(Skin)Aesthetics: A Study of Skin(s) in Spectatorship

by

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Declaration and Inclusion of Material from a Prior Thesis

I declare that the thesis is my own work and that the thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.
Abstract

The status of the skin in studies of embodied spectatorship is under-examined as, too, is the concept of the skin as the ‘common sense’ or the site upon which all other senses converge. This is an interdisciplinary study of skin(s) in spectatorship which investigates how the skin functions as the site/sight/sound of spectatorial engagement, intersubjectivity, and sensory slippage. I develop a new method of analysis for skin(s) in spectatorship and performance studies called “(skin)aesthetics”. As an approach, (skin)aesthetics combines various theoretical and conceptual modes in the analysis of skin, from Didier Anzieu’s psychoanalytic theory of *The Skin Ego* (1985), to French philosopher Michel Serres’ *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985), to research in contemporary neuroscience with a focus on synaesthesia, mirror neurons, and mirror touch synaesthesia.

With recourse to a number of case studies including plays; live-art exhibitions; and contemporary dance, I suggest how various modes of appreciation including direct skin-to-skin contact; extramediated touch; haptic visuality; and mirror neuron function influence the spectator’s experience of skin-based intersubjectivity as well as enhancing their understanding of a work and/or its wider implications. I consider a number of aesthetic materials (including, but not limited to, Vaseline, gelatine, fabric, sounds, and paint) to suggest how they influence the way in which spectators relate to the ‘other’s’ skin. The concept of the skin becomes more attenuated as the thesis progresses by moving away from experiences of direct skin-to-skin contact. The thesis is designed to emphasise the number of ways the skin functions as a multisensorial site of engagement as well as the pervasiveness of the skin in the social and sensorial imagination. Ultimately, I look to suggest how we might occupy another’s skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense. I suggest how the spectator’s engagement, via whatever sensory modality, with skins and (skin)aesthetics in the performance context reinforces the basic psychoanalytic ideas, outlined by Anzieu, of skin-based identity formation and intersubjectivity. I interrogate the representations of skin(s) for the societal and/or psychological issues they encode and, indeed, suggest how practitioners might manipulate the spectator’s skin-based experience to similar effect/affect – be that social, empathetic, educational, aesthetic, erotic or, indeed, torturous – in future productions.
Abbreviations

*FOH* – Front of House

*IT* – *Immersive Theatres*

*NMM* – “*No More Masterpieces*”

*OED* – *Oxford English Dictionary*

*PE* – *Psychic Envelopes*

*SFT* – *A Skin For Thought: Interviews with Gilbert Tarrab on Psychology and Psychoanalysis.*

*SIS* – “*The Sound Image of the Self*”

*SIT* – “*(Syn)aesthetics and Immersive Theatre: Embodied Beholding in Lundahl & Seilt’s Rotating in a Room of Images*”

*SRGM* – “*Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern.*”

*SS* – *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface*

*SW* – “*A Skin that Walks*”

*TBS* – *The Book of Skin*

*TPS* – *The Provocation of the Senses*

*TSE* – *The Skin Ego*

*TSP* – *The Senses in Performance*

*ULTB* – *Ugly Lies the Bone*

*WBSS* – “*Windbags and Skinsongs*”
**Introduction**

Making, taking, sharing, tearing, and wearing skins: this is an interdisciplinary study of skin(s) in spectatorship. It has long been known that our skins register affect during spectatorship. We feel the hairs on the back of our necks bristle, we might say that a performance has given us goosebumps, we feel blood rush to the surface of our skin, and our hands might become clammy. The spectator’s skin is an active and responsive site of engagement in the performance environment. Anticipation, pressure, fear, excitement and temperature are palpable on the skin. In Mary Caroline Richards’ translation of “The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” (1938), performance theorist Antonin Artaud proposes that “it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds” (99).1 The *OED* defines “metaphysics” as “the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things or reality, including questions about being, substance, time and space, causation, change and identity.” Artaud does not elaborate, however, on how exactly the skin functions to enable such ideas to re-enter the mind in this specific essay. It is not clear from Artaud’s proposition whose skin (the spectator’s, the performer’s, representations of skin?) metaphysical ideas must re-enter through or, indeed, what mode of engagement (tactile, visual, olfactory, auditory?) re-entry is predicated on. This thesis investigates how the skin functions to negotiate such ideas by emphasising the ways in which it acts as a multisensorial and intersubjective sight/site of engagement for spectators. We know, for example, that feeling the hairs bristle on the back of our neck as another person brushes past us, or whispers in our ear, makes us hyper-aware of ourselves, of our skin, and the proximity of the other person. This thesis asks how works of art might utilise the skin as a site of experience in similar ways to influence an understanding of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’.

This raises the question of the status of skin in performance which is currently under-examined, particularly as a conduit of the senses, in studies of embodied spectatorship. This thesis investigates skin as the site/sight of engagement and asks how the skin, and representations of skin, facilitate the spectator’s understanding of relational ideas such as ‘self’ and ‘other’. The lack of attention is significant because the skin does, and can do, so many exciting things in performance. We should

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1 This is translated from the original French “c’est par la peau qu’on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits” (Artaud 107) in “Le Théâtre de la Cruauté (Premier manifeste).”
therefore seek to further understand how the skin functions as a site of multisensorial engagement, a site-to-be-manipulated, and an intersubjective site in the performance environment. Practitioners conceivably benefit from further research in this area in terms of designing future performance aesthetics which manipulate what I have termed the spectator’s “skinbodied” experience, by which I mean embodied experience as it registers through the skin, to desired effect/affect.

Artaud’s proposition presents three factors for consideration: skin, the senses in relation to the skin, and relational ideas negotiated through the skin. To address these, I have developed a new method of analysis termed “(skin)aesthetics” which accounts for skinbodied experience in relation to the senses, aesthetic representations of skin, and other skins. I explain (skin)aesthetics in detail in the ‘Method’ section but for now it suffices to say that it is an interdisciplinary approach and that interdisciplinarity is common practice in studies of skin and in studies of embodied spectatorship. In Shakespeare and Audience: In Practice (2013), for example, Stephen Purcell ranges across the philosophy of phenomenology of embodiment to phenomenological approaches to spectatorship to cognitive science to the neurophysiological groundings for empathy (mirror neurons). While these are not obviously connected approaches “they are not so much in opposition” says Purcell “as in negotiation” (41). Nicola Diamond’s Between Skins: The Body in Psychoanalysis – Contemporary Developments (2013) similarly spans psychoanalysis, neurobiology, phenomenology, and philosophy in the study of skin as intersubjective surface. Diamond’s approach is also applicable to my study because:

this more open and fluid style of thinking is […] thematically reflected in [the] fascination with opening up body borders and allowing for flow, and with fundamentally challenging rigid body boundaries [which] allow[s] the line to become blurred between imaginative body geographies and evidence-based claims [to] incite, more lively debate and a greater licence to play productively across disciplinary lines and borders. (Diamond 215)

By taking an interdisciplinary approach such as this, we can find different ways under and between skins in spectatorship which helps to answer how it is through the skin

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2 Mirror neurons become “active both when an individual executes an act and when he observes it being executed by others” (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 59) which conceivably explains how the spectator sees ‘self’ in the skin of the ‘other’ who performs a familiar action.
that concepts such as ‘self’ and ‘other’ re-enter the mind. I suggest ways in which evidence-based claims, such as those found in mirror neuron studies, support the idea of imaginative body, or rather skin, geographies which form between skins. Indeed, (skin)aesthetics holds together various theoretical and conceptual modes in the analysis of skin, from Didier Anzieu’s psychoanalytic theory of *The Skin Ego* (1985), to French philosopher Michel Serres’ *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985), to contemporary neuroscience (with a focus on synaesthesia, mirror neurons, and mirror touch synaesthesia). They are sutured tightly enough to reconcile them, converging as they do on the skin, but loosely enough to let them shift in negotiation. I manage the negotiations as they arise and thus present detailed explanations of embodied simulation, mirror neurons, and mirror-touch synaesthesia in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

The purpose of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, I develop a new theory “(skin)aesthetics” which functions as a methodology for analysing skin in performance. I present a step-by-step guide for how to use this methodology in future analysis in the conclusion. Secondly, I introduce a number of aesthetic materials (including, but not limited to, Vaseline, paints, chicken skins, fabrics, and sound) and suggest how they function as (skin)aesthetics. And, finally, I suggest how such aesthetic forms can help us understand the basic operations of identity formation and intersubjectivity as they are negotiated through the skin, via whatever sensory modality, in the performance environment.

**Case Studies**

I consider one contemporary dance piece, four plays, and one live-art exhibition. I have been a spectator at each of my case studies which have been selected for their skin-based content, or the way in which aesthetic features impact the skin, and how, in turn, the spectator’s interactions with such features can be understood to model, or act as analogy for, the basic psychological operations of identity formation and skin-based relationality. In this section, I offer a brief overview of each case study which forms the basis for each of my five core chapters. I expand on the arguments being made in each in the ‘Structure’ section towards the end of this introduction.

In Chapter 1, “Skin-to-Skin Contact,” I focus on Robert Hesp’s contemporary dance piece *HARD C*CK (2017). *HARD C*CK does not present any single, or straightforward, storyline but the work engages the spectator’s entire sensorium as it recreates “arenas of sexual activity” (Hesp qtd. in CAM4). There are scenes of skin-
to-skin audience interaction, naked dance, writhing through Vaseline, pumping talcum powder into the air, and the soundscapes are tangible.

Chapter 2, “Skin Ecologies in Macbeth,” considers director Lucy Bailey’s production of William Shakespeare’s Macbeth (2010), at The Globe Theatre. Macbeth is infamously a tale of regicide, madness, and witches but skin also enjoys a bloody ubiquity. I present a reading of Bailey’s Macbeth through the optic of the skin with a focus on the unique staging of this production. Indeed, the audience in the pit of the Globe stand through head-holes under a large fabric sheet which connects them by the skins of their necks.

Chapter 3, “Skinscapes and Soundscapes,” considers Donna Huanca’s live-art exhibition SCAR CYMBALS (2016), a multisensorial piece which engages the spectator with the smells of Palo Santo wood, the tangible soundscape, and surreal spectacle of an environment saturated with skins. The exhibition features naked models whose skins are painted with turmeric, coffee, and other natural substances, fabric representations of skins, and photographs of cracked and peeling skins. The soundscape is loud, discordant and, most significantly, palpable, and activates the spectator’s skin as a site of engagement. The exhibition responds to the spectator through heat and motion detectors which convert the spectator’s presence and proximity into sound. The work addresses political and media practices which enable ‘othering’, marginalization, violence, silencing and subjugation.

Chapter 4, “Fran[skin]stein: A New ‘Skin Job,’” looks at Tristan Bernays’ play Frankenstein (2017), directed by Eleanor Rhodes. The play re-imagines Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) and casts the same actor in the role of both Creator and Creature. Bernays’ Frankenstein concentrates primarily on the Creature: the Creature’s experience of abandonment, for example, learning language (through interacting with the audience), and his search for Frankenstein. While there are no clichéd representations of the Creature’s skin in this production, I suggest how the sound work – specifically the sounds of tearing skin – approximates the skin and how the tonal approximates the tactile sense when the spectators interact with the Creature.

Chapter 5, “Scars in their Eyes,” considers the spectator’s visual engagement with the presentation of skin, burns, and scars in Lindsey Ferrentino’s play Ugly Lies the Bone (2017) and Pat Kinevane’s play Underneath (2015 –). Ugly Lies the Bone tells the story of Jess, a former soldier, who suffers extensive third-degree burns following an accident with an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. Jess’ scarred skin is represented by prosthetic applications, compression bandages, and her
pained movement which audiences understand is restricted by scar tissue. The play focuses on Jess’ engagement with a Virtual Reality (VR) world which is based on SnowWorld – a pioneering treatment for pain-reduction in burns patients.

_**Underneath**_ is a dramatic monologue told by ‘Her’, a dead, middle-aged woman, who was struck by lightning and badly burned as a child. It documents the abuse directed at ‘Her’ throughout her life because of her appearance and, indeed, her eventual murder at the hands of a “beautiful” sociopath. ‘Her’s’ skin is blackened by stage paint and spectators understand that the tattered black fabric, smeared with green, represents decaying flesh. A shock of gold paint across ‘Her’s’ face represents scarring. The re-inventive twist on the cliché “beauty is only skin deep” arises as the story is told by ‘Her’, a re-animated corpse, from the depths of her tomb in Cobh, Ireland. In Chapter 4, as we shall see, I problematize the lack of visual horror in _Frankenstein_, in relation to the semiotics of monstrosity, for the way in which it potentially allows audiences to renege on a duty of care for those who appear to be different. Both case studies in Chapter 5, however, suggest how the (skin)aesthetic representation of visual difference does not impair a spectator’s ability to relate to, and begin to understand, the vulnerable ‘other’s’ skin-based experience.

In this section, I have offered an overview of the case studies and the aesthetic forms I focus on in this thesis. In the following section I introduce the skin-based theory which enables my investigation into what such aesthetic forms reveal about basic identity formation and intersubjectivity as it can be negotiated through the skin in spectatorship.

**Didier Anzieu’s _The Skin Ego_ (1985)**

Didier Anzieu’s skin-based theory of _The Skin Ego_ (1985), translated by Naomi Segal, helps address the question of how the skin works to enable relational ideas to re-enter the spectator’s mind. While Artaud proposes that it is “through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter [the audience’s] minds,” _The Skin Ego_ effectively reformulates the proposition so that it may be expressed thus: “it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to enter our minds.” It is worth noting here that I investigate metaphysical ideas without recourse to traditional philosophical method. I consider how ideas such as ‘self’ and ‘other’, including societal ‘other’, are negotiated through the skin with recourse to psychoanalytic theory in each of my case studies. Artaud’s use of “re-enter” suggests such concepts were once known but must now be _rediscovered_ through the skin in spectatorship. Anzieu focuses on an earlier
developmental stage, specifically the formation of a skin-ego in infancy, and so *The Skin Ego* suggests how it was through the skin that such ideas first entered the mind. I therefore investigate whether similar processes are in action in the performance environment and whether something akin to the infant’s initial formation of ideas of ‘self’ as either connected to the ‘other’, as with the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ which I will explain shortly, or as separate from the ‘other’ takes place again – a form of “re-entry” through the skin for the adult spectator.

Anzieu argues that “every psychical activity leans anaclitically on a biological function [and] the Skin-ego is supported by various functions of the skin” (*TSE* 44); in other words, the skin is the intermediary for the formation of a skin-ego. The ‘skin-ego’ refers to the mental image that the individual uses to “represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, based on its experience of the surface of the body” (*TSE* 43). The concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’, according to Anzieu, are derived through the infant’s experience of skin-to-skin contact in daily care which leads to the formation of an imagined “common skin” (*TSE* 45). The ‘common skin’ refers to the infant’s fantasy that “a single skin is shared by the child and its mother, figurative of their symbiotic union” (*TSE* 45). The skin-ego, or the understanding of ‘self’ as separate from ‘other’, is formed following “the process of detachment [which] involves the breaking off or tearing of that common skin” (*TSE* 45).

I investigate how reconfigurations of the ‘common skin,’ or imagined, or felt skin geographies, might emerge in the performance environment between spectators in response to the skin aesthetic features I discuss. Claudia Benthien summarizes the relationship between real and imagined skins in a useful way. She explains that *The Skin Ego* presents “the human skin as […] both an organic and imaginary reality” (Benthien 8), which enables us to take the organic skin as the point of departure for the formation of felt skin(s), intersensorial mingling, and connection. Franziska Schroeder’s concept of the “body skinned” (61) exemplifies the idea of “imaginative [skin] geographies,” or the skin as “organic and imaginary reality,” because it refers to:

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3 As an example of imaginative skin geographies, David Howes’ “Skincapes: Embodiment, Culture, and Environment” (2005) describes how skins mirror landscapes and how landscapes can be gendered. Howes explains how the Kwoma “women’s bodies are conceived of as cold and permeable like the swamps” (35).
a body that needs to feed much more on an abstract reading of another human
being’s presence; it is a body that is made of fragments, glances, and sometimes
fantasies [...] It is a body that needs to become more akin to the skin itself, a
meeting place for the other senses, more like Serres’ milieu. (Schroeder 62)

She gives the example of a musical ensemble who are physically connected to each
other through sound-based cues felt on the skin (an idea that I draw on in Chapters 3
and 4). Sound “becomes more akin to the skin itself,” (Schroeder 62) as an imaginative
skin forms in the spaces between bodies but is also felt as reality on the skin.

In “The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto),” Artaud does not specify through
which mode of sensory engagement metaphysical ideas re-enter through the skin –
although he does suggest “the need to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility
through the organs […] from the point of view of sound” (95). As we shall shortly see,
Artaud explores the idea of palpable sound in relation to the skin more closely in his
eSSay “No More Masterpieces” (NMM). Anzieu, however, recognises that the skin
“separates and unites the various sense-faculties” (TSE 19). Indeed, the skin functions
as “a system [which] compris[es] several sense-organs (touch, pressure, pain, warmth)
[which are] closely connected to the other external sensory organs (hearing, sight,
smell and taste) and to the awareness of body movement” (TSE 15). The spectator’s
skin as intersensorial surface is, therefore, an ideal site to study in the performance
environment to determine how various forms of contact influence relational thinking
and/or impact the spectator’s psyche. And, indeed, how such forms of contact are
negotiated by various aesthetic forms.

Skin Studies
Skin studies is an interdisciplinary field. Over the past two decades, research has
traced the changing historical conceptualisations of skin, from porous membrane, to
sealed off sac, to the “sensorium commune” (Serres 70), or the meeting place, of the
senses. The skin has been considered as container of ‘self’; intersubjective boundary;
racialized site; malleable site; mimetic site; consumable; wearable; audible;
commercial; cosmetic; tattooed, pierced, and incised site; to name but a few areas of
investigation. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey’s collection Thinking Through the Skin
(2001), Claudia Benthien’s Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and World
(2002), Steven Connor’s The Book of Skin (2004), Nina Jablonski’s Skin: A Natural
History (2006), and Sheila L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler and Rachel Alpha Johnston
Hurst’s *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (2013) offer comprehensive overviews of the social, cultural, historical, psychological, and biological significance of the skin. Such texts, to name but a few, form the corpus of the ever-expanding field of skin studies and I draw on them throughout this thesis.

The skin has been well researched as boundary. Benthien writes that skin “serves as a representation of the whole [self] and as that which conceals it” (23), Jablonski observes that “more than any other part of the body, our skin imbues us with humanity and individuality” (3), and Kathy O’Dell argues that the skin is the “denotative aspect of the body” (15). But the skin is an intersubjective boundary too and it is this boundary, as well as its dissolution, that I investigate in this thesis. John Mowitt refers to the skin as a “gnarled border” and proposes that “we think of skin […] as arising at the point of contact” (21). Elspeth Probyn argues that the metaphor of “eating skin [provides] a way of being overwhelmingly close to difference [the ‘other’] without subsuming difference into the same-other” (90). Diamond challenges the idea of the body as “separated from its environment by a sealed-off skin sac” (208) and argues that “skin-to-skin contact becomes a relational space where an affective connection is created between persons and the outside world” (3-4). O’Dell suggests that the sight of damaged skin points to an “‘it’s me’ quality of the body […] particularly palpable in masochistic performances […] because of the focus on the performer’s skin” (15), and Steven Connor argues that the skin has become a “transbodily hyper organ” (*TBS* 66). The idea of a “transbodily hyper organ” refers to the way that skin is no longer perceived:

primarily [as] a membrane of separation, but [as] a medium of connection or greatly intensified semiotic permeability, of codes, signs, images, forms, desires. In the reforming, infinitely reformable contemporary sensorium, the associations of the skin with transmission, passage and connection become more emphatic than its functions of screening, or separation. (*TBS* 66)

My research builds on the idea of skin as a “transbodily hyper organ,” specifically the way in which the boundaries between skins are dissolved or extended through the spectator’s engagement with different aesthetic forms and multisensorial conditions (including but not limited to skin-to-skin contact, fabrics, sound work, and visual manipulation of the skin) which facilitate the formation of ‘common skins’ in spectatorship.
Skin in Performance Studies

The question of *how* the skin functions to enable ideas such as ‘self’ and ‘other’ to *re-enter* the spectators’ minds arises in performance studies where the spectator’s skin-based experience is under-examined. Research often focusses on performers’ skins instead (Valerie 2016; Cheng 2010; Stephens 2014). Susanne Valerie’s *Actors and the Art of Performance: Under Exposure* (2016), for example, focuses on the actor’s skin and suggests that “the skin is no longer the border of the physis, but the site where it stretches, is crossed, and dissolves” (28). I similarly consider *how* the skin, or tactile sense, might be extended but also amongst spectators and, always, with recourse to the literal skin.

Existing research *has* considered the spectator’s skin as part of the embodied experience but “part of” is the operative phrase. The skin is either considered as an indication of the spectator’s affective response, or in terms of how the sight of skin influences response, but it is less frequently considered as the site of engagement itself. Throughout this thesis I explore the skin as the sight/site of engagement but when I refer to the skin as the ‘site’ of engagement I consider how the spectator’s skin physically registers the experience of the performance (such as palpable sound or props) or touch-based interactions with performers and how such interactions influence response. Erin Hurley’s *Theatre & Feeling* (2010), for example, considers the production and management of the “sensate body” (9) in the performance environment. Drawing on the work of theatre phenomenologists Bert O. States and Stanton Garner, Hurley explains that “thrill experiences […] are the most physiologically basic of a repertoire of responses to our environment that are captured under the general rubric of ‘feeling.’ [And] scholars tend to call this immediate, uncontrollable, skin-level registration of a change to our environment ‘affect’” (13). Studies consider “skin-level registration[s]” of affect, such as sweating and blushing (Hurley 13-17); Nicholas Ridout suggests affect is transmitted between bodies as vibrations felt as “tremulous beneath the [audience’s] skin” (25); and in Fiona Bannon’s essay “Baring All on Stage: Active Encounters with Voyeurism, Performance Aesthetics, and ‘Absorbed Acts of Seeing’” she entitles a section “Impressions on the Skin of the Voyeur” and, similarly to Hurley and Stephen Di Benedetto, explores skin-based physiological reactions to performance. The skin as the site of engagement is not, however, considered exclusively or extensively in performance studies. I extend research in this area by considering the spectator’s skin...
as the site of multisensorial engagement whereby the touch, sight, or sound, of other skins influences relational thinking in spectatorship. Broadly speaking, ‘relational thinking’ refers to the way in which an individual understands themselves in relation to other(s). Such thinking may take the form of embodied relationality whereby an individual understands the ‘other’ based on their lived experience of performing actions similar to those being observed. Relational thinking may also, as we shall see in Chapter 2, be triggered by the spectator’s embodied experiences during a performance. Thinking relationally is therefore significant in terms of influencing perspective taking and increasing knowledge of, or empathy with, the ‘other’. As we shall see, conditions might be manipulated in a performance environment to achieve such effects. This is significant because such skin-based experiences may be encoded with an impetus for change in line with a work’s aims, for example, to raise awareness of a specific social issue or the experiences of an ‘other’ or ‘othered’ group. In this respect, the spectator’s sense of being able to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin – in more than a loose metaphorical sense – indicates the potential that skin-based experiences have for influencing intersubjective thinking and behaviour beyond the performance space. Indeed, I suggest how spectators’ intersubjective thoughts are motivated by skin-based experiences which are comparable to Anzieu’s theory and underline similar processes of identity formation and the formation of intersubjective relationships in a performance setting.

The investigation into how relational ideas re-enter the spectators’ minds through the skin is therefore a study of multisensorial skinbodied experience. How the sight of skin influences relational thinking has already been considered. Gillian Hanson’s *Original Skin* (1970), for example, considers changing attitudes in the way Western culture comes to terms with the experience of nudity in performance. Similarly, in “Baring All on Stage,” Bannon discusses how nakedness prompts “bodily thinking” (129); therefore, skin functions as the sight/site for relational embodiment. From sight to sound, in “No More Masterpieces” – as I mentioned earlier – Artaud suggests how sound may be encountered as a bodily experience. Artaud argues that “we must have done with [the] idea of masterpieces reserved for a self-styled elite and not understood by the general public” (*NMM* 74). He argues that what society considers as “masterpieces” are, in terms of language and style, often out of touch with

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4 Embodied relationality refers to the way one body relates to another based on their own experience as a lived body.
the times (NMM 74-75). Artaud therefore proposes a “theater of cruelty” which positions the spectator at the centre of the spectacle. “The theater”, writes Artaud, “is the [...] last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism” (NMM 81). Artaud ultimately suggests that spectators should encounter the theatre as a bodily and visual, as opposed to purely auditory, experience (NMM 81). By comparing spectators to snakes, Artaud posits the experience of palpable sound as one way in which ideas might be made to re-enter the spectator’s mind through the skin:

If music affects snakes, it is not on account of the spiritual notions it offers them, but because snakes are long and coil their length upon the earth, because their bodies touch the earth at almost every point; and because the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth affect them like a very subtle, very long massage; and I propose to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer’s subjects and conduct them by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions. (NMM 81)

Clearly other sensory modalities, here sound, can be felt through the skin. Artaud proposes that the spectator use embodied experience to make sense of performance and, in this thesis, I consider exactly how – and through which sensory modalities – a spectator’s understanding of a work, or its wider implications, might be influenced in relation to the skin, skin aesthetic forms, and other spectators in the performance environment.

Di Benedetto’s The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre (2010) similarly considers embodied spectatorship and the five senses, with recourse to contemporary neuroscience and physiology, in a way that informs my approach to the skin. The chapter “Attendant to Touch” describes the skin as “a giant pressure plate waiting to be stimulated” (TPS 73) and considers how the spectator’s tactile senses are engaged directly, or indirectly through observation of touch and mirror neuron function. Di Benedetto asks, “how can we make sense of our cutaneous perception?” (TPS 84), which is a recurrent question throughout this thesis, but Di Benedetto considers the tactile sense as just one sense to be manipulated. I consider how the tactile acts as conduit for the other senses and thus also ask: “how do our other senses register as, or through, cutaneous perception?” As we have seen, there has been work on skin in performance studies and this has approached the skin in relation to different sensory modalities (predominantly sight); however, my research extends
work in this area by considering spectators’ skin, exclusively and extensively, as the site of engagement in performance and asking how the skin acts as conduit for the other senses. While I prioritize the spectator’s skin-based experience, as it is currently under-researched, the performer’s skin is, of course, also significant because it serves as sight and/or site of engagement for the audience and I am focusing on how the skin influences an understanding of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other(s)’.

Skin and Identity
Questions of skin colour, embodiment, and relational embodiment have also been investigated in performance studies. Anne Anlin Cheng’s *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (2010) situates the skin of twentieth-century black performer Josephine Baker in relation “to various modes of Modernist display – the stage, photography, film and architecture [to] trace alternative stories about racialized corporeality” (7). Michelle Ann Stephens’ *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer* (2014) focuses on four black male performers (Bert Williams, Paul Robeson, Harry Belafonte, and Bob Marley) and by “fleshing out the performance of black subjectivity as a skin act” asks us to “think about black skin not just in terms of the gaze – skin colour, epidermalization, racialization – but also in terms of the flesh, as flesh circulating and performing in a multisensory and interpersonal world” (30). This thesis does not address racialized corporeality in any great detail (although I suggest how (skin)aesthetics might be applied to studies in this area in conjunction with audience research in Chapter 4) but rather analyses skin according to Stephens’ observation that:

the skin we see, upon which so many signs of difference can be projected and inscribed […] does not feel the way it looks; no matter how different two people may look their skins feel virtually the same. The skin reminds us of ourselves in a way that differs from how we think about ourselves in the abstract; the skin brings us back in touch with ourselves, literally, as bodies. (1)

The idea that all skins “feel virtually the same” is reflexive. Skin feels the same to touch and *feels* the same in response to stimulation. John Mowitt points out that colour is redacted from Anzieu’s theory (19), and in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) Jay Prosser raises Judith Butler’s criticism that *The Skin Ego*
does not consider the gendered body.\textsuperscript{5} Such caveats address \textit{The Skin Ego} as a developmental theory. As this is a study of embodied spectatorship, however, and all “skins feel virtually the same” and Anzieu’s theory focusses on the quality of contact, I do not consider how a person’s gender or skin colour may influence the development of a skin-ego.\textsuperscript{6} This is not to suggest, of course, that a person’s skin colour or gender does not affect the type of contact that they experience (we know that it does) but simply that this is beyond the remit of my investigation. It is also not to suggest that the colour of skin does not affect processes of identification or how a spectator encounters the skin in performance. The reality is, of course, that while all skins may feel virtually the same, they do not look the same. Certainly, as we shall see, visual engagement is a prominent mode of engagement, and identification, with the skin and, indeed, I look at visual engagement as a proxy for contact. I predominantly focus, however, on that which is common to spectators and that is the embodied experience of skin in performance. Spectators might relate to the ‘other’ through visual engagement alone (the sight, for example, of a wound) based only on their own skinbodied knowledge; indeed, in this respect, the claims that I make throughout this thesis about performance, embodied spectatorship, and the skin are intended to be relevant in a universal sense. While the thesis is concerned with what a psychoanalytic, psychophysical, and neuroscientific framework (which does not bring race into view) might reveal, the next steps for future work might be to think about skin-based experiences and interactions via social psychology and the attendant race and gender politics of spectatorship.

\textbf{Documenting Experiences of Embodied Spectatorship}

\textsuperscript{5} Prosser questions where gender is located and focusses on gender transitions with recourse to \textit{The Skin Ego}. Whilst the focus is on the body and the boundaries of gender, the skin is of critical significance too. The skin figures in the question of where the ‘self’ is located and the idea of “second skins.” It is argued that the ‘self’ does not correspond with the gendered surface, and Prosser points out that the rejection of skin is felt both internally and in viewing the body.

\textsuperscript{6} Such caveats are, of course, important but it is outside the remit of this thesis to address them. The fact that colour and the gendered body are not taken into consideration reflects a criticism of \textit{The Skin Ego} as a developmental theory because skin colour and gender does influence the treatment of skin and, therefore, the formation of a skin-ego. This thesis, however, considers the skin of spectators who have, according to Anzieu’s theory, already formed skin-egos. This is not to suggest that this would not be a profitable line of enquiry in future investigations of skinbodied experiences of performance.
My approach resonates with a phenomenological one because I focus on the spectator’s embodied experience of performance as it registers on the skin and how skin(s) register with the other senses. There are, however, issues with documenting the embodied experience of performance. Di Benedetto suggests language is a limiting factor and proposes a “revised sensual language […] tied to the body” (TSP 133). Joana Frueh argues that academic language should be displaced by an erotic language – “a subjective, image-driven language to capture the transient sensations of phenomenological experience” – in the analysis of embodied response (qtd. in TSP 126). William Sauter found that audience members often express their experience of a performance “in a physical way,” but a disjunction appears between the spectator’s physical expression of their experience and scholarly performance analysis which privileges semiotics and the symbolic over sensory and aesthetic factors (Purcell 37-38). Purcell says that the “intensely embodied effect” of a performance on a spectator “cannot […] be adequately described in print, and this is the reason for its critical neglect” (140). Purcell suggests, however, that performance scholars such as W.B. Worthen and Josephine Machon have made advances in describing the phenomenological experience of a performance by offering personal accounts, or formulating strategies of analysis which combine “sensation and perception” (140). It is not feasible, here, to abandon academic language in favour of one tied to skin, whatever form such a language might take, but I have been a spectator at the case studies I consider and my thesis extends research in this area by formulating a strategy of analysis which considers “sensation and perception” through the skin and spectatorial accounts of skinbodied perception.

Method

I have developed a new method of analysis termed “(skin)aesthetics” specifically for the analysis of skin in performance. In this section, I explain how (skin)aesthetics relates to Richard Schechner’s performance theory of “Rasaesthetics” (2001), Josephine Machon’s strategy of analysis “(syn)aesthetics,” Anzieu’s theory of The Skin Ego, and Serres’ The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies. I explain

7 The predominant focus of this thesis is the skin as the site of embodied engagement; however, the pressure for a more bodily language to document the embodied experience of performance (such as Di Benedetto and Frueh’s suggestions here) is comparable to Michel Serres’ argument in The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (1985) for the development of a new bodily language, or means of communicating embodied knowledge.
how (skin)aesthetics works as a strategy of analysis for skin(s) and how it encodes intersubjective concepts to address the question of how intersubjective concepts re-enter the spectator’s mind through the skin.

**Rasaesthetics**

This thesis spans the five senses as they converge on, and through, the skin, but (skin)aesthetics derives from just one: a theory of taste. Richard Schechner’s “Rasaesthetics” focuses on the gut but indicates space for a model of analysis which focuses on the skin as the site of engagement. Rasaesthetics conceptualises embodied spectatorship in terms of a “mouth-to-belly to bowel” process (Schechner 10). Making sense of performance in this way has been described as an “ongoing interlinked muscular, cellular, and neurological process throughout the body” (Schechner 10); therefore, making sense is an ongoing process from initial “taste”, or perception, through to “digestion”, or making sense of embodied experience after the performance. I return to the idea of “making sense,” specifically at what point our embodied experience “makes sense,” when I discuss Machon and Anzieu.

Performances based on rasa draw on the spectator’s “sensuous, proximate, experiential [and] aromatic” perception (Schechner 13). Making sense in this way, however, is not simply a case of presenting metaphorical expressions of embodied perception. Schechner suggests that the gut is biologically capable of knowing:

the gut’s brain, known as the enteric nervous system [ENS], is located in sheaths of tissue lining the oesophagus, stomach, small intestine, and colon. Considered a single entity, it is a network of neurons, neurotransmitters, and proteins that zap messages between neurons, support cells like those found in the brain proper and a complex circuity that enables it to act independently, learn, remember, and […] produce gut feelings. (18)

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8 The term “rasaesthetics” is derived from Schechner’s comparison of the pan Indian *Natyasatra* to Aristotle’s Western theory of performance in the *Poetics*. The *Natyasatra* is a “sastra, a sacred text, authorized by the gods, full of narration, myth and detailed instructions for performers” while the *Poetics* “is secular, focussed on the structure of drama and dependent on the logical thinking that its author helped to invent” (Schechner 11). Schechner states that the *Natyasatra* is “more powerful as an embodied set of ideas and practices than as a written text” (11), the difference in style may help explain why Western performance analysis privileges semiotics and the symbolic over the somatic. Antonin Artaud also comments on the more embodied, and gestural practices, of the Balinese theatre in comparison to Western theatre.
The skin is, therefore, a comparable organ through which embodied experience might be studied. Jablonski explains that the skin “contains several specialized types of receptor cells, which send signals to the central nervous system about the external environment and the state of the skin” (17). Anzieu also points out that the skin and the skin of the brain – “the surface of the nervous system” – are formed at the same time from the same embryonic structure, or the ectoderm (TSE 104); therefore, the skin and the brain are closely connected (although I do not focus on the neurobiological relationship) not only in terms of formation but also theoretically as the skin informs the skin-ego. Drew Leder explains the differences between the skin and the gut as responsive sites:

my acutely articulate skin yields a panoply of tickles, itches, pains, sensations of light and deep pressure, warmth and cold, slow and fast vibrations [but] the interoceptive vocabulary is not as well developed […] In physiological terms, the viscera have a greatly decreased number and variety of sensory receptors compared to the surface body. (337)

This indicates space for my method of analysis which focuses on the skin as the site of engagement because we can accurately locate sensation (touch, pain, pressure, temperature) on the skin. It responds to and remembers aspects of the environment in a far more intersensorial and interrelational sense than the gut.⁹ F.T. Marinetti’s suggestion that because the skin can know objects before the brain that “perhaps there is more thought in the fingertips” (332) therefore makes literal sense in relation to the development of embodied knowledge.

We might, therefore, be able to think through our skin but Schechner points out that “mainstream […] scholars, and critics do not look on […] synaesthesia with favour” (13). While visceral performance is common practice he suggests “now is the

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⁹ Drew Leder’s essay “Visceral Perception,” The Book of Touch (2005), ed. Constance Classen and David Howes, presents a comprehensive overview of the differences between the interoceptive and exteroceptive fields of the human body as sites of response and feeling. Using the example of eating an apple, Leder writes that once the apple is swallowed it is incorporated into the visceral space which “invokes its withdrawal from exteroceptive experience” (335), which points to a possible limitation of Schechner’s theory of rasaethetics, as the spectator’s general impressions of performance are vagaries of the gut (however compelling).
time for theory to follow” (Schechner 25). (Skin)aesthetics responds to the gaps Schechner identifies. I expand on the way skin works in spectatorship as the intermediary site for the senses and the psyche. I consider how multisensorial performance conditions converge on the skin, or make skins, or skin-based sensations out of other senses, including the often-prioritized sensory modalities of sight and sound.

**Josephine Machon’s (Syn)Aesthetics**

Josephine Machon’s “(syn)aesthetics” enables us to derive the strategy for analysing the skin as multisensorial conduit. Machon’s concept of “(syn)aesthetics” is an adept strategy for describing the phenomenological experience of a performance by combining “sensation and perception” (Purcell 140), and accounts for experiences which approximate synaesthesia in performance. In *Immersive Theatres* (2013) (*IT*), Machon draws on neuroscientific research with the intention of “find[ing] a discourse for experiential performance events, which articulates both the approach to practice as well as the methods of appreciation that occur in the experience of that work, for practitioners and audience members alike” (3). Drawing on the work of film theorist Laura U. Marks, performance theorist Gianna Bouchard, and architect Juhani Pallasmaa (who all investigate the slippage between the tactile and visual senses), Machon expounds on the way that other senses can perform as the tactile if certain “sensual aesthetics” are created in the performance environment (*IT* 77-78). In Chapter 5, for example, I consider the prohibition on touch in *Ugly Lies the Bone* and *Underneath* which means that the spectator must visually engage with the skins onstage. Making sense of the skins, or touching with the eye, requires the spectator to draw on their pre-existing embodied knowledge of burns and scarred skin in the visual negotiation of a relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ as they develop knowledge of the ‘other’s’ skinbodied experience.

The way seemingly unconnected sensory modalities can approximate each other forms the crux of the term “(syn)aesthetics.” Machon defines (syn)aesthetic practice in, and experience of, performance as being:

Distinguishable by a *felt* appreciation of ‘making sense’ in a semantic and cerebral fashion and ‘sense-making,’ [which is] understanding through somatic embodied perception via *feeling* (both sensory and emotional) created in performance. In
(syn)aesthetic practice the process is often fused as a making-sense/sense-making experience. (*IT* 104)

‘Making-sense’ in a semantic sense follows ‘sense-making,’ or making sense of embodied perception. (Syn)aesthetics is useful to me for two reasons. First, Machon’s bracketing of “(syn)” distinguishes her term “(syn)aesthetics” from the neurocognitive condition synaesthesia, which is defined as “the production of a sensation in one part of the body resulting from a stimulus applied to, or perceived by, another part” (*IT* 104). Secondly, the term “(syn)aesthetics” refers to the performance conditions (aesthetics) which simulate synaesthesia. As Nicola Shaughnessy points out, expanding “(syn)” gives us “synthetic” which alludes to the manufactured conditions that the spectator feels (186). “(Syn)” therefore lends itself to reformulation as “(skin)” for my method which considers the spectator’s skin in relation to synthetic skins, and the way skins might be created synaesthetically from, or act as conduit for, other senses. In Chapter 3, for example, I consider how sound can become a synthetic skin, or a (skin)aesthetic, when it is felt palpably on, and through, the spectators’ skins.

(Syn)aesthetics is a “strategy of analysis [which] prioritizes individual, immediate and innate processes of recall and interpretation” and its foundations are in “primordial impulses” [and] the physiological capabilities of the physical body” (*IT* 105), an idea which returns us to my earlier point that making sense of performance is not limited to the live-moment experience. For example, making sense of *SCAR Cymbals*, which encodes the marginalisation of ‘othered’ groups in its sound work, requires the spectator to re-consider their skinbodied experience to make the associations between the experience of being performatively ‘othered’ and silenced and the experiences of the wider societal ‘other’ or the marginalised groups – such as refugees – that the work encodes. Indeed, in “(Syn)aesthetics and Immersive Theatre” (*SIT*) Machon explains that “to experience (syn)aesthetically means to perceive the details [of an event] corporeally. The felt embodied analysis of the performance experience occurs both in the live moment and subsequent to the event” (*SIT* 205). A spectator might practice “embodied thought in analysis” predicated on their (syn)aesthetic experience (*SIT* 205) subsequent to the event. The (syn)aesthetic components of a work can be interpreted when the spectator “return[s] to an innate knowledge, the preknowledge of instinctive sentience” (*SIT* 205) or embodied memory. Machon explains that it is with recourse to her “affective memory” that she “make[s] sense/sense of the archive of art history [held] within [her] subconscious
imagery and [her] more (im)mediate sensual memory” (SIT 214) and such reflection constitutes “embodied thought in analysis” (SIT 214). I consider a range of spectator comments and reviews in Chapter 5 which illustrate “embodied thought in analysis” after the performance but which also indicate that the sight of skin motivated embodied analysis during the event, or the spectator’s belief that they think they know what it feels like to occupy the skin of the ‘other’ onstage.

(Skin)Aesthetics

My method “(skin)aesthetics” is, therefore, both a reformulation and extension of Machon’s “(syn)aesthetics”, as a strategy of analysis for skinbodied spectatorship. (Skin)aesthetics specifically focuses on the spectator’s skin, other skins, aesthetic representations, and the senses. Focussing on the skin as the site for embodied engagement positions skin in relation to performance aesthetics, or multisensorial conditions (which may be felt on, or as, skin), and in relation to the “(skin)aesthetics”, or aesthetic representations of skin.

The term “aesthetics” is defined as “the (attractive) appearance or sound of something” (OED). When I discuss performance aesthetics, or the aesthetic representation of skin, I refer to the appearance, sound, or sensation of an aesthetic object or feature of a work. The term ‘aesthetics’ is used to refer to the skin-based objects of study. This naturally invites a discussion of their properties and appearance but the term ‘aesthetics’ is not used in a conventional sense to discuss ideas of formal beauty. (Skin)aesthetics works as a strategy of analysis by reading the “aesthetics” for how they emulate skin and/or register on the spectator’s “(skin)”. The bracketing of “(skin)” indicates the relationship between skin(s) and aesthetics. In Chapter 2, for example, I consider the fabric sheet which covers the groundlings (the aesthetic as part of the design) for the way it functions to extend the spectator’s tactile sense (illustrating the (skin) component in relation to the aesthetic) and sense of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’ because the head-holes the spectators stand through connect them, via the skins of their necks, to each other (the relational component of (skin)aesthetics which influences identity formation) as a reconfiguration of the ‘common skin’. The term “(skin)aesthetics” also encodes (syn)aesthetic approximations of the skin. The

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10 “Art history” here refers to Machon’s own knowledge of performance/artworks – past and present. It is a personal archive of both embodied memory and remembered images as well as the “more (im)mediate sensual memory” of the live-moment experience.
The purpose of (skin)aesthetics as a strategy of analysis is to investigate how ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ re-enter the spectator’s mind through the skin(s). By taking skin as the focus we can investigate how relational ideas are negotiated with recourse not only to the senses but also to how the sensorial experience influences processes of embodied simulation, various haptic encounters, and mirror neuron function.

(Skin)aesthetics, as a new method for reading skin, extends existing research on what I think of as studies in skin aesthetics,11 or the way materials are applied to, accentuate, transform, obscure, or represent the skin. Benthien describes skin as “like a cloth garment” or a “kind of enveloping leather or textile tent” (64), which anticipates Cheng’s observation that “questions of skin often turn into questions of fabric or other materials” (SRGM 1030). Andrea Rae Stevens’ Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama (2011), suggests how skin is “paint’s milieu” (8): a place for skin and paint to converge. Stevens discusses paint as a “second skin” which emphasises it as the “early modern stage’s more ubiquitous prosthetic” (3), which resonates with psychoanalytic ideas of reinforcing the skin against damage (both physical and psychological). Connor writes of “skin-like” materials, such as oil, which provide “a kind of hypodermis” (TBS 187), and second skins such as the ozone layer and condoms. In this thesis I consider a number of “skin-like” materials, or “(skin)aesthetics”, including but not limited to Vaseline, paints, stage makeup, gelatine, and fabrics.

Cheng’s “Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern” (2011) focuses on Anna May Wong – “the great “Oriental Beauty” of the time” (SRGM 1024) – in her role as Shosho in the 1929 film Piccadilly, and the way different materials serve in relation to, or as substitute, skin. Cheng’s observation that “questions of skin often turn into questions of fabric or other materials” (SRGM 1030) relates to my concept of “(skin)aesthetics” because her examples of skin aesthetics are imbued with a relational component. Cheng focuses on a scene in Piccadilly, for example, where the shine of

11 “Skin aesthetics” is the blanket term that I use in this thesis to refer to research which investigates the relationship between skins and other materials and the way in which the two surfaces may merge or emulate one another. It is not too dissimilar from my coinage of the term “skindustry” which is a “simple portmanteau of ‘skin’ and ‘industry,’ but more specifically refers to the uses of skin in industry” (Verlander 85). I use skindustry to refer to ‘industry’ or the ‘‘intelligent and clever working; skill, ingenuity, or cleverness in the execution of anything’ (OED), but in skin-based work” (Verlander 85) or, more specifically, skin-based work which uses human skin to create products. Skin aesthetics are different because they do not have to use literal skin.
Shosho’s metallic, spiky costume redirects the fetishistic spectatorial gaze away from her skin as she dances under lights (SRGM 1027). Similarly, I consider how (skin)aesthetic materials negotiate relational ideas through the skin – the tears in the naked model’s body stockings, for example, which accentuate erogenous zones in SCAR CYMBALS, or the Vaseline which shines and draws the spectator’s gaze in HARD C*CK, or the shreds of fabric which represent rotting flesh in Underneath. Such examples lend weight to the idea that concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ might be made to re-enter the spectator’s mind through (skin)aesthetic representations. Materials which emulate skin are imbued with qualities that the ‘other’ observing, touching, or hearing, can relate to by drawing on skinbodied knowledge.

(Skin)Aesthetics and The Skin Ego

As a method of analysis, (skin)aesthetics is imbued with a relational component that considers the dynamic between skins and between skin and skin aesthetic representations. Anzieu’s psychoanalytic theory of The Skin Ego is, therefore, integrated into the analysis of skin (although (skin)aesthetics can function independently) because it theorizes skin-to-skin contact, the imagined sharing of skin, how materials can be felt as skin-like, how other senses function akin to skin, or to touch, and how relational ideas are negotiated through the skin.

I take selected psychoanalytic tenets from Naomi Segal’s translation of Anzieu’s The Skin Ego, Anzieu’s “The Sound Image of the Self” (1979), Daphne Nash Briggs’ translation of A Skin for Thought: Interviews with Gilbert Tarrab (1990) – specifically the idea that “there is no group without a common skin” (SFT 97), and Briggs’ translation of “The Formal Signifier and the Ego-Skin” (1990), which I explain in detail in each chapter, to investigate how it is through the skin, skin-to-skin contact, and the approximations, as well as aesthetic representations, of skin, and skin-to-skin contact, that ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ might re-enter the spectators’ minds. I am referring to the spectator’s understanding of ‘self’ and ‘other’ as they pertain to real embodied entities – spectators, performers, and even bodies beyond the performance space if a work encodes the experiences of ‘others’ – in performance environments and the skin-based experiences which highlight such an awareness. In turn, I will suggest how the ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ encountered during the performance relate to those ideas of skin-based identity formation which Anzieu suggests we acquire during our psychic development. I do not formulaically apply the main tenets of Anzieu’s theory to the skin, or its representations, but suggest how such
tenets are reactivated through skinbodied spectatorship. *The Skin Ego* is a developmental theory but, as Connor observes, the relationship between skin and skin-ego can operate at a societal level too. He writes that:

if we can see an increase in the intensity and frequency of processes designed to promote or supplement the process of psychic integumentation, then it seems appropriate to ask what are the cultural as opposed to purely medical conditions to which this is a response. What, in Didier Anzieu’s phrase, might be the terms of ‘pathogenic impingement on the skin ego’ which leads to the formation of these second skins? (*TBS* 64)

Connor suggests that an increase in films which display ruptured skin (like *Alien*), for example, indicates a wider “apprehension of the growing fluidity of relations” (65-66) between bodies. He also references a “Practise Safe Sun” campaign which he suggests “depends on some level on the association between AIDS and Kaposa’s sarcoma, the previously rare form of skin cancer which AIDS sufferers become vulnerable to and which was indeed the first form in which the AIDS epidemic manifested itself in the US” (*TBS* 67). The campaign therefore produces a “phantasmal identification between the sunblock and the protective second skin of the condom” (*TBS* 67). In a similar vein, I interrogate the production of skins, and representations of psychic integumentation, in performance, for the societal issues, impingements, and relationships they encode.

**(Skin)Aesthetics and Synaesthesia**

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12 In a similar vein to the reading of *Alien*, I have previously considered the opening sequence of *American Horror Story: Cult* (2017) which features a woman’s naked back, riddled with bloody holes, through which bugs crawl, and suggested that the movement through the skin reflects political and cultural anxieties. Within the thematic context of *AHS: Cult* (which centres on the presidential elections and aftermath), I suggested that the permeated skin speaks, perhaps, of wider fears of losing touch. Or, more broadly, of the destruction of the social fabric in a post-Trump era? During the course of writing this thesis there have also been a significant number of plays, performances, and artworks which have focussed on the skin, the idea of changing skins, and, indeed, the desire for contact expressed through the medium of a skin-flavoured ice-cream (an example of how taste and skin mingle to illustrate relational dynamics). This is perhaps testament to a similar increase in societal anxiety which manifests in productions which examine societal issues, or insecurities, through skin-based means.
(Skin)aesthetics pinpoints the skin as the site for sensory slippage. Existing research, as I have suggested, tends to focus on the sensory slippage between the spectator’s visual and tactile senses. In *Touching: The Human Significance of Skin* (1971), Ashley Montagu defines haptics as a term:

> used to describe that mentally extended sense of touch which comes about through the total experience of living and acting in space. Our perception of the visual world, for example, in fact blends what we have *felt* in past associations with what we have seen or the scene before us. The haptic is an acquired sense in that it applies to seen objects that have been touched and acted upon. (17)

The blending of the “visual” and the “felt”, or sight and skin, relies on embodied knowledge. Laura U. Marks’ concept of “haptic visuality” refers to the way that the eye is compelled to “move over the surface of [the] object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze” (162). Haptic visuality “calls upon […] embodied and mimetic intelligence” (Marks 190), specifically of the tactile, and allows spectators to touch with their eyes. Bouchard similarly expounds on “vision becoming like touch” (163) through the sight/site of Christ’s wound in Caravaggio’s painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1603). She argues that the sight of Christ’s wound, and Saint Thomas’ probing finger, invites the haptic encounter (163). The spectator’s gaze is drawn in through the wound and, as they draw on embodied knowledge of wounds, they imagine they know what the other’s skin *feels* like. Patrick Anderson considers the inverse slippage of the “almost tactile view” (82), or the way skin “sees”, when spectators “touch […] the glass cases in order to see better” (82) at the *Body World* exhibition (which displays, real, skinned bodies).  

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13 Marks’ concept of “haptic visuality” takes a phenomenological approach to embodied spectatorship in cinema but the concept is just as applicable to the spectator’s experience of live performance or live art.

14 Anderson also considers the ethics of Body Worlds because the exhibition prompted spectators and human rights activist to ask the “who are they?” question of the skinned cadavers. Anderson explains that “Premier Exhibitions [argue] that these are the bodies of ‘the poor, the unclaimed, or the unidentified’” (82). Anderson argues that it evidences “the widening gaps between owners and owned” (83) and it might also be understood as a real-life exemplar of the rationale behind Jonathan Swift’s *A
I consider haptic visuality, but I also ask how the entire sensorium might be engaged, through the skin, to create experiences of (skin)aesthesia. David Shearing, for example, considers the voice, or sound, as an “agent for sensory simulation via vibration of the skin” (76). Sound is the aesthetic felt on the skin and registers as a “form of haptic feeling” (Shearing 76). (Skin)aesthetics as method extends existing research not only on how other materials substitute skin, but also on how other senses approximate the skin, can be felt on the skin, or touch the ‘other’s’ skin. As we shall see, processes of skin-based identity formation slide between sensory registers, and relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’ are forged through whatever mode the skin is accessed or activated via. (Skin)aesthetic relations in the case studies I consider, however, often go beyond establishing simple skin-based relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’. For example, a (skin)aesthetic can influence different effects such as increasing the spectator’s empathy with a character. The skin-based connection can act as a point of departure for educating the audience (raising awareness of wider societal issues, for example, through the spectator’s skin-based experience or the display of burns which teaches the spectator something of the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience), or, as in Chapter 3, the sight/site of naked skin (accessed via haptic visuality) could defuse an erotic engagement with the ‘other’ on display, or, indeed, the (skin)aesthetic representations of a wound might prompt a mirror touch synesthete’s experience of literal pain (see my concluding manifesto). In this sense, throughout this thesis we see how the spectator’s skin-based experience reflects more general processes of human identity formation and the formation of intersubjective relationships as well as the role skin plays, in such processes, which is in line with Anzieu’s theory, and how this might be understood to play into a particular kind of aesthetics – namely (skin)aesthetics.

