

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

“AND THEN THEY FOUND HER BODY”  
T. S. Eliot’s corporeal *Cocktail Party*

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

Maili Öst

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# JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Tekijä <b>Maija Öst</b>	
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<b>TIIVISTELMÄ – ABSTRACT</b>	
<p>Tutkin työssäni ruumiillisuuden representaatioita ja rakentumista T. S. Eliotin näytelmässä <i>Cocktailkutsut</i> (<i>The Cocktail Party</i>, 1949). Tahdon selvittää voiko ruumiin paikallistaa näytelmän keskeiseksi kipupisteeksi ja millaisia heijastumia tämä saa tekstin eri tasoilla. Samalla hahmotan ruumiista analyttistä työkalua, jolla raottaa näytelmän rakenteellisia rinnakkaisuuksia ja selittää sen ratkaisemattomia jännitteitä. Ruumis on näin ollen sekä työni matkamittari että sen tuntematon määränpää.</p> <p>Työni pyrkii olemaan löyhästi fenomenologinen löytöretki ruumiiseen ja ruumiillisuuteen. Väitän Maurice Merleau-Pontyn ruumiinfenomenologiaa myötäillen, että <i>Cocktailkutsujen</i> ruumis pohjimmiltaan määrittynyt eräänlaisena välitilana. Keskiöön nousevat tällöin ruumiin rajat ja rajanylitykset. Rajoja rikkova ruumiillisuus sukupuolittuu näytelmän puitteissa pitkälti naiseksi. Työni polttopisteeseen nousee näin Eliotin kokonaistuotannossa harvinainen naismarttyyri, Celia.</p> <p>Näytelmät ovat Eliot-tutkimuksen runsaaseen kenttään suhteutettaessa pitkälti yhä aliedustettu alue ja lähestymistavat luutuneita. Toisaalta myös ruumiillisuuden tarkastelu Eliotin tuotannossa on aivan viime aikoihin asti ollut lähinnä satunnaisen sivujuonteen asemassa tai korostetun biografista. <i>Cocktailkutsut</i> on tutkimuksessa usein nähty jäykän dualismin ilmentymänä, jossa suhtautuminen ruumiiseen on yksioikoisen kieltävää tai vähintäänkin väkimmäistä. Ruumiskäsitteen problematisoiminen haastaa tällaisia lukutapoja ja paljastaa näytelmässä myös polyfonisia säröäänä. Työssäni pyrin intratekstuaalisten huomioiden kautta luomaan pohjaa ruumiillisen luentatavan mahdolliselle laajentamiselle Eliotin teosten kokonaisuuteen.</p> <p>Koska tarkoitukseni on ehdottaa erilaisia näkökulmia ruumiiseen, työni teoriakenttä on laajan poikkitieteellinen. Hahmottelemani ruumiin kartta saa biologian, maantieteen, kulttuurintutkimuksen ja narratiivisen yhteisöruumiin kosketuspintoja, mutta se myös kyseenalaistaa ja muuntaa niitä. Ruumis asemoituu useilla akseleilla Simone de Beauvoirin tai Luce Irigarayn määritelmien mukaisesti toiseudeksi. Samalla se kurkottaa siltana dikotomioiden yli.</p> <p><i>Cocktailkutsujen</i> ruumiskokemus on kaottinen ja muuntuva, dynaaminen. Näin se asettuu myös haastamaan lineaarisen ja kronologisen ajan ja tilan mittasuhteet. Pohdin cocktailkutsuja kaksoisvalotettuna kulttuurikudoksena, jonka rituaaleissa ruumis on sekä keskeinen rakennuspuu että kätkemisyrittysten kohde. Katson, että ruumiin lähes anorektinen kahlitseminen cocktailkutsujen kehyksiin saa vastapainon näytelmän runsaslihaisena ja toisteisena ryöppyävästä puheesta. Näkökulmani on näin ollen pitkälti tekstilähtöinen. Ratkeava ruumis avaa samalla tien runokielen ja arkirupattelun välille sekä genrenylitysten tulkintaan.</p> <p>Tekstissä eri tasoilla ilmenevä väkivalta liittyy elimellisesti ruumiin rajojen rikkomiseen. Näytelmän kannalta keskiöön nousee syömisen ja syödyksi tulemisen aaltoliike. Kieli ja puhe näyttävät tällöin cocktailkutsujen ravintona ja lihana. Samalla kietoutuvat yhteen keskeiset tekstianalyttiset lähestymistapani: elliptinen poissaolo (askeesi) sekä ahnehtivan ritualistinen toisteisuus (ylensyönti). Väkivallan riitteihin sisältyy lisäksi itsetuhon elementti, koska ruumista syövä ruumis voidaan käsittää kannibalistiseksi. Ruumiin kaottiseen diskurssiin kätkeytyy toisaalta myös ruumis karnevalistisena nauruna.</p>	
<b>Asiasanat:</b> text-based literary analysis. phenomenology. drama. Eliot,-T.-S. <i>The Cocktail Party</i> . body. gender. alterity. transgression.	
<b>Säilytyspaikka:</b>	
<b>Muita tietoja:</b>	

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## ENTRANCE

ALEX . . . And then they found her [Celia's] body,  
Or at least, they found the traces of it.

EDWARD. But before that...

ALEX. It was difficult to tell.  
But from what we know of local practices  
It would seem that she must have been crucified  
Very near an ant-hill. (*Cocktail* 434.)

My interest in the corporeal cords of T. S. Eliot's drama stems from the controversial spot in *The Cocktail Party* (1949) where the body literally vanishes from view. The aim of the present study is to locate this missing body "[o]r at least . . . the traces of it" and to explore the functions it performs in the play. At the same time, I will use *The Cocktail Party* for testing the body as an analytical stethoscope to the structural pulsations of Eliot's dramatic corpus. In the process, a gendered reading of the cocktail-corporeality will increasingly present itself and build up to a more detailed analysis of the character Celia Coplestone. To borrow Eliot's lines from 'Little Gidding' (1942), "the end of all our exploring" will then hopefully be to return full circle and to scratch deeper into the passage quoted above or indeed "to arrive where we started/[a]nd know the place for the first time" (*Complete* 197).

The method adopted here is broadly phenomenological in that it trades the body as a firmly established category for a continuous effort to describe corporeality as it presents itself and mutates within the context of the play. *The Cocktail Party* proves, I contend, a suitable ground for this pursuit, as the body turns out to be a far from unequivocal concept in the play. In my undertaking to trace the (en)trails of the body in *The Cocktail Party*, I have been struck by the magnitude of physicality found in a play which has often been slighted particularly for its virtual purgation of the flesh. In effect, I will attempt to show that the relation to the body may be perceived as one of the core anxieties of the cocktail-community, and that this infiltrates all aspects of the play. A further incentive for my work is that, in view of the vast bulk of Eliot studies, critical presentations of the body in Eliot's oeuvre have until recently been scarce or tangential.

The borders of the body will be (re)traced here on a deliberately broad and multidisciplinary map. From time to time, the discussion will be braided with some of the theoretical frameworks surrounding the body, stretching from

comparative literary analysis and narratology to cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and feminist philosophy. My goal, then, is not to fit the corporeal dimensions of *The Cocktail Party* into a strict theoretical straitjacket but rather to provide a meeting ground for various approaches to corporeality against the background of Eliot's play. Similarly, I pretend neither to produce a conclusive anatomical chart of all the cocktail-bodily functions nor to dissect one segment of it in minute detail, but to mirror it from various angles with the intent to find parallels as well as sources of conflict. The objective is to move away from one-way relations of authority in order to incite a dynamic dialogue between the theory and the text. Tackling corporeality from a cocktail-mixture of perspectives is also intended to avert the risk of overinterpretation entailed in an overly narrow approach.

Terminologically, the basic bodily binoculars used here includes the cluster *body/ (corpo)reality/ secret(ion)/ (en)trails* with its retina of *gender* and *alterity/ othering*; the nomenclature is tailored dialectically in relation to, for instance, Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964, 1968) and Irigaray (1984, 1985a, 1985b). A glimpse of the contemporary post-war background and the rising controversy surrounding gender and the female body is provided by de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949a, 1949b), published in the same year as *The Cocktail Party* was first performed. Heinämaa (1996, 1997 and 2000), for example, has pinpointed the shared theoretical flesh between these three theorists. My work will primarily involve vivisectioning the way that corporeality clots diverse dichotomies: animate vs. inanimate, culture vs. Nature, civilised vs. primitive, male vs. female, order vs. disorder, speech vs. silence, presence vs. absence, and life vs. death. I claim that, though initially used to establish and flesh out binary opposition, the corporeal cutlery becomes actively involved in a duel against such dualism. To account for the dynamic sense of *transgression* at the borders of these concepts, elements of textual ellipsis and repetition will be tailed here. As all slices of (corpo)reality in the play are served against the background of the cocktail-party ritual, the chief utensils of literary analysis will appear alongside dietary metaphors, such as eating and being eaten, or overeating and abstention from food. This *digesting/di-jesting* cocktail-body is compared tentatively to Bakhtin's (1968) grotesque body as well as to the symptoms of anorexia and other eating disorders diagnosed in modernist texts by, for instance, Anderson (1988) and Heywood (1996).

The structure of this study largely mimics my take on the body as a polemic and inherently dynamic category. The fluctuating borders of the cocktail-(corpo)reality resonate, for instance, in the way in which the chapters tend to float into each other. My intention to let the analytical anatomy of this body-study embody the actual bodily concerns of the play is also reflected in the use of direct quotations to launch individual chapters and form the vertebrae of the text. To match the multidisciplinary approach, the text itself is littered with corporeal metaphors deriving from various fields. The idea is to avoid fixing the body lexically as an exclusively physiological, medical, or mechanical entity and to bore through the idiomatic pores of the metaphors that generally pass unnoticed in everyday speech. My first task will be to locate *The Cocktail Party* DNA in time as well as in actual and literary space. This involves identifying the play against the family portrait of Eliot's work in order to locate the basic genetic resemblances as well as the limits of intratextual kinship. In this section, I will also attempt to place the play within the field of Eliot criticism and to introduce my main guest list among Eliot critics. Since the body presents itself as inseparable from its context, the core corporeal ingredients and analytical instruments subsequently appear not in isolation but as already commingled with Eliot's body of work.

The largest and most corpulent section of this study charts the way in which the human body is, to a considerable degree, dieted away from the urban scene or transposed onto non-human materiality. While a close reading turns the sightings of actual bodies in the text into an autopsy report, an almost organic connection ensues instead in the border areas between the human body and the trinity of animal, machine, and the metaphysical. In the section entitled 'Artery', I will proceed from this mechanical body count to exploring how these bodies behave on the social scene and act as go-betweens between physical space and time. It should be noted that the natural sciences, mainly biology and geography, are summoned in order to be (re)defined by (corpo)reality just as much as the body seeks recognition from these fields.

Gradually, the scope of this body-study will dilate from zooming in on the microscopic fragmentation of insular or even cellular corporeality to a panoramic view of the communal and cultural party-body. In the last section of the study, I will start to envision the symbiosis between solitude and community through the female body. As a kind of summary, I will then turn to the

most conspicuous story involving subversive alterity in *The Cocktail Party*. This involves exploring the way in which Celia manages her escape to the centre of the play, even if she is killed off and thereby marginalised before the last scene. At the same time, Celia apotheotically enacts all the different aspects of the body offered in this study.

In Eliot's play, the cocktail-party institution introduces itself as a domain where corporeality and language converge and where speech partly absorbs the body. To a varying degree, this uneasy relation between the physical body and language becomes a recurrent component in all segments of this body-study. My meeting with corporeality as a complex and conflicting category instils the play with a certain amount of polyphony. This inner ambivalence can mainly be explained by the fact that, despite the mockery and overt destruction constantly hurled at the body, corporeality is invited to *The Cocktail Party* in an essentially comic costume.

My reading of Eliot's drama mainly relies on the published text, whereas references to performance remain marginal. In part, this reflects the fact that the play is, at present, relatively rarely seen on stage, and audiences as well as critics hence encounter it predominantly in print. Accordingly, when quoting passages from the play, I will attempt to follow the original layout as closely as possible. A literary bent is further justified by the prominence assigned in the play-world to language and to verbal telling instead of showing. However, this approach does not mean disregarding the theatre as the primary medium for Eliot's drama. In fact, the tumultuous cohabitation of poetry and drama can be regarded as one of the main strands in the Eliotic oeuvre. Accordingly, an undercurrent in this study consists of probing the body as a possible tool for describing the boundaries between literary genres.

For reasons of clarity, the abbreviation *Cocktail* will be adopted here for the standard text of *The Cocktail Party*, whereas the term *Complete* is used in reference to other works by Eliot included in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (1969). On occasion, reference will be made to the draft versions of the play as recorded by the director E. Martin Browne in *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (1969); this will be indicated separately. When the intertextual commentary is briefly extended to Euripides' play *Alcestis* and Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915), the abbreviations *Alcestis* and *Verwandlung* appear.



## BACKBONE TO THE CORPOREAL *COCKTAIL PARTY*

### Invitation to Eliot and *The Cocktail Party*

#### Eliot's Organic Oeuvre

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. (*Complete* 175.)

In my attempts to pursue the pulse of *The Cocktail Party* and other texts by T. S. Eliot, I have found the body to be an increasingly lucrative reading tool. For one thing, the corporeal paradigm not only allows for but also indeed invites an interdisciplinary approach instead of caging the analysis into a pre-ordained methodological pen. In addition, the body proves a resilient enough category for penetrating both microscopic detail and the panorama of the macrocosm. Similarly, the corporeal may be measured against concepts as disparate as fragmentation and symbiosis, or chaos and hierarchical order. In effect, it may be argued that both Eliot's work and his life seem to call for this elastic brand of unity, accepting paradox. The division takes almost physical shape; born in St. Louis and a Harvard graduate, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) settled in London and posed for decades as an Englishman rather than an expatriate, though returning, in the end, to his childhood scenery. Biographers of Eliot have perhaps tended to overemphasise the contrast between the young Eliot, escaping into a rebellious Agnosticism after a strict Protestant upbringing, and the stern convert of the Anglican Church he became in the 1920s (see Ackroyd 1984, Moody 1980:xiii, Malamud 1994:11); this narrative simplification can even be sensed in Gordon's in-depth biography appearing in two independent volumes entitled *Eliot's Early Years* (1977) and *Eliot's New Life* (1988), respectively. This divide is so ingrained in the criticism, in part, because Eliot himself encouraged it in his self-contradictory role of "a poet of his time who was yet deeply opposed to it" (Moody 1980:xiv).

Eliot's writings have frequently been chopped in a similar fashion by invoking a sharp partition between *The Waste Land* (1922) as the paragon of Modernism and Eliot's later work, or by tracing Janus-faced or even multiple "Eliots" (Altieri 1994:189-191, Schuchard 1999:3). Even more tangibly,

Eliot's works still dwell on two geographical shelves and continents at once, hovering between English and American literature. This fascination with boundaries can also be felt in the vacillation and repeated interplay between literary genres, when the poet merges with the playwright, for instance. As a writer and a critic, Eliot (1951a:25-45) was equally drawn to "poetic drama" and "dramatic poetry" and he explored them extensively in both his creative and his theoretical writings. Crawford (1987:1) indeed locates the core "constancy" of Eliot's writing in his lifelong "preoccupation with bringing together apparent contraries" (see also Brooker 1994:3).

Eliot's textual corpus abounds with metaphorical and actual bodies (cf. Buttram 1995, Trombold 1996). This infiltration begins at the metatextual level, where bodies and corporeal metaphors serve as the scaffold for describing the course of literary genesis, writing and re-writing. In the process, metaphorical bodyweight becomes the scales to distinguish between literary genres, as well. In a lecture held shortly after the New York premiere of *The Cocktail Party*, for instance, Eliot (1951a:32) uses *dieting* as the torchlight to trace the borders between poetry and drama by indicating that the task of a poet aspiring to become a dramatist involves "a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage". Similarly, the director E. Martin Browne (1966:10,25; emphasis original) reports that his role in the production of the script consisted, to a large extent, of "*amplifying*" and "*cut[ing] and shap[ing]*" Eliot's textual offspring. In a way, then, drama displays itself here as the fat-free or athletically trimmed sibling of poetry. At the same time, the injection of poetry into the dramatic body broadens its textual reach to catch the floating "fringes" of (corpo)reality:

It seems to me that beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action—the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express—there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus. (Eliot 1951a:34.)

One of the recurrent perspectives on the body throughout this study involves the way in which it is fundamentally and almost parasitically dependent on others for nourishment. In view of Eliot's dietary approach to literary creation, this flexibility of borders appears to manifest itself within the textual body of Eliot's work, as well. It becomes paramount, then, in entering *The Cocktail*

*Party* or any other work by Eliot, to recognise both the family resemblances and the limits of intratextual cross-fertilisation. Eliot is indeed notorious for his abundant intertextual references, and many of his poems have been read as collages of more or less direct quotations and hypertextual mutations of canonical writers (Kenner 1960:X, Phelan 1990:xvi, Gordon 1998:148,160n). Aiken indeed labelled Eliot's verse "a kind of parasitic growth on literature, a sort of mistletoe" (Aiken as quoted by Ellman 1987:95-96). As Longenbach (1994:176-177) notes, this impression is largely an illusion, and the allusions are not strikingly numerous; Eliot, however, integrates them into the structure of his writings and, thereby, "forces his readers to feel the weight of his allusions very strongly". In this light, a parallel process of osmosis may be expected intratextually within Eliot's oeuvre. In fact, as Browne (1969:174) recounts, the poet changed the title of *The Cocktail Party* (from *One-Eyed Reilly*) at least in part to emphasise that it feeds on the same thematic flesh as the preceding play, *The Family Reunion* (1939) and that it, in turn, "set the mood for the subsequent plays", namely *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).

It should be noted that, at least to some extent, Eliot's intratextual considerations operate as multifaceted exchanges between poems, plays, and critical essays. A temporary flouting of boundaries between literary genres and texts is indeed woven into Eliot's own critical views, as he claims, for instance, that "[t]he whole of Shakespeare's work is *one* poem" (Eliot as quoted by Kenner 1960:42; emphasis original). Incidentally, Evans (1977:164) records an interview, where Eliot refers to *The Cocktail Party* as "a poem". Similarly, there is an ongoing debate surrounding one of Eliot's "unfinished poems": *Sweeney Agonistes*, subtitled "Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama", could just as well be read as an experimental proto-play and it was indeed first performed on stage (Howarth 1965:149; Grove 1994:159, Malamud 1994:12). Similarly, specific poems and plays often exhibit a sense of blood relation, which coagulates and remains visible as an extensive echoing effect in literally

almost identical twin passages<sup>1</sup>. This intense kinship encourages a reading of Eliot's drama that focuses on poetic qualities and actual words on the page, their dramatic effect on stage notwithstanding. However, it also highlights the difference in meaning and poetic/dramatic effect triggered by changing the format.

As words cross textual borders independently and appear to have ancestors and offspring in other textual bodies, it may be argued that the sense of organic unity in Eliot extends from the dynamics and growth of literary genres to the evolution of individual words and phrases. The relation between poetry and drama appears almost symbiotic: The double occurrences and verbal reverberations add weight to the play's structure and to the dramatic dialogue. In return, the dramatic dimension gives a sense of polyphony to the poetry by transforming it into a conference between different physically produced "voices"—an aspect that Eliot himself stressed in, for instance, *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1955). On a yet broader plane, this word-world may also be seen to relate organically to its linguistic lineage and the etymological language body. Jones (1964:169), for instance, notes Eliot's persistent method to "invoke a word's pedigree". In effect, from Eliot's first published collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), critics have been intent on Eliot's "persistent, even obsessive" treatment of both fictional and real name symbolism, reaching from onomatopoeia to the use of playful pen names, or to proper nouns as (pejorative) stand-ins embodying entire ethnic groups (Ricks 1988:242, Phelan 1990:77). A similar sense of origin extends beyond names to other word classes and to the morphological flesh, as words cling to their individual heritage and behave like independent organisms. Employed as a conscious device in this way, Eliotic names stretch beyond punning to the point of materialising apparent dichotomies or abstract entities into a joint word-world.

Significantly enough, the surface similarities and the shared gene pool also serve to stress the differences within the Eliotic textual organism. In discussing Eliot's poetic imagery, Thormählen (1978:123 and 1984:7-9,18,179, 182) underlines the heterogeneous aspects and clashes between Eliot's works

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<sup>1</sup> This sense of shared origins may perhaps best be felt in the way that 'Burnt Norton' (1935) was engendered by the play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), when passages eventually removed from the play resurfaced in the form of a poem (see Behr 1983:73). For instance, the line "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" survives in 'Burnt Norton' as "human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (*Complete* 172,271).

and calls for a refusal to compromise “the integrity of the single work” and “the individual context” of individual words and images by assuming universal meanings for each symbol (cf. Malamud 1994:51). One of the basic aspects of Eliot’s organic word-world is indeed that it “will not stay in place” (p.8). It may even be argued that this constant *dis*-placement forms part of the way in which Eliot’s textual bodies defy the fixity suggested by lexical items as pinned down into dictionaries. The complexity and elusive nature of Eliot’s intra-textual (*t*)issues may be exemplified by the various claims to paternity expressed in relation to *The Cocktail Party*. Thus, Malamud (1994) takes *The Waste Land* as the “prologue” to the play, whereas Jayne (1985:102) regards *The Cocktail Party* as “the finished work” in comparison to *Sweeney Agonistes*. Kinnison (2000), in turn, treats the play as “embodying the comic vision of *Four Quartets* on the stage”. While all these views add insight into the play, none of them should be taken exclusively. Similarly, it is worthwhile to remain cautious of the customary trend to read Eliot’s poetry at least partly in the light of his critical ideas and political pamphlets, and vice versa (see Worth 1985:126, Beehler 1999:75). While fruitful to a certain extent, this approach risks repeating preconceived assumptions about what ‘should’ appear in the work rather than actually confronting the text and its potentially subversive elements.

My attempts to outline the kinship between the corporeal core of *The Cocktail Party* and Eliot’s oeuvre thus consist of finding a balanced middle way between radical division and fusion. Even if Eliot’s textual body can be regarded as an organic whole, it should not be reduced to a simple chronological development or seen in terms of “superficial notions of evolution”, to recycle Eliot’s phrasing in *Four Quartets* (*Complete* 183). Eliot’s work is to its nature not ‘evolving’, especially in the sense that the characters and ideas of his early work would in some way be more rudimentary or flawed than later in his career. In a way, then, the Eliotic textual bodies belong to the same species but allow for significant mutations. Grove (1994:169) describes the parallels between Eliot’s plays with metaphors drawn from the biological family: “The terms shift, but the patterns are strangely alike, resemblances springing up amongst them as between blood-relatives and generations.” It follows that Eliot’s progeny of textual bodies is best seen as an essentially plural, gradual layering of ideas and shades, proceeding in circles rather than in terms of line-

arity. To cite *Four Quartets*, it constitutes “both a new world/ And the old made explicit, understood” (*Complete* 187).

### **The Basic Anatomy of *The Cocktail Party***

JULIA. The only reason for a cocktail party  
For a gluttonous old woman like me  
Is a really nice tit-bit. I can drink at home. (*Cocktail* 355.)

The reasons for my choosing *The Cocktail Party* as a path towards the corporeal core of Eliot’s corpus can perhaps best be unravelled through the above statement by Julia in the first scene of the play. The lines show a characteristic tendency of Eliot’s drama to cloak broad existential and structural implications into a veil of seemingly light comedy. At Eliot’s *Cocktail Party*, the body is peculiarly hidden behind social restraint and tradition at the same time as the entire ritual evolves around answering to bodily needs. Through her seemingly flippant remark, Julia pricks a hole into the cocktail party tissue to reveal its carnal intestines. In this and similar instances, *The Cocktail Party* may indeed be seen to answer the call of phenomenology to “enter . . . the familiar only to illuminate its constitutive reality” (Butler 1998:xiii). *The Cocktail Party* indeed seems to have managed this familiarisation to the point of “intermingl[ing] with the culture it depicts” and becoming, in the early 1950s, the fashionable subject of conversation in actual cocktail party circles (see Malamud 1994:138-139). First performed at the Edinburgh festival in 1949 and published a year later, it is Eliot’s first post-war play and marks the peak of his success as a playwright. Having received the Nobel Prize for literature the previous year, Eliot was an international celebrity and his new play was met with enthusiasm and critical acclaim in both London and New York.

On the surface level, the relation to physicality in *The Cocktail Party* appears to be of a superficial and stilted cocktail-party brand. The play takes the pointedly chalked geometrical shapes of an almost *too* well-made play (see, for instance, Gardner 1967:159). In the centre, a neat square of marital conflict unfolds between Lavinia and Edward Chamberlayne, five years married, and their respective young lovers, Peter Quilpe and Celia Coplestone. Instead of remaining in their separate corners of the drawing-room, the main characters are subsequently pitted against each other through various machinations orchestrated by the trio Henry Harcourt-Reilly, Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, and Julia

Shuttlethwaite; this secret society of so-called *Guardians* are caricatured as a priestlike psychiatrist, a seasoned world traveller, and an inquisitive elderly lady. Charting the personal relations within its paragon of parallel characters, the plot of the play goes full circle from the end of one (failed) cocktail party to the beginning of another (presumably successful) one, occurring two years later in the same London flat. To perfect this loop, the absence of Celia in the final act mirrors that of Lavinia in the first two scenes. The two parallel parties emboss the middle act and pivotal abdomen section of the play, which consists of lengthy interviews taking place in Reilly's sterile consultation room. In addition to this basic grid, there is a neat netting of repeated phrases and parallel rituals running through the play. In fact, Eliot reportedly plotted his plays in the manner of mathematical equations on a blackboard (*Time*, 6 March 1950, available [www.time.com/time/time100/artists/profile/eliot\\_related.html](http://www.time.com/time/time100/artists/profile/eliot_related.html)).

Befitting its focus on the midlife crisis of its main protagonist(s), *The Cocktail Party* has repeatedly been considered a watershed in the chronology of Eliot's drama (Moody 1980:268-274 passim, Gardner 1967:161). This means that it is recognised as the first and at the same time the last play to display, if not yet fully to embrace, both Eliot's earlier negation of the physical realm and his later attempts at a humanist acceptance of what the healer Reilly terms "the human condition" (*Cocktail* 417). As a result, a seemingly conventional drawing room drama subtitled 'A Comedy' by Eliot himself becomes, at heart, an unsettling battlefield of fierce, even irreconcilable conflict (see Browne 1966:4, Smith 1963:147, Phelan 1990:15). The deep repercussions of the play become even more pronounced when taking into account that the play loosely recognises Euripides' mythical drama *Alcestis* as its subtext and poses as its modernised sequel (Eliot 1951a:32-33).

In a way, the body has the leading role in the play's surface quibbles about adultery and physical ageing. These corporeal (*t*)*issues* are generally seen as the cover-up for 'deeper' feelings of failed communication and identity crisis. There is nothing exceptional in a story where a woman leaves her husband only to return 36 hours later, after their respective lovers have decided to leave for abroad. The one single action that distracts from ordinary everyday experience is Celia's later fate, as she is reportedly "crucified/ [v]ery near an ant-hill". This fracture in the text-tissue is conveyed through a distancing in

time, as the last gathering occurs two years after the initial, relatively closely-knit timeframe.

The decisive action in Eliot's plays is, without doubt, a mainly psychological and internal carpet of, in Badenhäuser's (in press) terms, "contrasts and choices". In particular, the last act of *The Cocktail Party* has been deemed to be dramatically deficient by critics and a kind of "epilogue" by Eliot (1951a:32) himself (see Williams 1968:197, Stein 1973:99, Phelan 1990:227). Paradoxically, these complaints commonly concern the conspicuous intrusion of physicality into the conversation: Alex's lurid account of Celia's violent death has generally been regarded as a gross miscalculation on the part of the author. However, it is also precisely at this point that the play can be said to take a final "phenomenological turn" or, as Natanson (1998:132) defines it in his account of "phenomenology in literature", "to track the normal for the sake of misleading it, discomforting it, and, in that almost lost word, to alienate it". This rupture, in turn, reflects hermeneutically backwards and serves to highlight a trail of disruptive trinkets trickling through the play, including Julia's alimentary condensation of the essential cocktail party routine (see p.13). As I will attempt to show, the entire play is shattered by this "abstention from claiming the ordinary as real" (Natanson 1998:28); Moody (1980:269) indeed recognises the play as a condensation of Eliot's wish in his works "[t]o bring home the unreality of what we ordinarily call reality—to effect a positive disillusionment" (see also Malamud 1994:121). Through these fractures, the ritualistically reined textual body escapes from its surface resignation and challenges chronological linearity. The seemingly one-dimensional play structure receives depth, as the narrated body refuses to remain contained within the spatial and temporal borders of its cocktail corset. A broadened definition of the body and its different manifestations opens up the play's (en)trails and makes possible an attempt to reinsert the apparent failures and structural malformations into the signifying flesh of the play. In this view, the apparent inactivity of the last act can, in fact, be seen as a revealing reflection of the redefinition that the play assigns to action itself.

As a sign of the tension inherent to the play, the verbal body of *The Cocktail Party* also constitutes a mongrel breed with everyday speech taking the upper hand, whereas the elements of verse are encapsulated to occur only to certain characters at intense moments. Stein (1973:103), for instances, stirs up



the impression of a play wrangling within its own generic skin, as he complains that “one of its most pervasive and obtrusive features is its leaning towards the undramatic on the one hand, and towards the prosaic on the other”. However, this variation in stylistic genre and linguistic register becomes the way for the characters to break the imaginary contradiction between feeling and thought and to “feel their thoughts and think their feelings”, as Brooker (1994:174) sums up Eliot’s critical stance (see also Eliot 1964:18).

All Eliot’s plays invariably present individuals in terms of their participation in static social roles and rituals. As for *The Cocktail Party*, the very title seems to distance the play from individual bodies and to embrace more abstract notions of community. The subsequent play titles, *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman*, differ from this cocktail party mode in their singling out one male figure, even if he remains defined through his professional role in society. However, this almost organically tight network between the partygoers coaxes a double meaning of *party* as a symbiotically combined body of people in addition to the institutionalised and faceless feast itself. In terms of *The Cocktail Party* organism and its view on society, this principle of unity may indeed be broadened in Merleau-Ponty’s (1964:10) terms: “All human acts and all human creations constitute a single drama” (see also Merleau-Ponty 1962:xx). In a way, then, *The Cocktail Party* forms a body with many talking heads. To stress this communal nature of the party-body, the dialogue is much more conversational and less strikingly poetic than in the preceding plays. The cocktail party society breathes or indeed *exists* exclusively through maintaining arteries of small talk.

### **Critics at *The Cocktail Party***

EDWARD. Yes, I’ve seen her poetry—  
 Interesting if one is interested in Celia.  
 Apart, of course, from its literary merit  
 Which I don’t pretend to judge. (*Cocktail* 367.)

The critical mass attached to Eliot’s drama is relatively thin if paraded against the vast bulk of Eliot studies. Malamud (1994:117), one of the rare scholars to focus expressly on Eliot’s plays, describes the scholarship as lacking both in quantity and nutritional quality. Thus, while *The Cocktail Party* was the focus of much critical attention in the first two decades after it first appeared on

stage, Malamud largely discards this as “outdated”, “largely vague and impressionistically belletristic, minimally useful to later scholars”. The persistence of this disparity in Eliot studies may still be felt, as the standard overviews of the plays date from the early 1960s. In effect, the contributions by Carol H. Smith (1963) and David E. Jones (1960) represent as yet rare book-length presentations of Eliot’s career as a dramatist.

A rather common approach remains to disregard or completely to dismiss Eliot’s drama as a diluted form of his poetry (see Badenhausen, in press). Grove (1994:159-160) notes that “the prominence of Eliot the poet has helped to obscure his drama” although “the impulse to theater-activity lasted longer” (see also Schlüter 1962:1). Similarly, while somewhat moderating his initial view of the plays as “fresh ground”, Malamud (1994:2) sticks to the claim that the plays have “often been glibly patronized and relegated to near obscurity” or “dismissed as lightweight or popularized tangents to Eliot’s more profound earlier aesthetic”. Crawford (1987:232), while acknowledging the theatrical value of *The Cocktail Party*, nonetheless reproduces these disparaging demands for poetic economy:

The play’s strength is that it draws on Eliot’s earlier work and makes that earlier work transferable to the West End, a triumph in itself; its weakness, like that of most of the plays, is that it offers us little we cannot find more concisely and intensely expressed in the poetry.

In a reaction against such dismissals, Malamud (1994:2) eulogises the way Eliot’s plays add to “his weighty contribution to the pantheon of modernism”. This goes against the grain of the prevalent tendency to regard Eliot’s society plays as atrophic in comparison to the modernist pose epitomised in *The Waste Land* (see Grove 1994, Malamud 1994:11). The potency of such views still shows, when Malamud (1994:2,3; emphasis original) apparently feels obliged to defend his scholarly stance by naming the plays a “more *accessible*” way to grasp the essence of Eliot’s “complete oeuvre”, “despite obvious generic and stylistic dissimilarities”. Without doubt, Eliot’s poems and plays exhibit a significant amount of thematic similarities and shared imagery. Nevertheless, such statements run the risk of reading too much unity and a simplistic sense of completion into Eliot’s work as well as the added peril of overlooking the idiosyncratic features (Thormählen 1978 and 1984; see p.11-12).

Aspects related to the body figure, albeit often indirectly, in much of especially the most recent research surrounding ideological aspects of gender and othering as well as the renewed interest in the biographical streaks in Eliot (see, for instance, Heywood 1996, Schuchard 1999, Gish and Laity (eds.), in press). The most extended strand involving corporeality in Eliot's writing has perhaps evolved around the Sweeney motif<sup>2</sup>; this "apeneck" character, personified as "natural man", has been traced as a recurring and constantly mutating component of Eliot's works. However, the body in Eliot's plays, or for that matter in his other works, has rarely been given centre stage until Buttram's (1995, later Trombold 1996) wide-ranging study on the human body and physicality in Eliot's life and work. Buttram indeed marvels at the way that the "complex, troubled, and persistent preoccupation with the body" in Eliot's prose and poetry has hitherto gone largely unnoticed. While she comes to consider the body as a significant tool for understanding "one of the principal unities of Eliot's corpus of verse", her focus remains on a biographical reading.

Much of the criticism discussing Eliot's choice of the cocktail party as a dramatic setting has come to centre on its hidden symbolic structure, emphasising the ritual toasts and introducing Reilly as a kind of male priest (Porter 1970, Smith 1974). I will adopt a more physical perspective where *The Cocktail Party* is treated, so to speak, in its flesh and bone. Accordingly, the spotlight will be on the seemingly smooth surface of the cocktail party ritual, which has often been swept aside as a facile facade and comic decoy used to lure the audience to ingest the 'deeper', prescriptively spiritual agenda (see, for instance, Smith 1963:148, Porter 1970). At the same time, however, critics such as Porter (1970) and Moody (1980) agree that the main theme of Eliot's plays can be summed up in terms of a search for 'true' identity. This involves a systematic tearing down of established order to reveal the reality behind—or within—the appearances. In my view, this radical disjunction should be extended to call for a redefinition of the body. Nevertheless, it appears that the physical meat of the play is met as a monolithic entity and taken for granted in

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<sup>2</sup> The name Sweeney itself appears in five poems published in 1920 and in Eliot's unfinished 'Aristophanic Melodrama', *Sweeney Agonistes*. The motif has aroused invigorated critical discussion in recent years and produced a collection of articles edited by Roby (1985). Sweeney has been discussed extensively by numerous scholars, including Smith (1963), Arrowsmith (1978), Crawford (1987), Malamud (1994), and Foster (1997).

much of the criticism. My goal, then, is to turn from what this outer hide may hide to what its surface may reveal.

One of the most commonly cited shortcomings of Eliot's drama lies in its alleged lack of dramatic action (Porter 1970:77; Grove 1994). To a notable extent, this criticism ultimately springs from aspects related to the treatment of physicality. As indicated by Grove (1994:161), this often results from a largely misguided idea of Eliot as clinging to a crude form of the Cartesian dualism of body and mind. Accordingly, Eliot's characters are seen as talking heads without any plausible physical extension or as thinly fleshed out poems only, as Crawford (1987:232; see p.17) seems to suggest. The dichotomous attitude has been widely recognised as one of the chief deficiencies of Eliot's drama. For instance, Stein (1973:102), echoed by Porter (1970:71) and Phelan (1990:226-227), decries *The Cocktail Party* as "Manichean" in the way that it "approximates to a radical division of existence into spheres of Nature and Transcendence sharply separated from each other". Commenting on the "failure" of *The Cocktail Party* in an article originally published in the early 1950s, Stein (1973:99,102-103) reflects on the denunciation of the corporeal as a larger tendency in contemporary culture, and goes on to indicate that Eliot is "caught in the boiling flood of life-revulsion that has gathered to such enormity in our time". Writing in much the same vein nearly four decades later, Grove (1994:174) deplores that "the dualism [Eliot] suffered from has been blighting". He goes on to explain: "Higher/lower, sacred/profane, the old oppositions construct so much of [Eliot's] thinking for him, it is sometimes hard to remember how unnecessary they are." Moody (1980:289,290), in turn, goes as far as stress the broad cultural foundations for this dualism as a kind of "endemic . . . neurosis which is like a dominant gene in our culture" and "so common that it can be regarded as a perfectly normal state of mind".

Peculiarly enough, Grove presents his criticism of binary Eliot while at the same time praising "the language he so intensified". This appears to overlook that the 'intensification' may also alter and dispute ossified dichotomies and even overthrow them. The repeated toying with duality may also suggest the fragmentation of a generally unified universe, with a resulting dissolution of absolute categories. Malamud (1994:3) seems to suggest as much, as he envisages Eliot's writing as "communicating the modern condition, in a language he had to craft as he went along because no extant voice could encapsulate its

scope". Significantly enough, the stress here is on Eliot as an artisan or explorer creating a new language for a new, embodied voice.

Apart from Malamud's (1994) extensive work on the "social agenda" revealed in Eliot's "communities of drama", the most extensive contribution to the study of *The Cocktail Party* in the last decade is Phelan's (1990) comparative rereading of the play as a hypertext of Euripides' *Alcestis*. Both these scholars, to some extent, discuss gender and creative linguistic aspects in the play. In the wake of Spanos' (1978) methodical deconstruction of Eliot's major poems, readings involving alterity and difference have been extended to Eliot's drama by, for instance, Beehler (1999) and Badenhausen (in press). In addition, I will comment on Severin's (1993b) radical rereading of gender relations in *The Cocktail Party*.

The fact that Celia is one of the few martyred female 'Saints' in Eliot's work has been commented upon by critics but has still largely escaped more detailed attention (see Jones 1960, Moody 1980). Badenhausen (in press) makes a decisive move in this direction by presenting a reading stressing Celia's power "to speak the body" in the light of Cixous and Irigaray; on the whole, his approach comes closest to the position adopted here. In general, however, Celia has been treated as one in a long line of Eliot martyrs in the vein of Thomas Becket and Harry of the preceding plays, or as a purely secondary character. Seen from a corporeal perspective, the emergence of Eliot's only fully-fledged female 'martyr' in this play must necessarily be assumed to be significant in explaining the unique aspects of the play. Accordingly, I aim to show that it is largely through the character of Celia that a communal approach to the body is achieved, unifying apparent opposites and transgressing borders.

The proliferation of bodies and corporeal themes in Eliot criticism is mainly related to the recent upsurge of biographies and biographical readings of his works (Gordon 1998, Lamos 1998, Schuchard 1999). Biography is tightly knit, for instance, to Cuddy's (2000) and Daumer's (in press) approach to gender and motherhood. While I side with Schuchard (1999:20-22) in welcoming the renewed critical interest brought along by tracing the man in the text, I intend to remain wary regarding the "autobiographical vein" that Malamud (1994:2,134) finds particularly striking in the drama. In Malamud's view, "Eliot frequently, if not always, inscribes himself with considerable detail (es-

pecially psychological detail) in the personae of his male protagonists”. Cuddy (2000:190), in turn, terms *The Cocktail Party* a “psychological and autobiographical drama”, and goes as far as to suggest that “Edward and Celia seem to be the combined character of Eliot”. A dominant vein in these gendered readings has so far consisted of naming the real-life models for Eliot’s fictional characters. Similarly, physical aspects of Eliot’s demeanour have been read almost directly into the text, as when Durer (2001) relates Eliot’s stylistic choices directly to a marked “ambivalence in Eliot the public figure between the love of ceremony and genuine emotion”. Although these autobiographical readings often expose vitally new perspectives for study, many of them tend to peter out as echoes of Edward’s cynical comment about Celia’s poetry: “[i]nteresting if one is interested in” Eliot (p.16).

An additional incentive for the arrival of these new (corporeal) readings is the rise of a more self-conscious and personal vein of intellectual honesty in the criticism itself. Instead of claiming to be objective and detached receptors, reviewers now admit to becoming actively, physically involved in the reading and ask for their political rights as readers. This may be exemplified by Gordon’s (1998:418) battle call: “[A]s women’s voices grow stronger Eliot’s ‘bullying’ is rightly questioned. Bodies are women’s creations; we don’t want to see them killed or tortured or throttled.” Corporeal additions have thus been injected into the field of Eliot studies from two main sources, i.e. through (re)inserting the actual physicality and person of Eliot and his contemporaries into the text or through a more openly political involvement of the reader. As a result, the physicality of both the poet and the critic are now more consciously present in the reading. There is still room for body-study, however, as this scholarship only marginally touches on how the body itself is construed, deconstructed and reconstructed in the discourse of the play. This approach may perhaps be one way to test Gardner’s (1967:160) prediction that Eliot’s plays, which were considered largely outmoded in the late 1960s, “will look . . . very different in the ‘eighties and ‘nineties” (see also Chiari 1972:143).

## The Corporeal Cocktail Guide to Reading Eliot

### The Core Corporeal Ingredients

#### *The Body/Bodies/(Corpo)(Reality)*

So I find words I never thought to speak  
In streets I never thought I should revisit  
When I left my body on a distant shore. (*Complete* 194.)

As one of the most elementary human concepts, the body is such a worn-out well for figurative language that it is easily overlooked. Corporeality is culturally layered with meaning, and bodily metaphors were seen to abound to the point of flooding long before the body gained currency as a critical tool (Turner 1991, Purdy 1992:5-6, Brooks 1993:1-27 *passim*). Historically, this corporeal delta has altered and slipped in and out of vogue in waves, with theorists such as Freud and Bergson fashioning and reshaping it for Eliot's era. The most recent upsurge of a veritable body boom in numerous disciplines in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has, in part, served to render corporeal concepts even more diluted and blunt as theoretical instruments. However, this plethora of bodies as fashionable parts cluttering the theoretical discourse everywhere from anthropology and physics to philosophy and cultural studies has also had stimulating side-effects. For one thing, the concept now has to be all the more rigorously delineated in order to have any critical value. In addition, piercing through the prism of this largely unconscious semantic wealth provides ample ground for study.

My way of worming out the (en)trails of the party-body is broadly phenomenological in attempting to shed the body of its fixed terminological coating in order to scrutinise and (re)formulate corporeality as it emerges and mutates within the miniature milieu of the play. Since the quest of phenomenological philosophy essentially boils down to "relearning to look at the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii), my study then basically involves '(re)learning' to walk and talk in the body as conditioned by Eliot's cocktail-party environment. Through 'living' the body in this way, the scope will inevitably expand to the immediate living conditions surrounding the body and, in part, begin to build "an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:vii).

The phenomenological method of hounding the body largely depends on the basic processes of *reduction* and *bracketing* (*Einklammerung*) as laid out by Husserl (1971, 1982). Husserlian phenomenology strives to radicalise Descartes' principle of universal doubt (Husserl 1982:83-87 *passim*). Carried out as an attitude termed *Epoché*, this bracketing involves an attempt to ruffle the very foundations of the natural sciences (*natürliches Boden, Erkenntnisboden*). Phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty (1962:vii) puts it, “tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide”. When the selective spotlight of these certainties is removed, what is left, in a way, is to feel the body and to “journey blind” as Celia does (*Cocktail* 418; see p.141):

Whether it is a question of another's body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 231.)

Husserl (1971:63,65,69 and 1982:85) and Merleau-Ponty (1962:vi) both emphasise that this bracketing does not entail a sceptical veto to the world, but rather the opposite: phenomenology “places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them” or to “re-achiev[e] a direct and primitive contact with the world”. The call to refrain from participation in the world is then only temporary, and the brackets may be removed: “the world is always ‘already there’ . . . as an ‘inalienable presence’” and a pre-scientific lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). The aim, then, is to grasp the *essence* of the lifeworld as a pure *phenomenon* without the scientific and conceptual cast (Husserl 1982:85).

Participating in the world in its totality, the ‘lived’ body thus defies compartmentalisation of the lifeworld into ready-made racks of physicality, emotions, or ethics (Husserl 1982:58). As the world loses its priorities and accustomed causal relations, this temporary refusal to take anything for granted swerves towards the paranoid: “[T]here is not a human word, not a gesture, even one which is the outcome of habit or *absent-minded-ness*, which has not some meaning . . . Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*.” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xx,xxii; emphasis original.) However, the ‘lived’



body intrudes as a measuring stick into this tangle of impressions: “my body is not only perceived among others, it is the *mesurant* (*mesurant*) of all, *Nullpunkt* of all the dimensions of the world.” (Merleau-Ponty 1968:248-249; emphasis original.)

It becomes evident, then, that the description of cocktail party (corpo)-reality can impossibly be complete. This study risks a nebulous approach, in part, to show how the body bands together with different spheres of experience, but also to explore the possible intersections between these spheres at the multidisciplinary borders of the body. It should, therefore, be noted that as I season my bodily broil with pinches of the natural sciences such as biology and geography, these disciplines themselves are meant to enter a process of phenomenological fermentation with the body. In addition, as the body touches the world on different planes at once, it composes a way to bring together seemingly disparate elements and reveal parallels between them. Merleau-Ponty (1962:xx) indeed calls for the “formula [of each civilization] which sums up some unique manner of behaviour towards others, towards Nature, time and death: a certain way of patterning the world”. Eliot (1951b:478) adopts a similar view of civilisation as “merely a frame to be filled with definite objects, not a definite object itself”. Perceived hermeneutically, *The Cocktail Party* presents such a miniature ‘civilisation’ permeated and ‘measured’ by its own brand of (corpo)reality. It is crucial, then, that the body is ferreted out from within the confines of this particular cocktail-culture and not inserted *a priori* from the outside. In his critical essays, Eliot (1996; emphasis original) indeed traces the independent position of the artistic creation in relation to philosophy and claims that a work of art should not “embody” but “*replace* the philosophy”.

It should be observed that the body as a *mesurant* is not a static metric system but mobile and dynamic, swelling and shrinking in its umbilical contact with the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962:248; emphasis original) stresses this reciprocal “relation of transgression or of overlapping” between the body and the world: “my body is made of the same flesh as the world” and “this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects*, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world”. This parasitic contact is realised through the senses. In this way, the ‘lived’ body refuses to be herded into strictly fenced categories. Lefkowitz (1997:1), for instance, appears to suggest as much, as she

points out that “the body’s history in literature is also the history of bodily violation; as the body acquires new definition, what it means to transgress its boundaries changes accordingly”. Turning these propositions around, the body itself can be seen as a transitional entity, and it is perhaps most firmly defined through this idea of transgression. Formulating his idea of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty (1962:94-95) indeed repeatedly refers to the body as “the vehicle of being in the world” or a “medium”, and he earmarks bodily sensation off as calling for “a middle term between presence and absence”. Transgression of borders may indeed be seen as the way to constantly redefine and test the borders of the body.

In this body-study, a central way to exert Husserlian doubt will be to distrust language itself. For Merleau-Ponty (1962:207), language indeed resembles the intermediary essence of the body, as speech constitutes “the vehicle of meanings”. In a way, then, the very vocabulary of this study is in the process of taking shape and metamorphosing. As the cocktail-body is constantly seen to stretch and transgress its own borders, the terminology surrounding it is bound to suffer from imprecision, too. In general, the body is referred to indiscriminately as a lump, with the term *body* alternating rather freely with the *corporeal* and the *physical*. In addition, the bracketed term *(corpo)reality* is adopted here to underline, for one thing, the intimate and reciprocal relations between the *body* and *reality*. In the phenomenological context of this study, a more accurate term for this relation is perhaps *(corpo)(reality)* with its implication that the everyday meanings of both *body* and *reality* as well as the link between the two are bracketed. In effect, all *(corpo)(realities)* temporarily present themselves as “fictions” (*Fiktionen*) when bracketed (Husserl 1982:85,96-97). This serves to explain my unwillingness to divorce ‘actual’ bodies from their metaphorical or symbolic counterparts—hence the denomination *me(a)taphorical*.

On occasion, the body can be seen to divide internally into what will be termed here as chaotic, preverbal, and bare *flesh* and the meaningfully masked *body* (cf. Niemi-Pynttäre 1996:73) This differentiation comes close to what Gatens (1996:12) terms the “material body” and the “body-phantom” or “imaginary body”, respectively. These concepts may also serve to explicate the broad concept of *(corpo)reality* and the deliberately diffuse border between *reality* and *unreality/irreality* adopted in this study. Evidently, I will not be concerned here primarily with the “material body”, defined as “the physical body,

the anatomical body, the neutral, dead body”, but with the “imaginary body”, ie. “the body as lived, the animate body—the *situated* body” (Gatens 1996:11; emphasis original). According to Gatens, the imaginary body is “socially and historically specific” and constituted through (1) “a shared language”, (2) “the shared physical significance and privileging of various zones of the body”, and (3) “common institutional practices and discourses . . . which act on and through the body”. In Eliot’s play, the cocktail party itself and the urban lifestyle may be said to constitute this (3) discursive field with its (1) shared idea of small talk and its (2) “privileging” of the talking (and cocktail-drinking) head. While the discursive (imaginary) *body* is impossible without its preverbal (material) *flesh*, the separation between the two spheres is largely lost in an invented textual universe. The material body, although fleshed out in the actor and entering the text through the author and the audience, is difficult to distinguish from its constructed, discursively produced garment. Thus, the sense that “discourse already, always, structures the body” is heightened in connection with a fictitious play, even if it claims to realism (Dallery 1989:64).

Befitting the transgressive nature of the party-body, the term *imagery* will be applied here in a broad sense. The fleeting border between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ (corpo)reality leads to caution in separating between actual and textual apparitions of the body and classifying images, for instance, into “explicit”, “symbolic” and “syntactic” structural compartments (cf. Gliserman 1996:15-19, Thormählen 1984). In the context of *The Cocktail Party*, it seems appropriate to withhold such definitions, since the dimensions are notably entwined and the body expressed on all these levels is remarkably similar. In addition, this temporary upheaval or bracketing of the borders between the levels of interpretation may prove useful, as it allows macrolevel aspects of genre to meet microlevel stylistic and lexical considerations. In general, I will use the term *word-world* to account for this double texture of cocktail (corpo)reality.

As the discursive body is defined through its “open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world” (Bakhtin 1968:281), the term itself defies atomistic singularity to flirt with the plural *bodies*. This form, however, appears somewhat misleading, as it invites the idea of specific, countable bodies. In her psychoanalytical perception of the female body, Irigaray (1985b:26,28,31; emphasis original) formulates the indefinite idea of “*plurality*” as a multitude “without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is

touched". *Touching* and the *tactile* become central tenets in Irigaray's (1984:154-155) work, when she seeks to define the diffuse and evolving frontiers between (sexed) bodies. Seen from this microscopic perspective, the transgression theme opens through the resilient (feminine) skin. To convey the elastic and inconclusive nature of this border texture, Irigaray (1984:71) samples terminology such as *porosity* (*porosité*) and *mucus* (*muqueux*) when discussing female sexuality. In addition, she trades solid causal categories for a reciprocal *fluidity*, which will be of particular use in my search for the liquid cocktail-body (Irigaray 1984:163 and 1985a:237). In this world, there is "no strict limit between a before/after, outside/inside, familiar/foreign,...speakable/unspeakable" (Irigaray 1985a:235). This fluid body is, as Merleau-Ponty (1962:231) puts it, "never hermetically sealed and never left behind". Significantly enough, Eliot's verse flows towards similar images of immersion in the world, as the body refuses to be left to dry in hermetic isolation "on a distant shore" (*Complete* 194; see p.22): "The river is within us, the sea is all about us." (*Complete* 184.)

