms of the audio recordings and footage. This was largely the result of the limited timeframe I had to create the film (one week to film within the studio-space), and these issues were only discovered upon reflection in post-production – therefore, this was too late in terms of possible reshoots. Despite this, these issues are commonplace within any filmmaking process – however, the plethora of obstacles that practitioners must overcome are vital resources in terms of challenging their creative practice and producing 'happy accidents' such as the aforementioned examples.

Conclusion

This thesis explored representations of the body on screen. The research was practical in nature to unearth distinctive, contemporary conceptualisation of the body and how it can be interpreted in audio-visual mediums.

In summary, delineated in the literature, the body maintains a centrality throughout the works of Lynch and Mendieta - both of whom visualise the human figure in unconventional and distinctive ways. Both artist-practitioners incorporate the body by experimenting with various practices in order to challenge the limitations of bodily representation and visualisation. While their methods of practice differ significantly, there exists a similarity within the pair's portrayal of the body: a simultaneous representation of beauty and the grotesque, demonstrated through their distortions and surrealist inclinations. Lynch's work – notably his early experiments and photography – represents fragmentations of the human body, influenced by artists such as Francis Bacon and depicted through his emphasis on bodily distortion and abstraction. Mendieta, however, centralises the body throughout her art practice in order to 'decolonise' it, reconnecting the female form with Mother Nature in both spiritual and feminist contexts. These ideas are visualised through physical processes including a fragmentation of the body, such as Lynch's surrealist painterly approach, as well as Mendieta's documentation of performative self-portraiture work through 35mm photography and Super 8 film.

The findings from the analysis chapters unearthed several parallels between both Lynch and Mendieta in terms of their visualisation of the body. Despite the differences in their filmmaking practices and intentions, for instance Lynch's mixed-media use of animation, painting and film, or Mendieta's blend of performance, photography, and film, both artists explore the physical limits of the body in their work. This was discovered by analysing their methods of altering the human form through visual distortions and fragmentations. These distortions of the body are utilised to different effect: where Lynch channels his painterly influences such as Bacon into his surrealist depictions of figures, Mendieta instead uses distortion to explore gender performativity, female and Cuban identity, and violence against women. This discovery impacted the research in that it opened discussions of gender and sexuality, as explored through Butler and primarily Mulvey, and this subsequently revealed how Lynch and Mendieta utilise the body in order to expand the capabilities of representation.

Furthermore, cementing the arguments for the analytical chapters, I contend that the crucial distinction between Lynch and Mendieta's approach to visualising the body is evident in the role of the gaze. Lynch focuses on abstract imagery and subconscious ideas yet still exhibits a dominant male gaze particularly in *Eraserhead*. Mendieta, however, inverts the male gaze to represent her female perspective and to 'decolonise' the gaze. Mendieta also utilises her female gaze to explore gender and racial issues such as the patriarchal nature of cinematic representation and cultural displacement. By pursuing this study, I have unearthed parallels and crucial contrasts in the creative practices of my chosen filmmakers. The combination of this qualitative analysis and screen production research, in which I produced my own short film in response to the research, demonstrates the potentiality of visualising the body on-screen to emerging practitioners in a contemporary context, as well as new methods to implement into practice. This research fed into the development and production of the creative component, and subsequently the short film fed into and developed the research area of 'the body on screen.' Thus, a dialogue was created between the research and film, expressed through the exegesis.

The creation of *Iris* and the written exegesis allowed the opportunity for extensive reflection, upon both the film itself as well as the practices involved with making it. As Goddard (2007) argues, "moreover, a third creative space opens. By interchanging and integrating the practice with the exegesis, it may be possible to generate a combined and reflexive research praxis" (p.113). The film's production was essential to create an intertwining discussion between the research and creative component itself. As an emerging filmmaker, the creation of a short fictional film was the most appropriate strategy for the overall thesis. As well as this, I am drawn to film and fascinated by the screen's ability to visualise the body and aestheticise it for creative purposes. Exploring the role of filmmaking within her creative practice research, Reid (2010) declares:

I have recognized a synergy between the aesthetic of film and my personal aesthetic which falls into three main areas. These are the temporal (a strong relationship to rhythm, sound, and musicality); the personal (a concern with the individual's story, connecting the physical with the emotional or interior landscape); and the collaborative (between art forms and practitioners). (p.49)