The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies and (Skin)Aesthetics

Michel Serres’ *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (1985) recognises that “light, shadow, clamour, silence, fragrance, all sorts of waves impregnate and flood our skin” (70) which figures the skin as a multisensorial conduit. Serres encourages the development of embodied knowledge through immersion in the empirical (here meaning material) world and states that “on the subject’s front line is

*Modest Proposal* (1792) which suggests the skins of the poor be turned into gloves and boots for the wealthy.
the skin” (35) which makes *The Five Senses* applicable to a study of skinbodied spectatorship.¹⁵ Serres explains how:

> the skin is a variety of contingency: in it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge. Contingency means common tangency: in it the world and the body intersect and caress each other […] Skin intervenes between several things in the world and makes them mingle. (80)

This underlies my concept of skinbodied experience as it is through the skin that the senses, bodies, and skins, meet and mingle.

The skin conceptualized as the ‘common sense’ further reinforces (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis when the skin is compared to fabric:

> The entire description [of skin as ‘common sense’] is equally valid for tapestry and body. Each insular sense organ forms a dense singularity on the diluted, cutaneous plain. The island is woven of the same fabric as the background, each sense organ is invaginated in the same skin, spreading around it. The internal sense is draped in its tent, a new veil fabric, but the same carpet and the same skin. The internal sense is veiled in skin. (Serres 54)

While a text entitled *The Five Senses* might *seem* to promise a consideration of each of the senses in turn, the emphasis is on “mingled bodies,” or a body of mingled senses. Serres begins with a chapter entitled “Veils” which focuses on the skin but explains how the other senses fold into it. Skin then folds itself, fabric-like, into the following chapters as Serres expounds on how the senses mingle, through the skin, in our embodied experience of the world.

Anzieu explains that “once the Ego has acquired its basic organisation as a skin-ego, it can only acquire a new structure by breaking off the primacy of tactile

¹⁵ Serres also argues that “words fill our flesh and anaesthetize it” (58) because language distracts from our lived experience of the body. In the chapter “Boxes,” which focusses on sound and hearing as it mingles with skin, Serres distinguishes between the concepts of hardware and software. The “hard” is the “given” and refers to the material world and our embodied experience of it. The “soft” is the transformation of the “hard” through language. Drivers slow down, for example, because a road sign advises caution rather than slowing down in response to experiencing the potholes in the road.
experience and constructing itself as a space of intersensory inscription, a *sensorium commune* (TSE 168). The spectators I consider would, according to Anzieu’s theory, already have Egos constructed as “*sensorium communes*.” The description of the ego as “a *sensorium commune*” parallels the skin-ego’s function as intersensorial “backcloth” (TSE 112) and Serres’ comparison of the literal skin to a fabric of common sense. The skin-ego is also a “space of intersensory inscription” derived from the subject’s skinbodied experience of the world and therefore parallels the literal skin’s role in “separat[ing] and unit[ing] the various sense-faculties [as] an intermediary, an in-between, a transitional thing” (TSE 19).

Michelle Ann Stephens also recognises that the skin “links the various senses to each other and facilitates the subject’s ability to use this linked sensorium to learn about the world and others” (8) which relates to my question of how the skin acts as multisensorial conduit and how other senses might be felt as skin, as well as anticipating the educational and empathetic effects that the engagement with skin(s) can have in spectatorship. Stephens draws on Naomi Segal’s discussion of the term “consensuality” which is:

> used by Anzieu for the fifth function of the skin-ego, which brings together all the senses in one place – all our senses are sited somewhere on our skin – and thus [consensuality] stands for the coherence, coincidence or co-presence of perceptions […] Anzieu often also uses other terms: ‘intersensoriality’ or ‘common sense’. (5)

Anzieu’s use of the term ‘common sense,’ to describe the fifth function of the skin-ego, parallels Serres’ description of the skin as the “*sensorium commune*” (70). Throughout this thesis, I draw together Anzieu and Serres’ writing on the skin as multisensorial conduit in my consideration of how and, indeed, via which senses relational ideas are made to re-enter the spectator’s mind through the skin.

In this section I have explained the theoretical influences behind my new method of analysis termed “(skin)aesthetics” which is designed specifically for the analysis of skin in performance. I explained how (skin)aesthetics is derivative of, and relates to, Schechner’s performance theory of “Rasaesthetics” (2001) which focuses on taste, Machon’s strategy of analysis “(syn)aesthetics”, Anzieu’s theory of *The Skin Ego*, and Serres’ *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. I outlined the relationship between “(syn)” and synthetic representations of “(skin)” as well as
noting the potential for those (skin)aesthetics, or synthetic skins, to prompt the spectator’s experience of (skin)aesthesia, or skin-based sensory slippage. I also noted the similarities between Anzieu and Serres’ writing on the skin-ego and skin, respectively, as a “sensorium commune” and suggested how the commonality is represented in images of fabric – a literal (skin)aesthetic form that I consider frequently in this thesis. I explained how (skin)aesthetics works as a strategy of analysis for skin(s), how it encodes relational concepts or the basic psychological tenets of skin-based identity formation, and how it can be used to address questions not only of how relational concepts re-enter the spectator’s mind through the skin but also the nature of those relationships within performance. The significance of this kind of analysis and the resultant findings highlights the ways in which skinbodied experience might be manipulated to produce a particular effect or form of engagement between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in performance.

Structure

My method, in taking skin as focus, also includes analysis of relevant play texts, novels, performance reviews, and Front of House Reports, to inform my readings in terms of how skin is staged in relation to the original text, how the representation of skin comes to influence spectatorial thought, as suggested by reviews, and how spectators react to certain aesthetic conditions. The structure of my thesis becomes more attenuated from the literal skin, and experiences of direct skin-to-skin contact, as it progresses. I begin with a focus on direct skin-to-skin contact but conclude with a case study where touching the skins on stage is prohibited. I aim to show how skin is prone to sensory slippage but relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’ can still be negotiated with recourse to the distance senses and the spectator’s skinbodied knowledge.

Chapter 1 is the least attenuated chapter and considers the literal skin and how skin-to-skin contact as well as an array of (skin)aesthetic forms contribute to the formation of felt, or imagined, skin-based connections in spectatorship in Robert Hesp’s HARD C*CK. I consider how scenes of direct skin-to-skin contact as well as scenes of skin-to-(skin)aesthetic contact have the potential to connect not only those who are touching but those who are observing scenes of skin-to-skin contact. I also consider the creation of ‘second skins’ in this performance as a form of psychic integumentation in response to felt impingements on the societal skin-ego, specifically with regards to issues of sex education. This introduces the idea – recurrent in this
thesis – that representations of skin in works may represent or allude to wider societal issues as well as emphasising the pervasiveness of skin in the social and sensorial imagination. The spectator’s experience of haptic visuality, or how eyes take skins, is also introduced in this chapter. Such scenes not only have the potential to connect entire audiences but, also, to raise awareness of societal issues at a wider intersubjective level through the creation of ‘second skins.’ HARD C*CK’s concept of “rediscovering the pleasure of skin in live space,” through tactile and visual engagement, links to Artaud’s ideas of “re-entry” through the skin and enables me to consider how the basic tenets of identity formation and the way in which intersubjective relationships are formed, according to Anzieu, might be re-configured, albeit temporarily, in the performance environment. This chapter considers the skin’s role when touch is actively at stake in a performance and the effect that this has on spectators – in HARD C*CK, specifically, but also for what this enables us to say about spectatorship more generally.

Chapter 2 becomes slightly more attenuated as I consider the movement from direct skin-to-skin contact between performer and spectator to the skin-to-(skin)aesthetic relationship, or the extramediated sense of touch facilitated by the fabric which covers the audience in Macbeth. It might be more accurate to say that I consider the skin-to-skin but mediated-through-the-(skin)aesthetic relationship between spectators because the spectators are still in some form of skin-based contact with one another. The relationship between skin and fabric, unlike in other chapters where fabric emulates skin, is less metaphorical. Indeed, in this play the spectators’ skins are literally bound in, and extended through, the fabric (skin)aesthetic itself.

Through an analysis of the Globe Theatre’s Front of House Reports which document audience behaviour, I consider the fabric as an aesthetic which captures the basic tenets of identity formation and negotiation through the spectator’s skin-based experience. I argue that the (skin)aesthetic produces a literal ‘common skin’ which models the formation (and, as we shall see, the disruption) of ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’. The audience members in the pit can get a feel for Shakespeare’s Macbeth, and each other, as part of the extended sense of ‘self’ – as they are cast as the body-politic as part of the play itself – through the skin-based connection to the stage that the fabric supports. In this chapter, I investigate how the fabric both facilitates and complicates a ‘common skin’ configuration and how spectator accounts allow us to speculate more generally about spectatorship. I suggest that while spectators might elect to take part in immersive practice, or communal experience, there is still an
expectation that they will maintain a sense of themselves as an individuated ‘self’. This chapter ultimately proposes a reformulation of Macbeth’s statement: “strange things I have in head that will to hand” (3.4. 140) to suggest how “strange things in hand,” or the spectator’s skinbodied experience, “will to head” in terms of influencing their understanding of themselves as part of a group identity – formed through extramediated touch – and influencing their intersubjective actions within this aesthetic form as well as affecting their understanding of the play and its skin-based meanings. This case study emphasises how skin-based experiences can increase a spectator’s sense of immersion in the play world and their understanding of the play itself. I conclude with a Frankensteinian reading of the audience as a ‘common skin’ configuration which parallels, and anticipates, my readings of sound-based ‘common sound skins’ in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3 is the first of a two-part consideration of sound as a (skin)aesthetic. In Chapter 3, there are two parallel lines of enquiry. Firstly, how far the spectator’s sensory experience of SCAR CYMBALS translates into a meaning beyond their immediate embodied experience. And, secondly, how far the sensory experience provides an analogy for the role of sound in psychic development with recourse to Anzieu’s ideas of the ‘sound bath’ and the ‘acoustic envelope.’ I consider sound as a (skin)aesthetic and the sense of acoustic confusion produced by this work as well as the impact that the spectator’s experience of sound on their skin has in terms of producing feelings of isolation which performatively parallel the experiences of the marginalised ‘other’ encoded in the work. Indeed, SCAR CYMBALS takes the spectator’s skin as a site of engagement that, in turn, might prompt an awareness of and, indeed, increased empathy for the experiences of marginalised ‘other(s)’ beyond the performance space. The work addresses practices which enable ‘othering’, marginalization, violence, silencing and subjugation which prompts me to investigate the relationship between the spectator’s immediate sensory experience and their awareness of the work’s wider meaning.

Chapter 4 considers Tristan Bernays’ re-imagining of Frankenstein (2017). Further reinforcing the pervasiveness of the skin in the social and sensorial imagination, it suggests how the spectator’s auditory experience, with recourse to audio visual mirror neurons, sutures them into the Creature’s skin(s) producing a felt ‘common sound skin.’ Indeed, certain sounds correspond to the spectator’s skinbodied memories of damaged skin and this chapter proposes a new “skin job” (Halberstam 6) whereby the tonal approximates the tactile to create felt connections between bodies.
The new “skin job” conceives of the audience as being able to imagine themselves in the Creature’s skin based on the sounds of tearing skin. The production emphasises the Creature’s vulnerability as infantile ‘other’ and prompts spectators to consider the wider social conditions which create “monsters” and, indeed, to consider what actions we might take to help prevent this. Spectators are offered the opportunity to take responsibility for the Creature during a scene of audience skin interaction in which they teach the Creature to talk. Ultimately, the idea of the skin as a ‘common sense’ is reinforced because the sound work returns spectators to their skin, as the site of skinbodied memory, which emphasises the skin as a method of interpreting performance. The representational sound work triggers neurocognitive processes of identification with the ‘other’ which reinforces skin’s importance in negotiating intersubjective relationships even when there is no direct skin-to-skin contact.

The binding of an audience full of skins through acoustic experience parallels the Creature’s composition as a literal ‘common skin’ in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the literal binding of spectators in *Macbeth*, and anticipates my proposal for a real (hypothetical) “Theater of Cruelty” in Chapter 5 where spectators literally feel the pain of the ‘other’, thus sharing their skin, through observation alone. While many of the (skin)aesthetics I consider in this thesis involve the application of skin-like materials to the skin (the representation, for example, of scarring) as my case study on *Frankenstein* shows, the skin itself does not have to be altered to have a (skin)aesthetic impact.

Chapter 5 focuses on Lindsey Ferrentino’s play *Ugly Lies the Bone* (2017) and Pat Kinevane’s play *Underneath* (2015-). It is the most attenuated chapter as there is no skin-to-skin, or sound on skin, or skin to (skin)aesthetic contact made between the performers and the audience. In this chapter, I focus on the mingling of the eyes and skin, the sensory slippage between sight and skin, or the spectator’s visual engagement with the skin(s) onstage under the prohibition of touch or Anzieu’s “taboo on touching” (*TSE* 169). I argue that it is the spectator’s lived experience of the skin as an intersensorial site which enables them to think that they feel themselves in the skin of the ‘other’ in intersensorial psychical reality, predominantly through haptic visuality, in such a way as to re-activate the skin-ego. I argue that the skin-ego must be “re-activated” because the taboo on touching facilitates the restructuring of the Ego to a “thinking ego” which is reliant on the distance senses as opposed to touch. I suggest how haptic visuality, processes of embodied simulation, mirror neuron
activity, and studies on the phenomenon of mirror-touch synaesthesia, produce variations of the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ when there is no skin-to-skin contact.

Finally, coming full circle, I readdress Artaud’s proposition that “it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds” (99), by concluding with a proposal for a new and, indeed, real Theatre of Cruelty, a thought experiment, which hinges on the collapse of boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’, through the skin, in cases of mirror touch synesthesia. Indeed, for mirror touch synesthetes the sight of damage to the ‘other’s’ skin causes them to feel physical pain which constitutes the production of what is, effectively, a literal ‘common skin’ in spectatorship.

**Findings**

Throughout this thesis the sensory interconnections or, more specifically, the sensory slippages between the skin and the other sensory modalities suggest how the spectator’s engagement (via whatever sensory modality) with the skins and (skin)aesthetics in the performance environment reinforces basic psychological ideas about identity-formation, and skin-based ways of relating to the ‘other’. The spectator’s skinbodied experience of the various (skin)aesthetic features discussed not only emphasises the work’s meaning but also suggests how the experience provides an analogy for skin-based theories of psychic development and intersubjectivity. This, as I have suggested, is significant in terms of a practitioner’s ability to manipulate skins and skinbodied experience to desired relational effect and reinforces the skin as an optic through which wider societal issues and/or anxieties are signalled.

In this thesis, I investigate the intersections between the experience or display of skins; (skin)aesthetics; the production, or application, of ‘second skins’; the desire to make contact (physically or verbally); and the work’s encoding of wider intersubjective relations including the idea of society’s “pathogenic impingement” (TBS 64) on the skin-ego. As a method of analysis (skin)aesthetics considers what (skin)aesthetic forms reveal about identity formation and intersubjective relationships, as they may be negotiated through the skin, and what kinds of effects (empathetic, educational, or aesthetic, erotic or torturous) this might have on audiences.
Chapter 1: Skin-to-Skin Contact in *HARD C*CK (2015-2017)

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?

– *John Milton, Paradise Lost*

We become what we see, what we touch.

– *Carolee Schneemann*

In this chapter I focus on Robert Hesp’s dance performance *HARD C*CK (2015-2017) and introduce the potential that (skin)aesthetics has as a method of analysis as well as the potential that (skin)aesthetics as a practice offers for the creation of skins in a performance environment. In addition to this, I explore how Didier Anzieu’s concept of an imagined ‘common skin’ might be understood as reconfigured in the performance environment. I suggest ways in which the felt skin-based connection has the potential to connect performer and spectator as well as entire audiences. This chapter is about the least attenuated, most direct version of this process. It focuses on the literal skin, materials applied to the skin, and scenes of skin-to-skin contact but also introduces the idea of haptic visuality by which spectators may think that they feel themselves in the skin of the ‘other’ on stage. The purpose is to begin to suggest how felt skin-based connections might be forged in spectatorship by stimulating, simulating, or recreating skins and scenes of skin-to-skin contact. This relates to the overarching argument of the thesis insofar as I suggest how sensory conditions in performance, such as the soundscape and visuals, might be manipulated so as to be felt through the skin (as with sound or touch based experiences) or reminiscent of skin-to-skin contact or skin-based experiences (as with haptic visuality). In this sense, we see how the spectator’s belief that they know what it feels like to inhabit the ‘other’s’ skin operates at more than a loose metaphorical level.

*HARD C*CK
**HARD C*CK** is a contemporary dance piece by performance artist and dancer Robert Hesp. Hesp explains in an interview with CAM4 that the work recreates “arenas of sexual activity” (CAM4) – namely clubs, online chatrooms, and bedrooms – through the production of tangible soundscapes (see Chapters 3 and 4 for sound felt on, and/or as, the skin) inspired by “queer clubbing” (Hesp CAM4). Indeed, the work engages the spectator’s entire sensorium. There is the visual spectacle of dance, naked skin, and Hesp’s adornment of his skin with other skin-like materials (including Vaseline, paint, and chicken flesh/skin); olfactory stimulation (the smell of chicken as it is torn apart); tactile stimulation through scenes of touch between spectator(s) and performer; and finally the taste of talcum-powder thrown up into the air to co-mingle with the smell of chicken.

**HARD C*CK** was presented in the round at Camden People’s Theatre. As the spectators enter the performance space, they see a large pink disc on the floor, lit from above, which serves as the stage (see *figure 1* below).

![Figure 1. Performer Robert Hesp seated on stage in HARD C*CK. Sarah Kouhou, Visual Instincts, Claudia Greco and Lucrezia Chiarle. Photograph. www.roberthesp.co.uk/hard-c-ck. Accessed 11 Nov. 2019.](image)

The audience take their seats on the floor around the pink disc. The performance pamphlet issued by Camden People’s Theatre (see Appendix A) explains that the audience “are encouraged to move around the edges of the circular dance floor if they want while still respecting the view and experience of the other audience members” and, as Fiona Bannon explains, the round setting means “the audience would have glimpsed other audience members, been close to the performers, [and be] aware of
more detail of physical presence” (134). In *HARD C*CK, this arrangement means bringing skins into closer contact and offering skin higher visibility from a spectator’s potentially changing perspective. The pamphlet also gives warning regarding the element of audience participation stating that “people who absolutely don’t want to be part of this interaction should stay towards the edges of the space or politely decline if approached [and] any audience members particularly interested in this interaction should stay closer to the circular dance flooring stage,” which gives the audience a degree of agency over whether or not they position themselves somewhere that increases the chance of becoming part of the production, which involves skin-to-skin contact. As the audience enter, Hesp is sitting half-naked in the centre of the circle and observes the audience observing him. At one edge of the circle there is a large, viscous mound of 5kg of Vaseline. At the far side, there is a laptop resting on top of a white plinth. At the opposite side of the performance space there is a bag filled with props and a cup filled with red liquid.

We can understand *HARD C*CK as a sensation-based story-board, of sorts, with scenes representing the stages (and I mean ‘stage’ in both the sense of linear progression and setting) of sexual encounter. The production begins with Hesp moulding the Vaseline with his hands before applying it to his skin; the piece then progresses into dance as the performer interacts with the Vaseline across the floor. This is followed by an ocean-type soundscape and a focus on repetitive movement: wind-milling of arms to-floor-to-ceiling, for example, and the clutching of hands to face. In this sense, *HARD C*CK presents a preoccupation with the skin and the sense of ‘self’ (imbued in the clutching-touching of face, body, and skin throughout the production). In another scene Hesp takes a square light and poses in front of it as if it were a mirror but, of course, the light also serves to accentuate the performer’s skin and draws the audience’s magpie gaze to the shining surface. Tempting us to take it? The scene of audience interaction, with its focus on skin-to-skin contact, follows. In this scene of audience skinteraction, Hesp invites a spectator to participate in a guided touch-based exploration of the skin of his hands, face, and torso (albeit through a jumper). *Figure 2* below shows the type of skin-to-skin contact on offer in this production.
The touch is consensual and although, as you can see, the scene appears intimate (the pair are in close proximity and Hesp, right, is in a state of semi-undress), it is non-sexual in nature. Within the context of the performance, however, the type of contact is in conversation with the more sexual forms of contact that the work alludes to. I also consider another brief skinteractive moment in which members of the audience reach out their hands to touch the performer’s outstretched hand. Following the scene of skin-to-skin contact, the performer sets up a webcam link on CAM4, an adult live streaming site, and proceeds to message a member online. The member then becomes
part of the performance by watching online as Hesp begins to dance again. What we see here is the desire for contact imbued in the performance (predominantly touch-based but also through online connections) starting to emerge.

In another scene, Hesp rubs silver paint over his face and skin. While Anzieu suggests that “the non-verbal messages spontaneously emitted by the skin are deliberately inflected or inverted by cosmetics, tanning, make-up, bathing [and] even cosmetic surgery” (TSE 18-19), Michel Serres argues in The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (1985), that, far from inflecting or inverting the skin’s non-verbal messages, the application of cosmetics activates the skin as lived-in site, site of sensory engagement, and site of sensory mingling. Of course, the application of paint to the skin will obscure non-verbal messages “spontaneously emitted by the skin” such as the rush of blood to the surface which signals embarrassment or anger, but it also brings “our real skin” (Serres 34) into focus both experientially (the skin feels the material on its surface), and aesthetically by emphasising the sensory faculties:

The naked woman in the mirror tattoos her skin, in a certain order and according to precise laws, she follows exact pathways; she emphasizes the eye and the gaze, accentuates with colour the place to be kissed, crowning the zone of words and taste, underlines hearing with an earring, traces bridges […] between the wells or the mountains of the senses, draws a map of her own receptivity. (Serres 34)

The use of cosmetic, or rather (skin)aesthetic, materials in HARD C*CK (paint, Vaseline, or chicken skin) similarly accentuates the skin as experiential and sensing surface not only for the performer, but for the spectator who can imagine they know what it would feel like to similarly cover their own skins through their experience of haptic visuality and embodied knowledge. The tactile nature of application is emphasised as the face paint and Vaseline are applied by hand; Hesp “traces bridges [between] the mountains of the senses” by dragging fingers (touch) of silver paint from ear-to-ear across his face, across his nose, around his mouth and eyes, connecting the five senses on the skin, or the site of receptivity in HARD C*CK (see figure 3 below).
The scenes are episodic in nature and could conceivably be rearranged without detracting from the work’s purpose which I discuss in detail shortly. Although, as I have mentioned, the touch-based scene between performer and spectator is not sexual in nature, the spectator’s consent to touch and be touched is clearly at the forefront of initiating and continuing interaction. Issues of consent also feed into the wider framework of sexual and other touch-based negotiations. In the scenes where Hesp layers his skin with other substances, such as Vaseline or paint, we might read the preparatory stages (cosmetic) for a night out, or the preparatory stages for sexual contact. The Vaseline scene, for example, potentially becomes one representative of pre-sex lubrication or, alternatively, post-sex fluids. We can understand the scenes where Hesp dances naked, backed by dance floor anthems, as a simulation of the club as an “arena of sexual activity.” The stages of club and bedroom and, indeed, club-to-bedroom, are conveyed by Hesp’s wrapping of a pillow around his head to dance, which further emphasises the interconnectedness between the two arenas of sexual activity. The skin-to-skin encounter with the spectator represents the realisation of the desire for a connection to the ‘other’ but, within the context of the performance’s coded sexual themes, this scene might also be understood to represent the realisation of the desire for sexual contact in the implied arenas of sexual activity staged.
There is therefore no obvious, or definitive, storyline in HARD C*CK. The audience are free to impose their own understanding and imagined narratives onto the work. Mark Richards, Director of Metal Peterborough, writes “[b]acked by a pumping playlist of dance floor anthems, the show is both joyous and painful as we witness one man’s struggle with love, lust and loss. Nothing but thought-provoking, and always downright sexy,” which suggests “love, lust and loss” as key phases of the work. Camden People’s Theatre suggests that the work is “about pleasure, consent, pain and exploration” (see Appendix A) all themes which are invoked by the treatment of skins in the performance environment. The performance is about “rediscovering the pleasure of skin in live space” through tactile engagement and exploration, it is about gaining the consent to touch the ‘other’, and the potential pain of rejection or failed connection. The recognition of the sense of “loss” and “pain”, as we shall shortly see through my discussion of Anzieu’s concept of the wrapping of secondary narcissism, are also particularly relevant to the performance’s aims to establish skin-based reconnection and to “rediscover the pleasure of skin.”

I am less interested therefore in establishing a definitive reading of HARD C*CK’s narrative, or lack thereof, and more interested in its production of second skins, and skin-based connection, through scenes of skin-to-skin contact or sight-to-skin-slippage. In this chapter, I also focus specifically on the spectator’s experience of haptic visuality or how sight might touch and take skins in the spectator’s (skin)esthetic response to the performance. Indeed, the haptic encounter actually takes place across two registers in HARD C*CK. Haptics are touch-based and while there are scenes which involve literal skin-to-skin contact between the performer and spectators not all audience members will experience this. The experience of haptic visuality, however, enables spectators to touch the performer with their eyes and imagine both what the ‘other’s’ skin would feel like and what it might feel like to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin based on their own skinbodied knowledge.

**Touching HARD C*CK**

When I saw the performance, the work featured as part of Camden People’s Theatre’s *Hotbed: A Festival of Sex* (2017), a season which, as the programme explains, asks: “how often do we talk about sex as it’s really felt, experienced or imagined?” and why it is that, in a world saturated with sexual imagery, theatre is “so seldom part of [this] conversation” (Camden People’s Theatre). The festival’s consideration of sex and sexuality on stage, as well as the staging of sex, aimed to “expand [the audience’s]
"carnal knowledge” (Camden People’s Theatre) by questioning attitudes towards sex and raising awareness of surrounding issues. \textit{HARD C*CK} has educational concerns, as Camden People’s Theatre’s pamphlet explains: “it is a piece for a generation inadequately educated and completely surrounded by sex; for people who will learn through the lens of apps and pornography” (see Appendix A). Yet in its presentation of a naked performer, the simulation and representation of sexual acts, and the online connection to the viewer who watches the live performance, we might ask how \textit{HARD C*CK} offers the spectator anything different? Surely the performance just offers a live view of the naked body and an insight into a world of live streaming where those watching online are paying for the privilege and can tip the performer? But it is different because it re-focuses the lens onto the human being, the human skin, who engages with these modes of production and connection.

In an interview with CAM4, Hesp discusses his intentions behind the work. He explains that his “desire [was] to have quite an honest, frank discussion about sex,” by addressing the “lack [of] sex education for specifically LGBT and queer people,” which he argues is not “setting people up for the best in terms of sex and body awareness and self-confidence” (CAM4). It is unlikely that the audience are aware of Hesp’s intentions regarding the lack of sex education for specifically LGBT and queer people; however, within the framework of a performance season which aims to educate, the content of \textit{HARD C*CK} clearly conveys to all spectators its intention to have a “frank discussion about sex” through its exploration of sexual themes. It also thematically models sex positivity and body confidence that conceivably some spectators may be reassured or encouraged by.

Hesp explains that while \textit{HARD C*CK} was “constructed from a very gay male perspective, hopefully there’s also a universality [to the piece], in terms of looking at things like touch, pleasure, and sex” (CAM4). \textit{HARD C*CK} is deemed suitable for audiences aged 16+ so the performance conceivably aims to attract young adults who may have experienced the lack of adequate sex education Hesp identifies. Without access to the audience demographic for this production, however, the predominant focus of this chapter is on the universality of the experience of touch and pleasure that Hesp hopes \textit{HARD C*CK} conveys. This is not to dismiss the perspective from which the piece was produced, the subject, or \textit{HARD C*CK}’s intentions, but rather to re-focus on the skin as the site of engagement and experience in the performance, the sharing of skin through moments of touch, and the creation of felt ‘common skins,’ as
a shared skin-based experience within the performance environment, to ask how the universality of the skin, of touch, might function in relation to the performance’s aims.

**(Skin)Aesthetics in** **HARD C*CK**

In his discussion of oil-based and state-ambivalent substances including wax, tar, and grease, Steven Connor indicates that “the skin or film formed by any of these substances is a congelation occurring between liquid and solid [and that] such a skin is always unstable, for the possibility of its alternative states seems to be immanent in it” (*TBS* 179). What about when these materials are applied to the literal skin? This state of in-betweeness, as Serres suggests, is what provokes our understanding of the skin as an experiential site underneath. At two recent research presentation events I showed an image of someone peeling glue off of their hand; the thin glue-film being lifted clearly preserves the details, fingerprints and pores, of the skin beneath and thus exemplifies my idea of a (skin)aesthetic, in the sense that it is a material which represents the skin and prompts, as we shall see, a relational dynamic between the spectator and the displayed skin of the ‘other’. I asked who thought they knew what the skin in the image was feeling, or felt like, which translates to a question of whether or not you can imagine yourself in the skin of the ‘other’ based on the aesthetic representation and your own embodied knowledge, and, by show of hands, the majority of both audiences indicated that they could. I suggest that it is in this in-betweeness, the space between the glue (or Vaseline or paint) and the literal skin, that the spectator can imagine themselves in the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense.

In this sense, **HARD C*CK** is a touching performance. It is “touching” in the conventional sense of the touch-based interaction between Hesp and the audience members he touches and is touched by. And it is “touching” in the affective sense in which an audience member might feel “touched” emotionally by the performance, or the apparent vulnerability of the naked performer. Indeed, skin has long been considered in performance studies through the focus on the naked body, or exposed skin, and spectatorial response. Fiona Bannon discusses the naked body for the way it evokes the experience of touching, or being touched, in the audience. Confrontation with the “visceral presence of human flesh,” or the naked performer, prompts “bodily thinking” (Bannon 129) in the spectator and, therefore, plays a role in negotiating ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ when confronted with skin. **HARD C*CK** is, therefore, a performance about touch, about touching, and about being touched by others. It also
facilitates the spectator’s experience of haptic visuality or the haptic encounter which enables them to imaginatively possess the skin of the ‘other’ by figuratively inserting themselves into the spaces between semi-liquid and solid skins. As Ashley Montagu explains in *Touching: The Human Significance of Skin* (1971):

The term *haptic* is used to describe that mentally extended sense of touch which comes about through the total experience of living and acting in space. Our perception of the visual world, for example, in fact blends what we have *felt* in past associations with what we have seen or the scene before us. The haptic is an acquired sense in that it applies to seen objects that have been touched and acted upon. (17)

Montagu anticipates the concepts of haptic visuality and the haptic encounter, as outlined by Laura U. Marks and Gianna Bouchard (see introduction), respectively, through his discussion of the spectator’s response to the skin-based scene or object. In other words, the idea of haptic visuality refers to the spectator’s imagined experience of touch without physically touching the object on stage; it is predicated on the spectator’s previous experiences of touch, or memory, as triggered by the scene before them.

In his discussion of touch-based expressions, Montagu writes that “we [spectators] are ‘held’ by an appealing performance” (12). He argues that expressions such as this, or “keep in touch,” are so much more than metaphor because they speak of a very human desire for skin-to-skin contact. But what of the desire for touch in *HARD C*CK? It is the skin as both sight and site of spectatorial engagement which brings the spectator and performer into this kind of contact. I expand on the concept of haptic visuality in further detail in my later discussion of Hesp’s use of Vaseline because it captures the “(syn)aesthetic” slippage in “(skin)aesthetic”, whereby skins can be *felt* through other sensory faculties. Here sight slips into skin. The haptic encounter is just one way that the spectator can take the skin of the ‘other’ for themselves in an imagined formation of a reconfigured ‘common skin.’ I begin, however, with a consideration of sex and sexuality in relation to Anzieu’s theory of *The Skin Ego*.

*The Skin Ego and Sexuality*
How does the formation of the skin-ego and early experiences of touch relate to sex and sexuality? Anzieu writes that:

it is undeniable that, as a child develops, its skin becomes eroticised: skin pleasures are part of the preliminaries to adult sexuality [and] it remains true that genital, even auto-erotic sexuality is only achieved by people who have acquired a minimal basic sense of security in their own skins. (*TSE* 43)

However, as Naomi Segal rightly points out, Anzieu “wrote little about the caress, and it is never theorized in detail in his work; indeed, it has been argued […] that sexuality plays a relatively small role in his theory of the *moi-peau*” (189). It is a surprising area to neglect considering, as Nina Jablonski does, that the “skin is the largest sexual organ of the human body” (119). Although faults in the skin-ego are theorized as underlined by inconsistent experiences of touch in infancy, Anzieu does not discuss the quality, or type, of touch as it relates to adult sexuality in any real detail. This also prompts John Mowitt’s criticism that Anzieu does not adequately theorise the impact of specific types of percussive touch – drumming, beating, striking – on development. Anzieu does list, however, the “support of sexuality” and “libidinal recharging” (*TSE* 266) as functions of the Ego and explains that “to reach sexual maturity one needs to have a secure narcissistic base [and] a sense of feeling good in one’s skin” (*TSE* 55-56); therefore, Anzieu does theorize a relationship between experiences in infancy and later adult sexuality even if he does not theorize the nature of the contact itself.

Anzieu argues that the constitution of the skin-ego is “one of the conditions of the dual passage from primary to secondary narcissism” (*TSE* 44). The infant’s experience of primary narcissism creates a secure attachment base: indeed, “the skin-ego arises in response to the need for a narcissistic wrapping and provides the psychical apparatus with a secure and consistent state of basic well-being” (*TSE* 43). The experience of primary narcissism is facilitated through adequate care in infancy specifically through physical contact which has “significance” (*TSE* 47-48) – that is, through contact which conveys, or responds to, meaning. In other words, the infant’s “needs are satisfied and at the same time so is its need to have those needs understood” (*TSE* 47). The infant’s experience of having a responsive maternal environment therefore “creates [for the infant] both a wrapping of well-being, which it cathects narcissistically, and the illusion, essential for the formation of the Skin-ego, that the person on the other side of that wrapping will respond immediately, and in exact
complementarity, to its signals” (*TSE* 47-48). In turn, this creates the “reassuring illusion of an omniscient narcissistic double always at [the infant’s] beck and call” (*TSE* 47-48).

With the exception of “the experience of being in love, in which each of the lovers encloses the other in their arms while at the same time being enclosed by them” as an example of the wrapping of secondary narcissism in adult life (*TSE* 68), Anzieu only discusses the relationship between primary masochism – the rending of the imagined ‘common skin’ – and secondary masochism in detail. He explains secondary masochism as a result of faults in the skin-ego, specifically its imagined failure to contain, which develop through inadequate daily care, or contact which communicates excitement rather than meaning, in infancy (*TSE* 47). According to Anzieu, secondary masochism underpins sexual practices which re-enact the fantasy of the torn ‘common skin,’ on the literal skin, as part of adult sexuality; such practice forces the literal skin to act as a container, under stress, to compensate for the felt deficiencies in the skin-ego’s ability to contain. *The Skin Ego* therefore says very little about the development of “normal” adult sexuality in terms of how it is negotiated through skin-based experiences. We can infer, however, that adequate care and meaningful and responsive touch leads to the development of “normal” adult sexuality. We might also infer, in line with *HARD C*CK’s intentions, that while the skin-ego is originally formed through skin-based experience in order that the infant might understand itself as separate from the ‘other’, in adult sexuality the desire for skin-to-skin contact is active, and it is about “rediscovering the pleasure of skin” and connecting to, as opposed to separating from, the ‘other’ to create this secondary wrapping of narcissism. The lack of LGBT representation in current sex education conceivably affects how young people think about their own sexuality, sexuality more generally, and what is perceived to be “normal”. In this sense, we can speculate that the lack of representation of other sexualities and relationships may create feelings of non-normativity for young LGBT and queer people – even if a secure attachment base was formed previously.

In their study of haptics and sexuality, Kurt Seikowski and Sabine Gollek similarly recognise the defining role of early tactile experiences in relation to adult sexuality:

touching is the central connector between haptic perception and sexuality. It establishes contact to another or to one’s own person via the skin. In this, the skin fulfils various functions which are decisive to the way in which touching is
experienced. How various forms of touching in childhood were experienced, processed and remembered is of decisive importance for sexuality experienced as an adult. (271)

Montagu, however, goes into greater detail in terms of explaining how secure skin-based attachment, as well as the type of touch required to form such an attachment, influences the individual’s later sexual development. Montagu writes that the “primacy of the infant’s first perceptions of reality through the skin can no longer be doubted. The messages he receives through that organ must be security-giving, assuring, and pleasurable if the infant is to thrive” (217) – note the mention of “pleasurable” here, firstly because it echoes Anzieu’s idea that “skin pleasures are part of the preliminaries to adult sexuality” (TSE 43), but also gives an indication of the quality of touch which underpins successful development. Secondly, it relates to HARD C*CK’s aim to “rediscover” the pleasure of skin. Montagu says that “inadequate communication with the baby through the skin is likely to result in inadequate development of later sexual functions” (217). In the chapter “Skin and Sex,” Montagu writes that sex has been “called the highest form of touch [and that] in the profoundest sense touch is the true language of sex” (204). Montagu stresses that “intercourse should mean what the word once implied: communication between two people in which coitus plays a part” (214); therefore, sex is only part of the communicative potential between skins.

Montagu captures the nature of Hesp’s exploration of touch, sex, and sexuality, when he discusses “the fact that in the Western world it is highly probable that sexual activity, indeed the frenetic preoccupation with sex that characterizes Western culture, is in many cases not the expression of a sexual interest at all, but rather a search for the satisfaction of the need for contact” (213). While HARD C*CK is an expression of sexual interest(s) and alludes to pornography and society’s obsession with sex, the work itself is not graphically sexual as these ideas are situated within the work’s aims to establish connections and communication between people. Although Hesp is naked for much of the performance, and fills a condom with chicken, he quotes Jean Cocteau as he explains how he hopes that “his obscenity is never obscene” (CAM4); indeed, the touch between performer and spectator is non-sexual, although we can infer the desire for contact and the necessity of consent, and sex is only ever simulated. HARD C*CK presents the desire for “re-connection” and the desire to “rediscover” the “pleasure” of the skin by exploring tactility throughout the work. The performance is
described as being as much about “male softness and vulnerability as it is about dicks and fucking” (see Appendix A) and, although the former is visible, and the latter is simulated with a pillow, sex itself is displaced by skin-based communication with the ‘other’. Seikowski and Gollek point out that “male sexuality is reduced to the erect penis – sexuality without touching” (270), but HARD C*CK challenges this through a touch-based exploration of sex and sexuality entirely devoid of hard cock. The effect of moving spectatorial focus onto the skin, onto movement, and onto other materials, communicates the desire for touching, contact, and connection, as a part of, not just for, sex. In other words, although the piece is concerned with sexuality, and explores sexual arenas, it is far less an “expression of [purely] sexual interest” and more a “search for the satisfaction of the need for contact” as it can be derived through the skin.

Second Skins in HARD C*CK
The performance, as I have explained, encodes a desire for contact but also aims to convey meaning; therefore, the types of contact convey “significance” and invite a “complementarity” from spectators who respond. I will go on to argue that this might be understood as analogous to the types of contact necessary for the formation of secondary narcissistic wrappings of well-being; indeed, Anzieu offers lovers embracing as an example of the secondary wrapping of narcissism and I argue that the types of contact and the second skins which are made in HARD C*CK are not so dissimilar. Anzieu explains that “to be oneself one must first have one’s own skin and second use it as a space in which one’s sensations can be felt” (TSE 55) which is a process that can be understood to occur performatively in HARD C*CK through the performer’s use of the skin as a site of engagement and the search for skin-based pleasure and re-connection with members of the audience. It would be wrong to hypothesise that the performer’s search for reconnection has its grounding in defaults in the formation of the individual’s own skin-ego or previous experiences of inadequate touch; however, it is not wrong to recognise in the performance’s aims at “re-connection” with an ‘other’, and the “re-discover[y]” of “the pleasure of skin,” a want of support and skin-based reinforcement as the solution to the lack identified and encoded in the performance aims. While Anzieu writes that if the skin-ego “develops markedly in the direction of narcissism, the primary phantasy of the common skin changes to the phantasy of a reinforced, invulnerable skin” (TSE 48), which underpins the narcissistic personality, I suggest that the performance stages the desire for the
secondary wrapping itself as opposed to indicating a narcissistic personality. I suggest that the production of second skins and the scenes of skin-to-skin contact speak more of the desire for reinforcement than of the narcissistic personality’s belief in the invulnerability of the skin.

Recall Hesp’s identification that the current education system is not “setting people up,” specifically LGBT and queer people, “for the best in terms of sex and body awareness and self-confidence” which might be remedied by an educational approach which addresses different sexualities as well as acknowledging the different ways in which sex is represented and accessed today. Such an education might, in turn, precede an increase in the sense of feeling good in one’s own skin because it offers an increased opportunity for young people to identify with the material being taught which, theoretically, precedes more positive sexual experiences in later life. The sex education offered to pre-pubescent/pubescent/post-pubescent individuals is perhaps not so straightforwardly relatable to Anzieu’s work on the relationship between the development of the infant skin-ego and later sexuality because the issue in question is the quality of information being offered – specifically a lack of LGBT representation in sex education and representations of the types of contact desired by young LGBT people – as opposed to the quality of touch. If one does not see one’s own sexuality, sexual desires, practices and so on being represented as part of a standardised education, feelings of being othered, non-normative, and/or vulnerable may result which would impact on the individual’s sense of ‘self’. Recall Connor’s suggestion that:

if we can see an increase in the intensity and frequency of processes designed to promote or supplement the process of psychic integumentation, then it seems appropriate to ask what are the cultural, as opposed to purely medical conditions to which this is a response. What, in Didier Anzieu’s phrase, might be the terms of ‘pathogenic impingement by the environment on the skin ego’ which leads to the formation of these second skins? (TBS 64)

This understanding is useful because it gives us the means for re-imagining skin-ego dynamics at a societal level. The pathogenic impingement of society on the skin-ego, as it is conceived in HARD C*CK, can be understood as society’s failure (at the time HARD C*CK was staged) to support different sexualities, sexual awareness, and/or body confidence, through its failure to provide adequate and inclusive sex education.
I argue that in response to this societal impingement, **HARD C*CK** can be understood to symbolically represent the formation of second skins designed to remedy psychic damage. For the purpose of my argument, Hesp dramatizes the processes by which psychic integumentation might be restored by creating secondary wrappings at an individual level; however, it is not implausible that some spectators might experience a healing, of sorts, through processes of identification with Hesp, who is part of the LGBT community, the type of interactions he engages in – such as the CAM4 live stream or the scenes of skin-to-skin contact with another person – and/or the performance narrative.

I suggest that the desire to propagate the sense of feeling good in one’s own skin (as far as this might be derived through adequate sex education) is evident through Hesp’s creation of second skins, such as Vaseline, paint, and the layering of chicken skins upon his bare chest, as he enters the staged arenas of sexual activity. It is the action itself of applying different materials to serve a doubling function, as opposed to the qualities of certain materials (namely the chicken) that he applies to his skin (which may seem counter-intuitive in terms of feeling good in one’s own skin), which reflects the search for adequate support or wrapping. Hesp also creates this sense of skin-based reinforcement through the arrangement of the spectators who are seated at the edge of the round. Connor recognises that “there is another, more emollient way in which the skin can be made new. This involves neither spoiling nor section, but the folding in, or applying of new life from without. Instead of being cast off, the skin can be doubled, renourished, refreshed, enhanced” (TBS 178) and, in the staging of the round, Hesp’s skin is doubled by the skins of the spectators who line the edge and with whom he makes contact. Anzieu makes the following observation of small group behaviour:

> Seeking a bond: if there is no seating plan and participants are free to choose where they sit, the majority will tend to huddle together. Later on, or out of defensiveness, they adopt a seating pattern in one or more concentric ovals – like a closed egg, providing the reconstituted safety of a collective narcissistic wrapping. (TSE 31)

There is no seating plan in **HARD C*CK** and the audience sitting in a “closed egg,” or rather circular formation, is determined by the fact that it is staged in the round. I would like to suggest, however, that perhaps the decision to stage the performance in
this way reflects the performer’s desire, conscious or otherwise, to be contained by a “collective narcissistic wrapping” as a form, or space, of reparation and, indeed, perhaps to provide a sense of “reconstituted safety” for audience members who might, conceivably, have experienced issues the work aims to address. While the search for second skins presupposes a lack that is rectified for the performer during the course of the performance, it cannot be said that the performance resolves any wider societal issues. Nonetheless the work encodes the lack of sex education for specifically LGBT and queer people as a social issue. Under new education guidelines, from 2020, sex education in schools will not exclusively focus on heterosexual sex, sexuality, or relationships and this may go some way in beginning to resolve the felt impingement on the societal skin-ego.

While the formation of the skin-ego and the infant’s understanding of individuation takes place when the “massage becomes message” (TSE 42), or when the infant understands touch as a means of communication, in HARD C*CK it is the spectator’s experience of watching the “massage”, or rather the skin-to-skin and (skin)esthetic-to-skin-based contact, that becomes the message. More specifically, the spectator’s experience of watching Hesp massage Vaseline onto, and to some extent into, his skin communicates to the audience the desire for the doubled skin which I argue symbolically represents the realisation of the fantasy of the “reinforced […] skin” imbued in the performance. It is clear in both Hesp’s one-to-one touch-based scene with the spectator, and his reaching out into the audience to take the hands of spectators, that the message is one of the desire for touch, the desire to connect, the desire for contact, and the desire for skin. Just as the wrapping of primary narcissism is facilitated when the infant’s “needs are satisfied […] at the same time [as] its need to have those needs understood,” the audience understand and respond to the performer’s desire for contact so that it is realised. Even if the audience are unaware of the lack of adequate sex education which underpins the work, the experience of watching scenes of contact, online contact via an adult streaming site, and scenes where other substances are applied to the skin has educational value, of sorts, because the clear message is one of sex positivity (in whatever mediating form – skin or screen), as well as endorsing the idea that skin-based pleasure should be rediscovered.

Artaud and Skin Joy
The fact that this “search [and] need for contact” has a degree of universality connects Anzieu, Artaud, the spectator, and HARD C*CK in their understanding of the skin.
Artaud’s proposal that “it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter [the spectators’] minds” (99), specifically the implications of “re-entering”, relates to Hesp’s description of HARD C*CK taken from his website and used as a publicity blurb by Camden People’s Theatre:

A man dances in the space, a blur of rosy tissue and liquid mass sliding over shifting ground. Threads of whipped candy and shining flesh bounce and spin in the artificial luminance. A face of silver and pink, eyes bright, scanning the trembling edge of the circle for signs of joy and reconnection.

TOUCH PLAY SEE
RUB GRIND HOLD
BEAT ((PULSE)) SHUDDER

[…] an open look at ideas of sexual autonomy, identity and fragility and an attempt to rediscover the pleasure of skin and bone in a live space. A piece for me, for you, for the void and the person on the other side of the laptop screen.

The implications of “reconnection” and “rediscover” parallel Artaud’s concept of “re-ent[ry],” as both suggest that connections, specifically to an ‘other’ or a prior knowledge, have been lost. More directly, the idea of rediscovery parallels Artaud’s proposition because it implies a prior knowledge that must be recovered, here the pleasure of skin (which recalls Montagu’s writing on the importance of pleasurable contact in forming secure attachments in infancy), which links to the former knowledge of metaphysical ideas (which I address as ‘self’ and ‘other’) that Artaud suggests must “re-enter” the spectator’s minds through the skin.

In HARD C*CK, the ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’, and ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’, can be understood to “re-enter” both the spectators’ and the performer’s minds through the engagement of skin, and skin-based scenes which engage the spectator. The excerpt above is the closest that HARD C*CK comes to offering a storyline. The performer – “the man who dances in the space” – is described as “a blur of rosy tissue and liquid mass” which not only metonymically reduces the performer to a “liquid” mass of “tissue”, or “shining flesh,” or a semi-solid skin – which calls to my mind the works of Francis Bacon which liquidize the human form (although Hesp does not cite Bacon as an influence) – but also thematically suggests the concept of an uncertain skin-image of ‘self’, to coincide with Hesp’s recognition that the lack of sexual
education does not set people up to be body-confident or sexually aware. Anzieu explains that “in his paintings, Francis Bacon portrays liquefying bodies, whose skin and clothes provide a superficial unity but which lack the dorsal spine that holds up body and thought: they are skins filled with substances that are more fluid than solid” (TSE 106-107) and, indeed, many of Bacon’s paintings from the 1960s, particularly the portraits, might be described visually as a “blur of rosy tissue and liquid mass.” As I suggested, the above excerpt describing HARD C*CK is perhaps the closest we get to a narrative. The “blur of rosy tissue,” as it pertains to an uncertain skin-image of ‘self’, relates to the performer at the start of the performance before he creates the second skins and finds reconnection with the ‘other(s)’ that I argue represent the secondary wrapping of narcissism and the rediscovery of the pleasure of skin.

The performer “scan[s] the trembling edge of the circle for signs of […] reconnec tion,” and we must ask what does this “trembling edge” represent if not the ‘other’ with which the performer tries to negotiate a sense of ‘self’? What is this “trembling edge” if not evocative of a skin, of a responsive (towards the performer), feeling (trembling), spectatorial surface? The performer’s reaching out towards the audience prompts a wave of audience members to reach out their hands in response to Hesp’s gesture which is emblematic of the desire for contact. In reference to the scenes of audience skinteraction, Hesp makes contact with some of the hands which reach out and, in the focal scene of skin-to-skin contact, he guides one spectator from outer to inner circle. The audience response further reinforces my argument that the performance is inclined in the direction of secondary narcissism because the reaching out of hands symbolically represents a ‘second skin’ or support function, extended by a responsive audience. In this sense, I suggest the performance dramatizes the processes by which damage done by society to the sense of ‘self’ might be remedied.

*Meat Joy* and *HARD C*CK

Hesp cites Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* (1964), a group performance replete with various meats, paint, and scantily clad bodies writhing through it all, as one inspiration for *HARD C*CK and explains that “[I] wanted to try working with my body as material, and meat and chicken in particular, drawing a parallel between the human body and consumable material” (CAM4). But the performance does more than simply draw this parallel. The focus moves away from the flesh and onto the skin. There is nothing novel about the use of body as material but the amount of skin in this production places it at the forefront of investigation. Skin as a consumable material
has much greater novelty value than flesh more generically, although in *HARD C*CK
it is the way that skin is consumed, and then assumed, by the spectators’ eyes (as opposed to mouth) and imagination, respectively, that I focus on.

Schneemann writes that *Meat Joy* has “the character of an erotic rite:
excessive, indulgent, [it is] a celebration of flesh as material” (62), and in a letter to Jean-Jacques Lebel she outlines the concept of *Meat Joy* as a “happening” for Lebel’s *Festival of Free Expression*

*MEAT JOY* shifting now, relating to Artaud, McClure, and French butcher shops – carcass as paint (it dropped right through Soutine’s floor) … flesh jubilation…extremes of the sense…may involve quantities of dark fabric and paint drawn from performance area outward into audience […] smell, feel of meat. (62)

This establishes a chain between works: Hesp’s *HARD C*CK is inspired by Schneemann’s *Meat Joy*, and Schneeman’s *Meat Joy* drew inspiration from Artaud (presumably from his manifesto for a “Theater of Cruelty”) and Artaud’s proposition regarding skin which inspires this thesis. Working forwards, we can move from flesh in Schneemann to skin and (skin)aesthetics in Hesp’s work. Schneemann’s notes highlight flesh as an aesthetic material, flesh as the site for sensation, and the ability of other materials – “dark fabric and paint” – to represent the flesh. The distance between the spectator and the performer/performance is also minimised in *Meat Joy* as Schneemann proposes an extension of flesh, or the movement of flesh aesthetics, from performer into the audience in such a way as to connect the two.