### **Gender**

So I would have had her stand and grieve,  
So he would have left  
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,  
As the mind deserts the body it has used. (*Complete* 34.)

The pivotal role of the body and the corporeal realm in much of Eliot's oeuvre, along with its intimate bond to aspects of gender, is foreshadowed in the early poem 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1917). Not only does the body here appear as an essentially gendered territory, but it is also distinctly female. Similarly, sexuality and biological reproduction may be seen to impregnate the very core of *The Cocktail Party*. In effect, even the *me(a)taphors* relating to the creative process of the text are (trans-)sexed. Thus, Browne (1966:2) describes his own part in directing the play by designating himself "the chief professional midwife" and explaining that "once the gestation had proceeded far enough for the embryo to reveal a definite shape, he [Eliot] was in frequent consultation with me upon its growth". To play up the persistence of such *me(a)taphors*, a similar pattern of textual "midwifery" and Caesarean section was propounded by Ezra Pound's editorial operations on *The Waste Land* nearly three decades earlier (Severin

1993a and 1993b, Heywood 1996:84-85, Froula 1999:180). Extending the connection between literary creation and biological parenting, Eliot, in a letter to the director, describes the future upbringing of *The Cocktail Party*: “I certainly expect the play to be born this year. I do not know how long it will be before it learns to walk, to say nothing of an acrobatic turn worthy of the theatre.” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:170.)

As a sign of the rising feminist debate in the post-war era, it is illuminating to compare Eliot’s textual body to de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe*, 1949), published in the same year as *The Cocktail Party* was first performed. In many respects, Eliot’s cocktail-world may be regarded a stereotypical scarecrow illustration of the patriarchal society that de Beauvoir (1949a:197-200 passim) assails, where Woman is intuitively wedded to the dreaded ideas of corporeality, Nature, bestiality, chaos, and death. Pointing to Eliot’s “overt misogyny”, Sparks (1989:56,68,70), for instance, notes a “consistent intertangling of images and tropes associated with emotions, nature and, women” and subsumes Eliot’s critical writings as a textbook example of “the way in which Western philosophy has always described the world in terms of hierarchical couples, dialectics in which one word—that associated with the female—is repeatedly elided” (see also Severin 1993a and 1993b).

In accordance with the phenomenological reluctance to recognise definite *a priori* boundaries within bodily experience, I will not be directly concerned here with the *sex/gender* distinction as such. As Gatens (1996:8,9; emphasis original) shows, the division itself remains largely theoretical, since the “[s]ubject is always a *sexed* subject” and “there is no neutral body” to use as a clean canvas for adding gendered building blocks (see also Bordo 1993:35, Heinämaa 1996:162). However, as my bouts with the body generally involve (corpo)reality as essentially “produced” within Eliot’s textual body, I will use *gender* as the overarching term. In addition, this bracketing of ‘sex’ is consistent with the phenomenological urge to question everyday truths. It remains imperative, however, that both gender and sex are impossible to conceive in isolation from the body, and vice versa. Impossible to insulate from the body, this sexual body is then also communally “developed, learnt, connected to the body image of others, and . . . not static” (Gatens 1996:12).

For my cocktail party purposes, it proves helpful to preserve the distinction between the bipolar pairs *female/male* and *femininity/masculinity*. Gatens

(1996:12; emphasis added) defines *feminine/masculine attributes* as “the social and personal significance of *male* and *female* biologies as lived in culture”, but she notes that there is no exclusive correlation limiting *femininity* to *female* and *masculinity* to *male bodies*. These distinctions may be seen to hold even in created theatrical space so that *The Cocktail Party*, in its claims to realism, is “historically and culturally situated in a society that is divided and organised in terms of sex” (Gatens 1996:11). In consequence, the cocktail party miniature world is sexed into *male* and *female* characters (bodies), but attributes of *femininity* or *masculinity* attach to them differently and are not interpreted in identical ways (Gatens 1996:9). Since language presents itself as an extension of corporeality, it also becomes a notable showcase for these gendered features. The connection between language and gender may be exemplified in the way Heinämaa (1996:13,15,162n and 1997:44), for instance, stresses sex as a *style* of being in the world rather than an entity.

In her analysis of modernity, de Beauvoir (1949a:233) observes the paradox that the female is identified with flesh at the same time as the embodied woman has systematically been excluded from the official anatomical charts. This ambiguous relation to (sexed) corporeality can be felt throughout Eliot’s textual body. Returning to ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (*Complete* 34; see p.27), a notable unease regarding the body is released in the poem through ravaging the body and leaving it *torn* and *bruised*. In line with the transgression theme inherent to the Eliotic textual body, the categories of the (male) *soul* and *mind* are presented as invaders, or even parasites, in their *using* and *bruising* the passively statuesque (female) body. At the same time, however, this violence occurs almost masochistically between the (masculine) *mind/soul* and the (feminine) *body*.

In addition to the sheer mass of the violated body, the emotional realm contained in the verb *grieve* and the Italian *piange* (‘cry’) are also labelled as feminine. By contrast, the only way for the male to react is by physical evasion, and the male is rendered almost immaterial by comparing him to *the soul* and *the mind*. This sense of vacuity is further emphasised by presenting the action by choosing the verbs *leave*, twice, and *desert*.

I should find  
Some way incomparably light and deft,  
Some way we both should understand,

Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand. (*Complete* 34.)

Bodily gestures are portrayed here as intensely expressive and exact while nonetheless striving to be almost acorporeal and uncloaked, as exemplified by the sequences *incomparably light and deft* and *simple and faithless*. However, the narrative voice insinuates that such a clean break between male/mind and female/body may not be attainable. In effect, the conditional verb forms suggest that the actual male and female (bodies) in the scene are liable to disobey the narrator-director's authoritative bidding. In several respects, the entry of physicality into *The Cocktail Party* shows analogous characteristics in comparison to Eliot's earlier verse. At the same time, however, the setting between the sexes is somewhat changed and made increasingly mutual.

### *Alterity/The Other*

And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
 And what you own is what you do not own  
 And where you are is where you are not. (*Complete* 181.)

Merleau-Ponty (1962:231) presents the phenomenological body, in essence, as a radically rebellious and ephemeral "other": "[My body] is always something other than it is, always sexuality and at the same time freedom, rooted in nature at the very moment when it is transformed by cultural influences". Significantly enough, this sense of ceaseless internal paradox is expressed in remarkably congruous terms to de Beauvoir's (1949a:278) assessment of the absolute alterity represented by Woman in her constant defiance of (male) expectation. In *The Cocktail Party*, the body is indeed stitched together with gender in a general sense of *alterity* or *otherness*. Consequently, aspects related to the body become fundamental to all the different facets of the *other* offered in the play.

According to cocktail-party etiquette, the body is, initially, relegated to the denigrated position in dualist oppositions such as self vs. other, subject vs. object, culture vs. Nature, order vs. disorder, and upper-class vs. lower-class. One of the core dichotomies, however, ensues between the sexes. Thus, if the body itself is always already understood as *other*, the body of the other sex comes to symbolise a doubled *alterity*. de Beauvoir (1949a:261,277-278) in-

deed stresses the *totality* of *Otherness* in Woman, who combines the symbolism of life and death, Nature and artifice, and light and night in patriarchal cultures. Paradoxically enough, then, this othered body also mothers the mutinous ligature or umbilical cord to contact between these opposites by trespassing the binary borders, as the “experience of one’s own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:231, cf. de Beauvoir 1949a:260, see also Irigaray 1984:154).

Significantly enough, the other (sex) is not seen here as deficient but complete in itself. At the same time, as de Beauvoir (1949a:234) sees it, it is impossible to ‘annex’ this *alterity* entirely. The significance of an unassailable *other* opens through the phenomenological claim that “we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xiv). If the other(s) become(s) indissolubly integrated into the self, these relationships collapse. Instead of attempting an imperial invasion of the other, the attention is then shifted to the possibility of finding a means of communication. Merleau-Ponty (1962:226) channels this transgression through language as an “open and indefinite power of giving significance . . . by which man [sic] transcends himself towards a new form of behaviour, or towards other people, or towards his own thought, through his body and his speech”. In everyday conversation, “[t]here is . . . a taking up of others’ thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:208; emphasis original). Laying out a theory of the sexed body, Heinämaa (1996:87,175) indeed singles out this intimate relation to speech and gesture as the trademark of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology.

As the body is perceived in terms of a general “reflectedness” (Merleau-Ponty 1968:249), its relations to the world dilate from a binary dialogue towards polyphony. In the process, the idea of alterity is unbolted and becomes potentially plural. Bauman (1991:9) indeed notes that “[t]he other of the modern intellect is polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets”. This breakdown of binary otherness lurks in the cocktail party scenery, as well. To emphasise this sense of unnameable and uncountable alterity, I will avoid the customary capitalised form *Other* and use the term *other* advocated by, for instance, Irigaray (1984). All bodily borders appear to leak and



could perhaps, building on Irigaray (1984 and 1985a; see p.26-27), be compared to a soft and resilient membrane. To stress this respect for the borders of the other but also the *issue* through these borders, the term *(t)issue* is tried out here. For similar ends, I have adopted the appellation *(en)trails* to indicate an internalised alterity, i.e. the body as an enigma to itself.

Paradoxically enough, though subjected to a relentless process of othering, the rebellious body thus also suggests the terminology to terminate or, at least, to redefine this process. A third insemination of bodily fluidity with the notion of transgression, *secret(ion)*, will be employed here to describe the approach to the body as an unsolvable enigma. Merleau-Ponty (1962:xiv) indeed demands “the same kind of attentiveness and wonder” from phenomenological thought as from poets and painters. Irigaray (1984:77,83-84) builds on this further by inviting an attitude of *admiration* for the intrinsic novelty of the unknown other; Heinämaa (2000:13,105-106), in turn, treasures this attitude of wonder and surprise in relation to any philosophical or scientific problem. I will attempt to apply this atmosphere of admiration and open-ended cocktail-dialogue when attempting, on occasion, to trigger an intertextual conversation between the play and a number of texts with similar concerns. My target, then, in evoking these intertexts, is not to demonstrate direct influences on Eliot or to make the texts explicate and grind each other but to bring them loosely into contact in order to fertilise, if possible, new thought.

Applied to the formulation of cocktail party (corpo)reality, Irigaray’s (1985a:26) invitation to *touch* instead of to conquer leads to a handshake instead of an abrupt break between binary oppositions. In effect, this attitude to alterity as both part of the self and part of an eternally alien *other* brings Eliot’s sense of dislocation, quoted above (*Complete* 181, see p.30), into skin contact with phenomenological experience: “[the body] is not a collection of particles, each one remaining in itself, nor yet a network of processes defined once and for all—it is not where it is, nor what it is (Merleau-Ponty 1962:229; emphasis added). Beauvoir (1949a: 187) likewise pins down the opposing Other as indispensable, since the male subject can only reach himself through a (female) (corpo)reality which he is not (*à travers cette réalité qu’il n’est pas*).

## Body-Talk at *The Cocktail Party*

### *The Physical Fast*

ALEX. . . . I really think that of all my triumphs  
This is the greatest. To make something out of  
nothing. (*Cocktail* 372.)

Given that the ‘lived’ body manifests itself mainly as a “network of relationships” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii), one of the main methodological preparations for an analysis of (corpo)reality is to find the vocabulary for describing how this dynamic web works. Bodily movements will be tracked here, basically, by deducing the rules of the hide-and-seek played out between *presence* and *absence*, realised in the text as *repetition* and *ellipsis*, respectively. Since the cocktail party itself forms the formulaic framework for the bodily processes in Eliot’s play, the recipe for this reciprocal transgression is articulated here in terms of *eating* and *being eaten*, escalating *me(a)taphorical* as *starvation* and *over-eating*.

In the cocktail party atmosphere, the transgression of (corpo)real bounds resembles Bakhtin’s (1968:281) rendition of carnivalesque eating: “the body transgresses . . . its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s expense”. At the same time, this transgression also disputes the autonomy of the body, as it becomes dependent on “the world” for sustenance. This uncontrolled ingestion in itself challenges the fixity of borders, as it entails the double movement of devouring other bodies and being, in return, torn and invaded by others: “the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world” (Bakhtin 1968:317). In addition, the warfare to decide the borders of the unruly body is not solely aimed at the outside world but also internal. The party-body is defined and constantly redefined in relation to others, but there is always something that remains unexplained and inexplicable, a *rest (reste)* in Irigaray’s (1984:19) terms. Thus, in the same way that the human body is essentially comprehended as inadequate or in some way lacking, its very definition remains perpetually incomplete. In this aggressively transgressive oral world, all confines between bodies thus appear to bounce and become arbitrary. Consequently, as Merleau-Ponty (1962:xxiii) maintains, the enforcement of any borders between this amorphous body and the world always constitutes a “violent act”. In the epigraph to his pamphlet

*Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (1949:3), Eliot comes to affirm this random nature of boundaries and the need to actively nail them down, as he invokes the meaning of *definition* as '[t]he setting of bounds; limitation'.

Significantly enough, the cocktail party small talk in Eliot's play repeatedly refers to eating and drinking in the light of abnormality: it is either excessive or insufficient. This prescriptive struggle towards moderation is particularly noticeable in the first scene of *The Cocktail Party*, where the guests decry the voracious appetite and excessive "vitality" of Lady Klootz, while at the same time complaining about the lack of food and the absent-minded host at the present shadow-party (*Cocktail* 354,355). In a way, then, the cocktail characters are involved in a ritualised attempt to solidify the porous body by closely monitoring and limiting any transactions across its borders, namely eating and drinking.

Erecting a theory of the "anorexic text", Anderson (1988:35,38) asserts this need to "control" a chaotic natural world and to "make the body into a self-fashioned artifact, a form of language". The invitation to read the body as a text seems to spring from a nearly organic relation between the two. As communication is possible only through the medium of the body, speech can be seen as an extension of (corpo)reality: "language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation*" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:228; emphasis original). Anderson (1988:29) makes this blood relation manifest, as he describes the contact between body and language in the manner of a pathogenic contamination: "the specific movement in modernist discourse toward increasingly brief, fragmentary, self-consuming, or 'silent' texts relies, with surprising regularity and insistence, on figures of anorexia".

When applied to Eliot's drama and *The Cocktail Party*, I would argue, the tendency to starvation is most decisively manifested in a consistent abstention from stage action and, in particular, from physical intimacy rather than occurring through any particularly striking economy of speech. The characters report their extensive travelling and exploits, and they talk of eating and working, but the action actually shown on stage is reduced to the absolute minimum. Virtually every action in *The Cocktail Party*, including murder and death in the last act, is predominantly verbal and narrated. The physical restraint and absence of activity is particularly striking in Eliot's play, as the death of Alcestis is actually presented on stage in Euripides' hypotext (see Phelan 1990:224). In

effect, the asceticism escalates, as even the cocktail party refreshments and the parties themselves are narrated rather than actual.

Reasserting the congruity between the word and flesh in a biblical reversal, words thus become the flesh of the play. In fact, the word-world is the main artery that holds the cocktail party organically together; Bakhtin (1968:283-284), for instance, assumes “an ancient [and living] tie between the feast and the spoken word”. Formulating his modernist aesthetics, Anderson (1988:29) extends this Siamese-twin relation by combining physical fasting with silence: “[i]f an ancient trope in Western writing has seen language as a kind of food, or food as a kind of language, modernism confirms their association by negating both”. In *The Cocktail Party*, especially the male characters can be seen to promulgate this Andersonian abstention through “food rejection, fasting, starvation, and other forms of corporeal self-obliteration” (Anderson 1988:29). Thus, the extreme protectionism of these (imaginary) borders leads to a complete closedown and, eventually, to self-destruction. However, the extreme manifestations of this suffragette are shown through women, culminating in Celia’s eventual extradition and death. To a certain extent, this concurs with Heywood’s (1996:89) remodelling of Anderson’s theory, as she identifies the “excess” fat in the modernist text with the female body: “The definition of the male body is the definition of the body, whereas the female body is extra, more body . . . with ‘more’ interpreted negatively.”

The very cocktail-party routine comes to be defined through active and repeated refusal and negating, or handcuffing of the body. In other words, *The Cocktail Party* ritual introduces an imposed order achieved through restricting and confining the chaotic body and its needs while investing them with a ritual meaning. The body is present in the cocktail party setting from a double standpoint. Consequently, the ritual itself is built around bodily needs at the same time as the corporeal is reined and relegated from the drawing room as obtrusive. In a way, then, the party itself is designed to tone down and neutralise the disruptive elements of the disorderly body. Significantly enough, the body becomes twice removed in *The Cocktail Party*, as a similar fade-out of spontaneous physicality is effected when corporeality is carved to fit into the format of the well-made play. Reference to the movement and corporeal comportment of the characters on stage is indeed almost completely absent from the script, except for a minutely orchestrated digestive system of exits and entries matching

the needs of the plot and the dialogue. Paradoxically enough, the patrolling to protect their own borders from outside influences leads the characters to restrict their own behaviour or even to shrink in order to avoid direct contact with the border-(t)issue. No indications are given in the dialogue and stage directions to suggest that the characters lash out at each other physically, or, for that matter, that they even touch each other; they have to be coaxed into direct confrontation. To emphasise this isolationism of bodies, much of the manipulation of the characters in the second act is actually aimed at hindering them from running into each other in Reilly's office.

Thus, in a kind of protest against the unruly body, the cocktail party as a ritual is itself built around anorexic tendencies. The storytelling also involves elements of anorexia, as stories appear only in snippets and hints instead of in fully fleshed out detail (see also Jones 1960:125). It is revealing that Alex announces that he "never tell[s] the same story twice" only eight lines down the play, before the audience has actually heard him tell any story in full (*Cocktail* 353). Similarly, Celia can be said to speak for the entire cocktail-community, when she complains that "[i]t no longer seems worth while to speak to anyone" (*Cocktail* 414). Thus, in a parallel movement to her abstention from speech, Celia also perceives that "it would really be dishonest/ For me, now, to try to make a life with *anybody*" (*Cocktail* 418; emphasis original).

As a consequence of Eliot's dramatic regime, *The Cocktail Party* ends up encompassing a relatively limited or malnourished verbal universe, with the same experiences and, to a large extent, even the same words being recycled. Williams (1968:239-40) contends that, in comparison to other poems and earlier dramatic texts by Eliot, *The Cocktail Party* displays a "deliberate lucidity and . . . the minimum of imagery and evocation". Discussing dramatic dialogue as a fat-free form of poetry, Eliot (1951a:33) indicates that, in writing *The Cocktail Party*, he saw himself as perhaps having moved too far in this disciplinary direction, planning in future to "dare to make more liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties with ordinary colloquial speech".

In essence, anorexia thus appears as refusal to participate in or even to touch the chaotic world. It should be noted that the results of textual as well as real-life dieting are unexpected, however, as "[a]n extreme concern with eliminating the text or the body results finally in the fetishization of both" (Anderson 1988:35). The very absence of the body introduces it as something foreign

and hence interesting to the characters, making it the object to be excavated. In a sense, then, the body is posited outside but refuses to remain there and keeps resurfacing. Similarly, the verbal self-discipline generates the effect that relatively small deviations and alterations, word choices and changes in style become noteworthy. This renewed sensitivity may activate semantic paradigms, which normally pass unnoticed.

Since the anorexic body/text reads as a “visible form of protest” (Anderson 1988:29), the inertia itself becomes expressive. On the metaphorical plane, this parallels with the interplay between speech and silence as well as verbal evasion and clear-cut negation. Corporeal (t)issues are explicitly negated or not spoken of and thereby eradicated. Paradoxically enough, the only way to stop co-operating with a world where everything has meaning is by leaving it. When the characters feel distressed, they leave the stage or the entire play in a similar fashion to the male character in ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (*Complete* 34; see p.27). However, even such elimination is not semantically mute but equals a statement in itself: “Heard from a distance . . . the silence of the fasting body is also a manner of speaking, and food for thought” (Anderson 1988:39). In his commentary on Alfred Schutz, Natanson (1998:10) comes close to a similar anorexic logic: “that which is not done, that which is abstained from, that which remains an unchosen option for action . . .—all these modes of conduct are also modes of action”. In *The Cocktail Party*, the intimate relation between bodily gestures and the word-world is spelt out by Reilly, when he reveals the anorexic bone structure of his professional séance:

REILLY. You must have patience with me, Mr. Chamberlayne:  
I learn a good deal by merely observing you  
And letting you talk as long as you please,  
And taking note of what you do not say. (*Cocktail* 404.)

Joining the rich trail of metatextual matter in *The Cocktail Party*, Reilly’s method may be applied to the entire play. Thus, it may be argued that *The Cocktail Party* incorporates an anorexic programme of questioning everyday reality into its structure to such an extent that it is indeed crucial to look at what is missing or elided. The significance of the dieted textual body can be decoded, in part, through detecting the sources of the fat that may have been suctioned away. Conducted with caution, a comparative reading of other works by Eliot suggests possible elided elements. A valuable tool for tracing the dietary

cuts and implants are the script versions of the play, recorded and discussed at length by the director E. Martin Browne (1966, 1969)<sup>3</sup>. Without doubt, this *a posteriori* pursuit of elided fat adds the danger of over-reading into the play. To follow the dietary reading advice proffered by Eliot (as quoted by Durer 2001): “We each of us have to find out for ourselves just how much we can read and assimilate—for over-eating may be as fatal as starvation.”

### *The Verbal Feast*

You say I am repeating  
Something I have said before. I shall say it again (*Complete* 181.)

JULIA. It's such a nice party, I hate to leave it.  
It's such a nice party, I'd like to repeat it. (*Cocktail* 358.)

ALEX. I never tell the same story twice. (*Cocktail* 353.)

In terms of both actual and lexical refreshments, *The Cocktail Party* can undoubtedly be seen as a fasting feast. However, this impression of self-discipline conceals a fierce fighting between the ascetic and the voracious, as the body seems to bulge at the seams of this abstention in significant ways. Anderson (1988:32) indeed records the counter-effect that an “effort to deny the body results in the proliferation of bodies and body parts” in anorexic texts. The corporeal is heavily subdued in the orderly drawing-room behaviour of the characters, but the denied physicality erupts in their conversational *me(a)taphors*; the cocktail party stories are, as a rule, extremely physical. In effect, mediated by the linguistic plane, both plenty and lack become present at the party simultaneously. This can be witnessed on several structural levels, and it eventually amounts to a search for what might be called a more liberal regime. Thus, despite all its restraint, the text revels in a fervent hunger for repetition. The absence is magnified through repetitive negation, or indeed assertion of what is not: There are no tigers, no olives or oysters, no mangoes or curry powder, and, most strikingly, hardly any cocktails at *The Cocktail Party*. On parallel levels,

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<sup>3</sup> Worth (1985:125), for instance, comments on Browne's presumably pivotal role in crafting the plays while deploring that his role in “moving [Eliot] towards a less ambiguous and equivocal expression of theme” has not as yet been fully accounted for in the criticism; Evans (1977:144-145) urges similar ends but assumes that the influence is marginal.

there is no film being produced by Peter, no real communication, and no whole stories being told.

Significantly enough, *The Cocktail Party* is held together by words and snippets of chattering talk; it is, in its essence, a verbal feast. The cocktail characters exist through their speech, and speech is placed on a structural pedestal in the play, as shown above (see p.14). Seen from this perspective, the talking heads at *The Cocktail Party* fuel the undernourished community with verbal fodder. The play shows a set of people bound together, on the surface level, by their communal eating and sharing of collectively regulated “nice tit-bit[s]” of small talk (*Cocktail* 355). The reliance on straightforward story-telling has been largely criticised especially in terms of the last act and the way Celia’s death is reported by Alex “as a piece of straight narrative, as a classical messenger’s speech, which is stylistically inappropriate in a naturalistic play” (Gardner 1967:180-181, see also Ward 1973:205, Elsom 1979). Gordon (1998:419), for instance, goes as far as to suggest a remedy for the discomfiture of the last scene by showing “the good life” of Celia by “open[ing] the drawing-room to some glimpse of the real Celia”, and she envisions that “this would be simple on film”. This, I think, denies the impact in the play of verbal telling (or even evasion of telling) instead of showing.

Merleau-Ponty (1962:206,228) notes a violent “productivity” in language: “For pre-scientific thinking, naming an object is causing it to exist or changing it: God creates beings by naming them and magic operates upon them by speaking of them”. This power of the ‘pre-scientific’ word to bracket or overthrow physical laws of nature is reflected in *The Cocktail Party*, as Julia is ready to accept the unverifiable ability of a man to “hear the cry of bats” simply “[b]ecause he *said* so” (*Cocktail* 355; emphasis added). Conceived in this way, the phenomenological word-world is related to the Bakhtinian concept of “the grotesque body”, which is:

a body *in the act of becoming*. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. . . This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. (Bakhtin 1968:317; emphasis added.)



In a way, the anorexic text is determined to shut down all the outlets of this ungovernable grotesque body and to regulate its growth. However, this attempt partly backfires, as language exhibits an unrestrained power to grow and *become* flesh. Merleau-Ponty (1962:207,229) notes that the spoken word “acquires existence for itself” and that “the word, far from being the mere sign of objects and meanings, inhabits things”. The party-world is indeed “inhabit[ed]” and constructed by words or metaphors. Heywood (1996:85), commenting on Eliot’s poetry, complains that “[m]ost of what refers to the body physically, rather than metaphorically, is cut”. However, such clear-cut pronouncements run the risk of overlooking the complex connections and fleeting borders between physical and metaphorical flesh, i.e. what I have termed the *me(a)taphorical* (see p.25). In *The Cocktail Party*, at any rate, it may be argued that the physical flesh is not simply “cut” but transplanted or translated into language. In Bakhtinian terms, what I have termed *me(a)taphors* may be seen here as language “*in the act of becoming*” or “changing” (corpo)reality. In effect, Natanson (1998:132; emphasis original), in his phenomenological reading of several authors, recuperates the meaning of metaphors as “misleaders” or “condensations of language in which words *become*, in which words escape their bounds and reverse our perception of what is real”. A meticulous incision of the (en)trails of these *me(a)taphors* may then reveal the underbelly of (corpo)reality.

The cocktail party community thus becomes a *body* or an extended *me(a)taphor* fed by communal chatter just as its members feed themselves (inadequately) with cocktails and potato crisps. Words become the brickwork or the very flesh of the play, where the outside world is, almost by definition, presented only in words. Seen from this perspective, the talking heads at *The Cocktail Party* fuel the undernourished community with verbal fodder. As nothing (corpo)real happens in the inhibited cocktail-universe, society-gossip and world events are smuggled in through the conversation. The textual body of the play may be seen to mushroom mainly due to the impact of the burgeoning mass media in the post-war era; a frequent contributor to newspapers and an editor himself, Eliot may indeed be identified as “belonging to a great broadcasting generation” (Thormählen 1984:15). Accordingly, the cocktail-party community appears as a sealed media world, where outside happenings arrive only indirectly, cushioned by the journalistic jargon or relayed images.

The need for mediation through the border-(t)issues of the media suggests that the outside world seems to lack contours if seen from within the walls of the cocktail-cage. In this interceded world, (corpo)reality is (re)created as a verbal construct, a coded artefact comparable to the regulated anorexic body. In addition, the code is created *elsewhere*, outside the cocktail world. Consequently, there is a constant struggle to nail down this intrusive foreign element to the limits of the controlled body. In this way, the word-world becomes the physical location of the *other* in the play.

The body appears as both abstention from and revelling with food. It is worth noting, in effect, that the starvation is not entirely willed by the characters. Browne (1969:197n) indeed remarks that the play still bears the imprint of wartime rationing, where spoiling “half a dozen eggs” actually matters. Thus, the cocktail party logic stems from an excessive frolicking with few ingredients. Even if the vocabulary is limited and the stories told only as hints, they are endlessly repeated and re-masticated. In this way, the body that is limited in physical expression can be said to crack at the brim and burst out as language. The repetition of words and entire phrases throughout the play adds to the sense of rhythm noted as crucial to Eliot’s drama (see Malamud 1994). This also reveals another truth behind Alex’s claim to “never tell the same story twice” (*Cocktail* 353; see p.38), namely the Heraclitan idea that no repetition of an event is ever identical.

The intimate fraternising between language and physical (corpo)reality x-rays the everyday action of the play in an altered light. In a sense, the word-world and physical matter appear to complement each other as a single organism. Thus, the verbal flesh of the play is arranged so that the outspoken and semantically direct discussion amasses into the barren settings of the consultation room in the middle act. By contrast, the two acts in more or less well-furnished party-settings mostly amount to a fast-paced ping-ponging with half-formed phrases. It is as if, in the cocktail-party universe, words and physical matter outbalance each other, so that a matting of coherent sentences intrudes to fill in for the lacking physical furniture, and vice versa. Similarly, the fewer characters there are on stage, the more room they acquire to vent and fill the room with their verbal flesh. Significantly enough, in keeping with one of the basic rules of the gossip-universe, people are talked about the most when they are absent. Since the most acute and unsettling absence becomes personified

through the cocktail-women, Celia and Lavinia generate speech and invade the conversation at the party through their non-attendance. As the borders between the real and the virtual body are bracketed and merge into one *me(a)taphorical* flesh, the divide between absence and presence thus loses its absolute nature. Another way to master the chaotic (corpo)real appetite entails playing with its borders and cracking them up with laughter. Bakhtin (1968:89) considers “[t]he feast . . . a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers”. One of the central ways in which the borders of the binary body/soul open up and grow in *The Cocktail Party* thus occurs through its comic skin, as the play is fattened with seemingly innocent wordplay. The laughing body transforms the privately *digesting*, beastly body to embrace a communal, jovial air, which is marked here as *di-jesting*.

The parallels between textual and physical anatomy and gestation suggest a reversal of the customary idea of Eliot’s drama as a mere mechanical extension and staging of his poetic thought (cf. Crawford 1987:232; see p.17). In effect, it should be noted that the *me(a)taphorical* compound of physical action on the stage and verbal dialogue contains a source of irreconcilable internal conflict and that the word-world is partly challenged by the physical body of the characters. The spoken word is undoubtedly central to most of the institutions on the play’s turf; speech is the main adhesive of the cocktail party, the psychiatrist’s appointment, and Edward’s work at court. Similarly, the written tradition is crucial to Celia and Peter in the first act, as they discuss their poetry and film manuscripts, and it rules the medialised environment of the society columns. However, towards the end of the play, Peter increasingly slides into the visual world of film, whereas Celia comes to adopt (corpo)reality in full as a missionary nurse. Ultimately, then, when verbal language and non-verbal aspects of communication clash, the characters find themselves at a loss of words. Moreover, the verbal flesh shows but also conceals actual events. In all its reliance on the spoken word, *The Cocktail Party* thus ends up recognising the limits of words in comparison to other means of communication allowed by the stage, involving the physical presence/absence of the characters as well as their acts on stage and wider elements of setting and structure.

## BODY BUILDING: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY IN SPACE

### The Evasive Human Body

#### The Body as Corpse

CELIA. . . . I looked at your [Edward's] face: and I thought that I  
 knew  
 And loved every contour; and as I looked  
 It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy. (*Cocktail* 382.)

As an indication of the anorexic logic inherent to the cocktail party community, direct reference to the human body has been dieted away from the conversation in the play. Moreover, what remains of the body in the dialogue is repeatedly subjected to violence and mutilation or simply killed off. Characteristically, while the term *body* itself appears four times in the text, three of these instances actually refer to the dying (1,2) or already dead (3) body:

(1) EDWARD. I once experienced the extreme of physical pain,  
 And I know there is suffering worse than that.  
 I am not afraid of the death of the body,  
 But this death is terrifying. The death of the spirit. (*Cocktail*  
 404.)

(2) REILLY. . . . I'd say that she [Celia] suffered all that we should  
 suffer  
 In fear and pain and loathing—all these together—  
 And reluctance of the body to become a *thing* (*Cocktail* 437;  
 emphasis original.)

(3) ALEX. . . . And then they found her [Celia's] body,  
 Or at least, they found the traces of it. (*Cocktail* 434.)

For the cocktail party crowd, the essence of the body appears to reside in its inescapable transience. To play up the coupling of the body with death, the generic living human body manages to elbow its way into the play only once, and even then it apparently demands a toll of spiritual shrivelling and mummification in return:

(4) UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. . . . All there is of you is your body  
 And the 'you' is withdrawn. (*Cocktail* 363.)

In view of the paucity of these occurrences, any inferences based on their content must of course be drawn with caution. The lack of such reference in itself together with the considerable thematic congruity of the passages nevertheless indicates possible perspectives on corporeality in the play. In these passages, then, the body is mainly portrayed as the site for suffering and pain. In the process, corporeal existence is constantly cornered to the borders of death so that the very definition of the body becomes infested with connotations of the *body-as-corpse*. It seems to be no coincidence, then, that both Celia and Reilly, the two visionaries of the play (see Phelan 1990:207), should have vivid apparitions exclusively of the dead body. Recalling his first meeting with Celia in the first scene, Reilly assigns a dead shadow body or macabre double to her: "I saw the image, standing behind her chair,/ Of a Celia Coplestone whose face showed the astonishment/ Of the first minutes after a violent death." (*Cocktail* 437.) A similar post-mortal effect spreads into Celia's gaze, when she *metaphorically* skins Edward and testifies to seeing a "withered . . . mummy" instead of his face (*Cocktail* 382). In a sense, then, although it is buried and distanced from metropolitan modernity into a primordial and antiquated world, corp(s)oreality vividly reasserts itself in the cocktail consciousness.

The consistent body-bashing in these images can, without doubt, be read as the extreme reflection of a predominantly negative or belittling attitude towards the corporeal in general: the body in itself does not suffice to form a complete 'you'. In an apparently dichotomous comparison to the spirit, the body is ranked hierarchically low in (1) and (4), and it is consequently either ignored or negated. This denial peaks in (1), where the battered body is surpassed and brushed away as an insignificant aside in the only field where it still persists, namely in the mainly negative and self-abolishing realm of physical torment and death: "there is suffering worse than [physical pain]". In this way, the body is decisively disarmed and trivialised by refusing it access even to negative superiority. To play up the conceived irrelevance of physicality, the body in pain is posited in the perfect verb tense (*have experienced*) and consequently contrasted with the immediacy associated with the here and now of spiritual suffering. In addition, the prospect of physical death appears sweepingly indefinite to Edward and has no apparent import for his present situation, whereas, by contrast, spiritual death is marked as acutely present, to the point of being materialised in both space and time: "*this death is terrifying*" (empha-

sis added). A more morbid distinction between different deaths occurs, when Reilly terms Celia's death "a happy death": "That way, which she accepted, led to *this* [happy] death" (*Cocktail* 437; emphasis added).

Initially, then, as suggested by this systematic devaluation, distancing, and even elimination of the corporeal, the body is of no apparent avail to the partygoers. However, the very violence through which it is rejected challenges such claims and may even be seen to re-inject the urgency of corporeal (t)issues into the play. This is perhaps best exemplified through dissecting the ambivalent distinction made in (4) between the written forms *you* and 'you'. At first, the body seems categorically cut off and discarded from the 'you', which reads as a substitute form for the a-corporeal reference to "person" in a preceding parallel line: "You're suddenly *reduced* to the status of an object—/ *A living object*, but no longer a *person*" (*Cocktail* 362; emphasis added). Becoming *a (living) object/body* in these passages is clearly conceived as a "reduc[tion]" of the *you*. This belittling effect appears much toned down if compared to the draft version of the play, where the contempt is spelt out through the recurrent use of *merely*:

Suddenly to find oneself merely an object  
Is never pleasant. . . .  
You are merely your body, merely an object,  
And *you* have been withdrawn. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:  
191; emphasis original.)

The emphatically repeated evaluative reduction becomes almost counterproductive in a party-world, where the body will not stay a *mere* vessel or passive object into which the meaningful categories of the soul and the emotions are poured. In these passages, identification with being "(merely) your body" is shown as the source for ambiguity, and it designates a split in terms of personhood. This is increasingly stressed a few lines down, where the independence of this object quality is emphasised strategically through enjambment: "one is an object/ As well as a person" (*Cocktail* 362). This slashes open a reading of the *you* as either a "(living) object" (i.e. body) or "an object/ As well as a person". The ambiguity of the body is brought to the extreme, as the homonymous *you/'you'* is simultaneously both segregated from and inconceivable without the body, while it can, at times, even be equated with it. Significantly enough, then, the body is ensnared in the *you/'you'* distinction in (4) and actually be-

comes the essential ingredient in this uneasy split. Instead of disarming the corporeal, *The Cocktail Party* thus forces its characters to face their own physicality.

In a sense, all these passages can be seen to arise from some form of communication breakdown, which leaves a numbing sense of estrangement between the body and its communal surroundings. This break appears in terms of the body and the world as well as internally, and it is manifested in conjunction with undertones of violence or pain. Consequently, what still appears as a fairly unified and undivided lump identified as *body* in examples (1) and particularly in (4), is described in a state of radical, albeit grudging metamorphosis in (2), and ripped to shreds and scattered to the point of vanishing in (3). At the same time, the attempts to define the body in a dichotomous relation to the mind/spirit erode, as the borders of the body become increasingly diffuse. Accordingly, the separation between the body and the world becomes far from straightforward, as there are no clean breaks between them. Due to this indivisibility, the body provides a challenge to dualistic designs. This suggests that the fundamental import of the body as an entity resides in an existential position that might be termed *in between*, as a link or border zone between two apparent extremes. This duplicity closely resembles the basic premise of Merleau-Pontian corporeal phenomenology that “[t]he experience of our own body . . . reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing” and that it “runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:230,231).

Paradoxically, the most persistent revelation about this attempted bodily banishment remains, after all, the fact that it fails. It may indeed be argued that the violence aimed at the body, rather than simply reviling the corporeal, actually testifies to a basic unease about relating to and being in the body. The urge to downgrade corporeal experience in these images also suggests a need to (re)assert a position of power over the body, and, through it, over other bodies. Discussing textual and real-life anorexia, Anderson (1988:36) indeed testifies to this “powerful sensation of controlling nature by eliminating it”. In their apparent tendency to ostracise the corporeal, the passages thus endeavour to delimit and isolate the body by slicing it apart from the rest of the world and positing it in a subordinated relation to immaterial concepts of identity and existence. This approximates Anderson’s (1988:36) description of the tendency

of anorectics to “experience themselves and their bodies as separate entities” through “constitution of the body as a controllable other”. However, despite repeated attempts to explain it away, the body proves impossible to eradicate completely. Diffuse and changing by nature, it perpetually escapes conclusive definition and hence also de(con)struction. In fact, (corpo)reality turns out to be increasingly evasive and difficult to fathom as the play proceeds, and it finally dissolves into Celia’s absent but still omnipresent body. Accordingly, even at the extreme when this fleeting body is nailed down to be literally crucified, it still manages to flee. Echoing the fate of Celia, “the traces of it” seem to be the closest that any of the other partygoers ever get to the body. The cocktail-body thus becomes increasingly evasive and unstable as the play proceeds. In its refusal to coagulate into a distinct unit, the (corpo)real repeatedly appears to disintegrate or escape the interpretative action. Matching the *porous* or evaporating borders of Irigaray’s (1984 and 1985a; see p.27) fluid or evaporating (feminine) corporeality, the cocktail-body thus liquefies at the borders and becomes impossible to measure.

In the verbal word-world, the characters react strongly to the (corpo)real aspects of language. Even Edward’s self-proclaimed indifference to the death of the body becomes somewhat suspect, judging from the way he reproaches Reilly’s use of the phrase *bring someone back from the dead* in relation to the physically absent Lavinia: “That figure of speech is somewhat...dramatic./ As it was only yesterday that my wife left me.” (*Cocktail* 384.) Edward’s explanatory reference to “only yesterday” suggests that his shock does not perhaps ultimately spring from the thought of his wife being dead but from a need to keep the notion of death itself at a temporal remove from his present situation. In addition, by classifying Reilly’s phrase as a “figure of speech”, Edward immediately relegates the idea of death as well as the abnormality involved in a physical return from death to the realm of metaphorical language use or stylistic adornment, thereby altogether refusing to face it as a feasible, *me(a)taphorical* fact. Edward’s unease with death and the uncontrollable nature of corporeality is revealed even more clearly at the end of the play, when he “resent[s the waste]” of Celia’s death.

To complicate the classification of the departed party-body even further, the body actively defies the object category. Even if initially merged with the “(living) object”, by the end of the play, in example (2), the body is infested



with a “reluctance of the body to become a *thing*”. The body itself is invested here with an unyielding will, verging on the anthropomorphic in its instinctive but also emotional opposition to its own death and functional passivisation. Far from surrendering in the face of the escalating violence aimed at it, the body in fact reasserts itself in the last act:

REILLY. Do you imagine that the Saint in the desert  
 With spiritual evil always at his shoulder  
 Suffered any less from hunger, damp, exposure,  
 Bowel trouble, and fear of lions,  
 Cold of the night and heat of the day, than we should? (*Cocktail*  
 438.)

This sermonising re-evaluation of corporeal suffering in Eliot’s dramatic work reads as a sadomasochistically angled and explicit extension of the idea expressed in, for instance, *The Rock* (1935): “You must not deny the body.” (*Complete* 165.) There appears to be a need for this reassertion in a community where people meet the body as an essentially strange and incomprehensible element instead of identifying with it.

To play up the power of the bodily bond to disseminate through all levels of society, “the Saint in the desert” and the deserted husband in the above examples unite in their “reluctance” to be “reduced” to physical objects. Despite its isolation, the body of the Saint is portrayed under fierce attack from outside forces beyond its control. In general, however, the heightened awareness of physicality occurs precisely when the body enters a community, where it is put in contact with and manipulated by other bodies in the role of an object. In the party-world, chastising and regulating the body become ways to repossess it in confrontation with the world itself. This seems to reflect the anorexic need to (de)posit the body as a “controllable other”, a tendency recognised by Anderson (1988:36) as one of the main structural urges in modernist literature. However, as shown in the above discussion (p.47-48), the party-body refuses to be sealed off and reasserts itself as chaotic. The passages are permeated by the notion that the body and its borders are to some degree subject to controversy and unstable by nature.

The cocktail party characters are seen in a constant but ultimately futile search for the borders of the body. Conditioned by the different objects against which it is measured, the semantic skin of the body is constantly shed and renewed, or set in perpetual motion. In reverse, this changing definition of

(corpo)reality suggests a different order to the surrounding reality, as well. For instance, the conclusiveness of death as a unique event becomes challenged, as the very idea of death is clad in the possibility of plurality: “*this* death is terrifying” (emphasis added). Thus, Edward’s statement that he is “not afraid of the death of the body” actually disintegrates to contain the possibility of different, and thereby partial or even incessant, multiple deaths apparently out of tune with each other. Morbidly enough, the body in (2) and (3) appears to be so imbued with dynamic fluctuation that it resists inertia and actually manages to resurrect itself even when killed. Instead of succumbing to death, the definition of the (living) body embraces it, with shifting semantic tinges. This inclusion goes against the grain of dichotomous absolutes, as it inserts, through the medium of the body, an awareness of death into every instance of life: “we die to each other daily” (*Cocktail* 384). In this way, time itself inexorably loses its cohesive linearity. Similarly, death loses its singular meaning to include the “dying to someone” (see Smith 1963:218; emphasis original). Dying becomes a selective experience aimed at the world instead of escaping from it. In the process, the absolute negativity of the association of the body with death is mitigated. To stress the unity of the social body, death is interspersed and divided within the play and between the characters individual death. Even the dominant role given to death and dying may, in this sense, reveal a deep ambiguity in the way in which the body is construed.

A close reading of cocktail-party carnality then comes to contradict predominantly a-corporeal readings of the plays such as Smith’s (1974:220) claim that the resolution reached in *The Cocktail Party* “is not limited to psychological adjustment” but creates a “spiritual discipline” as well. This appears to ignore the perpetual and uneasy adjustment to physicality attempted by the cocktail party characters. Introduced as an alien force into the cocktail-party community, the body (re)inserts alterity within the self. Significantly enough, Reilly presents this “reduce[tion]” to a “body” or a “living object” as “always happening . . . But we forget about it/ As quickly as we can” (*Cocktail* 362). In its troubled but increasingly conscious attitude vis-à-vis the body, *The Cocktail Party*—assisted by ‘(corpo)really-Reilly’—can be seen to work against this constant amnesia.

### The Missing Body/Corpse

EDWARD. . . . But that is not all.  
 Since I saw her this morning when we had breakfast  
 I no longer remember what my wife is like.  
 I am not quite sure that I could describe her  
 If I had to ask the police to search for her.  
 I'm sure I don't know what she was wearing.  
 When I saw her last. And yet I want her back.  
 And I *must* get her back, to find out what has happened  
 During the five years that we've been married. (*Cocktail* 363-  
 364; emphasis original.)

Paradoxically enough, while the human body itself is meticulously absent(ed) from the cocktail party small talk, the main social exchanges within the cocktail-clique come to swarm around this very absence. As if intent on actually (re)locating the missing (corpo)reality, the non-appearance of the body can be seen to materialise verbally in the form of Lavinia's imagined aunt in the country, but it is also more covertly dispersed into the word choices. Characteristically, as the very definition of the body becomes dyed with death, the social interaction associated with the living body is impregnated with mortality, too. This supports the idea that the body is actually also the flesh of the conversation in the cocktail party universe and intimately involved in the constitution of its (corpo)reality.

A shortcut to death and the tortured body is brought to the cocktail-party community through a sustained lexical flirtation with the language of murder mysteries. Eliot's fascination with detective stories and the popular press has been recounted by numerous critics (Smidt 1961:154, Ackroyd 1984:143, Jayne 1985:104-105, Worth 1985:127, Grove 1994:166). Howarth (1965:312), for instance, notes Eliot's interest in crime fiction, but he also holds that *The Cocktail Party* echoes popular accounts of divorce rather than murder mysteries. However, the play constitutes a marked farewell to the whodunit as both a literary and a film genre, as it plays extensively with words such as *mystery* and *murder* (*Cocktail* 362,365,389,390). Julia, in particular, revels in assuming the role of an inquisitive Miss Marple, as she relates to the cocktail-party events in "thrilled" terms of "plotting" and "delightfully mysterious" "adventure[s]"; she even suggests that Lavinia was "abducted" and pries for the details (*Cocktail* 359,365,390). Despite Edward's protests, Julia surrounds his work as a lawyer with the same aura of adventure and asks about "the secrets

of your cases” (*Cocktail* 358). In effect, Edward and Lavinia are also infected by the vocabulary of homicide and kidnapping in their speech: Lavinia confesses to having been “warned of the danger” in returning to her husband, who has, in turn, contemplated contacting the police (*Cocktail* 394). In this way, the sense of mystery and suspense secretly seeps through and vivifies even the most conventional patterns of everyday action in the play. For example, when noticing the smell of burnt food from the kitchen, Celia explains that she “must go and investigate” (*Cocktail* 375).

The vocabulary of crime fiction indeed penetrates all levels of *The Cocktail Party*, as suggested by Porter’s (1970:61) account of the “profane and ritualistic” repercussions merging in the cocktail-party uses of the term *mysterious* (see also Gordon 1998:481). This sense of double-entendre is even more conspicuous in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and it is corroborated by Browne’s (1969:55-56) observation that Eliot, a “Sherlock Holmes devotee”, “always wanted the ritual aspect of the play to be balanced by the homicidal”. This ambivalent mode has been interpreted as “criticism of our modern attitude to murder: that it is no more than an entertainment, with none of the spiritual significance” and a loss of regard for “the value of human life” (Peter 1962:158, Foster 1997). However, the murderous streak in Eliot’s oeuvre can be seen to bear broader implications relating, for instance, to aspects of gender and to a destabilisation of the existential borders between life and death. For instance, it should be noted that all the attempts at a collective reference to the *body* as a unit are made by male characters, whereas the object of their discussion is invariably female, namely the missing body of Celia. In *The Cocktail Party*, the archetypal body is not only female but a dead (and literally decomposing) female. Accordingly, one of the rare instances where the draft version of the play was actually fleshed out with additional “physical detail” involves the mutilation of an already dead woman (Browne 1969:226). In this passage—eventually excised again due to audience outrage—the interest of the cocktail party male gaze appears almost necrophiliac and flagrantly unfeeling:

EDWARD     But before that...  
 ALEX             It is difficult to say,  
                   At such a stage of decomposition:  
                   Bodies disintegrate quickly in that climate.  
                   . . . They smear the victims

With a juice that is attractive to the ants. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:225.)

In its addiction to such “juic [y]” stories, the cocktail party language itself feeds on the murderous pattern. In the last scene, the intensifying verbal violence and the hunger for blood culminate in a sacrificial feast, where Celia becomes consumed and exploited as a narrative by the cocktail-community.

Frequently, there are distinct sexual overtones to the mass of real or imagined accounts of femicide trickling through Eliot’s oeuvre (see Lamos 1998:115). An immediate precedent can be found in Harry’s hazy recollection, in *The Family Reunion*, of having pushed his wife overboard and drowned her (*Complete* 294). In its corporeal detail, however, the cocktail violence reverberates the world of *Sweeney Agonistes*:

SWEENEY: I knew a man once did a girl in  
 Any man has to, needs to, wants to  
 Once in a lifetime, do a girl in  
 Well he kept her in a bath  
 With a gallon of lysol in a bath (*Complete* 124.)

The intrusion of the *dis*-figured and *de*-composing body can be seen as a reflection of the modern urban landscape, where the urban flat is effectively *dis*-infected of the body, and where sickness and especially death are shunned as something unsanitary. Popularised tales of murder become a means to (re)introduce the (corpo)real into the cocktail party society and to consume it in a seemingly safe and controlled form. This can indeed be seen to reflect what Anderson (1988:37), in his diagnosis of modernist anorexia, discusses as the “fetishization of both [body and text]”. According to Anderson (1988:32), “the essential self becomes a written body, an opaque ‘cipher code’ in which body and literature are joined”. In this way, the cocktail-party institution and the modern urban lifestyle can be seen to suffer from a collective form of anorexia, where the flesh is hidden from view and butchered only to pop up again and exhibit its extreme linguistic remains. In the party-world, the body re-enters verbally and enacts a metamorphosis of the cocktail party itself to a *me(a)taphorical* crime scene, where the characters do undercover police work to find out what is amiss and missing; however, in addition to the crime, the cocktail characters have to reconstruct the body itself.

Although Celia is spatially removed from the urban scene, her death nonetheless seems to suit the corporeal logic of the cocktail party community. In fact, her death becomes re-inscribed into the social system of the party-scene, when Peter asks for Celia in his wish to take her to Hollywood:

ALEX. . . . I'm afraid you can't have Celia.  
 PETER. Oh... Is she married?  
 ALEX. Not married, but dead.  
 LAVINIA. Celia?  
 ALEX. Dead.  
 PETER. Dead. That knocks the bottom out of it.  
 EDWARD. Celia dead. (*Cocktail* 433.)