Upon reflection of my creative practice, I would proclaim that Reid's process overlaps strongly with my own – however, I would note that my practice emphasises the corporeal as opposed to Reid 'personal' area. In this sense, my practice appears to focus on the relationship between corporeal elements (that is, the body and its physicality on-screen) and temporality (rhythm, structure, and poetics). The collaborative element, however, has largely been unearthed throughout this research process – manifesting through my consistent collaboration with other

practitioners, such as musical composers, actors, and other filmmakers. All these elements fed into my creative process and thus shaped how I visualise the body in the film. Further, throughout the various stages of production, I unearthed several other new forms of practice that assisted my representation of the body on-screen. For example, the use of online communication in the form of Zoom meetings proved to be a resourceful and efficient tool during the rehearsal process and may become an essential practice when physical interaction is limited – such as during the Covid-era, in which this film was produced. Another practice I unearthed was utilising the aesthetic capabilities of sound to assist my representation of the body. With this, the distortion of recorded atmospheric audio and vocal recordings shifted my representation of the body into more surreal and subversive territories. Sound is not particularly utilised within Mendieta’s film-works. Where Lynch uses disparate audio cues or soundscapes made after the fact, I unearthed a new form of filmmaking practice by blending the two stages of principal and post: sound is recorded naturally, then digitally distorted and warped to coincide with the desired representational intent. In this case, I wanted to distort and warp my representation of the body, in order to highlight the damaging impact of the gaze and the effect of ‘over-stylising’ the body for the screen. Therefore, the experimentation involved with ‘making’ and creative practices generated new knowledge throughout my research process.

In terms of my findings, the creation of the film generated a variety of data. The short film and my creative practice share similarities with both Lynch & Mendieta, in the sense that all three practitioners utilise the body within their work in order to express varying ideas and interests. Lynch’s work uses the body as a simultaneously grotesque and beautiful tool, and thus he explores his fascination with tone, texture and colour – particularly in the case of *Six Figures*, as *Eraserhead* is shot in monochrome and thus colour is replaced with shadow and contrast. His focus on the body maintains a strong painterly approach, contextualising the human form within his typically oppressive and surreal environments to juxtapose the organic with the industrial. As well as this, Lynch’s representation often demonstrates a strong male-gaze perspective, portraying women in his earlier works as a visual and erotic spectacle or sidelining them entirely. While Lynch adopts his painterly practices for the screen, Mendieta instead uses the body as her canvas. Mendieta’s representation of the body is used as a tool for cultural and political confrontation, challenging the limited representation of women in art and pushing the boundaries of acceptable art practices. Her female perspective and Cuban heritage sought to ‘decolonise’ the gaze, ultimately deconstructing the role of the male gaze and its cultural significations on the body – in turn, reclaiming the female body for her own forms of

uninhibited representation. Further, Mendieta employs grotesque distortions of the body and violence as a tool for cultural and political confrontation, using material elements as part of her performative practice to highlight issues of violence against women.

My own filmmaking practices, however, utilise the body in a different manner. *Iris* presents the body largely through close-up and fragmentation and uses distortion as a coexisting quality. My work reflects a fascination with the organic and textural qualities of the body yet distorts the natural features through the language of film. Where Lynch and Mendieta utilise physical or organic materials to distort their representation of the body, such as paint, blood and feathers, my creative output instead uses digital means. For example, the use of fragmented close-ups in tandem with projected digital artefacts, or the reflexive role of the camera in the film that leads to emotional and physical harm. Comparing Lynch and Mendieta's practice with my own illustrates the impact of my contemporary environment upon my creative practice. With the consistent rise of digital technology and shifting aesthetics over time, it is evident that these aspects of modern filmmaking and art have seeped into my personal practices and creative interests. This in turn impacts my visualisation of the body, distorting it by blending the organic nature of the human form and juxtaposing it with digital audio-visual effects and processing. The role of my gaze is predominantly male; however, the inclusion of female perspectives throughout my practice and principal photography allows me to disrupt my modes of representation, and potentially assists on the path to fairer representational strategies. This method of creative practice was unearthed during the production stage through serendipity – however, as a mode of representation, I will carry this strategy into future practices. Ultimately, I believe that the overarching thread between the visualisations of the body is a fascination with identity – or, rather, the loss of it. Through creative mediums, this interest can be explored via an abundance of subversive and engaging techniques that have the potential to resonate with spectators. In a contemporary environment that emphasises the representation and politics of the human form, visualising the body on-screen is potentially more important than ever.