*Meat Joy* is also a multi-sensory piece which focuses on the movement of bodies, the quality of movement, and the quality of felt sensations. This focus is reflected in Schneeman’s performance notes such as “slow slow and wild against the skin […] (others pulse by me)” (65) which indicate her aspirations for the performer’s experience of the piece (but conceivably also the spectator’s experience). Hesp’s own production notes emphasise the skin as the site of sensory engagement:

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TOUCH PLAY SEE
RUB GRIND HOLD
BEAT ((PULSE)) SHUDDER
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It is an effective epigraph for the performance for the way it mobilizes the skin, both the spectator’s and the performer’s, to engage it in the ways described above – “RUB” “SHUDDER” “BEAT” “((PULSE))” – as a sensory receptor. There is an emphasis, lacking in Anzieu’s theories, on the quality of the touch; indicators of duration (“((PULSE))” or “BEAT”), pressure (“RUB” and “GRIND”) and intensity (“SHUDDER” or “HOLD”). HARD C*CK secures the skin as a site of engagement with sounds – “BEAT ((PULSE))” – and the ‘other’. The spectator “TOUCH[ES]” and/or “SEES” the skin being touched and touching others.

Both works stage flesh, representations of flesh or skin, and skin in close proximity to the spectator; it is the connection established between the performance and spectator by doing this that illustrates Schneemann’s argument that “We [the audience] become what we see, what we touch” (66), and Anzieu’s argument that “there is no group without a common skin” (SFT 97). It provides an aesthetic foundation for Artaud’s proposition that it is through the skin that metaphysical ideas, such as ‘self’ and ‘other’, must be made to re-enter the mind. Indeed, whether we (the audience) become what we “SEE”, or what we “TOUCH”, in HARD C*CK we become skin, conscious of our own skin, and the skin of the ‘other’, as well as the other skins on stage. As Connor explains in “the reforming, infinitely reformable contemporary sensorium, the associations of the skin with transmission, passage and connection become more emphatic than its functions of screening, or separation,” the skin becomes a “transbodily hyper organ” (TSB 66); in other words, as we shall see in the sections which follow, the skin, or the (skin)aesthetic slippage whereby other senses take and make skins, supports the skin as a medium through which ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ can be re-negotiated.

**Skin-to-Skin Contact**

This section considers how haptics can facilitate the imagined formation of a reconfiguration of the ‘common skin’ for the spectator, which is another register in which reconnection is achieved through the skin as sight/site of engagement in HARD C*CK. Rosalyn Driscoll explains that haptic sense is “the oldest, most comprehensive and complex of the senses, with receptors embedded throughout the body from the skin down to the joints and muscles” (qtd. in IT 77), and Josephine Machon explains how “haptic perception (incorporating tactile touch – skin to surface, skin against skin – and kinaesthetic and proprioception,” which refers to an extended sense of touch without touching, “is often crucial to the immersive performance experience; whether
via direct interaction and sensual involvement with the bodies and spaces of the work or via the sensual involvement of haptic vision that can come through the sensual aesthetic of the immersive world” (IT 77-78). I discuss the concept of “haptic vision,” or rather “haptic visuality” and the “haptic encounter,” as outlined by Marks and Bouchard respectively, in further detail in the final section of this chapter which considers the Vaseline scene for the way it “activates a sensory involvement akin to touch within [the spectator’s] act of looking alone” (IT 77-78).

Claudia Benthien creates a bridge between Serres’ The Five Senses and Anzieu’s The Skin Ego when she draws on “Serres’ image of a ‘skin dress’ as a person’s own ‘memory turned outward’” (220). Benthien writes:

Remembrance is concretely tied to the presence of skin perceptions; the loss of these perceptions is tantamount to a loss of memory. The skin as a surface whose sensory-motoric tonus must be continuously maintained through external stimuli corresponds to the libidinous charging of the psyche, the maintenance of “inner tension” […] The loss of that tension results in the fragmentation of the self, of memory, of social relationships. Here, it becomes very clear that […] the skin ego cannot be an image ego at all […] but instead a sensation ego that establishes and continuously sustains itself through tactile traces. (220)

I argue, however, that the spectator’s experience of watching skins, or of seeing the “skin dress” of the ‘other’ while wearing a sensation-based one of their own, does mean that at, some level, the skin-ego is an image ego. Indeed, the performer in HARD C*CK provides the skin-image for the spectator to engage with. As Benthien points out “remembrance is concretely tied to the presence of skin perceptions” and it is, indeed, the spectator’s skin-based memories which allow them to relate to the skin of the ‘other’ in the performance environment. In this respect, of course the skin-ego is predominantly a sensation ego but the “tactile traces” which sustain the skin-ego are those visually presented to the spectator which then trigger sensory memory. The idea that a skin-ego is “sustained” through tactile traces and sensation also reinforces the idea that sensation and skin-based performance, which cast the skin as an active and reciprocal site of engagement, are capable of influencing changes to a spectator’s psychical configuration – or more specifically to their skin-ego which responds to the sensations it sees, feels and/or remembers.
“Touch and the promise of touch,” as David Shearing writes “is an explicit dramaturgical tool” (72) as the anticipation of physical contact can be as palpable as the experience of touch itself. Jablonski corroborates Shearing’s idea when she observes that “much of the pleasure of sexual intimacy comes from the exquisite expectation of touch and the delight and relief of skin-to-skin contact with another person, before, during, and after the sex act” (119) – observations which help us to relate “touch and the promise of touch,” as tools, to the sexually encoded kinds of touch implied and anticipated in HARD C*CK. In the performance I watched, the first spectator Hesp chose to participate in the touch-based interaction declined to take the outstretched hand of the performer. The space between Hesp’s outstretched hand and the spectator represented the “promise of touch” or rather the anticipation of contact which became palpable – you could feel the wider audience willing the spectator not to leave the performer hanging. The audience watched this failure to connect with the same desire for touch and skin-based reconnection. There is pleasure in both the anticipation of and fulfilment of touch. It is voyeuristic but in the sense that Shearing “consider[s] voyeurism from a body-centred perspective [by] replac[ing] the sexual pleasure,” which is conventionally attached to the concept of voyeurism, with “a more nuanced erotics: a desire for touch” (73-74). In this sense, the spectator could feel themselves in the skin of the performer in as much as they shared the desire for touch, specifically a desire for the audience member to take Hesp’s outstretched hand.

Having been declined the first time, Hesp continued his search for reconnection to the ‘other’. He extended his hand towards the audience once more, found the hand of a willing spectator and guided him into the circle. Marvin Gay’s “Let’s Get It On,” prompted laughter from the audience and provided the backing track to the intimate scene of touch between the two strangers. They did not get it on but the lyrical framing of the scene positions it within the wider context of the arenas of sexual activity and the desire for contact, which supports my reading of the episodic scenes as part of a wider narrative of the stages of sexual encounter. The performer and the spectator stood face-to-face, Hesp moved his hand towards the spectator’s hand. In isolation, it is about touching and consent and negotiating an understanding between ‘self’ and ‘other’ through the skin. The spectator looked nervous; his hand was visibly shaking (the representative of the “trembling edge” of the circle). It was apparent that he was uncertain of what to do/touch, and of what was expected of him in this interaction.
The spectator stood facing Hesp. There was no dialogue but the performer smiled reassuringly at the spectator while maintaining skin-to-skin contact (rediscovering the pleasure in skin). As the tactile contact continued – hands on hands, hand to face, hand to abdomen – the spectator took off his glasses (perhaps expecting more from the encounter?) as if wanting to reveal more of himself to the ‘other’. The action serves to reinforce Artaud’s proposition because it could only be through the spectator’s skin that an understanding of the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ could re-enter the spectator’s mind in the performance environment. Figure 2 shows the same scene but at a different performance of HARD C*CK; this interaction also features as a promotional video (“HARD C*CK Trailer 1”) on Robert Hesp’s website. In this video, the spectator, who was tentative at first, became more confident in his tactile exploration of the performer’s body. When Hesp removed his hands, which initially placed the spectator’s hand on his abdomen, we can see that the spectator-participant’s thumb slowly started to stroke the performer. This was, therefore, a skin-based negotiation of the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

During this scene the audience become what they see – in the formation of a reconfigured ‘common skin’ – because skins remember what it is to touch and to be touched in the way that they see performed before them.

**Vaseline Skins**

Laura U. Marks’ *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) considers intercultural and feminist works for how the film itself functions as a metaphor for the skin and the phenomenon of embodied spectatorship. Marks explores the concept of haptic visuality in which the spectator feels the surfaces of objects through optical interaction and their own embodied knowledge. Thus, sight can approximate tactile interaction. Marks’ idea of the interaction between the film and the viewer operates at surface level (the skins/materials shown in the film, the material of the literal film, and in the space between spectator and film, in much the same way as the space operates between the spectator and performer in HARD C*CK) and draws on theories of embodied spectatorship. She describes the “tactile and contagious quality of cinema as something we viewers brush up against like another body” (xii), and the way the “works [she considers] pollute viewers’ idea of a cultural distinction, implicating each of us in them” (xii), something which emphasizes the way that skin as stimulus motivates the spectator to feel in contact with the film and to feel themselves in the skins shown. A comparable dynamic takes place, as we have
seen through my discussion of touch-based scenes in *HARD C*CK, within the setting of the performance environment.

Gianna Bouchard expounds on the wound as a site that invites not only the experience of haptic visuality but the haptic encounter, or the possibility of “vision becoming like touch” and how this relates to the spectator (163). The interest in the wound can be traced back to the anatomy theatres of the fourteenth century. Dissections were part of a new method of truth seeking; however, the spectator could only watch the process. The relationship between the tactile (the incised skin, for example) and the visual (the observation of the incised skin) begins to converge as the spectator’s gaze is drawn in through the wound; they can imagine the materiality of the cut, the sensations, and the surrounding flesh. Their eyes insert themselves into the wound, become investigative, and take imagined ownership of the skin on display. When I discuss the spectator’s belief that they think they know what it feels like to inhabit the skins on stage, it is the haptic gaze and, often, the haptic encounter, to which I refer.

Through an analysis of Caravaggio’s *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1603), Bouchard investigates how openings in the body invite spectatorial probing or a visual-tactile search for knowledge. Saint Thomas wanted to touch Christ’s wounds to re-affirm Christ’s identity as visual evidence was insufficient. Caravaggio’s painting depicts Saint Thomas’ finger inside the incision (giving the illusion of depth). Saint Thomas’ visual-tactile investigation is, therefore, an attempt to understand the ‘other’, or the other’s ‘identity’, and how the ‘self’ relates to ‘other’, through the skin. Bouchard suggests that we might read the paint itself as a skin and links her reading to Anzieu’s theory of the skin-ego, specifically the function of the skin as an inter-relational surface. I believe that this argument can be developed further to account for the relationship between the two-dimensional stimulus (the painted figures/image) and three-dimensional space (the space occupied by the spectator). Bouchard suggests that the two-dimensional subjects of the painting draw the spectator’s gaze into the physical arrangement of the scene, specifically towards the finger under the skin. Saint Thomas’ posture, the raised skin above Saint Thomas’ finger, and Christ’s hand guiding the investigation is conducive of the haptic encounter for the observer. The arrangement of the characters in the painting – a half circle gathered around Christ – invites the viewer to complete the formation and to join in Saint Thomas’ literal haptic encounter by inserting their eyes into the skin of the image. The guided touch-tour through the skin parallels Hesp’s guiding of the touch-based interaction in *HARD*
C*CK; Hesp guided the hand of the ‘other’, the spectator, who touches his skin and comes to understand Hesp (as ‘other’) through his own skin (sense of ‘self’). Painted skins on canvas will always invite haptic visuality and, indeed, comparisons to the literal skin (see Serres’ writing on Pierre Bonnard’s nudes (37)) but the application of such materials (paints, for example, or Vaseline) to bodies imbues them with a three-dimensionality, a layering, which invites the spectator to penetrate the second skins and metaphorically get under them.

Connor explains that “in such processes [of layering], the skin is doubled by the substances with which it merges, which can be applied to, rubbed or worked into it” (TBS 179) and HARD C*CK’s use of Vaseline creates this doubling, or a film-like second skin, as a literal wrapping. The performance begins with Hesp’s interaction with the Vaseline. His movements are slow, rhythmic, and repetitive. He shapes the mass of Vaseline to a point, lifts half of it up, then drops it back down again. He then covers himself in Vaseline, slicking it up and down his arms and across his chest, until the viscous second skin begins to shine under the lights (see figure 4 below).
The Vaseline scene suggests how future productions might use materials to make audiences into “what [they] see [and] what [they] touch,” or more specifically how materials can be used to make skins out of spectators. I envisage that this could happen either through the spectator’s direct contact with such substances which, as I will explain shortly, can preserve something of the skin or, as is the case with *HARD C*CK, I suggest that such materials provoke an enhanced experience of haptic visuality via the skin. This is because spectators have embodied memories of how it feels to interact with Vaseline, for example, and so can relate to the skin of the ‘other’ on stage and may come to think they know what it feels like to inhabit that skin.
Connor writes at length about the relationship between practices of unction and the skin. He focuses on oil-based substances because “as well having an affinity to the skin, oil has many features that make it apt to be considered as skin-like in itself” (*TBS* 182). The Vaseline used in *HARD C*CK is similarly oil-based and skin-like, and fulfills the role of a second skin or the secondary narcissistic wrapping as well as drawing the gaze of the audience. Vaseline warms to the touch, it responds to skin-contact and preserves the impressions of this contact (fingerprints and pressure). It is also soft and serves reparative functions to damaged skin. These are properties which arguably make it analogous to a “wrapping of wellbeing” responsive to the skin.

Vaseline, like oil, has “the property of spread [and its] natural tendency is to move evenly across a surface, forming a thin film upon it” (*TBS* 182). Hesp spreads Vaseline to create the second “skin-like” surface, or the “thin film,” on top of his own skin. The Vaseline then “cling[s] to itself in attenuation” (*TBS* 182) and draws in the spectator’s eyes, as I have mentioned, so that they might share in the imagined occupation of this second skin. Rubbing materials into the skin indicates the potential for the creation of skins in the performance environment:

> Oil is versatile; like a skin it can be turned. Though oil is applied to surfaces, its power derives from a welling up of what is deep or submerged. So, sitting on the surface as a sheen-like second skin oil also provides a kind of hypodermis, a skin which comes from and sinks below the skin. (*TBS* 187)

It is this welling up and sinking of Vaseline, as a (skin)aesthetic, which both sinks the spectator’s eye into skin and facilitates the formation of the reconfigured ‘common skin’ through the haptic encounter and haptic visuality. I want to draw attention to the concept of a skin which “can be turned,” and the fact that the skin “can be partially penetrated by [materials such as] water, oil [and] dirt” (*TBS* 214), because it means that the skin can be turned into the substances, or rather the substances can be turned into skins, which double the first skin by preserving something of it. Andrea Stevens’ study of the painted body in early modern drama similarly points out that “paint also captures the potential unpredictability of a substance that manages to occupy different states of matter” and she presents the *OED*’s definition of paint as “a liquid which when spread over a surface dries to leave a thin layer of colour or protective coating; the dried film itself” (3) which emphasises paint’s quality as a second skin. Indeed, the “protective coating,” or the “dried film itself,” on top of the performer’s skin is
described as almost intractable from the first. Similarly, in *HARD C*CK, the function of the skin with Vaseline blurs the inner and outer skins because the substance carries with it (a welling up of) the literal skin beneath and serves a doubling function, or what I have argued might symbolically represent the secondary narcissistic wrapping for the performer. A literal second skin, in and of itself, does not necessarily have psychic effects but within the context of the performance’s aims we can speculate that such second skins serve as psychic integumentation, in Connor’s terms, against society’s impingement on the skin-ego.

While above I have largely been reading the second skins as symbolic of psychic processes, we must also understand that spectators will engage with the literal spectacle in and of itself. If “oil has the tendency to form skins, its tendency to spread also helps associate it with the spreading or transfer of virtues or properties between skins and across individual bodies” (*TBS* 182), which means that Vaseline is an ideal substance for connecting skins. The spectator does not have to touch the Vaseline to activate its potential as a transbodily substance, or its potential to “turn” like a skin, or to create a reconfigured imagining of the ‘common skin’ between the spectator and the performer. Through haptic visuality the spectator vicariously rediscovers the pleasure in skin by watching the performer play and writhe through 5kg of Vaseline, watching as he creates a second skin, and *knowing* at skin-level how it would feel to inhabit Hesp’s skin at that moment.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has considered scenes of direct skin-to-skin contact between the performer and spectator(s) in line with *HARD C*CK’s aim to “rediscover the pleasure of skin in live space.” *Rediscovery*, as I suggested, is significant in terms of its parallels to Artaud’s proposition that metaphysical ideas, such as ‘self’ and ‘other’, must be made to *re-enter* the spectator’s mind through the skin. In turn, this is significant because it relates to the way in which ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ were originally derived, in Anzieu’s theory of *The Skin Ego*, through the infant’s experience of skin-to-skin contact. The infant’s formation of a skin-ego and, therefore, also its fantasy of the ‘common skin’ (the tearing of which precedes the formation of the skin-ego), requires the infant’s experience of the primary wrapping of narcissism. I argue that *HARD C*CK’s aims reflect a desire not only for contact, and rediscovering the pleasure in skin, but that the performer’s actions can be understood as analogous to the desire for a secondary narcissistic wrapping. The piece
is a performative, skin-based, exploration of the themes of sex and sexuality and Hesp explains that his aim was to address the “lack [of] sex education for specifically LGBT and queer people” which he argues is not “setting people up for the best in terms of body awareness or self-confidence” and while the audience are not necessarily aware of this, during the performance, I have suggested that Hesp’s creation of second skins may be symbolically representative of a desire to rectify society’s pathogenic impingement on the skin-ego. I have argued that the societal impingement takes the form of current sex education which does not address different sexualities or gender identities (until 2020 when new guidelines are in effect) which may be damaging to a young person’s sense of ‘self’, creating feelings of non-normativity, if they do not see adequate representation.

The type of skin-to-skin contact in the scenes of audience interaction, as well as the audience’s response to it – reaching out hands, for example, to touch the performer’s – conveys meaning and, therefore, Hesp conceivably creates a supportive, receptive, secondary wrapping of narcissism around himself. Indeed, I have introduced and considered a number of (skin)aesthetic materials including paint and Vaseline, as well as their application, to suggest not only how HARD C*CK expresses the fantasy of “a reinforced […] skin” but how the spectator’s visual engagement with the skin(s) of the ‘other’ creates a “mentally extended sense of touch” in their experience of the haptic encounter which reconfigures the shared skin with the performer. While the audience may have been unaware of the work’s wider intentions, I have suggested that HARD C*CK has educational value as the piece conveys the intention to have a “frank discussion” about sex and demonstrates sex positivity throughout.

We have seen how the spectacle of the application, or unction, of Vaseline and paint enables the spectator to think that they know what it would feel like to be in Hesp’s skin. I conclude this chapter, therefore, by looking forward to the rest of this thesis with a passage borrowed from Connor’s The Book of Skin which suggests unction’s full potential:

by rubbing and massage [unction] is an action that testifies to the skin’s power to be turned from a layer, barrier, or surface into a mingled and mingling substance, into flesh and more than flesh, into an ideal compounding of substances. If the application of oil constitutes an imaginary sealing, it also makes of the skin the possibility of interfusion or interchange. Kneaded dough, or shaped wax is
frequently associated with the making of new life. It is surely for this reason that myths of the making of life so frequently involve the kneading and cooking of clay into flesh. (225-226)

Let me draw your attention to my first epigraph: “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee/ From darkness to promote me?” The quotation, taken from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), recounts Adam’s words to God and, later in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), inspires the Creature’s understanding of himself as Frankenstein’s Adam. Both men (of sorts) were created from the materials associated not just “with the making of new life” but, in the case of Frankenstein’s Creature, with the remnant materials of old life kneaded anew. From clay to the pieces of flesh and skin that Frankenstein shapes to form the Creature – as literal embodiment of a ‘common skin’ – materials can clearly be repurposed as skin in acts of creation.

Frankenstein’s Creature is both “flesh and more than flesh” (*TBS* 225), therefore, in as much as the assemblage draws together several different skins from several different bodies to function and feel as one. It is this phenomenon or, more specifically, how skin can be both skin and more than skin through its expansion into other sensory modalities and materials that I investigate in the performance environment. The material used to create the Creature, for example, represents the turning of dead skin, no-sense, to ‘common skin,’ common-sense, and sensory receptor in *Frankenstein*. In the chapters which follow, I consider the extended sense of connection between skins, and materials which come to impact on, or represent, skins in spectatorship. I consider how (skin)aesthetic conditions in the performance environment constitute the formation of felt ‘common skins,’ skin images of ‘self’, and sound images of ‘self’ through the manipulation of the spectator’s senses and skin.

Indeed, the practice of unction need not be confined to the massaging action of oils into skin; there are other ways of drawing the spectator into the skin of the ‘other’ or recreating the spectator’s skin and projecting it into the performance environment. The spectator’s skin might be massaged by sound, for example, as in Donna Huanca’s *SCAR CYMBALS* (2017) and, as we shall see in Chapter 3, sound has the ability to form skins both in relation to the spectator’s own skin and in terms of sound’s ability to carry with it something of the skin. Alternatively, it might be the imposition of a physical skin-like membrane which holds spectators together to form a literal ‘common skin’ as in *Macbeth* (2010), which parallels the suturing of skins in
Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), and the tearing of skin as carried by sound in Tristan Bernay’s production of *Frankenstein* (2017). In this sense, *HARD C*\(^*\)\(^C\) is the least attenuated of my case studies, because it considers scenes of direct skin-to-skin contact and the application of materials to the skin, which serve as ‘second skins,’ as well as the experience of haptic visuality which motivates the spectator’s belief that they think they know what it feels like to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense. This may, however, be achieved in more attenuated ways as well, as the thesis will go on to explore.
Chapter 2: Skin Ecologies in *Macbeth*

Just as flat or irregular fabric becomes islands, hems, flounces, frills, gatherings, sewn decorations, so does our skin form the continuous backdrop, the base note of the senses.

– Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*

The focuses of this chapter are William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, published in The First Folio (1623), director Lucy Bailey’s production of *Macbeth* (2010) at the Globe Theatre, a giant sheet of fabric, and the skins within it. In the previous chapter I introduced the concept of “(skin)aesthetics”, a number of (skin)aesthetic materials, and the scenes of direct skin-to-skin contact which reconfigure Anzieu’s concept of the ‘common skin’ in the performance environment. In this chapter, the relationship between skins becomes slightly more indirect as I consider how the fabric which covers the audience in Bailey’s *Macbeth* (see figure 5 below) functions as a (skin)aesthetic to extend the spectator’s tactile sense, and sense of ‘self’, through the production of a literal ‘common skin.’ The spectator’s skin “form[s] the continuous backdrop [or] the base note of the[ir] senses” (Serres 70) but, in this production, the spectators’ skins are set in the same fabric backdrop with their collective tactile sense spreading around it, supported by the fabric’s elasticated quality.

Scholars have long considered embodied spectatorship at the Globe. Stephen Di Benedetto, for example, points out that:

> whether we are milling about in the pit, shifting from leg to leg through the duration of the piece, or feeling the boards of the benches in the galleries bite into our glutei maximi, we are attentive to our bodily state as we watch the play. (TPS 90)

But this chapter isn’t about the aesthetics of seated spectatorship, it’s about the skinbodied experiences of those standing in the pit. Penelope Woods also engages with Bailey’s *Macbeth* in her study of audience affect. While Woods only mentions the skin once in her discussion of fainting – “[blood] floods to the surface of the skin in order to cool [the spectator] down” (237) – her research methods have influenced my study. Woods uses the Globe Archive’s Front of House (FOH) reports to investigate the phenomenon of fainting, stage blood, and the weather as constructing
or disrupting illusion and affect. In this chapter, I use FOH reports to analyse audience behaviour within the fabric and discuss what it might suggest about their experience of the play and the relational dynamics of spectatorship more generally. This is just one way that I consider “theatre ecology,” which, Baz Kershaw explains, “reference[s] theatres and performances as ecosystems [and] refers to the interrelationships of all the factors of particular theatrical systems, including their organic and non-organic components” (15). Such an analysis allows me to suggest how various ecologies at the Globe might be re-considered with recourse to the skin, (skin)aesthetics, and the skin-based experience of spectators.
Figure 5. The Audience Canopy in Rehearsal, Macbeth (dir. Lucy Bailey, 2010), Production Photos, SGLA. Reproduced in Penelope Wood’s thesis “Globe Audiences: Spectatorship and Reconstruction at Shakespeare’s Globe.” 2012. p.211.

Evelyn B. Tribble’s Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Theatre (2011), which explores methods for “reconstructing the cognitive ecology of early modern theatre” (166), concludes with a proposal for a
model “of cognitive ecology [which] allows us to see the dynamic and relational component of any theatrical enterprise” (166). Tribble explains that “a truly ecological view of acting and cognition demands that we focus on the entire system, not just on one part of it” (157), which:

includes such elements as neural and psychological mechanisms underpinning the task dynamics; the physical environment(s), including the relationships between playing and audience space; cognitive affects such as parts, plots, and playbooks; technologies such as sound or lighting; the social systems underpinning the company […] the economic models by which the company runs; the wider social and political contexts […] and the relative emphasis placed upon various elements of the enterprise. (151)

Although I largely focus on just “one part,” the fabric, I emphasise the concentric networks which stem from it – including the relationships between spectators, actors, and staff and between those agencies and the material setting – as part of a wider ecology at the Globe. By focussing predominantly on “the relationships between playing and audience space,” the material which connects the two, and the staff who monitor these spaces, I suggest how the fabric not only facilitates an extended sense of touch but also enables us to recognise the audience as a microcosm of society and, more specifically, as part of the disordered society presented in Macbeth.

This chapter first considers Shakespeare’s sensitivity to skin before reading Macbeth through the optic of skin. I then introduce the concept of the ecology of the passions which refers to the early modern belief that the physiological, psychological, and non-human world are interconnected and in a state of flux. I suggest how Bailey’s production of Macbeth might be understood to dramatize such ecologies before suggesting how this early modern world-view also accords with more recent psychoanalytic and cognitive ideas which recognise the influence of, and our interdependency on, others for our sense of ‘self’. In light of this, I argue that we might read Macbeth’s skin-based experience, in Bailey’s production, in relation to Anzieu’s concept of the ‘sieve skin-ego,’ which refers to an imagined deformation of

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16 Tribble’s research contributes to the fields of Distributed Cognition and the philosophy of Extended Mind and, by considering various artifacts (such as playbooks, plots, parts and space) and training structures (such as apprenticeships) within the early modern theatre, she gives a historical account of strategies of memory and attention.
the psychical container, and Anzieu’s concept of the fantasy of the ‘common skin.’ I conclude with a reading of spectatorial behaviour which aims to highlight how more recent cognitive ideas relate to the early modern ecologies discussed at the beginning of the chapter. I suggest how the fabric both facilitates and complicates a literal ‘common skin’ configuration and how this allows us to reflect on spectatorship and immersive practice more generally.

**Shakespeare’s Skins**

Set in medieval Scotland, *Macbeth* is a tale of murderous ambition that offers readers and audiences alike scenes of witches, regicide, imagined daggers, madness, suicide and, most significantly for this thesis, skin. Indeed, Shakespeare’s writing displays a “heightened awareness of skin” which, suggests Jennifer Rae McDermott, “is likely a consequence of his upbringing because his father’s trade involved tanning goat and deer hides” (158). “Shakespeare may even have helped to prepare these skins,” she explains, “before stitching them into gloves” (McDermott 158). Shakespeare therefore may have had a feel for skin and this has long captured the imagination of scholars. In 1935, for example, Caroline F.E. Spurgeon recognised that “there is one substance in especial to which [Shakespeare] is markedly sensitive and that is the texture of the skin” (82). Farah Karim-Cooper writes more recently that Shakespeare as the “son of a glover, whether consciously or not, would have viewed the hand and its accessories as crucial symbols of identity and character” (10). While Karim-Cooper focuses on the relationship between the glove, the hand, and identity, I suggest that skin and material are also closely associated with each other in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The description, for example, of Macbeth’s defeat of Macdonwald in battle illustrates this:

Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel  
Which smoked with bloody execution,  
Like Valour’s minion carved out his passage  
Till he faced the slave –  
Which ne’er shook hands nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th’chops,  
And fixed his head upon our battlements. (1.2. 17-23)

Whether consciously or not, Shakespeare’s description equates skin with fabric because Macbeth “unseams” the Rebel leader. The staging of Bailey’s *Macbeth*,
produced in collaboration with designer Katrina Lindsay, also seams the spectators’ skins into fabric and, indeed, the fabric itself is described in terms which relate to qualities of the skin: a “membrane” (Boyle 213; Woods 212), for example, or as “porous” (Anon. 1) with a “sense of visceral immediacy” created as the “groundlings’ heads poke through a perforated black sheet” (Anon. 2 [my emphasis]).

There is scope, therefore, to read Macbeth through the optic of skin. Duncan’s declaration that “there’s no art/ To find the mind’s construction in the face” (1.4 11-12), for example, or Macbeth’s admission that “strange things I have in head, that will to hand” (3.4 140), highlight a relationship between psychological and somatic planes. Duncan’s comment, similarly to Spurgeon, implies that character can be read through the skin. And while “hand” appears to be a straightforward substitute for “action”, in Macbeth’s comment, the hand is also emblematic of the sense of touch (McDermott 156). The hand is the agent in Macbeth, and the image of bloody hands is emblematic of the play, but the skin which covers the hand is overlooked in criticism.

Macbeth would feel the dagger, for example, as an extension of his skin in the skin-to-skin, or rather skin-through-skin, contact he makes with Duncan during the stabbing. Duncan’s skin is necessarily the site for receiving the dagger. Skin is the surface Lady Macbeth scrubs when she imagines she sees the bloody traces of murder on her hands – “Out damned spot – out, I say.” (5.1 33) – and it is upon her skin that she imagines the lingering smell of blood. When others speculate that Macbeth “feell[s]/His secret murders sticking on his hands” (5.2 16-17), it is the skin that murder is imagined sticking to. These ideas and images emphasise “Shakespeare’s intuitive grasp of ‘skin’s’ singular ability to register [the] motions of experience” (Gallagher and Raman 18).

Recent scholarship considers the role of skin, touch, and haptics in Shakespeare’s plays including Othello, The Winter’s Tale, and King Lear but, as I have suggested, the significance of skin in Macbeth is neglected. Unlike Othello which features the greatest number of references to skin or touch of all Shakespeare’s plays (McDermott 156), direct references to the skin, or the texture of the skin (the “withered” witches (1.3 41) for example) in Macbeth are comparatively few. The word “skin” itself appears only once. Nonetheless, the skin enjoys a bloody ubiquity in Macbeth, to which the frequent references to breaches in its continuity are testament:

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature
For ruin’s wasteful entrance. (2.3. 113-116)

During the European Renaissance period, the unease surrounding incisions to the skin was alleviated somewhat through discourse and anatomical illustrations which presented the breaking, or removal, of skin as a prerequisite for uncovering medical truths. The act of murder, however, renders the “gashed stabs,” or broken skin, as a “breach in nature” – “nature” here referring to the body-politic or natural order (although, arguably, the breaches in Duncan’s skin are prerequisite to realising the truth of the witches’ prophecy). The gashes invite “ruin’s wasteful entrance” which recognises the skin as a site of interchange but speaks at a wider level of deformations in the body-politic. While I return to the idea of deformations in the body-politic, or the natural order, in the final section of this chapter, it is the skin’s permeable nature which motivates my reading of Bailey’s *Macbeth* in line with the early modern world view.

**Early Modern Ecologies**

In “Preposterous Nature in Shakespeare’s Tragedies” (2016), Philip Armstrong discusses early modern ecologies and suggests the benefits of reading the “Shakespearean stage as a network of engagements amongst a diverse and ever-changing set of agents” (113). Armstrong begins with the concept of “nature” and points out that it “is always a slippery word” (104) and might refer to environmental nature, human nature, or the “natural” order. With recourse to Bruno Latour’s concept of the “Modern Constitution,” a mindset which emerges during the seventeenth century and understands humans in opposition to non-human nature, Armstrong writes that “we should expect to find in Shakespeare’s works, on the cusp of the early modern transition, something very different” (105). As Shakespeare is writing before the emergence of the modern constitution, Armstrong explains that:

> Shakespeare and his contemporaries perceived the continuities between human nature (what we now call human biology) and the larger non-human natural world (plants, animals, lands, waters, weather, and so on) to be literal and material, rather than merely rhetorical as we have (from our modern perspective) too often assumed [...] Shakespeare draws on this interconnected (or hybrid, as Latour
would call it) quality of human and non-human nature everywhere in the tragedies. (108-109)

Gail Kern Paster’s study of the ecology of the passions, or “psychological materialism – what [she] call[s] psychophysiology,” similarly refers to the early modern concept that “there was no way to separate the psychological from the physiological” which in turn was inseparable from non-human nature (12). In Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage (2015), Paster explains that “the passions — thanks to their close functional relation to the four bodily humours of blood, choler, black bile, and phlegm— [were perceived to have] a more than analogical relation to liquid states and forces of nature” or, in other words, “the stuff of the outside world and the stuff of the body were composed of the same elemental materials” (4). The skin can be factored in here because, in the early modern view, “the humoral body was one in flux […] and the skin’s porous quality made the body and soul vulnerable to penetrative vapors and contamination” (Karim-Cooper 166): the skin was understood to function as an intermediary between the internal and external world.

Armstrong takes melancholy, “so vital to understanding several of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes (including […] Macbeth)”, as an example and explains that “black bile doesn’t just cause melancholy; melancholy somehow resides in it” (110). He argues that the “execution of [the Macbeths’] murderous and tyrannous intentions involves a struggle to command both their own natural agencies (the animal spirits, blood, bile, gall and other substances that govern their minds and bodies) and the equivalents of those agencies in the non-human environment” (Armstrong 112) and suggests how the dagger scene in Macbeth exemplifies this struggle. He writes:

the very air into which [Macbeth’s] eyes are gazing becomes infected with his melancholic humour and its congealed fantasies. Such moments conform exactly to Paster’s notion of an early modern ‘ecology of the passions’; they ‘disperse agency from the body out into the environment and back’, in such a way that ‘agency is vividly produced and just as vividly decentred’. Macbeth alternates between interpreting the dagger as a phenomenon projected outwards from his brain, and as an invitation or command from the external environment. (Armstrong 112)

Bailey’s Macbeth illustrates this struggle because the dagger is held by the witches, apparently unseen by Macbeth, which poses the question of whether the dagger is
produced by his melancholic mind (as congealed fantasy) or the external agent (the witch). The idea of the ecology of the passions links to the early modern ideas of the body-mind relationship whereby immersion in the material world informs knowledge through sense-perception. I argue, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, that the interconnectedness of spectator and material, and ‘self’ and ‘other’, within the (skin)esthetic form, models a comparable skin-based ecology. First, however, I consider how the production visually illustrates the early modern concept of the ecology of the passions through (skin)esthetic means on stage.

The Ecology of (Skin)Aesthetic Substances

The production might be said to illustrate the ecology of the passions, or at least a comparable exchange, through the (skin)esthetic representation and transfer of black bile between characters on stage. When Macbeth confronts the witches at the Pit of Acheron following Duncan’s murder, for example, they are circling a cauldron set beneath the stage. The “Double, double, toil and trouble,/Fire burn and cauldron bubble” (4.1. 10-11) chant causes three hands, blackened with paint, to shoot up from the cauldron. The witches start to rub and lick the writing hands and black paint smears across their faces. When they lower a shirtless Macbeth into the cauldron, so that he might see more of the prophecy, the disembodied hands rub his skin and face with black paint. I argue that the scene illustrates the early modern ecology of melancholy because Macbeth is “collied”, which literally means “blackened with coal, dust, or begrimed” (Paster 67), with stage paint. The substance, which visually resembles what we might imagine black bile to look like, is dredged up from below stage (the external and non-human) and transferred onto Macbeth’s skin which, in turn, influences his thinking (the internal) and breeds the impetus to murder again in conjunction with the prophecy.

The “gruel thick and slab” applied to Macbeth’s skin is composed of many poisonous ingredients, including “poisoned entrails”; “Toad, that […] sweltered venom”; “Root of hemlock”; and “slips of yew” (4.1. 5-27). It also includes “Gall of goat” (4.1. 27), or literal bile, as well as “sow’s blood, that hath eaten/ Her nine farrow; [and] grease, that’s sweaten from the murderer’s gibbet” (Shakespeare 4.1. 78-80). It exemplifies how the ecology of the passions works “in such a way that ‘agency is vividly produced and just as vividly decentred’” because although Macbeth later orders the murders of the Macduffs, this substance effectively decentres his agency as it can be understood as the witches’ supernatural influence over him via humoral
manipulation. If “black bile doesn’t just cause melancholy [but] melancholy somehow resides in it” then Macbeth’s painted second-skin is one of melancholy which links to the early modern idea of the humoral body/mind in flux with the external world. The (skin)aesthetic transfer illustrates the body-mind relationship – or, more specifically, it illustrates how melancholy can be transferred from the physical, external, world as well as coming from Macbeth’s internal, or mental, world – and accentuates the skin as the porous membrane which facilitates such a transfer. Bailey, intentionally or otherwise, has dramatized something of the ecology of Shakespeare’s worldview (in collaboration with designer Katrina Lindsay who helped realise Bailey’s vision for the production).

**Reconciling the Early Modern and Post-Freudian**

Unlike the transfer of (skin)aesthetic materials, however, which can be related to the ecology of the passions, the fabric’s configuration of various agents (spectators, actors, and staff) does not illustrate psychophysiology in any early modern sense of the concept (although, as we shall see, it might be understood to illustrate a “psychological materialism” of sorts). Spectator movement is not, for example, an ecology of the passions but a comparable sensation-based ecology of influence between agents and materials. Armstrong argues that the early modern concept of ‘psychophysiology’ challenges “the nucleus of modern individualism familiar to us today – particularly the notion of the rational, consistent, self-contained and self-determining will” (110), an idea I will problematize shortly, by explaining that:

[i]instead of deriving from a coherent motive located deep within the self, the behaviours, intentions, and actions of Shakespeare’s characters are dispersed across a network of interrelating impulses, passions, drives and influences, some deriving from the embodied mind and some from its exterior environment. To achieve anything these characters must manage not only their fellow characters, but also the disparate collection of agencies both within their own bodies and in the external non-human environment. (110)

Armstrong explains that “thinking about the relationship between characters and their environments ‘ecologically’ […] allows us to perceive the Shakespearean stage as a network of engagements amongst a diverse and ever-changing set of agents” (113). Nicola Boyle points out that Bailey’s *Macbeth* “put[s] the actions of the sisters […]
on stage more often than they appear in the printed text” (215) and interprets the increased presence as a dramatic representation of the influence of others. She writes:

in their first unscripted scene they initially observed Lady Macbeth as she anticipated Macbeth’s return, seeming to influence her thoughts […] Their influence over characters was seen again when Macbeth girded himself to kill Duncan; they choreographed the vision of the dagger and the second witch taunted Macbeth with it after she cut herself ritualistically with her own dagger to coat the visionary dagger with blood. (Boyle 215)

This constitutes an early modern ecological reading of the production as it recognises the network of influences that determine the action as opposed to, as is convention now, trying to read the witches, for example, as an externalisation of Macbeth’s psychological phenomena. This is not to suggest that phenomena such as Banquo’s ghost, or the blood Lady Macbeth imagines on her hands, are not such externalizations; however, it is clear that the witches, or the supernatural hands which apply the aforementioned bile-like substance, are independent agents and influencers in this production. Armstrong goes on to suggest that by:

focusing on agency in this sense we also eschew the temptation to impose a modern, post-Romantic or post-Freudian psychology of personality on Shakespeare’s characters, and we do a better job of responding to the psychophysiological epistemology of the time, within which all kinds of agents were in operation, sometimes in collaboration and sometimes in conflict, both within and outside the human body. (113)

I argue, however, that the early modern worldview which recognises the individual as subject to “a network of interrelating impulses, passions, drives and influences” actually accords with more recent psychoanalytic ideas (including, as we shall shortly see, therapeutic ideas) and cognitive ideas of the ‘self’ (such as the concept of the extended mind which I discuss later) and, indeed, specifically with Anzieu’s theory of The Skin Ego whereby skin-based intersubjectivity informs the development of a sense of ‘self’ and, in some cases, might result in the incomplete individuation of ‘self’. Taking another line on the agents in operation in Bailey’s Macbeth, we can see that the production enables the post-Freudian reading I propose without departing too far from the basic premise of psychophysiology whereby the psychological is informed
by embodied experiences. Bailey’s production, as we have seen, draws attention to early modern ecologies in action but Anzieu offers us the imaginative means to think about the ‘self’ in terms of influences “within and outside the human body” in a new way. In a comparable sense to the way that the humoral body was understood to be “one in flux [because of] the skin’s porous quality [which] made it vulnerable to penetrative vapors and contamination” (Karim-Cooper 166), Anzieu suggests that our sense of ‘self’ is mediated through the skin which is, similarly, theorized as porous to the influence of others. My psychophysiological reading of Macbeth’s psyche through the optic of skin highlights the ways in which agency is influenced by the ‘other’, through a consideration of Macbeth’s skinbodied experience and, in the final section, the skinbodied experiences of the audience. We have already seen how the ‘other’s’ influence might refer to the witches and the substances applied to Macbeth’s skin but henceforth the ‘other’ I focus on is Lady Macbeth and the touch-based influence she has on Macbeth.

**Shakespeare and the Amending Imagination**

Such ecological readings of the “network[s] of interrelating impulses, passions, drives and influences” can also be related to more general psychoanalytic practice which understands, or seeks to uncover, the influence of others on the individual’s formation, and sense, of ‘self’. *Macbeth*, for example, has been harnessed for its therapeutic potential. In *Shakespeare as Prompter: The Amending Imagination and the Therapeutic Process* (1994), Murray Cox and Alice Theilgaard’s purpose is “to show [that] Shakespeare has an inherent capacity to prompt the work of psychotherapists when movement comes to a standstill, and to demonstrate the relevance of the aesthetic imperative within therapeutic space” (8) which, in turn, increases empathy between therapist and patient. I return to the ideas of increased empathy, in the theatre as opposed to the therapeutic setting, in the final section of this chapter when I suggest how the staging might increase the spectator’s empathy with Macbeth because they see and experience the world of the play as he does. Cox and Theilgaard recognise that “the worlds of theatre and therapy, although separate and self-contained, are linked by the fact that their core energy system is the amending imagination” (26) and suggest how incorporating Shakespeare’s language, metaphors, and poetry in a therapeutic context can help improve clinical understanding of a patient as well as improving an individual’s understanding of themselves.
Indeed, as mentioned above, *Macbeth* has been used in forensic psychotherapy groups in which most participants have committed “violent offences ‘against [another] person’” (Cox and Theilgaard 28). Cox and Theilgaard explain that:

forensic psychotherapy is one of the spheres of professional activity where both literal and metaphorical boundaries to the body, and damage thereto, form part of the central dynamic issues being studied within therapeutic space [...] There is the need for the patient to learn the necessary nuances [...] between the impact of a penetrating look and a penetrating injury. This becomes clear if we consider the stab wounds caused by Macbeth’s dagger. As Meltzer (1992, 71) observes ‘every sense and orifice is a potential portal for the intruder’. The distinction between the psychological damage caused by the entrance of ‘ruin’ and the psychological damage caused by the entrance of a fatal stab wound, is the kind of theme which might maintain a therapeutic group in introspective rumination for many sessions. (28)

The ‘self’ is understood as permeable to the ‘other’s’ influence and actions which is closer to the early modern understanding of an ecological ‘self’ than it is to the “rational, consistent, self-contained and self-determining” sense of ‘self’ that Armstrong suggests forms “the nucleus of modern individualism familiar to us today.” The case study “Knives with Minds of Their Own,” for example, exemplifies how *Macbeth* was used in “the demisting of amnesia for a ‘dagger’ sequence from forensic ‘off-stage life’,” or, in other words, how the dagger scene from *Macbeth* was related to a real-world stabbing to help the patient, ‘Birgit’, recall the fatal stabbing she committed (Cox and Theilgaard 168). Cox and Theilgaard describe how group members had gestured and asked: “did you hold the knife like that?” and varied the stress on different words to try to help ‘Birgit’ recall, even re-live, the stabbing. Promptings from *Macbeth*, however, enabled the therapist to help assuage ‘Birgit’s’ amnesia. The therapist asked: “Could it be that in some way the knife went first and the hand followed it?” and ‘Birgit’ replied “My mind was in that knife [...] It (the mind, and then the knife) went into her” (Cox and Theilgaard 161). Although the initiating agency was originally hers, the idea that ‘Birgit’s’ intentions were transferred into the dagger and then into the other’s body establishes a psychodynamic ecology, of sorts, between ‘self’, ‘other’, and the material world which is comparable to the early modern world view. H.W. Fawkner’s literary study suggests that Macbeth “requires that pointing dagger as an indispensable connective link to attach him to the
possibility of murder” and that “the dagger is a dagger of intentionality” (qtd. in Cox and Theilgaard 161). Taking inspiration from Fawkner, the therapist understood that ‘Birgit’ required the connective link between mind, dagger, and the ‘other’ to be made for her, through prompting, in order to remember her role in the sequence.

Like the critics mentioned earlier, Cox and Theilgaard also draw attention to Shakespeare’s affinity for the skin. In addition, they also recognise the connection between Shakespeare’s use of skin and Anzieu’s. They write:

Shakespeare uses the skin as representative of the protective, the containing and filtering functions in much the same way as Anzieu does […] the skin being the outward, visible part, endowed with the capacity for variation, is not only an indicator of the state of the whole body but also of the mind. The state of the skin as a figure of speech may symbolize the mental state. (Cox and Theilgaard 298)

Further building on this connection, Cox and Theilgaard consider Fawkner’s analysis of the following passage taken from Macbeth:

Come, seeling Night,  
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day,  
And with thy bloody and invisible hand,  
Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond,  
Which keeps me pale! (Fawkner’s emphasis qtd. in Cox and Theilgaard 169)

Fawkner writes that the reference to the hawk’s eyelids being sewn together, or the practice of seeling, “joins joining and unjoining: healing and wounding, violation and repair” (qtd. in Cox and Theilgaard 169) which, once again, emphasises the close relationship between skin and fabric, or the skin being treated as fabric, in Shakespeare’s work. Cox and Theilgaard comment on “how closely this links with many psychoanalytic insights […] thinking particularly of the work of Anzieu on the skin ego […] and psychic envelopes, where wounding and healing, violation and repair are linked” (169); indeed, this is a dynamic I investigate in relation to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s relationship in the section which follows.

Furthermore, Cox and Theilgaard relate the “gashed stabs” in Duncan’s skin to the skin’s failure to contain or protect and, at a wider level, we can see how this corresponds with the disordered society. They draw connections between the “breach
in nature” and the “direct echoes of this phrase in Anzieu [who writes]: ‘one is in the

grip of hidden and uncontrollable forces, that one is opening a breach in the surface

of the skin’” (Cox and Theilgaard 28-29). I suggest that the breach in Duncan’s skin,

which catalyses the breach in the natural order, not only evidences the way in which

Macbeth is “in the grip of hidden and uncontrollable forces” in the early modern sense

of the ecology of the passions (black bile, for example, and the witches) but also, as

Cox and Theilgaard suggest, Macbeth experiences subsequent “psychological damage
cau sed by the entrance of [that] fatal stab wound,” or the act of regicide. I suggest that

the breach in the natural order also corresponds to “ruin’s entrance” at a metatheatrical

level by informing the disordered society of the audience in Bailey’s Macbeth.

Indeed, Cox and Theilgaard draw attention to Shakespeare’s “unrivalled
capacity to prompt intrapsychic and interpersonal reflection” (12) and suggest that his
accounts “of intrapsychic and interpersonal life are congruous with, and closely
mirror, life in the consulting room and the market place” (14-15). As Adrian Noble
writes in the foreword to Shakespeare as Prompter:

the subject of Shakespeare as Prompter is not the theatre but, strangely, it brought

me very close to the essential function of theatre; the first, the finest, the greatest
collective therapy session! It demonstrates […] that [Shakespeare’s] poetry has
the energy and the power to change the individual; and that in a performance,
shared by many hundreds of people, something can happen that is infinitely
enriching, invisibly healing. (xiii)

I am interested, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, in the semblances
between the society constructed as part of the play world in Bailey’s Macbeth and the
society outside of it. While the subject of Shakespeare as Prompter is not the theatre,
Cox and Theilgaard write that “life on-stage cannot exist without ‘ordinary off-stage
life’ and the latter is perpetually enriched by the former” (26) and this can help us to
consider the audience’s experience. We have considered how Macbeth works at the
intersections between wounding and healing in a therapeutic space and can, therefore,
hypothesise that there is potential for Macbeth to offer the opportunity for some
audience members with non-normative experiences (such as participants in
psychotherapy groups), to identify with particular scenes and to experience a change
that may be healing (‘Birgit’s’ amnesia lifted for example); however, it is also
reasonable to assume that the events portrayed in Macbeth will be outside the remit of
most spectators’ experience. Cox and Theilgaard suggest that “one of the ‘faults,’” which the amending imagination has the power to address, “may be an over-sheltered, too blinkered existence” (26). While not having committed or conspired to murder is not indicative of a particularly sheltered life, Cox and Theilgaard identify the way in which “Shakespearean theatre always restores the balance [by] throwing an illuminating beam of vicarious encounter with life on those areas in which direct personal experience may be wanting” (Cox and Theilgaard 26). We can therefore see the potential that *Macbeth* has for changing the individual spectator, in some sense, through their immersive experience of Macbeth’s world and, indeed, inner world.

**Didier Anzieu’s “Formal Signifiers and the Ego-Skin”**

When thinking about Macbeth’s inner world what comes into play in Bailey’s *Macbeth*, arguably, is Anzieu’s concept of the formal signifier which refers to the “psychic representatives […] of various forms of organization to the self and the ego” (*PE* 1). Or, in other words, the shape the subject imagines their psychic container to have. When we think of the term “signifier” we typically think of linguistics but Anzieu’s concept of the formal signifier refers to the imagined form of the psychical container and how it is informed by embodied and intersubjective experience. Anzieu explains how “despite [his] initial reticence about using the term ‘signifier’ outside the field of language” he was convinced by:

G. Rosolato’s (1984) arguments in his article ‘*Destin du significant*’ [in which Rosolato] distinguishes properly [between] linguistic signifiers (articulated to a signified and referring to a referent [and] constitutive of signs) and those that he calls signifiers of demarcation, which he relates to representations of things […] These signifiers originate in early infancy [and] their ‘weight of impregnation’ bears heavily upon psychic functioning. (*PE* 11)

The signifier of demarcation underpins the formal signifier because both are informed by sensorial impressions and relationships with ‘others’. These signifiers or representations allow “impressions, sensations and ordeals that are too early or too intense to be put into words to be […] committed to memory” (*PE* 11) and as Anzieu points out “there is an obvious relationship between the faults in the ego and distortions in tactile sensations” (*PE* 6). Signifiers of demarcation are naturally outside the field of language (at least at the point of their formation) because they precede the
infant’s acquisition of language. Psychoanalysis, however, asks the subject to describe the psychopathologically felt deformations of the formal signifier. In psychoanalysis “it is appropriate to lead the patient to describe [verbally] the particular configuration of his envelopes (which are generally preconscious) [but it may be] necessary [for the psychoanalyst] to name this configuration for him […] if he cannot express it except in gestures, postures, etc. – i.e. in non-verbal material” (*PE* 23). I argue, further on, that Macbeth describes the configuration of his formal signifier as a ‘sieve skin-ego’ by using the imagery of a scorpion-filled mind. Undoubtedly this would improve clinical understanding of Macbeth, if he were a real person, in a therapeutic context.

Anzieu agrees with Rosolato that “thanks to speech, the translation of those [enigmatic signifiers of demarcation] by means of linguistic signifiers is the major function of psychoanalysis” (qtd. in *PE* 12); however, this prioritises verbal language over body language and somatic experience. In Tristan Bernay’s *Frankenstein*, for example, the abandoned creature’s acquisition of language enables him to articulate the signifiers of demarcation, or his early experiences of abandonment, and the physical, multisensorial, bombardment, which was “too early [and] too intense to be put into words.” However, signifiers of demarcation “underlie […] the importance of the analogical body language that permits understanding without words” (*PE* 13), because Frankenstein’s Creature understood his first experiences as physically overwhelming despite being unable to express this verbally. Signifiers of demarcation “seem to be unlimited in number” (*PE* 12) and refer to any embodied experience that evaded language, but formal signifiers refer to the description of a shape, image or sensation, are restricted in number, and are “the object of psychoanalytic investigation” (*PE* 12). I suggest that if we analyse Bailey’s production of *Macbeth*, for the skin-to-skin relationships portrayed on stage, then Macbeth’s most likely psychical configuration would be that of the sieve skin-ego which I suggest points to the importance of such configurations in the psychological and social imaginary.