To the cocktail-party consciousness, only two viable excuses for Peter's "not having" Celia seem to present themselves: marriage or death. Malamud (1994:118-119) comments on the "hyberbolically underplayed" tension of this passage and even sees it as a precursor to "the late modernist (or perhaps post-modernist) avant-garde theatrical sensibility" of Harold Pinter and *Monty Python*: "the inappropriate social disjunction handled with quintessentially English aplomb yet still, beneath the surface, remaining awkwardly unsettled". This is the moment in the play where the cocktail party language is stripped to its (en)trails. As Peter formulates it in his initial shock, the neat "bottom" canvas of consigned meanings is literally "knock[ed]" away to leave Celia with an array of choices reminiscent of the condensed lifecycle on Sweeney's "cannibal isle": "Birth, and copulation, and death./ That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all" (*Complete* 121,122.) Through this asphyxiation of detail, "body and literature are joined" in Anderson's (1988:32) sense. Language turns into ritual drumbeats, and the empty "knock" becomes suggestive of an auditory or even onomatopoeic representation of the content; this reading is amplified by the serial "KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK" and other seemingly inarticulate noises appearing as the driving force of *Sweeney Agonistes* (*Complete* 118,126). Discussing this earlier play, Grove (1994:172) indeed indicates that "names, echoes and non-vocal noise are actors, quite as much as anyone in make-up and costume could be". Significantly enough, the minimalist reduction of the conversation to a rudimentary repetition of the word "Celia" along with the one syllable of "dead", finally combined into one concept in Edward's mouth, causes the language to undress and *become* flesh; the language thereby loses its polished and polite cocktail-party sequence and sentence structure.

In *The Cocktail Party*, the traces of direct violence between lovers or spouses appear much subdued if compared to some of Eliot's earlier work. On occasion, however, married life itself is described in terms of *me(a)taphorical murder* and *strangulation*:

REILLY. . . . When you [Edward] see your wife, you must ask no questions  
And give no explanations. I have said the same to her.  
Don't strangle *each other* with knotted memories. (*Cocktail* 385; emphasis added.)

JULIA. . . . Oh, of course, they might just murder *each other*!  
But I don't think they will do that. We shall see. (*Cocktail* 421; emphasis added.)

In comparison to other sightings of murder and sexual violence in Eliot, it is worth noting that the *me(a)taphorical* killing in *The Cocktail Party* is expressly mutual, as indicated by the reciprocal *each other* in the above examples. Again, this loss of (patriarchal) directionality can be traced back to the world of *Sweeney Agonistes*:

SWEENEY: . . . He didn't know if he was alive  
and the girl was dead  
He didn't know if the girl was alive  
and he was dead  
He didn't know if they were both alive  
or both were dead  
. . . Death or life or life or death  
Death is life and life is death (*Complete* 125.)

As the cocktail party (re)builds the party-body that is has deported, the violence of this word-world also turns out to be a construct. In accordance with the constant theme of mut(il)ation, the muted body thus re-enters on the cocktail-party scene through the covert word-flesh of extremely violent physical *me(a)taphors* and semantic fields (*murder, strangle, abduct*). In the draft version of the play, Peter builds a playful *mise en abyme* of personal traits by allotting imaginary parts for the characters in what he terms a "full dress country house murder" (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:222). Through these murderous metaphors, mental states thus become physical and approximate the semantic field formerly occupied by the physical body. In this way, Badenhansen's (in press) notion that the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* "speaks the body" through "insisting on maintaining a bodily language even when

characterizing the spirit” applies to *The Cocktail Party*, as well. However, the definition of the body blurs, when Reilly comments on Celia and her equals: “Some of them return, in a physical sense/ *No one disappears*. They lead very active lives/ Very often, in the world.” (*Cocktail* 419; emphasis added). This takes the bounds of (corpo)reality beyond the material, as it suggests “active” participation in the life-world even outside physicality. In addition, the idea that “[n]o one disappears” brings a resolution to the awkward feeling expressed in the previous play about Harry’s wife as “permanently *missing*” (*Complete* 289; emphasis original).

Placed in an intermediary category between life and death, murder recreates the body as a transgressive border activity *between* presence and absence. In addition, the killing loses its singularity and conclusive nature, as murder becomes a form of serial entertainment in a party-world that exists by telling and retelling itself and reproducing the endless jungle-logic of eating and being eaten. Through this violence, culminating in the verbal account of the actual killing of Celia Coplestone, *The Cocktail Party* produces a society where the body resists arrest or even interrogation. In the phobic atmosphere of the city, the flesh is silent and incomprehensible or even pre-linguistic even to the ‘owner’ of the body. However, when there is no body, the characters are still held together by the common search for its *secret(ion)s*. The body in its entirety behaves here in the manner of the “phantom limb”, which Merleau-Ponty (1962:87-90) takes as one of the basic premises for broadening the concept of corporeality beyond the material: after amputating (corpo)reality from its midst, the partygoers keep acting *as if* the body was there. Language itself thus becomes enmeshed in embodying absences; this culminates when Celia’s death and the elusive “traces” of her body are reconstructed verbally for a London audience.

It should be noted that the secretive cocktail-aura bears broad-ranging effects on the conversational plane. Caught in a maze of murderous *me(a)taphors*, the characters are expected to behave as accomplices in a police investigation. Both Peter and, later, Reilly, ask Edward not to tell Lavinia about having seen them, and Reilly advises the Chamberlaynes not to discuss their previous whereabouts and “not to ask any questions” (*Cocktail* 364,386). Lavinia’s silence has often been regarded as a forced and inadequately motivated reflection of the silence enforced on Alcestis when she returns from the dead in



Euripides' play (Phelan 1990:115). The silence sounds different, however, when it is tapped through the conventions of the detective-story routine: when translated through the pronounced right of the accused to remain silent, the silence materialises into pregnant word-flesh. In effect, in an explosive cocktail-party word-world where everyone is under constant surveillance and expected to behave in certain ways and, most notably, expected to talk, it is a relief to stay unaccounted for and silent.

Thus, even if the body is removed from view or self-consciously hidden, it still manages to (re)appear. In effect, this (re)construction of the body turns out to be the only way to make the party-body truly visible. It should indeed be noted that the characters fail to see the body when it is actually there, and Edward is unable to "describe what [his] wife looks like" (*Cocktail* 363-364; see p.50). Only after her absence and the subsequent *me(a)taphorical* "return from the dead" does Lavinia apparently become visible to her husband, and the couple comment on each other's physical comfort and discuss Lavinia's appearance (*Cocktail* 424-425,426,440). Nevertheless, even in the last scene, this attention remains a consciously artificial array of compliments, as Lavinia and Edward openly discuss the best timing and manner to flatter a woman on her looks. In a way, the characters remain blind to each other and memorise the right words in order to stay in contact with the world.

To play up the connection between the body and death, the party-body is thus reconstructed as a murdered and presumably immobile body. Ironically enough, however, even the body nailed down through crucifixion refuses to stay still but disintegrates: it is never found. In the cocktail-world, (corpo)-reality cannot be held still, and it evades the inquisitive gaze. To stress the sense of estrangement and distance, the body in the modern machine age seems to spring from another, antiquated world, perhaps most clearly represented by the "mumm[ified]" sense of antiquity evoked by Celia in the first act (*Cocktail* 382; see p.43). In this way, it is brought close but at the same time set aside. Merleau-Ponty (1962:229) indeed stresses this "enigmatic nature of our own body". It is as if the body can never be known: "The world and reason are not problematical. We may say, if we wish, that they are mysterious, but the mystery defines them: there can be no question of dispelling it by some 'solution', it is on the hither side of all solutions." (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii.) The cocktail-characters repeatedly reach the same verdict, as they doubt that there 'is

any solution” ether to marital or geopolitical conflicts (*Cocktail* 428,355; emphasis original).

### **The Party-Body in Parts**

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. . . . Then sometimes, when you come to  
the bottom step  
There is one step more than your feet expected  
And you come down with a jolt. (*Cocktail* 362.)

Beside the negated and ejected corp(s)oreality, there is a brief parallel discussion of a more fragmented living body in the cocktail party environment. This party-body is sighted only in parts, as a complete view proves impossible. The division appears to arise from the paradox that the body is visible to others but invisible to itself, simultaneously seeing and being seen. This unendingly othered body creates an uncontrollable alter ego. It is unshakeable and follows the characters around; at the same time, it cannot be grasped in full, but wilfully exists in “the corner of the eye” (cf. Eliot 1951a:34; see p.9). Significantly, then, the body in itself constitutes a border not only against the world but also against itself. In this way, the fragmentation of the body is also an indication of the internalised sense of alterity.

The dissolving semantic borders of the body are reflected in the way that bodily party-parts remain dispersed in the text. Thus, as the cocktail party is itself a patchwork of teasing “tit-bit[s]” of food and gossip, the ban on the body appears to burst at the seams to reveal a limited cocktail mixture of corporeal “traces” and individual body parts (*Cocktail* 355,434). At the same time, these shreds of the (corpo)real demonstrate the failure of the forced deportation and extinction of the body from the text. On occasion, the deported body resurfaces at the party as separate organs, extending from head to toe, namely “when you’re are not concerned with yourself/ But just being an *eye*” or when “there is one step more than your *feet* expected” (*Cocktail* 362,436; emphasis added). Discussing the symbolism of the so-called Sweeney poems, Hargrove (1985:151) records as “one of Eliot’s favorite devices . . . the use of bodily parts (rather than the whole) to suggest not only the physicality but also the fragmentation and dehumanization of modern man”. To play up the idea of body-parts gone literally missing, Eliot originally intended to include an authentic cocktail-party story about a Lady losing her false teeth (Browne

1969:173). It should be noted, however, that the effects of corporeal fragmentation in *The Cocktail Party* appear multifarious and ambiguous, as the body, at various times, both propagates and actively opposes this “physicality” and “dehumanization”.

Significantly enough, the fragmentation is used to meet different—to some extent even diametrically opposed—objectives in the two above images. Basically, the indefinite and dynamic (low) feet clash with the singular and frozen oneness of the (high) eye. Thus, when the *I* is transmuted into a single *eye*, it disentangles from sentiment into the coldly trimmed air of detachment and objectivity. In view of their appointed *expectation*, the *feet*, by contrast, are invested with anthropomorphic emotions and an active will of their own. The *feet*, in their dynamic movements, appear volatile, whereas the *eye* is inflexible and unmoved by others, even mechanical. In a way, then, since the chaotic (corpo)reality no longer offers an easy opposite to the mind or metaphysical soul, the body is compartmentalised to allow for this separation. Thus, the haughty *I-eye* raises itself high above society, whereas the hesitant *we-feet* humbly stumble down to join a communal cocktail party.

Arrowsmith (1977:45) has provided a presentation of Eliot’s use of the pun “Eye-I” throughout his career, including the cocktail-passage about Peter “just being an eye” (see also Donoghue 1962:176, Porter 1970:71, Arrowsmith 1981:30,51). In addition, Julia and Reilly may indeed be listed among what Arrowsmith terms ‘Eliot’s whole gallery of one-eyed men [sic]’. Summing up these “clinical” *eyes* as a row in Eliot’s struggle towards “impersonality”, Arrowsmith mainly retains the dualist vision, but he also recognises a “clear conflation of the ego-withdrawn spiritual vision and the one-eyed phallic vision of Sweeney-Riley”. The conglomeration of *I* with the homophonous *eye* indeed brings to light, on the one hand, the indissoluble corporeality of personhood. On the other hand, the pun emphasises *eyesight* and the physiological senses as the defining elements of the self in its contact with the world. To emphasise the fragmentation of corporeality and the singularity of the *eye-I*, Julia’s spectacles with “[s]ome kind of a plastic sort of frame” only have one lens, whereas Reilly sings a song about “One Eyed Riley” (*Cocktail* 365).

Thus, the *eye* does not stand metonymically apart for the body but rather invades the entire existence of the character. In consequence, the individual is identified with this single *eye* and *eyesight*. In this way, the *stichomythia* in *The*

*Cocktail Party* becomes meaningful in itself, and can not be reduced to mere stylistic variation in terms of *pars pro toto*. In effect, the dissection serves as an indicator of isolation and distancing: the *eye* is apparently not an active participant in the scene it piercingly perceives, whereas the *I* would be emotionally involved if present in his or her entire (corpo)real being. The *feet*, in turn, emphasise the impact of a collision with the material (and social) world and the way that this disruptive resounds in every party-body part independently. The body and its moving parts are portrayed here as leading a life of their own, which condenses their power to feel and thereby electrifies the body in its totality.

It should be noted that the split body also serves to loosen and variously transform the outward dimensions of the body. In Eliot's play, the female characters, in particular, appear to play around freely with the idea of fragmented (corpo)reality, as they alter the scale of the body and its individual parts. Accordingly, it is Julia who presents the notion of Peter as "just being an eye", while Celia, similarly, presents a fragmented view of Edward as "a beetle the size of man". The world, in turn, grows or shrinks as determined by the changing dimensions of this Merleau-Pontian *mesurant* body (Merleau-Ponty 1968; see p.23-24). This prepares the ground for a sense of (corpo)real flexibility, where the body can be composed of a single eye or of an entire community.

### **The Non-Human Body**

You no longer feel quite human. (*Cocktail* 362.)

The lack of overt reference to the human body in *The Cocktail Party* becomes particularly striking as physical similes abound in the cocktail-stories as a whole. However, the verbal wealth serves similar ends as the physical dearth, since it endows the characters with an additional method to slough off the corporeal by categorising it as either sub- or superhuman. Significantly, then, the body becomes detached from humanity itself, when the idea of being "reduced" (p.45) to a body is associated, in the above line, with a sudden renunciation of humanity. In effect, the body itself is a marker of excess in an ascetic party-world dependent on normative modesty and constraint. Accordingly, exclusion from the elitist cocktail-community is achieved through assigning corporeal attributes to the people who are barred from it. At the same time, the

corporeal is again revealed as one of the basic building blocks in the construction of alterity and the *other* in the play.

A prominent way in which the idea of the body as essentially *other* invades the cocktail party becomes apparent in the way that (corpo)reality is constantly conglomerated with non-humanity. The effect aimed at through dehumanising imagery is, in general, a marked distancing of a character perceived to be a threat or a stranger. It is worth noting that, in general, *The Cocktail Party* testifies to a remarkable reciprocity between the sexes in the use of dehumanising denunciations. For instance, Edward's portrayal of his wife's strength as "sub-human" is matched by her remark about Edward's apparent lack of feeling: "if you were human,/ You would burst out laughing" (*Cocktail* 398,403). Identification with non-human existence becomes a marker of distance between the sexes, cutting both ways. At the same time, the intrusion of non-humanity into the (corpo)real field defies absolute scientific and semantic categorisation, as "feel[ing] . . . human" is receives the diffuse modifier *quite*.

A significant way to fragment and disperse surplus (corpo)reality thus appears through ousting it in verbal shreds onto other bodies and non-human surrogates. As a part of their own search for identity, then, the cocktail party characters keep defining and redefining each other and themselves verbally. This is achieved by means of a relatively limited vocabulary as to themes or connotations. In particular, there is a strong undercurrent in the play describing and addressing other characters with attributes suggesting non-human qualities. These characterisations will be divided in the following three chapters into three tentative categories. The first and by far the widest group of images consists of references to Nature and, in particular, to the animal world. The second strand draws its similes from the objectification of the physical body into an artefact or a machine. Finally, there are expressions drawn from the supernatural or mythological realm, with half-jocular references to "devils" in particularly frequent use (*Cocktail* 377,378,392,406). These categories partially overlap and may be seen to impinge on each other's territory, so that the last group becomes diminished as it is eaten away by the mechanical metaphors belonging to the second. In fact, Edward comes to illustrate all three categories, as he bombards his wife with the denominations "octopus", "stronger than...a battleship", and "angel of destruction", respectively (*Cocktail* 398,406).

## The Body as Beast

### The Untamed Urban Jungle

ALEX.            You've missed the point completely, Julia:  
                         There *were* no tigers. *That* was the point.

JULIA.           Then what were you doing, up in a tree:  
                         You and the Maharaja? (*Cocktail* 353; emphasis original.)

In view of its restrained urban setting, *The Cocktail Party* is ensnared with a veritable zoo of violent wildlife lurking in its conversational corners. The tone for this infiltration is set in the very first exchanges, which circle metatextually around a comic adventure-story set in the distant jungle, where the storyteller and his friend take shelter from (non-existent) tigers. Thormählen (1984:48), for instance, dismisses “the joke” by declaring that “it is not taken any further”. However, viewed against the narrative universe of the play, this shred of a story actually becomes the first in a series of gradually intensifying images portraying predatory life in the jungle. The reality of the threat notwithstanding, the (thought of) predators still causes the characters to react both in Alex’ story and in the cocktail-conversation, where the (nonexistent) tigers trigger a comment from Julia. In addition, the tigers indeed reappear as a repeated absence no less than two years later, in the last act. In addition, the feline is felt in the extremely physical “fear of lions” (*Cocktail* 438; see p.48). The absent tigers thus become far more decisive for setting the tone of the entire play than apparent from Browne’s (1969:189) assertion that these initial lines were a rather late addition to the script prompted by the director for purely practical reasons. While undoubtedly revealing “the vapidness of the partygoers”, as Thormählen (1984:48) suggests, the passage has broader implications for the cocktail-circle. The importance of this tropical theme in the midst of a London social elite is increased by locating it within the larger thematic duel between the primitive and the urban running through Eliot’s work; the constant contrasting and mirroring of these aspects have been discussed extensively by Crawford (1987), albeit with a strong penchant towards Eliot’s poems and early works. Without doubt, the blending of the beast and the city reiterates a broader historical reaction among Eliot’s contemporaries to the uncontrollably mushrooming modern city: “The city was the storm-centre of civilization; it was the jungle awaiting the ministrations of the missionary; it was the place of cultural confusion and cultural hope” (Bradbury 1971:49-50).

The direct conglomerations of the human and the animal body are not, on the whole, strikingly abundant or explicit in *The Cocktail Party* if compared, for instance, to the glaring “gesture of orang-outang” and epithets such as “apeneck” in the so-called Sweeney poems, or to some of the chorus sections of *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) (*Complete* 42-43,56-57,269-271; see p.18). In the latter, the female chorus reciprocally devours and is itself eaten away by a parasitic animal world, and fears of the future are “woven like a pattern of living worms/ In the guts of the women in Canterbury” (*Complete* 270). However, the effect of the animal imagery in *The Cocktail Party* is amplified by the coherent and repetitive use of an essentially limited range of images throughout the text-(t)issue. By means of this condensation, the central animal imagery stretches its natural habitat throughout the play along with its attendant ecological and climatologically equatorial environment, thereby attaining a remarkable constancy in terms of thematic hue.

The image of Nature is distinctively wild and untamed in *The Cocktail Party*. Transposed into the far-away jungle, the natural realm is also radically foreign to the characters and removed from their immediate experience. This creates a marked contrast to the main vein in Eliot’s other modern-dress plays, where images of the rural or urban garden appear as the dominant natural realm. Unger (1961:36-37), for instance, considers the garden to be so central in *The Family Reunion* as well as in *The Confidential Clerk* that the plays cannot be fully understood without placing these images alongside “the spiritual and religious intimations” hidden in the Edenic garden imagery elsewhere in Eliot’s work (see also Smidt 1961:205,207-208,212-213, Williams 1968:190, Ward 1973:208, Thormählen 1978:142). Apparently, this emotional landscape is so pervasive in Eliot’s work that Thompson (1963:92,108) artificially inserts it into *The Cocktail Party*, as he describes Celia’s fading relationship to Edward in terms of her being “half outside the gate of the rose garden”. However, while the draft version of *The Cocktail Party* still contains some significant instances of the meditative, introspective garden imagery compatible with Unger’s description, these images are virtually weeded out in the finished play. In fact, even in the draft version, the typically Eliotic spiritual imagery recognisable from *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets* rapidly becomes diluted, as Lavinia takes Edward’s meditative musing literally to indicate a synthetic perfume worn by Celia:

EDWARD    Why was the other way  
 Impossible? There was another door  
 Ajar, and a beam of sunlight through it,  
 The warm spring breeze, the smell of lilacs...

LAVINIA    I'm afraid you are mistaken about the smell:  
 'Lilacs' is not the trade name for it. (Eliot as quoted by Browne  
 1969:207.)

It is worth noting that, despite the denominational reduction, the smell is essentially wild and unruly, spreading the presence of Celia into the room for the other woman to detect. In this respect, the cocktail party women appear to orientate in the urban atmosphere through sharp animal senses. However, Lavinia domesticates the fragrance by making it mechanically produced, and she provides it with a "trade name":

LAVINIA    Really, Edward? I have my sense of smell,  
 And there are a good many kinds of scent

Besides the one I use. This one is quite identifiable  
 And I could name it. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:209.)

During the revision of the draft version, the wild gradually overshadowed the few remaining glimpses of manufactured milieu in the play. This creates a sharp contrast to what Thormählen (1978:139-140) recognises as the dominant vein in Eliot's works: "Even when he uses nature imagery, it bears the stamp of human hands". In the finished play, the garden imagery can be said to survive only in a heavily uprooted form. Actual flowers do not appear until in the last scene, where they are cut off from the garden environment and arranged indoors as decorations in the Chamberlayne flat to please the cocktail-guests, as Lavinia "*looks about the room critically and moves a bowl of flowers*" (*Cocktail* 424). In a play where detailed stage directions are generally avoided, such remarks become the more significant. Notably then, this remnant is tamed and completely stripped of subversive elements. As the only place where the married couple may be "alone", the countryside briefly blossoms as the physical extension of inner peace and marital unison (*Cocktail* 426). However, the image remains an isolated hint in the play, where the cultivated countryside is generally set off from modern urban society as "decayed" and costly old English country houses belonging to the past (*Cocktail* 414,431). This idea of romantic country life is fenced off from the party-world and limited, in temporal



terms, to the a-communal holiday season: from the cocktail party perspective, the countryside is simply “remote” enough to provide an “excuse for not seeing people” (*Cocktail* 426). The distance of the garden imagery from the cocktail party consciousness is further stressed, as the only image of “walking in the garden” turns up in an explicitly indirect form, when Reilly quotes Shelley’s ‘Prometheus Unbound’ (*Cocktail* 437).

Smidt (1961:237), for instance, marvels that Eliot’s “has little to say of the outward mechanisation of life and still less of the value of country life” and concludes that “these things do not seem to have interested Eliot very much”. However, this imposes a dichotomous relation between the country and the mechanised city, which is not necessarily reflected in Eliot. It should be noted that the cocktail party characters feel equally at a loss in the mechanical film world as in the countryside. My reading of the cocktail-countryside turns out to be almost diametrically opposed to Phelan’s (1990:55) conclusion that, in contrast to the overcrowded “sterility of city living”, “[t]he country, with its distance and its unknown spaciousness, is the source of health, growth and fertility” for the cocktail-community. In effect, the countryside appears to be infested with sickness and solitude, as indicated by Julia’s description: “It’s dreadful for old ladies alone in the country,/ And almost impossible to get a nurse” (*Cocktail* 357). Although Celia can be seen to alleviate this shortage of (spiritual and medical) nurses, she turns to the villages of faraway Kinkanja instead of returning to her roots in the English countryside. Ironically enough, even the eggs sent from Lavinia’s (real) aunt in the country end up “ruined” and consequently inedible (*Complete* 376).

Although the window into the *me(a)taphorical* garden is largely lacking in *The Cocktail Party* and the scene is set in a flatly metropolitan “London flat”, the play is persistently and even violently entangled with imagery involving the natural world (*Cocktail* 353). On the whole, Nature is perceived as uncongenial and even aggressive towards humans. It represents an unmapped frontier territory to be avoided, and the references to it amount to a process of consistent othering. In fact, in the only image in the finished play where a character relates emotionally to Nature, the wild comes to serve as a *me(a)taphor* for estrangement and bewilderment: Celia compares Edward to “a child who has wandered into a forest/ Playing with an imaginary playmate” (*Cocktail*

416). Characteristically, this unfamiliar and illusory forest eventually betrays the lovers, leaving “only a child/ Lost in the forest, wanting to go home”.

Throughout the play, the characters relate to the natural world with a sense of dread, and Nature accordingly figures in the cocktail-stories as the site for incessant violence, death, and decay. To stress the nebulous borders, this (corpo)reality spreads uncontrollably into the ecosystem and infects the cocktail-climate instead of remaining neatly caged. This aversion to the virulently violent and physical forest is so pervasive that the subject becomes literally unspeakable and out-of-place in terms of both ordinary cocktail party etiquette and the conventions of traditional drawing-room comedy. This can indeed be sensed in the dismayed reactions of audiences, when unfettered physical violence encroaches upon the party-world through the detailed description of Celia’s violent death in the jungle (*Cocktail* 437). In this way, the intrusion of physicality into the cocktail-party society—achieved through Celia’s body—may even be seen to destabilise and transcend the borders of the dramatic genre of drawing-room comedy that the play purportedly represents.

### **The Rat- and Bat-Body**

EDWARD. So here we are again. Back in the trap,  
 With only one difference, perhaps—we can fight each  
 other,  
 Instead of each taking his corner of the cage. (*Cocktail* 395.)

In accordance with its overall image of Nature, *The Cocktail Party* selection of animals is more reminiscent of a bestiary consisting of exotic predators and vermin derived from the tropics rather than belonging to the orderly, domesticated world of traditional pets associated with polite urban society. Thus, in sharp contrast to the dogs and horses still, even if remotely, populating Eliot’s previous play, the only domesticated animal in *The Cocktail Party* is “Mary Mallington’s pet monkey”. To point up the discrepancy, this ‘pet’ is actually mentioned as the prime example of disorderly behaviour and described by Julia as a “destructive” and “horrid little beast” (*Cocktail* 428). Ironically enough, the only extended *me(a)taphor* evoking associations of caged animals in the play is actually explicitly about humans:

CELIA. Do you mean to say that she’s [Lavinia] laid a *trap* for us?  
 EDWARD. No. If there is a *trap*, we are all in the *trap*,

We have set it for ourselves. But I do not know  
 What kind of a *trap* it is. (*Cocktail* 375; emphasis added.)

The concept of the *trap* and *being trapped* recurs in the play several times on various levels of inclusiveness. The connection of the trap with hunting is eventually substantiated with an account of the actual “trap[ping]” and “kill[ing]” of monkeys for food (*Cocktail* 395,401,428). The repeated emergence of a primal hunter instinct in the characters serves to underline the way in which the frontier of the verbal battle roughly follows gender lines. For instance, there appears to be a caged sense to the entire marital institution, as the Chamberlaynes find themselves “[b]ack in the trap” in the above example. The only options in this caged world appear to be either a complete, taciturn isolation or a combative hostility. The symbolic animal counterpart of the caged couple is not specified. However, in view of the abundance of rodent imagery with similar connotations elsewhere in Eliot’s oeuvre (see Thormählen 1984:120-132), the nature of the violent action is perhaps best attributed to rats. In this respect, it undoubtedly falls within the same category as the corresponding imagery in Eliot’s poems classified by Thormählen (1984:127) in terms of “the deadlock in a man/woman relationship”. The collective sense of (animalised) entrapment of a couple is familiar from *The Waste Land*, for instance, where a section involving a lopsided quarrel between lovers was originally entitled “IN THE CAGE” (Eliot 1971:10-11,16-17). In a sense, then, Edward speaks collectively and intratextually for the lineage of earlier Eliotic characters in the above passage, as he exclaims that “here we are *again*” (*Cocktail* 395; emphasis added, see p.65).

At least in terms of marriage and the urban home, hunting and the law of the jungle come to overthrow the professional jargon of the legal justice system and the courts dispersed by Edward elsewhere in the play. In effect, when Peter, in a passage eventually omitted from the play, provides his fellow partygoers with imaginary parts in a Hollywood film, Edward is appropriately recast as a *poacher* exuding an air of “furtive simplicity” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:221). It should be noted, then, that this animalised *entrapment* in *The Cocktail Party* is essentially collective, even if it turns into a combative boxing ring. The animalistic *cage* may indeed be contrasted to Eliot’s earlier images of the *prison*; this can be felt in *The Cocktail Party*, as well, when Edward individualises the sense of entrapment by referring to the solitary con-

finement of 'my prison': '[h]ell is oneself' (*Cocktail* 397; emphasis added). This passage retains associations of solitude similar to the captive individual selves in *The Waste Land*, "each in his prison/ Thinking of the key" (*Complete* 74; see also Goldman 1973:163). Arrowsmith (1977:20) sums up this stance: "Hell becomes individualized, a private and personal fact. It is no longer shared, no longer a common human prison, filled with other suffering human beings, but a solitary cell." Celia, in contrast, brings the disembodied justice system and its *prison* back to the plainly physical level, as she envisages the "sanatorium" she is headed for as a crammed "prison": "[T]hey can't *all* stay there!/ I mean, it would make the place so over-crowded." (*Cocktail* 419; emphasis original.)

As the violent description of the spouses in their "cage" suggests, there are pervasive sexual overtones to the cocktail-party violence. In fact, all the instances where violent animal imagery is used as ammunition occur in confrontation between the sexes, and more precisely between lovers. The sexualised overtones of this fight become transparent when compared to the use of such imagery elsewhere in Eliot's works, and the image agrees with Arrowsmith's (1977:24) conception that "[a]lmost without exception the imagery of sex is animal, often murderous" in Eliot's poems. A particularly vivid instance of animalised sexual appetite indeed occurs in the draft version of *The Cocktail Party*, where Edward advises the younger man, Peter, not to continue courting Celia:

You have been spared the coming to awareness  
That the superficial is the substantial  
And that nothing else is left you but the yearning of the loins  
As full of concupiscence as a weasel of eggs—  
Fry, lechery, fry! I congratulate you  
On a timely escape. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:195.)

This lash-out apparently reflects Edward's own experience of (emotional) impotence and his attempts at a fierce ousting of sexual desire. However, in line with the tendency towards ellipsis of direct reference to the body, this passage was aborted from the published play. The remnants of this sexual imagery nonetheless seem to persist in Edward's labelling his wife with strongly physical animal epithets: "The python. The octopus." (*Cocktail* 398.) The effect here is intensified by the staccato punctuation with its indications of inner turmoil; Edward is confused and out of breath. The destructive animalised power is re-

lated here to direct physical violence and a voracious appetite expressed through clutching and strangulation; Edward presents his wife as a set of limbs and tentacles that swamp him in a watery and fluid environment.

The connections between the party-world and the jungle are manifold. On the one hand, the cocktail party chatter documents a contemporary fascination of audiences with the exotic and an attitude of colonial exploration and curiosity. Seen from this point of view, the tropical *topos* functions as a polite ploy employed to divert from the direct discussion of London society, while allowing for an aura of light entertainment and impersonal surface chatter. On the other hand, the cocktail party as a social ritual may itself be seen as a zoo, where the characters exist in order to be seen or visually devoured by others. As an indication of the parallels between the two worlds, the layers of chaotic jungle imagery not only refuse to vanish from view but actually thicken and peak, when the social order is eventually restored onto the cocktail-party scene in the last act. Similarly, the separation between the urban and the primitive turns out to be far from definite, as a member of the cocktail-crowd, Celia, actually enters the jungle and even perishes there. This can be seen to reflect the association of Woman with Nature, as they are jointly posited as the *other* of patriarchal culture and “consumed” by the male storyteller (cf. de Beauvoir 1949a:188,214, Gatens 1996:51). Severin (1993b:403-404) emphasises this connection in terms of its negative tendency to expel the female from culture into the primitive jungle. However, this tends to overlook the essential infiltration of the feral into the cocktail-universe. In this respect, the transfixed image of Nature becomes a part of the persistent, albeit ultimately futile quest in the play to expel the physical body.

It should be noted that the opposition between human and beast is not straightforward. As a rule, the characters resort to using animal imagery when portraying their hostile or alienated sense of distance from other characters, and the human and the animal are presented in a relation of antithetic contrast. Accordingly, the play penetrates spheres of wildlife with traditionally negative connotations of darkness, infection, and death. Besides spreading waves of ever intensifying violence throughout the play, the animalised flesh intrudes into human relations as an almost tangible barrier between the individual and ‘civilised’ society. The extreme manifestation of this clash occurs towards the end of the play, when some native tribes of Kinkanja exclude themselves from

polite society by “hold[ing] . . . monkeys in peculiar veneration” (*Cocktail* 428). This conflict is comically paralleled in the London cocktail-society by the antisocial and even anarchistic behaviour of Mary Mallington and her mischievous monkey. However, the borders between the jungle and urban society become increasingly blurred here, as jungle-life is actually seen to seep into London to the point of suggesting a shared fauna. Thus, the lack of tigers turns out to be a common trait for both London and Kinkanja, as the initial negation gains geographical specification in the last act: “There are not tigers, Julia,/ In Kinkanja” (*Cocktail* 427). Conversely, monkeys are a property shared by both cultures.

The relation between human and beast proves profoundly complicated in one of the initial cocktail-stories, where a man is forced into isolation on an island because “he could hear the cry of bats” (*Cocktail* 355). Isolation from bats here happens to implicate exclusion from the human community, as well. This suggests a blending of the human with the animal world, and “the cry of bats” indeed ties in with and echoes the much earlier anthropomorphic instance of “bats with baby faces” in *The Waste Land* (*Complete* 73). In her study focusing on Eliot’s animal imagery, Thormählen (1984:109,119) notes that the recurring imagery of bats and other “small creatures” is generally sympathetic rather than negative, although Eliot’s bats have often been simplistically swept aside and interpreted as direct descendants of the negative symbolism promulgated by, for instance, horror films. In *The Cocktail Party*, the implications of animal imagery appear to be deliberately double, and the play seems to align itself with Arrowsmith’s (1977:17) notion that “the remarkable richness of Eliot’s scavenger metaphors” testifies to the way “the ideas of death and cosmic purification converge” in Eliot’s work.

In its association with sharper, almost superhuman senses, the bat-body appears as the condensation of physicality in *The Cocktail Party*. The physical eccentricity adds a peculiar touch of sensitivity and even innocence to the ‘batman’, as indicated by Julia’s determination to classify him as “only harmless” rather than “feeble-minded” (*Cocktail* 354). In fact, the man’s sharp sense of hearing seems to be almost supernaturally linked to his being “very clever at repairing clocks”. The sense of time itself being restored or healed is amplified if compared to the constant unease about unreliable clocks that eventually threaten to “stop in the dark” in Eliot’s previous play (*Complete* 285,287,347).

In this sense, the bat-body is more than the “set of obsolete responses” that tends to define human (corpo)reality elsewhere in the play (*Cocktail* 363; see p.83).

Significantly enough, the attitude of animalistic animosity is largely imposed on Nature by the characters themselves in their fear of the unknown. They seek to build an ontological barrier of exotic imagery between their own insular and a-corporeal urban existence and the unpolished physicality and animal flesh of the jungle. However, this imposed border between Nature and (Wo)Man turns out to be artificial. This *porosity* of boundaries culminates (Irigaray 1984 and 1985a; see p.27), when Celia chooses to leave the urban landscape of London and settles in the Kinkanja jungle. It is revealing in view of the entire play that the fear in Alex’s initial jungle story, despite its effectiveness, actually turns out to be unfounded and that the ‘batman’ is “harmless”. Hay (1982:128) indeed takes the initial negation of tigers to indicate that the play is concerned with “human violence alone”. In effect, Celia is not killed by wild beasts but by her fellow humans. Hay’s dismissal of animal violence seems somewhat hasty, however. The recurring provocations in the border-(t)issue between the human and the animal body reveal that the violence of the jungle, far from resolved, actually builds on the same chaotic flesh as its urban counterpart. In terms of (corpo)reality, *The Cocktail Party* is not “about human violence alone” but rather about violence, in general.

### **The Simian Body**

ALEX. To begin with, the monkeys are very destructive... (*Cocktail* 428.)

At the borders of the body, there is a constant fear of relapsing into the non-human. The cocktail-party anxiety over the physical body is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that the rivalry between the animal and the human intensifies and eventually culminates precisely when they exhibit the greatest physical likeness. The last act of the play is, in effect, invaded by a relentless hostility towards the primate, indicated by the robotically repeated phrase “monkeys are (very) destructive” as well as by labelling the monkeys “a pest” that causes “general unrest” and “damage”; they must consequently be “trapped”, “killed”, “destroyed”, “exterminate[d]” or “slaughter[ed]” in order to be “cooked” and

“eaten” as an “extremely palatable” dish (*Cocktail* 427-429 *passim*). Significantly enough, this prolonged attack, embedded into a background of entertaining chatter about London restaurants and “monkey nuts”, does not appear stylistically aberrant in terms of the play as a whole. A similar anxiety, though in a less conspicuous form, manifests itself and gradually builds up throughout the play.

In effect, the comic banter mouthed by Julia and Alex in the first and last scenes of *The Cocktail Party* functions as the framework for one of the core insecurities in the play. There are no tigers to justify the flight of Alex and the Maharaja in the initial story, which makes the image of the human dignitaries perched as apes in a tree appear all the more bizarre, while it consolidates the direct connection between the human and the ape. The comedy of this story indeed reveals a dangerous edge, as it suggests a carnally carnivalesque reversal of roles. In their unfounded fear and flight, Alex and the Maharaja, and the cocktail-party audience with them, lose “all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1968:10). Paradoxically enough, these adventurers are, to borrow a line from the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*, “descending/ To the horror of the ape” through the simple physical action of ascending into a tree (*Complete* 270). Thus, the farther away from direct contact with the animal world the cocktail-characters attempt to flee, the closer they apparently get.

While the monkey imagery has numerous equivalents elsewhere in Eliot, it is perhaps most importantly elaborated and, in all its complexity, even personified in the character Sweeney (see p.18). Arrowsmith (1981:24; emphasis original), for instance, labels this “apeneck” character an “evolving *persona*” and treats it as a hyponym for a trail of thematic strands throughout Eliot’s work until *The Cocktail Party*. Tracing a kind of intratextual growth and evolution in this ape-shaped (hu)man, he defines Sweeney as a “a type of *homo duplex*—carnal and *buffo*, violent and fatuous, but with an emerging capacity for spiritual life”. In *The Cocktail Party*, despite the rigid segregation of humans and monkeys, the emphasis is on this ambiguity. The conflict becomes clear, for instance, in Julia’s seemingly disproportionate rant about the pet monkey that apparently “stole” her train ticket and forced her to spend the rest of the journey uncomfortably “in a very slow train/ And in a *couchette*” (*Cocktail* 428; emphasis original). In view of the comic note of the passage, Julia’s repugnance at “the horrid little beast” and her insistence that “the creature ought



to be destroyed” appear violently out of proportion. In its defensive context of fear and unease at the borders between the human and the animal, the reaction becomes understandable, however. The italicised and affected use of *couchette* with its French origins adds to the contrast, while the discomfort serves as a reminder of physicality in the sleepily “slow[ed]”-down (evolutionary) train.

Part of the awkwardness associated with the physical body in the play thus appears to arise from the ease with which humanity boils down to an animal body attempting to shroud itself thinly with clothes and civilised manners. Paradoxically enough, the other characters fear Julia’s “instinct” to intrude and her intrusive manners in the same way that she fears the “mischievous” monkey (*Cocktail* 367,390,392). This also strengthens the strand of women misbehaving in the cocktail-party environment. In effect, the monkey is brought to the city by a woman and introduced as a conversational subject by another woman. In contrast to macho-Sweeney, the cocktail-women thus appear to acquire an apelike air in the play. De Beauvoir (1949a:197,200), for example, comments on the way that Woman combines the jungle and the urban in the male imagination. However, the monkey imagery in *The Cocktail Party* is not conclusively gendered. A similar dehumanising effect is produced, inadvertently, when Peter returns to his notion of Alex “know[ing] everybody, everywhere” and jokes about it: “But I didn’t know/ That he knew any monkeys” (*Cocktail* 388,430). In this way, the physical likeness of the human and the monkey body virtually invades the play despite—or perhaps due to—the repeated attempts to keep them apart or brush them aside with a laugh.

The play thus features monkeys as the ingredients in deep mortal and political combat both in the cocktail party society and abroad. At the same time, however, monkeys also become entertainers in the vein of light comedy. By accentuating the connection to the ape on several levels in this way, *The Cocktail Party* foregrounds “the inescapable contact, and even kinship”, which Thormählen (1984:175) perceives to be one of the key components in Eliot’s ambivalent animal imagery—one that “causes the animal world and the human world to merge” despite their differences. The simian connection indeed becomes one of the central ways in which physicality and the body come to haunt habitual dichotomies.

The cocktail monkey-business serves to illustrate the loose definition of *imagery* and *me(a)taphors* adopted in this study, as it shows, rather conspicu-

ously, the way Eliot's works tend to suggest both literal and several metaphorical readings to single images and thus to invite a multidimensional collage. On the surface level, chattering about actual monkeys is a comic ploy supposed to add a sense of authenticity and contemporary colour to the cocktail-conversation. At the same time, the monkeys and the invocation of the jungle, in general, are comparable to the Chekhovian gun on the wall, as they serve to predict and advance the plot: the monkeys eventually provoke the core action in the play, culminating in the ritual killing of a cocktail-character. In addition to this massacre, there is a clear allegorical take on the simian discussion. The play's religious agenda becomes most pronounced, when Eliot's word-world appears to pit the Darwinian and the religious worldviews against each other and to lump together pagan beliefs and superstition with the monkey heritage.

The power of the flesh to weaken the barriers between the different species springs from a sense of all flesh being essentially the same. It follows that all borders between bodies involve an ultimately forced and even arbitrary choice: "instead of eating monkeys/ They are eating Christians./ . . . Who have eaten monkeys" (*Cocktail* 429). In this blurring of the borders between eating monkeys and cannibalism, (carnivorous) eating inherently appears as two forms of cannibalism, or of body eating body. The borders of flesh and life crumble, as the killing is augmented and suddenly becomes real, even if distant, in the eyes of *The Cocktail Party* crowd instead of remaining the imaginary bouts between the sexes portrayed elsewhere in the conversation. To play up the tainted physicality of the animal body, monkeys come to be associated with disease, much in the way of the modern HIV epidemic. The sense of an almost genetic fear and a self-defensive struggle against the ancestral ape is corroborated by the fact that the cocktail-monkeys seem to possess virtually unlimited reproductive powers, and they are seen to "multiply" in a competitive relation to humans, or, more accurately, to "the Christian natives" (*Cocktail* 429). Conversely, in the absence of monkeys, these natives "prosper exceedingly" (*Cocktail* 428,429). The animal body apparently possesses an excessive sexual appetite and hunger.

The monkey-body becomes the container for the surplus energy of the restrained party-world. In a sense, then, the monkey combines all chaotic and banned aspects of (corpo)reality: promiscuity, sickness, and social anarchy. In effect, the (animal) body in itself appears as "excess" and it is eaten away in

order to construe a new body—built of “extremely palatable” monkey-flesh. In this way, the violence entailed in the animal imagery becomes suggestive of a larger breakdown of established order, resulting in chaos and death. The corporeal *me(a)taphors* promote a view of the body as something unpredictably dynamic, chaotic, and foreign to the characters. It is constantly changing and thus represents the *other* as a constant reminder within the self. As this physicality lacks any definite contours, constantly destroying and being destroyed, the predatory imagery of eating and even cannibalism suggests a constant warfare for space. The body depends on cannibalism and its procreative powers are strongly contoured by a cannibalistic hunger to engulf the borders of the *other*.

Significantly enough, the cocktail party characters both in the jungle and in urban settings fear monkeys more acutely than they do any predators. The dread appears to be innate and based on the close resemblance between the ape and the human physique. Projected onto markedly physical animal imagery, the body in *The Cocktail Party* then comes to represent the animal, uncontrollable side of humanity, reflecting an archaic fear of the primate and of the implications of Darwinian thought as reflected in Hargrove’s (1985:151) notion that “man as represented by Sweeney has made little if any progress in terms of evolution”. The cocktail party monkeys provide a fresh angle on “the *dualism* of man and nature”, which Eliot (1951b:485; emphasis original), in an essay originally published in 1929, explains in terms of the human capability to “recognise supernatural realities”:

Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below, or something must come from above. There is no avoiding that dilemma: you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist. If you remove from the word “human” all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man, you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable, and mischievous little animal.

The diminutive *no more* entails a harsh hierarchical divide here between human and animal, as Foster (1997) notes when discussing this passage. *The Cocktail Party* indeed provides a detailed display of this division, as the “mischievous” monkey serves as the tangible basis for sharp ontological classifications in the world; it determines social class and even segregates between people. However, the term *no more* in Eliot’s essay also gives way to a central source for alarm, retraceable in *The Cocktail Party*, namely that this “extremely clever, adaptable, and mischievous little animal” nevertheless forms

part of humanity, and that it has to be resisted repeatedly and consciously, “from above”.

Initially, then, the animal imagery in *The Cocktail Party* is presented in an antithetic relation of contrast to humanity; eating monkeys is set against cannibalism and made into a concrete marker of cultural difference between tribes and, as it turns out, religions. This is brought to a head, when holding monkeys “in peculiar veneration” is set against “the tribes [that] are Christian converts,/ And, *naturally*, take a different view” (*Cocktail* 428; emphasis added). The very term *naturally* here comes to have a constructed sense approximating to *supernaturally*, and it depends heavily on worldview. Significantly enough, despite Alex’ attempt to sweep the monkeys aside as “a pretext/ For general unrest” and “merely a symptom” rather than “the core of the problem”, the differences between tribes and belief systems is described exclusively in terms of their relation to monkeys (*Cocktail* 427,428). Eventually, the comic surface-(t)issue cracks to show the outbreak of a real war between monkeys in liege with the “heathens” and “the Christian natives”, which eventually results in the death of Celia. Thus, not only does the monkey show its face both in Kinkanja and in London, but it also refuses to absent itself, remaining a menace against the order of both primitive and urban society. In both cultures, the wild cannot be fully tamed, although it is diminished into parts, isolated, and reduced to comic effects. In fact, the conflict apparently remains unresolved, as even the omniscient Alex doubts that “there *is* any solution” (*Cocktail* 428; emphasis original). In accordance with the forced nature of the difference, the battle then must be (re)fought interminably.

The monkey becomes a means to distil and consequently to isolate the corporeal from humanity by relegating it into an animal hide, which is, in turn, distanced geographically from the cocktail characters. The way in which the ape helps to construe and materialise a sense of alterity is suggested in the way in which the relation to monkeys allegedly “creates friction between [the Christian natives] and *the others*”, with the antagonism aggravated further by a reference to still more “*foreign agitators*” (*Cocktail* 428; emphasis added). Nevertheless, the body is no impenetrable border. Arrowsmith (1981:30; emphasis original) seems to address this constant sense of insecurity in Eliot’s ape-imagery by indicating that the Sweeney character “galvanizes the idea of *decision*—for standing erect or falling, for civilised life or barbarism and savagery,

for becoming a man or reverting to animal—implied in Sweeney’s ambivalent nature”. In *The Cocktail Party*, however, the very grounds for making this “decision” are blurred; it is not an option to “becom[e] a man”, as the evolutionary stages present themselves synchronically.

The distance between the human (body) and the ape appears in the temporal terms of natural history. In this way, Eliot’s monkey imagery comes to side with this living concept of tradition and to challenge the linearity of time: “all time is eternally present” (*Complete* 171). In a space-time that has lost its absolute border and order, the human is constantly running away from the monkey body in an ultimately futile chase. This is made explicit in *Four Quartets*, where the primate body threatens to catch up with humanity:

The backward look behind the assurance  
Of recorded history, the backward half-look  
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror. (*Complete* 187.)

### **Insect Imagery**

CELIA. . . . I looked,  
And listened for your heart, your blood;  
And saw a beetle the size of a man  
With nothing more inside it than what comes out  
When you tread on a beetle. (*Cocktail* 382.)

In view of the parallel uses of dehumanising imagery between the sexes exemplified elsewhere in the play (see p.60), it is worth noting that Celia appears to become the centre of a significant subcategory of cocktail-party animals, namely insects. In a sense, Celia’s path is paved with insect imagery. She introduces it in the first act by comparing Edward to a “beetle the size of a man” and his voice to a “grasshopper scraping its legs together” (*Cocktail* 382). Insects reappear in a reversed light in the final scene, where they materialise from the metaphorical plane, as Alex reports that Celia was “crucified/ Very near an ant-hill” (*Cocktail* 434). The indication is that her body was eaten away by an ant population in the jungle, and this is indeed pinpointed in the draft-version description of “local practices”: “They smear the victims/ With a juice that is attractive to the ants.” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:225; see p.51-52.) Thus, the violence changes direction so that, in the first act, it is exerted by Celia, while it finally devours her body.

To play up Celia's insect connection, in the only instance where an insect *me(a)taphor* is evoked in discussion between two male characters, its immediate point of reference is the memory of a relationship with Celia. The thought of Celia indeed enters into the same line as the destructive insects: "There's no memory you can wrap in camphor/ But the moths will get in. So you want to see Celia?" (*Cocktail* 371.) Thus, in a parallel pattern to the ants that eventually consume Celia's body, the moths are said to eat away the memories of her. The basic effect of these images is identical, although the ants occur in a primarily literal context, whereas the reference to moths displays a set metaphorical meaning. The (female) body is difficult to cling on to, as it has no reality beside the current situation and is always "already a memory" and incomplete: it is not "the same Celia", as Edward remarks.

The violence of the insects is analogous with the ruthless passing of time and the transience of matter and feeling. Insects function as the destroyers of the past and bespeak the immediacy with which the body exists in the present. The insect-imagery also forms part of the play's preoccupation with ageing, as it rekindles the territorial conflict at the border between life and death. Celia indeed "unwrap[s]" beetle-Edward "as if [she] had unwrapped a mummy" (*Cocktail* 382; see p.43). Besides actively destroying physicality, the ants thus heighten the significance of corporeality by making concrete eating produce a resurrection. Similarly, although "actively destructive", as Thormählen (1984:105) phrases it, the moths devouring memories actually work as agents of renewal. In this way, the connection between the destructive powers of moths and the positive "memories draped by the beneficent spider" is not perhaps as great as indicated by Thormählen (1984, *Cocktail* 74).

The insect imagery in *The Cocktail Party* is thus strongly connected with violent change of both physical and mental state. This agrees with the beetle image that invades Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915). This connection is brushed upon in passing by Eliot scholars such as Smith (1974:223) echoed by Thormählen (1984:119), who apparently regards it as a mainly superfluous though captivating curiosity. The link between the two works is undoubtedly thin. The insect image, nevertheless, suggests a wealth of correlative aspects, and the works may, accordingly, be elucidated along similar lines. The social focus of the two plays differs notably, as Kafka's characters have no access to the cocktail party circles. However, the

urban and mechanical framework of the metamorphosis is similar in both cases. In effect, both works use insect imagery to stress the communication breakdown in a modern city, while retaining an emphasis on the sexual body and its sustenance. In Kafka's story, the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning as a giant verminous insect (*ungeheueren Ungeziefer*) and becomes isolated from his family and former professional life in a locked room, where he ultimately starves (himself) to death (*Verwandlung* 7). Discussing Kafka's novel from a phenomenological perspective, Natanson (1998:108) comes to focus on the "theatrical" body or the body as "gesture": "Left with language which cannot communicate, Gregor's bridge to the world is his body, its movements, its whereabouts". A similar use of the body and insect-imagery, in condensed form, resides in Celia's speech about beetle-Edward as well as in her own life and, ultimately, death: "It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone" (*Cocktail* 414; emphasis original). In this way, the beetle-image becomes the condensation of one of the central concern in an aphasic cocktail-party community. Both images circle around the loss of meaningful language, as the body itself becomes a unfamiliar element and impossible to control.

As if to prove Thormählen's (1978 and 1984; see p.11-12) caution about overly simplistic groupings and explications of the imagery in Eliot's work, the cocktail insects exemplify how similar images in Eliot's work may be used to express opposite and far from self-evident ends. Thormählen (1984:110) herself appears to disregard this variation, when she ventures a generalisation of Eliot's frequent use of "small creatures" as representing the "very insignificance of the small insect" and a sense of "humility, having renounced all those parts of the body where the individual personality was contained". In the draft version of *The Cocktail Party*, Lavinia tentatively supports this *me(a)ta-phorical* string of minuscule and measly insects by rebuking Edward for not making the choice of either "allowing oneself to be crushed by [humiliation]/ And revelling in being the worm one is,/ Or . . . forgetting all about it" (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:208). Without doubt, the insect images in both Eliot and Kafka entail a pronounced sense of emptiness and renunciation. In *The Cocktail Party*, there is virtually "nothing" inside the insect body and the noises it produces are "dry", whereas Gregor Samsa's body eventually dehydrates to become entirely flattened and dry (*vollständig flach und trocken*)

(*Cocktail* 382, *Verwandlung* 86). However, breaking the everyday code, the bloated beetle-body also appears as an encumbrance in the face of modern humanity, resisting its aims to become superhuman. Significantly enough, then, insect physicality intrudes into the mechanical flow of everyday existence and clogs it, thereby hindering the individual from becoming only a part of a well-oiled urban machine.