In terms of practice, while Lynch welcomed accidents and improvisation, Mendieta's work was obsessed with restrictions and outcomes. In terms of my practice, the work combined both perspectives. The project was confined by the Coronavirus pandemic as well as the conventional structures of filmmaking: pre, principal, and post-production. These constraints, however, generated a plethora of impromptu adaptations to my practice, much as Lynch's creative process, many of which were revealed in post-production. These came in the form of unexpected images, such as the film's opening scene, and experimental editing choices that

were not conceptualised in the pre-production stage. *Iris* cements the influence of not only Lynch and Mendieta, but Mulvey and Butler, with my explorations of the gaze and performativity through both the audio-visual construction and the narrative itself. However, the role of my male gaze may be addressed in future film practices by collaborating with a female cinematographer, in order to avoid representational issues. By pursuing this study, I discovered the vast capabilities of highlighting the body in a creative format as well as the implications this can have on representations of gender and identity. I have demonstrated this through my analysis of two different artists from incredibly different backgrounds, both of whom place emphasis on the body at the heart of their creative practice. I also discovered the repercussions of the gaze, and how perspective affects meaning even when there are overlapping subjects – in this case, Lynch’s male perspective and Mendieta’s female perspective, as well as my own perspective as a white cis male. The combination of methods produced the outcome of rigorous analysis on both artists, and this qualitative analysis subsequently fed into the production of a short film. *Iris* is both situated *within* and a *reflection of* this research, yet the film is its own standalone entity. The film creates a conversation between the written research and highlights many elements of my argument, notably the role of my male gaze and my exploration of Butler’s performativity. Through the combination of the methods, I have developed and generated knowledge within the field of screen production research.

This thesis will make an impact of this research area by addressing the gaps in research. For instance, there is a significant lack of literature or analysis that has been conducted on Lynch’s early work and short films, nor the interdisciplinarity and transitional nature of these works. Lynch’s film work is ultimately rooted in fine-art, and thus I argue the need to expand literature on this work in order to better understand his filmmaking practices and the specific methods he uses to visualise the body on-screen. In general, Mendieta’s work and profile is also lacking in literature, even less so that focuses on her film work. Thus, I am widening the perspectives in which her work can be analysed. Additionally, this research is among the first to comparatively analyse these two artists – therefore, this thesis generates new opportunities for researchers in terms of understanding how different filmmakers from various backgrounds use the body in their creative practice.

The research advances literature on screen production research and creative-practice research, fields that are still developing in our contemporary environment. Therefore, I have made an impact on the research area of screen production research through my discussion of *Iris* and in doing so, I have answered the question of how emerging filmmakers can develop a

contemporary practice focused on the body. This research also answers the research question, how do specific creative practices influence body representation on screen? This is answered through my exploration of the multimedia practices of Lynch, Mendieta, and myself, with a focus on filmmaking practices. Combining specific creative practices influences body representation on screen by widening the potential of representation. For example, in the case of my own screen production research, filmmaking practices allowed the opportunity to visualise the body with specific aesthetic qualities. These included cinematographic approaches, lighting and colour palettes, and experimental editing choices – all of which affected how I represented the body on screen. In the case of Lynch and Mendieta, using multimedia approaches of film, photography, animation, and performance allowed their work to channel their fine-art and painterly backgrounds, subsequently feeding into their abstract and distorted representations.

This research also addresses the question, what are the socio-cultural implications of the body on screen in the 21st century? As Poppi and Urios-Aparisi (2018) argue, “commodification, integration, dissatisfaction, beautification and idealization, and politicization are some of the prevalent ways how the body is conceptualized in contemporary culture and societies” (p.298). While these socio-cultural and political implications still come into play, on-screen representation of the body can subvert these aspects. As demonstrated in the exegesis and my screen production research, the body on screen is a multi-dimensional form, encompassing the physical body of the actor or actress, the actor’s body transformed into character through makeup, costume and other filmic elements, and finally the cinematography of the film (Poppi & Urios-Aparisi, 2018, p.299). Essentially, creative practices allow practitioners to transform the body into specific representations using a variety of techniques, and thus they can subvert socio-cultural implications of the body such as commodification and idealisation. This answer to this research question was explored within my qualitative analysis of Lynch and Mendieta, however it was primarily unearthed through my own experience during the production of *Iris*.

The final statement that I want to emphasise in this research is that the body can, and fundamentally *should*, be an integral element of creative practice. As evidenced by the analysis of Lynch, Mendieta and my own filmmaking practice, the body can be utilised for a plethora of thematic or aesthetic purposes, and the way practitioners visualise the body can have substantial impacts on representations of gender and identity. Ultimately, highlighting the body within creative work allows practitioners to reclaim their identity and explore new ones.

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