**Macbeth’s Sieve Skin-Ego**

The skin-ego, as we know, is a psychic envelope informed by skin-based experiences. It refers to the successful formation of a sense of individuation unless predicated by terms such as ‘sieve-skin’, or ‘muscular second skin,’ which indicate a fault in the physical or psychical plane. For clarification, the terms ‘psychic envelope,’ ‘psychic container,’ and ‘psychic wrapping’ refer to the same imagined outline, or container of psychical contents. The psychical container is where deformations and
transformations (imagined holes, reversals, bending lines, undulations, puckering, etcetera) are subconsciously felt by the subject to take place and, when questioned in psychoanalytic settings, the subject is often able to articulate the deformations.

The sieve skin-ego reflects one form of anxiety that results when the containing function of the skin-ego fails. It is felt as a:

[psychical] wrapping [which] exist[s] but without continuity, pitted with holes […] [T]houghts and memories are difficult to retain and they drain away […] the subject has a great fear of having an inside that is emptying itself out, and especially that aggressivity needed for any self-affirmation is leaking away. (TSE 110)

Anzieu’s summary of Colette Destombes’ case study on ‘Élénore’ models the concept of a sieve skin-ego in psychoanalysis. ‘Élénore’ was failing at school because she was unable to retain information; Destombes was at the point of giving up because ‘Élénore’ was similarly unable to retain information from her therapy sessions. Finally Destombes said:

“You know what, you’ve got a head like a sieve.” [And] the child’s manner and tone changed completely: “How did you guess?” For the first time […] Élénore had been given the right description of how she saw her Ego and her psychical functioning”. (TSE 71)

Following the correct labelling of her psychical configuration, ‘Élénore’ began to draw her own representations. She drew a bag with a closed pen-knife inside which, across a series of drawings, she began to open out. Anzieu analyses her creative work:

The bag was the wrapping of her skin-ego which was now continuous [the effect of the therapist’s correct summary of her psychic configuration] and could guarantee the continuity of her Self. The knife was her unconscious aggression, denied, closed up, turned back on herself, and which made cuts all over her psychical wrapping. Her hateful destructive envy could flow out through these multiple holes without too much danger – split, fragmented, and projected into numberless pieces. But at the same time, through the same holes, her psychical energy was draining away, her memory getting lost, the continuity of her Self crumbling, and her mind could not contain anything. (TSE 72)
In other words, the sieve skin-ego is “one common configuration of the skin-ego that results from unconscious attacks of hatred against the containing psychical wrapping” (*TSE* 72). The correct labelling of the psychical configuration as ‘sieve’ translates into physical “aggression [which] became more open and violent as ['Élénore’] attacked her therapist” (*TSE* 72). Macbeth, as I mentioned earlier, might be understood to similarly label his own psychical configuration following the murder of Duncan: “O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!” (3.2 39). Similarly to ‘Élénore’s’ knife which makes “cuts all over her psychical wrapping,” Macbeth’s labelling of his mind as “full of scorpions” encodes the threat of puncture and attack. This reinforces the idea that Macbeth’s psychical configuration takes the form of the sieve skin-ego. Further reinforcing this, the witches circle the Macbeths onstage as Macbeth describes his state of mind. There is a circular ring above them which has a fabric sheet attached that can be drawn around its circumference. The witches pull the sheet around with them. The fabric extends in an almost complete circle; however, there is not enough fabric to fully contain the couple. The effect of this, in conjunction with Macbeth’s labelling of his scorpion-filled mind, dramatizes the idea that the sieve skin-ego does not fully contain. Following the labelling, Macbeth becomes increasingly aggressive and orders the murders of the Macduffs.

If, as Cox and Theilgaard argue, “much pathology can originate from a failure to be fully and adequately enveloped” (28), we can assume that such failures motivate Macbeth’s original attraction to Lady Macbeth and we can see how her failure to fully, or adequately, envelop him following the murder might exacerbate any pre-existing deformations associated with a sieve skin-ego.

**The ‘Common Skin’ Fantasy in Bailey’s *Macbeth***

The concept of the sieve skin-ego is, therefore, not only the most obvious visual comparison to draw to the fabric in Bailey’s *Macbeth*, an idea I return to in the final section, but also the most appropriate with reference to the character of Macbeth. In *Suffering and Sentiment in Military Art* (2013), for example, Phillip Shaw equates Macbeth’s armour with “a form of ‘skin ego’” (194). Shaw clearly means, however, that the armour is the “second muscular skin” (*TSE* 67) because he argues Macbeth must wear it “to protect the core self from the intrusion of feminized affects” (195) which suggests pre-existing deformations to Macbeth’s psychic envelope. In Bailey’s *Macbeth*, Macbeth returns from battle as Thane of Cawdor and strips off his shirt. At
this point he is most vulnerable to the influence of Lady Macbeth but not, I argue, to the “intrusion of feminized affects” which Shaw appears to equate with an “unman[ning]” (194). Macbeth’s skin is exposed – he no longer wears the second skin, or armour, which protects and contains his sense of ‘self’ – and it is during this scene that Lady Macbeth influences him to murder.

Without his armour, Macbeth turns to the ‘other’ for the ‘second skin,’ or sense of reinforcement, because his skin-ego is conceivably “porous and full of holes” (TSE 67). The Macbeths fall to the floor in a passionate embrace as the plot to murder Duncan is conceived. Lady Macbeth, however, expresses her concerns:

Your face, my Thane, is a book where men
May read strange matters; to beguile the time,
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue – look like th’innocent flower,
But be the serpent under’t. (1.5. 61-65)

During this speech, Lady Macbeth touches Macbeth’s arms, back, and crotch – “be the serpent under’t” – with her face pressed very close to his. It is a scene of semi-sexual seduction as, through her caresses, Lady Macbeth really aims to seduce Macbeth to her plan. In alignment with the early modern concept of psychophysiology, Macbeth is impelled to act by external influences including the witches, skin-to-skin contact, and here Lady Macbeth but, as I have suggested, such ecologies of influence can also be read psychoanalytically.

The type of contact Lady Macbeth makes, for example, is significant: it is controlling and infantilizes Macbeth. While touching him, Lady Macbeth instructs Macbeth on how to conduct himself. She says that she will murder Duncan. She then places Macbeth’s Thane of Cawdor chain back over his neck, effectively dressing him, takes his hand, and leads him offstage as a mother might lead a child. This introduces another dimension to the permeability of Macbeth’s ego. Cox and Theilgaard write that “in clinical settings the therapist encounters patients whose parenting figures have not seen them ‘in their own right’ but given them roles not fit for them” and suggest that this “is the case with Coriolanus and his mother when Volumnia redesigns his role” (278). As the above quotation indicates, however, this is also the case with Lady Macbeth who looks to change Macbeth to befit the role of murderer. The Macbeths’ relationship has therefore been compared to a parent-child relationship by a number
of scholars. Peter Hildebrand argues that Lady Macbeth represents a maternal imago; Harold Bloom comments that “until she goes mad, she [Lady Macbeth] seems as much Macbeth’s mother as his wife” (177); and Michael Jacobs writes that “they are paired as husband-wife, but unconsciously as mother-son […] Lady Macbeth is the bewitching, sexually seductive mother, but she is also the incompletely separated nurturing mother” (173).

Indeed, Macbeth sees the “idealized parent” in Lady Macbeth and “is incapable of disobeying her, because she is revealed as the source of his strength” (Muslin qtd. in Jacobs 161-162) and Susan Bachmann writes that “rather than weaning [Macbeth] with care and thereby encouraging an individuation which both of them need, she threatens him with a severance that forces him to grip even tighter to her” (qtd. in Jacobs 158). Jacobs’ reading of Trevor Nunn’s Macbeth (1976), specifically the feast scene when Macbeth’s commitment to murder falters, corroborates Bachmann’s argument. Jacobs points out that Macbeth “tries to get closer to [Lady Macbeth], attempts at intervals to embrace her, to kiss her, and she pulls away and mocks him” (159). Jacobs suggests that “the powerful image [in Lady Macbeth’s infamous speech] of the child sucking at the breast surely threatens to emasculate [Macbeth]” (159), similarly I argue that it establishes a comparison between Macbeth and the “babe that milks”:

… I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this. (1.7 54-59)

In Lady Macbeth’s rejection of Macbeth’s desires for tactile reassurance (the threat of severance) we can read Macbeth in the image of the infant from whose boneless gums she would pluck her nipple: withdrawing contact, sustenance, and support.17

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17 Lady Macbeth’s violent imagining of infanticide also supports readings of her as the “bad mother” which, in turn, equate her with the witches, or the archetypal “bad mothers,” associated with infanticide (Bloom 189-190). H.P. Hildebrand similarly imagines a speculative production of Macbeth in “The Caledonian Tragedy” (1986), and argues that the witches should wear masks “that are, at least in part, replicas of Lady Macbeth’s face” (48).
Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to murder through tactile reassurance and the audience witness the blurring of the boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in a scheme negotiated through skin-to-skin contact. As Cox and Theilgaard explain: “where a stable sense of differentiated self-boundaries is not developed, fantasises of merger – or enactment of merger – will often be present. The most archaic form represents the revival of an early stage of primary identity of self and object […] of the infant with the mother” (278). The scenes of skin-to-skin contact are arguably representative of the fantasies of such merging. While Cox and Theilgaard conclude that “male and female images merge [in] Macbeth,” I argue that they merge in the more specific fantasy of infant/mother dyad. Susan Bachmann cites Barron who suggests that “the image in which [the Macbeths] are to be conceived is not that of the composite personality but of a mother and son who have failed to achieve separate identities” (qtd. in Jacobs 158-159) which supports my reading, further on, of the Macbeths’ ‘common skin.’

Even in Freudian psychoanalysis the self is not the completely self-contained and individualised one suggested by Armstrong above. Freud argued that the Macbeths could represent two halves of the same person and Jacobs identifies in this reading an allusion to the concept of the “folie à deux,” a French expression which “refers to the way in which two people act together in a way that either one would be unlikely to do on their own” (177). He goes on to explain that “there is a psychological blending between two people, so that it is difficult to know who contributes what to the psychological expression of the partnership” (Jacobs 177). This might be related to the concept of the formal signifier which is:

inscribed within the setting of an original phantasy requirement, which J. McDougall translates thus: ‘One body between two, one psyche between two’ (in other words, ‘a being missing half of itself’), which is another way of describing what I mean by the ego-skin, but an ego-skin confronted with a severely conflictual maternal imago. (PE 15)

The quotation above enables us to see how the formal signifier is born out of a “one body between two, one psyche between two” relationship which is comparable to the fantasy of a ‘common skin,’ or the relationship between the Macbeths as it plays out through the skin in Bailey’s production. I have outlined a number of ways that the mother-son relationship has been read in Macbeth but I argue that it can also be related
to the parent-child connection theorized in the formation of the ‘common skin,’ the skin-ego, and its deformations.

The imagined blending of skins and psyches manifests similarly in Anzieu’s case study of ‘Marie’. Anzieu explains to his patient ‘Marie’, who has anorexia, that “the sensation of a skin that obliterates itself doesn’t tally with your own wishes. It is the fulfilment in your imagination of your mother’s supposed wish, a way of pleasing her by disappearing,” to which ‘Marie’ admits “I do feel inhabited by desires that are not my own” (PE 5), just as Macbeth is inhabited by Lady Macbeth’s desires to murder and the witches’ prophecy. But “Macbeth expresses the terrible experience of losing one’s self” (Grunes 23) following the murder and “one of the strangely moving aspects of Shakespeare’s play is the mutual isolation that inserts itself between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as soon as Macbeth ascends the throne” (Williams 23). The fact that the isolation inserts itself following the realisation of the common goal (one psyche between two) marks the loss of a sense of shared ‘self’, or the rending of a ‘common skin,’ to part them, and supports the reading that the Macbeths formerly comprise two halves of the same person at an imaginative level akin to the ‘common skin’ fantasy.

Two skin-based scenes take place prior to the mutual isolation. The first follows Macbeth’s return as Thane of Cawdor. In this scene, as we know, the couple are physically very close as they plot Duncan’s murder. In Mark Ronan’s review of Bailey’s production, he recognises the portrayal of “the two of them [the Macbeths] as a young couple full of sexual energy and ambition” (Ronan). In Michael Coveney’s review he similarly comments on the way in which “they [the Macbeths] writhe in sexual ecstasy on his return from the fray” (Coveney). However, the Macbeths do not actually have sex in this production. Bailey explains that, in her interpretation of the play, “once Macbeth makes his pact with Fate […] the Macbeths’ marriage bed is sterile – they don’t sleep, they don’t have sex. The poisonous prophesy of the witches literally destroys all personal fulfilment, sexual and spiritual” (qtd. in Neill 6). There is skin-to-skin contact in this scene, but it is almost entirely withdrawn following Duncan’s murder, the second skin-based scene, in which Duncan’s skin is breached by “gash’d stabs” and his body is brought onstage wrapped in a bloodied white sheet. Bloom writes that the usually “unseen nature of the butchery allows us to imagine, rather horribly, the location and number of Macbeth’s thrusts into the sleeping body” (188); however, Bailey’s decision to bring the body on stage means only the bloodied sheet obscures the butchery. The blood-soaked sheet acts as a visual aid to imagining the location and number of stabs to the body. The lack of tactile contact, or skin-to-
skin support, following Duncan’s murder represents the mutual isolation akin to the rending of the common skin.

As Jacobs suggests, “as soon as Macbeth is without his Lady [following Duncan’s murder] he demonstrates the familiar manifestations of a self that has undergone a precipitous rupture from a self/self object bond, and is thus suddenly subjected to anxiety and fragmentation” (163). The “rupture from a self/self object bond,” or the Macbeth/Lady Macbeth infant/mother bond, reflects the “metaphorical mental activity that first of all substitutes one pair of oppositions (appearance/disappearance) for another (present/absent) in a system of communication that is non-verbal” (PE 13-14), as Lady Macbeth’s absence corresponds to the withdrawal of a consistent tactile relationship and might, therefore, correspond to the formation of Macbeth as ‘self’ separate from Lady Macbeth. We know, for example, that following Duncan’s murder, Macbeth does not involve Lady Macbeth as co-conspirator to murder Banquo and Fleance. In his discussion of H. L. Muslin’s study, Jacobs comes closest to approximating the Macbeths’ relationship as analogous to Anzieu’s idea of the formation and rupture of the ‘common skin’ fantasy:

Muslin sees Macbeth as someone who suffers from a lack of real sense of self – his sense of self comes from having someone else who affirms, validates and, facilitates him. In infancy the relationship with the mother meets these functions for all of us, but where there has been a lack of such a relationship, a person may try to re-enact this early relationship in what Muslin calls “a fruitless search to complete their self-development”. (163)

Whatever Macbeth’s putative infancy might have entailed, his sense of ‘self’ is derived from his relationship with Lady Macbeth in a way that parallels the ‘common skin’ fantasy. He is strongest in his support for the murder plot, for example, in the scene in which he receives sustained physical skin-to-skin contact. But when Lady Macbeth, as the “idealized parental image” (Jacobs 163), is no longer in physical contact with him, Macbeth’s conviction wavers. He questions the devised course of action and the “split in this [maternal] imago goes hand-in-hand with the split in the psychic ego and the body ego” (PE 15). The most appropriate “psychological expression” for the Macbeths’ relationship seems to be, therefore, the formation and rending of a ‘common skin’ which leads to conceivable deformations in Macbeth’s skin-ego.
Productions often depict the conception of, and agreement to, the murder plot as a tactile affair. Director Trevor Nunn’s 1976 *Macbeth*, for example, presents the plan to murder Duncan as conceived during a scene of merging skins. In the 1979 television filming of this production, broadcast on ITV, the effect is heightened as the relatively monochrome lighting gives the Macbeths an almost identical grey skin tone. Here the Macbeths’ faces are pressed into each other, skin crumpling, as they kiss. Lady Macbeth speaks directly into Macbeth’s mouth as she effectively ventriloquizes him. Justin Kurzel’s film adaptation of *Macbeth* (2015) takes the merging of skins in the conception of murder one step further. When Macbeth’s conviction wavers, Lady Macbeth’s encouragement of her husband – “screw your courage to the sticking place/ And we’ll not fail” (1.7 61-62) – becomes a scene of sexual seduction. Macbeth’s commitment to murder is re-established during sex, or the formation of a literal ‘common skin,’ and the plot’s details are punctuated by thrusts. Macbeth declares “I am settled” (1.7 80) following climax. As we can see, although there is a lack of sex in Bailey’s production, scenes of contact function to similar effect to illustrate a Macbeth who is not fully individuated and requires the other to physically affirm and validate him. If Hildebrand imagines a production of *Macbeth* where witches wear parts of Lady Macbeth’s face and Lady Macbeth is old enough to be Macbeth’s mother, I imagine a production that would take the tactile connection between the two one step further. *Macbeth* might be staged to literalise the ‘common skin’ between the Macbeths, be that through binding or body suits, and also thereby enact the rending of such a skin.

*Macbeth’s Audience*

Thus far I have considered how Bailey’s production draws attention to the early modern concept of the ecology of the passions and how the early modern understanding of the skin as a porous site of interchange allows us to re-read the skin-based scenes (indicative of interrelating networks) in *Macbeth* through an Anzieuian lens which similarly understands the ‘self’ as permeable to the influence of others. In this section, I suggest how the construction of the audience dramatizes an ecology of sorts between the world of the play, the world of the theatre, and the one outside of it.

Cox and Theilgaard, as we have seen, suggest that “life on-stage cannot exist without ‘ordinary off-stage life’” (26). Gareth Lloyd Evans similarly writes that “theatre can be a microcosm of society at large [which] must speak directly to its own age” (133). And, more specifically, Simon Williams considers four historical
adapts of Macbeth (Sir William Davenant’s adaptation of the 1660s; David Garrick’s adaptation in the 1740s; Johann Friedrich Schiller’s adaptation of 1800; and Verdi’s operatic version of 1847) for the ways it “was moulded to redirect and readjust the audience’s attitude towards Macbeth, his crimes, and the forces, be they psychological or supernatural, which impelled him to them” (55). Each adaptation speaks directly to, and, indeed, of, its own age. Highlighting the aforementioned ideas of the interrelation between on-stage and off-stage life, for example, the English theatre was “implicated in the Enlightenment project of cultivating and coercing audiences into the formation of a civil and civilising society” (Williams 55) as productions of Macbeth took the form of morality plays. Factors including political instability, pressures to validate the monarchy, and censorship meant that the act of regicide was often not staged. The intention was to suppress “even the slightest possibility that audiences might identify [with] one who committed [regicide/murder]” (Williams 68) in line with the aim of cultivating a civil society.

Williams argues, therefore, that the adaptations he considers “effectively […] take Macbeth out of himself so that we view the stage world around him not as a projection of his imagination or as a description of his inner world but as a phenomenon independent of his consciousness” (56). He suggests that “it is unlikely that the capacity of Macbeth to serve as the conduit through which we apprehend both the physical and metaphysical realms of the play was ever fully realized” until “the coming of expressionism [when] the idea of the stage as a means of reflecting the inner consciousness of the character enabled performances of Macbeth that fully realized the disturbing dramaturgy of Shakespeare’s tragedy” (Williams 68). If we interpret Bailey’s membrane, as I have argued it is possible to do so, as a representation of Macbeth’s psychical configuration, then her Macbeth certainly realises that the “ultimate aim is to unfold Macbeth’s emotional and imaginative being [using] the entire stage” (Williams 54). Even if we do not, Williams writes that:

by-and-large we [the audience] accept the premise that dramatic action on Shakespeare’s stage serves as a surrogate for or a reflection of life in the world outside the theatre […] but in Macbeth our vision is as clouded, as coloured, and as mystified as that of Macbeth himself. He sees the world through his accumulating guilt and the terrible fears generated by his imagination; it is frightening, full of menace and we see it as he does. (54)
That “we see it as he does” is certainly true of Bailey’s *Macbeth*. The audience see, for example, the bloodied head of Banquo emerge through the table at the feast scene while Macbeth’s guests do not. Indeed, experientially, the audience are immersed in Macbeth’s vision of the world and, as we shall see, the audience’s vision of the real world is clouded and coloured by the play world of *Macbeth*. The effect of the audience bound in a semi-permeable fabric, through which bloodied bodies, witches, and vapours arise, also materially dramatizes something of the early modern worldview of the interconnectedness of organisms.

Stephen Purcell points out that “all audiences play at being audiences, whether self-consciously or not, by the very fact that they adopt certain behaviours as a group and in response to that group” (150) and in Bailey’s *Macbeth* the fabric constructs the audience in a novel way which affects group behaviour. Duncan speaks of the re-establishment of the natural order following Macbeth’s appointment as Thane of Cawdor:

> …Sons, kinsmen, thanes,  
> And you whose places are the nearest, know  
> We will establish our estate upon  
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter  
> The Prince of Cumberland. (1.4 36-39)

When Duncan says “you whose places are the nearest” he gestures towards the groundlings connected to the stage via the fabric sheet. The fourth wall is collapsed and the audience are implicated as part of the natural order, as serfs within the feudal system residing on the same land, and thus part of the ecosystem comprising Macbeth’s world. The audience in the pit are configured as part of the natural order of the play world and I consider responses to such an immersive experience with recourse to Front of House reports and spectator accounts. Penelope Woods, for example, documents her experience within the canopy:

> I look around and people’s faces are standing out in clear definition against the black and it gives a frisson to an aspect of Globe performance that I always find interesting, the presence of so many faces. The perspective feels different from in here, attached by the neck to all the other yard members who have opted for this experience. (212)
Spectators elect to be part of this communal experience which, as we shall see, disturbs the sense of being an individuated ‘self’ because they are physically attached to others. Purcell discusses the concept of *communitas*, which is “Victor Turner’s term for the ‘direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities experienced by a crowd at a moment of togetherness’” (45), but notes that, while many practitioners aim to create *communitas*, “the audience is never *really* unified [because] even those moments that are marked by the most powerful feelings of togetherness for some audience members are likely to generate feelings of alienation, exclusion, or resistance in others” (51). Indeed, the experience of the groundlings in the pit is no different.

Despite the fact that spectators are “attached by the neck to all the other[s] who have opted for this experience,” which configures literal togetherness, actors run beneath or spring from the fabric sporadically which sets spectators whirling in their head-holes and disrupts any sense of ‘self’ as part of a unified society. Woods recalls that:

*Crawling under the membrane and then poking my head up through it doesn’t feel much like tumbling into Hell, which, I understand is the design idea being worked out here. However, it does feel somewhat uncomfortable. My bag is tucked between my ankles but out of sight where I can’t keep an eye on it. There’s some jostling in my corner, and it feels pretty claustrophobic.* (212)

The idea that Woods “can’t keep an eye on” her bag underneath the canopy, her sense of being “uncomfortable” and “claustrophobic”, and the fact that the Weird Sisters *appear* to pickpocket spectators (214-215) is testament to anxieties over social disorder. Such anxiety is not just reflective of the way this feature constructs the audience as part of the society of the play world either but suggests real-world anxieties – specifically the possibility of real crime (Woods’ bag is out of sight). Indeed, Woods comments that “this raises the possibility that maybe we are more vulnerable than we think, more physically at risk” (215). The awareness of the “jostling” also suggests that others are perceived as being in too close proximity. Here we might speculate more generally about spectatorship to suggest that while spectators might elect to take part in immersive practice there is still an expectation that they will maintain a sense of themselves as an individuated ‘self’. Woods’ comments, for example, indicate a preference for the preservation of personal space, being able to monitor the entire surround, and to take part in a communal experience but also,
somehow, to remain unmolested by others. Woods draws attention to an analogy that Bailey makes between slasher movies and *Macbeth* and argues that while “it’s not an analogy that seems […] revealing about the play itself […] it does account for the staging” which “plays on the lowest common denominators of […] suspicion, mistrust and fear in societies” (216). Indeed, suspicion, mistrust, and fear are prevalent in *Macbeth* and I argue that the audience’s immersive experience in the canopy cultivates such feelings and, in conjunction with the narrative which casts them as part of the play world’s society, directly enhances their understanding of the themes of the play.

Alongside the rhetoric that “the behaviours, intentions, and actions of Shakespeare’s characters are dispersed across a network of interrelating impulses, passions, drives and influences” (Armstrong 110) the Globe operates within a hierarchical framework in response to discordance. We can read a corresponding dispersal of “behaviours, intentions, and actions” across the network of spectators, actors, and FOH staff, illustrative of the “struggle of command” mentioned earlier. The witches wear the same tabards as the FOH staff which picks up on and accentuates the wider ecology of control at the Globe (FOH staff and stewards) and, in turn, emphasises the witches’ control, as guides and influencers, within *Macbeth*. Bailey explains that the witches are “the gatekeepers to Hell in my production and, in that sense, relate to the stewards who are the gatekeepers of the Globe theatre” (qtd. in Boyle 215). Boyle suggests that “this stewarding role was reinforced by the actions of the witches before the play began when they moved about the yard amongst the groundlings rather like the stewards shepherding the audience to their correct places” (215); therefore, the intersections between the real world of the theatre and the fictional world within it are configured as part of the same ecosystem.

Another example of FOH re-establishing order within the theatre can be seen in the reports of audience aggressivity within the fabric. The witches were assigned extra bodyguards during performances, for example, following repeated incidences of them being “manhandled” by spectators under the canopy (FOH 06/05/10 14:00). On another occasion, a report cites the aggressivity of a spectator towards an actor playing one of the bloodied corpses. She kicks him as he emerges from his pod under the canopy (FOH 26/05/10 14:00) which perhaps illustrates the affective response, or literal knee-jerk reaction, to a perceived threat. As Peter Kirwan indicates in his review of the production, a sense of “panic” is produced in response to the bodies which emerge from the canopy and run beneath it. Aggressive behaviour towards actors, policed by FOH and bodyguards, fits the thematic of discord within the play and
speaks of the spectator’s sense of threatened ‘self’. We might speculate that such behaviours are the result of an insufficiently unified group.

FOH also frequently had to speak with spectators regarding their treatment of, and movement within, the membrane. The reports express a desire to restore order, here meaning the proper use of the canopy, with one head through each hole. If we recall Duncan’s “gashed stabs” as a “breach of nature/For ruin’s wasteful entrance,” the spectators “who kept coming in and out of the canopy [which] pulled on it causing discomfort to those immediately around them” (FOH 27/04/10 19:30), or the spectators who tear holes, can be viewed as fulfilling the role of “ruin’s wasteful entrance.” The “breaches”, or threat of “breaches”, occur so frequently that FOH “kept a roaming eye in the Theatre just to deter any […] canopy abusers” (20/06/10 13:00). FOH’s language “canopy abusers” illustrates the “struggle of command” and condemns behaviour which threatens the fabric despite the fact that the novelty of its design provokes such behaviour. The fabric influences some spectators to behave in ways they might not ordinarily which is comparable to the way in which external forces and materials influence Macbeth’s actions in the play and recalls the early modern idea that the material world influences the internal world. The discordant treatment of the canopy causes discomfort to other spectators and provokes complaints, followed by FOH intervention and, therefore, models one aspect of theatre ecology in action. The microcosmic society within the theatre experiences a form of disorder analogous to the way that the social order is rent in Macbeth.

Sensory Perception and Skin-Based Ecology
Not only does Shakespeare have a feel for skin but, as we have seen, the audience members in the pit can get a feel for Shakespeare’s Macbeth, and each other, as part of the extended sense of ‘self’, through the skin-based connection to the stage that the fabric supports. In addition to this, we have seen how spectators might get a sense of the limitations of the unity of the ‘self’ through the discord felt in this ‘common skin’ configuration of the audience. Here more recent cognitive ideas might be compared to the early modern ideas of intersubjectivity. As Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble explain in the introduction to Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare’s Theatre (2014), “the “mind” as it is currently conceived in many strains of the cognitive sciences is wildly heterogeneous […] an on-the-fly assemblage of neural, kinaesthetic, somatic, interpersonal, and material resources” (3), which means that the mind can be understood as embodied or “extended” through multisensorial interaction
with others and materials. Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman’s *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition* (2010) similarly explores the relationship between being and knowing, the senses, and the staging of the senses in Shakespeare’s works. The collection suggests how “Shakespeare’s theatre of mind expresses its own enmeshment in the momentous cultural shift whereby the mind’s capacity is taken apart and reconstituted on a different sensory basis” (Gallagher and Raman 22) as Shakespeare’s works interrogate the various forms of sense-perception in relation to knowledge acquisition. Gallagher and Raman explain that this shift emerges when the “once-dominant Aristotelian system of elements (central to which was the sensory immersion of self in its material environment),” or the idea that mind, specifically knowledge, and material are interconnected, gives way to a “proto-scientific and proto-colonial perspective that separates the subject from the natural world, privileging vision as means of both access and control” (23). *Macbeth* is preoccupied with sensory perception and does not privilege vision. Take, for example, the aforementioned scene where Macbeth sees the air-drawn dagger – “Come, let me/clutch thee” (2.1 35) – seeing is *not* believing, despite the early modern cultural shift, and Macbeth desires touch-based confirmation.

The skinbodied experience of Bailey’s *Macbeth* similarly privileges sensory immersion in the material world, negating the sensory shift towards vision’s dominance, as the spectator’s mind both extends into, and is informed by, the fabric through their sense of touch. As I have suggested, this experience experientially and imaginatively locates the audience in Macbeth’s world which they see through Macbeth’s eyes, and feel through their own skin, as part of an immersive ecology between the play and real world. Karim-Cooper explains that “the human sensory network, in the early modern imagination […] is a synaesthetic system […] where more than one sense worked together to understand the world” and that “crucially, the sense of touch underpinned the entire system” (165). While the spectator’s embodied experience of the aesthetic form is not strictly synaesthetic, the sense of touch similarly underpins their multisensorial engagement with the production. And, as the material does function to extend their tactile sense, we might understand a (skin)aesthetic slippage, of sorts, taking place as a synthetic material serves to extend the skin. This, therefore, modifies Anne Anlin Cheng’s idea that “questions of material frequently become questions of skin” (*SRGM* 1020) to include how questions of material and skin might become questions of mind.
My argument is not so far removed, therefore, from McDermott’s writing on spiders and webs in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1622) which are “appropriate to the Renaissance iconography of touch – at once overlaying the fibrous web of skin, the neural web of ideas, and a social network within the theatre” (157), resonating with the idea of an extended sense of touch. McDermott explains that in “Renaissance iconography touching and arachnoid sensitivity are consistently linked” and that “through the web’s extension of the body, the spider senses with a remarkable range and nuance, it not only ‘feels’ but infers changes in the surround with a power homologous to the thinking brain” (157). McDermott explores the relationship between affective feeling and sensory feeling or, more specifically, how embodied metaphors in *Othello* communicate a “touching” affect to the audience. While McDermott argues that Shakespeare “embodies jealousy in *Othello* as a form of cognitive (and cutaneous) pressure that touches the audience” (154), I focus on how the spectator’s embodied experience of cutaneous pressure in Bailey’s *Macbeth* accentuates a literal “touching” affect between spectators. Just as the analogy of the spider in the web captures the early modern idea of the body-mind, whereby knowledge is shaped by sensory perception, I suggest that a fibrous web of skin is materialised by the fabric cast over the audience to comprise a literal “felt social network” and, indeed, to produce an experience of the interconnectedness of mind, body, and world. Not only does this recall early modern perceptions of body-mind, and the porosity of the skin, but also the way in which “the “mind” as it is currently conceived in many strains of the cognitive sciences is wildly heterogeneous […] an on-the-fly assemblage of neural, kinaesthetic, somatic, interpersonal, and material resources” (Johnson, Sutton, and Tribble 3).

As complaints to FOH evidence, the actions of others are felt as disruptive which emphasises the fabric’s role in temporary identity-formation as the spectator understands ‘self’ in relation to and as part of a collective, if disorderly, ‘other’ through the skin. The fabric encourages the re-positioning of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’ and spectators frequently position themselves in shared head-holes. Groups were described as “continually disruptive” because it “appeared that they were swapping head holes” (FOH 19/07/10 19:30). Another report indicates that stewards were asked “to be extra vigilant about the problem of two people putting both their heads through one hole in the canopy” (FOH 06/05/10 14:00). Spectators cannot put their heads through the same hole without being in direct contact and this may explain why
sharing a head-hole was a common reaction. We might ask whether it was motivated by the desire for contact in response to perceived threats.

The novelty of this type of (skin)aesthetic feature motivated other attempts at collective actions. FOH explains, for example, how one group “thought it would be a good idea to start a ‘jumping bean’ Mexican wave” (11/06/10 14:00). The movement reinforces both the skin and the (skin)aesthetic as sites of active and reciprocal engagement between ‘self’ and ‘other’ as the sensation of tension and release are perceptible cues to action. While the (skin)aesthetic makes a physical ‘common skin’ of the spectatoral body by holding spectators together in fabric, which parallels the way in which we might imagine the stitching of skins in Frankenstein to comprise the Creature’s literal ‘common skin,’ the spectators are not in direct skin-to-skin contact in Bailey’s production (if they stick to their own head-hole) which means that the sense of ‘self’, and the skin, is extended through the fabric. The jumping wave therefore parallels Frankenstein’s Creature’s first movements in Tristan Bernays’ Frankenstein (see Chapter 4) as it attempts to draw together all its skins to activate the ‘common skin’ in a sequence of movement. The (skin)aesthetic therefore functions in the same fibrously connective way as the webs McDermott discusses:

touch is the defining trope of contiguity. Yet […] touch is not always bounded by the body. Rather, prosthetic technologies of extension, such as the web; can artificially enlarge and stretch touch across the air and into the environment, moving from the physically immediate to the relatively distinct in a corresponding shift from sensory to “extrasensory” gathering. The spider’s web offers an exceptionally clear example of what I call “extramediated touch” although the same principle inheres in skin […] extramediated organs of touch draw the external world nearer to the points of “touch[ing] our wits.” (158)

Artaud proposes that we should treat spectators like the charmed snake, subject to vibrations through its skin, but McDermott makes just as convincing an argument for the spider-spectator who senses through “extramediated touch” through the skin. Whether spectators more closely resemble spiders or snakes, however, the commonality is that the sense of “extramediated touch” inheres in the spectator’s skin. The canopy acts as the “prosthetic technolog[y] of extension” as it facilitates the shift “from sensory to “extrasensory” gathering” because the spectator can feel the ‘other(s)’ movement which accentuates the relationship between skin, material, mind
and the ‘other’ that pervades Macbeth. The spectators in the fabric, like Macbeth, are not fully individuated and neither are they sufficiently sustained by others; indeed, as we have seen, stewards look to prevent spectators making skin-to-skin contact with the ‘other’ in this production. Bailey’s staging of Macbeth, as we have seen, enhances the spectator’s understanding of the play in some ways, in particular their understanding of the society of the play world that they are cast as part of, as the immersive experience simulates something of the anxiety and mistrust which thematically pervades the play. Of course, I suggest that such staging and the resultant skin-based experience also serves to tell us about the nature of the ‘self’ more generally. In other words, we can understand aspects of Anzieu’s theory in operation in this performance setting. The audience, of course, need not make this link to Anzieu, but the immersive experience in such staging undoubtedly brings notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ to their minds through the skin. In this sense, we need to recognise the skin-based experience not only as a method for interpreting performance but for the analysis of audience response and what it tells us about the nature of the ‘self’, as it is negotiated through the skin-based experience, more generally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has suggested how we might read various ecologies through the skin. I have considered the early modern understanding of the humoral body and the ecology of the passions, which Bailey’s production dramatizes through (skin)aesthetic means (recall the black bile), as well as the more recent psychoanalytic and cognitive ideas which accord closely because they similarly understand the sense of ‘self’ as dependent on others and sensory perception. Just as the early modern body was understood as “one in flux [because of] the skin’s porous quality,” I have suggested how Anzieu allows us the imaginative means to think about Macbeth’s sense of ‘self’ in terms of the skin-based influence of Lady Macbeth. Whatever Macbeth’s infancy might be imagined to entail we can speculate as to the configuration of his psychic envelopes based on the veritable skin-based experiences staged and Macbeth’s own labelling of his scorpion-filled mind. I suggested therefore that Macbeth’s psychic envelope would take the form of a ‘sieve skin-ego’ and how we might understand the Macbeths’ relationship as a dramatization of the formation and rending of the ‘common skin.’ I suggested how the “gashed stabs” in Duncan’s skin represent deformations in the body-politic and how the audience are configured as part of this (dis)order. With recourse to the Globe’s FOH reports and spectator
accounts, I have argued that the fabric supports a touch-based ecology of intersecting agents, of which the audience are physically aware, and this models the basic operations of identity-formation and intersubjectivity in connection with the anxieties over the ‘self’, ‘other’, and social organism (of which the audience understand themselves to be part of) thematised in the play.

I began by drawing attention to Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the skin, particularly how Shakespeare equates skin and fabric, and I concluded with a reading of the ‘common skin’ configuration in the pit which parallels my later reading of a sound-based ‘common skin’ in relation to Frankenstein but in a less abstract sense; here, it is fabric rather than sound which facilitates the spectator’s relationship to the other’s skin. In Michel Serres’ Philosophy of Mingled Bodies, as we know, the intersection of the subject, the senses, and the world can be expressed through the conflation of skin and fabric:

> each insular sense organ forms a dense singularity on the diluted, cutaneous plane. The island is woven of the same fabric as the background, each sense organ is invaginated in the same skin, spreading around it. The internal sense is draped in its tent, a new veil, a new fabric, but the same carpet and the same skin. The internal sense is veiled in skin. (54)

In Bailey’s production the relationship between skin and fabric is less metaphorical. The audience’s tactile sense is woven into the same fabric membrane and spreads around it. The internal sense is still, however, “veiled in skin” because it is through the skin that the spectator perceives the movement of ‘other(s)’ through the fabric. We might therefore reformulate Macbeth’s “strange things I have in head, that will to hand” (3.4 140) to “strange things in hand which will to head” to capture the spectator’s experience of extended touch, as facilitated by the canopy, which influences relational thought and action in a comparable way to the early modern worldview which understood the skin as a porous site of interchange. But, more than just analogy, I have suggested how the spectator’s skin-based experience acts as a method of interpretation in terms of their understanding of those around them and the themes of the play. The (skin)aesthetic makes for a responsive site of engagement which illustrates how “the physical interaction of bodies within the theatre venue materializes as a web of touch [and a] social “net” of relations [which] reduces the affective space between man and man [sic]” (McDermott 167). The fabric as a surface
of “extramediated touch” brings the “external world,” or the spectator’s relation to ‘other(s)’ in the performance environment, closer to “touch[ing their] wits” specifically through the skin but, here, without direct skin-to-skin contact. Indeed, visually and experientially, the fabric immerses the audience in Macbeth’s vision of the world – they see as and when and what he does (the witches, for example, as they emerge from the canopy or the “floating” dagger) – which increases identification with, and empathy for, him. In the following chapter, the relationship between skins becomes more attenuated as I consider the prohibition of touch, as well as the slippage between sound and skin, in Donna Huanca’s SCAR CYMBALS. In place of skin, or fabric, I consider the spectator’s experience of tangible sound.
Chapter 3: Skinscapes and Soundscapes in *SCAR CYMBALS*

*We are bathed in things from head to toe. Light, shadow, clamour, silence, fragrance, all sorts of waves impregnate and flood our skin. We are not aboard a vessel, ten feet above the water line, but submerged in the water itself*


*SCAR CYMBALS* (2016) is a live-art exhibition by Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca. The work opened at the Zabludowicz Collection in London as part of ‘Frieze Week,’ a contemporary art festival, and continued as a durational event from September until December 2016. It was Huanca’s first solo exhibition in the UK. *SCAR CYMBALS* is a multisensorial work set in a nineteenth-century former Methodist chapel; the exhibition features live models and a number of mixed media art installations. The curator Maitreyi Maheshwari explains that “into this sterile petri dish,” or the originally white-walled chapel and glass structures, Huanca “introduced the porous, sticky membrane of skin” (11) – see figure 6 below. *SCAR CYMBALS* showcases a range of skins and (skin) aesthetics from the naked skins of the models, to the second, or “surrogate”, skins made from “leather hides, latex, [and] rubber – that derive their appeal from our tactile sensation of human skin” (Maheshwari 11). In turn, the skins of the spectators are engaged by, and even activate, intersensorial aspects of the work. In this chapter, I investigate how the exhibition acts as an illustration of the sensory slippage between the skin and sound. This is significant because at this point in the thesis we begin to move away from works which focus on direct skin-to-skin contact, as well as materials which extend our sense of touch, and towards the experience of tangible sound. Sound is a more attenuated aesthetic means for engaging the spectator’s skin as a site of experience; however, as we shall see, sound can act as a conduit for meaning and the spectator’s skin can act as a means for interpreting that meaning. The pervasiveness of the skin in the social and sensorial imagination is further highlighted in this case study through the way in which sound and skin interact. Indeed, the way in which the palpable sound work encodes, and begins to approximate, the ‘other’s’ experience – specifically the experiences of migrants and victims of police violence in the US – demonstrates another way in which a spectator might occupy the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense.
I borrow the term “skinscape” from David Howes’ “Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment,” to refer to a landscape, here the exhibition space, which is characterised by skin and engages the individual through skin-based experience. *SCAR CYMBALS*’ skinscape is composed of (skin) aesthetics; skins; and traces of skin which accumulate during the course of the exhibition. The live models are painted, for example, and interact with the walls and structures in the exhibition space. Towards the end of the durational event, the glass structures are almost opaque with paint and
the white walls are smeared with paint transfer. At the end of each day, the body tights that the models wear are taken off and displayed as an amalgamation of cast-off skins (see figure 7 below). Just as skin remembers tactile experience, Huanca conceives of the fabrics as remembering skin by “bring[ing] all that history [because] the owner infuses his or her DNA into it” (qtd. in Dafoe): indeed, the wearer’s DNA, dead skin cells, paint, and sweat, accumulates in the fabric of the body tights to create a literal (skin)aesthetic.

![Figure 7](image.png)

**Figure 7.** Installation composed of discarded body tights in *SCAR CYMBALS*. Thierry Bal. Donna Huanca’s *SCAR CYMBALS*. 2016. Photograph. Donna Huanca *SCAR CYMBALS*. Zabludowicz Collection. 2016. p.34.

The predominant focus of this chapter, however, is *SCAR CYMBALS*’ soundscape and, in alignment with Michel Serres’ observation that “clamour, silence, fragrance, all sorts of waves impregnate and flood our skin” (70), I suggest how the soundscape (the acoustic environment) becomes the skinscape (as sound registers at skin-level) and how the skinscape becomes the soundscape as motion and heat sensors in ‘The Mother’ sculpture in the ‘Rear Gallery’, see figure 8 below, respond to the spectator’s body and project this information as sound. In this sense, certain aesthetic techniques – here how sound can be felt on the skin and, at some level, how it can be
felt as a skin – have the potential to make (syn)aesthetes of us all in a performance space.

The phenomenon of sound becoming skinscape encountered in *SCAR CYMBALS* is not limited to the experience of this live-art exhibition; it is also generalizable to other contexts in which sound is palpably felt. Indeed, *SCAR CYMBALS*’ soundscape, although it is a live-art exhibition, conforms to the role of sound as outlined in Artaud’s “Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto).” He writes that sound:

needs to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the organs [which] invites research from the point of view of sound, into qualities of vibrations of absolutely new sounds […] Research is also required, apart from music, into instruments and appliances which, based upon special combinations or new alloys of metal, can attain a new range and compass, producing sounds or noises that are unbearably piercing. (Artaud 95)

The soundscapes produced in *SCAR CYMBALS* “act directly […] upon the [spectator’s] sensibility through the organs” by piercing the skin and the ears. The focus on the spectator’s skin-based experience of sound extends (skin)aesthetics as a method for performance analysis. The thesis is structured to consider works which move, in turn, further away from experiences of direct skin-to-skin contact, within a framework that understands the skin as the site upon which all senses converge. This chapter indicates how the spectator’s skin works as the site for interpreting palpable sound. As I have suggested, and as we shall see, the spectator’s skinbodied experience of sound offers a new approach for conceptualising the relationship between ‘self’ and marginalised ‘other(s)’ (migrants, refugees, and victims of police violence) in *SCAR CYMBALS*, specifically, but also suggests how sound might be used in future works to encode and provoke socially significant ideas and reactions respectively.

There are two parallel enquiries in this chapter: the first is a question of how far the spectator’s immediate skinbodied experience of sound translates into meaning; and the second is a question of how far the spectator’s sensory (acoustic and palpable) experience of sound might be understood to provide an analogy, albeit unintentional, of the role of sound in psychic development in terms of how the spectator might (re)negotiate ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through their experience of palpable sound. Both lines of enquiry involve reflection on embodied experiences. Following the event, for example, the spectator might reflect on their immediate skinbodied experience of sound in *SCAR CYMBALS* in line with the meanings encoded in the sound work. We can also reflect on the sensory slippage between skin and sound for the way it informs intersubjective relations during psychic development and, in turn, how this enables us to see a similar dynamic at play in *SCAR CYMBALS*. Indeed, the interaction between sound, skin, and the sense of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’ is reminiscent of Anzieu’s psychoanalytic ideas and may be understood as analogously demonstrating the basic psychoanalytic tenets of identity formation in a performance
context. The sound-based aesthetic used in *SCAR CYMBALS*, or the interplay between skin and sound, also illustrates the potential for spectators to relate to the ‘other’ through the experiential and embodied simulation of conditions which, as we shall see, approximate the ‘other’s’ experience of being politically othered.

This chapter is also the first of two chapters which consider sound as a (skin)aesthetic in performance with recourse to Anzieu’s concepts of the ‘sound bath,’ ‘sound envelope,’ or ‘auditory-phonic skin,’ and the ‘sound image of self’ which precedes the ‘skin-self’ or the skin-ego. In the theoretical section of this chapter, which follows the introduction of sound as a (skin)aesthetic, I explain the aforementioned psychoanalytic concepts and how they might be understood to function analogously in *SCAR CYMBALS*. This chapter, as mentioned above, moves away from more obvious tactile experiences such as the skin-to-skin contact seen in *HARD C*CK, or the fabric membrane which extends the spectator’s skin in *Macbeth*, towards a consideration of how sound can touch skin and, at some level, approximate it. The following chapter on Tristan Bernays’ *Frankenstein* makes use of the same psychoanalytic concepts but considers how sound might be felt as a skin when there is no skin-to-skin or sound-to-skin contact, when the tonal approximates the tactile at an imaginative level (with recourse to the spectator’s skinbodied memories). We therefore see how (skin)aesthetics functions at different levels of attenuation. This points towards the wider argument of the thesis which highlights the pervasiveness of the skin in the social and sensorial imagination as well as reinforcing how skin and skin-based experiences in performance can function as a structuring idea – in terms of identity and identification with the ‘other’ – well beyond direct experiences of touch. Such experiences, as I have argued, are constitutive of our relationship with the ‘other’ both in terms of the performance dynamic and in terms of informing wider social, political, or ethical relations. As we have seen, we can relate to the ‘other’ without skin-to-skin contact through experiences of haptic visuality, or extramediated touch, and, as we shall see in the coming chapters, through sound, audiovisual mirror neuron function, and the visual activation of mirror neurons. Ultimately, these are all ways of feeling ourselves in the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense.

This chapter begins with a description of *SCAR CYMBALS* and Huanca’s intentions for the audience experience, followed by a description of the soundscape including its embodied impact and the thought processes behind its development. I then introduce the idea of sound as a (skin)aesthetic with an emphasis on how sound
can be used to embodied effect/affect in performance and how spectators can use this embodied experience to make sense of a work.

I then consider Anzieu’s theory of how sound and skin-based experiences in infancy influence the formation of individual and intersubjective identity during psychic development. By using the soundscapes in the ‘Main Hall’ and the ‘Rear Gallery’ as worked examples of how 1) soundscapes become skinscapes and versa and 2) how the physical interplay between skin and sound can lead to the formation of ‘common sound skins,’ I suggest how Anzieu’s concepts can be understood in action in SCAR CYMBALS. Indeed, it seems there is something enduring about the interaction and conflation of sound and skin in structuring our ideas of intersubjectivity. Sound as a (skin)aesthetic might therefore be manipulated, as I will suggest, to serve socially significant ends in future works.

**SCAR CYMBALS as Live-Art Exhibition**

While *SCAR CYMBALS* features live models who manipulate the immersive sound-based experience in the ‘Main Gallery’ by using the two Kaoss Pads, DJ controller, and effects processor which are integrated into part of the installation, it is a live-art exhibition as opposed to a play, performance, or piece of immersive theatre. As Huanca explains, in an interview with Sven Schumann, she does not consider the exhibition as performance art:

> It’s just something you’re encountering. It doesn’t depend on the audience […] you can come in and see it and encounter it, but the model isn’t there to perform for you […] They’re in their own mind space, and that’s what I want to stress: I am not trying to get a reaction from you.

The Zabludowicz Collection’s exhibition guide, however, describes any aspect of the work that features live models as ‘performance’, but a critical difference between *SCAR CYMBALS* and my other case studies is that the models are not ostensibly performing for an audience. In alignment with Huanca’s claim – “I am not trying to get a reaction from you” – *SCAR CYMBALS* has no obvious, or single, narrative, meaning, or instructional component. This is not to say, however, that the work does not provoke reactions from spectators or that spectators will not try to find meaning in the work. Huanca’s intentions, or lack thereof, with regard to the audience experience complicates *SCAR CYMBALS* as a case study but does not detract from the fact that
the sound-and-skin based components are working in a particular way and that these embodied effects/affects might be used by a practitioner who wants an audience reaction; indeed, irrespective of Huanca’s intentions, an analysis of our embodied experience of the work enables us to see how *SCAR CYMBALS* already models ways of provoking empathic embodied engagement. *SCAR CYMBALS* models this potential even if, during the spectator’s immediate experience, the spectator is unsure of the work’s political context. The spectator is aware of the immediate and embodied feelings of alienation and apprehension produced by their experience of the tangible soundscapes – even if they do not necessarily know what to do with such feelings at the time. The work therefore points to the potential for spectators to experientially relate to, and empathise with, the experience of the othered groups encoded in the sound work; however, a clearer framework and/or signposting of the encoded meanings may be required in order to make further sense of the embodied experience and convert the feelings produced into empathy for, or knowledge of, the ‘other’ during the immediate experience.

*SCAR CYMBALS* is not set in a conventional art gallery but, as it showcases a number of artworks including the live-art models, sculptures, paintings, and photographs, it adheres to the conventions of such a space. There is, as you would expect, a prohibition on touch. Gallery staff are poised to enforce the prohibition because “Huanca’s sculptures, with their festishistic look and allure, evoke an intense desire to touch” (Maheshwari 11). Only the models can interact with the installations and materials which include a large block of ice filled with rambutan fruit; cups of paint (which the models paint themselves and the environment with); the sand in the grooves of a raised structure that resembles a fingerprint or the folds of a brain; and a three-storey glass structure that the models climb within. Of course, as I explored in Chapter 1 and will re-visit in Chapter 5, the spectator might watch the models and imagine that they know what the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience feels like, with recourse to their own embodied knowledge, but there is no skin-to-skin contact. @BigNickBerlin’s comment on Twitter “…Tracing Traces,” for example, refers to the way in which the models paint the glass structures with their hands and leave details, or traces, of this tactile interaction in paint. The Tweet is accompanied by a hand emoji and video of a model painting glass with her hands which suggests that observing the ‘other’ triggers an experience of relational embodiment, or the haptic encounter. The spectator knows what it feels like to run paint through their fingers, or to paint with their hands, but the performers do not touch the spectators and the
spectators cannot touch the performers, or the (skin)aesthetic works, with anything but their eyes. This is not to say that the spectators are not touched by and do not touch using other sensory modalities. This is a comparable experience, therefore, to the experience of haptic visuality that the majority of Hesp’s audience have.

With the exception of taste, the spectator’s entire sensorium is engaged by *SCAR CYMBALS*. The eyes are filled with surreal, multicoloured, multi-textural, and multi-thermal (warm bodies: cold ice) visuals. The chapel is populated by near-naked models who are painted with latex and different colours and move, incredibly slowly, around the exhibition environment. The nose is filled as the space is “suffused with the smell of Palo Santo oil, a South American holy wood” (Maheshwari 9). The ears and skins are, respectively, filled and flooded with noise. The spectator feels sound pulse through them. Sound can be felt on and through the spectator’s skin in the ‘Main Gallery,’ and heat and motion sensors in ‘The Mother’ sculpture register the spectator’s presence in the ‘Rear Gallery.’ In the following section, I outline the meanings encoded in the soundscape and suggest what the significance of the spectator’s immersion in such a soundscape might be. I suggest that the interplay between sound and skin acts as a model for how sound might be used similarly in future to influence intersubjective thinking during the spectator’s immediate experience when the skin is used as a site of engagement and a method for interpreting the performance.