In both Kafka and Eliot, the deficiency of the insect body is stressed by its being contrasted to and, finally, replaced by a fuller body. Gregor indeed becomes the “crucified son” and “martyr” of the Samsa family, and his death eventually liberates them from the biological ties and the familial duty to feed him (Natanson 1998:111,126). In their sense of regained freedom, Gregor’s relatives immediately undertakes a trip away from the mechanical city to the countryside; the original German wording stresses the sense of *freedom* from all electrical circuits, as they travel “*mit der Elektrischen ins Freie vor die Stadt*” (*Verwandlung* 90). After the purgation of the insect-body, the interest in the corporeal rapidly rekindles. Kafka’s story thus closes with Gregor’s mother looking approvingly at the young and nimble body of her daughter, while she plans to find a suitable fiancé for her soon. In *The Cocktail Party*, this idea of regained vitality and physical strength derived from the sacrifice of one member of the group is propounded by the profusion of food at the final cocktail party along with the suggestion that Lavinia is now pregnant.

In this way, both Kafka’s and Eliot’s beetles implement the anorexic logic, draining (corpo)reality of all its extra fat. As a further reflection of the toying with existential dimensions, the smallest animals in the play come to exhibit the strongest power to fragment and to demolish. Thus, the cocktail ants finish the extreme regime on Celia’s body by practically erasing her body. It should be noted, then, that the cocktail-insects, despite their emptiness and complete lack of regenerating fluids, actually grow to horrific measures, or work *en masse* as the collective body of ants or moths. This can also be seen to describe the altered dimensions of conceptual borders; the phenomenological *measurant*-body is no longer fixed in size but swells or shrivels in relation to its surroundings (Merleau-Ponty 1968; see p.24).

The disproportionate physicality of Eliot’s insect imagery frequently concurs with intensely physical connotations of abnormal sight and hearing. The beetle body in its entirety functions as a set of enlarged speech organs



meant to highlight the difficulty of communication. Insect-Edward's speech suddenly becomes unintelligible to Celia:

no, not a voice,  
 What I heard was only the noise of an insect,  
 Dry, endless, inhuman—  
 You might have made it by scraping your legs together—  
 Or however grasshoppers do it. (*Cocktail* 382.)

This diffuse dissemination of the noises to resound through the entire body of the grasshopper adds another dimension to the communicative aspects of (corpo)reality. The body in its entirety is electrified here to create an acoustic sound box producing unintelligible noises. The grasshopper appears distinctly mechanical; the insect-noise is not produced orally through the vocal chords but through the body “scraping its legs together”, or touching itself. This serves to accentuate the physical origins of sound, that “[d]iscourse is . . . at once message and massage” (Suárez 2001:760). The mute and chaotic aspects of the insect and monkey imagery are thus thematically magnified to imply a breakdown of everyday conversation. As Suárez (2001:756,757) recognises when discussing the fragmented universe of *The Waste Land*, “[m]echanized communication does not respect the organic boundaries of grammar and sense”. Again, the body poses an enigma to the cocktail-community, and the body-talk appears incomprehensible and arbitrary.

In spite of the overall male perspective in *The Cocktail Party*, the multiple insect eyes in the play endorse an alternative view by introducing men as seen through the eyes of women and, correspondingly, women evading the male gaze. In effect, the beetle-image does not depict Edward but Celia's present “projection” of him (*Cocktail* 382). In a reverse movement to Celia's “unwrapp[ing]” of insect-Edward (*Cocktail* 382; see p.43), the ants intervene in the last act to hide Celia's body from Alex as well as from the entire cocktail party audience. Through actually gnawing away the physicality of the body and its coherence, the ants thus also work as the concrete agents of the cocktail-party tendency to conceal the body from inquisitive eyes.

The diversity of Eliot's flea market of insect-imagery is thus clearly displayed in the small cocktail-collection of insects. For instance, the communal status of the ants can be set against the chaotic solitude of the grasshopper or the beetle. The ant community with its queen and effective workers represents

an ideally ordered society, whereas the grasshopper is a relatively frequent proverbial and preverbal guest in Eliot's poetry with its associations of drought and biblical plague. Commenting on another instance of Eliot's copious insect imagery, Thormählen (1984:111) indeed relates the Eliotic contrast between the "frivolous [male] grasshopper" and "the inexorable [female] ant" back to La Fontaine's fables. In *The Cocktail Party*, however, this limiting antithesis between the two insects is partly erased, as Celia comes to combine the grasshopper and the ant through her presence. At the same time, the cocktail insects allow for a double perspective on corporeal communication, as the monotonous "scratching" of the lonely grasshopper combines with the effective and unified, preverbal body created by the ant-community.

Significantly enough, when projecting Edward as a beetle, Celia makes the conscious choice of not using the power embedded into this perspective: "I won't tread on you" (*Cocktail* 382). Seen in terms of semantic categorisation, this refusal can indeed be read as the reverse of the crippling effect and conclusive definition suggested by the physical insect-imagery in the party-scene of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917):

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
And how should I presume? (*Complete* 14-15.)

It becomes apparent, then, that the insect body produces a challenge to language itself by embodying the fear of "fix[ity]". Celia reiterates her vision of insect-Edward at a loss of meaningful language later, when she expands the projection to comprise all human beings: "They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;/ They make faces, and think they understand each other." (*Cocktail* 414.) Frye (1963:56), for instance, has commented on the animal aspects of "making faces" and "making noises". The difficulty of meaningful communication especially between the sexes already takes animal shape in Eliot's debut collection, as exemplified by the circus-imagery of 'Portrait of a Lady' (1917):

And I must borrow every changing shape  
To find expression...dance, dance

Like a dancing bear,  
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape. (*Complete* 21).

Throughout Eliot's oeuvre, language is thus brought back into contact with physical and preverbal sensory experience. Manganaro (1992:93,95) takes note of Eliot's "reluctance to deal with semantics and his willingness to communicate with his readers on a 'primitive' level" and suggests that meaning itself is as distraction or disguise for Eliot. In *The Cocktail Party*, this effect is shown through the proliferation of mechanical insect-noises. Suárez (2001:760), in effect, suggests that the lexical meaning of the very term *meaning* must be reformulated due to the proliferation of mechanical sounds: "Touch and noise, traditionally on the outside of meaning, are now its harbingers. Woven with them, meaning itself becomes an intermittence." These insect-manifestations, consequently, also articulate the tension between the isolated, a-lingual *flesh* and the communicating and communal *body*, clothed in meaning. This tension between meaningless alienated noise and intense preverbal contact is developed throughout Eliot's oeuvre, only to end on the comfortable note of the poem 'A Dedication to My Wife':

The breathing in unison

Of lovers whose bodies smell of each other  
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech  
And babble the same speech without need of meaning. (*Complete*  
266.)

## The Body as Artefact

### The Abject Object-Body

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. . . . Just for a moment  
 You have the experience of being an object  
 At the mercy of a malevolent staircase. (*Cocktail* 362.)

Exhibiting a radical distrust of established truths resembling phenomenological doubt (Husserl 1982; see p.23), the cocktail-community instinctively shies away from the body as a material and quantifiable object of scientific study. Notably, there is a constant unease among the characters concerning the narrowly neurological, belittling description of self: “You are *nothing but* a set of obsolete responses” (*Cocktail* 363; emphasis added). According to Reilly, the standard reaction to this realisation involves the active and hurried endeavour to “forget about it” (*Cocktail* 362; see p.49). This bracketing of the naturalistic attitude largely concurs with Merleau-Ponty’s (1962:ix) dissatisfaction with it: “I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological, or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science.”

The search for the borders between the body and the material world again incorporates patterns of both dissonance and identification. The characters are constantly presented as existing in the borderline area between the savage and the urban as well as between matter and mind, and they all ultimately suffer from the same “reluctance of the body to become a *thing*” (*Cocktail* 437; emphasis original, see p.44). Merleau-Ponty (1968:255) indeed veers towards a broadly inclusive cyborg definition of self: “The things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world, through it the world surrounds me.” This cohabitation of (corpo)reality and the material world complies with Armstrong’s (1998:6; emphasis original) view of Modernism and modernity as generically obsessed with a tendency “to *intervene* in the body” and to modernise it. In *The Cocktail Party*, the effects of this “coition . . . of our body with things” are complex (Merleau-Ponty 1962:373), since the characters use technology as an aid for reaching (or avoiding) each other, while material objects also invade their personal bodily space and exploit them in return.

Among the cocktail-crowd, the material world itself is initially conceived as a threat to individual identity: “You no longer feel quite human./ You’re suddenly reduced to the status of an object . . .” (*Cocktail* 362.) It should be noted that this sense of exclusion from humanity unfolds from one of the core concentrations of figurative language in the play and that the isolation, paradoxically, occurs within the network of social rituals and exchanges. The immediate situation for the disclosure is Edward’s sense of bewilderment after his wife has left him without a warning, and he complains that everything now feels “unfinished” (*Cocktail* 362). This agrees with what Irigaray (1985a:236) recognises as the masculine fear of open-endedness and the patriarchal “passion for an origin that coils around neatly, even at the risk of biting its own tail”. Reilly, at this stage in the play still appearing in the guise of “Unidentified Guest”, claims that Edward’s confusion can be generalised and seen as an example of the typical “human condition” of ‘los[ing] touch with the person/ You thought you were’ (*Cocktail* 362,417). Reilly then produces a set of overlapping images to portray the feeling of uneasy surprise and helplessness at losing control over bodily movements, with a sense of helpless passivity and dependence on other people ensuing. This connection to the crumbling and disobedient (corpo)reality becomes amply exemplified in the images, which involve stumbling on the stairs when attending a cocktail party, undergoing surgery, and an embedded *me(a)taphor* evoking the sense of being shuffled around like furniture in a shop, respectively. Smith (1963:168) points to the erratic nature of social norms and concludes that “[t]he scene is intended to point out that a surer foundation than public opinion is necessary for spiritual selfhood”. However, this reading with its foregrounding of the “spiritual selfhood” already entails a reversal of the original proposition and its way of introducing the *object* quality of the human body as the novel and problematic although commonly ignored realisation. The feeling subject is presented as a given, whereas the material side of the person appears as a foreign, uncharted territory.

In *The Cocktail Party*, then, the human body is simultaneously insular and communal. The borders of individual physicality disintegrate, as the body becomes an adjustable part of the surrounding environment. However, through its reluctant resignation to “the experience of being an object/ At the mercy of” fundamentally *other* objects, the docile and seemingly paralysed body also

comes to serve as the vehicle which combines the individual with the community. Despite the unease of social relations, there is an essentially public element to the body; bodies exist and are shaped only in contact with other bodies. This interdependence becomes apparent, when the Unidentified Guest encourages Edward to become aware of himself as “an object/ As well as a person” in order to learn: “What you really are. What you really feel./ What you really are *among other people.*” (*Cocktail* 362,363; emphasis added.) In this respect, the cocktail (corpo)reality reveals itself as “intersubjectivity” rather than a self-sufficient entity (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxii). The difference is made even more explicit in Eliot’s next play, *The Confidential Clerk*: “I’ve been curious to know *what* you are,/ Not *who* you are, in the ordinary sense“ (*Complete* 475; emphasis added). The characters no longer think of themselves in terms of the individualised *who* but meet the broader, semantically much less clearly delimited *what*, along with its emphasis on relations and the object position. In addition, the cocktail-definition of (corpo)reality also introduces clear situational and contextual qualifications by limiting the question in time: “[W]ho are you *now*?” (*Cocktail* 363; emphasis added.) Thus, subjectivity is challenged by a more communal sense of identity, and the borders of the self as well as those of the body become a *porous* (t)issue in Irigaray’s (1984 and 1985a; see p.27) sense of open-endedness. This loss of causal directionality is suggested by, for instance, Merleau-Ponty’s (1968:249,255) emphasis on “reflectedness” and the paradoxical notion that “to touch is to touch oneself”. What ensues is a more complex concept of self, mediated by the body and its changing relations to others. Edward indeed terms this “[t]he change that comes/ From seeing oneself through the eyes of other people”, and he realises that he must “find out” about his wife in order to know himself (*Cocktail* 364,395).

In its reluctant intermediary position, Eliot’s object-body approximates Kristeva’s (1982:4) designation of the *abject* as “the inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite”: “abjection is, what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.” When social etiquette breaks down, corporeal chaos is lurking; the body loses its form, if the surrounding *Guardians* do not protect or literally guard it. In effect, Eliot (as quoted by Moody 1980:268) proclaimed in an interview that his purpose in writing the plays was “to produce characters whose drawing-room behaviour was generally correct”. Though essentially sarcastic, such statements reveal the idea that the material

room determines the inhabitants and make them conform to its needs rather than the reverse. The model for the social ambivalence may be found within the city itself with its centralised, geographically condensed sense of community and its radical, internal fragmentation into nuclear families in their flats (cf. Williams 1973: 242). In effect, the characters are moulded by the city and their living quarters in the same way that they themselves furnish the room as a (social) extension of themselves. Thus, the characters themselves are “piece[s] of furniture in a repair shop” and essentially shaped by “those who surround [them]” (*Cocktail* 362-363). Ironically, the ‘room’ even enters as an ingredient into the names of the characters starting from the private and public connotations of the surname *Chamberlayne*. In addition, as for instance Phelan (1990:51) points out, the name Lavinia can be etymologically elicited to mean ‘might of the home’, whereas Edward translates as ‘guardian of property’ or ‘defender’ (see also Porter 1970:62). Phelan (1990:48-51) effectively argues that *The Cocktail Party*, in accordance with its intertextual roots in Euripides’ *Alceste*, is preoccupied with the house and that the house may indeed function as a “character” in the play. In effect, not only is the house a major character in *The Cocktail Party*, but it is the most dynamic and active character. In this respect, the play with its anthropomorphically “malevolent staircase” can be seen to reflect other passages in Eliot’s work, such as the central pulse in *Sweeney Agonistes* emanating from the “KNOCK” on the door (*Complete* 118,126; see p.53). The entire party scene behaves like functional, organic flesh, as the house itself yields like a skin to entries and foreign influences. Significantly, for a large part of the first act, the door to the Chamberlaynes’ flat remains unlocked so that various intruders may osmotically enter. The party-ritual thus transforms the private flat into a public forum, where individual bodies are on display.

It should be noted that no stage directions indicate that the partygoers actually touch others. In fact, they only appear capable of reaching each other via proxy, as when Edward hands Julia her spectacles or when Lavinia promises to send clothes to her husband. Unity is reached through a middle ground, as when Peter wonders about his connection with Celia: “Did we really feel the/ same/ When we heard certain music?/ Or looked at certain/ pictures?” (*Cocktail* 371.) Significantly enough, the characters do not look or listen to each other but share the same material world, the same images and sounds. In a sen-

se, the predominance given to language in the play highlights the way in which language is used as a tool to reach other people, while it also provides an escape or a surplus skin hindering the characters from physically having to touch or even to look at each other. The connection between them, then, shows in a shared set of words and expressions, which the characters often unconsciously use when the other person is no longer physically present.

Although the room is repeatedly crammed with people, they all seem to live in their separate corporeal cocoons. Again, my reading is limited to the presentation of the play on the page, as actual performances may differ widely. Gordon (1998:418-419), for instance, comments on a 1986 London production, where Lavinia and Edward openly embrace and touch each other in the last scene. In the text, however, although a growing closeness can be sensed in the last act as the characters pay attention to their outward appearance and tend to each other's needs, physical proximity is not explicitly forced upon them. Lavinia comes closest to a direct call for intimacy, as she urges Edward to "sit beside me, then I can relax" (*Cocktail* 426). However, even here, the preposition *beside* leaves room for independent movement, and the borders of the body remain intact. Nevertheless, this marks a clear change in attitude if compared to Lavinia's earlier, coldly calculated invitation to her husband that they "share a taxi, and be economical" (*Cocktail* 411).

The attitude of repugnance at (transient) physicality and *touching* the material world is revealed through Lavinia's inclination to hide and protect her household environment from direct contact. Edward deplores this tendency: "You were always wrapping things up in tissue paper/ And then you had to unwrap everything again/ To find what you wanted" (*Cocktail* 397). The procedure suggests an extreme hygienic wish to avoid touching and seeing (abject) objects and thereby to keep the deteriorating material world in place. However, Edward makes a point of the fact that Lavinia has to reveal the objects again in order to use them. This is reminiscent of the previous scene, where Celia has to mentally "unwrap" mummy-Edward and make him disintegrate instead of maintaining an immaculate image of him (*Cocktail* 382; see p.43). The urge to maintain the borders can even be felt in Edward's alleged need to be "bolstered" by the women around him (*Cocktail* 393).

Significantly enough, the borders of the corporeal cocoon only break because of infirmity or sickness:



UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Or, take a surgical operation.  
 In consultation with the doctor and the surgeon,  
 In going to bed in the nursing home,  
 In talking to the matron, you are still the subject,  
 The centre of reality. But, stretched on the table,  
 You are a piece of furniture in a repair shop  
 For those who surround you, the masked actors (*Cocktail* 362-  
 363.)

The material world behaves in essentially organic ways: the wounded, passive body is open for consumption, even cannibalism, as the “masked actors” gain access to and feed on the mechanically opened body. Significantly enough, the object world of the cocktail party is as frail and incomplete as the sick and dying, “repair[ed]” body. The implications are even clearer in the draft version of the play:

there is a moment  
 In which you are aware that you are only an object  
 Among others, like a broken cup  
 Or a stalled engine. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:191.)

This passage shows a certain affinity with the mechanical sexuality of *The Waste Land*, where “the human engine *waits/ Like a taxi throbbing waiting*” (*Complete* 68; emphasis added). Similar mechanical metaphors, in fact, slink into Merleau-Ponty’s (1962:xxii; emphasis added) discussion of sensory experience and human relations: “The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other *like gears*”. It should be noted, however, that the “(human) engine” is generically out of order in Eliot, and it is therefore drawing attention to itself as an object. Significantly enough, then, there is no overt reason here why the cup in these similes must be *broken* or the engine *stalled* and repetitively *waiting*. It nevertheless fits into a play where human bodies form part of a material world, which is constantly deteriorating and essentially antiquated. It seems that the body becomes visible and felt only after its borders burst and are opened to foreign influences. At the same time, physical objects and bodies in general, much like the *me(a)taphorical* beetle-body, become dysfunctional in their infirmity and constant dilapidation, and they impair the mechanical flow of society. Significantly enough, both “the nursing home” and “the repair shop” strive

to mend or *restore* the broken parts instead of discarding and replacing them with new equipment.

The “malevolent staircase” (*Cocktail* 362; see p.83) gains additional layers of meaning, if seen against the mass of *me(a)taphors* relating to stairs in Eliot. Whereas critics have often tended to focus on the spiritual and mystical implication of the stairs, Palmer (1996:230) recognises that, at least in reference to Eliot’s early poems, “a flight of stairs to climb or descend often marks a symbolic distance, or fearful obstacle, between a man and a woman”. Although the echo in *The Cocktail Party* is faint and distant at most, the *me(a)taphorical* sense of a *faux pas* tends to turn up in the conversation whenever the sexes meet or, more accurately, collide. In addition, there is the repeated toying in the play with descending and ascending the ladder of both natural history and psychological awareness, evoked by Alex’s jungle story. Thus, the closer the cocktail partygoers get to “descending” the stairs to join a party, the closer they also are to the uncontrollably jostled animal body.

In the chimerical party-world, the knowledge of the body lasts “[j]ust for a moment” (*Cocktail* 362; see p.83). This momentary “jolt” involves a deferral from “[t]he centre of reality” to its margins. The object-quality of the body is used to stress the communal aspects of (corpo)reality by arbitrarily extending and removing the boundaries between sovereign bodies. Simultaneously, the strong *rejection* of the abject object-body reflects a realisation of alterity within the self. The vulnerable and broken object-body is fettered by dichotomous relations beyond its control, while it at the same time blurs these dichotomies, mixing the subject and object positions.

### **The Mechanical Body**

LAVINIA. . . . But it seems to me that yesterday  
 I started some machine, that goes on working,  
 And I cannot stop it; no, it’s not like a machine—  
 Or if it’s a machine, someone else is running it.  
 But who? Somebody is always interfering...  
 I don’t feel free... and yet I started it... (*Cocktail* 391.)

Incorporating modern technology into the stage-action and the conversational metaphors of *The Cocktail Party*, in part, reflects Eliot’s (1951a:26) conscious poetic programme that theatre audiences should be made to hear verse “from people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and

using telephones and motorcars and radio sets". Critics have recorded Eliot's attempts to portray a "modern setting", while at the same time marvelling at his "old-fashioned" adherence to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian drawing-room and its mores (Severin 1993b:397, Grove 1994:164-168). On the surface level, the technology easily presents itself as an inconsequential adornment designed to make the audience feel at home in the play-world. Taking into account the bare settings consciously adopted by Eliot, the everyday technological innovations must, however, be studied as more than simply superficial indicators of 20<sup>th</sup> century life. In effect, a significant bond between the static object category and the dynamic, living body is brought about in the play through the interplay between the (mechanised) (corpo)reality and the machine.

One of the most distinctive markers of modern life in the play are the technological devices, most notably the telephone and a series of telegrams as well as occasional references to lifts, taxis, and *me(a)taphorical* "machines", in general (*Cocktail* 361,366,391,411). The stage is generally described as rather sterile with only a few homely objects present but a considerable amount of electric equipment. These devices occur regularly in Eliot's poems, as well, and Kenner (1987:25), in effect, identifies Eliot as "undeniably his time's chief poet of the alarm clock, the furnished flat, the ubiquitous telephone, commuting crowds, [and] the electric underground railway". The uses of technology in relation to the party-body are multifarious. In their urban world, the cocktail-characters exist in the intersection between body and machine, blurring the categories of subject and object, activity and passivity, and fragmentation and unity.

It should be noted that Eliot's cocktail party community depicts a society in the process of adjusting to its modern technological environment. Accordingly, there are hints of enchantment as well as violent ostracism of the machine. On the whole, the characters are seen to accept technology as an almost integral part of their being and acting in the world. Communication technology accents the way that the body transcends and disperses its confines via the physiological senses. Accordingly, the symbiotic and ambiguous contact between the body and the machine begins close to the skin, as the cocktail party characters integrate technology to sharpen their senses. Sight and hearing, in particular, become disproportionately emphasised, as the rest of the body is subjected to a tight regimen. The telephone, in particular, fragments corporeal-

ity as it separates the voice from the speaker. Similarly, sight is detached from the person through Julia's (useless) spectacles as well as the film metaphors discussed below (p.97). Discussing the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Eliot's poetic technique in *The Waste Land*, Suárez (2001:751) points out how "[t]he new media dissociated language from human corporeality" to produce a "disembodied and, therefore, dis-organ-ized [voice]": it "detached oral language from the physical presence of the speakers and reattached it to inanimate objects". Beginning with Alex's non-existent tigers, the city is imbued with the chimerical presence of voices and verbal images of people who are invisible but nonetheless present. In the draft version of the play, the disembodied effect of the telephone is also reproduced, in connection to women, when Lavinia is able to detect that Edward has had a female visitor by the smell of her (artificial) perfume (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:207; see p.62-63). Within the cocktail party routine, language itself works as a disembodied transmitter, as it describes what is *not* there. At the same time, however, it may be argued that the "dis-organ-ized" voice animates these inanimate objects and thereby stretches the borders of (corpo)reality. In addition, however, as Armstrong (1998:222) notes when commenting on the advent of sound film, modern technology also makes possible a "*recombination*" of sensory data. In their semi-physical essence, technological devices thus notably enter the play of absence and presence, as they extend (corpo)reality beyond its physiological limits at the same time as they fragment and dislodge it. Armstrong (1998:3) indeed notes that "[m]odernity . . . brings both a fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology; it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation" (see also Bradbury 1971:57).

In its symbiotic interactions with the material world, the party-body, in effect, becomes a proto-cyborg body, if the cyborg is defined as "a cybernetic organism, a fusion of the organic and the technical forged in particular, historical, cultural practices" (Haraway 1997:51). Normally, intrusions such as spectacles or telephones would appear insignificant. However, Julia, in particular, actively draws attention to her material 'prolongations', as she gives a description of her spectacles and casually adds that "one lens is missing" (*Cocktail* 365). Mechanical aids thus appear to be just as evasive and defective as their physiological equivalents. To stress its mutinous nature, the material world often fails to serve its original purpose. Accordingly, when physical objects be-

come tools, they drift away from their assigned roles. Thus, Celia admits that she has left her umbrella at Edward's flat on purpose in order to speak to him. Similarly, Julia's distracted, repeated absentmindedness reveals a shrewdly utilitarian edge, as she gives up looking for her (broken) spectacles as soon as 'losing' them has provided the pretext for her return to the flat: "they're no use to me [*this evening*]" (*Cocktail* 391; emphasis original). In a way, then, the entire material world serves as a means to communication.

On another plane, the machines galvanise the characters; it is as if they need an electric shock to move. The main purpose of the cocktail devices is indeed to move people or, at least, their words. When the characters are not busy answering telephones, catching the lift or a taxi, and pressing electric buttons, the action peters out and proceeds in slow motion, involving the bare minimum of physical exertion. The doorbell orchestrates the cues for entries and interruptions. When not urged along by electronic equipment or attempting to command the machines, Reilly "*goes to the couch and lies down*", whereas Edward fidgets about aimlessly or "*moves a card*" of Patience (*Cocktail* 376,411). In this respect, the partygoers act like automatons or marionettes to the electrical strings that rule their lives, moving according to the cadences of mechanical noises. In a way, then, the "trap" that the characters suspect surrounds them is largely technological by nature: humans are the slaves rather than the masters of the machinery in their urban homes (*Cocktail* 395; p.65).

As machines become anthropomorphic, actual characters start acting "in a programmed way" or, as Donoghue (1962:181) puts it when commenting on the "mechanical feel of the play as a whole": "[t]he dramatis personae are as discontinuous from each other and from any common world as the parts of a machine". This agrees with Haraway's (1991:177) rendition of the cybernetic body: "It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine". The play ties the theatrical convention of non-speaking or minor parts into this double display of the machine age, as it introduces a "nurse secretary" and "two caterers' men" who simply perform walk-on parts and mechanically obey orders (cf. Grove 1994:165). Ackroyd (1984:217), for instance, points to the comically symbolic name of the "nurse secretary", Miss Baraway (*Bar-away*), and sees her as an autobiographical reflection of Eliot's attempts to keep his first wife, Vivienne, away from his office. At the same time, however, the name indicates the extreme intrusion of technology into

human space, as the only function of Miss Barraway literally is to work as Reilly's tool and to 'bar away' unwanted visitors, acting as the physical extension of the electric button. Within the wider mechanism, the idea of controlling machines and other people turns out to be an illusion. Lavinia, often accused in the criticism of being weak and ignorant (Cuddy 2000:190), realises this helplessness and conjures up an image of her own situation, locked in a kind of *perpetuum mobile*: "I started some machine, that goes on working,/ And I cannot stop it" (*Cocktail* 361; see p.89). To stress the loss of causality and chronology, this mechanical body, like its physical equivalents, mutates and moves without striving towards any specific, predictable goal.

In a sense, then, the entire play-world operates like a machine. On a yet larger scale, society itself is seen as a mechanism, where the Guardians enter as the motorising pilots separating or connecting people at will; they "manage the machine", as Julia puts it (*Cocktail* 366). Goldman (1973:163) indeed sees this "mechanical connectedness" as a defining feature of both "the well-made play, particularly the drawing-room comedy of mystery" and the society it portrays with its "psychological, biological, social, and economic determinism". The scientific community seems to embrace an unrelentingly mechanical worldview; this is advocated by its chief spokesperson, Reilly, when he views his patients as "only pieces of a total situation/ [w]hich I have to explore" (*Cocktail* 405). In this job description, the cocktail-party doctor closely resembles a mechanic. It is worth noting that Reilly's consulting room itself appears poignantly sterile and mechanical with its electric button and telephone. Similarly, the critical discussion of "the couch" and other methods stereotypically associated with psychoanalysis befits the overall mechanical mood of the play. As Suárez (2001:755-756) points out, psychoanalysis may, in several respects, be seen as "a product of the machine age and of the modern media, which are, in a way, its unconscious".

The mechanical worldview disintegrates, however, as the cyborg qualities of (corpo)reality liquefy the borders between the body and the machine. Grove (1994:166) suggests that "Eiot's places are constructed not so much to look 'like life', as to operate like theorems or machines". It should be noted, however, that the cocktail party machinery works in essentially organic, unpredictable ways and that it actually defies mechanical monotony. Paradoxically enough, then, modern communication technology is used to indicate physical

distance and communication failure as well as an extended or “prolong[ed]” presence (Merleau-Ponty 1968:255; see p.83). For example, recorded and thereby mechanised music becomes a distracting wall of noise employed to induce silence between the Chamberlaynes, when Lavinia suspects that “the gramophone was only your escape/ From talking to me when we had to be alone” (*Cocktail* 396). Reilly, in turn, simply pushes an electric button both to invite meetings between the characters and to prevent unwanted collisions. In *The Cocktail Party*, the dis-integrated voice is, in addition, re-organ-ised into the physical body at the same time as it re-organ-ises the body and transforms its borders. Suárez (2001:758) comments on the proliferation of “non-signifying noise” in the modern world. In terms of Eliot’s play, it is easy to dismiss the cocktail-chatter as sheer mechanical “noise”, taken to be “[d]ry, endless, inhuman” in the manner of insect-Edward (*Cocktail* 382; see p.80). However, if seen as an extension of (corpo)reality, this noise becomes communicative in itself and even calls for a redefinition and broadening of language. The noise of the cocktail-party “machine” becomes a crucial indicator and component of social well-being.

Paradoxically enough, while striving away from contact with the (fattening) outside world, the anorexic (corpo)reality presents itself as a mesh of communication technology. Phelan (1990:84) takes note of the way that machines interfere in the plot as characters, or, indeed, as mechanical gods. Significantly enough, the technological gadgets are not there simply to help. In effect, the wilful mechanical body participates in the anorexic logic of negation. For instance, the refrigerator is virtually empty in the first act after Alex’s attempts “[t]o make something out of nothing” have “ruined the saucepan”, whereas Celia is dieted away from the London telephone directory in the last act (*Cocktail* 372,376). Paradoxically enough, the telephone and the flurry of (false) telegrams become extensions of the body at the same time as they remove its physicality. It should be noted that the telephone and the doorbell habitually interrupt or even clot the plot; in fact, they draw attention to themselves to the point of becoming active agents in the play that give false impressions and cause frustration; twice, Edward exclaims: “Damn the telephone.” (*Cocktail* 375,382.)

To reinforce their nature as independent or even organic entities, the technological channels of communication apparently often malfunction and al-

low for various forms of interference. For instance, the characters almost invariably fail to reach each other by telephone, or they enter without ringing the doorbell. In this way, the cocktail-communication technology, instead of aiding the characters to communicate, actually ends up reinforcing the overall sense of communication breakdown. This goes against Armstrong's (1998:74) notion that Eliot "eliminate[s] the wasteful flows" of his early poetry through a "fascination with system, the circulation of messages, feedback". The communication technology in the cocktail-milieu is littered with waste, and the machines turn out to be ineffective and unorganised (un)organisms. The cocktail institution itself then exists as "a set of obsolete responses" (*Cocktail* 363; see p.83) just like the individual characters that inhabit it, and the modern city becomes the extension and expression of the autistic physical body. Kenner (1987:34) indeed comments on the use of the telephone as a means to deceive in Eliot's works by quoting Celia's speech: "You can't tell the truth on the telephone." (*Cocktail* 361.) Thus, as an extreme sign of its independently anthropomorphic nature, the machine is even seen to lie and to deceive. Technology becomes entangled in the general air of *mystery* (p.50) and suspicion in the play to the point functioning as spying equipment: on one occasion, Edward forgets to close the telephone line, which probably gives Julia the opportunity to eavesdrop on his conversation with Celia.

In effect, the telephone actively intervenes in the discussion, as when its signal interrupts Peter's sentence: "What is the reality...[*The telephone rings.*] . . . of experience between two unreal people" (*Cocktail* 371). The telephone asserts its presence between the characters and plays up the "unreal[ity]" "and duplicity of two people talking over the telephone, present but simultaneously absent. To amplify the absurdity of the situation, the caller turns out to be Celia who attempts to reach her lover Edward but ends up accidentally interrupting Peter, when he is talking about his (unrequited) love for her. In a counter-reaction to this dissociation from physicality, (false) telegrams are issued by Julia to bring the characters physically together: "They had to tell us, *themselves*, that they had made their decision." (*Cocktail* 411; emphasis added.) In this way, technology is used both to disrupt and reinstate the significance of physical presence.

The decisive impact of modern technology on the party-worldview is underlined by the sharp technological divide drawn in the play between London



and Kinkanja. The absence of modern technology and mass culture becomes one of the main distinguishing features of the Kinkanja region, where “there is no cinema” and where technological innovations seem to be on a par with the life on a “cannibal isle” as described in *Sweeney Agonistes*: “There’s no tele-phones/ There’s no gramophones/ There’s no motor cars” (*Cocktail* 430, *Complete* 121). Realising that his filmed image of the world has not yet penetrated Kinkanja, Peter begins to envision it as a new market for his film company. In the process, Kinkanja comes to stand for a fierce strand of criticism and suspicion blended into Eliot’s literary fascination with modern technology. Peter’s plans for Kinkanja closely resemble Eliot’s (1951b:459) concern for the predicament of the Melanesians (see also Crawford 1987:233): “[T]he natives of that unfortunate archipelago are dying out principally for the reason that the ‘Civilization’ forced upon them has deprived them of all interest in life. They are dying from pure boredom.” In this article dating from 1922, the edge of Eliot’s criticism is chiefly aimed at modern communication technology and the entertainment industry, in particular:

When every theatre has been replaced by 100 cinemas, When every musical instrument has been replaced by 100 gramophones, when every horse has been replaced by 100 cheap motor cars, when electrical ingenuity has made it possible for every child to hear its bedtime stories through a wireless receiver attached to both ears, when applied science has done everything possible with the materials on this earth to make life as interesting as possible, it will not be surprising if the population of the entire civilized world rapidly follows the fate of the Melanesians.

Approximating the manner in which the monkeys in Kinkanja render an early stage of natural history spatial and material, Kinkanja itself becomes the geographical destination for a kind of time travel to the pre-industrial era. On entering Kinkanja, Celia notably penetrates an unmapped territory from the modern urban viewpoint. In effect, when Julia comments that Celia is “[n]ot in the [telephone] directory/ Or in any directory”, this absence passes as more than a tactless euphemism for Celia’s death (*Cocktail* 433). The technological devices not only move people around, but they actually determine their physical relations and place them on the (social) map. Thus, Celia advances beyond all fashionable London networks and renounces her former status as “merely a name/ In a society column” through the very act of leaving for Kinkanja (*Cocktail* 357,369).

Severin (1993b:400), for instance, reads Celia's move to Kinkanja and Lavinia's pregnancy as signs of the exclusion of modern Woman from the male-dominated industrial world by means of a complete assimilation with Nature. However, in terms of communication, Celia's move away from the *dis*-connecting cocktail-technology is liberating. It should, in addition, be noted that images expressing mechanical power and strength notably relate to women in *The Cocktail Party*. Eliot (as quoted by Crawford 1987:245; emphasis original), in an interview, described Reilly as "a god *in* the machine". In the actual play, however, it is Julia, recognised by some critics as "the leader" (Donoghue 1962:179, Malamud 1994:1), who "like[s] to manage the machine" (*Cocktail* 366). She also feels peculiarly at ease in the hubbub of modern technology: "In the lift I can meditate". Thus, by appropriating the mechanical world, the cocktail party women essentially take over traditionally *masculine* qualities of unlimited, godlike power. At the same time, however, Julia readily admits her ignorance about the mechanisms of the cocktail machine: "You [Reilly] and I don't know the process by which the human is/ Transhumanised". In effect, the female characters appear to adapt to the mechanical and uncontrollable object side of (corpo)reality with more ease than their male counterparts. The cyborg body reaches its climax in an extended comic exchange concerning the "reconstruction" of a decayed English mansion on film only to culminate in Julia's suggestion: "Why not reconstruct *me*? It's very much cheaper." (*Cocktail* 433; emphasis original.) Combining the subject and the object positions, Julia both makes "use" of the material world and proudly defines herself as mechanically "useful to [Reilly]" (*Cocktail* 426,433). Significantly enough, then, the dynamic cyborg body in the play is predominantly labelled as female.

### **The Filmed Body**

JULIA.            You must have learned how to look at people, Peter,  
                           When you look at them with an eye for the films:  
                           That is, when you're not concerned with yourself  
                           But just being an eye. (*Cocktail* 436.)

One noteworthy intrusion of modern technology into *The Cocktail Party* occurs through the Hollywood film industry. In effect, it should be noted that much of the theatrical imagery prominent in Eliot's other plays is substituted in the cocktail dialogue by references to the cinema. Throughout the play, the cock-

tail party characters engage in a debate evolving *me(a)taphorically* around films and hinging, at times, on an open battle between “the film industry” and “the art of the film” (*Cocktail* 356,367,369,370,430-431,432-433,435,439). Without doubt, this serves as an indication of the modern setting, but film technology also influences the way in which the body and its borders are understood in the play.

Film and photographic *me(a)taphors* convey the idea of a filter between reality and the image achieved through the disfiguring senses and the intellect. On the one hand, the vertically detached “eye for the films” contradicts the blurred and partial vision of the physiological retina. The film-eye is cut off from the chaotic body and its dependence on multiple social and emotional networks. On the other hand, however, the conversational *me(a)taphors* introduce film in an anthropomorphic, physical form and present it as unreliable. Accordingly, the characters repeatedly talk about each other in terms of (un-)real and emotionally tinted *images* and *projections* (*Cocktail* 382,435). To apply Eliot’s terms in ‘East Coker’, the camera becomes part of the “shabby equipment always deteriorating/ In the general mess of imprecision of feeling/ Undisciplined squads of emotion.” (*Complete* 182.) The contact is, again, mutual, since film renders the bodily eye mechanical at the same time as it is, in turn, influenced by the chaotic (corpo)reality. The cocktail-difficulty to see more than the diffuse traces of the body resembles Merleau-Ponty’s (1962:115; emphasis original) theatrical or cinematographic take on the body in his differentiation between “bodily” and “external space”. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body can be said to “envelop its parts instead of spreading them out, because it is the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background . . . against which the gesture and its aim stand out, the zone of not being *in front of which* precise beings, figures and points can come to light”. In this way, the *I-eye* discussed above (see p.58-59) can never see itself in external space and is never caught on film except as a reflection, while it is still insolubly present “in-the-world”.

Film techniques may also be seen to bear structural implications for Eliot’s work. Wright (1960:66), for instance, notes a change in Eliot’s presentation of poetic images and suggests that his early poems exhibit “a technique comparable to sculpture”, while “his later works recall the motion picture”. The moving picture stresses the general sense of dynamism and change at-

tached to (corpo)reality. To some extent, the filmic vision is displayed as generational in *The Cocktail Party*, so that the older characters retain a more static, statuesque, and manually built vision: “What you’ve been living on is an image of Celia/ Which you made for yourself, to meet your own needs.” (*Cocktail* 435.) Portrayed as members of the “young” generation in the play, Celia and Peter are more engrossed in the film jargon, as exemplified by Peter’s view that Celia has “faded—into some other picture—/ Like a film effect” (*Cocktail* 370). Edward equates the superficiality of film with young love, as he belittles the relation between Peter and Celia by noting that “a mutual interest in the moving pictures/ Frequently brings young people together” (*Cocktail* 367). However, all the main characters appear to be deeply affected by visual artefacts: “a sudden intuition, in certain minds,/ May tend to express itself at once in a picture” (*Cocktail* 437). In fact, the characters almost literally feed on (false) pictures of each other, as they remodel their lovers in their own image. This *me(a)taphorical* feeding on images radicalises the idea that “the image incarnates and makes appear the person represented in it” (Merleau-Ponty 1964:132). Film technology also allows for a rapid change of angles as well as fragmentary close-up images; Reilly indeed zooms in on a still ‘image’ of Celia’s astonished face “the first minutes after a violent death”.

In the wake of an essay by Arrowsmith, several critics have stressed the interplay in *The Cocktail Party* between light and darkness (Donoghue 1962: 175-177, Porter 1970:71, Phelan 1990). In the first scene of the first act, Reilly spells out the constant shifting in the play between day and night as well as the difficulty of measuring the relative amount of both actual and symbolic light or blindness: “There is certainly no purpose in remaining in/ the dark/ Except long enough to clear from the mind/ The illusion of ever having been in the light.” (*Cocktail* 364.) However, instead of retaining a strict polarisation into black and white, the cocktail-crowd meets a spectrum of different relative shades of light. Significantly enough, this oscillation is tightly knit to a discussion of the nature of perception itself. Filmic *me(a)taphors* may be seen to describe the basic phenomenological “formula” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xx; see p.24) of seeing the world in the play, and film indeed separates between a set of partly contrasting cultural spheres built within the communicative universe of the play. Set in California, one of these worlds is entirely built around the film industry, hovering between the art of film and blockbusters. The Hollywood film world

is portrayed as something distant, where everything is an illusion. However, although the dream world of film is obviously unreal, it is also made almost palpably physical, and it constitutes an alternative universe to the cocktail-world. Through the distorting lens, the ‘real’ world and the imaginary film-world appear equally (corpo)real—or equally fictitious—to the cocktail-crowd. This blurring of existential borders strengthens the impression that, in *The Cocktail Party*, the material world is problematised at least as much as the spiritual self of the characters.

The cinematic vision becomes a central way in which *The Cocktail Party* dislocates and blurs temporal borders. Significantly enough, then, the film world exists in the border zone between the ‘Old’ continent of Europe and the ‘New’ (Anglo-)American world. Despite its modern flare, the image of British society as seen through the cinematic lens appears antiquated. In effect, Peter’s Hollywood film script portrays the ‘old country’ in complete unison with what Cunningham (1999:61), in a comparison of British and American films of the period, describes as “stereotypes of swish West End dinner parties and country houses where everyone spoke with a plum in their mouths, and the working class, if they appeared at all, were included as a bit of light relief”. Ironically enough, this description indeed fits the drawing-room mode that *The Cocktail Party* itself painstakingly preserves and even parodies (see Grove 1994:167). In a sense, then, Hollywood represents the next generation of the party-world, matching its constructed unreality.

Initially, the authority over the visual universe is presented as male. The play parades men as the creators of the film world, where women are brought in mainly as actresses or as *reconstructed* objects. Rokem (1997:221-222) stresses the physical power of the male point of view by discussing an almost voyeuristic male “gaze... institutionalized by the theatre as well as the cinema” and embedded into texts as “an emblematic, and for our culture almost archetypal, situation of men not only creating fictional women characters but also watching them”. Irigaray (1985b:26) draws similar conclusions from a fundamental and (corpo)real difference in the manner in which the sexes tackle the world: “Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation”. In *The Cocktail Party*, however, this “male gaze” is partly inhibited, as the vibrant cocktail-

women actually move away from view. Ironically, the male lens fails to see the women when they are there (*Cocktail* 363-364; see p.50,56). Edward, for instance, has been completely unaware of his wife's having had an affair with Peter, whereas Lavinia knows of Edward's relationship with Celia. At the same time, the cocktail-women return the gaze; they actively participate in the "scopic economy" and thereby transform it. This refusal can be exemplified through Celia's decision to ignore the film career carved out for her by Peter in California. This alternative path as a film star would, in fact, entail a public life extremely involved with visibility, continually engrossed in the culture of being seen. Celia would proceed from "a name/ [i]n the society column" (*Cocktail* 369; see p.97) to a celebrity face on the film screen, gaining ever larger visibility but only in the mask and the words of someone else. In a way, California reads as the expansion of the cocktail-scene and its elite audience onto a nearly global scale. This adds weight to the apparently superfluous information that "there is no cinema in Kinkanja" (*Cocktail* 430). The global nature of film technology turns out to be an illusion and fails to reach Celia. Accordingly, Peter is unable to locate Kinkanja on the map: "Kinkanja? Where's that? They don't have the pictures?" (*Cocktail* 431.)

In moving East, Celia becomes invisible to the others, as there is no recorded documentation available of her fate. In this way, the modern film-world of California and Peter is contrasted to the (invisible) East of Celia's Kinkanja. Significantly enough, the male characters are not in possession of a similar power to avert the gaze, and they remain seen. In effect, Edward frequently expresses his wish to be "alone", but he always seems to have company—even when Julia invites him to "dine alone with me": "I've already chosen the people you're to meet" (*Cocktail* 357-358,366,368,374). Goldman (1973:168) comments on how Edward makes several attempts to absent himself from the scene; he fidgets away from view and manages to "half-leave" into the kitchen or to answer the door-bell, but he is inevitably drawn back. In this way, in accordance with the conversational strand of mystery and crime novels, the scopic fixation makes the cocktail party scene itself appear as a monitored prison. In effect, Edward becomes doubly visible: after Lavinia's return, he is required to tell his wife about the events that the theatre audience has already witnessed once on stage, whereas Lavinia is allowed to keep her secrets.

The camera-view and Peter's "eye for the films" (*Cocktail* 436; see p.97) add to the broader pattern in the play involving monocular vision. Technology is thus seen to add to the fragmentation of the body, as the single eye is simultaneously described as physiologically defective and an indicator of objective, clear-sighted vision. The bodily eye is apparently incapable of seeing clearly without this technological fragmentation. Phelan (1990:171-172), for instance, refers to the "binocular vision" of Julia and Reilly and sees that these two characters "complement each other"; Julia wears spectacles with only one lens whereas Reilly sings a song about "One-Eyed Riley". Through the parallel worlds of London, Kinkanja and California, there is a movement from monocular to binocular or even a dynamic multi-vision. Paradoxically, the cocktail-males are indissolubly tied to their public and visible roles, but they cannot see themselves. In effect, as the characters avoid touching each other, the physicalised film *me(a)taphors* also render the (male) gaze indirect. The cocktail-men do not see the film they write the script for; they do not find Celia at the end of the play and can only guess at her fate. Similarly, their connection to art is achieved through metatexts: "[y]ou won't have seen my novel,/ Though it had some good reviews" (*Cocktail* 367). Edward realises his own blindness and confesses that he is "completely in the dark", while others can see him (*Cocktail* 387).

In the film culture—and in cocktail party society, at large—the body itself becomes an artefact produced by the eye. Accordingly, the film-world visibility is portrayed in the play as an attempt to *recreate* Nature through male culture. In this respect, the film world may be seen to exemplify what Severin (1993a:357), for instance, criticises as Eliot's "goal of erasing woman" by "locating all the generative power in the phallus" (see also Heywood 1996, Sparks 1989, Clark 1989, Severin 1993b, Cuddy 2000:193). It should be noted, however, that the artificial, male-constructed body fails to create new life in *The Cocktail Party*, and Peter and his film team only 'reconstruct' "good old English faces" and places for their standard murder mystery (*Cocktail* 433). Similarly, the cocktail-party stories only *reproduce* actual events.

In significant respects, then, the cocktail party corporeality also strives away from the preoccupation with (male) vision. In general, when the visual and the linguistic collide, the verbal plane prevails over the film world: the visual scene is enacted by language and not shown. The film-flesh also rebels

against its creator, and Peter loses all control over the contents of ‘his’ film: “They did a film/ But they used a different scenario.” (*Cocktail* 356.) This anticipates, for one thing, Peter’s own future for the next two years, which he spends waiting in vain for Celia. In addition, this divorce of the medium (the film) from the meaning (the script) foresees the whole (male) script of *The Cocktail Party*, as the play is partly hijacked by Celia’s fate. In their attempts to lock and perpetuate the meaning of (corpo)reality, they eventually fail.

De Beauvoir (1949a:198-199) notes how the female is combined with both the womb and the tomb in the patriarchal tradition. Besides attempting to “reconstruct” life parthenogenetically, the cocktail males must rebuild the abject, eroding object and death, as well: “We’ve got a team of experts over/ To study the decay, so as to reproduce it.” (*Cocktail* 431.) Significantly enough, then, the filmed avatar of the cocktail (corpo)reality strives to *rebuild* its dynamic and mutating nature. At the same time, however, the mechanical “reconstruction” and exact duplication of people and stories on film and in cocktail stories forms a stark contrast to the constant transformation stressed elsewhere. The image perpetuates (corpo)reality interminably, but it is at the same time inaccurate and diffuse in the manner of memories and dreams; in its monocular view, the film world is organically limited. It is worth noting that, at the end of the play, when Peter finally manages to produce a successful film-script, it builds on a “reconstruction” of organic “decay”. In a way, then, after his unsuccessful escape into the dream-world of California, Peter eventually has to face Celia’s death and the significance of transient (corpo)reality, in general.

## **The Body as Ghost**

### **The Hellish and Heavenly Body**

LAVINIA.                    Are you [Reilly] a devil  
                                   Or merely a lunatic practical joker?  
 EDWARD. I incline to the second explanation  
                                   Without the qualification ‘lunatic’. (*Cocktail* 406.)

*The Cocktail Party* has been acknowledged as the first of Eliot’s full-length plays to hide the supernatural forces from view (Moody 1980, Donoghue 1962:186). Significantly enough, the action of the play is entirely situated in



the everyday world. This complies with Eliot's (1951a:31) professed professional goal to include "no chorus and no ghosts" as well as with the conscious effort during the production of the play to avoid any "overt religious words and symbols" (Browne 1969:213,226-227). It follows that much of the metaphysical imagery is consciously written out of the play, as suggested by a comparison to the manuscripts. However, this far from implies that the corresponding abstract ideas not be discussed. On the contrary, much of the savage animal imagery is ingrained with references to darkness, evil, and hell, whereas ghosts are supplanted by wilful modern technology. In the party-world, metaphysical (sur)reality can apparently not be dichotomously divorced from physical (corpo)reality, and it is subordinated to it.

In a sense, the remnants of the chorus scatter into several physical bodies that speak the same words at different times unaware of each other. Reilly suggests as much, when he chooses to stress the everyday world when combining Celia's fate with "the Saint in the desert": "To speak about it/ We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors./ *But that world does not take the place of this one.*" (*Cocktail* 438; emphasis added.) In fact, the cocktail-characters seem to have digested this advice so well that they hardly ever "speak about it", not to mention use mythical or mystically elusive 'Minotaur' vocabulary to do so. Instead, they almost invariably resort to the material realm for their conversational *me(a)taphors*. This choice is made visible when Edward, in the above passage, chooses to consider Reilly a "practical joker" instead of a "devil" or even "lunatic". For the cocktail party crowd, the real enemy seems to reside in the immaterial realm represented by "the phantasmal world/ Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires" (*Cocktail* 419).

In *The Cocktail Party*, then, the metaphysical realm rather prominent in Eliot's previous play is consciously toned down and powdered with a distinct touch of light comedy. In contrast to the surreal *Eumenides* in the preceding play, the three Guardians not only appear on stage when they perform their "commission[ary]" work, but they are also flesh-and-blood characters who blend perfectly into the modern cocktail-community (*Cocktail* 432, emphasis added; see also Moody 1980:270). As exemplified by the fragmented body parts, the play displays a general drawing towards (corpo)real detail. The veering towards increased physicality is best exemplified in the detailed description of Celia, which deviates radically from its counterpart in *The Family Reunion*.