**The Soundscape**

The soundscape in *SCAR CYMBALS* is loud, palpable, and discordant and the effect is an unpleasant and often alienating experience for the spectator who hears no immediately obvious meaning in the sounds. Maheshwari explains the wider social, ethical, and geopolitical issues which informed the soundscape in the ‘Rear Gallery’:

> [t]he development of the sound work NERVE ENDINGS/ASTRAL LAYER (*Blind Spot*) [or the soundscape projected by ‘The Mother’ sculpture] started in the midst of the widespread outcry and panic around the refugee crisis in Europe and the parallel crisis of police violence in the US. Huanca’s feeling that these individuals were collectively described as a criminal other and that the media perpetuated a culture of mistrust around their words and actions became a trigger to thinking about the impossibility of communication and making meaning understood. (12)
The sound work which encodes this is composed of different tracks which respond to various global and historical atrocities as well as sounds which correspond to warfare. As Maheshwari explains:

the work is composed of 40 individual tracks ranging on the peripheries of the room from bells, chimes and meditation balls, to a voice track extracted from a viral internet post in response to the othering of citizens in the face of police violence, a Japanese poem about the Hiroshima bomb and digitally composed drone and bass sounds. (13)

The meaning of SCAR CYMBALS’ soundscape, which addresses the marginalization of the ‘other’, is physically conveyed through the affects produced which, I argue, offers the spectator a comparable experiential understanding of being othered. The sound work, as Maheshwari points out “enforc[es] silence with its presence” amongst spectators (12). The spectator’s immersive experience therefore shows us how an understanding of the ‘other(s)’ situation might be derived through the sound-based approximation of the very conditions of socially and/or politically imposed ‘otherness’ – such as the experience of enforced silence or the cultivation of mistrust surrounding the spectator’s own words and actions (spectators wonder, for example, how their actions influence the soundscape) as they explore the live-art exhibition. This is significant because the spectator’s understanding is predicated on the effects of their skin-based experience; although this takes the more attenuated (though still very bodily) form of sound, this still enables the spectator to empathise with a semblance of the ‘other’s’ experience. As I have mentioned, this is significant because it tells us something about the way in which intersubjective human relations are developed – through skin and sound – as well as suggesting how ethical and/or political thinking may similarly be predicated on skin-and-sound-based experiences.

In Anzieu’s developmental theory, as we shall shortly see, sound – often in conjunction with skin-to-skin contact – helps the infant begin to understand the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ and, based on their early experiences, sounds might later be understood to have a tactile quality which can influence intersubjective connections. In SCAR CYMBALS, we can see how experiences of palpable sound – although it has an aversive as opposed to comforting tactile quality – might cultivate the development of ethical and/or political thinking about othered groups which
extends beyond the performance space. Indeed, Stephen Di Benedetto suggests that “our bodies prime for action when sound vibrations are perceived” (TPS 129); therefore, the vibrational soundscape of SCAR CYMBALS has the potential – even if it is not the artist’s intention – to encode an impetus for action. Towards the end of this chapter, I consider the action spectators have reported taking in response to the soundscape to illustrate this. I address the two parallel lines of enquiry mentioned earlier: predominantly the question of how far the spectator’s embodied experience of SCAR CYMBALS translates into meaning; and how the spectator’s sensory experience of the sound work provides an analogy, albeit unintentionally, to the role of sound in psychic development as it pertains to intersubjectivity. I also ask how our understanding of ourselves as part of a collective may be predicated on and/or communicated through such skin-and-sound-based experiences.

**Sound as (Skin)Aesthetic**

In this section, I introduce the concept of sound as a (skin)aesthetic. Di Benedetto notes that “experimentation with sound has led artists to make use of ambient noise to stimulate [audiences’] bodies in meaningful ways” (TPS 129). He suggests that “by paying attention to the phenomenal reception of sound, we can deemphasize the bias we have for sight” (TPS 142). As Serres rightly observes:

> [w]e can free ourselves from a scene by lowering our eyelids or putting our fists over our eyes, by turning our back and taking flight. [But] we cannot escape persistent clamour. No barrier or ball of wax is sufficient to stop it. Practically all matter, particularly flesh, vibrates and conducts sound. (47)

Sound surrounds, clings to, and invades the ears and skin to shape the spectator’s embodied experience. Di Benedetto explains in detail the mechanics of hearing, and the structure of the inner-ear, but also points out that “the sensations produced by hearing are blended into the body mechanism in the central nervous system to make them part of the whole milieu in which we live” (Alberti qtd. in TPS 127). The skin is brought into focus as a “resonant surface for sound” as sensations blend to “produce a visceral reverberation in our bodies” (Maheshwari 12) and sound becomes assimilated with our sense of skin. Skin and sound conflate in the sensory ‘milieu’, supporting the idea of skin as the ‘common sense.’ The skinscape thus becomes the soundscape as “flesh vibrates and conducts sound” and the soundscape becomes the
skinscape as sound permeates flesh. Practices of unction permeate the skin and sound functions similarly in *SCAR CYMBALS*. Sound does not, however, serve as a protective, or healing, second skin as Vaseline functions in Chapter 1. Instead, sound besieges the spectator. Huanca uses the metaphor of skin to “evoke experiences of […] slippages in interpretation and understanding” (Nielsen 5) but it is the palpable sound work that penetrates spectators’ *literal* skins to cause such slippages.

Howes recognises that “our environments, whether natural or built, tattoo our skins with tactile impressions” (28) and Serres similarly expounds on sound’s interaction with skin:

> [t]hus does faint evidence of the visible and audible linger on the skin, chiaroscuros and whispers; on it remain the invisible side of the visible, the inaudible sounds of music, the heavy caress of the light wind, imperceptible things, like remnants of marks of loud, harsh energies. Skin is haunted by the gentleness of the sensual. (70-71)

Skins are historiated with embodied memories of tactile experience and sound contributes to this because the “audible lingers.” John Mowitt’s *Striking, Beating, Drumming* (2002) argues that Anzieu’s *The Skin Ego* fails to consider the “production […] of our sense of skin” within other semantic paradigms such as the “percussive field” (20). The “percussive field” refers to actions, including drumming, beating, and striking, which produce “our sense of skin” as a “theory of embodiment at work within musical beating” (Mowitt 20). The production of sound raises questions, however, about the location of the skin. Mowitt asks: “if, as Anzieu proposes, the skin is a gnarled border we share with others, then where exactly is it [?]” (21). He goes on to suggest that “we [should] think of skin […] as arising at the point of contact, in the event, perhaps even the scene, of ‘beating’” (Mowitt 21). *SCAR CYMBALS’* soundscape is percussive and the bass line pulses through the spectator’s body which draws the skin to the forefront of embodied awareness. The spectators’ skins retain the “remnants of [the] loud, harsh energies” as skinbodied memory which can be analysed in line with the encoded meaning of the sound work.

Huanca’s background “as a musician and sound artist” helps explain why “the installation’s sonic elements go beyond atmosphere” (Pangburn). The soundscape is a defining feature of the work and one spectator notes the relationship between the “explorations of #surfaces and #sounds” (@frencis85), which emphasises the
interplay between the skin, as activated surface, and sound. The skin has been described as a surface that “hears much” (Serres 70) and as “an audiophonic aggregate, both a kind of mouth, or sounding board, and also a kind of ear” (WBSS); therefore, it receives sound (as sensation) and reflects, or projects, it. The use of “embedded sound works inside the sculptures [such as ‘The Mother’] which respond to the movements and proximity of the models and visitors by emitting various bass tones that affect the body” (Pangburn) evidences how the soundscape physically affects the spectator and how the spectator’s presence affects the soundscape. The fact that the spectators’ skins register sound and influence the soundscape in the ‘Rear Gallery,’ as a “kind of” ear and mouth, represents a mingling of the tactile and auditory senses. It suggests how sound-and-skin based aesthetic techniques might begin to make (syn)aesthetes of all spectators.

Embodied Thought in Analysis

The spectator’s embodied experience of sound in SCAR CYMBALS therefore indicates how skin might be used as a method of interpreting the sound work’s meaning and, indeed, also how sound might be consciously harnessed in future works to communicate an intention or message via the spectator’s skin. Josephine Machon’s concept of ‘embodied thought in analysis’ is one method that might be used by the spectator to make further sense of a work after their immediate experience. Through the practice of ‘embodied thought in analysis,’ which takes place after the event, we can begin to make further sense of the embodied experience of SCAR CYMBALS’ soundscape. We can begin to understand how the spectator’s experiences of alienation, being silenced, and of acoustic invasion performatively approximate the very conditions of socially and politically imposed ‘otherness’ encoded in the soundscape as well as how this enables an embodied relationality, of sorts, to take place. Indeed, we can see how practitioners might manipulate palpable sound (making use of the audience’s skinbodied responses, for example, by simulating an approximation of the ‘other’s’ situation to increase experiential understanding and empathy) to serve an educating effect in future within a more structured narrative framework with clearer intentions (making it clear to spectators, for example, that the work is raising awareness of a particular social/ethical/political issue).

The (syn)aesthetic elements of a work are, as we know, the aesthetic, or synthetic, elements which influence the spectator’s multisensory experience. As the brackets “(syn)” indicate, this includes the creation of a type of synaesthetic
experience in a performance context in which a spectator experiences one sensory modality as, or through using, another (which is distinct from the neurophysiological condition because it is a temporary and, significantly, synthetic experience). (Syn)aesthetic components can be interpreted bodily as part of the spectator’s immediate experience or when the spectator later returns to their embodied knowledge in order to make further sense of the work. Machon explains that it is with recourse to her “affective memory” that she is able to “make sense/sense of the archive of art history [held] within [her] subconscious imagery and [her] more (im)mediate sensual memory” (SIT 214), following her experience of a performance or immersive event. By “art history,” Machon refers to her own personal “art history,” or past experiences of art works and performance. It is this process of reflection which constitutes “embodied thought in analysis” (SIT 214), or the documentation of (syn)aesthetic experience.

It might be argued that we do not need a technical name for this kind of analysis because spectators all have an embodied, sensory, experience of a work that they can reflect on after the event – perhaps prompted by further contextual information – to make further sense of the work. In this sense, we might simply refer to such a practice as the process of returning to and reflecting on our embodied memories and asking what they mean. Machon’s technical term, however, is more nuanced because it describes the process of returning to our corporeal memories of specifically (syn)aesthetic experiences. She explains:

in (syn)aesthetic appreciation of experiential performance work individual audience members are enabled to reconnect with a (latent) synaesthetic potential […] a quality of perception is activated and felt, affecting both perception and cognition in the immediate moment, the traces of which are rekindled in any subsequent recall and analysis. Here then the potential of the corporeal memory to influence interpretation becomes paramount. (SIT 203)

Synaesthetic experiences in immersive works call for Machon’s concept of (syn)aesthetics because such works, as opposed to other kinds of embodied experience in traditional theatre (which may only stimulate one sense at a time), are more likely to engage the “holistic nature of perception” (SIT 202) or, in other words, the spectator’s bodily experience of the stimulation of multiple senses at once. Machon writes:
Immersive theatres are quintessentially (syn)aesthetic in that they manipulate
the explicit recreation of sensation through visual, physical, verbal, aural, tactile,
haptic, and olfactory means within the real-time, site-responsive experience of the
event. (SIT 208)

Machon explains that the significance of (syn)aesthetic experience is that “such play
with the multidimensional capacity of the full human sensorium allows for a new
protocol of interaction and exchange to establish itself” (SIT 209); indeed, as I have
mentioned, SCAR CYMBALS similarly engages the spectator’s entire sensorium and
has the potential to establish new protocols of interactions and exchange beyond the
performance space. In this chapter, however, I am specifically documenting the
(syn)aesthetic – or rather (skin)aesthetic – experience of the slippage between the skin
and sound to suggest how this aesthetic technique has the potential to make
(syn)aesthetes of us all. I also suggest what types of interactions and exchange
immersive works like SCAR CYMBALS produce, and have the potential to produce, at
the intersections between skin and sound. I therefore suggest Machon’s idea of
embodied thought in analysis is more critically relevant and useful to this chapter than
simply referring to the similar practice whereby a spectator might reflect on their
embodied memory of a/any work, which may or may not feature (syn)aesthetic or
(skin)aesthetic components, to make further sense of it.

Machon’s concept of ‘embodied thought in analysis’ therefore allows me to
focus on the soundscape, as it registers on and registers the spectator’s skin, to detail
the (skin)aesthetic conditions at play in SCAR CYMBALS and to suggest how we might
understand them, after our immersion, in relation to the work’s engagement with the
contemporary geopolitical, social, and ethical issues surrounding police violence, the
treatment of refugees, and the media. Such a reading also enables me to emphasise the
way in which the skin-based experience might be used as a method for interpreting
the sound-work and meaning(s) both during and after the event. There can be no doubt,
for example, that spectators of SCAR CYMBALS understand their immediate embodied
experience of the work as aversive, as othering, and as confusing – “How do I
influence the soundscape? What does it mean? Why aren’t I being acknowledged by
the models?” – which is in line with Huanca’s intention of conveying the
“impossibility of communication and making meaning understood.” This embodied
understanding, however, also has the potential to provoke empathy with the othered
groups beyond the performance space when/if spectators revisit and re-contextualise their embodied memories of the work in line with the meanings behind its development.

Sound “trigger[s] visceral reactions that can be analysed” in the immediate experience of the work (and, as we shall see, spectators do analyse such reactions) but embodied thought in analysis enables us to return to those initial “visceral reactions,” now embodied memory, to make further sense of them. Indeed, the more nuanced meaning behind the development of *SCAR CYMBALS’* soundscape is unavailable to spectators at the time (through either the exhibition guide or their senses); therefore, the spectator’s immediate embodied reactions can be re-contextualized in line with this information to suggest how the sound-based aesthetic could function. What follows is my embodied, or rather skinbodied, thought in analysis which contextualizes the spectator’s skin-based experience in line with the meanings encoded in *SCAR CYMBALS’* soundscape to suggest how sound might be used to influence the spectator’s understanding of themselves as part of a wider socio-political collective identity predicated on their skin-based experience.

**Anzieu and Sound**

In this section, I elaborate further on sound’s potential as a (skin)aesthetic with recourse to Anzieu’s writing on the ‘acoustic envelope,’ to suggest how the sound work in *SCAR CYMBALS* creates a parallel between the experiences of ‘self’ and the othered groups encoded in the soundscape. More specifically, I suggest how the interactions between skin and sound, upon which the infant’s understanding of ‘self’ and intersubjectivity are predicated, also have the potential to influence the spectator’s understanding of themselves both as an individual and as part of a wider socio-political collective which suggests the enduring nature of the way in which intersubjective human relations are formed. With recourse to Anzieu we must, seemingly counterintuitively, turn away from the skin and towards the environmental conditions which precede our awareness of it. Marc Lafrance argues that “Anzieu’s model is relevant to cultural theorists [because it] emphasizes the fact that the infant must learn how to make its skin its own” (25). More specifically, the production of a “skin of [one’s] own” is derived through the negotiation of the sounds and skins of ‘other(s)’. The preconditions for understanding the skin as boundary between ‘self’ and ‘other’, are cultivated through the infant’s immersion in the acoustic environment.
In “The Sound Image of the Self” (1979) and *The Skin Ego*, Anzieu argues that a “bath of sound pre-figures the skin-self” (*SIS* 29). From the “bath of sound” the infant develops a ‘sound image of self’ based on its understanding of internally and externally produced sounds. The ‘sound image of self’ develops prior to the ‘skin-self’ (the skin-ego) which is derived through skin-based experiences. The ‘sound image of self’ is predicated on the development of an ‘auditory-phonic skin,’ a term which is synonymous with ‘audio-phonic skin’ and ‘acoustic envelope.’ The concept of an ‘auditory-phonic skin’ refers to “a metaphorical skin or envelope of sound” which is “formed by the echoing interchanges between the mother’s voice and the child’s own sounds” (*WBSS*). The “interchanges” of sound form the acoustic environment, or “bath of sound,” in which the child’s ‘sound image of self’ develops. Anzieu explains:

the Self was formed as a wrapping of sound, through the experience of the “bath of sounds” which accompanied breast-feeding. The bath of sounds prefigures the Skin-ego with its double surface, facing inwards and outwards, since this wrapping is made up of sounds emitted by both the baby and its environment. The combination of these sounds produces: (i) a common volume-space which permits bilateral exchanges […]; (ii) the child’s first (spatio-auditory) image of its body; and (iii) an actual bond of fused reality with the mother (without which the later imaginary fusion with her would not be possible). (*TSE* 184)

The acoustic environment and the bodies within it comprise an audiophonic exchange system and the exchange of sounds between an infant and its caregiver(s) gives an acoustic impression of the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’. Anzieu explains that the “original skin-ego is a tactile wrapping backed by [an] acoustic […] wrapping” (*TSE* 224); indeed, the acoustic wrapping is the first psychical skin.

While the “wrapping of sound” (*TSE* 184), or the ‘auditory-phonic skin,’ develops prior to the skin-ego, it critically develops in conjunction with tactile experience. It is, therefore, an intersensorial envelope, or sense of ‘self’, because “at the same time as the boundaries and limits of the Ego are being established [by] leaning anaclitically on tactile sensations, the self is constituted by introjecting the world of sound” (*TSE* 173). The ‘auditory-phonic skin’ develops first but the infant’s sense of the “skin self” develops simultaneously. Steven Connor explains that:

[a]t this early point in the child’s development, there is no clear distinction between tactile and auditory sensations, and the sensations of being held, stroked
and patted are experienced in terms of the soothing, containing, enclosing contours of the self, while the voice itself becomes something palpable. (*WBSS*)

To parallel the fact that there is “no clear distinction between tactile and auditory sensations,” Lafrance explains that “the skin of the psyche is not only a tactile skin, but an auditory skin” (31). Similarly, in the spectator’s immediate sensory experience within the ‘Main Hall’ there is no clear distinction between “the tactile and auditory sensations,” and although the sensations are not “soothing”, akin to being “stroked [or] patted,” they are “containing” because the soundscape generates awareness of the “enclosing contours of the [spectator’s] self,” or the skin. The audio-phonic skin posits “the space of sound [as] the earliest psychical space [because] noises from outside [can] cause pain when they are loud and sudden [and] gurgles from inside the body [might be] disturbing because it is not clear where they are coming from” (*TSE* 188).

While the infant eventually distinguishes between the sounds it produces, or a sense of ‘self’, and the sounds produced by ‘other’, in *SCAR CYMBALS* the spectator may not be able to distinguish the sources of the sounds or understand how they reflect either ‘self’ or ‘other’ during their immediate experience (although, of course, spectators are aware that the sounds are not self-produced – or at least not directly, as we shall soon see). In the following section, I consider how the spectator’s experience of sound in the ‘Main Hall’ nonetheless influences a sense of ‘self’ and intersubjectivity.

**How Soundscapes become Skinscapes**

In this section, I consider what Huanca entitles the ‘KERATINOCYTE/KETHERIC LAYER (*Muscles/Vibrational Level*)’, or the speakers and Kaoss Pads installation, in the ‘Main Hall’ in more detail (see *figure 9* below). The performer controls the ‘sound bath’ by “accessing two Kaoss Pads – DJ controller and effects processors – [and] deliberately and playfully changing the experience for themselves and by extension anyone watching” (Maheshwari 12).
It has been suggested that “this demonstration of control deepens the sense of unease for visitors, who become aware of their encroachment into a territory that is not theirs” (Maheshwari 12) which, as a demonstration, ‘others’ the spectator. The sense of “unease” the spectator feels as a result of the “aware[ness] of their encroachment” suggests that the spectator’s sense of ‘self’ is of themselves as the ‘other’ encroaching. If we relate this back to the concept of the migrant crisis and the experiences of othered groups which inspired the sound work, the spectator’s encroachment “into a territory that is not theirs” can be understood as an approximation of the experience of being ‘othered’, silenced, and unwelcomed. Maheshwari draws attention to Huanca’s background as a musician and argues that:

[s]ound becomes a crucial component within the experience of \textit{SCAR CYMBALS}.
From the insistent pulsing hum as you enter, to the more gradually climatic
soundscape further in, sound shifts the atmosphere within the gallery, enforcing a silence with its presence and demanding a different kind of focus that is trying to decipher meaning from noise. (12)

The spectator’s sensory impressions during the event are sufficient to indicate that, perhaps, SCAR CYMBALS alludes to serious issues. The “different kind of focus” required to “decipher [further] meaning from noise” is therefore a bodily one.

In the BBC documentary “Sound Waves: The Symphony of Physics” (2017), Dr Helen Czerski explains how “sound reflects differently off different materials, so it actually gives you a lot of information without touching.” Indeed, “reflection is a way of redirecting sound and that redirected sound carries information about the object it bounced off” (Czerski); therefore, sound is not only felt on the skin but also carries information about the skins it reflects off. Soundwaves and vibrations connect people.

Edith Lecourt advances Anzieu’s concept of the ‘acoustic envelope’ in this respect by proposing a ‘musical envelope.’ This idea refines the concept of a ‘sound bath’ by suggesting a musical component as distinct from ‘sound’ or ‘noise’. The ‘musical bath’ is not necessarily a more appropriate term than ‘sound bath’ to describe SCAR CYMBALS’ soundscape because the soundscape is not musical in any conventional sense; however, Lecourt’s idea of a ‘musical envelope’ focuses on the vibrational quality of sound and the way sound creates connections between bodies, to form an “original music group” (Lecourt 213), in a way relevant to the impact sound has in SCAR CYMBALS. Similarly to the audiophonic exchange system between infant and caregiver in the ‘sound bath,’ Lecourt describes:

the musical quality of the harmony of the group and, in the first case, of the family around the baby [because it is within this group that] the baby takes his note amidst a sharing of sounds (noises, music, words), vibrations and silences: a fusional experience of omnipotence. (213)

The “fusional experience of omnipotence” refers to the infant’s understanding of itself as connected to ‘other(s)’ as part of (indeed the centre of) a responsive audiophonic exchange network. The exhibition “makes sense,” therefore, in the (syn)aesthetic, or rather (skin)aesthetic, sense of the word because the ability of soundwaves to bounce off, and between, bodies shows how we might make one sense (the tactile) of another (sound) to create a ‘common sound skin’ between spectators. Sounds and vibrations
might therefore be harnessed in future works to create a sense of veritable group
connection.

Frankenstein’s Creature is a patchwork of different skins just as the fabric
membrane in *Macbeth* holds together the spectators’ skins to form a ‘common skin’
(skin)aesthetic. In *SCAR CYMBALS* the amalgamation of skins, or rather the
information about the different skins – carried by soundwaves, is more attenuated from
direct skin-to-skin contact because, although the vibrations are physically felt, it is not
a visible connection. It illustrates “the invisible side of the visible” skins. Nonetheless,
the way sound functions here exemplifies how the formation of a collective identity
can be predicated on the interaction between skin and sound. Lecourt asserts that
“sound can never be grasped; only its sonorous source can be identified” (211), yet
just because a sound cannot be physically grasped does not mean that it cannot be
physically felt. Lecourt suggests how music can move the listener which she “relate[s]
to the gesticulations of a baby being carried and the coenesthetic qualities of
‘holding’” (213); therefore, as it is from this impression of being “held” that Lecourt
derives the concept of a ‘musical envelope,’ it makes sense to conceive of the acoustic
environments in performance as similarly capable of approximating the skin’s tactile
qualities and, indeed, influencing ideas of physically felt intersubjectivity.

**Pathogenic Sound Mirrors in *SCAR CYMBALS***

But how can we move from an understanding of the way in which vibrations
physically connect individuals in the immediate performance environment to an
understanding of how the same (skin)aesthetic technique might work to influence
embodied empathy – or the spectator’s awareness of themselves in relation to othered
groups beyond the performance space? As we have already seen, Connor provides a
useful explanation of how skin manifests in cultural productions to motion towards
the idea of a social psyche. Connor writes:

[i]f we can see an increase in the intensity and frequency of processes designed
to promote or supplement the process of psychic integumentation, then it seems
appropriate to ask what are the cultural, as opposed to purely medical conditions
to which this is a response. What in Didier Anzieu’s phrase might be the terms of
‘pathogenic impingement by the environment on the skin ego’ which leads to the
formation of these second skins? (*TBS* 64)
*SCAR CYMBALS* complicates this idea, however, because the sound work seems to simulate the conditions of society’s “pathogenic impingement.” Or, more specifically, the sound work simulates the very conditions by which otherness is politically and socially imposed on the marginalized groups (the refugees in Europe or the victims of police violence in the US) whose voices and actions the media create a culture of mistrust around. The work acoustically simulates an experiential approximation of such conditions for the spectator who is silenced and alienated. Connor writes of society’s “pathogenic impingement” on the societal skin-ego and suggests how it materializes in the presentation of psychic integuments, or substitute skins, in productions but I suggest that we can develop this to include the creation of ‘pathogenic sound mirrors’ as a reflection of the cultural, social, or political conditions of ‘othering’ – which impinge on the spectator’s auditory-phonic skin and, in turn, on the skin-ego as part of the approximate experiential simulation of being ‘othered’ which takes place.

Indeed, *SCAR CYMBALS* arguably models the kind of acoustic environment, or ‘wrapping of sound,’ that produces defects in the ‘auditory-phonic skin.’ Anzieu explains that “characteristic defects of the pathogenic sound mirror” include:

- Its dissonance: it intervenes in ways that contradict what the baby is feeling, expecting or expressing;
- Its abruptness: it is insufficient and excessive by turns and switches from one extreme to the other in an arbitrary manner that the baby cannot understand; it inflicts multiple micro-traumas on the nascent protective shield (once, after a lecture I had given on the “sound wrapping of the Self” a member of the audience […] spoke to me about problems he had in relation to “sounds invading his Self”).
- Its impersonality: the mirror of sounds fails to give the baby information either about what it is feeling or about what its mother is feeling about it. (*TSE* 187-188)

The infant must see, or rather hear, something of itself in the ‘sound mirror’ to develop an ‘auditory-phonic skin.’ Anzieu explains that there is a “mortal threat of an audiophonic shroud fallen into tatters, which does not form a wrapping or retain in the Self either psychical life or meaning” (*TSE* 191). Adults, however, also experience issues of “sounds invading [the] Self” and *SCAR CYMBALS* enables us to see how this aspect of Anzieu’s theory might operate analogously in a different context. We might
understand some semblance of this threat as manifesting in the “impersonality”, “abruptness”, and “dissonance” of the soundscapes I suggest function as ‘pathogenic sound mirror[s]’ in SCAR CYMBALS. The abruptness of the noise in the ‘Rear Gallery’ is similarly “insufficient and excessive by turns and switches from one extreme to the other” in what seems to be an “arbitrary manner.” In a comparable way to the infant who cannot understand anything of itself in the ‘pathogenic sound mirror,’ the spectator cannot understand themselves, or how they influence sound, in their immediate experience of the soundscape. The experience of SCAR CYMBALS is, however, temporary and unlike the infant whose auditory-phonic skin may be permanently affected by the experience of a pathogenic sound mirror, the spectator will not experience any permanent damage. What this achieves, as I have suggested, is an experiential approximation of the very conditions of socially and politically imposed otherness – specifically of being silenced, acoustically overwhelmed, and made to feel as if they are encroaching on a space which does not belong to them – which parallels the experiences of the migrants, refugees, and victims of police violence that inspired the piece (as you will recall the development of the sound work took place at the same time as “the widespread outcry and panic around the refugee crisis in Europe and the parallel crisis of police violence in the US”), which, in turn, has the potential to raise awareness and prompt embodied empathy and ethical consideration for the ‘other’ in future.

The ‘auditory-phonic skin’ is the backcloth to the skin-ego. Faults in the individual’s ‘sound image of self’ necessarily precede faults in the ‘skin-self’, including a sense of ‘self’ as not fully contained by either the ‘audiophonic shroud’ or the skin. Anzieu presents a case study on his patient ‘Marsyas’ which illustrates this. Connor points out of Anzieu’s case study that ‘Marsyas’ is “so named because he is skinless, either because the skin of his ‘acoustic envelope’ is lacerated and interrupted, or because it has never properly formed” (WBSS). In Anzieu’s case study, ‘Marsyas’ was deprived of meaningful, or consistent, skin-to-skin contact with his mother as well as being subject to a “negative bath of words” (SIS 25). Consequently, ‘Marsyas’ had difficulty in understanding himself, or his skin, as the container of volume and he experienced (psychosomatic) difficulties hearing ‘other(s)’ in later audiophonic exchanges. Anzieu explains that ‘Marsyas’ mother’s voice:

[h]ad hoarse and rough intonations, corresponding to frequent, abrupt, and unpredictable mood swings. The relation of the baby Marsyas to the maternal
melody […] was thus interrupted […] Marsyas’ mother was […] unable to talk to [Marsyas] in a language through which he could recognise himself. (SIS 25)

Much of Anzieu’s writing on the quality of the mother’s voice (linking the mother’s monotone voice, for example, to the development of schizophrenia) has been disproved but we can continue to work with the idea that the qualities of the acoustic environment influence ideas of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’, and that abrupt and unpredictable soundscapes interrupt the sense of ‘self’ via the skin and acoustic envelope. *SCAR CYMBALS* thus conceivably impinges on the spectator’s psychical envelopes, albeit temporarily, through what might be understood as a comparable, analogous “mirror of sound” (*TSE* 173) felt through and influenced by the spectator’s skin. First, it interrupts the spectator’s ‘sound image of self’ because they cannot make sense of the soundscape, or how they influence it, and, in turn, this influences them to doubt their ‘skin self,’ which corresponds to their embodied sense of ‘self’, which goes unacknowledged by the ‘other’, or the models in the live-art space.

**How Skinscapes Become Soundscapes**
The soundscape in the ‘Rear Gallery,’ as I mentioned earlier, is composed of tracks which respond to atrocities and societal issues, as well as sounds which correspond to warfare (drones and bombs). Each track is triggered by an infrared sensor and the tracks are overlaid as the spectators move around. If ‘The Mother’ sculpture in the ‘Rear Gallery’ projects a soundscape based on the skinscape, or the spectators’ skins, however, then surely the acoustic environment is not a ‘pathogenic sound bath’ because the spectators should be able to understand (hear and feel) something of themselves in the soundscape? *Should*, however, is the operative word. In later embodied thought in analysis spectators can understand how the soundscape reflects them, or, more specifically, how it projects a ‘skin image of self’ through sound and how such a discordant soundscape might correspond to the experiences of ‘othered’ groups. The transformation of the skinscape (the spectator’s heat and proximity via ‘The Mother’ sculpture’s sensors) to soundscape models the inverse of Serres’ statement that the “faint evidence of the visible and audible linger on the skin [as] on it remain the invisible side of the visible, the inaudible sounds of music,” because, here, the soundscape bears the “faint evidence” of skin. The soundscape is the “invisible side of the [spectator’s] visible” skin.
As one attendant @lenaheubusch comments on Twitter – “#soundscapes #motiondetector #physicalawareness” – the motion detectors produce the soundscape, based on the skinscape, which influences the spectator’s “physical awareness” within what is the ‘sound image of self.’ However, at the time, the spectator does not necessarily realise how the sound bath implicates them or understand the wider geopolitical and ethical concerns encoded in the tracks; therefore, the soundscape simulates the conditions of a negative sound bath. Similarly to how ‘Marsyas’’ mother “had been unable to talk to [him] in a language through which he could recognise himself,” the spectator is unaware of how the ‘The Mother’ responds to them or what the sound work produced encodes. The stakes of not being responded to in SCAR CYMBALS are, of course, much lower than in Anzieu’s theory of infant development and the ‘Marsyas’ case study. The spectator does not necessarily have the same expectations of being responded to as the infant does (although, as we shall see, some spectators understand that the acoustic environment is responsive to them and want to know specifically how it responds to them). The nature of the sound-based experience in SCAR CYMBALS, its relationship to affect, and the relationship between the acoustic environment and the spectator’s sense of ‘self’ is, however, operating similarly to Anzieu’s ideas; indeed, the sound is felt as invasive, aversive, alienating and disruptive to a sense of ‘self’. We can therefore draw a convincing analogy between Anzieu’s theory, the case study on ‘Marsyas’, and the spectator’s experience of the sound work in SCAR CYMBALS. I would also go as far as to hypothesise that similar psychic processes to those involved in Anzieu’s account of the development of the skin-ego are somehow, albeit temporarily, re-activated in the spectator’s experience of SCAR CYMBALS.

Of course, we cannot speculate as to the condition of the spectators’ acoustic envelopes prior to entering the exhibition, but we can conjecture that their auditory-phonic skins are, albeit temporarily, “lacerated and interrupted” through immersion in a soundscape which is not immediately meaningful but is immediately piercing. ‘The Mother’ impinges on the spectator’s auditory-phonic skin through palpable sound felt on the literal skin. If the lacerations, or interruptions, to ‘Marsyas’’ acoustic envelope render him “skinless”, then an analogous, performative, “skinning” takes place in the ‘Rear Gallery.’ Just as Marsyas in Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses’ cries “why do you strip me from myself?” (qtd. in Feldherr 102) as he is flayed, ‘The Mother’ facilitates a comparable process of flaying by taking information about the skinscape (the spectators’ heat, proximity, and motion) and stripping it, or rather stripping the ‘skin
self,’ from the spectator and projecting it as sound, or the ‘sound image of self.’ In the ‘Main Hall’ we conceptualised the ‘common sound skin’ carried by vibrations. In the ‘Rear Gallery,’ it is the skinscape which becomes the soundscape through the spectator’s navigation of, and proximity to, ‘The Mother.’ The soundscape, therefore, represents another reformulation of the ‘common sound skin’ because it takes the spectators’ skins and makes sense of them, or rather makes another sense of them, by producing soundscapes which register as tactile and aural experience. This illustrates how sound works specifically in SCAR CYMBALS to transform skinscapes into soundscapes and how this relates to Anzieu’s ideas regarding identity formation in a way which draws on spectators’ embodied experiences; however, it also gestures to the ways in which sound/skin might be used in future to impact on the spectator’s sense of ‘self’ and/or to increase empathy, for example, with the ‘other’ through the experiential simulation of the conditions of ‘othering’. I argue that if a work has a clear intention regarding the desired spectator reaction and the spectator is aware of even just a vague narrative framework or theme then the sound-and-skin based aesthetic technique used in SCAR CYMBALS can be used to prime bodies for action. In the following section, I consider how the soundscape influences audience reactions and how their embodied experience of sound acts as a method of interpreting the work.

Reactions to SCAR CYMBALS’ Soundscape
The soundscape produced in the ‘Rear Gallery’ dramatizes the abruptness, seeming impersonality, and dissonance of the ‘pathogenic sound mirror.’ In an analogous sense to Anzieu’s developmental theory it interrupts the spectator’s sense of ‘self’, specifically their acoustic envelope, but also alludes to ruptures in society (the social skin-ego). The tracks correspond to atrocities, processes of othering, and institutional violence and although the spectator is not necessarily aware of this meaning at the time they are still very much aware of their embodied engagement with the work (or the work’s embodied engagement with them). As we saw, in the introduction to this thesis, Artaud writes in “No More Masterpieces” that:

[i]f music affects snakes, it is not on account of the spiritual notions it offers them, but because snakes are long and coil their lengths upon the earth, because their bodies touch the earth at almost every point; and because the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth affect them like a very subtle, very long massage; and I propose to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer’s subjects
and conduct them *by means of their organisms* to an apprehension of the subtlest notions. (81)

Indeed, bodies act as a means for interpreting performance and are “prime[d] for action when sound vibrations are perceived” (*TPS* 129). One charmed spectator comments in a *TimeOut* review, for example, “I loved the almost painful sub bass drones in both rooms which [were] borderline intolerable […] yet addictive” (Carr). That the sub bass drone was felt as “addictive” suggests that this spectator (unlike others) is motivated to remain immersed in the performance environment and perhaps begin to make sense of it. Another spectator describes, however, her experience of the soundscape:

One of my colleagues […] run [sic] out of the space after a few seconds of viewing the exhibition, since for her it became unsupportable. I didn’t have enough time to discover myself where is the sensor and how it works since after a while the sound was triggered to be lauder [sic] too many times and I could not bear it any more. Maybe it was a part of Huanca’s intentions: another representation of a torture. (Faina)

This demonstrates how *SCAR CYMBALS* makes snakes of spectators who are moved – here to the exit – by vibrations. The spectator expresses her frustration at not understanding the control she has before the noise becomes unbearable and she, too, exits. The comment “I didn’t have enough time to discover myself where is the sensor and how it works” models Di Benedetto’s argument that during our experience of a performance “our attention focuses on identifying the sound and situating where it is located” (*TPS* 129). The reviewer’s comment reflects the desire to “master sonority by using vision” (Lecourt 212), to establish the location of the sound.

The spectator speaks of discovering the mechanism behind the soundtracks as opposed to meaning itself; however, the speculative “maybe it was […] another representation of a torture” marks an attempt, through later embodied thought in analysis, at deciphering the meaning behind the *felt* as negative sound bath. The spectator’s suggestion not only corresponds to the idea that sounds can be weaponised (Bradshaw and Chatdizatki 354) but implies how the ‘negative sound bath’ imparts its message through sound as *felt* sensation (the sounds of drones *felt* as a “representation of […] torture”) even if the words of the poem or the viral post cannot be understood. The soundscape may be interpreted as a kind of proto-language, therefore, because it
is felt as unpleasant – “painful”, “torture”, “intolerable”, “unsupportable” – or, more specifically, it is felt as a “representation” of torture which alludes to the semantic meaning behind the tracks. It alludes, through sensation, to the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’, or ‘self’ as ‘other’, in parallel to the experiences of the ‘other(s)’ encoded by the soundscape. It also suggests that the spectator had some awareness of the work’s broader socio-political resonance at least via retrospective analysis.

The shift in control from the models in the ‘Main Hall’ to the spectators in the ‘Rear Gallery,’ suggests that the responsibility for deciphering meaning from sound falls to the spectator and it is specifically a bodily focus which is required. The fact that the spectators’ actions cause the auditory confusion, as skinscapes become soundscapes, implies that the spectators can resolve it (recall the desire to understand how the sensors work). We might also recall Serres’ observation that “to confuse means, first of all, to pour together, to conjoin several streams into one,” here skin – the tactile – and sound, but that when “taken literally, confusion sounds rather like solution” (162), as the solution might be found through the spectator’s later embodied, or rather skinbodied, thought which aims to make sense of the (skin)aesthetics – or the solution of both visual and sound-based senses – of the immediate experience.

Conclusion

The performance space frustrates the spectator with its prohibition on touch, but the soundscape has the potential to get under the spectator’s skin nonetheless: indeed, as we have seen, the spectator’s movement facilitates the proverbial sense of “getting under the skin” of the ‘other’. The closer the spectator gets to ‘The Mother,’ for example, the “more viscerally [they] feel the sound and see the violence with which the synthetic skins […] that are draped over the sculpture vibrate” (Maheshwari 13). The spectator wants to find out how to control the soundscape that overwhelms them; however, just as the media has perpetuated a mistrust around the words and actions of othered groups, represented by the soundtracks, SCAR CYMBALS’ skinscapes and soundscapes lead the spectator to mistrust their own words and actions. SCAR CYMBALS enforces the spectator’s silence, a parallel mistrust of their own words, through the ‘sound bath’ in the ‘Main Hall,’ and then the ‘Rear Gallery’s’ acoustic conditions frustrate the spectator’s understanding of their own actions (how do their actions influence the soundscape?).

SCAR CYMBALS illustrates how easily a group, or an individual, can be transformed into an ‘other’ in a performance context and, indeed, more generally. The
vibrational soundscape in the ‘Main Hall’ creates a sense of being part of an embodied collective. The sense of becoming a collective is based on the shared experience of vibrational, tangible, sound. Spectators are aware that other spectators are experiencing sound in the same way and are similarly unacknowledged by the performers who do not welcome them into the space. This functions in a comparable way to Lecourt’s psychoanalytic concept of a ‘musical envelope’ which creates a felt sense of cohesion between group members based on a shared experience of physical sound. It is this shared experience of sound which establishes the parallel experience of being ‘othered’ by enforcing the spectator’s silence. In this sense, the establishment of the collective operates relatively neutrally – it does not foster any meaningful sense of group identity, for example, amongst spectators in the same way as we saw in Macbeth where the audience are aware that they are part of the body-politic of the play-world. Indeed, as we have seen, it is the experience of being alienated, and unacknowledged, as an individual which is felt as most aversive in this work.

More specifically, I have argued that SCAR CYMBALS creates the experience of being ‘othered’ through conditioning a sense of entering a territory that does not belong to spectators. The spectator’s experience is only a performative parallel of ‘othering’, relative but comparable to the ‘othered’ groups the soundtracks represent. It illustrates how the creation of conditions which simulate society’s “pathogenic impingement” on the acoustic-envelope and, in turn, the skin-ego and sense of ‘self’, operates similarly to Connor’s argument that an increase in the presentation of psychic integumentations points towards cultural conditions that impinge on the societal skin-ego. The spectator’s silence, conditioned by the performance environment, can be understood as analogous (although, of course, not the same) to the experience of the conditions of social and political ‘othering’, to correspond to the institutionalized silencing of refugees in Europe or those labelled as “criminal other” in the US, the contexts to which Huanca is responding in the piece. SCAR CYMBALS’ palpable soundscapes therefore represent the possibility of priming the spectator for action and embodied empathy with the ‘other’. The foundations are set but it requires the spectator to spend time acclimatizing to and making sense of what initially appears to be an impersonal acoustic environment which can be achieved through later embodied thought in analysis.

In conclusion, this chapter has used SCAR CYMBALS as a case study to argue how (skin)aesthetics can be extended as a method of performance analysis to take into account the skin-based experience of palpable sound, as well as how sound can be
used to manipulate the spectator’s skin-based experience and encode wider meaning in a work. I have suggested how the skinbodied effects/affects of sound might, in future, be turned to socially significant ends within a performance framework which aims to provoke a reaction and/or raise awareness in response to a particular issue. I have also suggested, with recourse to Anzieuian theory, that the interplay and conflation of skin and sound-based experiences is significant because it shows us that there is something enduring in the way in which ideas of human intersubjectivity and identity are structured via the skin. Finally, I have argued that the spectator’s skinbodied experience of sound and its affects in *SCAR Cymbals* reinforces the idea of skin as ‘common sense’ and as a site of engagement that can be used to make sense of performance.
Chapter 4 Fran[skin]stein: A New “Skin Job”

How many skins make up Frankenstein’s Creature? How many skins would you need if you wanted to make one of your own?\(^{18}\) You would need to know how to make one first, of course, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) does not go into the specifics or scientifics of how to do so. In fact, Victor Frankenstein actively discourages others and, by extension, the reader from any D.I.Y. attempts at reanimating corpses. We are told that the Creature is a “monster” and of the “deformity of [his] figure” (Shelley 90) but there are comparatively few details regarding the Creature’s skin or, more specifically, his skins in the text. The skin itself is mentioned only once when Frankenstein describes his horror at the Creature’s appearance:

> His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (Shelley 39)

Fernando Vidal also points out that Shelley’s “narrative includes no nightly forays into cemeteries or morgues, no organ removal from corpses, no stitching together of bodily parts, [and] no scars on the Creature’s skin” (94) which means that, as Judith Halberstam suggests, “the reader can only imagine the dreadful spectacle of the monster and [therefore] its monstrosity is limited only by the reader’s imagination”

\(^{18}\) We know that Frankenstein’s Creature is an assemblage of parts taken from an indeterminate number of different bodies. Alan Rauch, for example, draws attention to Frankenstein’s claims that he can only re-animate the re-assembled parts of bodies as opposed to the recently deceased whole body – a claim which runs contrary to nineteenth-century studies in galvanism (238). The fact that an assemblage of different limbs necessitates an assemblage of different skins is, however, less frequently discussed. Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson point out that “Frankenstein’s Creature has impeccable credentials for a monster [because] he [represents the] mixing [of] life and death [and] the body parts of several individuals […] stitched together from cadavers” (239), which means he also represents the mixing of several cadavers’ skins.
(3). But what if we could do more than just imagine the Creature’s skins? What if, at some level, we could inhabit them? Or stitch our own skins into the Creature’s? In this chapter, I suggest how Tristan Bernays’ play *Frankenstein* (2017), directed by Eleanor Rhodes, offers spectators such an opportunity at the intersections between sound and skin. I build on the idea that skin(s) might be created and perceived through other sensory modalities – specifically sound.

Michel Serres recognises that the skin is the site for sensory engagement – “light, shadow, clamour, silence, fragrance, all sorts of waves impregnate and flood our skin” (70) – and, as we shall see, sound conveys the Creature’s skin-based experience to an audience in the play *Frankenstein* (2017). In the previous chapter, I focussed on the spectator’s experience of palpable sound in *SCAR CYMBALS* and how the skin-based experience of sound might be used as a method for interpreting the performance’s encoded meanings. I suggested how future productions might manipulate the sound work to increase a spectator’s awareness and/or empathy with the ‘other’s’ experience. In this chapter, however, the relationship between skin and sound is more abstract than in the previous chapter. I consider how sound represents the skin and approximates the skin’s tactile qualities as well as how, in turn, this forms connections between bodies in performance without a literal touch-based component. I conclude with a proposal for a new “skin job” (Halberstam 6), a term I explain further on. My proposal for a new ‘skin job’ identifies the sound-based aesthetic technique in operation in Bernays’ *Frankenstein* and reinforces the idea of sound as a (skin)aesthetic in productions. The new ‘skin job’ is therefore another aesthetic technique that practitioners might use, or modify, to produce certain (skin)aesthetic affects/effects. It picks up the thread of this thesis that identifies various aesthetic practices, in which the senses and the skin may be manipulated, which can be used in future works.

The chapter begins with Bernays’ reimagining of *Frankenstein* to ask how the mingling of bodies extends from Creature to spectator via the skin, or its sound-based approximations, in performance and to what effect. This is the second part of my two-part consideration of sound as a (skin)aesthetic and the chapter is structured in two parts. Firstly, I focus on skin and then on sound as a (skin)aesthetic. In the second part, I focus on David Gregory and Rowena Lennon’s sound work in Bernays’ *Frankenstein* in relation to the skin or, more specifically, as an elaboration of the ways that sound may be understood to produce skins. Through a consideration of three key scenes in the production – the Creature’s abandonment; a scene of audience interaction; and the
scene in which the Creature is brought to life – I suggest how the staged acoustic environment, or the ‘sound bath’ (see Chapter 3), can be understood to support the formation of the Creature’s ‘sound image of self’ in the absence of the skin-to-skin contact required for the formation of a skin-ego. I argue that the audience interaction scene, in which spectators teach the Creature to speak, dramatizes Anzieu’s idea that “spoken words […] have the power of a skin” (TSE 291) as the tonal approximates the tactile. Similarly to SCAR Cymbals, I suggest that such sound work might be turned to socially meaningful ends in future productions. Bernays’ Frankenstein, for example, can be understood to gesture towards the necessity of a touch-based ethics of care because it is clear to the audience that they have a responsibility for the vulnerable ‘other’, the Creature, on stage. In relation to both echo mirror neuron systems and audio-visual mirror neuron function (which I explain where relevant further on), I then suggest how the spectator’s experience of sound brings skin to the forefront of thought to suture the Creature and spectator. I suggest the way in which the spectator’s experience of sound as it relates to the skin triggers an experience of relational embodiment; in other words, the spectator’s belief that they think they know what it feels like to inhabit the ‘other’s’ skin. I conclude by presenting a new kind of ‘skin job.’

The implications of my reading of Bernays’ Frankenstein are twofold. Firstly, where there is no direct skin-to-skin or physical skin-based stimulation in the spectator’s experience, the sound work stimulates the spectator’s skinbodied thought processes and increases identification and empathy with the Creature. In turn, this enhances the spectator’s understanding of the story of Frankenstein from the Creature’s perspective. The significance for my overall enquiry into (skin)aesthetics is that the sound work reinforces the idea of the skin as the ‘common sense’ because, through sensory slippage, sound returns spectators to the skin as a method for interpreting the performance. While such effects may seem more illusory than in previous case studies, the representational sound work can trigger neurocognitive processes of identification with the ‘other’ which suggests the importance of skin in negotiating ideas of intersubjectivity even when there is no skin-to-skin contact.

Tristan Bernays’ Frankenstein (2017)
Tristan Bernays’ re-imagining of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein moved from The Watermill Theatre to Wilton’s Music Hall in March 2017. The work was originally commissioned as a touring production for school children but the transfer to Wilton’s
Music Hall saw it staged for predominantly adult audiences. The staging is minimalistic: the props are limited to lamps, a coat, a mirror, a trunk, and a journal. As the audience enter, an atmospheric fog hangs above the stage against the black backdrop. There are two cast members. George Fletcher portrays both Creature and Creator and switches between the two. Rowena Lennon (the chorus) plays a number of instruments and any secondary characters. True to Shelley’s novel, Frankenstein abandons the Creature at the beginning of the play and for much of the beginning of the play the Creature is portrayed as infant at a pre-verbal stage with limited motor skills. The audience sees the influence of movement coach Tom Jackson Greaves as the Creature evolves from crawling infant to upright “man” in search of Frankenstein. Watermill Theatre’s promotional material (see Appendix B) describes Bernays’ re-imagining of “the timeless relationship between parent and child” which invites my Anzieuian analysis as to how this relationship plays out through the skin, or rather lack of skin-to-skin contact.

The production presents the skin as a shared site in a number of different ways. Firstly, the skin is a shared site between the Creature and Creator who share a literal skin in this production (because they are played by the same actor). Secondly, during the audience interaction scene, I argue that a conceptually felt skin stretches between the spectator and the Creature when the tonal approximates the tactile. And finally, I suggest how Gregory’s sound work opens up the Creature’s skin(s) for imagined occupation by, potentially, an entire audience. In other words, I explore how the sound of skin invites the spectator to think that they feel themselves, at some level, in the Creature’s skins. As we know, there is no direct skin-to-skin contact in Frankenstein, unlike in HARD C*CK, and there is also no physical skin-based stimulation, as in Macbeth or SCAR CYMBALS; however, the audience’s experience of the sound work in Frankenstein suggests how the skin as ‘common sense’ acts as a method of interpreting performance. The spectator is returned, as we shall see, to an awareness of the skin through the acoustic simulation of the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience. In addition, as Anzieu suggests, we can see how the tonal approximates the tactile and how such sensory slippage motivates the formation of felt connections in group settings which reinforces basic psychoanalytic ideas of identity-formation and intersubjectivity.

**Skin)Aesthetics in Bernays’ Frankenstein**
In *Skin Shows* (1995), Judith Halberstam argues that skin “becomes a kind of metonym for the human” and, indeed, what is not human, through the study of the nineteenth-century Gothic Horror novel and its afterbirth in horror films. Skin’s “colour, its pallor, [and] its shape mean everything within a semiotic of monstrosity” (Halberstam 6-7) and it is often suggestive of the boundaries between bodies, the internal and the external, and between the human and the ‘other’ – be that gender, species, class, or racial ‘other’, or, like Frankenstein’s Creature, an amalgamation of *others*. Indeed, the Creature in *Frankenstein* has been understood, amongst many other readings, as representing the proletariat body (Benčin 33; Halberstam 29); the “body politic” (Baldick 52); and Anne K. Mellor uses the Creature’s skin to argue for a link between the Creature and the “Mongolian race, [or] one of the five races of man first classified in 1795 by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach” (481). Halberstam suggests that “monsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of the human, these novels make way for the invention of the human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (22) and, in this way, produce “the human as a discursive effect” (46). Halberstam points out that “the monster in *Frankenstein* establishes visual horror as the main standard by which the monster judges and is judged” (39).

In “What is a Monster?” Peter Brooks recognises that “the monster clearly understands that it is not visual relation that favours him – but rather the auditory” (83). Brooks uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to consider the formation of intersubjective relationships through acts of narrating and listening in *Frankenstein*. Following the Creature’s murder of Frankenstein’s brother, for example, the “monster persists in his claim that he has a right to a hearing from his creator” (Brooks 83) but Frankenstein demands of the Creature “Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form” (Shelley 79). The Creature responds: “Thus I relieve thee, my creator” […] and placed his hated hands before [Frankenstein’s] eyes […] “Thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me” (Shelley 79). Brooks comments on this “touching gesture” as indicative of the “opposition of sight and language [and between] the hideous body and the persuasive tongue” (83). Brooks

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19 Mellor also draws attention to the fact that the “text twice identifies the Creature’s skin with that of a “mummy”” (485). She writes “the only mummies that Mary Shelley could have seen [were] either in the British Museum (where mummies were unwrapped and displayed as early as the 1790s) or [in] the Louvre in 1814 [where the mummies] were typically painted with faces ranging in colour from pale yellow to reddish yellow and, if unwrapped, possessed an embalmed yellow skin” (485).
suggests that “the central issues of the novel are joined in the opposition of sight and speech” (81), as it is the monstrous sight of the Creature that obstructs listening. Bernays explained in an email exchange that his focus when writing the play (which is unpublished) was on character and language “rather than a physical or visual framework which would be more in line with the tactility of flesh and skin.” The absence of the stereotypical “visual framework[s],” which traditionally signify monstrosity, enables the reconfiguration of the skin in this case through the sound work.