Despite their similar decision to leave their respective societies, Harry's future fate is only hinted at dimly, whereas Celia goes to a "sanatorium" and joins a "very austere . . . [nursing] order" only to be crucified by "the heathen" (*Cocktail* 429,433,434). To play up the physicality, Browne (1969:227), in effect, notes that the intention in describing Celia's death was "making sure that it bore no relation to the romantic crucifix". In part, this comes to topple what Donoghue (1962:177) comments on as Eliot's tendency to add "a spiritual dimension to physical facts". In terms of the cocktail party conversation, the effect is not one-sided but a reciprocal or even reversed assigning of physicality to the metaphysical. Thus, instead of conjuring up a miraculous resurrection, the ants provide a potential natural cause for the disappearance of Celia's body. Similarly, Celia refers to "the sanatorium" in poignantly practical terms by comparing it to "a prison" and worrying about the living arrangements (*Cocktail* 419). Badenhausen (in press) comments on a similar string in *Murder in the Cathedral*, where the chorus of Canterbury women "insist . . . on maintaining a bodily language even when characterizing the spirit". However, whereas *Murder in the Cathedral* still retains a hierarchical order and presents the bodily extensions of language as exclusively female territory, *The Cocktail Party* may be seen to disperse (corpo)real concerns into the entire community.

Significantly enough, besides replacing metaphysical words with their (corpo)real equivalents, *The Cocktail Party* also sets out to reconquer the religious and metaphysical vocabulary and to render it physical. The characters refer to each other jocularly as "good Samaritans", and Julia jokes about Edward replacing St. Anthony in her prayers: "The next time I lose anything, Edward/I'll come straight to you, instead of to St. Anthony" (*Cocktail* 376,366). In this respect, *The Cocktail Party* resembles Bakhtin's (1968:285-286; emphasis original) "grotesque symposium" in its shunning of hierarchical order: "it freely blends the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material. There are no *misalliances* in its case." For instance, then, Edward labels Lavinia an "angel of destruction": "at your touch, there is nothing but ruin" (*Cocktail* 398). Ironically enough, the comparison is inadvertently extended here to blend Lavinia with a deity, as well, when Edward exclaims "O God" thrice in this passage and finishes his complaint about his wife's power to "ruin": "Must I become after all what *you* have made me?" (emphasis added). When it is sexed as female, the angel/god does not only give birth, but

it also destroys. This process of *rehumanising* the metaphysical is indeed brought to completion in Eliot's next play, *The Confidential Clerk*, where a "flighty" character is surnamed *Angel* (Grove 1994:167).

In particular, *The Cocktail Party* exhibits an almost programmatic demystification of the term *devil* by making it refer, often with comic undertones, to actual characters in the play. Browne (1969:204) comes to stress this everyday interpretation in discussing the role of the Guardians, noting that the other characters refer to them as *devils*:

In reality, however, they have no sinister intent; we all feel this way when we are confronted by the truth about ourselves, especially through the agency of someone over whom we have no means of control. Eliot's Guardians appear in a pattern which suggests a symbolic meaning, but they do only what anyone who influences us does: they show the way towards a choice by which we may solve our problems.

Again, *The Cocktail Party* dialogue vivifies wooden metaphors and transforms their apparent semantic emptiness into significant wordflesh or *me(a)taphors*. Through the extended repetition of different forms of *devil*, seemingly innocent exclamations become animate:

LAVINIA. But I'm puzzled by Julia. That woman is the devil.  
(*Cocktail* 392.)

CELIA. But why should that man [Reilly] want to bring her back—  
Unless he is the Devil! I could believe he was.

EDWARD. Because I asked him to.

CELIA. Because you asked him to!

Then he *must* be the Devil! He must have bewitched you. (*Cocktail* 377; emphasis original.)

EDWARD. What the devil's that? (*Cocktail* 377.)

CELIA. That's the Devil's method!" (*Cocktail* 378.)

The physicalisation of devilry culminates in connection to Edward's *me(a)taphorical* musing: "What devil left the door on the latch/ For these doubts to enter?" (*Cocktail* 392). Initially abstract, the image of "the door on the latch" is materialised through an echoing effect. Thus, Edward has previously suspected the "devil[ish]" Julia of leaving the door open and insisted that Alex "[p]lease *shut the door after* you, so that it latches" (*Cocktail* 367,372, 388; emphasis original). In the draft version of the play, a similar conglomerate

tion of the physical and the mythical appears by calling the Guardians *daimons*; this physicalisation was, however, removed on the instance of the director in order to avoid confusion (Browne 1969:184).

Significantly enough, the ghost-*me(a)taphor* also perform what might be called the semi-physical re-*present*-ation of the past in the present tense of the cocktail-community. Goldman (1973:158), for instance, points to this physical connection, as he recognises Eliot's phantoms as "ghosts of past associations and deeds, of heredity and environment". In effect, the ghosts become personalised, when childhood relations re-enter memory in the guise of "affectionate ghosts" (*Cocktail* 385). In the draft version of the play, the ghost of the past is tangibly connected to evolutionary history:

But one cannot escape  
From a ghost to a ghost, from lemur to larva;  
One must fight with the ghost, until it becomes real,  
Flesh and blood. One can part from the living  
But not from the dead. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:206.)

The antiquated ghosts here appear in a relation of apposition with a recoiling of evolutionary chronology "from lemur to larva". Similarly, on the personal plane, the "obsolete" nature of dynamic (corpo)reality and the breakdown of communication turn the cocktail characters into a community of phantoms—or indeed "phantom limb[s]" (Merleau-Ponty 1962; see p.56)—who "live on a little knowledge/ About ourselves as we were" (*Cocktail* 363). Similarly, this constant transformation of people into ghosts of themselves applies shows in the evasive nature of human relations: "What we know of other people / Is only our memory of the moments/ During which we knew them. And they have changed since/ then." (*Cocktail* 384-385.) Accordingly, Lavinia realises that she is "only a ghost" to her husband, whereas Edward attempts to convince Peter that the young man's liaison with Celia is "already a memory" (*Cocktail* 371,396). In the draft version of the play, Lavinia presents the entire cocktail party society as such a collection of spectres by redoubling the distance between ghosts and (corpo)reality: "ghosts *have* ghosts" (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:206; emphasis original). In keeping with the sense of the lived body as a "network of relationships" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii; see p.33), the characters strive to become "[f]lesh and blood" to each other in order to exorcise their past ghosts. Goldman (1973:163), in effect, notes how the "phantoms

of connectedness . . . are revealed to be illusory, and the characters are seen to be truly haunted by an inability to connect”. In effect, Lavinia’s wish to escape nothingness is built on *recreating* emotional connections: “Oh, Edward, I should like to be good to you—/ Or if that is impossible, at least be horrid to you—/ *Anything but nothing*, which is all you seem to want of me. (*Cocktail* 396; emphasis added.)

### **Fictional (Meta)Physicality**

REILLY. . . . And the other life will be only like a book  
You have read once, and lost. In a world of lunacy,  
Violence, stupidity, greed...it is a good life. (*Cocktail* 418.)

As a rule, the fears and apprehensions of the cocktail-characters take on a distinctly physical and demystified form when verbalised by them. In the urban flat, the mechanical and manufactured world intrudes to replace the invisible, supernatural realm. Kenner (1987:36) seems to strike a significant chord when commenting in passing that, to the poet Eliot and his early 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries, “the telephone must have seemed as queer as any transaction with a ghost in Shakespeare”. Suárez (2001:752-753), similarly, allocates the role of “ghosts” in *The Waste Land* to “voice-recording devices”: “[t]hese media repopulate the world with spirits, from the Latin *spiritus*, breath—or, what is the same, with voices.” Befitting the cocktail-problems with communication, voices and communication become ghosts through the technological channels that reproduce them. A prominent way of taming the metaphysical is achieved through treating it as fictitious. Simultaneously, fiction is presented as a mechanical or manufactured object. Through a simile, “the other world” thus materialises in the wordworld as “a book”, which can be set aside or even “lost”. The main machinery for achieving this fictionalisation of both the physical and the metaphysical occurs through the film industry. In a sense, then, the cocktail party communication technology and the Hollywood dream industry materialise Celia’s feeling of the unreal world: “I don’t imagine that I am being persecuted;/ I don’t hear any voices, I have no delusions—/ Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion.” (*Cocktail* 413.)

Significantly enough, the demystifying effect of fictionalising technology also gnaws on the symbols drawn from Nature and affects their applicability as substitutes for the supernatural forces. The *me(a)taphysical* breed of animal

imagery is prominent elsewhere in Eliot, and Frye (1963:56), for instance, notes that the “threatening angels are usually replaced in Eliot by birds and animals” (see also Thormählen 1984). In *The Cocktail Party*, however, the only ‘bird’ allowed into the fabric of the play is embedded into the name of a California-based but apparently multinational film company named Pan-Am Eagle. Thus, even the birds have become poignantly mechanical in the play. There is a contrast with *The Family Reunion*, where birds are associated with spiritual experience, where the hero is compared to a “bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame” amid a multitude of ominous apparitions of “wings . . . beak and claws” and the “black raven” (*Complete* 285,292,310,315,316,333,335). In the draft version of *The Cocktail Party*, the mystical connotations persist in the form of an incantation: “two winged ones shall watch over the roof” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:187). The only birdlike remnants in the finished play, if disregarding the entirely demystified bird that may still be lurking in Julia’s “ravenous” appetite, are the occasional beetles and bats discussed above (*Cocktail* 355,382; see p.69-70,76).

Despite the diversity of bird imagery in Eliot, extending from connotations of dove-like sanctity to haunting vultures and nightingales singing of rape, the wholly mechanical and constructed Pan-Am Eagle marks a rare variety. The image appears all the more striking as, elsewhere in Eliot’s oeuvre, the image of the eagle appears in relation to ageing and is commonly associated with spiritual rebirth, existing in “a momentary, rebellious desire to recreate the beauties of the world of the senses” (see Thormählen 1984:77-80,83). Pan-Am Eagle, in fact, sets in motion a kind of “reconstruction”, as well, but it is strikingly futile or even false and limited to the surface level. Suspended between heaven and earth and shattering the boundary between them, this soulful breed of bird in Eliot is turned into a mechanic machine suggestive of aeroplanes and making a business of human dreams. The company is expressly impersonal, spreading its wings over the entire Pan-American continent. In keeping with the mechanical touch, Alex refers to his apparently spiritual accomplices in the film world as a Mafia of *corporate* business partners: “I have connections—even in California.” (*Cocktail* 390,423,431.) In a sense, Pan-Am Eagle and its detached “eye for the films” is set on creating what might be termed unreality or surreality. In this way, the mechanical film-bird becomes the cage through

which the characters are “trapped in a world of make-believe”, as Goldman (1973:164-165) terms the general atmosphere of the play.

Another way of separating the metaphysical elements from the actual cocktail party surroundings occurs through a metatextual strain involving the transformation of poetry and art into pragmatic objects. When Lavinia confronts Reilly about the “expression . . . of...satisfaction” which she detects on his face at the news of Celia’s death, he replies with a question: “Do you mind if I quote poetry, Mrs. Chamberlayne?” (*Cocktail* 436.) Severin (1993b) interprets Reilly’s predilection for poetry as evading the question and deems that it results in one of the countless attempts in the play to silence modern Woman by means of flaunting the superior male mind and its literary tradition. Initially, Lavinia indeed seems to swallow the bait and gives the emphatic reply “Oh no, I should love to hear you speaking poetry...” This appears to be an inappropriate reaction for the situation at hand, and it is interrupted by a comment by Julia. However, Lavinia is not so easily distracted, and she finishes her sentence after the interruption with the decided qualification: “...if it answers my question” (*Cocktail* 437).

The effect of the metatextual exchange is double. Primarily, Lavinia’s pragmatism spells out the general tendency in the play to avoid overtly poetic language, and at the same time it removes the potentially surreal edge from the poetry by bringing it down to the everyday level and labelling it ‘a poem’. Edward aims at a similar effect concerning Celia’s poetry and art in general by claiming that Celia’s poetry is “[i]nteresting if one is interested in Celia” and by regarding the cinema as a convenient place for “young people” to date (*Cocktail* 367). However, “quoting poetry” also allows Reilly the opportunity to distance himself, along with the entire cocktail party community, from the supernatural implications included in the passage from Shelley’s ‘Prometheus Unbound’ concerning the “two worlds of life and death” (*Cocktail* 437). When he proceeds to recite the poem, his words are then pointedly borrowed and no longer his property. Discussing *The Family Reunion*, Grove (1994:168) notes how Eliot’s play-world “no longer splits ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ apart, but recreates them as inseparably involved with one another, happening and not-happening together”. Similarly, the dynamic cocktail-body refuses to respect the border between reality and unreality as the basis for knowledge. This loosening of ex-

istential borders agrees with the implications of Husserlian bracketing that all physical identities are essentially fictions (*Fiktionen*) (Husserl 1982; see p.25).

### **The Haunted House**

LAVINIA. One can be practical, even in hell. (*Cocktail* 397.)

Alongside the tendency among the cocktail-characters to label each other as “devils” discussed above (p.106-107), there is a penchant in the play to approach the metaphysical world by internalising or indeed swallowing it. In this regard, a door to embodying the *me(a)taphysical* realm opens through the connection between the body and the house, established in many of Eliot’s works. Like houses, the characters or gods “ruin” “redeem” each other from ruin (*Cocktail* 374,381,398,402). In the process, the urban flat becomes the (t)issue needed to break the borders between the physical, the mechanical, and the metaphysical. Edward, in particular, endorses the poetic and cultural image of the body as a house (cf. Delany 1997:105-106):

There was a door,  
And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle.  
Why could I not walk out of my prison?  
What is hell? Hell is oneself.  
Hell is alone, the other figures in it  
Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from  
And nothing to escape to. One is always alone. (*Cocktail* 397.)

Edward Chamberlayne here refurbishes his mental state in the shape of a virtually empty chamber haunted by “mere . . . projections” or phantom images. A vivisection of this internalised space reveals that the personal *prison* is, paradoxically enough, a room with a handle, i.e. designed to be opened. In addition, the door is apparently unlocked, and the captivity is hence self-inflicted. As if surrounded by an electric fence, Edward describes himself as incapable of crossing his own borders and reaching out or even “touch[ing]” the border. In the draft version of the play, the hermetic solitude of this image is even clearer: “the other figures in it/ *One’s own* projections” (Eliot as quoted in Browne 1969:265; emphasis added). With the exception of the closed door, the walls in this claustrophobic place appear solid, and they reflect (false) images of its lonely inhabitant. From this perspective, the devils and the ghosts that the characters see in the people who surround them may perhaps more accurately be



regarded as “projection[s]” of themselves rather than real. Hell is presented as an existential stance: “But I don’t need a doctor./ I am simply in hell. Where there are no doctors—/ At least, not in the professional capacity.” (*Cocktail* 397.)

Moody (1980:269) comments on Eliot’s tendency to “transform the life of the world from a hell into a purgatory” (see also Wright 1960:66-67). Within the scope of *The Cocktail Party*, the individual, (corpo)real self is presented as a “hell”, whereas the urban household is reminiscent of a purgatory. Edward envisions this sudden plunge into eternal suffering after he asks Reilly to bring his wife “back from the dead”. Time loses its chronological bounds and dissolves into a formless eternity: “It was only yesterday/ That damnation took place. And now I must live with it/ Day by day, hour by hour, for ever and ever.” (*Cocktail* 397.) In *me(a)taphysical* universe of *The Cocktail Party*, the purgatorial flames are subdued and condensed into married life, which is presented as “casual talk before the fire” (*Cocktail* 417; see p.114). The connection between the homely hearth and the purgatorial flames is clearer in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

You shall forget these things, toiling in the household,  
 You shall remember them, droning by the fire,  
 When age and forgetfulness sweeten memory  
 Only like a dream that has often been told  
 And often been changed in the telling. They will seem unreal.  
 Human kind cannot bear very much reality. (*Complete* 271.)

It should be noted, then, that the (corpo)real immune system of the cocktail-party home has multiple ways to deter the interruptions of the metaphysical. For instance, the characters may be seen to by-pass the unexplainable on the (1) conversational, the (2) medical, and the (3) perceptual level by labelling it (1) “poetry”, a (2) “nervous breakdown”, and a (3) cinematic “projection”, respectively (*Cocktail* 378,397,402). This categorisation makes it easier for the cocktail-crowd to control the chaotic edges of their universe. In addition, the cocktail-party vision remains limited to the house with its predetermined microcosmic relations. In the draft version of the play, there is indeed a pronounced fear that the certainties of “this world”—and the world itself—ends where the well-lit, inhabited rooms end:

EDWARD     There's only one door out,  
               Though it opens into the dark, though on the other side  
               There may be nothing—just nothing—vacancy;  
               No corridor, no stair, only the brief moment  
               Of surprise, of stepping into nothing  
               Before annihilation. Only the one way. (Eliot as quoted by  
               Browne 1969:205.)

The geographical coordinates of the urban home falter and turn out to be arbitrary, as the flat appears to float around in nothingness. The very dimensions of this haunted house seem to vary, as the characters search for “a door” or “a way out” without finding it (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:205-206).

Since the household is the only relatively certain, although constructed, reality in the constantly fluctuating world, the characters cling to it. Accordingly, the cocktail-crowd domesticate and make their internal “hell[s]” inhabitable and (corpo)real by living. Donoghue (1962:174) comments on the admixture of “domestic and Christian” imagery in *The Cocktail Party*. In terms of the gendered society with its *feminine* home and the *masculine* public sphere, this entails that the religious vocabulary becomes essentially *feminine* territory. When Edward complains of his entrapment and incapacity to act because he is “simply in hell”, Lavinia repeatedly urges him to carry on and to be “practical” (*Cocktail* 406-407).

The cocktail party pragmatism also shows in a tendency towards casual speech, which highlights (corpo)real needs. In the draft version of the play, Reilly corroborates the connection between “speaking the body” and prosaic speech, when offering the others a drink in French:

*Reilly.* Je suis de si bonne disposition que c'est moi qui vous verserai à boire. What a relief it is to be talking prose.  
*Julia.* Henry! When have you ever talked anything else? (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:187.)

From treating the spiritual ailments and “salvation” of the characters, Reilly here simultaneously produces a shift to “prose” and answering to the (corpo)-real needs of the cocktail party congregation. Significantly enough, the mixing of the fictitious, the mechanical, and the supernatural is reached in the cocktail-party environment through the body:

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. . . . to approach the stranger  
               Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,

Or let the genie out of the bottle. It is to start a train of events  
Beyond your control. (*Cocktail* 361.)

Paradoxically enough, then, the cocktail party needs the element of surprise that it struggles to control through an anorexic regime. In this passage, the body is reintroduced to feed both the machine and the fairy-tale. Within the cocktail party society, the chaotic body takes the role of the creative intruder, the uninvited but necessary guest, and it is even personified in the guise of “Unidentified Guest”. The body causes the machine to start and the ghosts to appear. Thus, the body presents itself as an unidentified and uninvited guest at the party that poses as the celebration of corporeality. It is the flesh, or the substance, whose meaning cannot be fully appreciated or controlled. The cocktail-women, in particular, combine the three spheres of the physical, the mechanical, and the metaphysical. Thus, Edward describes his wife as mechanically “*stronger than...a battleship*” and in possession of an animalised “*sub-human strength*” at the same time as she has the powers of a metaphysically “*destructive angel*” (*Cocktail* 406,403; emphasis added). In effect, Julia’s meditation in the moving mechanical lift combines the different levels of existence. It includes the mechanical and the spiritual elevation, controlled by physically pushing a button.

## **ARTERY: THE BODILY BONDS BETWEEN SPACE AND TIME**

### **The Biological Breakdown**

#### **The Fall of the Family Tree**

REILLY.      They do not repine;  
Are contented with the morning that separates  
And with the evening that brings together  
For casual talk before the fire  
Two people who know they do not understand each other,  
Breeding children whom they do not understand  
And who will never understand them. (*Cocktail* 417.)

On the surface level, the cocktail-world *rearranges* itself along the lines of traditional family values, where the characters are either paired off to form families or depart from the society in a kind of voluntary exile to lead solitary or even monastic “careers” devoted to art or to public service (*Cocktail* 435). A closer examination, however, reveals a society where even the nuclear family crumbles and testifies to a world where biological bonds all but dissolve. In the above passage, indicative of what Reilly terms “the human condition”, there is a chasm and a breakdown of (meaningful) communication both between the sexes and between generations, or rather a sense of shared resignation to this indispensable distance. Human contacts are arranged according to a monotonous mechanical cycle orchestrated by the diurnal rhythm as well as office hours. In this modern urban world, families lead separate, public lives in the daytime and only meet at dusk and in darkness, when they can *see* neither each other nor the meaning of other people’s words.

Wanting to stress the nature of the “old-fashioned” society propagated in the very settings of *The Cocktail Party*, Grove (1994:164-168) suggests that the importance of traditional family values is heightened by being “doubled” to encompass both biological kin and a spiritual community. Severin (1993b:397) goes even further by contemplating the entire play as a fight against “family decay”, which “leads to social anarchy and the dissolution of civilized behaviour” unless the patriarchy manages to “resurrect an almost forgotten binary order”. According to this view, “Eliot suggests that only a return to the Victorian family code can prevent the social crisis from worsening”. Although the deteriorating familial ties are a genuine concern in the play, numerous features in the play deter programmatic solutions to the unease. In several respects, it might be argued that the “chosen” family of kindred spirits is emphasised in the play to the detriment of traditional blood relations.

Critics have tended to proffer confusingly contradictory conclusions regarding the role of the family in *The Cocktail Party*. For instance, Phelan (1990:58) sees Eliot on a crusade “to re-establish and strengthen familial lines”, whereas Malamud (1994:196n) opines that the same signs show Eliot’s intent “to deconstruct whatever remnants of familial connections endure” from Eliot’s previous play. This divergence may perhaps be explained in terms of the anorexic principle of elision prominent in *The Cocktail Party*. Instead of inviting a discussion about family background, much weight is put on dimin-

ishing the vocabulary itself and thus removing these aspects from the word-world of the play. The process of negation through elimination is reflected in the way that the sections dismissing “parentage,/ [u]pbringing, education, social background” and “recollections of infancy” are notably more detailed in the draft version of the play (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:208). The treatment of family relations is thus subjected to a methodological process of starvation and excision, as even the negative allusions to family are removed. This is reflected, in part, in Reilly’s emphatically repeated disregard of the childhood memories and “early history” of his patients (*Cocktail* 402-403,404):

EDWARD.                   What else can I tell you?  
                               You didn’t want to hear about my early history.  
 REILLY. No, I didn’t want to hear about your *early* history. (*Cocktail* 404; emphasis original.)

The past is effectively eradicated and the characters are expected to behave like reborn followers of a cult, even leaving their relatives. In the cocktail-universe, individuals are, in effect, only born in the middle of their lives: “They have, *for the first time*, somewhere to start from.” (*Cocktail* 421; emphasis original.) Similarly, at the end of the play, there are no *new* beginnings but first beginnings: “You’ve only just begun.” (*Cocktail* 435.) However, the cocktail-amnesia does not build on complete oblivion but on “altered” pasts: “Only by acceptance/ Of the past will you alter its meaning.” (*Cocktail* 439.) The characters are constantly faced with a set of ‘true’ and ‘false’ pasts, and family members always seems to be grouped among the liars or *misrepresenters* of the past: biological ties do not last. A similar pattern occurs when Reilly evokes the image of “the grandmother,/ [t]he lively bachelor uncle at the Christmas party,/ [t]he beloved nursemaid—those who enfolded/ [y]our childhood years in comfort, mirth, security” only to dismiss them again as “[t]he affectionate ghosts”:

                              If they returned, would it not be embarrassing?  
                               What would you say to them, or they to you  
                               After the first ten minutes? You would find it difficult  
                               To treat them as strangers, but still more difficult  
                               To pretend that you were not strange to each other. (*Cocktail* 385.)

Family relations are portrayed as an “enfold[ing]” environment or a physical location, which is abandoned when physically out of sight. In the correspond-

ing passage of the draft version, Reilly explicitly denies the importance of genetic ties and places biological kin on a par with any human relations: “I speak of childhood, only to point my meaning/ More clearly.” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:201.) As the society becomes mobile and the offspring leave the family estate to settle in the deracinated city, the connections quickly evaporate: “Intimacy is an accident/ Or a habit. A day, an hour, a moment/ Of separate experience can annihilate it”. In this passage from the draft version, the fundamental distrust of biological kinship starts already in infancy: “But think of those you loved in childhood—*if you loved them*” (emphasis original). The weaning from all biological bonds begins, when practicalities and even social considerations of class solidarity alienate children from their authoritative parents: “Above all, perhaps, the nursemaid/ with whom the best terms of all—terms of equality”. When social status changes, (corpo)real bonds shift accordingly.

The meaning of the few remaining familial ties in the finished play thus has to be deduced from a paucity of instances or indeed reinserted into the play. In terms of this reconstruction, Malamud’s (1994) inclination to base his interpretation on a comparison between *The Cocktail Party* and Eliot’s previous works appears more viable. In effect, Reilly’s method to disregard memories of the past can be seen to reflect a larger pattern present in Eliot’s plays and in his work in general. In *The Family Reunion*, the sense of family is toned down or turned into a negative, pathogenic force. Thus, the protagonist Harry actually connects more intimately to his aunt and shuns his biological mother. *The Cocktail Party*, in turn, exhibits a uniquely modern family situation from the onset, as aunts turn out to be imaginary and the bonds between the generations are broken.

In terms of a hermeneutically sealed reading of the cocktail word-world, the absence of biological ancestry presents itself as an existential reality and it must thus be fitted into the body image of the play. Thus, in the cocktail-party view of (corpo)reality, there may simply be no familial ties to restore. In effect, relatives appear only as memories and dreams, which are treated as fictions in the cocktail-world. Like an omnipotent (film) creator, Reilly indeed professes his power to hypnotise his patients: “I could make you dream any kind of dream I suggested” (*Cocktail* 403). Significantly enough, *The Cocktail Party* is the only one of Eliot’s four so-called society-plays where none of the charac-

ters are biologically related. In fact, in his last two plays, Eliot returns to a situation where much of the dramatic tension lies between parents, especially fathers, and their children.

There appears to be no sense of genetic continuity or any lasting benevolent family feeling in the world of the modern cocktail-party adults. When family resurfaces in the dialogue, the influence is typically seen as devastating rather than healing. In Celia's case, family background only serves to strengthen her feeling of isolation. This becomes clear as Edward and Reilly both bring up Celia's family, in passing, when discussing or addressing her. When Edward rather bluntly enquires whether Peter has been introduced to any of Celia's relatives or friends (supposedly as her fiancé), he elicits a negative answer: "No, but once or twice she spoke of them/ And about their lack of intellectual interests" (*Cocktail* 370). Upon Edward's further pushing his point, Peter reveals that "nothing happened" as the result of these conversations. In the party-world, relatives are thus seen from a distance and judged socially according to their tastes and their (lack in) conversational skills.

Grandparents and other ancestors are non-existent in the uprooted urban atmosphere. In addition, the relation between parents and children is also seen as mutually forced and uncomfortable, and the 'nuclear' family appears split. This becomes clear, on the one hand, in Celia's apparent inability to communicate with her parents: "my family want me to come down and stay with them./ But I can't face it." (*Cocktail* 414.) Similarly, as an appendage to one of her cocktail-party stories, Julia hints at the marital problems of the Vincewell family by labelling their son "the product, but not the solution of a domestic situation", who "only made the situation more difficult" (*Cocktail* 355). Julia's choice of words is markedly cold and unfeeling. It is perhaps revealing that the businesslike tone of this "domestic situation" is echoed when, in the last act, Alex is unable to decide "whether the monkeys are the core of the problem/ Or merely a symptom" of the unrest in the remote colony of Kinkanja (*Cocktail* 427). Parents seem to belong to a different species than their offspring, and they generations categorically fail to "understand" each other (*Cocktail* 417; see p.114). A similar calculating attitude towards blood relations is hinted at when Julia reacts to the news of Lavinia's having left the city to nurse her (imaginary) aunt by bluntly asking about there being "any prospects" (*Cocktail* 357).

According to Phelan (1990:55), the country is the source for “health, growth, and fertility” in *The Cocktail Party* and contrasted to the “rootless housing” and “anonymity” of the urban household. However, the countryside actually described in the play is, in essence, shrivelled and dishevelled. In several respects, family and the ancestral abode actually become more of a strain than a blessing, as revealed in Celia’s indifferent description of her childhood home: “they live in the country, now they can’t afford to have a place in town./ It’s all they can do to keep the country house going:/ But it’s been in the family so long, they won’t leave it.” (*Cocktail* 414.) In its constant need of renovation and repair, the dilapidated country house here cannibalistically drains its inhabitants of their vital energies and enslaves them to immobility. The same dissolution of family name and tradition seeps into the cocktail-party relations, as neither Celia nor Edward, on separate occasions, manage to recall Peter or his family name: “Peter? Peter who?” (*Cocktail* 380,408.)

As a sign of the severed (blood) relations between the country and the city, the only potentially fruitful element in the first act, the eggs sent from Lavinia’s (real) Aunt Laura in the country, end up “ruined”. Whereas the city reflects solitude due to anonymity and overcrowding, the half-empty countryside presents a private isolation more focussed on death than on rebirth. When asked about her current relation to her parents and “the point of view of your family”, Celia comes to indicate a sense of physical distance suggestive of the fissure between the modern isolation in the city and the old familial country house. Space appears generationally divided, so that Celia and her cousin share a flat in London, while her parents and lonely “old ladies” inhabit the decaying and desolate countryside (*Cocktail* 357). Celia resembles her namesake in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* in her estranged relation to her parents; Shakespeare’s Celia chooses to denounce her father in order to express her solidarity to her cousin, Rosalind.

Family ties become muddled and radically reduced to a matter of “good mimic[ry]”, as when Julia’s attempts to ape the accent of Lady Klootz provoke a flurry of misguided guesses as to the geographical origins of the family (*Cocktail* 354). In fact, the confusion becomes understandable, as Julia finally traces the socially “too . . . vital” Lady Klootz multinationally to “one of the *oldest* Baltic families/ [w]ith a branch in Sweden and one in Denmark” (*Cocktail* 354; emphasis original). Part of the cocktail-party fear of the family may



indeed reflect the organic tendency of family trees to *de-generate* and to criss-cross geopolitical boundaries in disregard of ordered maps. In this way, biological blood bonds threaten the solidity of geopolitically demarcated divides between communities and individuals. In addition, the dissolution of biological bonds may be seen to reflect a broader reluctance to separate between different existential spheres. In Reilly's prescription of family life quoted above (p.114), the term *breeding*, reminiscent of the first lines in *The Waste Land*, indeed combines vegetative or animal procreation with the cultural transmission of tradition and the production of well-bred offspring (*Complete* 61).

While deploring that "very little has been written about mothers and almost nothing about daughters" in Eliot criticism, Cuddy (2000:192,194) notes that the Eliotic "mothers are essentially irrelevant—except to verify a man's birth and name". In effect, Cuddy (2000:119,193) singles out *The Cocktail Party* as the play where "Eliot essentially erases mother from the stage of family relations". According to Cuddy, the play marks the culmination of a "tradition elevating women in the Ideal while diminishing them in Reality". However, this ignores the fact that the cocktail-world knows no male biological ancestors, either. The exclusion of bodily bonds is in line with the general tendency in the play to cure its anxiety about the chaotic body by refuting it. The play creates a peculiarly *de-generated* pocket among Eliot's drawing-room dramas: like the urban flat of the Chamberlaynes, the play hovers in a zone where no blood relations are allowed and where the promise of children only presents itself in the last act. This can be seen as a sign of the existential atomism formulating the very concept of (corpo)reality in the play. Paradoxically enough, mechanical disconnectedness and lack of emotional commitment provide one of the rare means in Eliot's plays to escape the almost parasitic parental domination described by, for instance, Cuddy (2000:196): "parents are dominating creatures who withhold their approval, ignore their children's desires, and take over their lives". In Reilly's description of "the human condition" (*Cocktail* 417), both the spouses and their progeny are presented, not as possessions or organic prolongations of each other, but as fundamentally independent.

The way in which biological ancestry becomes a matter of choice is reflected in building an antithetical relationship between (imaginary or fake) aunts and mothers. This is heightened in Eliot's next play, *The Confidential*

*Clerk*: “I was your mother; but I chose to be your aunt./ So you may have your wish and have no mother.” (*Complete* 514; emphasis original.) Again, the cocktail party itself occupies the place of biological kin, becoming something of a surrogate mother to the isolated party-people in their urban homes. Similarly, the “Guardians” become a kind of surrogate parents or legal *guardians* of the other characters, and Julia indeed posits herself as Edward’s “maiden aunt” (*Cocktail* 357,381,383). Malamud (1994:122), reflecting on the ritual setting of the play, points to this function of the modern cocktail party as a substitute for the urban social vacuum. Thus, parenthood is not eliminated, but it is separated from the biological family and becomes a matter of choice. Through blurring the borders of (corpo)reality in this manner, the cocktail-crowd attempts to assert its power to (genetically) *manipulate* and control Nature. At the same time, it expresses a broadened sense of (corpo)reality and the ‘living’ body, as family feeling or the lack of it override biological determination and scientific truths.

The radical fragmentation of biological unity at work in the play can be traced on several levels from community to the family and, eventually, to individual bodies. Like kinship, human contacts in the cocktail-world melt down to a “convenient social convention/ [w]hich must sometimes be broken” (*Cocktail* 384-385). As the characters can no longer be irrefutably explicated by revealing “who” they are genetically, a heightened sense of the present arises: “at every moment we are meeting a stranger” and “every moment is a fresh beginning” (*Cocktail* 385,414,440). This shows clear affinities with the phenomenological, ‘lived’ body: “Given a perpetually new natural and historical situation to control, the perceiving subject undergoes a continued birth; at each instant it is something new” (Merleau-Ponty 1964:6). At the same time, just like film technology or the lens, perception and experience of the body work through a filter and fail to capture it in its immediate entirety. Borrowing the vocabulary of neurology and broken synapses, *The Cocktail Party* thus draws an image of the continually disjointed self: “You are nothing but a set/ Of obsolete responses.” (*Cocktail* 363.) In effect, in the dynamic lifeworld, the experience of remaining “the same” turns out to be an illusion or a “preten[se]”, and Reilly urges the characters to meet both others and themselves as “strangers” (*Cocktail* 385). The fragmentary nature of the (corpo)real consequently promotes alterity as an internal force suggesting an almost cellular isolation. In a sense, after five years of marriage, Lavinia and Edward already live with “another

woman” and “another man”; in addition, they are significantly ‘other’ to their own former selves, as well (*Cocktail* 360,370). It should be noted that this bent towards relativism and radical dynamism has its counterpart in the 20<sup>th</sup> century developments within the natural sciences and its theoretical reinterpretation of space-time. Smidt (1961:237) holds that Eliot’s work “has little to do with the exact sciences and has not caught up with atomic physics”. This contention seems debatable, however, if compared to the way in which the play questions and embodies a relativistic view of the world.

### **The Ageing Body**

EWARD.      The only thing of which I am relatively certain  
Is, that only since this morning  
I have met myself as a middle-aged man  
Beginning to know what it is to feel old. (*Cocktail* 381.)

Coming into terms with the constantly changing borders of the body and, eventually, with death become central themes in *The Cocktail Party*. To a considerable degree, the play is concerned or even preoccupied with ageing; Smidt (1961:193), for instance, maintains that the “obsession with old age” is one of the main veins trickling through the Eliotic oeuvre. In *The Cocktail Party*, an ongoing midlife-crisis becomes a way of depicting the constantly changing body. At the same time, age difference turns out to be one of the most distinctive ways in which aspects of the body come to draw borders between individuals and thereby to isolate them. In effect, reference to age may be seen to draw distinct temporal borders in a play-world where time itself has lost its linear shape and become fragmented. Merleau-Ponty (1962:210) indeed notes how “the body . . . is the medium of our communication with time as well as space”.

*The Cocktail Party* community presents a miniature cross sample of age ranges, with the virtual omission, however, of children. This contrasts with Euripides’ *Alcestis*, where biological children occur instead of the young lovers advocated by *The Cocktail Party*. In Eliot’s play, the modes of introducing and relating to age are distinctly gendered, as marital status and attitudes towards love and the other sex almost inadvertently come to serve as indicators of age, as well. Thus, Celia is young and single and generally referred to as a “[school]girl” (*Cocktail* 389,392), whereas Lavinia, her older counterpart, is a

housewife. Julia, the stereotypical elderly busybody, chooses to present herself in terms of old age and infirmity, albeit with a rebellious edge: “I’m not helpless yet” (*Cocktail* 366). The male generations are much less clearly demarcated in this respect, even if a similar distribution, with the above feminine counterparts, appears to exist between the “young friend” Peter, the “middle-aged” Edward and, at least to some extent, the elderly sage Reilly (*Cocktail* 381,409). In effect, the relatively small part reserved for Peter in the play has generally been explained through his age, as critics recognise him as a “half-formed version of Edward” and translate his surname Quilpe as ‘whelp’ (Phelan 1990:88). However, in stark contrast to Julia, Reilly and especially Alex appear almost ageless, even if Reilly attempts to assume a paternal role as he addresses Celia solemnly as “my daughter” (*Cocktail* 420). Thus, Julia is referred to by reference to her age as “that dreadful *old* woman” or “dear *old* Julia” (*Cocktail* 359,430,369; emphasis added). However, when Julia inadvertently employs a similar expression to refer to Reilly, “that dreadful man”, the reference to age is absent (*Cocktail* 365). In general, the gendered bias of cocktail party society shows in the way in which the male characters are separated through their professional career rather than in terms of age or family relations. It should be noted, however, that the younger generation, Peter and Celia, are naturally assumed to be in pursuit of a “career”.

The impact of age difference on the self-image and the personal choices of the characters becomes manifest, as age apparently determines the acceptable social relations between the characters. The elder generation—Julia, Alex, and Reilly—seem to lack a love life, although Reilly flirts indirectly with Julia by singing, as she enters: “*Who came in but the landlord’s daughter/ And she took my heart entirely*”. (*Cocktail* 365.) Even here, Julia is transformed into a young girl before the flirtation is sanctioned. In effect, the cocktail-generations are treated as isolated entities. The age difference materialises itself as an almost tangible barrier between the characters, and it can be seen to result in a kind of segregation between generations. It should be noted, however, that the age categories are largely self-imposed or generated by members of the same sex. Thus, Lavinia repeatedly refers to Celia as a girl and even chides herself for speaking like the younger woman: “What a silly thing to say./ Like a schoolgirl. Like Celia. I don’t know why I said it.” (*Cocktail* 392.) Even friend-

ship apparently fails to cross the material barrier created through the ageing body:

LAVINIA. Why, Celia, but haven't we always been friends?  
 I thought you were one of my dearest friends—  
 At least, in so far as a girl *can* be a friend  
 Of a woman so much older than herself. (*Cocktail* 389; emphasis original.)

In this passage, the very idea of a friendship crossing the border between generations is presented in the manner of an anomaly. Through its biological age, the physical realm and the transient body here become the concrete markers of much more subtle degrees of social etiquette and emotional distance. Edward's ruminations about age seem to take this thought even further in that the physical changes in the body are seen to precede the knowledge: "Only since this morning/ I have met myself as a middle-aged man/ Beginning to know what it is to feel old" (*Cocktail* 381; see p.122). For Edward, the experience of personal ageing indeed paradoxically crystallises itself as the only cause for "relative . . . certain[ty]" in a world of radical doubt (*Cocktail* 381).

Seen against the background of Edward's midlife crisis, Lavinia's remarks to Celia reveal a difference in the way in which the male and the female characters deal with their own ageing. Without doubt, both Edward and Lavinia express approximately the same condescending and age-discriminating attitude towards the younger characters of their own sex. Thus, Edward repeatedly belittles the "interesting affair" between Celia and Peter (*Cocktail* 367, 370; see p.99). However, while Lavinia acknowledges herself as *so much older* in the above example, her husband displays considerable difficulty in coming to terms with his own ageing. This is revealed by Edward's surprised reaction, when Peter happens to use the same phrase *so much older* in reference to Edward:

PETER.                                See Celia for me.  
                                               You know her in a different way from me  
                                               And you are *so much older*.  
 EDWARD.                                *So much older?*  
 PETER.                                Yes, I'm sure she would listen to you  
                                               As someone disinterested. (*Cocktail* 372; emphasis added.)

In his hapless choice of the word "disinterested", Peter reveals his assumption that Edward is *too* old to be thought of as showing romantic or, for that matter,

any interest at all in the young girl. In stark contrast to Lavinia, Edward appears to cringe at the thought of being *so much older*, a reaction reflected in his surprised echoing of the phrase. One possible explanation for Edward's shocked reaction is to question the reality of the age difference implied in the phrase *so much older*, as Phelan (1990:159) does by estimating that Edward is "just fifteen years older" than Peter. However, the actual age-difference notwithstanding, the sense of a generational gap remains very tangible throughout the play. Following his initial reaction of disbelief, Edward then gradually learns to accept or at least to endure the thought of his own ageing and the segregating gap between generations. The first sign of this appears in his remark to Celia: "It never could have been...a permanent thing./ You should have a man...nearer your own age." (*Cocktail* 380.) At this stage, however, Edward still hesitates to address the age (t)issue, as shown in the pause and struggle to find the right words. The euphemistic choice of *nearer your own age* may be seen to indicate the conscious exclusion of the idea *younger [than me]* as well as an unwillingness to convey that Celia is *too* young (for Edward). The significance of the pause and the vacillation to find the appropriate expression is enhanced by the notion that this is only one example of a general trend in the play to use hesitations and sheer absence of words at crucial moments of realisation.

In the party-world, age discrimination clearly cuts both ways between the generations. The young are thought to be naturally shallow, whereas middle-aged and married couples are stereotyped as rational and detached from any emotional involvement, to the point of appearing dull or even (emotionally) dead. Furthermore, when this prejudice is not overtly imposed on the characters from the outside, they seem to prompt it themselves. After his initial hesitation in front of Celia, Edward eventually encapsulates the idea of age as a limiting factor and presents lack of "desire" as an almost physical trait:

That is the worst moment, when you feel you have lost  
 The desire for all that was most desirable,  
 Before you are contented with what you can desire;  
 Before you know what is left to be desired;  
 And you go on wishing that you could desire  
 What desire has left behind. But you cannot understand.  
 How could *you* understand what it is to feel old? (*Cocktail* 381;  
 emphasis original.)

Significantly enough, as suggested by Lavinia's comments about age difference, *The Cocktail Party* women acknowledge and refer to their own age in a much more unproblematic and relaxed manner than the men. Julia, in particular, gladly stereotypes herself among "gluttonous old women like me" and dubs herself the "maiden aunt" of Edward (*Cocktail* 355,357). Unlike Edward's decided awkwardness regarding his age, Julia displays a feeling of what might be considered pride when associating herself with her age group, and she can hence be regarded as the only elderly person in the play. For women, age apparently implies no necessary limitation of vitality, rather the reverse. Julia goes as far as to imply a secret, even if half-jocular, pact with her peer group: "I understand these tough old women—/ I'm one myself." (*Cocktail* 357.) On another occasion, Julia suggests an explicit refusal to be intellectually subdued by libelling labels: "I know you think I am a silly old woman/ But I'm really very serious" (*Cocktail* 356).

The gulf between the generations then appears to be rigid to the point of forming insurmountable social barriers and incontestable behavioural patterns. In effect, part of the gulf between parents and their children thus lies in the depth of the generational gap itself. However, in keeping with its tendency to avoid simple statistical truths, the play simultaneously contests the idea that age and generational differences can be measured in years. Conceived as a social construct, age becomes a broad concept only loosely tied to chronological time. Accordingly, in Edward's final acceptance of himself as "a middle-aged man/ [b]eginning to know what it is to feel old", the marker of age is not tied to any particular age, but to *feeling* old. Edward here presents himself as a newborn infant, growing into his fresh status as "a middle-aged man" "only since this morning"; in effect, he elicits an association to children from both Celia and Lavinia. Youth becomes like a cloth or layer of skin that can simply be peeled off, as Celia does when she compares the sudden transformation in her attitude towards Edward to "unwrapp[ing] a mummy" (*Cocktail* 382; see p.43). In this way, Edward's physical body and his (corpo)real experience of this body exist in different time spheres. This agrees with Husserl's (1982:181-182,184) conception of "phenomenological time" as opposed to "cosmic time". In accordance with Husserl's view, Edward becomes aware that no change, including physical ageing, is complete without a 'lived' awareness and acceptance of the change.

Celia seems to be the only character who is able to turn the age issues around and thereby to break, at least at times, the borders between generations. For instance, she portrays Edward as well as herself in terms of “only a child/ Lost in the forest, wanting to go home” (*Cocktail* 416). This turn is much in accordance with the general tendency in the play to challenge the straightforward flow of temporal reality and the rigid categories of past and future. Similarly, when Edward expresses anxiety about his imminent reunion with his wife, Celia produces another simile:

Edward, forgive my laughing.  
 You look like a little boy who's been sent for  
 To the headmaster's study; and is not quite sure  
 What he's been found out in. I never saw you so before.  
 This is really a ludicrous situation. (*Cocktail* 386.)

Indicating self-conscious power-relations regarding age and hierarchical status, this passage reaffirms the positions of female dominion over men suggested in Celia's use of insect-imagery and her capability to “crush” Edward as “a beetle the size of a man” (*Cocktail* 382; see p.76). In this image, Lavinia—and indirectly Celia herself—assumes the role of the headmaster. The moment appears so “ludicrous” to Celia partly because the roles are carnevalistically overturned. Lavinia seems unwilling to make a similar juxtaposition in the present of different age groups, as she expresses similar ideas of Edward invariably in the past tense: “you must have been real/ At some time or other . . . / Perhaps only when you were a child” (*Cocktail* 396). Similarly, her image of Edward as a child springs from the past:

When you were a little boy,  
 I'm sure you were always getting yourself measured  
 To prove how you had grown since the last holidays.  
 You were always intensely concerned with yourself;  
 And if other people grow, well, you want to grow too. (*Cocktail*  
 395.)

In this image, physical height melts together *me(a)taphorically* with the idea of spiritual growth. Edward is viewed as a person who is never at home within his age range and is either wanting to outgrow or disregard it in order to be like others. In effect, Edward and Celia are the only characters who are, at some point, referred to as children in the play. Throughout the play, the sense of youth clings to Celia. Julia likens Celia to “a child sent on an errand/ In eager-



ness and patience" (*Cocktail* 421). In its positive connotations of calm curiosity combined with zeal, the image contrasts with the impatient and teary lost "playmate" of the earlier passage. When saying goodbye to Celia, Reilly refers to her as "my daughter" (*Cocktail* 420). The image of the young child also connects Celia with the extract from Shelley, which Reilly recites when asked about the meaning of Celia's fate: "the magus Zoroaster" receives the epithet "my dead child" (*Cocktail* 437).

In its preoccupation with age, *The Cocktail Party* seems to tie in thematically with the Alcestis myth. Without doubt, much the same themes in relation to age and the age-old wish to escape death are present in Euripides' play. The gendered relation to ageing and death have parallels, as well: Admetus cowardly wants to "escape immediate death", whereas his wife is not afraid to "die for" him (*Alcestis*). Ultimately, Admetus' flight from death turns out to be futile, as death actually inundates his life: "If he had died, he would be nothing now; and, having escaped, he suffers an agony he will never forget". In her comparative study of *The Cocktail Party* and *Alcestis*, Phelan (1990:xii) formulates the preoccupation with age as an autobiographical urge, as she claims that both authors were "struggling with personal and professional ageing" at the time of writing. However, Phelan does not discuss the possibility of *The Cocktail Party* stretching beyond the limits of the earlier play to encompass the larger mythical surroundings of the mythical character of Alcestis. This extension would not seem unreasonable, however, in view of Eliot's pronounced wish in writing the play to explore what happened to the married couple after Alcestis had returned from the underworld (Eliot 1951a:31-32). This stretching would also seem justified when taking into account the general pattern in the play to mix beginnings and Prufrockian "butt-ends" of stories and thereby to challenge the limits of story-telling (*Complete* 15). Such claims undoubtedly demand closer investigation of possible sources used by Eliot before they may be confirmed. The comparison seems fruitful, however, as the life of Alcestis in Greek mythology is intimately entangled with problems surrounding ageing and an explicit fight for eternal youth. To illustrate, another strand in the Alcestis myth recounts how she is tricked by Medea into cooking her own father alive in order to bring him eternal youth (Henriksson 1980:I,270). This strongly physical and brutal image adds an age-based angle to the theme of familial decay, violence, and cannibalistic martyrdom in *The Cocktail Party* and to the

way in which the deeper philosophical and existential layers of the play appear to be interwoven with the physical body. This motif of patricide takes the fear of ageing to the extreme; ironically, the attempt is partly successful, as only the death of Alcestis' father stops him from ageing. In *The Cocktail Party*, biological kinship has already been boiled away and it is replaced by the young sacrificial flesh of Celia. In some of the unpublished versions of the play, the *Cocktail Party* description of Celia's fate indeed approximates the Alcestis myth, as it hints at "especially horrible ways of preparing the victims [of cannibalism], who begin to cook before they die", as Malamud (1994:135) reports. *The Cocktail Party* thus involves a strand of the Alcestis myth reviving the indelible significance of (corpo)real suffering.

Despite the blatant clashes, the simultaneous presence in the play of three generations also challenges temporal borders and presents a community spreading itself vertically in the timeframe of the present. Celia's way of toying with different age groups serves as a key to such a reading of an underlying symbiotic, (corpo)real unity between the generations. As age loses its calculable nature, it provides a challenge to the borders between individuals and invites the concept of a communal body. In effect, despite its focus on a kind of midlife crisis, the cocktail selection of people condenses the life cycle of the individual into a three-hour play, expanding from glimpses of childhood to the meddling elderly sage Julia. The condensation of life in drama is also suggested in Eliot's (1955:11) call for intense dramatic density because the dramatist has "only two hours of life to allow" to a limited group of characters. *The Cocktail Party* community may indeed be read as a miniature model not only of an entire society packed into one drawing-room, but also of the temporal dimension itself.

On the personal level, however, the individual characters mostly remain unaware of the communal patterning of time. When time is measured with the individual 'lived' body as a chronometer, it dissolves and becomes multitudinous. This agrees with Natanson's (1998:121) phenomenological development of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*; leaning on the phenomenological take of Alfred Schutz, Natanson does not stop his methodological reconstruction at Gregor's loss of a language but suggests that Gregor's beetle-body unveils a wider existential isolation from his "contemporaries" or "consociates". According to this reading, the implications of Gregor's transmutation extend to a "metamorpho-

sis of time”: Gregor and his family are no longer “growing old together”. Similar *me(a)tamorphoses* may be traced throughout *The Cocktail Party*, as the characters realise their own age in sudden leaps outside the communally synchronised sense of cosmic time. Husserl (1982:180-181,184) compares phenomenological time to an inexhaustible *stream* of various experiences. Caught in this current, the cocktail-party characters seem to be Alices in a terrifying Wonderland, where the velocity of time varies from one situation and person to the next, and where everyone ages separately, in isolation.

### The (Patho)Logical Body

ALEX.            She [Celia] was directed to Kinkanja,  
                       Where there are various endemic diseases  
                       Besides, of course, those brought by Europeans,  
                       And where the conditions are favourable to plague. (*Cocktail*  
                       434.)

Since the human body is repeatedly presented in *The Cocktail Party* as either dead or dying, sickness may be regarded as one of its main constituents. This theme of morbidity has been seen to resonate throughout Eliot’s oeuvre. Smidt (1961:144-146,186,193,199), for instance, refers to “Eliot’s constant insistence, both in his prose and poetry, on pain and suffering” as well as his “constant preoccupation with the theme of death”, a “mood of morbidity”, and an overt “death-wish”. Buttram (1995), in turn, diagnoses this sickness against the autobiographical data that “Eliot lived a life of acute bodily awareness and was often fixated on his own and others’ physical ailments” (see also Armstrong 1998:69). In several guises and reprises, the party-body is defined in terms of pain or indeed as a disease that must be endured. The hurt is precisely at the sensitive borders of the body, ie. where it touches or rather rams into the outside world. This is also the (t)issue where other bodies, or the *other*, penetrate the isolation of the individual body and transmute it. Sickness blurs existential borders, as it smuggles death into the living body. For fear of contamination, the convalescing body as well as the sickness itself are sealed off and isolated from the urban home in various ways. In *The Cocktail Party* atmosphere, disease is not only removed from view to hospitals and secluded sickbeds, but it is also expelled both in space and time.

In *The Cocktail Party*, the most striking illustration of the bodily banishment takes the tone of an adverse travelling advertisement, when Alex first introduces Kinkanja exclusively in terms of its “favourable conditions to plague”. At the same time, Kinkanja marks the Eastern border of the broader cultural (corpo)reality encompassing the cocktail party sphere; the remote island constitutes the fuzzy margins of the visual field covered by the cocktail-party eye and its technological extensions. This cultural border-(t)issue reacts to the clash between the (westernised) Government and the rebellious “heathen” cultural bodies by breaking out in a physical “plague” epidemic or “pestilence” (*Cocktail* 428). The cocktail sickness presents itself as a softening of the immune system that allows foreign influences to enter. In effect, Kinkanja suffers from a double contamination in its frontier position between Nature and Western culture: the Europeans have penetrated Kinkanja like a virus importing disease, whereas the animal body of the indigenous monkeys is equally labelled “a pest”. In this way, the cocktail-stories virtually feast and fester on sickness while keeping it out of reach from the party itself.

Another way of showing the cocktail party unease with disease—and with the body itself as a by-product—from the urban atmosphere involves confining it to the rural regions. This perturbs the customary view of the countryside as the source for fresh air and health and mixes it with the stench of putrefaction and “decay”. From the stereotypical cocktail party perspective, the country is antiquated and lacks the modern medical facilities to fight illness. Although Lavinia’s real aunt is reportedly “very well” and the illness turns out to be imaginary, the notion of “an aunt/ [w]ho [is] ill in the country” naturally seems to spring to Edward’s mind (*Cocktail* 374,390,392). Celia quickly joins him in this lie and provides further ‘evidence’ for it in a mode which clings like a truism to the cocktail party ear: “It’s dreadful for old ladies alone in the country, / And almost impossible to get a nurse” (*Cocktail* 357). In addition, the English countryside is presented as an exotic attraction, where foreign “experts” flock to “study” “the most decayed mansion in England” (*Cocktail* 431). The persistence of this distancing of sickness is reflected in the way that, to the cocktail-party mind, the notion of a “cure” involves the diffuse idea of “go [ing] away” to a sanatorium or a hotel. Even death is ejected from the urban flat and rehoused verbally in “the *depths* of Essex”, when Lavinia is said to return

“from the dead” as nailed down in the punning with the name Dedham (*Cocktail* 357,384,390, emphasis original; see also Phelan 1990:196).

In the cocktail-party universe, sickness differentiates the body from other, presumably healthy bodies. As a coveted side effect, sickness then offers a shortcut to individuality and a sanction to be quarantined from the general mass of faceless (human) flesh. This general disgust with (corpo)real life and ordinary human contacts is exposed, when Reilly diagnoses the Chamberlaynes as “people who imagine that they need a respite/ From everyday life” (*Cocktail* 406). In the medicalised modern world, traditional forms of physical illness are elided as unfashionable, however, and the body itself is shunned as an outmoded and chaotic obstacle. At the same time, *The Cocktail Party* community is obsessed with stress-related or mental illness. Malamud (1994:124) indeed recognises a rich “smorgasbord of psychiatric dysfunctionality” in Eliot’s drama. Claiming to have what the cocktail characters prefer to term a “nervous breakdown” becomes a way for them to become “unique” or “very unusual case[s]” and to “feel interest[ing]”; in effect, Edward purportedly “enjoys his illness” (*Cocktail* 397,402,403,407,409,413). The controlled and socially acceptable face of this illness is revealed in its being contrasted to the chaotic implications of *madness*. “I think you are mad—/ I mean, you’re on the edge of a nervous breakdown.” (*Cocktail* 378.) Characteristically, the cocktail contamination lacks any clear (corpo)real symptoms. Accordingly, Reilly eventually dismisses this popularised appellation as meaningless: “‘Nervous breakdown’ is a term I never use:/ It can mean almost anything.” (*Cocktail* 402.)

By means of medical labels or geographical and temporal confinement, the cocktail party community thus attempts to coax forth a controlled and socially presentable form of the (patho)logical. The attempts to keep the urban flat germ-free fail, however. In the cocktail-party conversation, the phobic fear of contamination easily turns into a morbid fascination with physical disintegration and suffering. In the absence of actual sickness, reports of various plagues populate the play, and the parallel subjects of illness and a possible “cure” for the illness burgeon in the cocktail party dialogue. Perceived as an extension of the (corpo)real, speech exists in the border zone where the battle between bodies and cultures is fought. In its tendency to cross borders and mutate in meaning, the word-world may be studied in juxtaposition to sickness, and it works in parallel ways. For example, words spread like a contamination

in the party-world, so that the same ideas and phrases spread from mouth to mouth throughout the play. In effect, Edward only agrees to solicit a doctor because both Celia and Lavinia recommend it “in almost the same words” (*Cocktail* 402). Similarly, although repeatedly negated, the image of the ailing aunt lingers on in the dialogue of the play. In this way, the chaotic air of illness is nursed in the dialogue throughout the play. The verbally transmitted disease peaks in the final act, where Kinkanja is opened like Pandora’s box to fill the cocktail-party conversation with the scourge of “plague-stricken natives” and a violent “insurrection” (*Cocktail* 434). In accordance with the Pandora myth, however, the murder unleashed in Kinkanja is presented to the cocktail party circle as a harbinger of a “triumphant” hope as well as in terms of violence and (corpo)real disintegration (*Cocktail* 438).

Even if the sickness shows no outward symptoms in the cocktail-community members, the infected and infectious body then persists in the pores of the play like a throbbing pain, dynamic and changing. The characters extensively struggle to distinguish between “pain” and “suffering” and to give them meaning outside (corpo)reality: “there is suffering worse than [the extreme of physical pain]” (*Cocktail* 404). An invisible component of the (corpo)reality, this pain cannot be controlled, however. For “the Saint”, in particular, the body acts as a torturing machine (*Cocktail* 438; see p.48). Suggesting that Eliot’s introduction of physical violence into the cocktail-skin was, in a way, ahead of its time, Browne (1969:226) contends that “[i]t was evident that the physical details which the author intended to reinforce the authenticity of Celia’s suffering were having the effect of distracting from what he wanted to say about its meaning”. The violated female body here almost seems to burst out of its intended semantic artery to dictate its own definitions or even to deny any meaning beside itself. Contrary to Browne’s belief, the criticism accumulated so far suggests that objection to Celia’s crucifixion may in fact prove the most persistent audience reaction to the play. Instead of ebbing as audiences have become accustomed to increasing violence in the theatre, the criticism voiced against the passage has become virtually unanimous in recent years; earlier critics are indeed attacked for failing to condemn the cocktail-femicide or for disapproving of it for the wrong reasons (Severin 1993b:396, Gordon 1998:418).

In the face of the escalating violence, the cocktail party bodies prefer to present themselves as immune to pain. Edward indeed practically brags about his indifference regarding the physical (*Cocktail* 404; see p.43). There is a notable exception to the general downgrading of physical pain, however. When the prospect of the dying and even disintegrating body as both significant and actual appears, the body presented is female, and more precisely Celia's. Reilly indeed exalts her sufferings, comparing her to the suffering "Saint in the desert" (*Cocktail* 438). Palmer (1996:92), for instance, goes as far as to suggest that "pain and suffering constitute a positive force" in Eliot, and that it is "reserved for women". Smidt (1961:218), in turn, maintains that "suffering is shown to be potentially meaningful, to be related to pattern and not to chaos". However, the significance of suffering lies precisely in the chaotic aspect of losing control and transcending the borders between life and death or being "transhumanised", as Julia terms it (*Cocktail* 421). Sickness and pain are the extreme reminders of the body and its borders in the cocktail party milieu. At the same time, however, this very aspect of decay and constant dying becomes the ultimate means for the body to test and to transgress its spatiotemporal limitations. Sickness posits the body in a medial position inasmuch as it forges a link between life and death: it depicts the body in the intersection between absolute absence and presence. In addition, pain and sickness challenge the objectively measured sense of time and entail a process of escalated disintegration, where life gradually grows closer to inertia and death. The cocktail party suffering does not translate into the neat semantic categories posed by the cocktail-community. In effect, Reilly admits that, when he prescribes Celia's "cure" and thereby seals her eventual "sentence of death", he fails to "understand/ [w]hat I myself am saying" (*Cocktail* 437).

The sick body has to surrender to be helpless and in need of others to be cured. Wanting to stress his distress, Edward turns himself into a hyperbole of helplessness in front of the doctor: "I can no longer *act* for myself./ . . . I am in your hands." (*Cocktail* 404; emphasis original.) In a world where (corpo)reality presents itself as a "network of relationships" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii; see p.33), not only the cure but the illness becomes a bond that welds the society together: "The single patient/ Who is ill by himself, is rather the exception." (*Cocktail* 405.) In accordance with this collective vision of sickness, what ensues is thus rather a broadening of the (corpo)reality to involve "a total situa-

tion” rather than excluding the body (*Cocktail* 405; see p.93). While sickness in the individual is hidden from view, it shows in the extended social body of the cocktail party. In effect, as Malamud (1994) argues, the entire cocktail community may be diagnosed as “schizophrenic”. Trombold (1996), on a lighter note, follows the trail of alimentary metaphors in Eliot’s writings and plays up the frequency of references to what might be interpreted as literal “indigestion”. The cocktail community may indeed be placed within a larger framework of a society coming to terms with its “bowel trouble”, as Reilly stresses that even “the Saint” does not escape such problems (*Cocktail* 438; see p.48).

Thus, not only are the signs of illness visible despite the illness being internal or psychological, but they are also peculiarly related to bodily needs. It should be noted that the society is sick in the way that it does not eat or lacks in appetite despite the food-centred cocktail-party environment. Accordingly, the party-body may be labelled as anorexic. In fact, part of the failure to communicate in the first act actually shows in Edward’s apparent reluctance to eat. It is the cocktail-party institution itself that is ailing, and the outward symptoms are lack of a host(ess), lack of food, and guests who are not really invited. In effect, the characters appear mostly disgusted by the food, as exemplified by seemingly trivial exchanges labelling it “indigestible”, “poison[ous]”, and “absolutely deadly”, as well as discussing dietary advice over the telephone (*Cocktail* 368,375,376). In effect, food becomes defined as a source of sickness. This ambiguous relation to physical nourishment may be seen as a parallel reaction to the fear of contamination and, on a broader scale, to the fear of touching and penetrating the frail borders of (corpo)reality: the food is spoilt, when it is prepared or when it enters the digestive system. The anorexic fear of the porous (corpo)real borders thus leads to a closing of these borders. The cure turns out to be the injection of “two caterer’s men” into the last act, functioning as a buffer protecting the characters from direct contact with their food.

In its social aspect, the body refuses to be contained in a single scientific cubicle. The cocktail-party word-world mixes different fields of expertise and does not stay in character. For instance, the term “case” is spread out explicitly through polysemy to cover both Edward’s situation as a medical “case” and his court “cases”; in effect, Reilly chides Edward when he attempts to “impose his own cure”: “A barrister/ Ought to know his brief before he enters the court” (*Cocktail* 405). A similar blurring of classificatory systems in front of the



(sick) body occurs, when the medical jargon mixes with the theatrical or fictional worldview. The discourse surrounding different “types” of illnesses mixes with “typical” comic caricatures.

CELIA. Perhaps I’m only typical.

REILLY. There are different types. Some are rarer than others.  
(*Cocktail* 416.)

As the sickness becomes communally shared, the borders between sickness and health become relative and individual. Accordingly, before being cured, the characters are to “decide/ [w]hat *is* normality”: “We have yet to find what would be normal/ For *you*, before we use the term abnormal.” (*Cocktail* 413,415; emphasis original.) In effect, the characters repeatedly refer to themselves and each other as “types” or “typical” and want to decide their “(ab)normality” (*Cocktail* 416,431; see also p.165). For Celia, this entails the complete reversal of the ratio between sickness and health, suggesting a healthy individual in a diseased world:

I should really *like* to think there is something wrong with  
me—  
Because if there isn’t, then there’s something wrong,  
Or at least, very different from what it seemed to be,  
With the world itself . . . (*Cocktail* 413; emphasis original.)

### **The Sexual Body**

REILLY. . . . To men of a certain type  
The suspicion that they are incapable of loving  
Is as disturbing to their self-esteem  
As, in cruder men, the fear of impotence. (*Cocktail* 409.)

In the cocktail community, sexuality matches ageing and illness in its power to impose borders and thereby to isolate individuals. In effect, this aspect of (corpo)reality becomes so central to the cocktail-party perspective that the sexual body is used as a defining feature drawing concrete class distinctions within its social hierarchy. In accordance with the recurrent pattern of ellipsis, the cocktail-consciousness is almost exclusively populated with people from (upper) middle-class backgrounds ordering faceless servants or secretaries around and spicing up the conversation with an occasional aristocratic Lady, duke, exotic Maharaja, or film mogul. The finished play diverges from this pattern, however, when Reilly draws a border between “men of a certain type” exem-

plified by Edward and “cruder men” in order to separate between emotional and sexual impotence. Sexuality is presented here as unrefined, and it reeks of lower rank. In effect, the term “cruder” suggests a distinction in physical build comparable to “the young man carbuncular”, the sex partner of the woman typist in *The Waste Land* (*Complete* 68). Heywood (1996:87) comments on the apparent class aspirations of “the young man carbuncular” but concludes that his crude and “mechanical” manners and his very body betray him: “this body is a sign of his lower-class status, the indisputable marker of his animal, bodily origins”. Initially, then, attitudes to sex and concrete features of physical appearance become grounds for classifying people. A similar dichotomous distinction is hinted at in Edward’s pointed dismissal of “the death of the body” for “[t]he death of the spirit” (*Cocktail* 404; see p.43). It should be noted, however, that the binary classifications turn out to be increasingly blurred and inadequate, as the play proceeds.

To the cocktail-party consciousness, sexuality appears blurred and lacks distinct borders. In the draft version of the play, sexual relations cause a paradoxical tear simultaneously extending and compressing the individual: “The ordinary passion—I think I know about it,/ The mixture of motives that poison each other/ The leaping vanity, the recoiling disgust.” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:193.) Critics have commented on the “preoccupation with sex” in Eliot’s works, while emphasising that “the sexual imagery of Eliot’s poems stands for a number of other things besides physical eros, especially for his view of spiritual isolation or communion” (Smidt 1961:195, Chmielewski 1969). However, this “mixture of motives” also serves to show how inseparable sexuality is from other aspects of humanity. As Merleau-Ponty (1962:182) notes, “sexuality is not an autonomous cycle” in the body; it is hence not viable to discuss sex as a soundproof cell of (corpo)reality.

Severin (1993a:366n) observes that, due to its assumed primitive connection to nature, the “working class sometimes occupies the position of woman” in Eliot’s works (see also Severin 1993b:406). In *The Cocktail Party*, the working class and women indeed share the role of receptacles, when Reilly and Edward dispose of the explosive and uncontrollable aspects of physicality, including sexual energy. Bundled within the violent jungle imagery, sexuality is posited as a marker of non-humanity. Thus, Edward resorts to dehumanising tropes when describing “the obstinate, unconscious, sub-human strength/ *That*

*some women have*” (*Cocktail* 403; emphasis added). The classificatory nature of the term *sub-human* is strengthened by its pedigree in Eliot’s work of portraying the “lower classes and other marginalized groups either as subhumans or nonhumans” (Cooper 1999:121). In *The Cocktail Party*, this restricted sense of humanity includes the attempted deportation of the body. In fact, Edward’s statement appears much softened from its original form in the draft version of the play, where it appears as a categorical pronouncement encompassing all women: “that obstinate, unconscious, sub-human strength/ *That women have* (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:211; emphasis added). To avoid simplification, it should be noted, however, that Edward refers to Lavinia as both sub- and superhuman, describing her as destructively angelic, mechanical, and beyond even protozoan in strength. A formless physical power and general disconformity is situated in the female sex, and it apparently shuns moderation and strives towards extremes. At the same time, the imagery suggests that Edward transfers his own physicality and lust to his wife; “without her”, he is apparently reduced to “vacancy” and “cease[s] to exist” (*Cocktail* 403; see p.184).

Sexuality enters the cocktail party economy on a sharply polarised scale as either excess or lack. In accordance with the tendency to shun corporeality, there is a strong bias in the classificatory system, so that the middle ground of “mediocrity” is, in effect, largely situated at the negative end of the scale, suggesting abstinence or a “dull, implacable” lack of ecstasy (*Cocktail* 381-382). Heywood (1996) notes how Eliot’s works tend to emphasise the violent nature of Eros. In her (sexual) strength, the female “python” or “octopus” becomes a vamp(ire), draining the life-force from its ‘victim’ much like the blood-sucking succuba that de Beauvoir (1949a:234) depicts as the stereotypical image of Woman in patriarchal society. Cuddy (2000:189) notes that the “sexuality carries overtones of darkness and alarm, sometimes of destruction” in a reciprocal horror film, where “the two sexes represent a threat to each other”. The unequal and changing distribution of sexual energies is indeed described in cannibalistic terms, as Edward congratulates himself on his withdrawal from this sexual battle field: “[o]nly the happiness of knowing/ That the misery does not *feed on* the ruin of loveliness,/ That the tedium is not the residue of ecstasy” (*Cocktail* 381; emphasis original). Instead of leading to procreation, sexuality is presented as a selfish, colonising act, which dishevels or poisons its source.

In the draft version of the play, Reilly locates the origins of Edward's interest in Celia in a paranoid "[g]luttony of power/ To dominate a woman who might have ignored you/ And who, for that reason, you would never trust." (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:193.) Significantly enough, the destructive effect of (excessive) sexuality is seen as mutual. Thus, Celia speaks about Edward as a passive and inanimate trophy, which is not even valuable: "I haven't hurt/ *her* [Lavinia]/ I wasn't taking anything away from her—/ Anything she wanted." (*Cocktail* 415; emphasis original.)

This mutual sexual violation differs radically from the passively "used" and "bruised" female body in 'La Figlia Che Piange' (*Complete* 34; see p.27). It also challenges the relation between the male lover and the female love-object reproduced through negation elsewhere in *The Cocktail Party*, when Reilly dubs Edward "a man who finds himself incapable of loving" and Lavinia "a woman who finds that no man can love her" (*Cocktail* 410). The action of loving is male, whereas the female is presented as "the love object . . . of representation, of discourse, of desire", as Irigaray (1985a:133) sums up the patriarchal stance. However, the "exceptionally unlovable" (*Cocktail* 410) female (body) is presented as both passive and active in a manner that challenges or precedes the categories of activity and passivity (see Irigaray 1984:154). In effect, Celia soon erases and transgresses the borders, as she magnifies the impotence onto a global scale, where the roles coincide in one person: "Are we all in fact unloving and unlovable?" (*Cocktail* 416.) The female characters seem much less prone to draw dividing lines and finite boundaries, as suggested by Celia's indecision to describe her desire: "But what, or whom I loved,/ Or what in me was loving, I do not know" (*Cocktail* 417). In a kind of counter-attack on the de-sexed (corpo)reality, emotion and sexual energy gain an independent existence outside its physical bounds: "I have thought at moments that the ecstasy is real/ Although those who experience it may have no reality." (*Cocktail* 417.) The linguistic appellations dissolve in a word-world that loses its contours along with the grammatical relations they entail: "one is alone, and if one is alone/ Then lover and beloved are equally unreal." (*Cocktail* 416; emphasis original.)

The "unloving" essence of the "mediocr[e]" cocktail-male also reveals the incongruity of a patriarchy where "the subject" is traditionally gendered as "masculine" (Irigaray 1985a:133), but where the male desperately seeks to

de-sex himself. In their tendency to distance the sexual body, Edward and Reilly, in particular, seem to side with Bordo's (1999:19) analysis of the de-sexed modern male: "[Men] are not supposed to be slaves to sexual moods and needs, to physical and emotional dependency. They are supposed to think objectively—to think like Man with a capital letter, discerner of the Eternal Truth, the Universal Subject of History, Philosophy, Religion." A similar shade may be sensed in the remnant of the Sweeney motif that persists in *The Cocktail Party*. Smith (1985:92) notes how Sweeney's nature changes in Eliot's oeuvre from representing "unaware, physical man unconscious of all but his body's needs" to a "man suffering from an awareness of his lustful nature". The ideal cocktail party male body indeed involves the exclusion of sexual desire. In effect, the cocktail men are, in part, engaged in an attempt to achieve an a-sexual (corpo)reality. Accordingly, through the process of ellipsis and anorexic abstinence, the overt sexual imagery in the draft version is excised from the word-flesh of the play. It should be noted, however, that the distinctions drawn between emotion and sexual desire turn out to be frail. Love and sex are increasingly confused, when Reilly notes that Edward "liked to think of [him]self as a passionate lover" but has "never been in love with anybody" (*Cocktail* 409).

To escape this flux of uncontrolled extremes, male sexuality is thus relegated in either social class or in time, or it is projected onto the female body. At the same time, love is distanced from male chivalry to an almost inborn physical defect. It should be observed, however, that sexuality itself is not seen as negative and that the disgust is confined to the anorexic male. Smidt (1961:195-196), for instance, attacks the notion that Celia is "punished" because of her "sexual transgression" or her "guilt . . . in respect of her affair with a married man". In Smidt's view, "that very affair was a sufficiently wonderful experience to stir her into a spiritual awakening" (cf. Cuddy 2000:189). Thus, Celia explicitly refuses to regret "anything I've ever *done*,/ Which I might get away from, or of anything in me/ I could get rid of" in her relation to Edward: "If I could feel/ As I did then, even now it would feel right." (*Cocktail* 416; emphasis original.) In the party-world, lovers apparently fail to meet lovers. Unger (1961:10,129) recognises that "[t]his theme of the failure of communication, of a positive relationship, between a man and a woman . . . is indeed a major theme of the whole body of Eliot's work", with a general "estrangement

from other people and from the world” as its social outgrowth. In essence, then, the cocktail characters shun *desire* because they fail to find it.

Instead of invigorating the characters, sexual appetite apparently consumes both the sex-object and the lover. In *The Cocktail Party*, *desire* itself appears to belong to the past. Schuchard (1999:121) comments on the rarity of positive *desire* in the face of recurrent “moments of horror [in Eliot’s poetry]” noting that “from the beginning the ecstasy is lodged in the memory as a stay against horrors that are most frequently released by desire”. In Reilly’s terms, Lavinia and Edward suffer from the relegated “shadow of desires of desires” (*Cocktail* 410). The appetite thus remains, although its object disappears or turns out to be chimerical. This fear of the uncontrollable *desire* itself may be seen to reflect a similar “fear of *hunger*”, which Bordo (1993:146) relates to anorexics: “far from losing her [sic] appetite, the typical anorectic is haunted by it”. Despite his attempts to the contrary, the cocktail-party male is no sexual conqueror and may be seen to approach his “masculine erotic desire in indirect, oblique, and guarded ways”, as Fjellestad (1998:200) defines the style of some male modernist novelists. It follows that the characters have only indirect access to experiences as well as to their senses. Love is also indirect, as the Chamberlayne’s decide they love each other because they themselves or other people “kept on *saying*” or “told” them that they were in love (*Cocktail* 396).

## The Territorial (En)Trails

### The (Corpo)Real Compass

REILLY. The destination cannot be described;  
 You will know very little until you get there;  
 You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession  
 Of what you have sought for in the wrong place. (*Cocktail* 418.)

Formulating the credo of modern American playwrights, Porter (1970:253) remarks how “[t]ravel is much talked of, sought after and hoped for, but seldom shown”. At the same time, he sees “a surprising neo-classical adherence to unity of place” in *The Cocktail Party* as well as in other American plays of the post-war era, “despite the resources of modern stagecraft”. In Eliot’s play, this fitting of the global map into the confines of the urban flat is achieved through

the body and its extensions in the word-world. For a drama set in one drawing room and one consulting room in London, *The Cocktail Party* is indeed crawling with place names in a virtual travel guide ranging from Kinkanja in the East to California in the West, from Albania to the north of England. Traveling is constantly evoked in words, as the characters discuss real or invented excursions both at home and abroad. On a smaller scale, the main action on stage involves a fast-paced metabolism of exits and (re-)entries, or erratic discharges and incisions through the cocktail-party (t)issue. The ascetic and congealed drawing-room routine of the party-body is thus surrounded by frantic patterns of movement.

The extensive exposure to condensed geographical locations indicates a change in the way that *place* is construed in the cocktail-world. In Reilly's prescription of Celia's future cure at "[his] kind of sanatorium", the journey itself loses its clear linear progression and its sense of a definite destination. The field of vision, in particular, is consciously toned down to allow for a *blind*-folded progression reminiscent of Irigaray's (1985a:26) description of the tactile body as constantly moving and feeling its way forward in the world. In a chronological account of Eliot's literary references to England, Marshall (1994:105) comments on the "sense of displacement" in *The Cocktail Party* by noting Edward's use of "the *depths* of Essex" "as if he meant the jungles of the Congo" (*Cocktail* 357; emphasis original). He finds that the poem 'Burnt Norton' (1935) marks a change to the abstract in the way in which Eliot's poetry relates to place (Marshall 1994:102). Marshall claims that this increasingly obscure sense of geographical location in Eliot's late work correlates with the way that "the body is left out of the picture". It should be noted that Eliot's works appear to aim at the same spatial confusion via vastly different means—either by filtering out all indications of geographical location, as in 'Burnt Norton', or by sporting a vertiginous cocktail-party over-abundance of place names. However, far from discarding the body or, for that matter, the spatial dimension as Marshall suggests, this myopic, gradual loss of distinct locations in Eliot's work may be explained against the background that the body itself turns into an increasingly obscure and complex category. Instead of "leaving [their] body on a distant shore" (*Complete* 194; see p.22), the cocktail-characters import the body with its cargo of remote locations into the metropolitan living room.

It is worth noting, then, that the cocktail-journeys do not entail a separation from the body. On the contrary, the body is not only the foreign land *representing* alterity but it is also the vessel employed to sail between different worlds. Acclimatised into the urban flat, the body can be seen as the yardstick linking together the dimensions of time and space. World history is condensed into geographically distinct areas, with the here and now of the English cocktail-party community contrasting with the 'primitive' past of humanity portrayed in the native tribes of Kinkanja as well as with the corrupted future represented by the dream-world of California. In a sense, Peter has been living for two years in a (false) future time, where he imagines himself joined with Celia. The sketch is crude and the borders again leak, but there is a sense of solidifying the temporal dimension itself in physical space. At the same time, the different ages are brought together and immersed into the conversation to the point of materialising verbally in one single room of a London flat. This very blurring of the borders between the past, the present, and the future can indeed be seen to illustrate the complexity and interdependence of these categories, with no clear advantage assigned to the here-and-now of the observer.

In addition, the cocktail-characters use the spatialised sense of (corpo)reality in their attempt to distance and thereby to hedge the uncontrollable and disruptive edges of the body. Thus, observed from the *measurant-meridian* of the London flat, different cocktail-bodily functions are dispersed in all the cardinal directions of the compass, excepting the South. Initially, this compartmentalisation seems to enforce a dualistic rip between (Eastern) spirituality and (Western) materialism. In the corporeal geography of *The Cocktail Party*, the main antagonism thus arises between the extremely scopic, *masculine* community the West and the *feminine*, tactile East. The cold North of the 'batman' and Lady Kloutz comes to designate a general adulteration of biological family ties as well as complete insulation from community; the 'batman' remains isolated on an island due to his physical abnormality, whereas Lady Kloutz breaks the collective wedding code by revealing her excessive appetite (*Cocktail* 353-355 *passim*; see p.71,119).

For Celia, "the East" is clearly a site for spiritual healing and meditation far from the worldly metropolis. Alex's stories as well as Celia's violent end suggest, nevertheless, that it is a place for extreme physical exertion and haunting bodily illness, as well. Similarly, Peter's film career in California seems to



focus on physical ‘recreat[ion]’ of corporeality but it is actually intent on reproducing dreams and spiritual visions. Thus, despite the (unconscious) effort to set the body and the mind apart by assigning them different geographical directions, the two spheres remain inseparable. The combination of clotted thoughts and “a nervous breakdown” with sheer physical exhaustion can be sensed on a smaller, national scale in Julia’s vision of Lavinia travelling on “the Great Old Eastern/ [w]aiting at junctions” (*Cocktail* 414). A similar connection between physical and psychological movement is revealed in Julia’s ability to “meditate” successfully “in the lift”, where the physical motions of ascent and descent combine with the different levels of consciousness (*Cocktail* 366; see p.97). This double layer contradicts Porter’s (1970:254) notion that “[t]he transcendent sphere that can reconcile dichotomies is not available to the space-and-time-bound American dramatist”. By bringing together the different spheres in the body and in the urban drawing room, *The Cocktail Party* contests dichotomies.

The geographical (and temporal) remoteness of Kinkanja from the West is reinforced by its isolation from modern mass culture. Until Celia’s death, the island of Kinkanja has existed beyond the reach of the London cocktail-community and the map it has drawn for itself through the popular press. Alex suggests as much by referring to Kinkanja ominously as a place “you won’t have heard of.../ yet” (*Cocktail* 413; emphasis added). Kinkanja remains similarly unaffected by the modern western lifestyle and its entertainment industry (*Cocktail* 432; see p.101). In sharp contrast to Kinkanja, the Western hemisphere, most blatantly represented by Peter’s California, appears as a flash world where the transformation of fantasy and dream into illusions on the film screen are made into a prospering business. In the midst of this pleasure industry, the body becomes a *thing* or a commodity, and the focus shifts to its photogenic outward aspects. In addition, this ‘brave new world’ seems to form a secret surface pact with the “decayed” mansions in the old aristocratic English countryside, exporting and “studying the decay” instead of attempting to find the still vital aspects of the tradition.

In addition to condensing and transposing actual maps and locations, the corporeal dimension of geography also manages to materialise the mind of the cocktail-party characters by dispersing it geographically. In its spatiotemporal dynamism, the living body and life in general take the *me(a)taphorical* form of

a journey. The borders between the symbolic and the real blur, when the inner journey that the characters undertake is directly projected onto their actions in the real world. Significantly enough, then, the visible result of any personal decision among the cocktail-characters tends to involve “go[ing] away” in a physical sense (*Cocktail*). One of the central themes is a shamanistic passage between places as well as mental states. For instance, then, the inner life of Celia follows the topographical formations of a biblically *me(a)taphorical* scenery, as she “will pass between the scolding hills,/ [t]hrough the valley of derision” (*Cocktail* 421). At the same time, the extreme changes in altitude bear a relation to the formations of the grotesque body: “Mountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body; or speaking in architectural terms, towers and subterranean passages” (Bakhtin 1968:318).

In the play-world, the externalisation of emotions leads to the inner destination assuming a physical, geographical shape. This becomes apparent, when Julia lists the “consequences” of the choices that the others have made: “Celia chose/ A way of which the consequence was Kinkanja./ Peter chose a way that leads him to Boltwell:/ And he’s got to go there.” (*Cocktail* 439.) These physical destinations are followed somewhat further down by Julia’s use of the same formula in her assessment of Lavinia and Edward: “the consequence of the Chamberlaynes’ choice/ Is a cocktail party.” This goes to show the intimate relationship between the characters and their surroundings, be they cultural and geographical or simply a mode of placing the body within a social framework. At the same time, the geographical cocktail-connection cements the bond between flesh and word. It also emphasises the all-encompassing cocktail-tendency to stage, cage, and thereby to fix the surroundings into a ritualistically rigid form. In their attempts to overpower the chaotic object-body, the characters thus tend to incorporate the physical settings into the concept of the body instead or vice versa: they strive to run the world instead of being shuffled around by forces beyond their control.

It should be noted that spatialisation and materialisation takes a peculiarly female form in the play. For Edward, his wife is the lifeline that keeps him together and ties him to a sense of physical and psychological unity. The connotation is clearer in the draft version of the play:

EDWARD. When I learnt that my wife had gone away from me  
I felt like a man, going about his business,

Walking the street, intent on his affairs,  
 Who becomes suddenly aware that he is in a different city,  
 In another country, where the streets are unfamiliar,  
 Where the people are talking an unknown language,  
 Where he is completely lost. (Eliot as quoted by Browne  
 1969:210-211.)

Edward's separation from his wife entails the loss of all sense of direction as well as his *mother* tongue. Irigaray (1984:17-18) notes this double role of the woman as the object (*chose*) as well as the location (*lieu*) for the male, which also defines or even prescribes the male. This umbilical dependence on the immediate surroundings is displayed in the draft version, when Edward's account of a man "los[ing] his memory" and his physical destination stands for the idea of his "losing [him]self":

Or perhaps a man  
 Is travelling alone, and loses his memory,  
 And all he retains is the urgent conviction  
 That he was about some pressing errand  
 Of vital importance. It was something like that.  
 It was not regret for something positive, lost—  
 Regret of lost happiness, or contentment, or security—  
 But myself I had lost. I was utterly sure  
 That if she returned. I should find myself again,  
 And be: for how can I act, unless I am? (Eliot as quoted by Browne  
 1969:211.)

In the male cocktail-consciousness, Woman is conceived as a womblike location, ubiquitous and yet diffuse. For Edward, his wife appears as the epitome of (corpo)reality, whereas he takes the shape of an acorporeal will to "act". The idea of acorporeal being falls apart through the bond to physical travelling. Eliot (1964:195), in his dissertation on F. H. Bradley, employs similar terms when noting the conceptual awkwardness of the separation between body and soul: "Soul is to body as cutting is to the axe: realizing itself in its actions, and not completely real when abstracted from what it does". Like in 'La Figlia Che Piange', the body here shows itself as a material, passive object *used* and *bruised* by the mind (*Complete* 34, see p.27). However, without the physical background provided by his wife, Edward is "not completely real".

### The Colonial Travelogue

JULIA. . . . [Celia] will go far. And we know where she is going.  
But what do we know of the terrors of the journey? (*Cocktail*  
421.)

In its geographical extensions, the cocktail-body comes to smuggle elements of race and colonial conflict into its homogenous community. This ambivalence has been met in various ways in the criticism. Smidt (1961:237-238), for instance, identifies Eliot as a “cosmopolitan” and an “international prophet . . . not only because he has stated the dilemma of the modern *déraciné*, the international man, but because he has brought together in his work cultures widely separated in time and space”. This pronouncement clashes with Arrowsmith’s (1977:44) assessment that, in the “Christian homophony” of the majority of Eliot’s works, “other cultural voices play a role that is at best little more than an embellishment or pallid anticipation”. In contrast to these images of either peaceful heterogenesis or complete cultural hegemony, much of the recent criticism retraces a fierce struggle in Eliot’s work to maintain or purify the white, Occidental, patriarchal voice (Ricks 1998, Sparks 1989, Severin 1993a and 1993b, Cooper 1999, Cuddy 2000). Crawford (1987) embraces the middle ground by suggesting both clashes and fruition between what he terms “the savage and the city” in Eliot’s oeuvre. Befitting the constant transgression and reformulation of borders, Crawford (1987:17) sees Eliot’s entire oeuvre as a repetition of the “the essential elements of the American pioneer situation”, i.e. the troubled “opposition between discontented civilization and primitive life”. The intrinsic porosity of both the bodily and the geopolitical skin is suggested by Ellman’s (1987:52) recognition that, in Eliot, “boundaries are the traces of their own transgression”.

In *The Cocktail Party*, the colonial controversy is reflected in the inconclusive way in which the party attempts to compress and disarm a complex cultural clash in Asia by letting it loose as a comic interlude within the four walls of a London flat. In the absence of actual physical contact and transgressive movement, the skin surrounding the social body is mainly linguistic. The spatialised sense of the world, or worlds, thus occurs in relation to the verbal dimension. Language itself, instead of being a universal code for communication, is conceived as a foreign enemy element, having to be reinvented or, at least, invested with new meaning. Like learners of a foreign language, the characters

repeatedly find talking (“understand[ably]”) “not easy” or not even “worth while” (*Cocktail* 369,374, 381,382,417,434,435,414). In effect, Edward’s everyday phrase “I can’t talk right now” literally reflects a universal state of failing speech in the play (*Cocktail* 371). Like flesh, the cocktail-language is communal and highly personal at the same time. A common language is the only way for the characters to communicate their experience to others and to make sense of it, but words amount to a disguise as well. It then becomes apparent that the foreign enemy element or the *other* is located within the (en)trails of the community and its individual members. Even Reilly finally admits that “I do not understand/ [w]hat I myself am saying” (*Cocktail* 421). To a large part, the final ‘illumination’ of the characters eventually amounts to a humbled admittance of this ignorance and of their fundamentally autistic relation with the world: “I didn’t understand her. I understand nothing.” (*Cocktail* 435.)

It should be noted that, while not overtly visible on stage, the colonial conflict sneaks into the play through the word-world and the varying narrative techniques. The different conversational roles and strategies in *The Cocktail Party* have been analysed by critics such as Phelan (1990), Severin (1993b:400-401), Malamud (1994), and Badenhausen (in press). In effect, the play itself has been defined by critics as, at least in part, “a play about conversation” and “relationships” (Phelan 1990:194,195, Marshall 1994:104). Accordingly, the cocktail-body is essentially a narrated body, and it may be treated as a layer of competing stories. It follows that the fight at the borders between cultures may be translated into attempts to colonise language. The play can be treated as a constant battle at the borders of language with invasion and dominion of the linguistic field as a goal. There is a constant warfare for words and stories, and storytelling constitutes a colonising act. On the micro-level, words themselves become a battlefield for the characters and represent an almost physical extension of their minds. Language surrounds them and both isolates them and suggests common ground. There are constant references to the vocabulary of each character as a separate world of its own, where ideas are carried by specific “terms” with a private meaning (*Cocktail* 361,370). Faced with a new inner world, the members of the cocktail-crowd are at a loss of words and meanings: “It’s much easier to tell you what I don’t mean” (*Cocktail* 415). The privileged point of reference disappears in a world, where

all points of the compass collide: “And what, in your opinion, is the ordinary sense?” In the manner of a military conquest, the linguistic cocktail-colonisers must negotiate and separately settle “the terms” on which they delimit and divide the governance of their verbal territory.

In its preoccupation with the world-world, *The Cocktail Party* thus carries the insignia of linguistic imperialism. The action of the play may be seen to amount to predominantly verbal feats of the explorer in a foreign country, naming and measuring the *other* against the self. From the onset, there is also a strongly metatextual level added to the conversation, with a competitive discussion about stories and the skill of storytellers. The accumulation of place names and narratives from different parts of the world comes to stress the biological rootlessness of the floating cocktail-bodies in their urban space. At the same time, the cocktail-travelogues jeopardise the singular and permanent nature of names by making them potentially plural or even fictitious. Language is integrated into the characters, and the characters carry their verbal flesh around with them as appendages to their physical bodies.

The cocktail-conception of the world and the word-world challenges the idea of Woman as a colonised and passive continent. The cocktail-women are both active travellers and forgers of the form that the travel accounts take. Significantly enough, the sexes relate differently to the colonial aspects of language. Although noting significant gender differences in their narrative techniques, Phelan (1990:195) piles Alex and Julia together as story-tellers and characterises them as “exactly the kinds of people who regale willing and unwilling listeners with tales of unusual destinations and peculiar characters”. However, it should be noted that the difference in narrative style extends to way in which the sexes relate to or verbally relate their travels. The male and female travelogues differ both to their destination and to the focus of the description. To their content, Julia’s stories are not international but concentrate on London and her native country—from seaside resorts to a castle in Scotland. Alex, by contrast, is a weathered world-traveller, who allegedly “knows everybody, everywhere” (*Cocktail* 388). In addition, while Alex reports his activities in far-away exotic lands, Julia focuses on the journey itself, talking about trains and the hardships that meet the traveller. In Julia’s mind, travelling is indeed repeatedly associated with physical discomfort, as stressed when she complains about both Lavinia’s and her own “slow” train journey (*Cocktail* 414,428; see

p.71,144). The different conceptions of travelling are revealed, when the Guardians perform a ritual for the protection of Celia: Alex lists Celia's journey "in the desert", "in the mountain", "in the labyrinth" and "in the quicksand". Julia, in turn, asks for protection "from the Voices" and "the Visions" as well as "the tumult" and "the silence" (*Cocktail* 422). Alex here describes the concrete scene in visual terms, whereas Julia inhabits it with the 'lived' experiences of the traveller. Julia's interest lies with the *inbetweenness* of the experience: "[Celia] will go far. And we know where she is going./ But what do we know of the terrors of the journey?" (*Cocktail* 421.)

The male discourse in the play reflects the colonial language of exploration. For Alex, storytelling is a matter of personal pride so that he categorically refuses to "tell the same story twice" (*Cocktail* 353). By contrast, Julia goes to considerable lengths to avoid telling any traditional cocktail party "stories" in chronological order and without frequent interruptions. She seems to take pleasure of the spontaneous surplus texture and the arbitrary hiccoughs of communication: "You shouldn't interrupt my interruptions" (*Cocktail* 432). In effect, Julia makes several ultimately successful attempts to hedge her duty as a storyteller. To begin with, she repeatedly turns to the audience and mouths her suspicion that "you all seem to know [the story]" (*Cocktail* 353,354,355). When this attempt backfires, she denies her own rights to the story: "It really isn't my story" and finally claims to have forgotten the entire incident (*Cocktail* 355,357). This sudden lapse of memory turns out to be a lie, since Julia, renowned for being "observant", "never misses anything unless she wants to" (*Cocktail* 354,367). As a result, the strictly hierarchic roles of unassailable storyteller and submissive listener dissolve to allow for a dynamic and versatile, organic brand of interaction. Severin (1993b:400) indeed sums up Julia's "communal" strategy as tending "more towards process than product; its goal is to unite the listeners, not to enforce the authority of the teller".

In a sense, the female storyteller views the cocktail-conversation as the artery or the (en)trails of the communal party-body. To Julia, speech is not about conquering and authoritatively spreading information, but it turns instead towards maintaining the circulation of the cocktail-body. Thus, there is a shift away from chronology and fact. This transfers the focus away from semantic functions of language towards a collective vision, where speech becomes phatic air keeping the community together. In this way, language achieves a

double role of not only expressing a sense of distance and isolation from the others, but it is also as a means to find common ground. This emphasis on the (en)trails and the *inbetweenness* of the *interruptions* constitutes an alternative tradition within the cocktail-community challenging the “phallogocentrism”, which Sparks (1989:67,73), for instance, deplures in Eliot. In fact, Alex’s exotic story is the original intruder or appendage to the play: Browne (1969:189) notes that Alex’s story about his with the Maharaja was indeed a late addition to the play. In the draft versions, the play begins with Julia’s “story about Lady Kloutz [originally Lady Kahn] and the wedding cake.

The language of the play remains in a state of dynamic uproar and involves constant reinvention and (re)definitions as well as an acceptance of the limits of understanding. The women actually seem to make their own destinations and needs materialise. This is most clearly exemplified in the way that Julia manipulates her surroundings not only by “compell[ing]” Edward to make Lavinia’s imaginary aunt “live somewhere”, but also by producing telegrams from that location: “Julia made her live in Essex;/ And made the telegrams come from Essex” (*Cocktail* 392). A similar materialisation seems to occur, as Celia actually finds herself in a place called *Kinkanja* after having complained that she suffers from “mental kinks” or is “kinky” in the eyes of her parents (*Cocktail* 415). Besides suggesting a blurring or even a complete disregard of physical location, an added interest can be traced in sending Celia to a world she herself has created. Word choices and meanings thus prove unique for each person. This fits Merleau-Ponty’s (1962:211) sense of the corporeal word: “The word and speech must somehow cease to be a way of designating things or thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world, and, moreover, not its clothing but its token or its body”. Accordingly, Edward’s passivity at the beginning of the play is emphasised by his echoing the words of others.

The cocktail-party women take part in the colonialisation, but they communicate their experience in radically different ways. In terms of initiating the dramatic action in the play, *The Cocktail Party* portrays a decided blurring of the sex roles perpetuated by the speaker in, for instance, ‘La Figlia Che Piange’. The cocktail-universe is not conclusively divided according to gender, as shown in the constant flux between the sexes as regards subject and object positions. Importantly enough, the conquering and *leaving* (for abroad) loses its



male exclusiveness, as the entire play grows from the situation of Lavinia's departure and return, and it culminates after the cathartic final exit of Celia. In her hermeneutic reading of Eliot's poems based on Heidegger, Davidson (1985:47) discusses a similar "merging of subject and object" in Eliot's language. The characters lose their static place in the narrative empire or even in the basic sentence structure. This is stated explicitly in the draft version of the play, where the view of the subject dissolves:

U[nidentified] G[uest.] Ah, that leads us to the next hypostudy.  
 We think of ourselves as something positive,  
 Always the subject of the sentence;  
 As having arranged, having been responsible  
 For the part we play in every scene. . . .  
 We identify ourselves  
 With our action, and are lost when we do not act.  
 Discipline yourself to be the observer  
 Of yourself as well as others. (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:  
 228.)

The (feminine) emphasis on the journey or the meandering (en)trails of the conversational cocktail-body challenge the borders of the neatly ordered colonial narrative and renders the exact starting and finishing lines of the stories irrelevant. This appears as the complex play with beginnings and ends, a thematic strand already present in Eliot's childhood writings (see Crawford 1987:1). Significantly enough, there is a discrepancy in *The Cocktail Party* between beginnings and ends: there are few ends but a flurry of beginnings, suiting the way in which death and conclusions are shunned in the cocktail-image of (corpo)reality; Goldman (1973:167), among others, notes the extensive use of the verb *begin* in the play. In effect, the play ends at the beginning of a party, where the verb tense in Lavinia's final line posits the characters literally within that beginning: "It's begun". Thus, it is eventually the woman, in her capability to combine the womb and the tomb, who unites the beginning and the end of the play (cf. Beauvoir 1949a:199). As exemplified in 'East Coker', the perpetuation of beginnings comes to challenge the idea of clearly mapped locations: "I am here/ Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning." (*Complete* 178.) Commenting on similar strands in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Badenhausen (in press) notes how the "'open-endedness' serves as the antithesis of the type of closure the drama associates with the male . . . for male speech and action is

always tied to specific outcomes”. The repeated beginnings become incorporated into the general (en)trails of the cocktail-flesh:

EDWARD. Oh, it isn't much  
That I understand yet! But Sir Henry has been saying,  
I think, that every moment is a fresh beginning;  
And Julia, that life is only keeping on;  
And somehow, the two ideas seem to fit together. (*Cocktail* 440.)

### **The Metropolitan Body**

ALEX. Never, even when travelling in Albania,  
Have I made such a supper out of so few materials  
As I found in the refrigerator. (*Cocktail* 372.)

Dichotomies and polarisations present themselves on several planes in *The Cocktail Party*. It should be noted, however, that all these aspects meet in the urban flat. In addition to actual or narrated journeys, *The Cocktail Party* may be seen to display an acclimatisation of the characters in social space. Much of this social spatialisation of the body seems to occur within the urban landscape and, more specifically, within the cocktail-party institution and its society columns. In this view, the home, or the drawing room, and the kitchen become virtual extensions of the body. The borders of this social body are constantly encroached by uninvited guests. In the draft version of the play, the view of Eliot as a “city poet” is indeed corroborated (Thormählen 1978:140), as Edward goes on to compare his feeling of *losing himself* to getting lost in a city (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:210-211; p.146). In this urban jungle, the characters orient themselves with other characters and their bodies as their compass.

In the light of the double view projected onto the cocktail-party environment by the repeated tropical references, the urban rooms also come to reflect climatologic differences. The kitchen and the pantry, sealed off as essentially female territory, present themselves to the urban explorer in terms of the unknown jungle, where people eavesdrop and from where mysterious “popping” noises are heard (*Cocktail* 377). This secluded shadow-land is contrasted to the life in the well-lit drawing room and office that is completely visible to the audience. Alex strengthens such associations, when he ventures into the kitchen while bragging about his exploits in the jungle and planning a menu of exotic fruit and spices. In the passage quoted above, he moreover depicts the empty

refrigerator as a poorer region than Albania, which he apparently experiences as hostile in terms of its climate and natural resources. Similarly, after managing to concoct a meal for Edward, he boasts that “[t]here are very few peasants in Montenegro/ [w]ho can have the dish you’ll be eating, nowadays” (*Cocktail* 372).

The house itself is indeed a gendered microcosm. For the Chamberlaynes, the home and especially the kitchen represent female territory, whereas the husband is king at his work place and in the public sphere. As Severin (1993b:397) and Grove (1994) suggest, the traditional society with its separation into the male breadwinner and the female homemaker was beginning to crumble in the post-war era when the play was written, and women were called on to work outside the home in unprecedented numbers. Lavinia indeed appears ‘domesticated’ and declawed at the end of the play, where her ambition is fettered inside the flat in the manner of de Beauvoir’s (1949b) entertaining housewife. Her world is essentially limited to the intestines of the flat, and she only manages to retain a diminished godlike power over the drawing room. In this miniature universe and cage, she is at liberty to define even the geometrical relations, as she orders Edward to straighten a painting to her liking. However, in terms of the corporeal extension of the play, this division serves another purpose. Working as a barrister in court, the anorexic Edward is constantly disguised in a sexless, bodiless universe of bureaucracy, whereas his wife is in direct contact with matters related to food and bodily needs.

As the house serves as the physical extension of the cocktail-body, the physical and psychological wellbeing of its residents may be estimated from the degree to which they are aware of their immediate surroundings. Accordingly, the home much more consciously constitutes a part of the Chamberlaynes’ sense of self in the last act of the play. In addition to the hostess actually having hired a reputable catering service, the stage directions now mention that there is a vase with flowers. In one of the rare collective actions undertaken in the play, the husband becomes the hands and the physical extension of his wife, as she makes him straighten a picture on the wall. It is revealing that this explicit image of restored marital unison actually becomes one of the few attentions that the characters give to their surroundings during the entire play. In contrast to their negligence in the first scenes, the characters are much more conscious here of the surrounding flat and of their (corpo)real needs. In the fi-

nal act, the Chamberlaynes are also portrayed as having a neutral, shared zone, represented by their summer home in the country. Significantly enough, the cocktail-crowd, like the theatre audience, are not let in on this paradise, which may be seen as the physical illustration of the feeling Celia labels “a private world of *ours*” (*Cocktail* 379; emphasis original).

In this word-world of sexual warfare, Reilly’s office in the second act seems to provide relatively neutral turf for the Chamberlaynes to meet. Reilly indeed seems intent on building a no-man’s-land in terms of the verbal warfare: “You have come where the word ‘insult’ has no meaning.” (*Cocktail* 407.) It may be argued that Reilly’s clinical office with its mechanical “house-telephone” and “electric button” is close in nature to Edward’s acorporeal office with its avoidance of personal contact and the body (*Cocktail* 399,400). However, the women in the party-world apparently are not, after all, at such a great loss in the world of modern technology, as suggested by Lavinia’s “economical” and “practical” decisions to “share a taxi home” (*Cocktail* 411). In fact, the modern flat and the city in itself seem to defy traditional gendered roles, so that Lavinia takes the initiative in moving about town and keeps track of her husband. In the last act, she appears much more self-conscious about her dress and her appearance, but she still acts in a very relaxed and ‘unladylike’ manner and “force[s Reilly] to a showdown”.

The male relation to the shadowy and unknown areas of the kitchen, the pantry, or the jungle is notably different from their female counterparts. When the women venture into the kitchen or the pantry, they are alone, either eavesdropping or wallowing in food. The cocktail-males, in turn, depend on their being seen in the public sphere. Even when Edward attempts to imitate his wife’s disappearance and leaves home, she is able to intersect him at his club. In contrast, Lavinia’s whereabouts are never completely accounted for, and she is “to give no explanations”. In a way, then, the spatiality of the female body becomes much more dispersed, and it denigrates the sense of unity suggested by the dualistic view of corporeality.