The same actor portrays both Frankenstein and the Creature; therefore, the production literalizes a ‘common skin’ between two bodies in a re-imagining of the relationship between parent and child. As both product and paradox of this arrangement, there is no skin-to-skin contact extended towards the Creature from the maternal environment (Frankenstein). Frankenstein, as we know, abandons the Creature when he sees the disjunction between his designs – “I had selected his features as beautiful” – and the reality – “Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” – of the Creature’s appearance. Of course, to approximate the description of the Creature’s skin would pose practical issues for the transition from Creature to Creator in this production; however, in forcing one skin to cover two bodies, the performance dramatizes the idea of a skin that “scarcely cover[s]” and arguably represents both the bond between Creator and Creature as well as the strain on this bond.

Fletcher’s swapping of characters during scenes where the Creator and Creature interact, particularly during confrontational scenes, requires a high-energy output from the actor as he switches positions on stage with one side of his body representing Creator and the other side the Creature. The audience, who will most likely have a level of familiarity with the original story, either anticipate, or begin to suspect, that the character switching is not sustainable. In this production, I argue that Frankenstein can be understood to relinquish his claim to the shared skin when he dies at the close of the play. Indeed, similarly to how the rending of the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ between an infant and its caregiver precedes the infant’s understanding of ‘self’, and the formation of a skin-ego (the mental representation of ‘self’), it is ultimately the death of Frankenstein (a conclusive rending of a literally shared skin) and the Creature’s survival at the close of this production (in contrast to the novel) that allows the Creature to take possession of “a skin of one’s own” (Lafrance 25). Further supporting this idea of a conceptual ‘common skin’ between parent and child is the
fact that the Creature “call[s] out for his ‘Father’” (Tergeist) as Frankenstein dies. A ‘common skin’ fantasy is typically predicated on the infant’s experience of tactile care and we know that the Creature does not receive such care. As B. L. Sherrington points out in a review of the production, once the Creature is abandoned he “craves the love of a parent, particularly when he is beaten by the children of an elderly blind man [De Lacey], asking ‘Am I never to feel a friendly touch?’.” At the heart of this production is the Creature’s desire for the reassuring skin-to-skin contact found in the supportive maternal environment. A (skin)aesthetic is thus produced in this version of *Frankenstein* without having to physically create or manipulate skins.

It, perhaps, seems strange to suggest that it is the Creature’s skin which is most significant in a production where there are no visible alterations and, indeed, in a production where we might also read a ‘body’, or ‘identity’, of one’s own as viable aims for the Creature. The fact, however, that the Creature’s skin is unaltered is significant in relation not only – as we have seen – to the tendency to visibly emphasise the Creature’s skin as the site/sight of difference in productions of *Frankenstein* but also in relation to the semiotics of monstrosity. Halberstam, as we know, recognises that monstrosity is encoded visually in *Frankenstein*:

only a blind man can accept the monster uncritically in this novel and, in a way, the blindness of old De Lacey represents also the blindness of the reader. We are disposed as readers to sympathise with the monster because, unlike the characters in the novel, we cannot see him. Once the monster becomes visible in contemporary horror films, monstrosity becomes less and less recuperable. (39)

By not aesthetically altering the Creature’s literal skin, as I have suggested, an effect of Bernays’ production is that spectators are once again disposed to sympathise with the Creature. Reviewer Edward Lukes suggests that the depiction of the Creature “creat[es] possibly too much sympathy” as a result, perhaps, of the lack of visual indicators of monstrosity which then produces a disparity between the Creature’s appearance and the monstrous acts he commits (this is not to endorse the idea that morality and attractiveness are correlated, of course, but it would be in line with the problematic semiotics of monstrosity). In his review, Greg Stewart recognises that “no gory make-up or neck bolts are required here, just pure performance portrays the monstrous being” and Mark Ludmon similarly writes that “George Fletcher embodies
the Creature with sinuous movement and anguished expression with no need for extra make-up.”

In Bernays’ production it is arguably the human appearance of the Creature’s unaltered skin – a skin which is white and male and, therefore, the ‘human’ Halberstam suggests *Frankenstein* produces as a discursive effect – which means that spectators are more likely to identify with, listen to, respond, and sympathise with the Creature. While I suggest that the lack of visual horror makes it easier for the audience to relate to the Creature this is not entirely unproblematic. It could be perceived as suggesting that those who are not white or who are not male or who are visually different in some way (as Frankenstein’s Creature would be) are non or less-than-human and, therefore, less deserving of an audience. Skin colour, as I mentioned in the introduction, conceivably influences levels of engagement and identification and this is an area for further investigation in future audience research into (skin)aesthetic affects/effects, though beyond the scope of my investigation here. Despite the ways in which the Creature’s human skin might be problematized, and audience members with different skin colour or appearance might identify differently at one level, it arguably and, perhaps most convincingly, also serves to emphasise the fact that monstrosity, and monstrous behaviour, often takes human form.

Sherrington writes of Bernays’ fondness for monsters and quotes Bernays’ belief that monsters “remind us of what it means to be human. Not just because their hideous shapes make us reflect on our own, but because they can often demonstrate far more humanity than us actual humans.” Sherrington goes on to suggest that “these same thoughts permeate through [Bernays’] version of Mary Shelley’s masterpiece.” Not only does the “monster” share the human Creator’s skin in this production, and thus embodies the interchangeability of human and “monster”, but the spectator may also see a resemblance to themselves in the Creature’s human form. Tim Hochstrasser recognises that Bernays’ *Frankenstein* “forces us to look with fresh and freshly sympathetic eyes at *Frankenstein*, a familiar moral fable, while leaving […] uncomfortable thoughts for our own time about how we make our own monsters, whether by intention or accident.” The production defamiliarizes *Frankenstein* and encourages spectators to think about the ways in which “monsters” are created, the fluidity between the categories of human and monster,20 and the conditions which

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20 In this respect, it is pertinent to mention the 2011 National Theatre production of *Frankenstein*, directed by Danny Boyle, for its interchangeable casting. Actors Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny
influence monstrosity in society. The presentation of the Creature’s skin is the most prominent way that this production defamiliarizes *Frankenstein* and, ultimately, the effect of the unaltered skin as (skin)aesthetic results in an increased sense of audience identification and, indeed, sympathy with the Creature. The Creature is not portrayed visually as an “obscenity of the surface” (Halberstam 38)\(^{21}\) and the effect of this is that the spectator responds to the Creature’s speech and the sound work with a renewed sympathy. The staging of *Frankenstein* in this way is valuable because, as Hochstrasser points out, we are left with “uncomfortable thoughts for our own time about how we make our own monsters, whether by intention or accident” which indicates the potential wider social significance behind the impetus spectators feel to help the vulnerable ‘other’. I argue that the importance of skin-to-skin contact in forming positive intersubjective relationships, as outlined by Anzieu, is dramatized in this production. The production has social significance therefore in terms of highlighting the necessity of a touch-based ethics of care as well as how a lack thereof has the potential to foster conditions from which “monsters” might emerge.

**Sound as (Skin)Aesthetic**

Allow me to draw you a ‘sound bath’ and fill it with skin. There are a number of theories which explore the ways in which sound (verbal and non-verbal) can approximate the skin or the tactile sense. In a psychoanalytic treatment setting Anzieu

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\(^{21}\) Anca Vlasopolos points out that the Creature “cannily acquires attributes of the upper class: their aesthetic prejudices and language” (127) in his attempts to make human connections by appealing to the other senses if he cannot appease sight. The Creature’s understanding of himself as an “obscenity of the surface” (Halberstam 38), motivates him to learn language in an attempt to sidestep the sight-based-judgement of others. The Creature explains how he “had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty and delicate complexions; but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool!” (Shelley 90) and soon realises that “he has no place in a society which protects class boundaries by enforcing standards of beauty and manners” (Vlasopolos 127). The difference between what is visually monstrous and “the beauty of the De Laceys” (Vlasopolos 127), or the human, therefore registers at skin level in *Frankenstein*. 

Lee Miller would alternate between performing the role of Creature or Creator for each performance. It is also notable for its (skin)aesthetics. The Creature’s skin has visible stitches, for example, and it breaks through a membrane-like film in the “birth” scene. There is scope for future research here, in terms of a more sustained comparison of the two *Frankenstein* productions, specifically in relation to the semiotics of monstrosity and audience response.
suggests that the spoken word, if meaningful and delivered at “the right moment” (PE 6), can function as a psychical skin by performing the same containment, protection, and support functions as the literal skin. I consider how sound has comparable “power[s] of a skin” in the acoustic environment of *Frankenstein*.

Zeynup Bulut presents the concept of a “skin-voice” which she defines as the “voice as embodied sound, as a physical and phenomenal matrix of senses, a point of contact and difference between self and the external world” (2). The “skin-voice” as a “matrix of senses” is comparable to Serres’ description of the skin as a “milieu”, for the mingling of the senses, and provides the conceptual link between a sound which makes contact, or is felt to touch (in a more abstract sense than palpable sound), and the fabric of skins facilitated by sound that I propose towards the end of this chapter. Indeed, the “skin-voice” posits sound as “embodied” because it is produced by the body – the tongue, contact between tongue and palette, or teeth, the vocal chords and so on – which gives a physicality to the sounds as they are projected from the internal environment to the external one.22 As we saw in the previous chapter, Anzieu considers the audiophonic exchange systems between an infant and its primary environment similarly. The infant’s awareness of “difference between self and the external world” is derived from its understanding of whether a sound came from ‘self’ or ‘other’, or whether the sound was internal (depth perception) or external (plane like), akin to the tactile or Bulut’s idea of the ‘skin-voice’ as a “point of contact” between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

In “The Musical Envelope,” Édith Lecourt suggests that Anzieu’s concept of the sonorous envelope (a psychical container formed through the experience of sound) is problematized by the nature of sound. She points out that sound has an “absence of boundaries” and, contrary to Bulut’s concept of the skin-voice, suggests it is characterized by a “lack of concreteness” (211). Lecourt rightly asserts that “sound can never be grasped; only its sonorous source can be identified” (211) but just because a sound cannot be physically grasped does not mean that it cannot be

22 Bulut offers a sustained analysis of Alvin Lucier’s work *I am sitting in a room* (1970), in which Lucier “reads a text, records his speaking – stuttering – voice [the pathology], plays it back into the room, and re-records the playback [the aesthetic] until the text and his speaking voice dissolves into the room frequencies” (Bulut 1). The experimental aesthetic of the work leads to the (re)embodiment of Lucier’s voice between the listener and the physical environment. Bulut also considers the aestheticized and pathologized speech against Anzieu’s more abstract, psychical, concepts of the sonorous envelope, planes, and walls.
physically felt (as we saw in the previous chapter) or that the individual will not reach out for it (whether to grab or understand) as we see in *Frankenstein* when the Creature reaches out to the audience to learn language. In this section, I consider sound as a (skin)aesthetic in a more abstract way, however. In other words, I do not consider how the audience physically feels sound but rather how the tonal approximates the tactile and the sounds of skin.

Deidre Heddon suggests how listening can assume a tactile quality through her consideration of Adrian Howells’ one-to-one performances. Heddon draws on Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “being singular-plural” to explain how listening “renders one with the other” (27) which parallels the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ but in a sound-based register. Heddon explains how by identifying the concept of:

> a listening beyond oral-aural communication, I identify what I refer to as an ‘entangled listening’ practice. I propose entangled listening as a resonant listening – a listening which depends on touching [and] of touch as listening – that is a resonant touching. (19)

Heddon develops the concept of ‘entangled listening’ in relation to her experience of Howells’ one-to-one performances *Held* (2007) and *The Garden of Adrian* (2009). The performances respectively involved physical contact, such as the washing of feet while listening (resonant listening), or spooning in silence (resonant touching), between Howells and Heddon-as-participant. Heddon observes that silence during physical contact enables “entangled listening” as another mode of connection. She suggests that participant and performer are involved in “resonant touching” as they listen to the sounds of the other’s body as a means of non-verbal communication. Listening can therefore become a medium for cohesion between bodies as Brooks suggested in his reading of *Frankenstein*. Indeed, Brooks recognises that “the nested narrative structure [of *Frankenstein*] calls attention to the presence of a listener for each speaker [and] interlocutionary relations [are] thus established” and that “each act of narration invokes a certain bond or contract: listen to me because” (82). The Creature, as an “obscenity of the surface” in the text, needed language to establish relationships as there was no opportunity to form them through tactile means. I argue that the Creature’s speech in Bernays’ *Frankenstein* is able to invoke a more tactile bond with the spectators who interact with him because the “obscenity of surface,” or
the Creature’s visual monstrosity, is not staged and thereby the “opposition between sight and speech” (Brooks 81) is mitigated.

If touch can listen and listening can touch, Heddon effectively formulates a “skin-ear” to complement Bulut’s “skin-voice.” However, the concept of resonant listening, or listening which depends on touching, specifically refers to listening which takes place in conjunction with touching. I consider a more attenuated variation of this concept whereby the spectator’s experience of listening to sounds still depends on touching but, more specifically, it depends on their embodied memories of touching and the tactile. In other words, there is no sound-to-skin or skin-to-skin contact in the scenes I consider in *Frankenstein*, yet touching experiences are still produced. Bulut, significantly, posits the formation of a “skin-voice” in the spaces in-between bodies just as I will argue that the ‘common sound skin,’ based on the tactile quality of verbal exchange or the sounds of skin, forms in the spaces between skins in the performance.

**Sound as (Skin)Aesthetic in *Frankenstein***

Unlike Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which is structured to offer Walton’s account of Frankenstein’s account of the Creature’s creation, perspective, and revenge, Bernays’ *Frankenstein* focuses almost exclusively on the narrative from the abandoned Creature’s perspective. It accentuates the conditions which create the “monster”. The hostile world is heightened by the sound work of Gregory and Lennon who produce the sounds of electricity, unseen wild animals, birds, crashing, rustling, screams, the punctuating sounds of an accordion and keyboard, all of which emanate from different locations on stage to create a sense of acoustic confusion. I argue that the soundscape initially functions to dramatize a ‘negative sound bath’ for the newly abandoned Creature.

Anzieu says that the ‘sound bath’ is the infant’s primary experience and that ‘self’ is defined through “introjecting the world of sound” (*TSE* 173) but, as you will recall from the previous chapter, the ‘negative sound bath’ can frustrate the sense of ‘self’ if the infant cannot hear anything meaningful about themselves. Indeed, the Creature is frightened and confused by its experience of the acoustic environment (the forest) for a significant period. In contrast, if the infant is part of a responsive audiophonic exchange system it develops a ‘sound image of self’ through the ‘sound mirror,’ or the maternal environment which responds meaningfully and consistently. Reviewers recognise from the Creature’s crawling movement and approach to the environment that he is “like a child” (Stewart), or a “man-child” (Perry-Smith),
comparable to a baby (Daley), and the Watermill Theatre’s guide describes the Creature’s search “for his true identity.” I therefore suggest that the Creature’s understanding of the ‘sound image of self’ (which he acquires when the soundscape makes sense to him – when he can recognise the source of sounds, for example, the modes of acoustic production, and the meaning of sounds) precedes his search for “true identity” and the final assumption of a “skin [of] its own” (Lafrance 25). Marc Lafrance argues that “Anzieu’s model is relevant to cultural theorists [because it] emphasizes the fact that the infant must learn how to make its skin its own” (25) and, following Frankenstein’s death at the close of the production, the Creature has no alternative but to learn how to make his newly acquired skin his own.

The Creature in the ‘Sound Bath’

The production presents the Creature’s perceptions of objects, sounds, and the elements as part of an extended sequence that corresponds to the Creature’s account in Shelley’s novel:

all the events of that period [the period following his abandonment] appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. (Shelley 79-80)

The protracted dramatization of this period in a day-by-day conceit shows the Creature’s increasing ability to make sense of his environment (learning about fire, pain, which foods to eat, what sounds to avoid, and so on). Each day the Creature is roused from sleep by the unmediated sounds around him which causes him visible distress.

Frankenstein’s Creature has long been implicated in a relationship with sound, particularly music. The affect that music is shown to have can be understood as predicated on sound’s ability to hold and contain when the Creature-as-infant is not physically supported. James Wierzbicki considers the filmic and theatrical history of Frankenstein to suggest what factors, such as the tropes of gothic melodrama or financial motivations, have contributed to the production of the monster as a violent “music lover” pacified by music. Shelley’s original novel, however, “never suggests that the Creature’s involvement with music was in any way different to the
involvement of the average human being” (Wierzbicki 247). There is an emphasis in the text on environmental sounds but direct musical references or descriptions of the tonal qualities of “a speaking voice [with] a musical quality” (Wierzbicki 247) are infrequent. While the Creature’s appreciation of music indicates his “sincere efforts to become human,” the “modern myth” of the music-loving monster transforms the Creature into:

a brute who, upon hearing music of any sort, holds in check his violent nature and/or goes into uncontrollable raptures that have him – stupidly, pathetically – attempting to “grab” the sounds that float past his ears. (Wierzbicki 256 -257)

Bernays’ *Frankenstein* similarly presents the Creature as sensitive to music and the acoustic environment. The Creature’s attempts to “grab” at sounds do not, however, indicate that the Creature is stupid, but rather that he is at a pre-verbal stage of development. He reaches for sounds as the infant reaches for the mother’s voice (S/S 26). As the Creature is not carried, contained, or held, it is reasonable to assume that he would not form a healthy skin-ego and so support must be derived from the acoustic environment instead (similarly to how Lecourt suggests that sounds can approximate the sensation of being carried or held). Frankenstein’s abandonment of the Creature prompts him to “grab” at sounds when no tactile response meets his outstretched hand at the beginning of the play.

Following the Creature’s “birth” he is mute and the play progresses in silence, with the exception of environmental sounds, to show the Creature’s painful acoustic (and physical) experience. Following the trajectory of the “modern myth” of the Creature as music lover, one of the first objects he interacts with is a keyboard held by Lennon. Lennon and the keyboard can be understood to represent the acoustic environment as a responsive body. The spectator observes the Creature jab erratically at the keyboard and then retreat in fear from the punctuating sounds. He repeats the process several times. The other body on stage leans towards or away from the Creature as an environment might yield to human touch thus positioning the Creature in an audiophonic exchange system, of sorts, with the acoustic environment. However, it cannot be understood as a supportive ‘sound bath’ until the Creature makes sense of the sounds in the environment (for example the sounds of birds) and can identify both the cause of the sound (“birds”) and locate the source (pointing to the area onstage that the bird sounds emanate from).
The scene between the Creature and the keyboard parallels Lecourt’s case study on David, an autistic child, who had a proclivity for music but would not play unless he felt that his back was supported. During treatment sessions Lecourt would sit behind David to provide the “back contact” he needed to produce the sounds “in front” (Lecourt 220). As the infant cannot see its own back it must be reassured of its complete ‘skin-self,’ or somatic image, through physical “backing” or support from the ‘other’. David uses Lecourt as a “prosthesis for the parts of his body that were not connected together […] by an auditory-phonic containing skin” (Lecourt 222), which shows how the physical sense of containment can be re-constituted by taking the other’s “skin” to repair the sense of ‘self’. While the Creature is an amalgamation of many skins, he does not have the backing, or tactile reassurance, which helps the infant develop a somatic image of ‘self’. He must, therefore, look to establish a ‘sound image of self’ by discovering the spoken word’s power to function as skin (through the later exchange with the audience) which can be interpreted as offering the verbal (and, indeed, tonal) backing, approximating the tactile, which the Creature requires to move forward in his pursuit of Frankenstein.

Sound certainly moves the Creature in this production both in terms of narrative progression and literally through his aversion to sonorous aggression. The sounds produced through the Creature’s first interactions with the acoustic environment are sharp, loud, unidentifiable, and unpleasant. The experience motivates the Creature to move away as though he feels “intruded upon” (SIS 31) by the sounds. This might be related to Anzieu’s suggestion that certain sounds (tonal qualities) are felt as “intruding” or disruptive to a sense of ‘self’. Anzieu writes that “monotonic” or “metallic” tones:

disturb[…] the constitution of the self: the sound bath no longer envelops the subject. It becomes disagreeable and in terms of a skin-self it would be said to be rough or discontinuous. It contains holes as well as producing them. (SIS 31)

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23 The Creature receives literal backing from De Lacey, however, during the conflict scene which follows the return of De Lacey’s children. The children return to find their father in an embrace with what they perceive to be a monster. A physical confrontation takes place during which the character of De Lacey, who had agreed to help the Creature, physically holds on to the Creature’s back as he moves to defend himself against attacks from invisible assailants (only two cast members).
Sound, here, is posited in a direct relation with the disruption of the ‘skin-self’ and the production of a perforated sense of ‘self’. The Creature begins life with a discontinuous physical ‘skin-self’, composed of multiple skins, and therefore requires the ‘sound bath,’ or acoustic environment, to restore a sense of ‘self’, containment, and continuity in the absence of skin-to-skin contact. While the Creature’s skins act as metaphor for the lack of sense of ‘self’ the Creature experiences, the appearance of such skins are also the cause for the lack of maternal environment, support, and contact that the Creature receives – the sight of the Creature motivates Frankenstein’s abandonment – which is the more significant reason (the lack of contact) that the Creature experiences this uncertain sense of ‘self’.

The ‘Sound Image of the Self’
As the play progresses, the audience witness how the acoustic environment gradually becomes a more positively felt ‘sound bath’ for the Creature – “I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound [...] proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals” (Shelley 81) – as he begins to understand the nature and sources of sound. The fact that he recognises that sound emanates “from the [birds’] throats” evidences how the Creature begins to derive a sense of volume. In the novel, the Creature explains how:

> sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds, but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again. (Shelley 81)

The Creature’s attempts to imitate the birds represents an audiophonic exchange system, of sorts, which, as we shall see, is comparable to the exchange whereby the Creature imitates the spectator. The imitative attempts also model Anzieu’s idea of the infant’s experience of the primary acoustic environment (a ‘sound mirror’ is established between the Creature and the birds) which proceeds the infant’s understanding of internal and external ‘self’ through the attribution of sounds made by “me” (“broke from me”) and “not me” (the sounds “from the [birds’] throats”).

In the production, the Creature articulates how music “warms [his] belly” and “fills [his] head.” Not only does this recall the trope of the “monster” comforted by music, it is also comparable to Anzieu’s discussion of Blaise Pascal who lost a parent
at an early age and then developed a theory of “the abhorrence of the inner void, long attributed to Nature: the lack of the support object which the psyche needs if it is to find its centre of gravity” (TSE 99). As we have seen through the Creature’s development of the concepts of volume and sounds of ‘self’ in relation to sounds of ‘other’, sound becomes the Creature’s support object and music fills the “inner void,” becoming the intermediary between the physical and psychical planes in the absence of skin-to-skin contact. As discussed in the previous chapter, the infant’s experience of the ‘sound bath,’ negative or otherwise, informs the shape of the sonorous envelopes, or the ‘sound image of self,’ which precedes the ‘skin-self.’

The Creature’s ‘sound image of the self’ might also be partly derived from the screams that meet the Creature’s skin-self. The scene in which the Creature encounters Frankenstein’s younger brother William – “As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream” (Shelley 117) – culminates in the Creature strangling William, significantly to “silence him” (Shelley 117). William functions as a ‘sound mirror’ because his scream reflects back to the Creature something of ‘self’, or how his physical ‘skin-self’ is perceived by others.

**Audience Skinteraction**

In the production, the Creature is motivated to learn language so that he can communicate with the De Lacey family he has been observing. Indeed, the Creature’s motivations to learn language are comparable to the Creature’s relationship to music, which has less to do with the music itself and more to do with the Creature’s observations of how music moves the family (Wierzbicki 257), akin to Heddon’s concept of “entangled listening” in which listening can touch. This reinforces Lecourt’s idea that the audiophonic exchange systems between the infant and its primary social group might be understood as an “original-music-group” (213), because the Creature’s interest in music is a “reaction to the harmony of the family” (Hatch qtd. in Wierzbicki 257). In Bernays’ *Frankenstein*, the Creature hopes that learning language will enable him to become part of the harmonious group. Hochstrasser describes how “the lights go up in a real coup and the fourth wall is emphatically demolished as the audience become involved in teaching the Creature the use of language.” Sherrington describes the scene of audience interaction as one of the “strongest moments” of the production. In the scene, the Creature takes Frankenstein’s journal and crawls to the edge of the stage. He makes eye contact with
the spectators in the front row and indicates the title of the journal. He begins making sounds and gestures, miming his intention to learn.

Bernays said that the moment of audience interaction was “at its heart practical [because] the Creature […] needs to talk to someone at some point to learn how to speak,” but in practice the interactive exchange exceeds straightforward practicality because it evokes spectatorial investment. In an email exchange, Bernays explained how he:

feel[s] that modern audiences feel less of the responsibility to create a powerful story […] Whilst never wanting to thrust my work aggressively upon an audience, I try to make work that positively encourages them to engage, that tells them “You and I are in this together, so while us onstage will be doing most of the heavy lifting, you need to be engaged too!”

The interactive exchange therefore functions to make the audience responsible for the Creature-infant and by extension to feel a sense of responsibility for the vulnerable ‘other’ and the progression of the play.24 The spectator recognises that language acquisition may increase the Creature’s chances of survival. Indeed, in line with S.B. Hrdy’s hypothesis that “the [infant’s] babbling […] first emerged as a solution to a challenge […] the need to stay in touch without touch” (77), Frankenstein’s Creature first makes contact with the audience by “babbling” his intentions to learn language. Sophie Tergeist writes that “this production is fast-paced and exciting and really makes us feel for the creature” which I suggest is the dominant effect of collapsing the fourth wall in this production. By this point, the audience “feel for the creature” and, as reviewer Alex Foott suggests, this might be attributed to the way audiences identify in the Creature’s “childish expressions,” and “loping gait,” a resemblance to a human child. Foott recalls that the Creature’s interaction with the audience “ha[d] each of us beaming with delight” which evidences the protective and positive nature of the relationship established perhaps akin to, or the closest approximation of, the maternal environment that the Creature experiences.

24 Studies on aural architecture including Juhani’s Pallasmaa’s The Eyes of the Skin (2012), Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s Experiencing Architecture (1964), Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter’s Spaces Speak. Are You Listening? (2007) and Machon’s consideration of the acoustic environment in immersive theatre, emphasise the fundamental role that sound can play in promoting social cohesion.
The Creature’s appeal to the audience can therefore be understood to establish what Pierre Turquet calls “the relational boundary of the I with my neighbour’s skin” (qtd. in TSE 31). The relational boundary is formed when an individual, here the Creature, makes contact verbally, gesturally, or visually, with the one or two individuals closest to them in a group setting. In larger groups, the continuity of “the I with my neighbour’s skin” is threatened because people move around. As a result of this:

the I experiences a distended skin which attaches itself to the neighbour who spoke last but is now far away. Such distension may reach the point where the skin is about to burst open. (Turquet qtd. in TSE 32)

Once he has acquired language, the Creature moves away from the audience in search of Frankenstein and, therefore, conceivably stretches the felt “distended skin” which connects him and the spectators who speak to him. Just as the individual in the group setting feels that the imagined skin-like connection to the ‘other’ is threatened when the ‘other’ moves further away, a spectator might similarly feel that the felt-as-skin-like connection with the Creature is threatened as there is only one audience interaction scene – after which the spectator and Creature do not speak again. Anzieu points out that Turquet’s description of the distended skin “lends support to Bowlby’s [attachment] theory” because it:

shows how the attachment drive operates in humans through the search for a contact – in both senses: bodily and social – which can provide a double form of protection, against external dangers and internal psychical distress, and which allows the reciprocal exchange of communicative signs, with each partner feeling recognised by the other. (TSE 32)

Reviewer for SEEN Elinor Perry-Smith supports this reading as she writes of Bernays’ *Frankenstein* that “SEEN was particularly reminded of John Bowlby’s famous theory of attachment.” The spectators who responded to the Creature’s “communicative signs” spoke slowly and softly. The Creature is recognised as meaningful.

While Turquet suggests that in a group setting “the quality of […] voices has more effect than what they are trying to say – for a gentle, calm, soothing tone is introjected by the listeners while the words themselves may be ignored” (qtd. in TSE
in *Frankenstein* what the Creature is “trying to say,” as well as how spectators reply, is also significant. The Creature does not ignore the words themselves because language acquisition is vital for his development and the play’s progression. The tonal quality of the spectators’ voices, however, indicates that they care about the Creature and have assumed responsibility for the vulnerable ‘other’. The exchange evidences:

the typical tone of voice that the attachment drive aims for – softness, sweetness, furriness, hairiness – a quality that started out tactile and is then extended metaphorically to the other sense-organs. (*TSE* 33)

Through the “softness [and] sweetness,” if not hairiness, of tone the spectators assume the role of a parent talking to a child (reminiscent of the way adults teach children to talk and read phonetically). An attachment forms which approximates the tactile. Tergeist describes her experience of the audience skinteraction scene:

he [the Creature] speaks directly to us, craving communication. He even listens to audience members giving him tips on words. There was a strong connection here, and Fletcher [the Creature] was always pulling us in.

The account of the Creature who was “always pulling us in” evidences that, as spectator, Tergeist experienced a similarly tactile, felt, quality to the interaction. Just as Turquet suggests an extended skin forms between those who speak, Tergeist speaks of a “pulling” quality that captures the sense of the imagined skin-based connection. The audience teach the Creature the words ‘Frankenstein’, ‘coat’, and ‘woman’ through a process of imitative gestures, sounds, words and repetition. The exchange can be understood as a dramatization of how the spoken word has the power to function as a skin because not only are the words the audience offer meaningful and well-timed, specifically in response to the Creature’s appeal to them which establishes a responsive acoustic environment, but tonally the spectator approximates the tactile in their interaction with the Creature which conceivably creates a sense of support.

“If the passages draw sympathy from readers,” says Wierzbicki referring to the passages in the novel which correspond to Bernays’ re-imagining of the Creature’s desire to communicate, then “it is sympathy for a Creature that readers know is very much like themselves” (257). The production enables the spectator to extend the sympathy that they most likely felt towards the Creature when reading the original
(although the staging of Creature-as-infant evokes sympathy even if spectators have not read the text) – a sympathy which may have been reduced if his monstrosity had been depicted visually. As I mentioned earlier, however, this is not entirely unproblematic. It potentially reinforces a harmful predilection for what audiences perceive to be the same, here the human appearance of the Creature, as well as potentially reinforcing gendered and racialized ideas of what is ‘human’. Potentially this enables audiences to renge on their responsibility to care for, and empathise with, those who appear to be different. As we will see in the following chapter, it is entirely possible to communicate such messages while staging visual difference. Indeed, I hypothesize that if the Creature had been staged as visually “monstrous” the audience interaction scene would still have been sufficient to communicate that the spectators have a responsibility for making contact and extending care for the vulnerable ‘other’. Hochstrasser’s comment, however, that Frankenstein causes us to reflect on the conditions which create “monsters” in society reinforces the idea that the play encourages audiences to consider what an ethics of care and responsibility might entail in a wider sense of specifically human intersubjectivity.

Observing the Creature's suffering and hearing the stimulus that causes it (such as the sounds of tearing skin, as we shall soon see, or unidentified sounds) may activate the same affective structures of pain which facilitate the “comparison-simulation of the pain of another person [which then] enables empathic experiential understanding of the pain of others” (Mancia 14), which may increase the spectator’s desire to assist. Rizzolati and Singaglia explain how:

the long process of evolution towards language has been marked by a series of important events (the integration of the oro-facial and manual systems, the formation of a repertoire of predominantly mimetic gestural ‘protosigns’, the emergence of a bimodal ‘proto-language’ formed of gestures and sounds, and finally the appearance of a prevalently vocal system of communication), each of which appears to be linked to a phase in the development of a mechanism, such as that of mirror neurons, that was originally assigned to recognizing the actions of others. (170)

Language acquisition is an embodied process derived from interactions with the sounds, expressions, and gestures of others that enable the individual to recognise intentions and become attuned to a social group. The spectator, for example,
understands the Creature’s outstretched hand at the beginning of the play as an appeal for physical contact which contrasts with Frankenstein’s interpretation of the gesture as designed to restrain him. The Creature’s appeal is therefore a form of bimodal ‘proto-language’.

The production then enables the spectator to respond to the Creature’s later gestures towards them and inarticulate sounds, or “babbling”, as a form of touching without touch, or an appeal to grasp language. The spectator offers the Creature the verbal tactility which enables him to develop language and articulate sounds. Indeed, analogous to the way in which the infant reaches towards the mother’s voice, the Creature reaches out towards the audience and they respond, collapsing the fourth wall. The audience become part of the ‘sound bath’ and a reflexive and reciprocal ‘common sound skin’ forms because “a quality that started out as tactile [is] extended to the other sense-organs” to connect the Creature and those who speak to him. As the spectator feels connected to the Creature, we can conceive of the spectatorial body (a collective of support skins) as a physical representation of the “sound image of [the Creature’s] self.” His physical composition is that of many skins and so, too, is the audience composed. By establishing an audiophonic exchange system, the physical and acoustic environment converge. The Creature’s sense of ‘sound skin,’ or the ‘sound image of self,’ would be felt on the psychical plane in a comparable way to the audience members who might think they feel a shared skin, or tactile-tonal connection, to the Creature. It is worth noting however, that what can reasonably be supposed to take place on the psychical plane must necessarily be of a transient nature for both the spectator and the Creature. The skinteractive scene is the only opportunity that the audience and Creature have to interact and, therefore, the connection and support derived from the contact must be finite. That this scene can be understood to temporarily model Turquett’s psychoanalytic idea of the extended skin speaks of the pervasiveness of skin in the social imagination as well as modelling Anzieu’s idea that the spoken word has the power to function as a skin to help mediate the psychic damage done by lack of skin-to-skin contact. The audience interaction scene is also sufficient to communicate the importance of extending an ethics of care towards vulnerable and marginalised ‘other(s)’. The scene emphasises the skin’s integral role in forming intersubjective relationships through its ‘common sense’ function by modelling how the tonal might approximate the tactile. In turn, this emphasises how the spectator’s skinbodied memories of touch, and tones which are touching, acts as a
method for understanding the Creature’s situation and influencing how they respond to the ‘other’.

The Spectator’s Tongue in the Creature’s Skin

The skinteractive exchange between the Creature and the audience also relates to echo mirror neuron systems and highlights one way that the spectator may come to think that they feel themselves, at some level, in the skin of the Creature (as opposed to a conceptually felt skin between them). Bulut suggests how the process of speech development contributes to the individual’s understanding of such depth:

the constituents of the “second articulation” [language acquisition] or the formants of the phonemes, come earlier [than language acquisition] and deliver a sensible surface, which on the one hand leads to the experience of an inner volume of the body, and which on the other hand provides an awareness of the outer environment while building an exterior boundary. (7-8)

If the acquisition of phonemes “operate as a connective tissue between the baby’s body and his physical environment” (Bulut 7), then the process of language acquisition (similarly to Turquett’s concept of the shared skin) is posited as a skin connecting ‘self’ and ‘other’ within the acoustic environment because language is acquired through interaction with others. The “connective tissue” between bodies is therefore conceptually a ‘common skin.’ But the felt connection between ‘self’ (“exterior boundary”) and ‘other’, when the infant is learning to speak, can also be attributed to the functioning of the echo mirror neuron system, which provides a useful context for reading the audience interaction scene and its implications in terms of the spectator slipping into the Creature’s skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense.

Echo mirror neuron system function suggests how articulatory gestures (such as the Creature’s attempts to form words and his exaggerated facial expressions) become associated with specific sounds because the “motor neurons responsible for controlling the orolaryngeal gestures acquired the capacity to become active in response to sounds produced by similar gestures by others” (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 168). Luciana Fadiga et al conducted an experiment which measured the motor evoked potential (MEPs) of tongue activity as participants listened to verbal and non-verbal sounds (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 168) and the findings parallel Bulut’s concept of the embodied “skin-voice”. Rizzolatti and Singaglia explain how double ‘F’ and double
‘R’ sounds differ in terms of the tongue activity required to produce the sound, “‘F’ is a labio-dental fricative that, when pronounced, requires only slight movement of the tongue,” for example, “whereas ‘R’ is a linguo-palatal fricative that involves a marked movement of the tongue” (168-69). Indeed, there was a “significant increase” in the participants’ tongue activity when they listened to the linguo-palatal fricative sounds compared to the sounds which require less movement to produce (Rizzolatti and Singaglia 168-69); this suggests that processes of embodied simulation are triggered simply by listening to the sounds of the ‘other’ which, in turn, influence the movement of ‘self’ (‘self’, here, being represented by the MEP of the listener’s tongue).

I hypothesise that if a similar experiment were conducted on the audience observing the Creature’s articulatory gestures and listening to his attempts to form words, there would have been a significant MEP response. This is because the spectator was inclined to help the Creature to develop language skills as well as being able to recognise the Creature’s sounds and gestures based on their experience of similar gestures made by others. As Hochstrasser recognises:

At the heart of [the production] is a claim of personhood on the part of the monstrous that challenges who and what we think deserving of love in our own societies. We are above all invited to reflect on how far we should take responsibility for what we create in a purely instrumental fashion, and what we may owe to those dependents once they are amongst us.

This is a reflection on the entire play but the audience skinteraction scene models the Creature’s “claim [to] personhood” and the audience’s sympathetic response demonstrates a willingness to take responsibility for the Creature who, abandoned by Frankenstein, now depends on them (a society of sorts) to teach him fundamental language skills. Jennifer Daley similarly recalls that “in just sixty minutes, this performance takes the audience through ups and downs, happiness and sadness, with alternating feelings of protection and vulnerability” experienced. I argue that the “alternating feelings of protection and vulnerability” are the result of the interaction with the Creature. Making the audience feel “unsafe” or vulnerable, as we saw in Chapter 2, is often an effect of collapsing the fourth wall; however, in this scene, it increases the audience’s identification and the desire to protect the infant-like Creature they have assumed a level of responsibility for. The MEP response I suggest is therefore different from straightforward mirroring because the tongue activity would
be predicated on the sense of responsibility that the spectator feels to help the Creature form the words. As the spectators watch the Creature’s stumbling attempts to articulate ‘Frankenstein’, I suggest that an audience full of tongues figuratively slip into the Creature’s skin. The MEP responses would demonstrate the spectators’ physical, tongue-based, willing of the Creature towards the successful formation of the word.

**A New ‘Skin Job’**

The spectator’s tongue in the Creature’s skin is not, however, the only way in which the spectator may feel themselves in the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense. In this section, I introduce my proposal for a new ‘skin job.’ The term ‘skin job’ refers to the way that skin is depicted, treated, or displayed and what such a skin represents in relation to questions of identity and, indeed, the categories of ‘human’ and ‘monster’. The concept of the ‘skin job’ sets up a comparison whereby “if we measure one skin job against the other, we can read transitions between various signifying systems of identity” (Halberstam 6). Catherine Spooner’s *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (2004), for example, traces the progression from Frankenstein as tailor, to the monsters (such as serial-skinner Buffalo Bill) who fashion their own gothic bodies through the “agglomeration of surfaces” (90), or the layering and suturing of fabrics – notably skins. In Bernays’ *Frankenstein*, however, skin shifts sensory register. It is no longer a visual horror. The significance of Halberstam’s idea of the ‘skin job’ in conjunction with Spooner’s timeline of tailors, which similarly identifies “transitions between various signifying systems of identity,” is that both invite further contribution in terms of identifying new ways that the skin is used to signify, and negotiate, identity. While Spooner identifies the progression from tailor of the ‘other’ to the tailor who ‘self’-fashions, I suggest how the concept of the ‘skin job’ has evolved so that it is no longer confined to the manipulation of literal skin as fabric but branches out into other sensory modalities, more specifically how sound can substitute for skin, which, as we shall see, returns spectators to the idea, or memory, of the literal skin. Serres writes:

> you and I, are manifested in the reality of your daily life or mine, in the form of a suit, cobbled together with its seams visible […] The variety of sight, basted with large tacking stitches on the variety of hearing, these sewn temporarily to each other, and each one separately and both together tacked on to those of taste, smell and touch, piece by piece, and in no particular order. (60-61)
My proposal for a new ‘skin job’ focuses on the way such stitches tack together the senses of hearing and touch. The scene in which the Creature is brought to life and first stretches out his limbs is accompanied by a soundscape of electricity, tearing, creaking bone, and agonised screams. In this section, I argue that this soundscape forms an expanded skinscape, or the “cobbl[ing] together” of the Creature and the spectators in the form of a sound-based skin suit, which parallels, in a more abstract sense, the literal binding of spectators in Macbeth. The role of sound as a (skin)aesthetic in Bernays’ production expands the idea of “internal sense,” within one skin, to ‘common sense’ felt beneath the skins of the audience.

The “birth” scene models a way of communicating skinbodied experience (without language or visual (skin)aesthetics) because the audience understand that the tearing sounds represent the stretching of skin and re-animated bone. Anzieu writes that:

certain real-life experiences lend credence to the phantasmatic representation [of the tearing of the ‘common skin’]: [such as] after an illness, an operation or an accident involving a wound, when the dressing sticks to the skin [and] the mother or her substitute tears it off – or is imagined to be able to tear off – pieces of epidermis along with the dressing. (TSE 46)

In the scene where the Creature is brought to life, however, it is not so much that the acoustic representation of tearing skin lends credence to the “phantasmatic representation” of the rending of the common skin, but rather that the sounds themselves lend credence to the reconfigured ‘common skin,’ or ‘common sound skin,’ formed between the Creature and the spectators who can relate, at some level, to the Creature’s experience based on the “certain real-life experiences” Anzieu mentions. I suggest how audiovisual mirror neuron function underpins the concept of the imagined ‘common sound skin’ because the spectators’ skinbodied experiences enable them to relate to the ‘other’s’ skins onstage. Indeed, the skin is a site of embodied memory:

historiated skin carries and displays a particular history. It is visible: wear and tear, scars from wounds, calluses, wrinkles […] memory is inscribed there? And it is invisible: the fluctuating traces of caresses, memories of silk, wool, velvet,
The audience’s “historiated skin[s],” with the visible and invisible traces of touch and damage, as well as their knowledge of affiliated sounds, enables the spectators to be “sewn temporarily” into the Creature’s skins through sensory slippage. The new ‘skin job’ does not require any literal skin to sew but rather sounds and the spectator’s skinbodied memories act as materials to be manipulated and those responsible for the sound work become the Gothic tailors in this production.

But how does sound become skin through audiovisual mirror neuron function? Evelyne Kohler and colleagues’ “Hearing Sounds, Understanding Actions: Action Representations in Mirror Neurons” (2002) suggest that audiovisual mirror neurons in the premotor cortex of monkeys will fire whether a monkey performs, witnesses, or hears an action. They found that the sounds of actions such as ‘breaking’ or ‘ripping’ were more effective in acoustically triggering bimodal F5 neurons, or audiovisual mirror neurons (Kohler 846). Audiovisual mirror neurons can be triggered simply by hearing action-related sounds; there was, for example, a “significant but smaller response” recorded when the monkey heard a breaking peanut, compared to when the monkey observed the same action. While this appears to indicate “the importance of visual modality” (Kohler 847), Massimo Ammaniti and Vittorio Gallese explain that:

the functional properties of mirror neurons reveal the existence of a neurophysiological mechanism – the mirror mechanism (MM) – by means of which perceived events as different as action sounds and action images are mapped and integrated by the same motor neurons, enabling the execution of the very same actions. (11)

In other words, audiovisual mirror neurons function as part of the same system that enables the observer to understand the intentions and/or causes behind an action. The sound and affiliated action relate to the observer’s “motor knowledge” (Ammaniti 11); therefore, the response of audiovisual mirror neurons to ‘ripping’ sounds can be related to the scene in Bernays’ Frankenstein to explain how sound carries skin. Sound is capable of “carring[ying] horror,” here of ripping skin, even without the visual stimulus (Salecl 33), because of the spectator’s cognitive associations between the sound, skin, and memories of damaged skin and sound-based responses (such as cries or screams).
The spectator’s “motor knowledge,” or lived experience, means they can relate to the Creature because skin-related illnesses, operations, accidents, and/or wound aftercare are universally experienced, encoded as bodily knowledge, and can be independent of language. Monkey see, monkey hear, monkey feel themselves in the Creature’s skin.

Research suggests that pain-related sounds, such as the Creature’s screams, can provoke an empathetic response. Alessio Avenanti and Salvatore Maria Alglioti’s “The Sensorimotor Side of Empathy of Pain” considers the “neural underpinnings of empathy for pain” (235), or how representations of another’s pain activates the same neural structures that are activated when the individual experiences pain themselves. The sensation of pain usually arises when the individual experiences damaged tissue or the perceived threat of damaged tissue; however, Avenanti and Alglioti consider how sounds factor into this experience. Studies suggest that simply listening to sounds affiliated with pain can provoke the corresponding neural functioning associated with physical pain:

another indication of pain-related neural activity in the absence of physical noxious stimulations comes from a recent fMRI [functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging study] in which Japanese participants listened to Japanese pain-evoking onomatopoeic words and nonsense syllables. Listening to these sounds induced an fMRI BOLD signal in ACC, [anterior cingulate cortex] suggesting an activation of affective pain representation. (Avenanti and Alglioti 239)

The results suggest how sound-based representations of pain, like the Creature’s screams, can trigger “pain-related neural activity in the absence of physical noxious stimulation” in the spectator-listener who, through relational embodiment, can imagine how it feels to occupy the Creature’s skins. As Avenanti and Alglioti suggest “neuroscience studies support the view that pain processing has a fundamental social dimension” (239), sounds affiliated with others’ pain can promote cohesion based on empathy. This, of course, suggests how practitioners might use sound as an aesthetic technique in future productions to increase sympathy and/or empathy for a vulnerable ‘other’. The spectator understands that the soundscape carries the Creature’s skinbodied experience; therefore, listening, in conjunction with the visual stimulus of the Creature’s facial expressions and writhing in pain, effectively sutures the

25 Naoyuki Osaka found that simply observing gestures of pain (such as the Creature’s) can trigger the formation of corresponding mental representations of pain in the spectator’s mind (qtd. in Mancia 14).
spectators into the Creature’s patchwork sound-skin. The scene therefore constitutes a sound-based re-imagining, through sensory mingling, of the Creature’s “yellow skin [which] scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (Shelley 39). The sounds carry the stretching of ill-fitting skins being forced to accommodate the Creature’s new movement and, indeed, the audience. Thus sound work, here, constitutes a new ‘skin job’ because it marks a departure from the traditional visual encoding of monstrosity and horror in Frankenstein to create a new (skin)aesthetic which has the emotive and aesthetic effects of enabling audiences to sympathise with a Creature who appears to be and behaves very much like the human.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have presented a reading of Shelley’s Frankenstein through the optic of skin to contextualize my reading of a new sound-based ‘skin job’ in Bernays’ re-imagining of Frankenstein. I have suggested how Bernays’ re-imagining, directed by Rhodes, stages the Creature’s formation of a ‘sound image of self’ preceding his acquisition of a “sound image of self” when Frankenstein dies at the end. I have suggested how sound functions as a more attenuated (skin)aesthetic in which the tonal approximates the tactile (as opposed to the experience of palpable sound we saw in the previous chapter) and how the spectator can hear the Creature’s skin. I explored how the scenes of audience interaction, in which spectators teach the Creature to speak, facilitate the experience of a conceptually felt ‘common skin’ between spectator and performer. The audience contribute to the Creature’s development and so there is a sense, akin to Turquet’s idea of the distended skin, that the spectator is connected to, and invested in, the Creature. As we have seen in previous chapters, this also speaks of the pervasiveness of the skin in the social imagination. I argue that the scene in which the audience help the Creature learn to speak models Anzieu’s idea that the spoken word has the power to function as a skin because it helps mediate the psychic damage done by lack of skin-to-skin contact. The sound work increases the spectator’s understanding of Frankenstein from the Creature’s perspective because it draws out the Creature’s narrative from the original text, in which it was circumscribed by both Walton and Frankenstein’s narrative, in such a way as to make the Creature’s narrative its own and to emphasise the Creature as a vulnerable, infantile, ‘other’ made “monstrous” by its environment and lack of adequate socialisation. Bernays’ Frankenstein therefore also motions towards the necessity of an ethics of care by asking the audience to take responsibility for the vulnerable ‘other’ on stage. I suggest,
similarly to *SCAR CYMBALS*, that such sound work might be turned to socially meaningful ends: indeed, as Hochstrasser suggests, the production prompts spectators to consider the wider social conditions which create “monsters” and, indeed, the next step would be to consider what actions we might take to help prevent this.

I also suggested how spectators might get under the ‘other’s’ skin with their tongues, without licking them, through my proposed experiment to test audience MEP responses as they teach or observe the Creature being taught to speak. Indeed, the production mingles skins across the senses, as sound becomes skin throughout, to enable the spectators to *think* they *know* what it feels like to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin. I specifically suggested how echo and audiovisual mirror neuron function might trigger experiences of relational skinbodiment. I concluded with a proposal for a new ‘skin job’ which builds on Halberstam and Spooner’s ideas on the literal skin as signifier of monstrosity and suggests how the concept of a ‘skin job’ evolves in the direction of sound. The audience’s skinbodied knowledge sutures them, temporarily, to the Creature. A new ‘skin job’ for *Frankenstein*’s bicentennial. Ultimately, the idea of the skin as a ‘common sense’ is reinforced because the sound work returns spectators to their skin, as the site of skinbodied memory, which emphasises the skin as a method for interpreting performance. The representational sound work, as we have seen, triggers neurocognitive processes of identification with the ‘other’ which reinforces skin’s importance in negotiating intersubjective relationships even when there is no direct skin-to-skin contact.
Chapter 5 Scars in their Eyes: *Ugly Lies the Bone* and *Underneath*

Skin becomes more than the compliant wax in which passion and dread score their traces…the skin begins to wake and wander, an actively unfolding and self-forming organism.

– Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*

Anzieu recognises that intersensoriality “is a function of the central nervous system or, more broadly, of the ectoderm (from which the skin and the central nervous system develop simultaneously)” but suggests that “in psychical reality, by contrast, this role is unknown and instead there is the imaginary representation of the skin as a backcloth, an original surface upon which sensory interconnections are deployed” (*TSE* 112). Anzieu moves from a neurobiological to a psychical register to highlight the discrepancy in our understanding of intersensoriality. My focus, in this chapter, is on how the skin, as both literal and imagined backcloth, causes ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ to re-enter the spectator’s mind when there is no skin-to-skin or other tactile contact. In this sense, this chapter is the most attenuated of all. I consider how the skin “begins to wake and wander” through the intersensorial mingling of eyes and skin.

Mirror neuron studies, for example, have shown that neural pathways are forged simply by observing and/or hearing another body performing an action (as we saw in the last chapter) which indicates a level of sensory mingling between bodies. The corresponding neural firing is based on the observer’s embodied knowledge of performing similar actions and is just one way that the spectator may come to feel themselves, at some level, in the skin of the ‘other’. It is the spectator’s lived experience of the skin as an intersensorial site which enables them to feel the skin of the ‘other’ in intersensorial psychical reality, predominantly through haptic visuality, in such a way as to re-activate the skin-ego. This is an argument I make and develop in this chapter. I argue that the skin-ego must be “re-activated” because Anzieu’s concept of the taboo on touching (which I discuss in detail shortly) facilitates the
restructuring of the Ego to a “thinking ego.” The thinking ego is reliant on the distance senses and language, as opposed to touch, as a means of understanding. This renders the skin-ego, and the imagined representation of the skin, intersensorial “backcloth” to be re-activated through embodied experiences.