The cocktail party centres on the middle-class home and its kitchen. Besides functioning as a convenient stage device for allowing easy entries and exits at dramatically convenient intervals, the kitchen itself is clearly set off as essentially female territory in the play world: it is a space that provides a clear affective and expressive focus for the women. Thus, after abruptly ending her

affair with Edward, Celia finishes with the symbolic as well as trivially practical statement: “I will never go into your kitchen again” (*Cocktail* 383). In addition, Lavinia reinstates the status quo between the married couple after her return by saying that she “ought to go and have a look in the kitchen” (*Cocktail* 398). Such performatory pronouncements activate the house as a political statement, where the rooms are understood as an extension of the characters’ physical existence. Instead of actually touching each other, they speak via proxy, i.e. about the house. In the draft version of the play, Celia ends her affair with Edward by an even more overt verbal reference to spatial distance: “I stand apart from you/ And I shall never strand any closer.” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:196.)

The territorial annexations of parts of the house show that the sexes relate differently to the body and its needs. Food and the kitchen become female territory in the play world, allowing for temporary gender transgression. Thus, whereas the character Alexander McColgie Gibbs has to explain his intrusion into the kitchen and the *feminine* quality of “wearing an apron”, the cocktail-women have to explain their absence from the party and the kitchen. In terms of the household, the women seem to have access to the border areas of the house, with their more direct issue to the body and its appetites. A comic appendix to this female monopoly or even imprisonment in bodily needs appears, when Julia contends that the only time that Edward has ever been separated from his wife occurred when “Lavinia got locked in the lavatory, and couldn’t get out”. The hidden areas of the house allow for a simultaneous absence and presence, as when Julia suggests that Lavinia might be “in the pantry/ [l]istening to all we say” (*Cocktail* 356).

The spatialised sense of geography is reflected in the existence of a set of partly incompatible “worlds” within society. For instance, within the miniature cocktail-universe, a dualistic partition between the world of “society and fashion” (body) and that of artistic ambition and intellect (mind) is effected (*Cocktail* 369). There is a gendered ring to the divide reflected in the fact that Celia is automatically supposed to belong the former and Peter to the latter circle. At the same time, the colonial situation at the border of bodies and cultures invites an intermediary category of transgressive *inbetweenness* in society. In the case of Lavinia’s “amateur Thursdays” the attempted union of these two worlds is regarded a “failure”, and Edward refers condescendingly to his wife’s “ambi-

tion/ [t]o establish herself in two worlds at once” (*Cocktail* 369). In Edward’s view, this attempt led to a disaster because “she herself had to be the link between them”. Edward’s discontent reflects a general sense of insecurity at the disappearance of absolute classifications in this intermediary territory; in effect, he complains about having felt like “[Lavinia’s hired] butler” more than a host, and he is visibly uncomfortable in this double role (*Cocktail* 394). Reinforcing the sense of males weakness, Julia indeed implores him to “pretend [he is] another guest/ [a]t Lavinia’s party” (*Cocktail* 356). However, it should be noted that, despite Lavinia’s allegedly failed “attempts at starting a salon” (*Cocktail* 368), the two worlds already mix. Thus, the society-girl Celia surprises Peter by appearing “*alone* [a]t a concert” and turns out to be a poet, whereas Edward confesses to being limited in his intellectual interests (*Cocktail* 367,369; emphasis added).

The possibility of another world or other worlds shakes the scientific foundations and certainties of “this world”. Goldman (1973:171-172), when noting the prominence of “echoing dialogue” as one of Eliot’s major dramatic devices, focuses on the programmatic reiteration in *The Cocktail Party* of common verbs such as *know*. He also sets out to defend a reading of this that suggests more than a “Possum-mode of mystification”, mainly a putting into question of what the audience knows or does not know. Goldman suggests that, as a result of the extensive repetition, not only the characters but the audience “must expect some change in what we think we know“. In the light of this study, I would like to suggest an even broader implication to this riddling repetition. According to this view, it is the category of *knowing* and *knowledge* that is put into question. In accordance with the phenomenological urge to universal doubt, it is not merely the content of knowledge that is questioned, but also *how* this knowing is accomplished. This change is championed by Julia: when asked how she could “know” that the “harmless” man could hear the cry of bats, Julia shrugs off the question with: “Because he said so. And I believed him” (*Cocktail* 355). In the closed party-world, *saying* is believing. Knowledge is opened up to a double reading, not only consisting of data received from above but also involving, to a significant degree, the active participation of the person who “thinks” she “knows”. In fact, the tables are turned, so that the most important weight of these words is seen to lie with the words themselves and with the attitude of the hearer to the information. In the (corpo)reality of

the cocktail world, knowing itself becomes a category strongly subjected to will and loses its self-assured, eternal connotations. Through a similar rethinking process, the concept of *belief* entails the subjective, active involvement of the thinking and feeling subject. This is further corroborated by the collateral use of *believe* in connection to *know*, occurring several times. The characters hesitate in their choice of these seemingly set verbs. Celia, first seen as the “sceptic” of the play (*Cocktail* 355), ultimately gives up everything for what she *feels* is right. Thus, the very foundations of knowledge—the Husserlian *Erkenntnisboden*—as well as rational thinking and feeling are shaken and opened up for reinterpretation (Husserl 1982; see p.23).

## **DIGESTION: SYMBIOSIS THROUGH THE GENDERED BODY**

### **The Corporate (Corpo)Reality**

#### **The Theatrical Body**

##### *The (Corpo)Real Costume*

JULIA. . . . And now, when they are stripped naked to their souls  
 And can choose, whether to put on proper costumes  
 Or huddle quickly into new disguises,  
 They have, for the first time, somewhere to start from. (*Cocktail*  
 421.)

Commenting on the wealth of theatrical metaphors in the first draft of *The Cocktail Party*, Browne (1969:206) suggests in passing that “someone ought to make a study of [Eliot’s] theatrical references”. The prominence of imagery related to the stage and acting in Eliot’s works was indeed recognised relatively early and resulted, for instance, in a study by Schlüter (1962) into the actor as a metaphor in Eliot’s modern dress plays. Schlüter (1962:14) contends that, by the time of *The Cocktail Party*, this role-playing had become a defining feature of humanity in Eliot. As Grove (1994:166) suggests, the tendency to “exploit . . . the staginess of theater” also causes broad structural implications for Eliot’s

late drama. The role of the body in formulating these theatrical categories has not been subjected to much scrutiny, however.

*The Cocktail Party* can be seen to rely on a constructed or staged sense of (corpo)reality. For the cocktail-characters, theatre becomes a way to cage the disorderly (corpo)real “network of relationships” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii; see p.33) and to drape the inarticulate mass of the body with easily nameable and classifiable masks. The staged body becomes one of the weapons for the characters to distance themselves from the chaotic, preverbal, and naked animal body. In accordance with the tendency to shun (corpo)reality, the cocktail-body cannot stay bare. In Julia’s description above, there is thus an inevitable movement away from nudity; the “naked” body is presented as a starting state of Edenic innocence and purity that cannot last. To stress the corporeal garment of humanity, the repeated action of dressing and undressing solidifies “the soul” via *me(a)taphors* of “strip[ping]” and “put[ting] on proper costumes”. While attempting to enforce the dualistic borders drawn between the body and the spirit, this also comes to stress the difficulty of separating the body from the reality of the word-world: in the cocktail-universe, the reality is inevitably a *corporeality*.

The naked body/soul thus appears to be without any definite, meaningful shape until it is invested with clothes. In part, this agrees with Gilbert’s (1999:160-161) analysis of a marked gender difference in the way that modernist writers react to the “heightened awareness of the theatrical nature of clothing itself” brought about through the vast changes in dress code and the industrial mass production of clothes. According to Gilbert, most male modernists “[b]alanc[e] self against mask, true garment against false costume”, whereas their female counterparts “define all costume as false”. Placing “proper costumes” in an antithetic contrast to “disguises”, the Eliotic imagery here initially seems the prime example of this male modernist tendency. It should be noted, however, that Eliot’s cocktail-code does not necessarily entail a rebuttal of the notion that all costumes are false. In Eliot’s staged world, the “costume” also retains its double meaning of ‘a set of clothes worn by an actor or performer or by someone at a fancy dress party’ (*Collins Cobuild*). As befits the party-code, clothing is markedly a means of communication and of entry into society, whereas nudity entails a primeval escape from meaning. However, the costume is always a pretence to some extent, devised “to take people in” (*Cocktail* 395).



For the cocktail-characters in their staged world, to be in a body inevitably involves play-acting. In a sense, the characters struggle to make these outward appearances portray their (true) inner life as closely as possible. At the same time, they are forced to come into terms with the ‘naked truth’ instead of instinctively escaping and “huddling” from (corpo)reality. In combination with the extended discussion in the play concerning the idea of *starting* points and *beginnings*, the undressing and initial nudity indeed becomes the prerequisite for the characters’ ability to create plausible roles for themselves. Consequently, it signifies a kind of (re)birth, providing a concrete albeit temporary locus from where to “begin”. For instance, after Peter’s dreams for the future have collapsed, Lavinia comforts him: “this only brings you to the point/ [a]t which you *must* begin (*Cocktail* 435; emphasis original).

In accordance with the general tendency in the play to avoid abstract language, much of the theatrical imagery in *The Cocktail Party* has been incorporated into a matter-of-fact, material discussion of everyday professional or social roles. This involves a heightened awareness of the costumes and outward stage-looks of ordinary situations. Professional fields of action frequently discussed in theatrical terms include Edward’s work as a barrister and Reilly’s medical profession, Peter’s and Celia’s “careers” as well as Lavinia’s literary salon. To a notable degree, however, the sense of staging is applied to *The Cocktail Party* coquetry itself. The emphasis placed on the theatrical side of everyday reality is reflected onto the larger structural plane of the play in the explicitly staged or constructed linguistic and dramatic modes of cocktail toasts and professional rituals. The make-believe of the theatre is brought to bear on the cocktail-universe, as Reilly presents social situations and professional interaction in a vocabulary related to the stage (or films), involving *dressing* for different *roles*, *arranging* the scene, and *acting* (*Cocktail* 362-363). Even in the ‘real’ life of *The Cocktail Party* people, the staging thus is very literal and explicit. The characters all live in a world where, in Reilly’s words, “you’ve dressed for a party/ And are going downstairs, with everything about you/ Arranged to support you in the role you have chosen” (*Cocktail* 362).

By means of a careful staging and (p)rearranging of the body’s surroundings, the cocktail-characters may be seen to control the arbitrary aspects of their own (corpo)reality. In the staged cage-world, the borders of the body and its area of influence become extended to the point of breaking the borders be-

tween the actor-directors and their settings. However, the illusion of complete control is repeatedly broken in a “jolt” where the feet are suddenly forcefully made aware of their physiological limits, as the body refuses to stay in its staged corset (*Cocktail* 362; see p.57). At these intervals, the body is naked and without its protective skin: the border tissue here turns into an uncontrolled issue of unrestrained contact with the world. A similar effect is reached in the play by the layering of roles. All the characters are highly aware of their participation in several staged rituals and multiple social games, and they are constantly seen to stage their own small dramas. Accordingly, the text is filled with miniature plays embedded into plays. For instance, after her return, Lavinia suspects that Edward will soon lapse into his old way of life and acquire “another little part to play,/ [w]ith another face” (*Cocktail* 395).

The staged borders of the body constantly change and rearrange themselves: the role does not stay singular but multiplies uncontrollably. Similarly, the characters frequently adopt a kind of metatextual attitude to their own lives, naming their parts in these different drawing room dramas or toying with them. This staged feeling surrounding the cocktail-actions has its repercussions on the textual level of the play. Thus, in addition to their awareness of themselves in the varying roles of “hosts” and “hostesses”, “listeners” and “guests” in the different verbal exchanges enacted in the play, the characters display a sharpened sensitivity to their ‘lines’ and the linguistic style and register of their extensions in the word-world. For example, they repeatedly comment on their “own terms” and “ways of putting” things in a manner that echoes the metatextual ruminations in passages of *Four Quartets*: “That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:/ A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion” (*Cocktail* 361,370; *Complete* 179). The body and the word-world thus need to be defined and constantly redefined in relation to others.

It is worth noting that the attempts to rein the (corpo)reality by rehearsing prescribed theatrical routines bring the characters closer to the mechanical machine-body. In the draft version of the play, acting involves the loss of independence or even of humanity: “Like child actors and performing animals./ That sounds rather crude...” (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:216.) In their predictable routines, the actors become marionettes afraid to break their assigned dramatic genre. Grove (1994:169) notes the disembodied effect of robotic theatricality and concludes that the “setting, action, actors, are there to be

*seen through to the higher reality beyond*". Significantly enough, however, he also recognises a forceful (corpo)real cause for this stylistic technique: "[t]o annul his actors will seem a strange aim for a playwright, but suspicion of the body is the other side of fascination with the powers it may possess" (Grove 1994:174). In effect, through the enslaved sense of the staged body, the theatrical dimension of the play also reflects a struggle for political power over other bodies: the play has a director, who "run[s] the machine" and keeps interfering (*Cocktail* 391; see p.89). In accordance with the implied female dominance of the party-world, the cocktail-women are repeatedly conceived of as the secret or even explicit directors of the small drawing-room dramas. Much obvious theatrical reference has been removed from the final version, but its remnants can be read in passages such as Edward's accusation of his wife: "You wanted me to provide a public background/ For your kind of public life. You wished to be a hostess/ For whom my career would be a support." (*Cocktail* 294.) The close connection between theatrical and social roles is revealed in an analogous tirade of the draft version: "You wished to be the centre/ Not only the producer, but the leading lady./ Well, I played my part as a useful background." (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:206.) Again, the women are more comfortable with the "unexpected" events that differ from the standard cocktail-party script, and they have the upper hand. In effect, the chaos in the first scene directly originates in the seemingly sudden decision of "the leading lady" to leave the cocktail-stage.

In its congenital connection to community, the cocktail-body is itself conceived as a costume. Paradoxically enough, then, the obsession with costume entails its mirror action in the extreme anorexic tendency to "strip" all "disguises", including the flesh itself. Thus, before the impersonally "masked actors" of the operating theatre, the patient is even more pointedly naked, as he or she is stripped to his very intestines (*Cocktail* 363). The culmination of this ultimately futile tendency to skin the disguises in order to reach the 'real' (corpo)reality may be seen in the mutilation of Celia in the last scene. Thus, the cocktail-body is not nude but disembowelled in its search for a reality beyond disguises.

*The Buffoon-Body*

LAVINIA.                    Oh, Edward!  
                                   The point is, that since I've been away  
                                   I see that I've taken you much too seriously.  
                                   And now I can see how absurd you are. (*Cocktail* 392-393.)

Like the character Edward in Eliot's play, this study may for the most part be accused of taking its subject "much too seriously". To some extent, this gutting of the light comic costume of the cocktail-discussions may be excused because of the double edge proffered by Julia: "I know you think I am a silly old woman/ But I'm really very serious." (*Cocktail* 356.) In the draft version of the play, she gives a similar assessment of Reilly: "Well, you *are* a [music-hall] comedian, Henry!/ But he's really a very great doctor as well." (Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:224; emphasis original.) Thus, the comedy and the seriousness operate collectively within the same skin. This should not divert, however, from recognising that one of the central insights of *The Cocktail Party* resides in the realisation of the clownesque (corpo)reality itself. Accordingly, Lavinia's great "discovery" after her five-year expedition into the uncharted continent of marriage leads her to reclaim her rights to laughter:

                                  Yes, a very important discovery,  
                                   Finding that you've spent five years of your life  
                                   With a man who has no humour;  
                                   And that the effect upon me was  
                                   That I lost all sense of humour myself. (*Cocktail* 392-393.)

Initially, the idea of the comic body appears to be in conflict with the suffering and decaying prison-body promulgated in the play. In their attempts to reconcile the thorn of Celia's "triumphant" death into the flesh of a light drawing-room comedy, critics have pointed out the specialised Christian sense of 'comedy' and the Dantesque *commedia* (Porter 1970:66, Phelan 1990). However, the comic cocktail-chatter is often dismissed as a sheer technicality. Smith (1963:148), for instance, points to how the "comic surface . . . [is] present to appease or distract" the audience, while Donoghue (1962:174) remarks, much in the same vein, that the comic interludes "help to pacify and control the audience temperamentally suspicious of Holiness". Thormählen (1984), in turn, refers to the "safety" of the comic exchanges. However, this stress on comedy as a decoy may overlook the raw and disruptive powers in the repeated comic stories and situations.

Cramming itself with stories of torture and death, the cocktail-laughter does not create a seamless border. The difficulties that critics have encountered in classifying the play may be seen to reflect this dilemma. Phelan (1990:15, 141), for example, lists an array of different classifications and finally settles on the term “comedy of manners” with a discordant strand of the “manichean”. Similar definitions have been presented by, for instance, Gardner (1967:172) as well as Donoghue (1962:173,183,185); the latter simultaneously deplores the “gross discontinuity of tone” in the play and recognises its “daring flirtation with tragedy” and even suggests that “Eliot loses control over his ‘poetry’” in the play. Malamud (1994:119) seems to go even further in precision, referring to the play as an “ironic-pathetic mock tragedy”. Befitting the mood of this study, it is perhaps rewarding to allow for this fluctuation between dramatic genres instead of nailing the play down.

In a sense, the cocktail-community casts the body itself in the role of the “fool”. In accordance with the cocktail-tendency to ritualistic repetition, this word chimes several times as an integral part of the cocktail conversation; the idea is perhaps best summed up in Reilly’s repeated advice to “[r]esign to be the fool you are” (*Cocktail* 415). “To be the fool” entails a sense of relativity. The body is revealed in its comic nudity during the brief intervals in which it flutters *between* roles, ie. when it literally stumbles or otherwise falls out of character and before it has had the opportunity to assume a new mask. The female characters seem to be much more apt to accept the clownesque (corpo)reality, even if it entails a (temporary) loss of social status. Thus, both Lavinia and Celia, the women closest to Edward, pity him for his alleged lack of humour:

CELIA. . . . I can see you at last as a human being.  
Can’t you see me that way too, and laugh about it? (*Cocktail*  
387.)

LAVINIA. . . . Really, Edward, if you were human,  
You would burst out laughing. But you won’t. (*Cocktail* 398.)

The borders of the *human*—with the conglomerated idea of *humane*—indeed seem to be drawn through laughter. In the tradition of Shakespearian comedy, the fool repeatedly becomes the most serious and, in fact, the most real of roles, closest to naked and undisguised humanity. The original titling of

Eliot's play as "A Comedy" thus gains renewed importance, as it promotes the entire human life as something of a divine but also very human, comic cocktail-story.

It should be noted that, instead of constituting a limit, the comic casting of characters allows them to break and subvert their customary cages. For instance, Peter reveals that he has returned to England to find "some typical English faces" and to help the casting director to "decide what faces are typical", whereupon Julia hurries to assert that "[w]e're all very typical" (*Cocktail* 431). Part of the comedy of this exchange evolves around the fact that Julia herself, despite her stereotypic appearance, is the one character that most decidedly refuses to stay in her appointed comic category of the absent-minded elderly busybody. The cocktail-community thus defies simplifications by revelling in them. As all ways of categorising people into (comic) "types" are, in their essence, revealed to be simplified and artificial sketches, language and words themselves are also shown to be a matter of role-playing. Recognising this chaos, the shapeless shape-shifting of the cocktail-characters becomes a path to reduce the chaos by establishing categories and discussing them openly. This reveals the underlying relativity and plurality of all categorisations.

Significantly enough, the comic body becomes a central ingredient in the differing conceptions or facets of (corpo)reality advocated by the two sexes. Anorexically anaemic himself, Edward fears that his wife is imbued with a supraphysical, chaotically destructive, and imperialistically *digesting* strength. Characteristically, Edward's solitary game of solitaire in the first act clashes with the carnival tradition of communal games (cf. Bakhtin 1968:231). Lavinia, in turn, seems to call for the laughing, *di-jesting* and communal body-image promoted by, for instance, Bakhtin (1968:11-12): "The people's ambivalent laughter. . .expresses the point of the whole world; he [sic] who is laughing also belongs to it". Bakhtin (1968:20) indeed notes the power of laughter to "degrade, bring down to earth, [and] turn their subject into flesh". In her acceptance of the fool-body, Lavinia deplors this lack of carnival carnality in her husband.

## The Buffet-Body

### *The Female Feast*

JULIA. . . Edward without Lavinia! He's quite impossible!  
 Leaving it to me to keep things going.  
 What a host! And nothing fit to eat! (*Cocktail* 355.)

EDWARD . . . she [Lavinia] has made me incapable  
 Of having any existence of my own. (*Cocktail* 403.)

In its social extension, the definition of the cocktail-body stretches towards both the plurality of *bodies* and a corporate (corpo)reality of the community. Marshall (1994:104) underlines that “Eliot’s theater is, at every level, from the language to the plot to the actors to the audience, a study in community—a series of exercises in the spirit of cooperation”. On an even more radical note, Malamud (1994:60) maintains that “the affirmation and attempted attainment of communities of drama” is “the single most significant aspect of Eliot’s playwriting career”: “Every aspect of his dramas (as of the world outside) relates to the community, has meaning only in terms of it, and is meaningless in the absence of it”. It follows that, for Malamud (1994:125-126), the cocktail-party ritual itself is primarily a “metonymic representation” of this community. One of the central ways in which the play ingests the body is indeed the cocktail-party etiquette. According to this ‘light’ cocktail ideal, Alex repeatedly brags about his skills to make “a toothsome meal” out of thin air or “out of nothing”, suggesting a complete absence of calories and actual ingredients (*Cocktail* 368,372).

Although diminished in industrial societies, the metaphor of the “body politic” with its organic relations between the various members of a society or an institution is amply documented throughout history (Bakhtin 1968:351, Turner 1991:5, Bordo 1993:21,34). Bakhtin (1968:88) meets the medieval carnival in a *me(a)taphorical* sense as “the drama of the great generic body of the people, and for this generic body birth and death are not an absolute beginning and end but merely elements of continuous growth and renewal”. In a sense, then, the organic party-body formed of individual *bodies* may be read as the continuation and dispersion of Eliot’s earlier Chorus in both space and time. At the same time, the carnal carnival is a time when the limbs and their functions in this body change places in a “temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of

hierarchical rank [which] created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life” (Bakhtin 1968:10). In effect, the cocktail-characters go to considerable lengths to brush aside their professional selves as well as their jargon in the first scenes: “I have often used these terms in examining witnesses,/ So I don’t like them.” (*Cocktail* 361.) In effect, Edward does not even know the name of his “Unidentified Guest”: “I’ve no idea who he is/ Or how he got here.” (*Cocktail* 365.)

Despite the stress on community, Edward may undoubtedly be regarded as the main protagonist and focal character in the traditional comic plot of the first scenes (see Smith 1963, Moody 1980). Although both Edward and Lavinia are seen to suffer from the same discomfort in their marriage, the play ‘happens’ to him and the events are, until the last scenes, largely seen from his perspective: his wife has left him, various people flock to see him in his flat, his wife returns to him, and he goes to see a doctor. In this way, the play obeys the (unconscious convention to define the “subject” as naturally male (Irigaray 1985a: 133). The male perspective is reinforced by the fact that there is always a man on the scene; Edward and Reilly are the only characters who are ever seen alone. Despite her complaints of Edward’s general disinterest and apparent lack of social skills, Julia refuses to talk and virtually wants to stop the action on the stage during his short absence: “we’ll wait until Edward comes back into the room” (*Cocktail* 355). Conversely, the party survives both Lavinia’s and Celia’s absence, and indeed seems to depend on their absence for conversational incentives.

Badenhausen (in press) reads the cocktail-party institution in terms of Kristeva’s ‘phallic’ position: “The metaphor of the cocktail party, which frames and thus controls the stage action, is a world of logos and telos, a world marked by linear anecdotes that climax in punch lines and by social conventions requiring participants to follow prescribed modes of talking, thinking, and acting”. Gardner (1967:172), by contrast, terms *The Cocktail Party* “a woman’s play” on the grounds that “a comedy of manners is always dominated by women”. Read today, Gardner’s assessment may, without doubt, be attacked as somewhat simplistic, since the comedy of manners as a separate dramatic genre was itself largely forged by male writers and therefore only features female characters as created by men. As Rokem (1997:223,234) finds when discussing *fin de siècle* plays by Strindberg and Ibsen as well as Freudian psychoanalysis,



even seemingly rebellious female characters can be seen to be “effectively expelled from the texts by their respective male authors/authorities” in an institutionalised process termed “men writing women”. After all, both Lavinia and Celia undeniably fit into this paradigm, taking turns in their role as absent and violated women. During their absence from the cocktail-frame, the female characters thus exist through language and stories reiterated mostly by the men. However, focussing on the male authoring process overlooks the core of Gardner’s statement. Within the scope of Eliot’s play, the cocktail party is portrayed as an essentially female territory, dominated by women even during their absence. Edward, for instance, feels out-of-place both at Lavinia’s “amateur Thursdays” and when his wife is absent. The cocktail party may indeed be ‘sexed’ as female: the women issue the invitations and they host the social event. In this way, the cocktail-feast itself turns out to be a site for a reversal of social roles and hierarchies.

As the cocktail party gaze cannot be turned on itself, the characters “project” themselves onto others (*Cocktail* 382,397,435; see also p.111). In this way, the party-body feeds on the outside community for eye contact and existence; it can only be seen by others or projected into actions aimed at the *Lebenswelt*. Browne (1969:192) indeed names as “one of the cardinal ideas” in *The Cocktail Party* “that one’s belief in one’s identity is dependent on one’s sense of the identity of those closest to one”. Cuddy (2000:198) notes how Lavinia “achieves her image and value in relation to the man in her life”. However, this ignores the fact that all the characters who participate in the party-body are equally dependent on various forms of public recognition. As Lavinia points out, the cocktail party is about being seen:

LAVINIA. . . . Everybody likes to be seen at a party  
Where everybody else is, to show they’ve been invited.  
That’s what makes it a success. (*Cocktail* 425.)

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir (1949b:219) recognises the urban home as an essentially public showcase, where the woman is on display. In Eliot’s play, the cocktail party is also a showcase for the men: the women stage the cocktail-party scene and furnish it with men. The cocktail party then appears as an autonomous universe, where the boundaries are set by women, and it contrasts with the confident colonial world depicted in the cocktail-stories told by Alex. In the manner of Irigaray’s (1984:17-18) “enveloping” (*enveloppeur*) Woman,

the cocktail-women circumscribe a space that the male cannot leave because he “beg[ins] to dissolve,/ [t]o cease to exist” when her form is not present: “Without her, it was vacancy.” (*Cocktail* 403; see p.184.) However, the women not only create the cocktail-mode, but they also challenge and stretch it. This becomes most underlined in the shape of Julia, who refuses to co-operate in the cocktail-chatter and repeatedly reveals the banal frivolity and role-play involved in the party itself. Her irreverent attitude towards the cocktail-code persists throughout the play, as she arrives and leaves when she pleases and announces that she is only interested in the cocktail refreshments and ‘really nice tit-bit[s]’: “I’m simply ravenous/ And dying of thirst.” (*Cocktail* 355,426; see also p.13.) At the actual party, Julia repeatedly hijacks the male storytelling discourse by (misre)presenting it and issues (false) “warn[ings]” regarding both Reilly’s and Alex’s credibility: “My dear Julia,/ You are giving me a very bad introduction—/ Supposing that an introduction was necessary.” (*Cocktail* 365,376,432.) At the same time, she clearly enjoys the party she attempts to wreck. Similarly, the hostess Lavinia refuses to mother her party and abandons it without even remembering or bothering to cancel. The cocktail-women ‘own’ the party and are free to absent themselves from the scene at will. This movement is perfected in Celia, who absents herself from the entire urban cultural scene to pursue her alternative “career”.

In contrast to the singular male adventurer, Julia, in unison with Celia, takes a communal view of the agency of things. This is reflected in some of the metatextual exchanges between Julia and Reilly, where they discuss their influence on the others and the methods they use to achieve their goals as helpers or “Guardians”. Thus, when Reilly half regrets the cure he has prescribed for the Chamberlaynes by saying “I have taken a great risk”, Julia instantly responds with the more generalising: “We must always take risks./ That is *our* destiny.” (*Cocktail* 420; emphasis added.) Julia’s words appear somewhat ambiguous, as they may refer both to the group of unique Guardians and to humanity as a whole. Julia’s *we*-word bespeaks a world of personal risk-taking and suggests a possible polyphony within the skin of the communal cocktail-party. Malamud (1994:122) indeed notes a characteristic “dialectic tension between communal harmony and personal combativeness” in both the cocktail-community and its “microcosm[ic]” reflection in the marital institution: “Communities can be nurturing, natural, smooth. They can be deceitful, devi-

ous, intrusive. And, finally, they are both at once.” In effect, Malamud’s terms evoke the idea of the cocktail-community as an organic, ‘lived’ party-body.

Significantly enough, the cocktail party itself is built around the body and appears as both its physical and its social extension. Rhythmically, the play may be seen to mimic bodily functions. In the first act, the characters are inhaled and exhaled from the stage at a feverish and uneven pace. Edward—like the nervously opening and closing front door of his flat—is not ready to adopt Reilly’s medical advice to “[b]reathe deeply, and adopt a relaxed position” (*Cocktail* 360). In the scene set in Reilly’s office, on the contrary, the tempo slows down and becomes regulated with Reilly’s electric button as the respiratory aid. However, the dominant rhythm of the play remains the chaotic flux, which Julia repeatedly sets in motion in the urban cocktail-rooms. Whereas Reilly’s decisive “procedure” consists of inviting the characters to solitary interviews alone or in pairs (*Cocktail* 405), Julia’s telegrams favour summoning all the characters and randomly blending them into a party-body. Julia’s cocktail-method thus amounts to a collective form of polyembryony. Accordingly, when she expresses her wish to “dine alone” with Edward, she has “already selected the people you’re to dine with” (*Cocktail* 357-358).

The barren nature of the first cocktail-scenes has been probed by a number of critics (Smith 1963:180, Porter 1970:77). This draught is reflected in the actual setting of the scene, as well as in its language. It basically occurs as a blatant negligence of the bodily needs of the cocktail congregation and thus contradicts the very essence of social encounters involving ritual food and drink. The awkwardness of the situation is most bluntly pronounced by Julia’s exasperated complaint that there is “nothing fit to eat” (*Cocktail* 355). “[S]imply ravenous” for a ‘really nice tit-bit’, Julia actually whisks away the cocktails as the essence of the cocktail party by announcing that she “can drink at home” (*Cocktail* 355,426; see p.13). By this statement, Julia sets herself in the same category as the insatiable Lady Klootz, who was found “in the pantry . . . rinsing her mouth out with champagne” at a wedding party (*Cocktail* 353). The woman here breaks the social code and even the conventional communal meaning of the wedding party ritual to satisfy her own bodily needs. Similarly, Julia breaks the code by disentangling cocktail-drinking from its ritual setting and thereby asserting her independence from the party-body. Thus, the cocktail-women both break and enhance the communal meaning of food and play

with the barriers. This egotism connected with the body and its needs stands in stark contrast to the community and its codes of behaviour. Julia here seems to posit herself in favour of sheer physical enjoyment.

The cocktail party women appear to be more comfortable with the dissolving borders between subject and object as well as the borders of the body. The covert power of the women to order and 'stage' their men appears throughout the play. Thus, although Celia explains to Peter that she "depended on [him] for concerts" (*Cocktail* 388), her description of the situation to Edward is completely different: "I thought that I could help [Peter]. I took him to concerts." (*Cocktail* 380.) A similar pattern is revealed, when Lavinia's return is initially presented in terms of her being passively "br[ought] back" at Edward's request, while it eventually turns out that she has endeavoured an almost identical process of decision-making as her husband (*Cocktail* 364,384, 394). Lavinia explicitly explains the power relations when discussing their honeymoon: "But how could I tell you where I wanted to go/ Unless you suggested some other place first?" (*Cocktail* 393.) Similarly, what appears in the finished play as an insistence by Lavinia for Edward to "get the porter to fetch" her luggage is a direct command to Edward in the draft version: "I'm afraid I must ask you to carry it up for me." (*Cocktail* 398, Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:207.) This concurs with Edward's feeling of being "the butler" at Lavinia's parties. Similarly, like an automaton, Edward repeatedly *leaves it to* the women around him to make decisions and act on his behalf. He appears to be uncomfortable with this passivity in relation to women, but gladly indulges in it and even admits to Reilly that he "can no longer *act* for myself": "Coming to you—that's the last decision/ I was capable of making. I am in your hands./ I cannot take any further responsibility." (*Cocktail* 404; emphasis original.) The incentive to take action also seems to rest with the female in some larger, socially disruptive (t)issues, as indicated by Celia's semi-rhetorical question to Edward: "Surely you don't hold to that silly convention/ That the husband should always be the one to be divorced?" (*Cocktail* 374-375.)

While the cocktail-males (reluctantly) confess their dependence on the women, Celia declares her independence:

I suppose that most women  
Would feel degraded to find that a man

With whom they thought they had shared something wonderful  
Had taken them only as a passing diversion. (*Cocktail* 380.)

Celia's reference to "most women" in this passage reveals a view of the female as stereotypically subservient to male authority; at the same time, she excludes herself from this group. She does not feel "degraded", since what crumbles is actually Celia's view of Edward and not her view of herself. On the contrary, she sees herself as the authoritative party in the affair. To Celia, Edward and Peter do not "seem real enough/ [t]o humiliate me", and she announces her own agency: "Humiliation—it's something I've done to myself." (*Cocktail* 380.) This insistence on the active woman reveals a dangerous double edge, however. In effect, the play manages to suggest that the cruelty done to women, to the point of femicide, is essentially self-inflicted. Thus, according to the cocktail-logic, Celia manages to humiliate *herself*, and she finally even mutilates and martyrs herself of her own free will: "Everyone makes a choice, of one kind or another,/ And then must take the consequences." (*Cocktail* 439.) Paradoxically enough, the cocktail-party hierarchy is so omnipotent that the only way to leave it—in addition to the temporary freedom of the carnival season—involves absolute self-annihilation.

Timed to occur *after* the plot of Euripides' *Alcestis*, the very inception of Eliot's play invites a transgression of the confining cocktail-limits. Characteristically, then, the play named *The Cocktail Party* only features shadows of actual cocktail parties. The plot largely takes place during the intervals between 'real' parties, where the characters indulge in extensive interludes concerning parties that have failed or not yet taken place as well as metanarrative sequences concerned with storytelling. The (non-existent) party itself then comes to bear a *me(a)taphorical* relation to the characters and their experience of their own bodies as constantly fleeing to the past or the future: "You are nothing but a set/ Of obsolete responses" (*Cocktail* 363). The party in the first scene is spoken of but absent and portrayed as belonging to the past: the cocktail-crowd live before or after the party but not during it. However, the cocktail-universe still arranges itself mainly according to mealtimes, and the characters discuss their whereabouts in terms of breakfast, tea, dinner, and supper in addition to the various cocktail parties (*Cocktail* 369). Accordingly, by manipulating the cocktail-party routine, Julia actually comes to control time itself: she fabricates telegrams in order to "have yesterday's cocktail party today" and arranges

meals for Edward and Celia (*Cocktail* 387). Through this organic measuring of time, the cocktail-characters flutter between different time zones: “It’s too late, or too early, to go to a restaurant.” (*Cocktail* 377.)

The female domination of the cocktail party complies with, for instance, Beauvoir’s (1949a:218) notion that the Western world projects the body and bodily functions onto Woman. Accordingly, the absence of the flesh is apprehended through the removal from view of the female characters. The owners of the cocktail party, the cocktail-women may absent themselves or obstruct the proceedings at will. In defiance of the neatly framed drawing-room drama, both Lavinia and Celia live their lives outside its reach. Thus, Lavinia’s interview with Reilly has preceded the scope of the play whereas Celia escapes its reach geographically, and the audience is not let in on it. In effect, it may be argued that the ‘real’ female feast exists in the slot between actual parties. In this ambiguous relation to the party, the party-women resemble Irigaray’s (1985a:229; emphasis original) notion of the female “morphology”: “Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, *form is never complete in her*. She is not infinite but neither is she *a unit(y)*”. According to Irigaray, “[t]his incompleteness in her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else . . . No metaphor completes her.” This description seems to call for an alternate term that incorporates the organically changing body into the word-world, approximating perhaps what I have labelled *me(a)taphor* in the present study.

In contrast to the anorexic regime of the cocktail party, the play itself functions like a full meal: the first scene offers small, teasing appetisers, whereas Reilly’s consultation constitutes the main course, and the last epilogue act serves as the dessert. Seen from this perspective, the (male) anorexia and starvation of the cocktail-diet is outweighed by a sedimentation and vertical co-existence of different temporal and spatial locations. The *di-jestive* body also offers a different view on the layering of time: the play is not a process of healing from the initial situation of anorexia to a full recovery at the end but a cycle, where the earlier phases are not erased at the end of the play. Although the cocktail-party code is restored at the end of the play, the intermediary flesh and the region *inbetween* parties gains weight; In the last scene, the characters indeed obey the cocktail-code because they know there is a life outside of the party season or *inbetween* parties; even the Chamberlaynes with their “ap-

pointed burden” as cocktail-hosts trade the public communal party-body for a chance to “get away” and “have some champagne,/ [j]ust ourselves” (*Cocktail* 426,440). Similarly, in terms of plot, the interest of the theatre audience has shifted to Celia and events not presented on stage instead of focussing on the party. When the first actual cocktail party begins, the curtain closes and the theatre audience is no longer there.

### *The Gendered Food Chain*

REILLY. To send them back: what have they to go back to?  
To the stale food mouldering in the larder,  
The stale thoughts mouldering in their minds. (*Cocktail* 420.)

Corporeal needs enter the cocktail-community most prominently in the guise of eating and food. As the ‘lived’ squatter-body takes in the flat as its visible extension, a close connection between psychological and physical wellbeing and renewal arises, as well. For instance, Reilly produces the above corporeal comparison between the dull mind and the ailing body, where the parallel between alimentary products and the abstract ‘food for thought’ becomes almost tangible. The cocktail-party conversation offers a matching array of topics ranging from eating and overeating to the preparation of food, dining in restaurants, and hunting.

The cocktail party in the first scene may be seen to suffer from taking its own corporeal discipline to the extreme. In terms of food, Edward, in particular, apparently prefers to be viewed as an ascetic insect, who is contented with “a few biscuits” for supper and limits his breakfast to “a cup of black coffee/[a]nd a little dry toast” or “[a] boiled egg” (*Cocktail* 372,376). In contrast to the uncountable mass of bulimically feminine food, Edward indeed insists on the clear-cut and ascetic singularity of his appetite: “I wanted *one* for breakfast. A boiled egg./ *It’s the only thing* I know how to cook.” (*Cocktail* 376; emphasis added.) Instead of expressing his personal taste in food, Edward thus explicitly bases his wish on what is practicable. The dietary cocktail-discipline also affects the female characters, as exemplified by the repetition in Julia’s invitation to Celia: “You must come and have a *light* supper with me—/ Something very *light*. (*Cocktail* 378; emphasis added.) Tracing biographical sources for what he sees as a disgust of “waste” material in Eliot’s work, Armstrong (1998:68-

69) reports an almost obsessive preference for “eating light” in Eliot’s social circles. In view of the intricate interplay at the border between *light* and *darkness* in the play, Celia may indeed literally be seen to bring ‘light’ to the evening after having ‘seen the light’ in her relationship with Edward.

Despite the overall tendency towards asceticism in the play, the gender difference in relation to the body is perhaps most clearly portrayed in the way in which the sexes relate to food. Significantly enough, the appetite is not extinguished even if its immediate objects have been removed from the scene. During the first ‘party’, though failing both to eat and to prepare the food, the characters constantly discuss eating and express their hunger or lack of appetite. In contrast to the empty urban kitchen, the cocktail-stories constitute a Bakhtinian carnal carnival wobbling with accounts of excessive food and drink as well as sexual licence. Rajan (1976:135) complains that “Eliot’s work conveys nearly all of the distaste and hardly any appetite [for life]”. The cocktail party women go against this pattern, however. Notably, this is exemplified by the more direct relation that the women in the play adopt towards food and drink, as they integrate it with their overall emotional as well as a practical relation to the world. Lavinia has generally been deplored among critics as thin or “rather wooden” character (Smith 1974:222). However, while Edward proclaims his contempt of the corporeal, his wife relates to food as predominantly a pleasure and even a passion. This is shown in Lavinia’s alleged “love” of oysters and “hate” of curry powder (*Cocktail* 357,370). In effect, Julia seems to assume that Lavinia has travelled to the seaside in order to feast on oysters. Expressing a similar passionate relation to food, Julia herself praises the “delicious olives” and “can’t endure” the dry potato crisps, which Edward manages to produce (*Cocktail* 355). The predilections of the cocktail-women are described in strikingly excessive terms, and an almost corpo(real) relation between the female body and food thus ensues. In effect, the absence of Lavinia in the first scene may be seen to reflect and cause the vacuum that has invaded Edward’s kitchen and his party: “Without her, it was vacancy (*Cocktail* 403.) In losing his wife, Edward has at the same time lost his connection to his body. Thus, as the verbal profusion contradicts the reality, neither the “oysters” nor the “[dry] fish” actually exist in the first act where they are evoked: “There’s nothing in the place fit to eat:/ I’ve looked high and low” (*Cocktail* 377). Edward turns out to be a ghost of a host, who makes the first, half-cancelled cock-



tail ‘party’ in the play into the model of drought, since even the cocktails seem to run out, and the host himself mainly tries to absent himself from the room and to evade the collective party-body.

In a sense, then, the tastes in food strengthen the difference between the “dry” beetle-body of the male and the humid and fluid associations of the female “python” and “octopus” with her insatiable appetite for seafood. The cocktail-women are indeed “feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole” (Irigaray 1985b:29). The moist oysters and the olives become a proxy for the dangerously powerful female sexuality when compared with the impotent beetle-legs of Edward. In a sense, far from appearing as passively “unlovable” objects, the cocktail-women display an “intensity of loving” and a sexual appetite, which their favoured male protagonist cannot match. Within Eliot’s work, oysters are rather characteristically used to suggest sexual lust or even rape, present in the shady “sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells” with their associations to brothels in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* as well as in the female chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* (*Complete* 13,270). The imagery in the latter work is violent and formless:

I have tasted  
The living lobster, the crab, the oyster, the whelk and the prawn;  
and they live and spawn in my bowels, and my bowels dissolve  
in the light of dawn. (*Complete* 270.)

The male characters appear much more inclined than the women to establish and maintain borders between the dualistic categories of body and mind. In their relations to food, they display a considerable degree of unease and they come out as either anaemic or overly health-conscious. Edward forgets about eating and only wonders if it might be “indigestible” when faced with food (*Cocktail* 375). Approaching food as a sickening and potentially lethal *abjection*, the cocktail-males thus portray the typically anorexic “physical disgust with food” (Anderson 1988:29).

Building on Anderson’s theory of the anorexic text, Heywood (1996:89,93) concludes that “[i]n Eliot, the logic of anorexia is not about the elimination of ‘the body’ but rather the projection of all ‘undesirable’ qualities onto the non-anorexic female body to maintain the male body as the figure for the anorexic artist”: “Eliot’s urge to ‘trim the fat’ from bodies, textual and otherwise, is a desire to cut out and discard the extra, to reject the feminine as body to affirm

the masculine body". Many critics, similarly, comment on Eliot's "wish to be rid of woman" (Gordon 1998:287, see also Severin 1993a and 1993b, Sparks 1989).

A more flexible way of analysing the cocktail-relation to food may presents itself through developing the theoretical stance laid out by Lahikainen (1998) in defining the "bulimic" or "fat (female) text" in response to the anorexic writing discussed in relation to much modernist (male) writing. In terms of drama and *The Cocktail Party*, in particular, this might be calibrated to suggest that parts of the play suggest anorexic while others depend on "bulimic" readings. In addition, these two conflicting strategies may be seen to interact and clash within the play, creating a tension. Thus, the domination of the anorexic male stance becomes contestable within the cocktail-framework. Lahikainen (1998:140) comments on the way that food can be seen through consumerism as an object aimed purely at inducing pleasure in the (female) subject. In the cocktail-context, food is a source for egotistic pleasure, but this does not preclude its simultaneous manifestation as a fierce political statement. Food and (excessive) consumption is clearly enmeshed in the power relations of *The Cocktail Party*. For the cocktail-women, who remain largely silent or even absent from the party she is supposed to host, food thus becomes an extension of the body. It is a way for the woman to ridicule and challenge social norms from within.

It should be noted that the cocktail-men prepare and serve the food that the women crave. Nevertheless, the male chef appears to be an anomaly in the urban kitchen. Edward barely knows how to boil an egg, and Alex has to defend his entry into Edward's kitchen by eulogising his exploits as "rather a famous cook". It is not a coincidence, then, that Alex approaches what critics have termed an androgynous state precisely through food and cooking (Severin 1993b:407). Alex is also self-consciously and flamboyantly aware of the body and the fashions, and he is portrayed as "the sort of person/ Who would know the right doctor, as well the right/ shops" (*Cocktail* 400). As befits a world traveller who "knows everybody, everywhere" (*Cocktail* 388), Alex appears to exist in a transvestite border zone between the sexes, taking part in daring (male) activities and adventures abroad while at the same time jumping into Edward's kitchen clad in an apron to "prepare a nice little dinner" for Edward (*Cocktail* 388,368). He introduces an international culinary atmosphere and ex-

tension to the cocktail-body, ranging from monkey-flesh in Kinkanja to “cheese” as well as “prunes and alcohol” originating from Norway or Yugoslavia (*Cocktail* 375). At the same time, he makes the exploits part of his jungle adventure and thereby *masculinises* them. His attempts in the kitchen eventually ebb, however, since Edward either forgets about the food or openly rejects his offers. Julia, in part, challenges his exploits further by drowning it in vocabulary belonging to the realm of murder mysteries: “Anything that Alex makes is absolutely deadly/ I could tell you such tales of his poisoning people” (*Cocktail* 368,376).

At the same time as they offer seemingly frivolous and self-indulgent pleasure, food and drink receive complex symbolic or even sacred connotations in the play community. This culminates in the ritual toasts initiated by the Guardians, but it is also present in the comedy of the first act, when Alex attempts to “concoct a toothsome meal out of nothing”, such as “a little dried fish” and “half a dozen eggs” (*Cocktail* 368,372). The mythical echoes are multiple, as the passage has obvious associations to the New Testament but also to ancient fertility rites (see, for instance, Porter 1970). Smith (1985:99n) labels these eggs in terms of the “traditional symbol of elemental life and re-birth”. Armstrong (1998:74) contends that “Eliot frees himself from the flesh, from the pain-economy, and seeks an aesthetics of purification, as if the problems of production and consumption and their troubling relation to the body had melted away”. It should be noted, however, that the mythical touch does not remove the primarily profane and tangible or even abject nature of the cocktail-food. Significantly enough, all attempts to cook in the kitchen fail and reveal the potentially uncontrollable power of food to transform lack into profusion and, eventually, to putrefy. Like the abject object-body, the food constantly “moulders” or ends up “ruined” and refuses to stay in place.

Edward initially resembles Heywood’s anorexic male prototype. However, his abstention from food and his concern about constipation are portrayed as far from exemplary states in the play. The anorexic lack of appetite reads as an analogue to the fear of impotence and sexual desire in the cocktail-males. The collective hunger strike also poses a threat to the cocktail-community, as it points towards isolation from food as well as from other people. This fits Anderson’s (1988:31) view of anorexia as a stay against the suffocating intimacy of human contacts, since “food . . . establishes and maintains the family

as a single body". In *The Cocktail Party*, this family feeling is indeed frail, and the characters rarely actually end up dining together despite their attempts to the contrary.

In relation to their bodies, the cocktail-men appear helpless and even indifferent. Posing as nurses, secretaries, mothers, and organisers, the women hence continue to constitute the umbilical cord for the men to their (corpo)-reality. In Lavinia's absence, Edward proves incapable of keeping up with his domestic duties to the point of appearing paralysed and generally motionless. Julia complains about Edward "leaving it to me to keep things going", and Lavinia echoes it by objecting to her husband "leaving me all the practical decisions/ That you should have made yourself" and "giving in" to her (*Cocktail* 355,393). Edward indeed does not seem to bother about the conditions his body goes through. Lavinia complains how, due to his apparent indifference about where the couple should go on their honeymoon, they finally opted for the extreme inertia and emotional passivity suggested by *Peacehaven* (*Cocktail* 393). Similarly, in the absence of Lavinia, Julia declares herself, Celia, and Alex as "good Samaritans" and explains that "Edward must be fed", which elicits connotations of helplessness normally associated with the pampered object position of a child or caged animal (*Cocktail* 376).

The kitchen is a space for pleasure and nurture, providing a tangible and active way to show emotions and maintain personal relations. Consequently, Celia, Julia, and Alex all show their sympathy for Edward by volunteering to go into the kitchen and cook him a meal. However, the kitchen is not only the domain of the altruistically "good Samaritans" in the play (*Cocktail* 376). When laden with food, the kitchen and the pantry also provide a space for sheer physical, egotistic pleasure; this space is notably occupied by women. A seemingly casual remark by Julia can be seen as a key statement to approaching this thread in the play. Commenting on the social rebellion of Lady Klootz, Julia does not reproach her excessive "vitality" but instead justifies her transgression simply by stating: "But she enjoyed herself." (*Cocktail* 354.) Indeed, Julia readily puts herself into this category as a "gluttonous" and "tough old woman" and makes no effort to conceal her appetite demanding services from the catering firm: "I'm simply ravenous/ And dying of thirst. What can Parkinson's do for me?" (*Cocktail* 355,357,426).

Significantly enough, as Reuter (1997:150) notes, the anorexic body both supports the dominant cultural climate and opposes it. In a sense, the lack of food is an allergic rash breaking out on the communal body as a reaction against the bodily discomfort. Without their feminine extensions, the anorexic cocktail-male suffers from the corporeality he strives to achieve. However, this degeneration also occurs in the cocktail-women, as Julia's attempts misfire too; she whisks in to the Chamberlayne apartment only to produce a half-bottle of champagne instead of food. In effect, the production and preparation of food is removed from the cocktail party city to the remote countryside or to specialised catering firms. In a way, then, the cocktail-party ritual itself is used as a foil to protect the characters from their corporeal urges. Many of the urban residents lack cooking skills and they have to invite caterer's men belonging to a different social class in order to effect the transition. In Malamud's (1994:136-137) view, Eliot's drama constitutes a "proto-self-help paradigm" that anticipates the trend of such literature in the publishing industry of the 1980s; in *The Cocktail Party*, Reilly with his unending pseudo-psychological advice "resembles a self-help book come alive". In view of the corporeal cocktail party, it may indeed be argued that the cocktail characters in their unfamiliarity with their own bodies are enrolled in a self-help course about corporeality, where they learn how to live: how to laugh, how to feed themselves, how to dress, how to communicate with each other, and even how to breathe in a relaxed manner.

## **The Polymorphous Body**

### **The (Fe)Male Secret(ion)**

#### ***The Transgressive Body***

CELIA. . . . Edward, I see that I was simply making use of you.  
(*Cocktail* 382.)

CELIA. . . . And then I found we were only strangers  
And that there had been neither giving nor taking  
But that we had merely made use of each other  
Each for his [sic] purpose. (*Cocktail* 416.)

The cocktail party is an essentially communal body fed by stories of eating as well as a constant circulation of characters onto the stage. In effect, the cocktail-logic of food and eating may be seen to penetrate the relations between the characters: they exploitatively *use* or *abuse* and literally consume each other. In contrast to the Bakhtinian carnival-body, the modern cocktail-corporeality generally assumes a strongly utilitarian and egotistic edge despite its veering towards the communal party-body. Celia explicitly states this extended sense of exploitation, first, to recognise her own *making use* of her male partner and, eventually, to express a reciprocal, practically universal exploitation. Edward does not reach the realisation of mutual consumption in his relationship to his wife, but he echoes the same word when describing the negatively impairing and tearing effect of the marriage: “We were used to each other.” (*Cocktail* 362.) As seen above (p.67-68,76), the idea of exploitation is expressed in strongly physical terms drawn from the animal world, with Celia’s simile of “tread[ing] on [a beetle]” and Edward’s comparison of his wife to exotic wildlife (*Cocktail* 382).