In a consideration of (skin)aesthetics, specifically the aesthetic of burnt skin, this chapter focuses predominantly on Lindsey Ferrentino’s play *Ugly Lies the Bone* (2017), with recourse to the display of dead and burnt skins in Pat Kinevane’s play *Underneath* (2015-). I suggest that haptic visuality, processes of embodied simulation, mirror neuron activity, and studies on mirror-touch synesthesia produce variations of the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ in performances when there is no skin-to-skin contact between performers and spectators and, therefore, I give a neuroscientific substrate to Anzieu’s theory. In tandem, I suggest how intersensoriality functions on the psychical plane to facilitate the spectator’s idea that they *think* they feel the skin of the ‘other’ without physically touching it. Although the prohibition on touching skin in *Ugly Lies the Bone (ULTB)* and *Underneath* is a prerequisite of the performance in the proscenium and black box settings, respectively, it forces the spectator to rely on haptic visuality, which is intersensorial, to relate to the ‘other’ (thus a (skin)aesthetic mode of engagement). The thinking ego is bypassed when the skin-ego is re-activated because the spectator relies on embodied knowledge, or “the imaginary representation of the skin as backcloth,” to relate to the skins on stage through processes of embodied simulation. Skin, as Connor suggests, is “more than the compliant wax in which passion and dread score their traces,” but this chapter is not just about the “skin [which] begins to wake and wander” through the eyes and minds of the spectators. It is about the waking of the skin as intersensorial backcloth and the reactivation of the skin-ego in the thinking ego’s wake.

I begin with an outline of *ULTB* and *Underneath*, some skin for your eyes, before I explore how your eyes might take skins without touching them. Throughout the chapter, I consider how the characters’ skins are presented to the spectator’s eyes as skins to be felt, perhaps taken, in terms of imagined occupation. But I also consider how the characters’ search for second, protective, skins – a process we have explored previously in relation to Hesp’s performance and the character of Macbeth – reinforce the audience’s understanding of how such skins – dead, decaying, burned and painful – might feel to occupy. An explanation of Anzieu’s concept of the taboo on touching, which encourages the individual to rely on the distance senses, specifically sight, follows. I then re-consider haptic visuality in relation to the (skin)aesthetic and suggest
alternative ways a spectator might, figuratively, feel a skin using their eyes and embodied knowledge (or the intersensorial backcloth). This includes a brief consideration of philosophical and phenomenological accounts of how we experience others, which relates to embodied experience and simulation. More specifically, I consider Edmund Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1931) for his ideas on relational embodiment, or the “pairing” of bodies, whereby if:

a body “similar” to mine [is presented] – that is to say, a body with determinations such that it must enter into a phenomenal pairing with mine – it seems clear without more ado that, with the transfer of sense, this body must forthwith appropriate from mine the sense: animate organism. (113)

In other words, we perceive the ‘other’ as a lived body in relation to our own experiences of the ‘self’ as lived body. It is the Husserlian idea of paired bodies which prompts me to consider how mirror neuron activity works analogously as a form of pairing ‘self’ and ‘other’. From mirror neurons, I move to conclude the thesis with reference to the recently documented phenomenon of mirror-touch synaesthesia. Mirror-touch synesthetes physically feel the sensations, including pain, of observed touch on the ‘other’s’ skin. It is a non-normative experience, of course, but allows me, in the conclusion to this work, to present an imaginative proposal for a real “Theater of Cruelty,” exclusively for mirror-touch synesthetes, a logical (if extreme) conclusion to the possibilities of performance explored throughout this study, which collapses the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the formation of a ‘common skin’ and, linking back to Artaud, offers the ultimate conclusion for how ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ might be negotiated through the skin without touching.

**Ugly Lies the Bone**

*Ugly Lies the Bone* (hereafter *ULTB*) premiered in the UK at the Lyttleton Theatre, in London, in 2017. The production was directed by Indhu Rubasingham with set design by Es Devlin and makeup/prosthetics by Suzanne Scotcher. The play is set in Titusville, Florida, following the closure of NASA’s space shuttle programme in 2011. It tells the story of Jess, a former soldier, whose “*face and neck are severely distorted by third-degree burns*” (Ferrentino 9) after an accident with an improvised explosive
device (IED) in Afghanistan. Nina Jablonski explains the nature of third-degree, or “full thickness,” burns:

in which the entire thickness of the skin, including the epidermis and the dermis, is destroyed. Third-degree burns that cover large areas of skin (roughly, greater than 15 percent of the body’s surface) are extremely serious injuries: they lead to the relatively rapid loss of body fluid, and these burn sites can be rapidly colonized by bacteria that can cause major infections. (129)

It is unsurprising therefore that “when a serious burn occurs, the protective role of the skin comes into sharp focus” (Jablonski 129) and that, where skin is destroyed, other materials are used as substitute. The scar tissue which forms to heal the burn is not like normal skin, as Jablonski points out, it cannot sweat, it is hairless, it is not elastic, and overgrowths of scar tissue, or keloid scarring, can restrict the patient’s movement. It is “no wonder that the search for “replacement skin” has been one of the most fervent and difficult missions in the history of medicine” (Jablonski 129-130); indeed, as we shall see, the search for “replacement skin” takes place in both ULTB and Underneath.

ULTB follows Jess’ attempts to manage the chronic pain of stretching skin-grafts, movement, and the scrubbing off, daily, of skin to increase mobility. The play text describes Jess’ physicality – “everything hurts; skin, muscles, heart, bones. She limps, uses a walker, and at least thirty percent of her skin is covered in third-degree burns and recovering skin grafts” (Ferrentino 5) – details brought to life through prosthetics, makeup, compression bandages, and the performer’s visibly restricted movement. When Jess returns to Titusville, after fourteen months in hospital, she finds things have significantly changed. Her ex-boyfriend, Stevie, has married someone else. Kacie – Jess’ sister – tries hard to welcome her home. Kacie’s new boyfriend, Kelvin, is wilfully unemployed and described as “too comfortable in his own skin” (Ferrentino 5) which contrasts to the extreme discomfort Jess feels in hers. He tries to help by finding Jess work answering phones at a takeaway, but it only exposes the harsh reality of the former teacher and soldier’s post-injury employment prospects. The audience learns that Jess’ mother has dementia and is now in a home; Jess refuses to visit because she worries that “she is NOT going to recognize me” (Ferrentino 60) because of the extent of her scarring. This might be understood as a commentary on the extent to which we believe ‘self’ and identity are linked to our appearance
although, of course, the questions of recognition are problematized further by the questions of memory and recognition associated with dementia.

Jess’ pain locks her into an eternal present – “when my bigger grafts stretch, it feels like I’m still on fire” (Ferrentino 18) – which simultaneously refers back to her embodied memories of past pain. Much of her frustration, however, stems from the fact that the other characters stagnate in Titusville when there is nothing physically restricting them from pursuing aspirations beyond the town. In an interview with Jessie Thompson, Ferrentino explains her motivations for writing the play:

I’m from the town where Ugly Lies the Bone is set – a one industry town that […] when the shuttle program was cut went from being prosperous to having the number one rate of foreclosures in the entire country […] I noticed a parallel between the vets and the town, both looking for a way to begin again.

Looking for a way to begin again or, more specifically, to reduce her pain levels, Jess trials a pioneering virtual reality (VR) therapy in which, via a headset, Jess is immersed in a virtual world filled with snow. The technology enables her to control a virtual body within this world through her movements in the real world. VR is a new method of pain management but, despite positive results in trials, is not yet standard treatment. Its use in treating burns patients was inspired by cognitive psychologist Hunter Hoffman’s VR game SpiderWorld, which was designed to help arachnophobes confront a virtual spider, to alleviate the fear of real spiders. It was also found to have pain-management benefits as the first burns patient to try SpiderWorld “simply forgot to think about his pain” (Kirk) which has been linked to the patient’s sense of presence in the virtual world. This motivated Hoffman to develop SnowWorld, a snowy landscape with snowmen and snowballs, specifically for burns patients. Trials of VR therapy found that “soldiers reported significant drops in pain while immersed in SnowWorld [and] time spent thinking about pain, which is an inextricable contributor to actual pain, dropped from 76 percent without SnowWorld to 22 percent with SnowWorld” (Kirk).

The VR world Jess is immersed in is based on this programme. In the play “the action oscillates fast between the epic arctic vistas [Jess] experiences within her VR headset,” which she helps design, and “the oppressive small domestic settings where she attempts to re-engage with what’s left of her life” (Gibson). I argue that the virtual body Jess controls visually offers her a virtual ‘second skin’ as her view is rendered
from the perspective of occupying the virtual body, and, perhaps, to some extent this psychologically offers her the experience of a ‘second skin’ as the pain in her literal skin is reduced while engaging with the VR world. The spectator’s experience of relational embodiment is therefore twofold: they can engage with both Jess’ actions as she controls the avatar and, indeed, the avatar’s actions because they experience the same first-person view – as if they also inhabit the virtual body – as Jess does. The VR world is presented to both Jess and the spectator as if they are seeing it through the eyes of the avatar; therefore, the avatar serves as a ‘third skin,’ of sorts, for the spectator and increases their identification with Jess’ perspective and their understanding of the physical reality and limitations that patients with extensive third-degree burns may experience.

**Underneath**

While Jess attempts to “re-engage with what’s left of her life” in *ULTB, Underneath*, my other case study, presents audiences with a character whose life has expired. Kinevane’s *Underneath*, directed by Jim Culleton, was staged at the Soho Theatre, London, in 2016. It recounts the life, in death, of ‘Her’, the unnamed protagonist brought to life/death by writer-performer Pat Kinevane. It is a dramatic monologue set in a tomb in a Cobh graveyard, in Ireland, in which Kinevane plays all parts. ‘Her’ has been murdered and she recounts the story of her life up until that point. Her story begins when she is struck by lightning and badly burned as a child. The audience learn of the subsequent exclusion, ridicule, and judgement ‘Her’ endured because of her appearance, as well as the happiness she finds in later life through self-acceptance.

*Underneath* is critical of society’s obsession with surfaces and beauty. It is significant therefore that ‘Her’ is murdered by Jasper – “the Perfect One” (Kinevane 28) – whom she first meets when he is “a stunning young man” (Kinevane 11) at school. Jasper is represented synecdochally by a golden crown. He *appears* to befriend ‘Her’ but the “friendship” terminates with Jasper “borrowing” money under the pretence of escaping his abusive father (although his father is abusive). He asks ‘Her’ to “wave [him] off at the station” (Kinevane 19), but it is a set-up for public ridicule. When ‘Her’ arrives, Jasper is surrounded by his friends who begin to mock her. She asks him where his suitcase is and warns him he will miss his train. He feigns ignorance. He denies taking money. He denies kissing her (which coincidentally takes place above the grave that Jasper, many years later, dumps ‘Her’s’ body in). He reduces her to an abomination of the surface:
I said nothin’, you varicose bitch. The ugliest bitch I’ve ever met in my life. […]
If you played hide-and-seek nobody would look for you. You have a face like a hatful of assholes, you fucking gargoyle. (Kinevane 23)

The language “varicose” and “hatful of assholes” creates a textural impression of ‘Her’s’ skin as a twisted and veiny expanse of scarring.

The alternative reading is that the friendship was genuine but Jasper regrets confiding in ‘Her’ about the “underneath”, or his experience of abuse:

He lifted his shirt and it was raw with veins and white pus. His father drank a bottle of Courvoisier every afternoon at the yacht club and three days before he bate Jasper with a cricket bat when he tried to stop him kickin’ the crap out of his mother. (Kinevane 9)

In a play preoccupied with surface, Jasper’s skin has been reduced to a “raw”, infected, wound. ‘Her’ sees “underneath” Jasper’s apparently perfect surface in life and, in death, she has the supernatural ability to see underneath again to foretell of the “massive tumour beside [his] kidney [and his] horrible death” (Kinevane 30). The performance presents a re-invigoration of the cliché that “beauty is only skin deep” through inventive means (a re-animated corpse), asking spectators not to judge others based on appearances. The description of Jasper’s body as “raw with veins and white pus” reveals that he is, perhaps, a more complex character than his metonymic representation as a crown conveys. Jasper both experiences and witnesses the traumas of physical abuse and, as the audience learns, repeats similar patterns of behaviour within his own marriage before murdering ‘Her’.

While the descriptions and depictions of damaged skins across both plays represent embodied memories of being burned and experiences of abuse and trauma, and both present characters who try to find second skins, the common message is that audiences should learn to be comfortable in their own skins and be more sympathetic towards others’ skin-based experiences. While both takeaway messages are arguably positive in some respects, there is still something slightly uncomfortable with the metaphor of learning to be comfortable in your own skin as a result of watching either production. This is because it constructs an uncomfortable comparison between Jess and ‘Her’ and spectators’ own skin-based reality – as if to say: “if these characters can
learn to be comfortable in their own skins, so can you.” And, of course, presumably the majority of audience members will find it physically and mentally easier to achieve a level of comfortability in their own skins than those who have had experiences similar to Jess or ‘Her’.

Nonetheless, processes of relational embodiment take place between the characters and audience members which can still be seen to increase the spectator’s understanding and knowledge of the ‘other’s’ skin-based experiences. As we saw, the spectator in the dance performance HARD C*CK might be understood to physically double the performer’s skin (through direct skin-to-skin contact and audience formation) in a way which captures the idea of the secondary wrapping of narcissism. And, indeed, the performer’s search for other second skins (the paint or Vaseline) can be understood as looking to symbolically address a societal impingement on the skin-ego which affects body confidence. Both ULTB and Underneath offer Jess’ and ‘Her’s’ skins for the spectator’s eyes, and by extension skin-ego, to rest on. Both skins are portrayed as painful and damaged or dead and decaying, and the spectator is able to relate to the ‘other’ to learn something about the realities of the ‘other’s’ experience. While Underneath is critical of beautiful surfaces, some spectators of ULTB are critical of the play’s apparent superficiality as all skin-surface and no psychological substance. I return to this shortly, but first I consider how the distance senses, particularly sight, take precedence in the spectator’s experience of these plays according to Anzieu’s idea of the prohibition on touch which restructures the Ego.

The Taboo on Touching
In The Human Significance of Skin, Ashley Montagu outlines the order of sensory development as “(1) tactile, (2) auditory, and (3) visual” but explains that “as the child approaches adolescence the order of precedence becomes reversed as (1) visual, (2) auditory, and (3) tactile” (314). Anzieu offers a psychoanalytic, as opposed to anthropological, explanation for the reversal in the order of sensory precedence. Anzieu’s concept of “the taboo on touching” (TSE 159) introduces two prohibitions “the first against full-body contact – the conjoining fusion or confusion of bodies – and the second, more selective against touching with the hand” (TSE 161). Anzieu explains that:

The earliest prohibitions a family imposes on a child, once it enters the world of (locomotor) movement and (infra-verbal and pre-linguistic communication), are
essentially to do with tactile contacts; and these exogenous, variable and multiple prohibitions form the basis for an internalized taboo which is relatively permanent. (*TSE* 149)

According to *The Skin Ego*, therefore, the reversal in the order of sensory precedence begins earlier than Montagu suggests. The parental prohibition on, and gradual withdrawal of, touch (I outline a number of ways this prohibition materialises shortly) corresponds to the child’s developmental stage and the level of tactile care still required. Anzieu suggests that:

the taboo on touching [...] has a dual-starting point [and] we need to distinguish between two structures of tactile experience: (i) contact in the form of an embrace, which involves a large portion of the skin and includes pressure, warmth or coldness, comfort or pain, kinaesthetic and vestibular sensations [and] has connotations of the common skin phantasy; and (ii) the touch of the hand, which supports the infant’s body and to which, later on, touch tends to be limited, once the child has mastered the gestures of pointing and grasping objects. (*TSE* 161)

Here we see the staged withdrawal, in terms of area, of accessible skin surface from that “which involves a large portion of the skin,” and “has connotations of the common skin phantasy,” to the “touch of the hand” which serves a supportive function. By encouraging the child to rely on the distance senses of sight and hearing, the prohibition on touch reinforces through the skin, or rather the limitation of skin-to-skin interaction, the sense of ‘self’ in relation to, or, more specifically, as separate from the skin of the ‘other’.

The prohibition regulates the sexual and aggressive drives and aims to prevent “the surging of [either] drive” (*TSE* 159). The taboo on touching as it relates to the aggressive drive carries the instructions: “do not touch inanimate objects in case you break them or they hurt you,” and “do not use excessive force against parts of your own or other people’s bodies” (*TSE* 159). The taboo on touching as it relates to the sexual drive instructs “do not constantly touch your body or other people’s bodies in the areas sensitive to pleasure” which aims to protect the child “against its own or other people’s sexuality” by putting it “on its guard against an excess of excitation” which it is “incapable of understanding” (*TSE* 159).

Parents have a wide variety of phrases designed to stop children touching things, for example “look but don’t touch,” or “don’t touch anything,” or “if you break
it, you’re paying for it,” in relation to controlling the aggressive drive. The child caught touching items in a shop, for example, offers the indignant “I was just looking,” which is often met with the equally indignant “look with your eyes.” The exchange captures the pressure towards a reversal in the order of sensory precedence, as well as indicating the sensory slippage between touch and sight that this chapter focuses on. The child’s insistence that it is just “looking” is more accurate, in the proprioceptive sense of the eyes in the skin (see Juhani Pallasmaa’s *The Eyes in the Skin*), than “look with your eyes.” This is because, in this context, what the parent means is “touch with your eyes.” The real aim is to replace the child’s reliance on tactile means of knowing, or seeing, with the sense of haptic visuality in which sight approximates touch to discern the texture, depth, or temperature, and so on, of an object based on prior tactile experience.

This relates to the purpose of the taboo on touching which is to facilitate the transition from a skin-ego to a thinking ego. In other words, the prohibition serves a restructuring role on the psychical plane as “once the Ego has acquired its basic organisation as a skin-ego, it can only acquire a new structure by breaking off the primacy of tactile experience and constructing itself as a space of intersensory inscription, a *sensorium commune* ([or] the “common sense” of the empiricist philosophers)” (*TSE* 168); the restructuring takes place when the child learns that “skin-to-skin contact is too childish or erogenous or brutal and therefore must be limited” (*TSE* 161), and when it refers to objects using language. Michel Serres’ comparison of the literal skin, or “common sense,” to fabric resembles Anzieu’s descriptions of the skin-ego as “a backcloth to the functioning of thought” (*TSE* 164) and “a *sensorium commune.*” Serres writes:

The entire description [of skin as “common sense”] is equally valid for tapestry and body. Each insular sense organ forms a dense singularity on the diluted, cutaneous plain. The island is woven of the same fabric as the background, each sense organ is invaginated in the same skin, spreading around it. The internal sense is draped in its tent, a new veil, a new fabric, but the same carpet and the same skin. The internal sense is veiled in skin. (54)

Anzieu’s description of the restructured thinking ego, with the skin-ego as a backcloth, is akin to Serres’ understanding of the skin as fabric-like *sensorium commune*. The skin-ego as a “space of intersensory inscription,” or mingling, is derived from the
subject’s skinbodied experience of the world and therefore parallels the skin as the site of intersensory mingling in Serres’ work.

Anzieu’s understanding of the literal skin’s function in “communicat[ing] messages from the outside world to the brain, including “intangible” ones which its job is, precisely, to “feel” without the Ego being aware of them” and its role in “separate[ing] and unity[ing] the various sense-faculties [as] an intermediary, an in-between, a transitional thing” (TSE 19) resembles Serres’ comparison of the literal skin to a backcloth which connects the senses. In this sense, I argue that the skin-ego, as the skin’s corollary on the psychical plane, functions similarly to communicate “intangible”, (skin)aesthetic, messages through tactile-visual slippage where touch is prohibited. I argue that the spectator, who “touch[es] with their eyes,” similarly feels the “intangible”, or the (skin)aesthetics presented to the eyes, in such a way as to bypass the thinking ego and re-activate the skin-ego, as intersensorial site of mingling, based on the spectator’s skinbodied knowledge.

The Taboo on Touching, the Aggressive Drive, and the Spectator

The word “taboo” is commonly used in reference to sexual practices, deviances or, more generally in reference to off-limits topics. As a noun, however, “taboo” has a more general meaning and can refer to “the putting of a person or thing under prohibition or interdict, perpetual or temporary” and “the fact or condition of being so placed,” and “the prohibition or interdict itself” (OE D). In The Skin Ego, the family imposes the prohibition of touch and so the act of imposition is the taboo; the child is put under the prohibition of touch and, therefore, the taboo is also the fact of being so placed; and, finally, what is prohibited, touch, is also the taboo. The taboo on touch in ULTB and Underneath is, of course, a prohibition imposed by the nature of the performance. It is not immersive or physically interactive. The spectator cannot touch the skins on stage and so they must touch with their eyes instead.

At a (skin)aesthetic and narrative level, however, the taboo on touching across both performances relates to the aggressive drive which prohibits touch to the ‘other’ that might be harmful. Both Jess and ‘Her’ are portrayed as damaged, off limits, skins. We know we should not interfere with healing wounds, or touch other people’s wounds, to protect against hurting ourselves or the ‘other’. Steven Connor and Nina Jablonski both comment on children’s fascination with healing skin. Jablonski points out that “there isn’t a child alive who hasn’t picked at a scab […] or a parent alive who hasn’t told a child not to do it” (124). We also know that we should avoid touching
decaying matter to protect ourselves against bacteria/disease. Legislation also protects corpses from our touch; they are guarded against both the aggressive and sexual drives. Jess’ skin is all burns. ‘Her’s’ skin is decaying matter. The prohibition on touch protects them both.

Finally, Anzieu offers an overview of the “double taboo on touching,” as it emerges in psychoanalytic practice. He tracks the gradual removal of touch from psychoanalytic therapy (TSE 150-155). Charcot was a “decidedly ‘hands-on’ doctor [...] pricking, pinching, tapping, stretching, squeezing and compressing the bodies of his patients” (Connor 139), but by the time Freud was practising, it was established that psychoanalysts should not touch the patient, or allow the patient to touch them. In relation to the sight-to-skin slippage, the patient should not try to “see” or “contact” the psychoanalyst outside of sessions. Indeed, the definition of “taboo” as an adjective refers to “persons under a perpetual or temporary prohibition from certain actions [...] or from contact with others” (OED). If touch and/or contact is the prohibited action, then the skin acts as barrier to the fantasy of the ‘common skin.’ The lack of skin-to-skin contact reinforces ideas of ‘self’ as separate from ‘other’, and the skin as container. That is not to say, however, that connotations of the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ cannot be derived by subverting the taboo on touch. Through the eyes which wander and take the skin of the ‘other’, waking skinbodied experience, the skin-ego as intersensorial backcloth is reactivated. Vision and skin mingle.

Eyes Filled with Skin Touching Skin
Montagu suggests that “there is something about [the] eye contact between parents and a newborn which is almost palpable – a contact which survives into adult life, and is often experienced as such” (264), which means eye contact experienced as, seen, or felt as, palpable in adulthood. The fantasy of the ‘common skin,’ which was predicated on the tactile experience in infancy, can similarly materialise in adulthood, here in spectatorship, through the sensory slippage imbued in the concatenated “eye-contact”, which specifically merges the eye’s sense of sight and the skin’s sense of contact. The sense of felt contact is facilitated by the attendant’s experience of haptic visuality, which mingles sight and skin, when eye-contact is made with the skins onstage (reminiscent of the reformulated “touch with your eyes”). In other words, I investigate the eye-contact the spectator makes with skin(s), but not eye contact felt as palpable or the gaze of the ‘other’ felt on the skin of the ‘self’. The eyes feel the skins seen and, with recourse to sensorial knowledge, can imagine what the skin of the ‘other’ might
feel like. Anzieu’s idea of the skin as intersensorial backcloth on the psychical plane can therefore be understood, within the context of spectatorship, to extend the imaginary representation of the skin to include the skin of the ‘other’ in the creation of an, albeit temporary, ‘common skin’ forged by sight.

In *The Provocation of the Senses* (2010), Stephen Di Benedetto explains the biological and neurobiological mechanisms involved in sight. He also details the theatrical effects, such as lighting, colour, and different types of movement, which visually engage and “trigger a physiological reaction within the attendant’s body” (*TPS* 35). Holly Casey, a reviewer for *A Younger Theatre*, illustrates Di Benedetto’s point by suggesting that “every shaft of light,” in *Underneath*, “burst[…] in as if through a crack in the main character’s tomb [which] highlights and strikes every monologue and scene and moment of movement [which means that] our eyes are forced to focus on small details or moments as if they’ve been given a close up.” As I argue in the (skin)aesthetics section, the light similarly works to focus the gaze on ‘Her’s’ skin.

Di Benedetto’s consideration of sight is grounded in studies of physiological responses, but he also discusses the more synaesthetic:

> ancient conceptions of the senses [which] extended touch to vision, seeing and sound, suggesting that we knew the world by reaching out beams projected from the eyes, or nose, caressing the world beyond us with our different senses. (*TPS* 69)

The idea of sound beams felt, or projected, as caressing, intuitively supports Turquett’s findings that voices perceived to have tactile qualities, within group settings, can be imagined as an extended piece of skin between bodies (see previous chapter). The fact that the connection is imagined as a piece of skin suggests that the skin-ego, or the imaginary representation of the skin as intersensorial backcloth, has been reactivated by the tactile qualities of sound.

The ancient conceptions also resonate with Montagu’s recognition of “seeing [as] a form of touching at a distance” (124), and Laura U. Marks’ concept of haptic visuality. Marks suggests that through the haptic gaze the eyes graze the surface of the objects, the scenes, and the skins seen, without making physical contact. Indeed, the prohibition on touch encourages the individual to rely on the distance senses, but the residual remains of tactile contact register in alternative sensory modes. The tactile
can subvert prohibition by finding its “extensions in the form of the voice,” as we saw in the last chapter, but the extensions also extend to the eye (TSE 151). Anzieu outlines the concept of “an eye that does not only gaze,” but “a look and a discourse that envelope, seize and caress [and] an eye and a voice endowed with tactile powers” (TSE 151). The eye’s tactile “powers” are those of “enveloping”, “seiz[ing]”, and “caress[ing]” the skin of the ‘other’ in the performance. The reconfigured fantasy of the ‘common skin’ is predicated on the eye’s “tactile powers” when skin-to-skin contact is prohibited.

Like Di Benedetto, I consider how aspects of the performance visually engage the spectator in ULTB and Underneath or, more specifically, how the (skin)aesthetics of the performance engage the spectator’s eyes. I suggest how spectators might relate to the skins in the performances not only through haptic visuality, or felt embodied response, but in the psychical sense in which the eyes’ interaction with the skins onstage re-activates the skin-ego (predicated on the spectator’s own skinbodied knowledge) and subverts the thinking ego. This perhaps goes some way to answering the calls for greater attention towards embodied responses in spectatorship. The significance of the way in which spectators can “touch” skins with their eyes, across both plays, emerges in an increased empathic response and, indeed, in a greater understanding of the characters ‘Her’ and Jess’. Indeed, spectators are able to relate to and learn something of the ‘other’s’ lived experience in a skin which is, most likely, very different to their own skinbodied reality and experiences. While the main focus of this chapter is the possibilities for, and the mechanisms of, empathy in spectatorship, the readings also underpin my concluding proposal for a “Real Theatre of Cruelty.” In the proposal I consider perhaps the most extreme form of sensory slippage between sight and skin experienced by mirror-touch synesthetes. My hypothetical theatre, as we shall see, models an embodied form of empathy between the observer and the skin of the observed.

**Subverting the Thinking Ego: From (Syn) to (Skin)aesthetics**

When touch is prohibited the (skin)aesthetic component registers both as embodied intersensorial experience and in relation to the psychoanalytic framework. In her essay “(Syn)aesthetics and Immersive Theatre” Machon explains, as we saw in Chapter 3, that:
To experience (syn)aesthetically means to perceive the details [of an immersive event] corporeally. The felt, embodied analysis of the performance experience occurs both in the live moment and subsequent to the event. This accentuates the ‘presentness’ of human sensory experience, where ‘presence,’ to borrow from Elaine Scarry’s explication of the word, directly correlates to its etymological roots; ‘from prae-sens, that which stands before the senses.’ (SIT 205)

This chapter focuses on the presentation of skins, or “that which stands before the senses,” specifically before sight, in ULTB and Underneath. Machon’s concept of experiencing (syn)aesthetically states that the attendant must be conscious of corporeal perception to interpret the (syn)aesthetic elements by “return[ing] to an innate knowledge, the pre-knowledge of instinctive sentience” (SIT 205). She explains, as we saw in the previous chapter, that she accesses her “affective memory [to] make sense/sense of the archive of art history [held] within [her] subconscious imagery and [her] more (im)mediate sensual memory” which leads to later “embodied thought in analysis” (SIT 214), or her writing on (syn)aesthetic experience.

I similarly make “sense/sense” of spectators’ comments further on in this chapter. The sense/sense differentiation refers to making sense cerebrally/corporeally and making sense(s) synthetically, or how a performance makes one sense out of other sensory modalities. By this I mean that I consider comments which reveal the spectator’s embodied sense of the performance – which includes how one sense might be felt as/or by another sense (synthetically making sense) – and how we can then analyse such a response to make cognitive sense of the embodied effect. In this chapter, for example, I look specifically at how sight might make sense/sense out of skin. The comments I consider illustrate “embodied thought in analysis,” after the performance, but indicate that the spectators experienced embodied analysis during the event. The idea that the spectator “returns to an innate knowledge, the pre-knowledge of instinctive sentience,” during the performance, chimes with my concept of (skin)aesthetics within a psychoanalytic framework. Just as (syn)aesthetic conditions prompt a “return to an innate knowledge,” or an “instinctive sentience,” the spectator’s embodied analysis reflects a recourse to the skin-ego, or the imaginary representations of the skin as intersensorial backcloth. Later embodied thought, or the expression of the experience in language, is more closely affiliated with the thinking-ego but, again, with recourse to the backcloth of skinbodied experience.
Machon’s idea that we tap into “subconscious imagery” and “sensual memory” to analyse a work’s visceral content, and the embodied responses it provokes, also chimes with my idea that a skin-based performance re-activates the intersensorial skin-ego and subverts the thinking ego at the time of the performance. The (skin)aesthetics on stage, coupled with spectators’ skinbodied knowledge of skin’s limits and pain responses, means that, at some level, the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ emerges in the sensory, or rather (skin)aesthetic, slippage from eyes-to-skin under the prohibition of touch.

As Montagu points out “touch provides the verification and confirmation of reality” (124). You will recall St. Thomas’ desire to touch Christ’s wounds in order to verify Christ’s identity. When touch is prohibited, however, we must fall back on our eyes:

Rubbing one’s eyes in disbelief – as if the rubbing were done in order palpably to verify what one is seeing is in fact a not uncommon experience. The rubbing with one’s fingers of one’s closed eyes (the “plapebrae”), metaphorically and physically removes the film that may be over one’s eyes, and at the same time proves that one’s eyes are still there and are seeing what they see – palpably. (Montagu 124)

Rubbing one’s eyes increases the clarity of sight, but it is the idea of being able “palpably to verify what one is seeing” through skin-to-skin contact, the skin of the fingers on the skin of the eyelids, that implicates the skin in the eye in an intersensorial sense. It is the skin-on-eye contact which refreshes the eye’s ability to make sense/sense of what it sees. Clarity is gleaned from the skin’s contact with the eye, yet Serres writes that the eye itself is “pained by the sight of mixture,” as we saw in Frankenstein, and argues that it “prefers to distinguish, separate, [and] judge distances; the eye would feel pain if it were touched. It protects itself and shies away” (67). He suggests that, in contrast, “our flexible skin adapts by remaining stable,” and it “must be thought of as a variety [of senses because] it apprehends, and comprehends, implicates and explicates, it tends towards the liquid and the fluid, and approximates mixture” (Serres 67). However, sight itself becomes a mixture in eye-contact and, like the “flexible skin” which implicates itself in our eyes, sight “comprehends, implicates and explicates” itself in the skins of the ‘other’ on stage. In this respect, as I suggested in the previous chapter, ULTB and Underneath both illustrate that it is possible for
audiences to relate to and, at least begin to, empathize with an ‘other’ who is staged to look visually different. Although we cannot make a straightforward or, indeed, unproblematic comparison between the Creature and the characters who appear to be visually different in *ULTB* and *Underneath*, it is worth noting that all three are vulnerable ‘others’ and to ask how audiences respond to and relate to the ‘other’ when visual differences are staged. Indeed, as I argued in the previous chapter, audience reactions to the characters in *ULTB* and *Underneath* suggest that it would have been possible to stage Frankenstein’s Creature as visually different without an audience necessarily seeing “monster” as default or defaulting on their duty of care for the vulnerable ‘other’.

**Skin(Aesthetics) in *ULTB* and *Underneath***

In both *ULTB* and *Underneath*, the skin attracts the spectator’s gaze. It is the gaze which grazes the skin and the skin which sucks us in. A reviewer for the *New York Times* comments on the (skin)aesthetics in *ULTB* – “the skin on the right side of her face has the mottled look of some kind of exotic fish” (Isherwood) – the imagined texture, “mottled,” indicates the experience of haptic visuality which enables the eyes to feel the skin. As you can see from the image (below) there is a similar mottling texture to the prosthetic skin and makeup used to create the scarring on Kate Fleetwood’s face in the London production.

![Figure 10](https://photos.alastairmuir.com/Theatre/Ugly-Lies-The-Bone/i-k8vNSXZ)
Reinforcing the idea of the haptic encounter, or haptic visuality which leads the spectator to imagine themselves under the skin, Paul Taylor writes “you wouldn’t want to be in her [Jess’] skin, that’s for sure,” which suggests a veritable experience of imagined skin-swapping, or embodied simulation, and creates an understanding of the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience. Taylor’s comment, while initially seeming rather throwaway, even flippant, is in fact underscored by the fact that audiences are motivated to empathise with the character’s pain through processes of relational embodiment in which they begin to understand the physical difficulties Jess faces. The “presentational approach to the real” (Hood 76-77), the aesthetic of scarred skin, enables the spectator to negotiate an understanding of ‘self’ and ‘other’, of the ‘other’s’ pain, through haptic visuality.

One method for creating prosthetic applications, such as scars or wounds, involves gelatine. As Gretchen Davis and Mindy Hall explain “gelatin is a mouldable, flexible, and translucent material that simulates human flesh in a more natural way than latex” (192). I draw attention, however, to how gelatine is made. It is “a colourless protein formed by boiling down the skin, bones, and connective tissues of animals,” which is not significant in itself, but when the resultant prosthetic (created with gelatine) is blended, or rather “(melt[ed])” (Davis and Hall 187), into the skin of the performer (with alcohol), a common (skin)aesthetic is effectively forged. The second gelatinous skin merges the remnant skins of animals and the skin of the performer.

In Underneath, the skin aesthetic is different although similarly fills the eyes with decaying tissue. There are no visible burns or scars, but “colour can provide an abstract narrative” (TPS 41), as can gesture. The upstairs of Soho Theatre is transformed into a tomb and the audience, who are seated around the small, dark, performance space, are figuratively buried alive. As the performance begins, scented smoke falls over the stage:

we come upon a figure in jet black and grey. All that shows are its teeth and the fantastic whites of its eyes. Its face is stained with gold. (Kinevane 3)

‘Her’ becomes visible under a shaft of light. The abstract narrative of ‘Her’s’ skin is conveyed through the full-body paint of dark-blue/black and gold. The gold accentuated under the lights. The dark-blue/black paint represents dead skin. In an interview with Kernan Andrews, Kinevane explains “I had an image in my head of
someone who was race-less and somehow leathered by death and in that sense connected to all their ancestors” which presents a utopic vision of skin. Death is a universal experience and thus a dead skin is something we can all look forward to occupying. From her grave ‘Her’ explains that “my skin turned like charcoal leather after only two weeks…two weeks after that it turned as black as the fur on the back of a lion’s ears. It’s amazing how fast we decompose” (Kinevane 12), the textural quality of her skin, “leather”, indicating the transformation from skin to hide.

Just as Kinevane imagines a character “leathered by death,” ‘Her’s’ skin becomes ‘leather’, or fabric. While Serres imagines the live skin as ‘common sense,’ as intersensorial fabric, ‘Her’s’ dead skin, which would ordinarily signify the death of the senses, becomes literal fabric – leather – and a literal fabric representation of ‘common sense.’ Indeed, fabrics are another (skin)aesthetic which can work at the interstice between life and death. Di Benedetto recognises that “costume can shape or stand in for the bio-object” in his discussion of a production of Hamlet:

Wilson used the costumes of all the dead characters, in the final moments, as a sort of summary of all the deaths in the play. The clothing became a litany of senseless death […] The objects can be thought of as a type of ready-made sculpture acting as a surrogate to human corporeality. (TPS 59)

Clothing features as a “surrogate to human corporeality” as we saw in the discarded second skins, hanging, in SCAR CYMBALS. Recall how the nylon skins were removed after every performance and displayed as a collective, or a (skin)aesthetic representation of the model-performers’ ‘common skin.’ In the same way that the nylon skins are an abject representation of the body skinned, the tattered black fabric represents the skin of the “figure in jet black and grey” in Underneath. The “tight body suit [and] rags” (Calhoun) become surrogates for human corporeality. The fabrics representing the “state of putrefaction” and ‘Her’s’ “rotting [and] shredded skin” (Brantley) further emphasise how “questions of skin often morph into questions of fabric or other materials” (SRGM 1030), and how the spectator will see skin in fabric. It is not a “question of fabric” in the sense that we question the fabric’s role as skin but rather a more general question of how fabrics might be viewed as skin in place of literal skins.

As Cheng demonstrates in her analysis of Anna May Wong’s performance as Shosho in the film Piccadilly (1929), the story of a dish-washer turned dancer at a
London club, materials are imbued with transformative capabilities in relation to both the skin and the audience’s festishistic gaze. Cheng explains how “Shosho the golden girl replaces that skin with a metallic shield” (*SRGM* 1031) by choosing the most “armoured and prickly […] costume” (*SRGM* 1031) as a condition for performing. The shine of the armour, as I have mentioned, serves as protective “shield” as, under the lights, it deflects attention away from Shosho’s skin as she dances. In other words, fabrics take eyes like skins do. Cheng specifically focuses on the “enduring discourse of shine historically and pejoratively associated with racialized skin” (*SRGM* 1031) at the intersections between skin, gaze, material and subject/object status. She analyses the “scene of classic orientalist performance” in which Wong dances “moving dreamily, clad in bare skin and metal, a column of radiance that both draws and deflects the gaze” (*SRGM* 1026); the sharp angles, and reflective shine of her costume, serve as a material extension of self to re-direct the festishistic gaze away from skin.

While Cheng’s reading focuses on racialized skin and the interplay between gaze and fabric, I suggest that shine works similarly to deflect the spectator’s gaze from ‘Her’s’ decaying skin. Sam Marlowe, in a review for *The Times*, writes that “as she [‘Her’] tells a tale of shame, fragile hope, and casual, breath-taking cruelty, she becomes an Egyptian queen [as] Kinevane wraps himself in skeins of gleaming fabric.” The transformation not only represents the idea, revivifying the cliché, of ‘Her’ becoming more comfortable in her own rotting skin, but the shimmer of gold fabric against the backdrop of decay deflects the spectator’s gaze from the skin. ‘Her’s’ skin is decaying complete with – unfortunately un-staged – maggots (*Kinevane* 4); therefore, ‘Her’s’ wrapping herself in golden fabric serves a doubling function. As we have seen, throughout this thesis, the desire to double the skin works within a thematic of healing, or protecting a sense of ‘self’, where damage – psychical, physical, and societal – has taken place. Where the tattered black fabric represents her rotting flesh, the second golden skin provides a sense of containment. “Skein replaces skin” (*SRGM* 1031).

**Burns in Ugly Lies the Bone**

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26 Cheng argues that Wong’s “refusal of the human” produces an “aggressively inorganic quality that we might call ‘cellophane glamour’” (*SRGM* 1030). In the discussion of Shosho’s costume, Cheng points out how attention is diverted and “in this cinematic meditation on celebrity as spectacle making, we are given the fascination not a darkened or exposed body, or of one penetrated or ruptured by gaze, but of a body clad in resistant and mobile gleam” (*SRGM* 1031).
Both *Underneath*, which features representations of dead skin, burnt skin, pus-filled skin, and chronic skin conditions, and *ULTB* are filled with graphic descriptions, and displays of skins which fill the audience’s eyes. The (skin)esthetic effects of both performances, and Jess and ‘Her’s’ attempts to find second skins, are educational as the spectator learns something of the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience. In *ULTB*, Kacie explains the reality of burn care, in a heated exchange with Stevie, which offers an insight into burn patients’ treatment:

KACIE: *Throws a tub of medicated cream* [at Stevie]. Rub this on her skin grafts. Her scalp, her back, four times a day. On the new raw skin […] You’ll have to scrub until the scabs break open. Or else her skin hardens too thick and she can’t move […] patches on her spine still ooze a little, bandages stick when you rip them off. (Ferrentino 56-57)

The spectator imagines the “new raw skin,” the breaking scabs, and oozing wounds, by accessing their embodied knowledge of similar, if not as extensive, skin damage. Skein can become skin, but here the skein (bandages) becomes part of the skin, skein-in-skin, by “stick[ing]” in the wound. Further illustrating how burns call the skin’s surface into focus, Jess’ compression bandages (see image above) serve as a protective second skin for the fragile skin underneath, a barrier to bacteria, and to prevent excessive collagen formation.

Claudia Benthien’s analysis of burn treatments in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), in which the eponymous patient is severely burned in a plane crash, is comparable to the treatment for Jess’ burns and the remedial second skins in *ULTB*. With reference to Anzieu, Benthien argues:

It is possible to place the two treatments the helpless patient undergoes in context with the most extreme phantasms of skin ego disorders. In the Oriental method, the masochistic phantasm of flaying over and over again: the protective (common) skin is peeled off the helpless burn victim, but he is then given a new one. (218)

The “Oriental method” refers to the Bedouins’, who find the ‘English Patient’, methods of wrapping the burns in oil-soaked sheets, or pastes (which recalls my discussion of unction in Chapter 1). The practice “give[s] him a kind of oily, supple second skin” (Benthien 218). Similarly, Jess’ skin is treated (although this is not
staged) with medicated cream which would protect the skin underneath. The ‘English Patient’s’ oily fabric wrappings serve as a ‘common skin,’ between skin-as-skin and the biological skin, just as Jess’ bandages, which fuse with her wounds – skin-in-skin – are peeled off and replaced. Benthien argues that:

The Western practice of encrusting the skin through chemicals [tannic acid] evokes, on a symbolic level, the narcissistic phantasm of a “skin reinforced and invulnerable” [...] In connection with the fantasy of reinforced skin, Anzieu also speaks explicitly of a “crustacean Ego” that replaces the skin’s missing container and stimulus protection function with a rigid armour. (218)

The nature of burns treatment is that it evokes fantasies of being flayed alive and “a burns unit can only function psychologically if collective defence mechanisms are set up against the phantasy of flayed skin” (TSE 230). Although the ‘English Patient’s’ “supple second skin” is removed – (something Benthien suggests evokes the “masochistic phantasm” which relates the removal process to the pain of the rending of the ‘common skin’) – the renewal process also approximates aspects of the “narcissistic phantasm of a ‘skin reinforced’” although, of course, not “invulnerable”. The second skin is not only consistently renewed but the Bedouins’ practices of unction make anew the skin. The oily fabric, or the medicated cream, contain, and protect the skin against stimulus, and bacteria, in the same way that encrusting does.

The encrusting produced by tannic acid, of course, lends itself to comparison with the “crustacean Ego,” but in ULTB skin reinforced in this way is undesirable – “you’ll have to scrub until the scabs break open. Or else her skin hardens too thick and she can’t move” (Ferrentino 56-57) – in the interest of preserving, as much as possible, the qualities of biological skin (elasticity). The narrative of scrubbing Jess’ scabs, until they break, to preserve mobility is perhaps, therefore, a form of psychological defence against the masochistic fantasies of being flayed alive. This, in conjunction with the medicated cream and compression bandages, which contain and protect the damaged skin (as both second and ‘common skin’), guards against the formation of encrusted, or keloid, armour at both a physical and psychological level.

In his “Burning Man” article for GQ Magazine, which informed ULTB, Jay Kirk documents the experience of First Lieutenant Sam Brown who was involved in an IED accident. Kirk describes how “the sleeves of [Lieutenant Brown’s] uniform were burned off, with patches of the desert camo fused to his skin, and the visible bits
of his own flesh either meat-raw or charred black,” how the flesh of his hands came off with his gloves, and how scar tissue formed restrictive keloid “armour”. Kirk explains how the “morphine barely touched the worst levels of pain, such as the excruciating daily cleaning and debridement of open wounds [where] the scabs still ripped, and the open air on his bared nerve endings made [him] writhe in agony.” The descriptions are graphic and detail not only the surface level damage, but internal damage:

when a man’s [sic] body explodes in flame, the most visible devastation – the charring, the suppuration, the phantasmagoric melting – takes place on the surface, but the worst damage, the most dangerous and permanent damage, takes place invisibly, under the skin. (Kirk)

But in ULTB, Jess’ damaged skin, an aesthetic of “phantasmagoric melting,” is emphasised over internal and psychological damage through the more obvious representation of burned and scarred skin. While third-degree burns call into focus the skin’s protective function, this, perhaps, underlies criticism that the play is all surface and no substance. As I explain in the section which follows, however, the focus on surface is not necessarily indicative of a lack of substance but rather a reflection on the physical reality and restrictions that the most visible damage entails. Indeed, I argue that this portrayal has the potential to increase the spectator’s understanding of the reality of third-degree burns as well as, through processes of relational embodiment, their understanding of Jess’ skin-based reality.

All Skin and No Skin-Ego?

ULTB received mixed reviews. As hinted at above, some suggest there are too many underdeveloped plot lines (@EllieFJ; Davies; Taylor; Bano; Beech; Curtis; Hemming), or that “there is an excellent play *in* there” (@publicradionerd). Ben Lawrence reviewing for The Times, for example, suggests that it is “a shame that the play doesn’t give this complex character a proper resolution – or a proper story,” Connor Campbell argues that “Ferrentino prioritizes her leading character’s physical rather than mental pain,” and Ann Treneman, also writing for The Times, similarly felt that the “injured heroine needs an actual story.” Another spectator commented that ULTB is “ironically only skin deep” (@RobinSaphra) which conceivably refers to the
prominence of the physical effects of Jess’ accident as opposed to an in-depth exploration of its psychological impact.

I problematize the idea that ULTB is “ironically only skin deep,” by arguing that there is good reason for the focus on the damaged skin. It is “only skin deep” in alignment with the reality that the physical pain associated with Jess’ injuries, third-degree burns across a third of her body, is chronic and all-encompassing. The calls for a “proper” or “actual story” for Jess fail to recognise that the focus on physical pain is a proper story. Anzieu points out that “any intense and prolonged pain causes disruption to the psychical apparatus, threatens the integration of the psyche in the body and affects both the capacity to desire and the activity of thought” (TSE 225); therefore, those frustrated by the lack of psychological depth, or progression, perhaps miss the point. Rapid progression is not realistic for those suffering with extensive third-degree burns both in reality and in terms of the plot; the demand for a “resolution” to Jess’ story is not feasible (an idea I will return to further on). Anzieu explains that:

burns offer the equivalent to an experimental situation in which certain functions of the skin are suspended or damaged, so that it is possible to observe the corresponding repercussion on certain psychical functions. Deprived of its anaclitic support on the body, the Skin-ego presents a number of weaknesses, but these may in part be remedied by psychical means. (TSE 228)

Similarly, Jablonski’s description of the stages in the treatment of third-degree burns – “treating such a burn involves many steps, from acute care to surgery and then on to physical and psychological therapy” (129) – begins with the skin surface and works towards psychological therapy. The patient’s physical therapy is necessarily prioritized. Similarly, ULTB intentionally focusses on a pioneering new mode of physical therapy through a narrative centred on Jess’ experiences of, and progression with, VR therapy. Jess’ skin has sustained extensive damage and it is therefore unsurprising that the play focusses on VR which, as we shall see, works to reduce her physical pain, as opposed to the more in-depth psychological narratives some spectators wanted. Such extensive damage, of course, also has a “corresponding repercussion on certain psychical functions” and I argue that Jess represents the convergence of psyche and skin at the level of characterisation. Jess’ skin does not perform its containment function, for example, physically (leaking) and this
conceivably has repercussions on her skin-ego. Jess’ skin-ego is deprived of the skin it was previously supported by. In other words, Jess’ sense of ‘self’ is disrupted by her damaged skin and, as I discuss further on, her sense of ‘self’ and thus her character portrayal is often as an expression of pain (recall the characterisation of Jess – “everything hurts; skin, muscles, heart, bones” – mentioned earlier).

Max Adams suggests that “Jess is constantly trying to find some connection to her old self in her appearance, even going as far as to ask old flame Stevie, ‘do you remember my skin?’” which correlates Jess’ sense of ‘self’ with the loss of her skin. The question is taken from the following exchange between Jess and Stevie as they await the final shuttle launch:

JESS: Look. Do you remember my skin –
STEVIE: Enough. Okay?
JESS: I need to know –
STEVIE: Why are you doing this?
JESS: Do you?
STEVIE: What kind of question is that? Yeah, yes, sure.
JESS: Why aren’t you looking at me?
STEVIE: Fine. I do.
JESS: You’re still not looking at me.
STEVIE: (Angry). I remember your skin. Okay?! Is that what you wanna hear? (Ferrentino 48-49)

Jess’s sense of ‘self’ relates to her former skin and, clearly, so does Stevie’s sense of Jess as ‘other’. His reluctance to look at her evidences his difficulty comprehending the disjunction between Jess’ unrecognisable surface and recognisable personality. Jess’ skin-ego conceivably weakens with the destruction of its biological support. The destruction of skin illustrates how pain “takes up all the space available and I no longer exist as an ‘I’” (TSE 226). Jess’ sense of ‘self’ convolutes into the “space available,” her destroyed skin, and “I” becomes the expression and experience of chronic pain.

Anzieu discusses his PhD student Emmanuelle Moutin’s work with patients in a burns treatment centre. He explains that “the one prohibition imposed on her related to contact with the staff: she was not to “disrupt” them in their work: thus “psychical” care had to take second place to the priority of physical care” (TSE 228), which seems to be the case in ULTB. During the treatment of burns, which includes chlorine baths and scrubbing skin, Moutin reports that patients, in great pain, appealed to her to speak
to them. She found that engaging patients in conversation helped distract them from physical pain. Anzieu presents Moutin’s case study on ‘Armand’ who had asked for pain relief but, owing to the busy ward, had not received it immediately. Moutin engaged ‘Armand’ in conversation and when a nurse returned the patient reported that pain relief was no longer required (TSE 228-229). Anzieu suggests that although the patient’s skin-ego had lost its biological support:

Through talking [and] the symbolisations that grew out of it, it [the skin-ego] had found another anaclisis, a socio-cultural one (remember, the skin-ego works through multiple anaclitic supports). (TSE 229)

The patient’s skin-ego supports itself on conversation or “the skin of words” (TSE 229). Indeed, we might recall HARD C*CK’s attempts to supplement psychic integumentation, or the sense of ‘self’, through the creation of second skins which I argued could be read symbolically as the result of – or reaction to – society’s pathogenic impingement on the skin-ego. In Moutin’s case study, the patient’s skin-ego finds socio-cultural support in the ‘other’: in ULTB Jess’ skin-ego finds virtual support in the VR body which provides the patient with a sense of containment through the virtual skin they occupy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the psychoanalyst might use “a skin of words” (TSE 229) to address deficiencies in the patient’s skin-ego and/or restore a sense of containment on the psychical plane. Indeed, word baths are a way of restoring burn patients’ skin-egos, and sense of containment, when the skin itself has been damaged. General Practitioner, and Digital Healthcare Consultant, Keith Grimes also suggests that Jess’ psychological health is overlooked in ULTB. He argues that the ‘Voice’ who guides Jess through VR treatment concentrates on “the numerical rating of the pain, and the short-term goals of the treatment.” However, the “skin of words” is alluded to by Ferrentino’s casting preference notes which suggest the ‘Voice’ should be cast based on “strong vocal” and “passionate, powerful [and] maternal” qualities (6). As Anzieu explains, the “skin of words”:

harks back to the bath of speech in which a baby is immersed by people talking to it or by it crooning to them. Then, when the child develops the ability to think verbally, the skin of words provides a symbolic equivalent of the softness,
suppleness, and relevance of contact by taking the place of the faculty of touch which has become impossible, forbidden, or painful. (TSE 229)

The ‘Voice’ and Jess’ mother are played by the same actress. The “strong vocal quality” and maternal attributes of the ‘Voice’/Mother provides the “symbolic equivalent of the faculty of touch,” during VR therapy, when Jess’ burned skin is too painful to touch.

**Virtual Reality Therapy and Second Skins**

VR therapy attempts to make the patient’s skin more inhabitable. The VR element of the production, designed by Es Devlin, transforms the bowl-shaped stage into a wrap-around projection of the VR world so the audience has an insight into what Jess sees through her headset. As Mark Beech asks “Are we [...] looking through Jess’s eyes or ours? In a virtual reality world or the real thing?” I warp the question to ask whose skin the audience feels themselves in? While the skin-ego works through multiple anaclitic supports, in the context of spectatorship, in *ULTB* and *Underneath*, the spectator’s skin-ego is reactivated through the sight of skin which draws on their embodied knowledge of burns.

**ULTB** promotes the use of VR as pain-management therapy; Jess’ pain rating falls from 10 to 6 and, finally, she becomes so immersed that she ignores the ‘Voice’s’ request to rate her pain. Erin Hood explains that “aspects of self like memory, attention and expectation are officially absent from physical pain’s creation and modulation in th[e] dominant [neurobiological] way of understanding pain” (72), but by “expressing pain through an embodied, subjective and multidimensional representation network, performance can give form to the emerging neuroscientific view that we change pain as pain changes us” (69). Jess is an embodied, subjective, and multidimensional expression of pain. Her sense of ‘self’ is changed by chronic pain but the representation of pain, and Jess’ sense of ‘self’, also changes over the course of the performance. Jess hums, for example, during painful movement which relates to Anzieu’s ideas that a wrapping of sound can serve a protective, or compensatory, function for deficiencies in the skin-ego and as a substitute, protective, skin. It exemplifies Jess modulating her experience of pain in response to the pain of movement. Ultimately, however, Jess’ pain reduces as her sense of ‘self’ transfers to the second, virtual skin. She, albeit temporarily, becomes a ‘self’ separate from pain but also separate from reality.
Towards the beginning of the play, the ‘Voice’ instructs Jess to design her own virtual world – “I’ll craft a virtual place for you to go, totally unfamiliar to your senses, so they forget how much you hurt” (Ferrentino 18) – but Jess takes Kacie’s “dream board” instead of designing her own VR world. Kacie explains that “you glue on [to the dream board] – what you want from life, your ideas” (Ferrentino 14). Kacie has never seen snow before and so it is covered in snow. The project is therefore an optimistic, forward-looking, piece in contradistinction to the stagnation Jess witnesses and feels in Titusville. The ‘Voice’ explains to Jess:

Looking back will only cause pain. Forward motion. That’s what you need […]

The world we create must be designed by you. (Ferrentino 26)

But the VR world is not designed by Jess. Although when the ‘Voice’ questions her, about the dream board, Jess finds personal connections to the images – “the way it snowed in Afghanistan” (Ferrentino 27) – they are connections which look back. The sense of presence in the VR world is, however, unaffected by this; therefore, Jess still experiences quantifiable pain reduction. While ULTB anticipates Hoffman’s hopes that, in the future, patients will be able to personalise VR worlds, towards the end of the play the ‘Voice’ refuses to re-create Jess’ town, or family, in VR. Instead she encourages Jess (as a therapist might) to move forward in the real world which notions towards the message, common to both plays, that Jess must learn to accept her ‘self’ in her damaged skin.

The success in pain-reduction through VR has been linked to the quality of “presence”, the patient feels present in the virtual world, because VR effectively offers them a second skin to slip into. The virtual arm the patient controls, throwing snowballs in SnowWorld for example, is viewed as their own. “That which is presented to the senses” is the virtual skin which enables Jess to see and feel herself in the skin of the virtual ‘other’ she controls (albeit temporarily). In an analogous way, the (skin)aesthetic of burned skin serves to motivate ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ to re-enter the spectators’ minds. As Hood explains:

performance represents by taking what Daston and Galison call ‘a presentational approach to the real.’ They invoke the phrase to describe developing modes of
scientific image making [but] the concept can also be applied to performance-based means of representing physical pain. (76-77)

Jess’ skin is effectively the spectator’s virtual reality as, visually, it is the most obvious site for engagement (although, as I mentioned earlier, the spectator might also experience relational embodiment with Jess’ VR skin displayed on stage). Jess presents a second skin that spectators can feel through haptic visuality, and can imagine being in. Indeed, as we have seen, it is the (skin)aeesthetics or the “presentational approach to the real,” which represents Jess and ‘Her’s’ physical pain, and, as we shall shortly see, enables the spectator’s embodied response, and later embodied thought in analysis.

**Phenomenologically Experiencing the ‘Other’s’ Pain**

Spectators report bodily sensations which correspond to the “presentational approach to the real.” Williams’ comment that “I found my own limbs stiffening as [Jess] winces around the stage” (H. Williams), for example, suggests how the (skin)aeesthetic of scar tissue and skin grafts, which restrict Jess’ mobility, influences the spectator’s “stiffening limbs,” or the physiologically real response to the “presentational approach to the real.” The experience relies on the spectator’s embodied knowledge, specifically of how burns, scars, and healing skin feel. In this respect, the play also has an educational function, as I have suggested, because it offers spectators an insight into how more extensive damage might feel. When tactile contact is prohibited, it is this experience that I suggest accesses the spectator’s skin-ego, as intersensorial backcloth, and offers a sight-based variation of the fantasy of the ‘common skin.’ The eyes must touch the ‘other’ to (skin)aeesthetically sense how the ‘other’s’ skin feels both texturally and as garment to move in or move into (albeit temporarily and imaginatively).

This argument is ancillary, in many respects, to existing phenomenological and philosophical arguments of how we experience, and relate to, other bodies. While I argue that the (skin)aeesthetic representations of burns and scars enables the spectator to negotiate ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through observation of the skin, Jess and ‘Her’s’ movement and gestures are as much a part of the “presentational approach to the real.” Movement and gestures are co-presented with the (skin)aeesthetic of damage and should therefore be taken into consideration.
In this section, I offer an outline of the philosophical and phenomenological ideas of co-presentation and paired bodies. I suggest how these ideas relate to processes of embodied simulation, where an observer can imagine the intentions, experience, and perspective of the ‘other’ based on their own experience as a lived body. I specifically consider comments, as we shall shortly see, which suggest the spectator relates at a physiological level to the ‘other’ in ULTB and Underneath. I include this section before my consideration of mirror neurons and mirror-touch synesthesia because as Michael J. Banissy and Jamie Ward (2007) explain:

Given the neural mechanisms [mirror systems] thought to be involved in mirror-touch synesthesia, the differences in empathic ability reported here appear consistent with the hypothesis that we understand and empathize with others by a process of simulation. (816)

There is a relationship between mirror systems and embodied simulation processes (even in non-mirror-touch synesthetes). I do not investigate the nature of this link, but I do consider how an observer relates to the skin of the ‘other’ through embodied simulation, before suggesting how mirror-neurons, which rely on similar processes of pairing bodies, might be engaged in ULTB and Underneath.

It is worth noting that performance:

Can contribute an explicitly subjective representational form that draws attention to the spaces between mind and body and between self and others that are central to how physical pain changes. Performance […] generates embodied knowledge because, unlike metaphor, performance keeps the embodied person in sight. It also generates subjective knowledge because, unlike objectivity, performance emphasises the contextual factors present in the representational process. (Hood 76-77)

Kate Fleetwood’s portrayal of Jess is a subjective representation of pain. Spectators have commented on her “tin-man” (H. Williams) movements which suggests that the embodied person, in sight, is an access point for embodied simulation. The performance of pain closes the space between ‘self’ (the spectator) and ‘other’ (the performer’s body) because the spectator imagines that they understand the ‘other’s’ pain through observation of how the (skin)aesthetic (or contextual factors) affects movement. ULTB therefore “generates embodied” and “subjective knowledge” of
burns and scars which builds on the spectator’s pre-existing skinbodied knowledge. The distinctions between Jess’ psychological and physical pain – “the space between mind and body” – have collapsed and converge on the skin. At the end of the performance, the audience are left with the generated embodied memories \((PS\ 66)\), and a greater sense of empathy and understanding of the ‘other’s’ skinbodied experience.

The movement and gestures across both performances exemplify “pain-behaviour” which Joel Smith discusses in *Experiencing Phenomenology* (2016). Pain-behaviour informs Smith’s discussion of different phenomenological and philosophical views on how we experience others. He outlines John Stuart Mill’s idea that “we may fancy that we see or feel what we in reality infer” (qtd. in Smith 164), and how Edith Stein and Edmund Husserl’s views differ. Mill’s argument suggests that when spectators see Jess’ skin and expressions of pain (the surface) they can only infer pain. Smith explains:

> Suppose you see someone step barefoot on an upturned pin. They will, in all likelihood, react in a predictable way. In seeing them react, we may ask, what is it that one sees? On the view outlined by Mill, what I see are ‘modifications of [the] body’, and ‘outward demeanour.’ (162)

The inference “rests on an awareness of a correlation between my own pain-behaviour and sensations of pain,” but, according to Mill, to “see someone’s mere pain-behaviour is not to see any mental condition (pain) that they are in” (Smith 163). The performance of pain is given as an example to illustrate this point because “in the [spectator’s] observation of an actor and a genuinely pained person, one is aware of the same thing [and therefore] what one is aware of must be mere behaviour, not the pain itself” (Smith 164). However, in terms of experiencing the ‘other’ in performance:

> Although we are aware of the fiction of theatre, it is also physiologically real to the attendant; fiction and reality are merely different degrees of neuronal activity. Our embodiment makes real any stimulation and interprets it according to context, but it is also wired to respond empathetically. Theatre makes real mimesis through lived shared experience. \((TPS\ 63)\)
The observed pain-behaviour, or the “presentational approach to the real” in performance, is experienced as physiologically real for the spectator. Although we are aware that Jess is no more a burns victim than ‘Her’ is a living corpse, the theatrical context makes their pain real and spectators respond empathetically, and physiologically, as if it were real. The idea of mimesis as a shared knowledge of lived experience or, more specifically, the ways spectators might mirror the performer (imaginatively, physiologically, or at a neuronal level) supports the argument that through observing the (skin)aesthetic the spectator understands ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’, and, at some level, may feel themselves in the skin of the ‘other’. Despite the fact that across both works what spectators actually see is a performance of pain behaviour, the experience of spectating Jess, for example, paradoxically enables the spectator to see beyond the behaviour itself and learn something of the type of pain(s) that someone in Jess’ position might experience.

Indeed, Edmund Husserl’s view suggests that in “observing another human, we are not aware of mere behaviour but of the other’s experiential life itself” (Smith 164). Husserl’s account differs from Mill’s by arguing that when observing the ‘other’ “we are [also] co-presented with their mental life” (Smith 165) which suggests that damaged skin in conjunction with pain behaviour offers an insight into the psychological reality of the ‘other’. Just as “the view is that outer experience, such as vision, presents my body as thing but also co-presents it as lived. The awareness of the bodies of others is no different” (Smith 165); therefore, a spectator observing Jess or ‘Her’s’ pain-behaviour, in conjunction with the (skin)aesthetic of damage (as they are co-presented), experiences the physical and mental life of the ‘other’, with recourse to their own embodied experiences.

While the spectator can imagine the ‘other’s’ mental life across ULTB and Underneath, I am more interested in how the spectator experiences the skin of the ‘other’ and becomes perceptually aware of what it feels like inside that skin (as opposed to inside the ‘other’s’ mind). In other words, I am interested in the spectator’s embodied analysis of the skin as it emerges in embodied thought afterwards. Smith explains:

In the case of the experience of another person, Husserl claims that we experience our own bodies as paired with the bodies of others. This pairing is grounded in the fact the bodies of others appear similar to our own bodies […] Consequently, according to Husserl we experience the other’s body as a lived body. We do not
[however] experience the other’s body as lived in the same way that we experience our own as lived. Rather, since we experience it as paired with our own lived body, the sense of lived body is ‘analogously transferred’ to the body of the other. Thus, the other’s body is co-presented as lived. (166)

The skin of the ‘other’ is co-presented as lived to the spectator in ULTB and Underneath. Smith suggests that we can understand the ‘other’ as a “lived body,” paired with our own, but that we do not imagine the ‘other’ body as an extension of ‘self” (166-167). I argue, however, that the spectator’s engagement with the ‘other’ does constitute, at some level, an extension of ‘self’. But, in performance, the analogous transferral of the sense of the lived body, or rather the lived skin, seems to move from the ‘other’ performing, to the ‘self’ spectating. The reversal is exemplified by the spectator who suggests they feel Jess’ pain in their own limbs. Thus, the embodied representation of a body in pain finds its extension through the spectator’s embodied simulation of the ‘other’.

There is generally praise for Fleetwood’s “physically gruelling” (Bano) and “painful to watch” (H.Williams) performance; indeed, both comments suggest that ULTB demands the audience’s physiological engagement. Reflections on the “physical” and vicariously painful experience are expressed in terms which support the idea that eye-contact with Jess’ skin, and movement, facilitates a sight-based variation on the fantasy of the ‘common skin.’ Consider, for example, the following comments:

“the actress is able to convey this [pain] in minute detail so that the slightest grimace or pursing of the lips has us [the audience] squirming.” (Healy)

“Fleetwood manages to portray this feeling of mental and physical torture so effectively that you wince alongside her with every movement.” (O’Hanlon)

“It’s a physically gruelling performance. Fleetwood summons a juddering stiffness in her limbs so that the tightness of her skin grafts is palpable.” (Bano)

Touch is prohibited and yet “the tightness of [Jess’] skin grafts is palpable.” The spectator’s eyes have grazed the scarred (skin)aesthetic, which visibly restricts movement, and their skinbodied knowledge influences the idea that they can feel themselves in the ‘other’s’ skin. The comments exemplify how the skin-ego registers
the intangible – “physical torture,” “stiffness in her limbs,” and “tightness” of skin grafts – through the eyes, bypassing the thinking ego. With recourse to the imaginary representations of skin as backcloth the “tightness of her skin grafts is palpable,” which evidences the spectators’ later “embodied thought” based on embodied analysis during the performance. The spectator engages in embodied simulation when observing the ‘other’s’ pain, here the physical “squirming”, or “winc[ing] alongside [Jess] with every movement,” indicates the pairing of bodies and the transmission of bodily affect. As Montagu points out “the imagination renders the intangible tangible” (125) and “vision can only become meaningful on the basis of what it has felt” (315), which alludes to the spectator’s ability to feel what they see. The intangible, the performer’s skin, becomes tangible, or “palpable” and “meaningful”, based on the spectator’s subjective embodied memories.

**The Spectator’s Skin-Ego and Phenomenological Experience of ‘Others’**

We can now reconsider the criticism that Jess is reduced to a representation of physical pain, at the expense of a storyline which explores her psychology, in alignment with Anzieu’s explanation that:

> Pain causes topographical disturbance, and in a circular relation, the awareness that certain fundamental, structuring distinctions are being obliterated – the distinction between the psychical and bodily Egos, the distinction between the Id, the Ego, and the superego – makes one’s state more painful still. (*TSE* 226)

Pain collapses the structuring aspects of the psyche. In Jess’ case, as I suggested, the skin-ego has lost its biological support and, simultaneously, the distinction between the psychical and bodily egos collapses. Jess’ pain is chronic and thus the topographical disturbance and dissolution of psychical and physical boundaries is long-term. Stein suggests that “[t]he countenance is the outside of sadness [but] together they form a natural unity” (qtd. in Smith 164) and, therefore, the outside of the ‘other’ – in Stein’s example, the facial expression of sadness – indicates the mental state of the ‘other’. Jess’ damaged skin, in conjunction with the observed pain behaviours, similarly renders the skin (physical) and state of mind (psychical) a natural unity. The unity of the (skin)aesthetic and the character’s pained movement and expressions, expresses the dissolution of the distinction between the two planes, obliterated by pain; therefore, mind and body mingle in Jess’ skin.
The experience of observing the skin, and pain-behaviour, sets up a corresponding disturbance of the spectator’s topographical structures (despite not feeling pain themselves). The embodied analysis, after the performance, indicates an embodied response, during the performance, which suggests that the skin-ego has been accessed as backcloth, based on what the eyes have felt. The topographical disturbance is the subversion of the thinking ego, during the performance, when the spectator relates to the skin of the ‘other’. The spectator’s experience of relational embodiment relates to the characterisation of Jess as, predominantly, the embodiment of pain. Such a portrayal enables the empathetic response to the ‘other’s’ lived skinbodied experience which is, most likely, very different to the spectator’s own. Jess, of course, has a character beyond (or tied into) her experiences of all-encompassing pain (she notably approaches situations with humour and resilience) and, indeed, the play also touches on the psychological effects, such as the loss of a sense of ‘self’ Jess experiences through the loss of skin. I argue, however, that a strength of the (skin)aesthetic portrayal – focussing on the physical – is that it does not appease calls for “resolution” or “proper” storylines because pain and pain management are “actual storyline[s]” for those who experience extensive third-degree burns. Returning to my earlier point, the play does inhibit ‘progress’, as narrative ‘progress’ is conventionally understood, because the audience does not see much beyond Jess’ all-encompassing pain experience (there is, for example, no realisation of desires or goals or relationships) but this is important because it communicates something of the ‘other’s’ lived experience.

**Mirror Neurons: Or, Figuratively Taking the ‘Other’s’ Skin**

I have suggested, briefly, how phenomenological and philosophical accounts of experiencing the ‘other’ as lived body, might influence the spectator’s embodied simulation of the ‘other’ and, with recourse to the skin-ego and skinbodied knowledge, enable them to relate to the ‘other’s’ skin. In other words, to imagine the sensations and textures of the embodied skin based on the (skin)aesthetic presented to the eyes. Mirror neurons also have a part to play in embodied simulation. Di Benedetto describes Marina Abramović and Ulay’s performance piece *Light/Dark* (1977) in which the performers take it in turns to slap each other. Di Benedetto explains that “we [the audience] have experienced the event in as real a way as the artists, and walk away having been affected on a biological level [because] a neural pathway has been activated as a result of what we have experienced” (*TPS* 71). Even though there is no
physical contact, the spectator’s mirror neurons respond as if they were the one being slapped. This, figuratively, positions them under the skin of the ‘other’ through their embodied understanding of the observed action. Mirror neurons are activated in the same area of the brain in both the spectator and the individual being slapped; therefore, it is another way that an observer can experience the ‘other’s’ skin through observation alone.

In his discussion of a production of *Hamlet*, in which puppets represent human bodies, Di Benedetto explains how “touch was a bridge into [the audience’s] means of understanding the action” and how observing touch, even touch to the puppets, prompts the spectator’s “mirror responses [to] quickly make empathetic connections with the figure[s]” (*TPS* 81). Ideas of co-presentation and the pairing of bodies are relevant here, but mirror neuron studies suggest that pairing operates at a neuronal level. The spectator’s mirror neuron response to observed actions, here ‘others’ being touched, emphasises how the spectator can vicariously experience the impact of touch, at a neuronal level, without touching or being touched.

While ‘Her’s’ burns and scars are not obviously represented, using makeup or prosthetic skin, ‘Her’ uses language, screams, and gesture to simulate them. ‘Her’ describes the bodily impact of being struck by lightning:

> these eyelids almost welded together with the heat. This ear melted lower than the other. Burgundy scarring all along here and down my neck…Paralysed for a while. (Kinevane 7)

Through touching gestures, clawing at the face and neck, and the smudging of paint, the spectator sees what ‘Her’s’ skin may have looked and felt like. ‘Her’s’ account is reminiscent of Kirk’s “Burning Man” with images of “phantasmagoric melting.” Just as Jess explains that “it took three surgeries to give me back my eyelid” (Ferrentino 10), as the skin melts it mingles the senses in *Underneath*. It obscures vision, it alters hearing, and paralyses.

As I have mentioned, however, it is scarring which restricts movement because:

> as burns heal, the damaged skin is naturally replaced by scar tissue, which forms as collagen is laid down at the burn site. The collagen then contracts as the body slowly tries to bring the edges of the wound together. With large burns, this
natural process can have disastrous results because it leads to the formation of disfiguring contractures that can immobilize parts of the body that are normally highly mobile, such as the neck. (Jablonski 129-130)

In ULTB the audience sees how the contractures impact Jess’ mobility as she needs a walking frame. In Underneath, the contractures are alluded to through scenes of contracting gesture. Kinevane strains his neck in a violent upward motion:

When I would fit, my neck would do this…One minute of savage pain…then gone. Completely disorientated. And nobody ever gave me help. I think it just revolted everyone and they backed off. (Kinevane 15)

Kinevane holds the contortion in silence and, just as Holly Williams writes that “I found my own limbs stiffening as [Jess] winces around the stage,” as a spectator of Underneath you similarly imagine that you feel the strain of ‘Her’s’ gesture. The sensation of tightening skin carried by the tautness, and visible tendons, of the strained neck. The clawed tension in the hand which drags down the length of the throat. Just as spectators suggest that the tightness of Jess’ skin grafts is “palpable”, through concatenated eye-contact, here the invisible scars are “made tangible.” At a neuronal level, and indeed a physiological one, the spectator comes to mirror the performer. Such processes are always taking place in audiences; however, we can see that performances which explicitly feature more graphic thematics of skin, as we have seen in ULTB, Underneath, and my other case studies, accentuate such processes.

The significance of this, for the overall argument, is that the spectator’s visual engagement with damaged skin– specifically their experience of haptic visuality – can serve an educational function because spectators can draw on their embodied knowledge to learn about an ‘other’ whose skinbodied experience is, most likely, very different to their own. We can see how such (skin)aesthetics might, in future, be turned to socially significant ends within a performance framework which aims to provoke a reaction and/or raise awareness of a particular kind of experience. Indeed, as we have seen, there is something enduring about the interaction, and conflation, of sight and skin in structuring our ideas of intersubjectivity. Haptic visuality returns spectators to their skin, as the site of skinbodied memory, in order to relate to the ‘other’, which emphasises the skin as a method for interpreting performance. The visual representation of damaged skin, as we have seen, triggers neurocognitive processes of
identification with the ‘other’ which reinforces the skin’s importance in negotiating intersubjective relationships even when there is no direct skin-to-skin contact.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I have suggested a number of ways that the (skin)aesthetic representation of burns and scarred skin enable spectators to relate to and learn about the ‘other’s’ skin without physically touching the skin or being touched. *Underneath* specifically presents a re-imagining of the clichéd idea that beauty is skin deep and encourages spectators to treat others more kindly. *ULTB* similarly motivates empathetic responses and communicates to audiences something of the reality of pain and pain management through the (skin)aesthetic representations of third-degree burns. Indeed, through a re-consideration of haptic visuality I have suggested how sight and skin mingle, under the prohibition of touch, with recourse to the spectator’s own skinbodied knowledge. I have suggested how processes of relational embodiment (including Husserlian pairing and mirror neuron function) explain how spectators might come to *think* that they *feel* themselves in the skin of the ‘other’ on stage in more than a loose metaphorical sense. Such processes of relational embodiment, facilitated by visual engagement with the damaged skin(s) and co-presented pain behaviours, have educational effects as the spectator is able to relate to an ‘other’ whose skinbodied experience is, most likely, very different to their own skin.

I primarily focussed on the (skin)aesthetics of scarred, burned, and dead skin and suggested that such representations provoke the spectator’s experience of haptic visuality, processes of embodied simulation, including experiences of relational embodiment triggered by mirror neuron activity. In the first of my concluding manifestos, which follow, I explain how mirror-touch synesthetes experience ‘mirror pain’ through similar processes of relational embodiment. I argue that such processes constitute a variation on the fantasy of the ‘common skin,’ or the spectator’s belief that they know what it is to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin, in performances where there is no skin-to-skin contact. The effects of such (skin)aesthetic depictions and the co-presented pain behaviours, as I have suggested, are in terms of an increased empathetic response from audiences with the skinbodied experience of the ‘other’, based on their own embodied knowledge, and the development of further skinbodied knowledge. I have also argued that under the prohibition on touch the skin-ego is reactivated as intersensorial backcloth through eye-contact which draws on the spectator’s embodied knowledge of skin. The material in this chapter also provides the foundations for my
A concluding proposal for a new, *real* (albeit hypothetical), “Theater of Cruelty,” or my imagined audience comprised exclusively of mirror-touch synesthetes who physiologically register sensations, including pain, simply by observing touch to the ‘other’s’ skin. My revised “Theater of Cruelty,” as we shall see, relates back to Artaud’s proposition that it is through the skin that the spectator understands metaphysical ideas such as ‘self’ and ‘other’. Indeed, the mirror-touch synesthete’s experience of concatenated eye-contact models the ultimate variation of the fantasy of the ‘common skin.’
Conclusion

In this section I present two concluding manifestos. Firstly, I offer a simplified “How To” guide for using (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis in the future. Indeed, I strongly encourage researchers to use this to develop empirical research studies. I then use this guide as a framework for offering my concluding remarks on my research findings. Secondly, I present a manifesto for a “Real Theatre of Cruelty” – a thought experiment which acts as a coda to the thesis by speculatively taking my research to its extreme logical conclusions. Finally, I conclude with the “Aftertaste of (Skin)Aesthetics” which indicates areas for future research.

The First Manifesto: How To Use (Skin)Aesthetics as a Method

1. First choose a performance environment. It might be a play, a piece of immersive theatre, a contemporary dance piece, or a live-art exhibition. It’s ideal if it’s saturated with skin(s) but you can use (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis in any performance environment.

2. Secondly, find yourself some skin. It might be your own, someone else’s (a performer’s or another spectator’s), a representation of skin (paint or scars for example), or a material that emulates the skin’s qualities (such as palpable sound which “touches,” as we saw in Chapter 3). Materials which emulate skin are imbued with qualities that the ‘other’ observing, touching, or hearing, can relate to by drawing on their skinbodied knowledge.

3. Consider how your chosen skin relates to the other skin(s) or aesthetic representations of skin in the performance environment. This stage expands the brackets between “(skin)” and “aesthetic” and emphasises that, as a method of analysis, (skin)aesthetics is concerned primarily with the study of skin-based intersubjectivity in the performance environment.

4. Indeed, Anzieu’s psychoanalytic theory of The Skin Ego is integrated into (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis for skin-based intersubjectivity in this thesis. The next step, therefore, is to establish what psychoanalytic tenets (such as the ‘common skin’ or the ‘sound bath’) pertaining to basic identity
formation, or the formation of intersubjective relationships, the chosen (skin)aesthetic reveals and reconfigures in the performance setting.

5. Next, you need to establish through which sensory modality the (skin)aesthetic form is operating. Indeed, (skin)aesthetics pinpoints the skin as the site for sensory slippage (remember “(skin)aesthetic” is partially derived from Josephine Machon’s term “(syn)aesthetics”). Consider if and, indeed, how the (skin)aesthetic representations are accessible through other sensory modalities (is it the spectator’s eyes, for example, which touch the skins?). This is in accordance with the idea of a synthetic synaesthetic experience – or (skin)aesthesia – facilitated by the skin’s function as sensorium commune.

6. Ask what methods of appreciation underpin the spectator’s skin-based relationship with the ‘other’. Is it through haptic visuality, embodied simulation, recourse to skinbodied memories, or mirror neuron function? How do such methods of appreciation facilitate a relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’?

7. Consider how/if the spectator’s skinbodied experience of a performance relates to the work’s intentions or meaning, as well as asking whether the spectator’s immediate sensory experience makes them aware (and, indeed, at what point during or after the experience) of wider societal issues. On this note, consider how such an awareness might influence wider intersubjective relationships between ‘self’ and societal ‘other’ through the skin. Finally, consider the effects of (skin)aesthetic engagement within the performance for the spectator. Are they aesthetic, emotional, educational? And how does this relate to the overall meaning or narrative of the work in question?

**Findings**

In this section, I use my first manifesto, which outlines the method of analysis developed and used throughout this thesis, as a numbered framework to summarise my research questions, findings, and conclusions.
1. This thesis addressed the question of how it is through the skin that ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ must be made to re-enter the spectator’s mind. To begin to investigate this question I developed (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis to investigate how the skin works as an active site/sight of engagement and, indeed, how it might be manipulated to influence relational ideas in the performance environment. My thesis has addressed the gap in existing research which currently under-examines the skin itself as both the location of engagement and the way in which the skin might function as conduit for the other senses.

It has been structured to become more attenuated, in terms of moving away from experiences of direct skin-to-skin contact, as it progresses. I began with a consideration of Robert Hesp’s HARD C*CK, a contemporary dance piece, and focussed on scenes of skin-to-skin contact and the desire for connection. I then considered director Lucy Bailey’s Macbeth for the way that the tactile sense might be extended through the aesthetic form of an elasticated sheet. Chapter 3 focussed on Donna Huanca’s SCAR CYMBALS, a live-art exhibition, and was the first of two chapters to argue that sound functions as a (skin)aesthetic. More specifically, it focussed on the spectator’s skinbodied experience of palpable sound (or (skin)aesthetic-to-skin contact). Chapter 4’s focus became more attenuated still in its consideration of Tristan Bernays’ play Frankenstein and the way that sound can be felt to approximate qualities of the skin (such as when the tonal approximates the tactile) or the way sound might represent the condition of the skin (here as the skin stretches and tears). Finally, in my most attenuated chapter, I considered Lindsey Ferrentino’s play Ugly Lies the Bone and Pat Kinevane’s dramatic monologue Underneath for the way haptic visuality works under the prohibition of skin-to-skin or (skin)aesthetic-to-skin contact.

The structure illustrates a number of ways that the skin functions as a multisensorial site of engagement which negotiates ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the performance environment. My findings and various hypothetical experiments and proposals emphasise the skin’s sensitivity to manipulation and might, effectively, be used as the starting point for developing works which manipulate the spectator’s skin and experience of skin-based relationality to various ends in the future.
2. I introduced a number of materials that I have termed “skin aesthetics” including, but not limited to, Vaseline, paints, fabrics, and sounds which might be applied to, designed to reinforce, or represent the skin (be that the performer’s or the spectators). I have argued that such aesthetic forms function as “(skin)aesthetics” when they motivate a spectator’s engagement with the skin of the ‘other’. In turn, this evidences the relational component between skin and skin, or skin and aesthetic. As I have shown, this engagement with the skin can take place through a number of sensory modalities and, indeed, through sensory slippage. We have seen how eyes might “touch” the skin of the ‘other’ and how sounds can carry the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience to the ears of the spectator. (Skin)aesthetics can also encode the message of a work (such as the desire for support in Chapter 1) or be manipulated to convey a meaning (Chapter 3 suggested how the spectator’s experience of palpable sound might be manipulated to raise awareness of societal issues). My findings in this area, which are by no means exhaustive, begin to address the need for further research into the ways that the skin acts as a multisensorial conduit in embodied spectatorship, often to enhance a work’s meaning or aesthetic affect.

3. My case studies have shown how spectators might relate to the other skins or (skin)aesthetics in the performance environment through their embodied experience of a work. In Chapter 3, for example, I suggested how the spectator’s experience of palpable sound might condition silence and feelings of isolation to parallel the ‘othering’ of certain groups (an idea encoded in the soundscape). I have also suggested how the spectator might relate to the ‘other’s’ skin-based experience with recourse to their pre-existing skinbodied knowledge. In this sense, I have shown that there does not have to be direct skin-to-skin contact to provoke skin-based relationality. Indeed, as we saw in Frankenstein, audiovisual mirror neuron function enables sound to convey the ripping of the Creature’s skin. Without having to represent damage visually, therefore, a relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is negotiated through the skin via the spectator’s skinbodied knowledge which can continue to develop throughout their experience of the work.

4. I have integrated Anzieu’s psychoanalytic theory of The Skin Ego because it helps to address the question of how ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ re-enter the
spectator’s mind. This is because *The Skin Ego* theorizes how such ideas originally enter the individual’s mind through their skin-based experiences in infancy. As we know, the successful formation of a skin-ego is predicated on the formation of a ‘common skin,’ or the infant’s fantasy that it shares a skin with its caregiver, and its subsequent rending which results in the sense of an individuated ‘self’. Of course, the spectators I consider are adults; therefore, often the ideas I take from Anzieu, such as the experience of the sound bath, are identified as operating in an analogous way in spectatorship. Or, for example, how (skin)aesthetics might work to reconfigure approximations of the ‘common skin’ – or the connections to the ‘other’ which are forged through the experience of skinbodied spectatorship. I have argued that it is the novelty of certain (skin)aesthetic conditions which influences the spectator’s ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’, albeit temporarily, within the rubric of re-entry through the skin. In this respect, we can conclude that the basic tenets of identity and intersubjective identity formation, as theorised by Anzieu, might be seen in operation in the performance environment when the spectator’s skin-based experience is manipulated.

As I outlined in the introduction, the skin as a conduit for the other senses is under-examined in performance studies and Anzieu’s description of the skin as the “common sense” and the skin-ego as “intersensorial backcloth” have linked well with Machon’s ideas of the synthetic experiences of synaesthesia in performance, and with Serres’ idea of the skin as a “sensorium commune” with fabric, and thus aesthetic, parallels. The synthesis of the three theorists over the skin reveals the potential for the manipulation of the spectator’s skin and skin-based relationality, or the relational component of the term “(skin)aesthetic”, through (skin)aesthetic means. Indeed, Anzieu theorises about materials which might function as ‘second skins’ – such as oils or fabrics, for example, in the dressing of burns – in a way which remedies the individual’s sense that their skin-ego, or literal skin, does not contain or support them. As we have seen throughout this thesis, scholars such as Connor, Benthien, and Stevens, have suggested how materials might serve such reinforcing functions and/or speak of wider societal anxieties. Connor, specifically, suggests how an increase in such materials may indicate felt pathogenic impingements on the societal skin-ego which relates to the way in which a performance might convey the need to remedy societal issues through
(skin)aesthetic means (such as the practices of unction in *HARD C*CK*ck* which indicates flaws in the education system or the painting of bodies in *SCAR CYMBALS* which rejects the objectifying gaze).

5. I have expanded on the ways that the skin and qualities of the skin both act as conduit for, and are channelled through, other sensory modalities, often with recourse to Machon’s idea of synthetic experiences of synaesthesia where one sense registers through another. In Chapter 4, for example, we saw how the tonal approximates the tactile in order to create felt connections between spectator and Creature in *Frankenstein*. In Chapter 5 we saw how, under the prohibition of touch, the spectators are able to touch skins, discern textures, and learn about the ‘other’s’ skinbodied experience using only their eyes and, in this way, come to feel themselves in the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense. As we shall see in my second concluding manifesto, which follows, mirror-touch synesthetes literally feel the ‘other’s’ skinbodied experience in their own.

6. I have suggested how various methods of appreciation influence the spectator’s skin-based relationship with the ‘other’ (including touch, extramediated touch, processes of relational embodiment and mirror neuron functioning). It is a means of directly addressing the question of how ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ might be negotiated through the skin. Direct skin-to-skin contact may establish a connection between ‘self’ and ‘other’ but, as I have shown in this thesis, other, more indirect, methods of appreciation similarly influence the spectator’s sense of connection and, indeed, empathy with the ‘other’ through the skin. From processes of embodied relationality whereby a spectator draws on their own skinbodied knowledge to relate to the ‘other’s’ skin – in Chapter 5, for example, the spectator’s knowledge of, most-likely superficial, burns, provides the basis for the spectator to begin to relate to Jess’ experience of third-degree burns – to the audio-visual mirror neuron or motor neuron function discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 respectively whereby the spectator’s embodied knowledge of sounds and actions enable them to imagine that they think they know what it feels like to occupy the ‘other’s’ skin.
7. There are a number of different effects that manipulating the skin as the sight/site of engagement might have. In Chapter 1, we saw that the desire for skin-to-skin connection and the performer’s reinforcement of his skin with different materials (including Vaseline and paint) spoke of society’s failure to provide adequate, or inclusive, sex education for all. The (skin)aesthetics in Bailey’s *Macbeth*, however, casts the audience as members of Macbeth’s disordered society and makes that discordance palpable through the experience of extramediated touch within the fabric which connects audience members via the skins of their necks. *SCAR CYMBALS* was slightly different as Huanca did not intend for the spectator to react in any particular way; however, as I suggested, this does not mean that a spectator does not look for meaning. Indeed, as I suggested in Chapters 3 and 5, with reference to spectator reviews and comments, a spectator might make further sense of their skinbodied experience through later “embodied thought in analysis.” A spectator might, therefore, be able to make sense of their skinbodied experience of palpable sound in line with the meanings encoded in the sound work. I suggest that the principles I identify, for example the use of palpable sound to create experiences of confusion or alienation, might be used by practitioners in future works to achieve similar effects.
The Second Manifesto for a *Real* Theatre of Cruelty

Mirror neuron activity, as we have seen throughout this thesis, is at play in general audiences; however, I suggest that the pairing of bodies, or skins, in the formation of a felt ‘common skin’ might be strongest in an audience composed of a specific kind of spectator. The mirror-touch synesthete. In challenge to Anzieu’s suggestion that “pain cannot be shared, except when it is eroticised in a sadomasochistic relationship” (*TSE* 226), I conclude with an outline of mirror-touch synesthesia, a mode of visual engagement in which the observer feels the sensations of touch to the observed ‘other’, and its implications for physically engaging a mirror-touch synesthete audience through the skin. The experience of mirror-touch synesthesia, particularly the variation whereby the observer experiences actual bodily pain in response to observed actions, is a non-normative experience. In other words, it is not a type of synaesthesia that could realistically (or ethically) be induced in the non-mirror-touch synesthete spectator through manipulating the sensorium. Nonetheless, I mention this newly documented form of synesthesia because it enables me to propose a new, *real*, “Theater of Cruelty” – a thought experiment, underpinned by (skin)aesthetics and Artaud’s proposition that “*it is through the skin that metaphysical ideas must be made to re-enter the* [spectator’s] mind” (99), which indicates an extreme logical endpoint of my argument.

As Jamie Ward, Michael J. Banissy and Clare N. Jonas explain in “Haptic Perception and Synesthesia,” mirror-touch synesthesia was an accidental find:

> We made a chance discovery of someone who experiences tactile sensations on her own body when watching someone else being touched as a result of an email request about other forms of synaesthesia. We have since found that other synaesthetes had it too but they didn’t report it until prompted because they considered it ‘normal’ (i.e., they assumed everyone else had it). (259)

While “synaesthesia often involves inducers that are not strictly ‘sensory’ (i.e., words, numbers etc.)” (Ward, Banissy and Jonas 259), mirror-touch synaesthesia involves the conflation of sight and touch. My focus, in the previous chapter, was on how the spectator can touch and take skins through haptic visuality, embodied simulation, and, at some level, through corresponding mirror neuron firing but, as Ward, Banissy, and Jonas explain:
in [mirror-touch synaesthesia] the inducer is ‘observed touch’ rather than vision *per se*. More specifically, in many cases the inducer should more properly be described as ‘observed bodily touch.’ As such, this type of synaesthesia bears resemblance to the non-synaesthetic literature demonstrating that non-informative observation of body parts can affect haptic perception. (260)

Haptic perception may not be technically synaesthetic; however, haptic visuality works in a (skin)esthetic sense to emphasise how the mingling of sight and touch can negotiate an understanding of skin in a non-mirror touch synesthete audience. The “observed touch,” or the inducer of mirror-touch synaesthesia, collapses the distinctions between sight and skin. Sight effectively becomes the agent of touch – the hand or knife, for example, on the skin of the ‘other’ – which, in turn, melds into the skin of the ‘other’ body being touched. It is the observed bodily touch which informs the bodily sensation felt by the mirror-touch synesthete; therefore, sight carries skin and sensation back to the spectator.

In “Synesthesia, Mirror Neurons and Mirror Touch,” Banissy suggests that there are two kinds of mirror-touch synesthete. Specular synesthetes take the stimulus as their mirror image and so an action observed on the left cheek of the ‘other’ would register on the right cheek of the mirror-touch synesthete. Anatomical synesthetes, in contrast, view the ‘other’ as corresponding to their own body; therefore, an action observed on the left cheek would register on the left cheek of the mirror-touch synesthete. In the experience of anatomical mirror-touch synesthesia “the synesthete’s own body appears to share the same bodily template as the other person (i.e. the synesthete is rotating their body into the perspective of the other person)” (Banissy 593). The observer’s “rotating [of] their body into the perspective of the other person” constitutes a variation on the ‘common skin’ in which the spectator feels the skin of the ‘other’ in, or as, the skin of the ‘self’.

Mirror-touch synesthetes show increased rates of emotional empathy, or instinctive responses to the emotional states of others, than non-mirror-touch synesthetes (Banissy 596-597; Banissy and Ward). Mirror-touch synesthetes do not differ, however, in rates of cognitive empathy compared to non-mirror-touch synesthetes. Cognitive empathy is associated with mentalizing and perspective taking and, to borrow an example from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), relates to the idea that “you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view […] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 33) specifically the
perspective taking aspect: “consider things from his [the other’s] point of view.” In contrast, the findings which suggest that “heightened emotional empathy relates specifically to mirror-touch synesthesia and the neural system which underpins this condition” (Banissy 596) reflect the idea that you never really understand a person, in Lee’s skin-based elaboration, “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 33). Mirror-touch synesthetes “climb” into the ‘other’s’ skin with their eyes.

It is reasonable to conclude that mirror-touch synesthetes would experience the skin-based performances discussed in the previous chapter differently to non-synesthete spectators which motivates my development of Artaud’s “Theater of Cruelty.” Artaud proposes that it is through the skin that metaphysical ideas must be made to re-enter the audience’s minds but, as we know, he did not explain exactly how this would happen. Artaud’s suggestion, however, that spectators should be treated like charmed snakes, subjected to musical vibrations (felt through the skin) and made to move, certainly sets the tone. The “Theater of Cruelty” advocates that practitioners play with the spectators’ sensorium to manipulate their experience through the skin as site/sight of experience. Mirror-touch synaesthesia similarly takes the skin of the ‘other’ as the site/sight upon which the mirror-touch synesthete registers tactile sensation.

The mirror-touch synesthete’s observed-touch to sensation process, between ‘self’ and ‘other’, is not always a pleasant experience either. As Ward, Banissy, and Jonas explain “there is also one case of acquired ‘mirror pain’ in which observed pain was experienced as pain to himself [and] similar symptoms have now been well-documented” (261). Banissy’s later research details the differences in sensation experienced by mirror-touch synesthetes in response to different stimulus. For example:

- typical responses of mirror-touch synesthetes […] included reports that observing touch elicits a tingling somatic sensation in the corresponding location on their own body, and that a more intense and qualitatively different sensation is felt for painful stimuli (e.g. videos of a pin pricking a hand rather than observed touch to the hand. (Banissy 587)

Mirror-touch synesthetes have also been tested in response to “a person being prodded by a knife” and a “person touched by a candle” (Banissy 587). Banissy concludes that “painful stimuli to a real face (e.g., a sharp object prodding the face) did […] evoke a
stronger experience than a non-painful tactile stimulus” (Banissy 587) and that the mirror-touch synesthetes’ synaesthetic response is much stronger when observing live bodies. It is fair to hypothesise, therefore, that a mirror-touch synesthete’s response to Jess’ stretching skin grafts in Ugly Lies the Bone, or another touching her damaged skin, or ‘Her’s’ own hand clawing down her damaged neck, would evoke a strong synaesthetic, or rather (skin)aesthetic, response. It is also fair to assume that if scenes of scrubbing skin to breaking point were staged, then a mirror-touch synesthete would experience a stronger mirror-touch synaesthetic response. Through a process of synaesthetic embodied pairing, the pain of the ‘other’s’ skin might be physically felt by the observer.

Banissy creates a neurocognitive model to account for differences between mirror-touch synesthetes and non-synesthetes. The model hinges on the ‘What’, ‘Who’, and ‘Where’ mechanisms which correspond to an individual’s ability to register the type of stimulus, distinguish between ‘self’ and ‘other’, and the area of the body that the touch is observed (592). Banissy explains that:

the key process instigated by the “Who” mechanism is to distinguish between the self and other. It has suggested that mirror-touch synesthesia may reflect a breakdown in the mechanisms that normally distinguish between self and other, leading to altered boundaries of perceived body space and misrepresentations of another’s body onto the synesthetes own body schema. (592)

The break down in “mechanisms that normally distinguish between self and other” is easily integrated into (skin)aesthetics. Firstly, the mirror-touch synesthete-spectator will feel tactile stimulation as a result of the observed-touch to the skin of the ‘other’. Indeed, depending on the nature of the skin-based scene observed, the mirror-touch synesthete-spectator may even register pain in response to the skin aesthetic. The fact that the mirror-touch synesthete might feel pain represents an “error in the neural systems distinguishing between self and other” (Banissy 591), the misidentification highlights the relational component of (skin)aesthetics. The tactile experience on the ‘other’s’ skin means that the skin of the ‘other’ is mapped onto the synesthete’s body. Observed-touch, as an inducer of mirror-touch synaesthesia, would enable the eyes of the mirror-touch synesthete-spectator to feel the (skin)aesthetics, touch to the observed skin, and to take the skin of the ‘other’ for the ‘self’, in the formation of a felt ‘common skin’ through the experience of shared sensation between two lived bodies.
While it is the rending of the ‘common skin’ in Anzieu’s *The Skin Ego* which causes psychical pain, it is the formation of a ‘common skin,’ or the collapse of the boundaries between skin of ‘self’ and ‘other’, in mirror-touch synaesthesia which may cause physical pain. The condition provides the foundations for my thought experiment of a new, *real*, “Theater of Cruelty,” or my imagined audience composed exclusively of mirror-touch synesthetes who physiologically register sensations, including pain, when observing touch to the skin. It is the most extreme variation of the fantasy of the ‘common skin’ facilitated by concatenated eye-contact and demonstrates the extreme logical conclusion of how a spectator might come to think they feel themselves in the ‘other’s’ skin in more than a loose metaphorical sense.
The Aftertaste of (Skin)Aesthetics?

*Why eating, and not caressing, stroking or even grafting skin? In part, I use this figure because I really love to eat skin – the sheer pleasure of crackling, crème brûlée, crispy duck and roasted potatoes, the enigmatic delight of the skin on milky coffee. Eating skin is unavoidably sensual.*

– Elspeth Probyn, “Eating Skin.”

In Chapter 4, I proposed an experiment to investigate how the spectator’s tongue figuratively slips into the Creature’s skin during the scene in which the audience teach the Creature to talk. My hypothetical experiment, however, could only measure the spectator’s tongue movement (or MEP response) and not any literal tongue or taste-based negotiation of the ‘other’s’ skin. This thesis was unable to cover the sensory slippage between skin and taste and, indeed, between the olfactory senses and skin-based intersubjectivity. (Skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis could contribute to this as an area of further research. As I mentioned in the introduction, Elspeth Probyn suggests that the metaphor of “eating skin [provides] a way of being overwhelmingly close to difference,” or the ‘other’, “without subsuming difference into the same-other” (90). In this example, by “eating skin” Probyn refers to the literal skin of the ‘other’ but, as the epigraph emphasises, “eating [other] skin[s] is unavoidably sensual” and creates a – “crackling” and “crispy” – multisensorial experience for the consumer. Julia Kristeva would disagree with Probyn’s suggestion that coffee-skin is an “enigmatic delight” as she argues that we abject such skins. She writes:

> when the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. (Kristeva 2-3)

But, as we have seen throughout this thesis, our skinbodied experiences of works do not have to be enjoyable. We already have, therefore, points of theoretical departure for (skin)aesthetic studies of consumption, or skin-based relationality as it might be negotiated through taste.
FLESH FLAVOUR FROST (2011), by Polish artist Anna Królakiewicz, would be an ideal case study for further research. Królakiewicz explains that the FLESH FLAVOUR FROST itself has the “perversely identical percent composition to that of human flesh: water comprises more than a half, proteins stand for 20%, fat for 10%, while the rest is just carbohydrates and minerals.” While it does not contain any literal skin, it contains ingredients which the artist perceives to have skin-like qualities (tofu, for example, cumin, and almond milk). Królakiewicz explains that cumin is “an ingredient that most strongly reminds [her] of the richness and warmth of breathing, clean flesh […] the sweetness of sweat [and] the smell of skin after sunbathing” which presents cumin as a taste-based (sweetness) and olfactory (skin)aesthetic. Cumin evokes Królakiewicz’s embodied memories of the smell, quality, and proximity of skin. When I first learned of this skin-flavoured ice-cream it was described to me as aiming to recreate the quality of skin-to-skin contact as it might be experienced between parent and child or between lovers. Of course, this lends itself well to Anzieu’s theory of the ‘common skin’, here reconfigured in terms of taste and consumption, and suggests how ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ might be negotiated through the sensory slippage between taste and the tactile. In this example, the (skin)aesthetic is the taste (cumin) of the smell of skinbodied memories (sun-baked skin and sweat). Conceivably a similar project might be devised to illustrate how the olfactory conjures the skin and our memories of relationships (we associate specific perfumes, for example, with specific people); indeed, (skin)aesthetics as a method of analysis should be extended into olfactory studies.

Throughout this thesis, I have also suggested ways in which aspects of Anzieu’s theory of the skin-ego might be staged in performance. The thesis therefore effectively contains the blueprints for the creation of an immersive Skin-Ego Theatre – arguably another veritable Theatre of Cruelty – which would simulate the basic tenets of identity formation and skin-based intersubjectivity in a performance context. I suggested in Macbeth, for example, how we might dramatize the fantasy of the formation and subsequent rending of the ‘common skin’ through the sharing and tearing of skin-tight bodysuits. The (skin)aesthetic canopy in Macbeth serves as a model for how we could conceivably create a similar process for entire audiences as a comment on collective identity. Performances such as HARD C*CK, Ugly Lies the Bone, and Underneath have shown us how Vaseline, and other (skin)aesthetic materials, might serve as ‘second skins’ as well as how such ‘second skins’ encode a
response to felt impingements on the sense of collective, societal, or global ideas of ‘self’.

If the Skin-Ego Theatre were to be staged I suggest it be staged as an immersive and interactive performance. Spectators and performers slithering through Vaseline, glue, liquid latex, and paints. Eating FLESH FLAVOURED FROST. The work might move through skin-to-skin contact between spectators, or spectators and performers, towards a dramatized rending of this simulated sense of a ‘common skin’ or connection. We might, for example, connect spectators via skin-suits or fabric ropes, wait for them to bond, and then cut the connection. There might be spectators on the periphery of the performance space(s) that can only engage through haptic visuality – as we saw in the first and final chapters. There might be rooms which, as in SCAR CYMBALS, simulate the pathogenic sound mirror through the sound work – which conceivably impacts on the spectator’s acoustic envelope or the ‘sound image of self’ when they see/hear nothing of themselves reflected. In contrast, we might have rooms in which the sound work, or performers, are responsive to the spectator and as such, as in Frankenstein, we simulate the imagined shared skin with the ‘other’ when the tonal approximates the tactile or the responsiveness of the maternal environment. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this thesis but I hypothesise that audience research, following immersion in such an environment, would further reinforce not only the fact that Anzieu’s ideas of skin-based identity formation and intersubjectivity work in the performance context but also how (skin)aesthetics works as both a method of analysis and practice.

The development of “(skin)aesthetics” as a method of analysis is my contribution to the continued development of the study of skin as a multisensorial conduit in performance studies and, indeed, in practice. I have used (skin)aesthetics throughout this thesis to analyse works and (skin)aesthetic features in order to suggest how the spectator’s skinbodied experience of a work influences their engagement. Practitioners could use my findings to develop works which manipulate spectators’ skin-based experience, via different senses, and synthetic sensory slippage, to various social, educational, empathic, aesthetic, or torturous ends depending on the purpose of the work. The future use of (skin)aesthetics would identify numerous novel ways to influence, and draw on, the spectator’s skinbodied experience and relationship to the ‘other’ through the skin, thus contributing to the proliferation of any number of veritable Theatres of Cruelty. I began with Artaud’s proposition that “it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter [the spectators’] minds” (99) and asked
how exactly the skin might work to negotiate such ideas. Now, however, we see that it is a question of just *how many* ways.
Appendix

Appendix A

HARD C*CK

Artist/Performer
Robert Hesp

Scanography
Rosie Elinola

Lighting design and operation
Joshua Gadsby

Sound design
Peter Rice

Dramaturgy
Richard Dodwell and Kitty Fertorec

HARD C*CK is a performance about male softness and vulnerability as much as it is about objects and fucking. It is a piece for a generation inadequately educated and completely surrounded by sex, for people who will learn through the lens of apps and pornography. It’s about pleasure, consent, pain and exploration.

HARD C*CK is presented in the round. Audience are encouraged to move around the edges of the circular dance floor if they want while still respecting the view and experience of the other audience members.

This performance includes strobe lights, loud music and nudity. Duration 60 minutes approx.

AUDIENCE INTERACTION

There will be an element of audience interaction at a certain stage in the performance. People who absolutely don’t want to be part of this interaction should stay towards the edges of the space or politely decline if approached. Likewise any audience members particularly interested in this interaction should stay closer to the circular dance floor stage...

If you require any further information on this interaction please speak with a member of the front of house team.

With thanks to Metal Peterborough, LimeWharf London and CAM4. Supported with public funding from the Arts Council England and kind donation via Kickstarter.

rkhesp.co.uk
nwhesp@gmail.com

Appendix A: Camden People's Theatre promotional leaflet for Robert Hesp's HARD C*CK
Appendix B

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