Unlike the helplessly *used* and *bruised* female body laid out in ‘La Figlia Che Piange’, the exploitative action in *The Cocktail Party* is described as reciprocal. Nevertheless, the incapacity to communicate and the ensuing sense of isolation echo the same deadlock as the earlier poem. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir (1949a:187) comments on the solitary nature of the *masculine* consumerist mode and *digestion*: the only road towards “possession” is through consumption, which inevitably “destroys” the consumed object. The cocktail party ritual relies heavily upon regulation of corporeality and consumption. In part, this reflects a fear of the uncontrollable and destructive nature of corporeal urges. The regulatory system reflects the fact that bodies do not respect the limits of (other) bodies. The fear of desire seems to reside in the loss of borders and all sense of singularity and independence. The consumption of food or thoughts is never a one-way process, as the consumer cannot usurp the consumed without losing its own borders in the process.

Commenting on patriarchal societies, Brooks (1993:15-16) makes the paradoxical observation that the male body is “the public body par excellence, the measure of the world” and therefore “veiled from inquiry”. In *The Cocktail Party*, far from remaining the “deproblematized, decacheted” body, the anorexic tendencies reflect the problematic nature of this “hidden” body. Para-

doxically, despite its striving towards corporeality, anorexia is actually obsessed with the body and “fetishiz[es]” or even bloats it (Anderson 1988:35; see p.36-37). As the characters cannot see their own bodies, the *other*, or the other sex, becomes their mirror. In looking at their spouses or friends, the cocktail-characters are looking for themselves. Cuddy (2000:195) deplors that Lavinia “is still only an instrument to explore the emotions of the male protagonist”. This is, without doubt, the case because the males lack the capacity to express these feelings and to experience their own (corpo)reality. However, what they see is their own faulty reflection, as when Reilly describes Edward and Lavinia as “[m]irror to mirror, reflecting vanity” (*Cocktail* 420). In this way, the body becomes a labyrinth, which hinders the characters from ever leaving it behind or transcending it into a detached objectivity.

The mirror-body challenges the borders between bodies, as it entails a partial duplication of the person who is mirrored. The borders of the body are fluid and allow for a temporal integration. The destructive forces of unleashed sexual energy and the corporeal colonising effort are avoided by focussing on a third, intermediary object, such as a painting, a film, or a concert. Art becomes a way to overcome differences. Love presents itself as a chimerical realisation of the dual body. In the view of Celia, it is understood as a challenge to the natural borders of personhood, as it extends to embrace “the new person, *us*” (*Cocktail* 416; emphasis original). Thus, her statement that “the lover and the beloved are equally unreal” revels in a dream-region, where the “lover” and the “beloved” lose their borders and their hierarchical roles. The goal of this love is not reproduction but “a private world of *ours*” (*Cocktail* 379; emphasis original): the *other* within the self now becomes the loved one. In this way, love affairs and especially marriage become a site where the *other* threatens to be integrated into the self. The power of the dual body can be sensed in Celia’s and Edward’s fluctuation between the personal pronouns *we* and *I* (*Cocktail* 383,388). During the first cocktail party, Julia refers to Edward thrice with the epithet “without Lavinia”; she even invites him to dine with her “alone”, where this intimate *tête-à-tête* actually turns out to involve a company of assorted guests but with the significant exclusion of Lavinia (*Cocktail* 355,356,358). Thus, Edward’s existence is defined in a Siamese connection to his wife, even when she is physically absent. The symbiotic interconnection between the mar-

ried couple is crystallised even further, as Edward realises that “I must find out who she is, to find out who I am” (*Cocktail* 364).

Since the dual love-body is diffuse to its contours, it also becomes a way to extinguish the corporeal and to move beyond “excitement, delirium,/ [d]esire for possession” (*Cocktail* 370). To describe this new category of (uncountable) existence, Peter speaks of Celia with almost religious undertones, as something “different/ [f]rom company or solitude.” Disappearing into the imagery of his film-world, he treasures “the moments in which we seemed to share some perception,/ [s]ome feeling, some indefinable experience/ [i]n which we were unaware of ourselves”. He produces a wealth of hesitant, paraphrasing repetition in his attempts to describe how this unity made him feel “so happy”, “[s]o... contented, so... at peace” and his experience of “such quiet happiness” and “such... tranquillity...”: “I can’t express it.” Peter’s speech here presents a ‘bulimic’ amount of redundancy in its search for the right words to express a borderless state of complete stillness outside the universal cocktail-colonisation. Peter’s speech here presents a ‘bulimic’ amount of redundancy in its search for the right words to express a borderless state of complete stillness outside the universal cocktail-colonisation. Celia, in turn, condenses a similar feeling into the single verb *atone*, with the embedded borderless unity of *at-one*, to describe her goal (*Cocktail* 416). In the combative and transgressive physical and verbal world of the play, all movement and speech ends when the battle for borders and annexation ceases.

This broadened sense of love with the disappearance of subject and object categories and even language can be felt in Irigaray’s (1985b:26,28,31; emphasis original) psychoanalytic sense of woman as essentially “*plural*” or “several”, “without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched”. In addition, Irigaray (1984:20) evokes the concept of a necessary *interval* between the sexes while suggesting that there is no absolute destination for this touching: a sex is never completely digestible by the *other*. According to this view, “woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form”:

the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. *She is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists



all adequate definition. Further, she has no ‘proper’ name. (Irigaray 1985b:26; emphasis original.)

The idea of a single, countable body is thus challenged through the gendered (corpo)reality and mutual (sexual) consumption. As the sexes are “not one”, the body is not essentially one, either (cf. Irigaray 1985b). Comparing Eliot to his fellow male modernists, Altieri (1994:205) notes that “Eliot’s rendering of gender is . . . complex and open to internal multiplicity”. In the course of this study, the subversive elements have repeatedly been presented in a female guise and advocated by the cocktail-party women, with Celia at the fore. In her study investigating the relations between the sexes in Eliot’s early poetry, Palmer (1996:228) is impressed by the different female voices. This leads her to the realisation that “Eliot’s women consist of individuals rather than of types” and the rather uncommon reading that “the greatest variety on the part of Eliot’s characters is found among the female portraits”. It should be noted, however, that the male position in *The Cocktail Party* is far from simple or one-dimensional. It is indeed essential to recognise male subjectivity as essentially “nonmonolithic” or even “fluid, polysemic, disruptive, hysteric, fragmentary”, to employ a list of epithets used by Fjellestad (1998:15) in her attempt to “(re)gender” some male modernist novelists. The male point of view undoubtedly pervades the play, but it is far from settled or universal. In effect, the (male) corporeality is instituted as a perpetually transforming entity:

EDWARD. . . . Without her [Lavinia], it was vacancy.  
 When I thought she had left, I began to dissolve,  
 To cease to exist. That was what she had done to me!  
 I cannot live with her—that is now intolerable;  
 I cannot live without her, for she has made me incapable  
 Of having any existence of my own. (*Cocktail* 403.)

### *The Cannibal (Corpo)Reality*

JULIA. I wondered where you were taking us, with your  
 monkeys.  
 I thought I was going to dine out on those monkeys:  
 But one can’t dine out on eating Christians—  
 Even among pagans!  
 ALEX. Not on the *whole* story. (*Cocktail* 429; emphasis original.)

The exotic and the domestic body meet through their meat-eating. Transgressive by nature, the (corpo)reality does not obey definite borders: all flesh is the

same for the *digesting* or communally *di-jesting* body. Thus, both the bonds and the borders between cultures are established through a transgressive and incessant movement of *eating* and *being eaten*—as well as through the social regulation of the carnivorous appetite. To play up the classificatory power of (corpo)reality, differences in the relation to cannibalism become the outer signs of cultural division: the war in Kinkanja is literally fought at the border between bodies. Ultimately, however, all bodies in the party-world exist by consuming other bodies. Despite Julia's above attempt to prove the opposite, the (uninvited) cocktail-guests have, in fact, more or less unintentionally turned up at the party precisely "to dine out on" the information of Celia's death at the hands of a cannibal tribe. Celia becomes the centre of the violent way in which the body is ingested at the party.

The concept of the cannibal body is imbued with paradox, as it involves the recognition of both *sameness* and *difference* in the same semantic skin. In effect, the cannibalistic topos contains both the extreme manifestation of anorexia and what Stratton (1990:164,166) terms "a myth of excessive consumption sited at the edge of exploration . . . [which] marks the limit of humanity and the limit of civilisation. . . ., the extent of the voyage, the border of desire, the fracture of representation". Death remains the most difficult border to cross in bodily terms. Accordingly, it is distanced in space and assigned to another cultural sphere. In addition, the explosive power involved in the cultural taboo of cannibalism is reflected in the linguistic mechanisms through which it is distanced from polite society. Thus, in order to avoid direct contact with the body, the account of Celia's "crucifixion" camouflages itself with a costume of anthropological language (cf. Crawford 1987:61, Manganaro 1992:93, Marshall 1994:189). Alex's "messenger's speech" concerning Celia's death has struck commentators as cold and detached due to its stylistic angle of "reported fact" (Gardner 1962:175, see also Williams 1968:194, Porter 1970:69, Spender 1975:187, Phelan 1990:173,174, Gordon 1998:419). This fits the general paradigm of anthropological texts, which are "burdensomely *staged*" or presented as "*reported fact*" and thus indirect (Slemon 1992:168; emphasis original). According to Slemon, the anthropological narrative involves a methodological distancing of the cannibalistic act itself: as a rule, "the 'natives' of the next valley are cannibals, but the immediate 'native informants' are not". In the cocktail-world, the cannibal tribe is indeed doubly removed from the 'reporter'

Alex, so that the natives he meets are Christian converts and prey to the cannibals, who represent other tribes. To add to this distancing effect, Alex does not come in direct contact with Celia's body himself but only reports that "*they found her body*" (*Cocktail* 434).

As if to add to these precautions, the cocktail-stories stop short of actual cannibalism. Edward prompts Alex to explain that "the English residents [who have] been murdered...are not usually eaten./ When *these people* are done with a European/ He is, as a rule, no longer fit to eat." (*Cocktail* 429; emphasis added.) Besides revealing an abrupt disdain in its reference to "these people"—i.e. the "not . . . very logical" and "half-crazed savages" (*Cocktail* 429,438)—this explication entails an attempt to distance the concept of cannibalism and its extremely disruptive (corpo)real components. Similarly, since the native patients Celia was nursing were "tainted by the plague, they were not eaten" (*Cocktail* 434). In effect, the actual eating is delegated to impersonal forces of nature, as Celia's body is apparently eaten by ants and, according to the draft version, "deteriorates quickly in that climate". The intensely corporeal climate in Kinkanja thus aids the cocktail-community to get rid of the incriminating body/corpse quickly and without many "traces".

Again, the disruptive and corporeal edges of the story have been dieted away from the finished play after audience outrage (cf. Worth 1985; see p.38n). In the draft version, Alex describes Celia's fate after death and the rise of a cult around her:

ALEX. There's one detail which *is* rather interesting  
 And rather touching, too. We found that the natives,  
 After we'd reoccupied the village,  
 Had erected a sort of shrine for Celia  
 Where they brought offerings of fruit and flowers,  
 Fowls and even sucking pigs. (Eliot as quoted by Browne  
 1969:227; emphasis original.)

The fruit here re-enact Celia's (vanished) body, symbolising fertility and renewal. Continuing in the vein of anthropological curiosity, Alex treats this apparently central feature of the colonised *other* culture as a "detail". In the process, he reveals his stance as a scientific observer by attaching the adjective "interesting" to describe the incident. This is still the only instance where Alex allows for a streak of personal involvement and emotion, as he joins this interest with the precariously bland epithet "rather touching, too". However, the re-

port bespeaks his sense of superiority and adduces a childlike quality to the foreign culture. This overlooks the engendering of a culture that takes place through Celia's "shrine". In effect, the draft version of the play suggests that this alien tradition will easily be transformed and fitted into the acceptable patriarchal discourse of the cocktail world order, as "the Bishop" will later deal with this "detail". Girdled by this affluence of alimentary offerings, Celia nonetheless remains the anorectic *par excellence* in the eyes of the cocktail-community, as she has been robbed of all flesh. This peculiar double role can be understood through her belonging simultaneously to two different cultures.

Thus, the female body takes a notably ambivalent role in the cannibalistic colonisation. Discussing Jonathan Swift's brutally mocking ode to Celia, 'The Lady's dressing room' (1732), de Beauvoir (1949a:220) shows Woman in her paradoxical cage between animal, plant, and mechanically produced beauty-products. Eliot's Celia is placed at a similar crossing between the urban and the primitive. In moving away from the immediate cocktail party circles, Celia Coplestone removes the cocktail-covers of her (corpo)reality. In a reverse movement to her defiled namesake who hides her animalistic putrefaction behind feminine attire in Swift's poem, Celia literally dismantles the myth of the cosmetically pure virgin-body by moving away from polished society. Previously covered in manufactured disguises and tongue-tied by the cocktail-etiquette, she is now divested not only of these garments but also of her entire body and its unity. Her story, like "the grotesque image[,] ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths" (Bakhtin 1968:317-318). In this way, Celia as a character opens to the etymological significance of *coelia* as 'womb' or 'any cavity of the body' (*Old English Dictionary*). Bakhtin carves his grotesque body from similar corporeal cavities:

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation, and other elimination . . . as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all

these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (Bakhtin 1968:317.)

While partly conforming to the conventions of the well-made play, cannibalised Celia also breaks its frames. In this cocktail-context, Celia appears *excessive* even in her extreme denial of the body. She embodies the *other*, as she is both coloniser and colonised, urban and primitive. Her scandalous death is only the last in a series of minor breaches of the community-code. Badenhausen (in press) registers these “transgressions” as “having an affair with a married man, refusing to participate in linear discourse, and finally actively establishing conditions that lead to her martyrdom”.

In its fear of excessive appetite, the cocktail-corset aims at restraint. The community accordingly attempts to achieve an anthropological and objectively externalised perspective on the cannibalistic hunger. This detached outside view is challenged, however, as the colonial cocktail-society, in its relentless reiteration of (comic) cannibal stories, actually feeds on these stories and “project[s]” its fears of alterity onto a remote body (*Cocktail* 382,397,435; cf. Slemon 1992:167). This ostracism of the body and the cannibal tale result in a difficulty to control it. Accordingly, Celia’s death can only be inferred by her fellow partygoers: “From what we know of local practices/ It would seem that she must have been”... At this stage, however, the characters lack direct contact with Celia, and they have *recreate* her by studying the traditions of another culture. A similar uncertainty in the face of (corpo)reality and the other sex is reflected already in ‘La Figlia Che Piange’, where the narrator attempts to posit the woman and the man in a simile of *body* and *soul*: “So I *would have had* her stand and grieve,/So he *would have left*” (*Complete* 34; see p.27; emphasis added).

Controlling the body becomes a form of power. Paradoxically enough, the anorexic tendency that guides the regulatory cocktail-regime both supports and undermines the community. The anorexic logic also involves a violent streak of self-destruction. Thus, at the same time as Celia takes her asceticism to the extreme and becomes idolised by the community, she radically breaks with it and with herself. Bordo (1989:21) notes this double edge of anorexia as a “counterproductive, tragically self-defeating (indeed self-deconstructing) . . . protest”. At the same time she notes that “muteness is the condition of the silent, uncomplaining woman—an ideal of patriarchal culture”. Celia’s choices

in the cocktail-world are limited, as she is poised between the young (eligible) society-girl and the (almost edible) missionary nurse. Death provides the ultimate limit for the incessant negative ‘growth’ of the anorexic body. The same patterns of consumption become apparent in the way in which the cocktail-routine itself exists by consuming entertaining stories. The community cannibalistically drains Celia’s story and gains resurrection through her distanced, violated body. Celia has become the property of a different, foreign realm of the *other* and her fate now moves beyond Western logic: “she was taken” (*Cocktail* 434). At the same time, she finally ceases to be the property of the London social scene: she speaks another language. Thus, even if it may be argued that Celia is martyred in order to maintain the patriarchal society, the society does not control her. Ironically enough, the dramatic frame does not manage to bridle this unseen death either, as it continues to communicate with the audience and causes unexpected reactions. In accordance with Julia’s insistence in the first scene that “it isn’t my story”, Celia—or at least her ‘*whole story*’—is not ‘their’ story either (*Cocktail* 354,429). Alex has to imagine what has happened to Celia and to fill the gaps with (educated) guesses. Thus, Celia has moved beyond both the cocktail party including both the social cocktail ritual and the play itself

### ***The Silent Treatment***

CELIA. . . . It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone!  
(*Cocktail* 414; emphasis original.)

In the chattering cocktail word-world, silence constitutes the equivalent to the extreme anorexic cannibalisation of the body and the corresponding flouting of all the cocktail-codes. Significantly enough, in a parallel movement to the internal territorial warfare for verbal and textual control, the play pinpoints the limits of linguistic and semantic power, and ultimately of language and text itself. The dominating force of pre-verbal, chaotic existence against the coherently articulated ‘sound of reason’ is perhaps best reflected in Edward’s notion of the divided self:

The self that can say ‘I want this—or want that’—  
The self that wills—he is a feeble creature;  
He has to come to terms in the end

With the obstinate, tougher self; who does not speak,  
 Who never talks, who cannot argue;  
 And who in some men may be the *guardian*—  
 But in men like me, the dull, implacable,  
 The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.  
 The willing self can contrive the disaster  
 Of this unwilling partnership—but can only flourish  
 In submission to the rule of the stronger partner. (*Cocktail* 381-  
 382).

In this passage, the articulate self that “says” what it wants is set against a taciturn “spirit”. The two selves are personified to the point of the “tougher self” manifesting itself in human form. Peculiarly enough, (corpo)real aspects are braided into both these selves, in the guise of either the articulate, verbal *body* or the chaotic, preverbal *flesh*. The strength of this proto-sonic presence is revealed in a series of paraphrases for the mute partner, “who does not speak . . . never talks . . . cannot argue”. In the corporate party-body with its reliance on a verbal irrigation system, remaining silent becomes a disruptive argument. In effect, against the carpet of cocktail-noises, silence is the only sound that cannot be ignored.

According to Severin (1993b:404), the independent, modern cocktail-women become linguistically subjected to the patriarchal male rule towards the end of *The Cocktail Party*. She recognises the central importance assigned to language in the play and terms this ground “masculine”, as she ultimately deems Julia’s attempts at renewal to be a failure. Without doubt, Julia’s demeanour at the end of the last act differs radically from her incessant chatter in the first scenes. She becomes more and more silent to the point of making Peter implore: “Julia! Why don’t *you* say anything?” (*Cocktail* 435; emphasis original.) When Julia speaks later in the scene, she pinpoints this theatrical silence herself: “Henry, I think it is time that *I* said something” (*Cocktail* 439; emphasis original). However, Severin’s negative assessment of Julia’s mutating and finally almost mute role in the play depends on evaluating the conversation from an uncritically masculine perspective, where uninterrupted and coherent speech is valued over silence. In fact, Julia’s sudden reticence and her physical reaction of “feeling chilly” and “freezing—in July” constitute a more accurate and effective response to the news of Celia’s death than the forced discussion of the others (*Cocktail* 429). Consciously refusing to stay within the confines of party-etiquette or to act according to her assigned role of the “silly old

woman” (*Cocktail* 356), Julia repeatedly breaks the cocktail-code either by interrupting and refusing to participate in the communal storytelling or by remaining stubbornly silent when talk is expected. In this way, the subversive female discourse perseveres and remains different from the corresponding male conventions.

As a token of the disruptive and (corpo)real powers of silence, cannibalism becomes the prologue to the final turn towards taciturnity in the play. The intimate combination between language and the body becomes detectable, when the only way for Celia to keep her verbal silence is by physically moving away to the unmonitored territory of the jungle, beyond the documented history of her native cultural sphere. Badenhausen (in press) emphasises that “Celia ‘adventures’ forward by embracing silence specifically because the drama highlights verbal communication as the culturally privileged action”. This escape route, accompanied by silence, is apparently reserved for the women, however. Thus, Celia’s jungle are paralleled by the domestic pantry as well as “the depths of Essex”, which may temporarily swallow Lavinia and make her invisible to the cocktail-community.

Significantly enough, though initially defined as chatterboxes, the cocktail-women repeatedly give their companions the silent treatment. Paradoxically enough, though Celia herself remains silent, “[a]ll of the elements of Celia’s death are presented in words” (Phelan 1990:124-125). Thus, the community becomes mesmerised by its absent and therefore mysteriously silent members. Accordingly, Lavinia and Celia dominate the first and the last scenes of the play because of their physical absence. Phelan (1990:195), for instance, discusses the significant silences in the conversation and notes, for instance, “the silence of the absent Lavinia” as an “absence which is felt like a presence in the first scene”. Spanos (1978:563), similarly, notes how Eliot’s poetry turns to “celebrat[ing] the absence of presence”. In their refusal to talk, the cocktail-women posit themselves in an ambivalent relation to mystery and *magic*, archetypically combined with Woman (see, for instance, de Beauvoir 1949a:226). The difference in the representation of male and female characters contributes to create an air of mystery around the cocktail-women. At the same time, however, the trinity of cocktail-women also actively demystifies this *mystery* by their repetitive comic small talk.



The effects of silence are difficult to determine precisely. Jones (1960: 144), for instance, regards Lavinia's determination to "give no explanations" as an imitation of the corresponding silence in Euripides' play but not sufficiently justified in the modern cocktail-world (*Cocktail* 392). According to Jones, Reilly's advice not to discuss Lavinia's absence after her return has no justifiable thematic or structural cause except for the "practical reasons" of the plot. Severin (1993b:404), in turn, states that Lavinia-Philomela's "cut . . . tongue" conveys her curbed position as a mere "silent complement to Edward". Without doubt, the female characters do not explicitly share their experiences with the group, whereas Edward's entire drama is flaunted in front of the audience in its chronological progression. However, in view of the larger pattern of the disruptive *feminine* narrative at work in the play, the silence may be seen to have other effects. In the conversational cocktail-world, silence is generally regarded as intimidating and uncooperative.

Celia's allegedly "triumphant" death in the jungle bears the stamp of what Delany (1997:102), in her reading of Bokenham's *Legendys of hooly wummen*, terms "the suffering but triumphant female body" of medieval hagiographies. Phelan (1990:52) notes, in passing, the connection between St. Cecilia and the character Celia as obvious, but does not pursue the connection further. In effect, Celia resembles the early saint in her emphasis on "the language theme" and "the apparatus and the practice of speech", which Delany (1997:111) finds striking in her medieval predecessor. Both women may be termed as "notoriously insolent" and they are concerned with what Delany (1997:114) terms an "abstract . . . transcendence of [philosophical] dualism": they both contrast and combine "spirituality and worldliness", the private and the public sphere, "interiority and exteriority".

In effect, Celia possesses the widest linguistic register in the play, and she is most directly and personally involved with language. She is "given all the poetry in the play", and she is a poet herself (see, for instance, Badenhäuser, in press). Appropriately, Reilly resorts to "quoting poetry" when describing his reaction at hearing of her fate (*Cocktail* 436). There is a marked difference between masculine and feminine creativity: while Celia innovates and actively produces fresh poetic images, Reilly literally echoes the male traditions of Shelley and a bawdy song; he performs the words of others, in song or by "quoting" and "speaking poetry" (*Cocktail* 436,437). At the same time,

Celia reaches the opposite end of the stylistic spectrum, as she is also the “kinky” society girl, who excels in using everyday language and talks about “being ditched” or, in the draft version of the play, “having had the bird” (*Cocktail* 414, Eliot as quoted by Browne 1969:214). This confirms Phelan’s (1990:152) assessment of Celia: “she who is most spiritual is also most practical”. In the process, Celia becomes the direct connection between “familiar speech” and “official language”. This contrasts with what Bakhtin (1968:320) terms “the new bodily canon” of the modern cocktail-party world, where colloquialisms are canonically sharply divided from the literary tradition. Pushing the limits of the word-flesh to the brink of bursting, Celia then eventually reaches the extreme of non-verbal body language and a mutilated muteness, as well.

Delany’s (1997:114) reading of Bokenham’s hagiographic Cecelia displays significant affinities with *The Cocktail Party* in other respects, as well. For instance, “the two-levelled wordgames and stichomythic dialogue” are persistent features of the feminine word-world of *The Cocktail Party*, and its “verbal battle is emblematic of deeper structures”. Crammed with (corpo)real detail, Bokenham’s (1938) description of Cecelia indeed focuses on the saint’s linguistic ability and the fact that she avoids the final silencing act of decapitation, i.e. that she does *not* ultimately lose her tongue. In effect, St. Cecelia is listed among the rare saints who avoid decapitation with its symbolic associations of muteness; thus, she retains her linguistic ability. This emphasis on language may be seen to reflect and contrast with the connection to the mythical Philomela and Lavinia’s namesake in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (cf. Severin 1993b:399). Despite *me(a)taphorically* losing their tongues, the cocktail-women are not silenced. The borders between life and death become blurred in a radical *inbetweenness*:

The saint survives three days half-living and half-dead—or rather, both living and dead, a liminal-transgressive figure linking and participating in two worlds normally distinct and opposed. She becomes an emblem of the ology of her tale, her living-dead body the visible site of passage between physical and spiritual levels of reality: a bridge, as it were, just as her preaching is a bridge in the linguistic realm. (Delany 1997:115-116.)

The body depends on being seen and formulated, and it is thus social by nature. At the same time, however, it has the tendency to evade the gaze. This

is brought to the extreme, as Celia's (corpo)real choice of Kinkanja as "the way of life/ [t]o lead to death" actually makes her communal while at the same time leading her to embrace an insulated existence removed from the cocktail party gaze (*Cocktail* 437). Due to the changed proportions between absence and presence, Celia frees herself of society more than the society of her. Badenhäusen (in press), in effect, emphasises Celia's power to "speak the body" during her consultation with Reilly:

Celia's language threatens to collapse upon itself during these moments of intense awareness. Marked by sudden reversals, sentences broken off abruptly, and elliptical pauses that embrace silence rather than fear it, the speech struggles to contain the sentiments expressed by its speaker. Celia seems at this point almost paralyzed by her own discourse, by the abundance of conditionals, qualifications, and halting conclusions. Her struggle to articulate the meaning of her existence is as messy and bumpy as the cocktail-party prattle is clean and smooth.

However, this description of the cocktail small talk as childishly "clean and smooth . . . prattle" overlooks the way in which the rest of the community "speak the body", as well. In effect, as I have attempted to show above (p.148), this description of Celia's speech in terms of "abrupt . . . ellip[sis]" applies to large portions of the cocktail-party conversation and its endemic lexical amnesia. Celia affects Lavinia's speech, for instance, as the older woman marvels at her own reverting to "silly . . . schoolgirl" prattle: "Like Celia." (*Cocktail* 392; see p.123). Exclaiming that Edward does "not seem very pleased to see me", she recognises that she loses control over her words: "I don't know why I said it". Spontaneous and impulsive speech becomes unpredictable and ceases to obey any rational intentions. Similarly, merely by "looking at [him in silence]", Celia manages to transform Edward into a "little [school]boy" (*Cocktail* 386).

Celia's mutinous muteness brings additional change to the cocktail-language. In effect, the cocktail-community is forced to encounter its (corpo)-reality through ingesting Celia's physical obliteration. When confronted with Celia's death, the colonial storytelling championed by Alex thus breaks up to contain the same qualities of "conditionals, pauses, and silences", which Badenhäusen (in press) notes as emblematic for Celia's discourse. In effect, all the cocktail-characters at times find themselves in a situation where words literally seem to fail them and to lose their stability. Only Celia remains in this zone, however. She seals herself off from the cocktail-community by moving

to a private language of radical anorexic starvation, which signals her refusal to participate in the extreme. Thus, instead of “forever divorc[ing] herself from the static group” through her language, as Badenhausen defines it, Celia may be said to drag the group with her and make it more dynamic. In this way, Celia’s body and her word-world *recolonise* the cocktail-world that colonises her.

### **The Symbiotic Celia**

REILLY. . . . Each way means loneliness—and communion.  
(*Cocktail* 419.)

In the manner of a mythological hero(ine) or a legend, Celia Coplestone is swamped with tales and guesses as to her origins. Judging from the accumulated Eliot scholarship, the character is a cosmopolitan cross between intratextual and intertextual, autobiographical and anthropological, pious and pagan, fictive and historical texts. Celia’s birth and her worth have been contested in passing by numerous critics. She has been labelled “a simplified version” of the martyred males in Eliot’s earlier plays or applauded for her “singular” nature (Moody 1980:269, Cuddy 2000). In terms of her political views, Celia has been seen as both a radical rebel and a staunch “conservative” (Smith 1974: 221, Severin 1993b; Badenhausen, in press). It should be noted that a subversive reading of Celia gains support from Eliot’s own remark that she “came to be really the most important character in the play”, despite the original setting where she was simply intended as “an appendage to a domestic situation” (Browne 1966:8). Any claim that a fictional character might somehow surprise the author and hi-jack the story as a *me(a)taphorical* appendicitis of the textual body must, undoubtedly, be treated with suspicion. However, Eliot’s statement has, without doubt, added to the aura of mystery surrounding Celia. The broad gene pool of Celia in the criticism may be seen to reflect the wealth of different *Celias* glimpsed at in the play.

In her biography on Eliot, Gordon (1998:414) recognises the unique role of Celia among Eliot’s female characters by claiming that “[f]or the first and last time in his career, Eliot creates . . . a woman who acts in her own right, not as a foil or prop to a man’s realisation as artist, convert, or sinner”. The role of (corpo)reality in her unique status becomes evident as Gordon goes on to ex-

plain that “Celia is not a bodiless Virgin, or a Lady of silences”, or “a statue” (Gordon 1988:172). As one of the rare female ‘martyrs’ in Eliot’s plays, Celia has copious male ‘relatives’ ranging from Christ to missionary priests (Smidt 1961:201, Moody 1980:272, Crawford 1987:223,233, Gordon 1998:417). Crawford (1987:61) binds Celia to the tribal crucifixion-theme and men eaten by ants in fictive works by, for instance, Rudyard Kipling. Among contemporary audiences, as Smith (1974:217) notes, Celia’s adventurous ways may have been reminiscent of Bernard Shaw’s play *Saint Joan* (1957) and its tomboyish heroine. Browne (1969:225) reports that Eliot originally planned to leave Celia’s fate “as vague as Harry’s future” in the preceding play but changed his mind at the insistence of the director’s wife, who assumed that “the audience would share her own curiosity to know what exactly happened”. The more ‘rounded’ image of the female ‘martyr’ may, in part, explain the fact that an increasing number of critics claim an almost physical connection between Celia and either Eliot himself or his female acquaintances (Smith 1974:217, Hastings 1997, Gordon 1998:417). The female ‘martyr’ may also be seen as a reaction against the lack of emotion that Eliot (1951a:31) lamented in *The Family Reunion*. According to Eliot, the only ‘living’ character in the preceding play was the hero’s mother, mocked by her son. Harry’s wife dies a violent death by drowning, but is otherwise left outside the happenings. In this sense, Celia can be seen as a continuation of the many violated or murdered female characters in Eliot’s plays at the same time as she takes up the path of the martyred men.

Celia has routinely been classified as a character that undergoes “significant growth” during the play (see, for instance, Badenhausen, in press). According to Severin’s (1993b) reading, Celia’s past is brushed aside by her fate. However, such a reading may be seen to disregard the rebellious chord of dissonance introduced through the plural nature of the life and feminine narrative that Celia introduces into the play. Kelleter (1997:442), for instance, views Celia’s sacrifice as a direct continuation of her initial scepticism. In view of the cocktail-concept of (corpo)reality, it should be noted, in addition, that time is vertically layered rather than linear in the play-world and that it attempts to subvert the organic sense of (positive) ‘growth’ and evolution. In effect, attempts to read the play in terms of traditional character development threaten to suffocate the subversive elements of its circular structure and the ways in which it renews its borders or transcends them. Thus, Celia does not denounce

her earlier self or 'grow out of it'. In effect, matching the relativity of the cocktail-world, she may be seen as the condensation of the entire play.

Far from having what Cuddy (2000) dismisses "a woman's modest expectations" and "no high sense of her own drama", Celia actually realises her role as a kind of Every(wo)man. While the other characters wrestle with their personal problems, Celia repeatedly magnifies her personal experience to embrace all of humanity: "Can *we* only love/ Something created by *our* own imagination?" (*Cocktail* 416; emphasis added.) Diagnosing the entire cocktail-community, Celia here unwittingly puts the earlier conversation of the Chamberlaynes in perspective by suggesting that the same conditions, in fact, apply to all men and women, and ultimately to "the human condition" itself (*Cocktail* 417). Similarly, within the cult(ure) that spontaneously seems to arise around Celia's (martyred) body, the borders between human and Nature become less clearly pronounced. In the light of these repeated expansions, Reilly's vision of Celia as "a woman under sentence of death" reads as the definition of human life: all humans are, ultimately, sentenced to death (*Cocktail* 437). As witnessed in Reilly's vision of her, Celia manages to contain time itself vertically within her being, as she makes her present and future self simultaneously visible even beyond death. Effecting what Natanson terms a "metamorphosis of time" (Natanson 1998:121; see p.129-130), all the generations are mapped onto Celia, who seems to live at a fast-winding pace without "growing old together" with the others in the phenomenological sense.

Gordon (1998:420) sees the sudden sex-change of the customary Eliotic male 'saint' in terms of Eliot's wish to "distanc[e] himself, to some degree, from the saint in the making" in order to give more room to the other characters in the play. Gardner (1967:180-181) seems to sense a similar impact of this new heroine: "But we misinterpret the play, if we find its meaning solely in Celia. Its concern is with a concept of society." The introduction of a female 'saint' in *The Cocktail Party* must, in effect, be studied in relation to the split from one central character to encompass a group or indeed an entire community. This structural and thematic change in Eliot's drama is underlined by, for instance Jones (1960:124), who emphasises the break involved in trading single heroic individual for a set of 'ordinary' people and "the salvation of a group" (see also Williams 1968:191). Significantly enough, Celia is able to dominate the ending of the play without being the central character or, cruelly

enough, without even surviving until the last act. Thus, the female ‘saint’ becomes the key to the communal vision of cocktail-corporeality. This may be one of the reasons why Celia has relatively rarely been given centre stage and critical readings of the play have veered towards the communal aspects of the play. A notable intertextual divergence from the setting of Euripides’ *Alcestis* indeed lies in the added characters and their changed (and changing) parts in the plot (see Phelan 1990). For example, Celia has no direct counterpart in *Alcestis*, where the married couple is surrounded by their children and their servants. Replacing the biological kin of the earlier play, Celia thus provides the link in the cocktail-community between the isolation of the individual and the shared identity of the community.

One of the basic semantic notions involved in the presentation of the body in *The Cocktail Party* lies in the power of (corpo)real *me(a)taphors* to incorporate aspects of both isolation and community, or a radical *alterity* and sameness. On the one hand, then, the revelation of the inherent separateness of physical bodies is a constant battlefield in the play, realised as a sense of estrangement between the sexes and between different cultures as well as within the individual (ageing) body itself. On the other hand, however, the body becomes virtually inseparable from its context and the word-world, forced as it is to the role of an object at the mercy of other bodies in the material world and engulfed in a pattern of ever-changing and inherently diffuse borders. For instance, then, it is impossible to delimit the physicality of the human body from the corresponding animal world. In her double role of the unique, active subject and the passively martyred object, Celia combines the two (corpo)real perspectives of Merleau-Pontian (1962:xiii) phenomenology: “there must be, besides the perspective of For Oneself . . . a perspective of For Others”.

As a sign of the symbiotic cocktail-organism, Celia has a strong sense of both connection and conflict with all of the characters, and others identify with her. Phelan (1990:207) notes the similarity between Reilly and Celia as visionaries. In addition, Reilly refers to her ritualistically as “my daughter”, whereas Celia recognises Julia as “my guardian” (*Cocktail* 383,420; emphasis original). Besides being in parallel positions in their liaisons with the Chamberlaynes, Celia combines with Peter in their shared interest for the arts and in terms of their age. They leave the cocktail-community in a mirror movement, where Peter leaves for the West and Celia heads in the opposite direction. With Alex,

she shares her exoticism, and Alex comes as close to an eye-witness account of her fate as the play ventures. Although separated in years, Celia and Lavinia are joined in their relation to Edward to the point of both being realisations of Alcestis, and they are both distanced from the scene. In addition, Celia fits Lavinia's social agenda. As for Edward, even if disregarding Cuddy's (2000:190) view of these two characters as "the combined character of Eliot", Celia has shared or imagined the closest synthesis. In this way, Celia may be seen to condense all the interests of the other partygoers.

Celia comes to embody the extremes of both distancing and closeness at display in the play. To Peter, for instance, she has initially appeared "merely as a name/ [i]n a society column" (*Cocktail* 369). Until her departure, she has apparently been intended as a background figure in cocktail-circles and subdued to the role of a beautiful ornament. Thus, whereas Edward describes Peter as "one of Lavinia's discoveries", Celia was invited to "to provide society and fashion" (*Cocktail* 369). In the eyes of Lavinia, Celia is something of a "schoolgirl" at first, saying "silly . . . thing[s]" (*Cocktail* 392). In the social context of what Edward refers to as Lavinia's "amateur Thursdays", Celia has clearly not been seen as a creative artist, but as belonging solely to the realm of polite society. The initial sense of social distance and detachment from Celia and her world stands in stark contrast to Peter's later identification with her and her interests, reminiscent of idolatry more than simple infatuation. Peter recoils from Edward's condescending remarks concerning his affair with Celia by claiming that she was "different from any girl I'd ever known" and that being with her was "something different/ [f]rom company or solitude" (*Cocktail* 369; emphasis added). He underlines the singularity of his experience with Celia's by repeated reference to the situation as "very strange" (*Cocktail* 369,370).

In its general adherence to anorexic ellipsis and bulimic repetition as its basic structural principles, *The Cocktail Party* may be seen to perform both anorexic and bulimic transformations of its intertextual ingredients, as well. For instance, even if *The Cocktail Party* falls technically short of presenting a consistent "transfiguration of Jesus" as Ziolkowski (1971:10,26) defines the genre, a comparative reading of the Christ-elements or "pseudonyms" suggest significant anorexic modifications to the way in which the events of the Gospels are presented and weighed. Instead of Ziolkowski's sated artistic reiteration of the exact "original form" of Christ's life in "a totally new sense", the ano-



rexix/bulimic cocktail-version of Christ offers only scattered and abbreviated nuggets of the biblical narrative. This dieted cocktail-transformation suggests not only the obvious transfiguration of Jesus in the guise of a woman but also the possibility of stretching and dispersing the tale to feed an entire community of (anorexic) characters in need of a plot. Suiting the communal view of identity forged in the play, elements of the Christ figure are indeed able to pollinate the behaviour and word choices of several characters (cf. Smith 1974:217, Phelan 1990:211). Instead of an individual character, the entire (anorexic) cocktail party as an institution appears resurrected at the end of the play.

As a comic indicator of structural bulimia, the good Samaritan multiplies to “three good Samaritans” who manage to spoil the food, as they play around with the miraculous “special gift [to] [c]oncoct . . . a toothsome meal out of nothing” (*Cocktail* 368). In this way, the entire cocktail party comes to circle around the Communion and the Last Supper without actually consuming anything but scattered drinks. In addition, to play up the (anorexic) synthesis of different cultural voices into one, Reilly summons the three final words of Christ as well as Buddha: “It is finished” (*Cocktail* 420, see Smidt 1961:183, Phelan 1990:118,121). In accordance with its tendency to fragment and dislodge the chronological and cohesive narrative universe, the elements of the Christ-story are dispersed into the cocktail-frame. In its anorexic shortage of narrative ingredients, the Christ-death itself is finally cloven between two women, Lavinia and Celia; in a reversal of chronological order, Lavinia returns “from the dead” near the end of the first act, whereas Celia is later “crucified”. The anorexic minimalism may, in addition, be sensed in Celia’s death “[v]ery near” a miniature-Golgotha built by the insects. As if to stack a physical emphasis onto this fragmentarily retold gospel, the ants here finally combine the implications of pagan rites as well as Christian martyrdom in their material ingestion of the body (see, for instance, Smith 1974:217).

In terms of gender relations, ‘saint’ Celia’s skills at condensation then lead to the continuation of Eliot’s much debated note on *The Waste Land*: “all the women are one woman, and the sexes meet in Tiresias” (*Complete* 78). In the context of *The Cocktail Party*, this process of complementation and conglomeration can be viewed in terms of broadening circles of inclusion. To begin with, the female cocktail-characters can be read as one. On top of this, the unifying force also results in a blurring of the borders between the sexes, and it

even suggests a single party-body or a communal (corpo)reality containing humanity as a whole. In her ultimate transgression, Celia intrudes into the male category of “the Saint”; this implied masculinity is hinted at in Reilly’s automatic use of the masculine pronoun *his* when discussing “the Saint”, even though the direct referent here is undoubtedly Celia. The crucifixion may indeed be seen as the extreme method of de-sexing or re-sexing the *female*. However, in view of the flexibility of borders and the acceptance of internal controversy, the female ‘saint’ does not *desex* society but rather *reactivates* the borders between the sexes by challenging and tentatively transgressing them. In effect, she may be said to *regender* parts of the cocktail-community by combining an unprecedented mixture of traditionally *masculine* and *feminine* qualities into her (female) body.

Highly dynamic and active by nature, Celia constantly stretches the borders of the heroine. It should indeed be noted that this society-saint is able to contain a remarkable amount of ambiguity. She is a liberated modern intellectual and an artist as well as missionary nurse and a young eligible society girl; she is both Mistress and Madonna, living and dead, violent and violently destroyed, a sceptic and a true believer. She is in league both with the leisured life of the social elite and with harsh physical labour. She is simultaneously present and absent both in the jungle and in the city. Though showing a penchant towards the arts and to poetry in particular, she eventually moves beyond the reach of Western ‘civilisation’, into silence. Through her sex, Celia embodies the discourse of the *other*, while at the same time forming part of the cocktail-party social elite and the imperial forces colonising Kinkanja. Drawn towards solitude, she eventually becomes the saviour and centre of two vastly different cultures. Self-centred by nature, she still inserts herself as a selfless saviour in two societies. She is martyred by her community and victim to its patriarchal regime. However, having been subjected to the patriarchal code of western society and lived by it, she goes on to establish a maternal cult. In her ultimate transgression of borders, she moves beyond everything. In effect, stretching the linguistic peculiarities of the party-world, Celia creates a world of her own by linguistic means. Celia thus appears in a peculiarly double and internally conflicting role as both coloniser and colonised. As a kind of tragic heroine, she performs the ultimate Promethean transgression of borders; in the process, she sacrifices her own life and submits to the destruction of her body.

Celia thus combines the traditional female myths, containing as well as challenging both the self-indulging *femme fatale* and the stereotypical, altruistic nurse. Celia's ambivalent relation to her (corpo)reality is reflected in the way in which her later "career" in medicine and nursing comes to be emphasised as a battlefield in terms of hierarchical positions. In discussing the evolution of gender relations in T. S. Eliot's work, Cuddy (2000:195) comments on Celia's "selfless" nature: "No matter that her sacrifice seems to achieve no great end, she is a woman who has the capacity to care for something beyond herself." Gordon (1998:414), similarly, claims that "it is Celia's destiny to discover in her slighted depth of feeling the altruism of a potential saint". The female characters are then seen to sacrifice themselves, and their lives for the males. Celia challenges this view, however, as her choices are not made, at least primarily, out of altruism, and they do not involve negation of the self. Although her acts are interpreted as sacrifices for the community, she Celia chooses for herself, disregarding the service she can do to others.

Spender (1975:206), for example, is struck at the revelation that, for Celia, "death was not defensible as a risk undergone for the sake of doing real good to ignorant people . . . but triumphant because it was the means whereby she perfected her will, bringing it into conformity with the will of God and thus achieving her martyrdom". In the same vein, Gardner (1967:167-168) emphasises the differences in comparison to Euripides' rendition of the Alcestis myth by recognising that "Celia's death . . . is not the result of any sense of duty to her fellowmen". In this way, the idea of the suddenly submissive and silent nurse crumbles. Similarly, Celia exhibits no sign of a maternal instinct or vocation for nursing others. Whereas Julia and Alex are keen to help Edward, Celia only goes into the kitchen when Edward realises he has left the saucepan simmering. Similarly, her claim to care for Edward's wellbeing is only a verbal smokescreen meant to protect her secret liaison with him: "I'll say I found you here starving and helpless/ And had to do something." (*Cocktail* 376; emphasis added.) Similarly, when she compares Edward to "only a child/ [l]ost in a forest, wanting to go home", she is, as it turns out, identifying with the "child" and not its parent (*Cocktail* 416). In fact, the personal gain involved in Celia's quest is even more pronounced in the draft version of the play, where Alex states explicitly that Celia's work as a missionary nurse "was appointed as the way of sanctification" (Browne 1969:227). There is, then, a lack of idealised

(female) nurse with the customary attributes of “self-abnegation [and] ‘doing’ for others at the expense of her own vital powers”, as Bailin (1998:209-210) terms these Victorian ideals when discussing and largely refuting them in relation to Florence Nightingale. In effect, the body here shows itself as a miniature battle field. In the cocktail-universe, the cocktail-women are relatively comfortable in their own bodies and are, therefore, in charge of men’s bodies, as well. Bailin indeed goes on to stress nursing as involving a “uniquely feminine power” over men’s bodies.

In contrast to the masculine destructive combativeness and the stereotypical female self-extinction for the common good, Celia and the cocktail-women may be seen to promote a symbiotic sense of (corpo)reality and a mutually beneficial ‘healing’ power. This enhances the double edge of Celia’s path to the *sanatorium*, where she herself is “healed by healing (Malamud 1994). Significantly enough, the symbiotic body does not exclude personal gratification or demand the quenching of the self. Indeed, Lavinia gives a central clue to this reading by her admission that “perhaps what I’ve been saying/ Will seem less unkind if I can make you [Peter] understand/ That *in fact I’ve been talking about myself.*” (*Cocktail* 435; emphasis added). This refusal to put words into the mouth of the *other* challenges Phelan’s (1990:43) reproach of the lacking polyphony in the play. The symbiotic cohabitation necessarily entails another or multiple and independent *other* voices. The liquid cocktail-body is thus simultaneously parasitic and symbiotic; at all times, it is closely interwoven in (corpo)real (*t*)issues.

**RE-ENTRANCE**

ALEX . . . And then they found her body,  
 Or at least, they found the traces of it.  
 EDWARD. But before that...  
 ALEX. It was difficult to tell.  
 But from what we know of local practices  
 It would seem that she must have been crucified  
 Very near an ant-hill. (*Cocktail* 434.)

Returning in the end to my place of departure in the above lines, Alex's report now reveals an edge of uncertainty and unresolved tension. If my reasoning has been sound and the body in my body-study defends its place as a lucrative analytical tool, the patriarchal voice is no longer capable of re-instituting absolute control over the narrative universe of the cocktail-community and the bodies of its individual residents. Losing their position as sovereign rulers, Alex and Reilly turn into a kind of apostles or supporting actors to the heroine, Celia. In addition, the colonial discourse of Alex cracks at the seams, as reflected in the half-rhyme and the complex verb construction: "[i]t would seem that she must have been . . ." The fissured (*t*)*issue* of this word-world allows for multiple readings, internally conflicting but not mutually exclusive by nature. As the dominant male observer loses his privileged and omnipotent position, the body becomes impossible to place or trace definitively. Accordingly, Alex fails in his attempt to reconstruct what is no longer there and to force it into a linear, scientifically exact *history*. Thus, even when the (female) body is pinned down and literally deconstructed, "the traces of her body" still escape exact explication.

At the same time, the above exchange between Alex and Edward reflects the depth of the ambivalent cocktail-obsession with the body. Far from dismissing it, the repeated violence reveals a basic unease at the borders of the problematic concept of (corpo)reality. In effect, the cocktail-party ritual itself becomes one of the main ways in which the play becomes intimately entangled with the body and various (corpo)real concerns. Initially, the community may be seen to follow an anorexic urge to smother the body and to diet it away as a form of outmoded waste material. As a result, the very definition of (corpo)-reality veers towards abject expressions of suffering and death. In the process, the dichotomous divide between animate and inanimate dims both in space and in time. In the cocktail-party world, the bodily border-(*t*)*issue* thus behaves in terms of incessant transgression. Constantly metamorphosing and flouting its

own borders, the body defines itself as a Merleau-Pontian “network of relationships” rather than a solid entity (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xxiii; see p.33). The cocktail-body is dynamic, chaotic, and excessive in essence. In a controlled party-world that exalts moderation and fears scandal, the body always presents itself as unpredictable and excessive in its contacts with the lifeworld, either feasting or fasting. In the anorexic absence of actual food, *me(a)taphorical* eating and consumption become the ruling logic both in the urban drawing room and in its corporeal prolongations in the jungle. The transgressive body culminates in the cannibalistic *topos*, which incarnates the extremes of both difference and sameness into the same conflicting skin. It is the extreme expression of both anorexia and an unrestrained appetite.

The cocktail-characters exhibit a constant need to corner and cage or to theatrically stage the chaotic, irrational body. The dynamic body refuses to stay hidden, however, and *me(a)taphorically* mixes with all the different spheres of the miniature cocktail-universe. Shuffled between the subject and the object category, the fluid cocktail-body constitutes the porous neighbouring state of the aggressively animal, the inanimate machine, and the metaphysical realm. In addition, as the physicality of the human body is shoved aside through the neatly costumed cocktail-routine, the body bulges linguistically and materialises through the worn-out *me(a)taphors* of the body as, for instance, a house, as food, and as language. In effect, the anaemic nature of the movement on stage serves as an invitation to treat the dialogue and the word-world as the flesh of the play, underlining the importance of individual or collective word choices. The cocktail-body is indeed essentially a narrated body in a narrated universe. This effect is augmented by the fact that the violence in the play, sometimes understood as offensive by contemporary as well as modern audiences, is presented verbally instead of through actual slaps or crushing. Literally speaking, small talk and wordplay evolves to have a major impact in the play-world.

The Eliotic body is essentially sexed as female, whereas the problems of relating to the (corpo)real invade the male. In a sense, the society-saint Celia Coplestone embodies the apotheosis of these conflicting aspects of corporeality in the play. For one thing, Celia’s martyrdom presents the extreme relegation and corporeal hunger treatment in the play. Through her mutilated body, the corporeal is exiled and attributed to Woman as the colonial *other*. However, the (female) body also finds ways of re-entering and reconstituting not only its

own borders but also the (*t*)*issue* of larger, corporate (*corpo*)realities. Paradoxically enough, the commemoration of Celia continues in two cultures, and it is intimately involved with food and a feasting (*corpo*)reality, which defies the anorexic tendencies that consume her. Celia forges the crossroads between the egotistically parasitic and closed *digestive* system of the man-eater, on the one hand, and the carnivalistically and carnally communal, comically chaotic symbiosis of the *di-jestive* fool-feast, on the other. The cocktail-conception of a (*corpo*)real symbiosis thus has room for both isolation and community. The ambivalent nature of laughter, similarly, resides in the power of the comic body to transgress and to break the staged borders between bodies at the same time as it is used to uphold them.

The body is the phenomenological *measurant* of the play-world, perpetually changing its *me(a)taphorical* metric system. In the process, it spreads the sense of relativity and eternally mysterious *secret(ion)* to the surrounding world. The physical is used to materialise and compress or to dislocate time and space. At the same time, the temporal and spatial dimensions work as a means to compartmentalise the diffuse body. Through its technological and practical extensions, the body incorporates alterity and transposes different b-cations and climates into the urban flat. In geographical terms, the body is poised both as the foreign land and as the vehicle employed to travel between these lands. In broad terms, the acclimatisation of the body shows in a division between the extremely scopic, *masculine* West and the *feminine*, tactile East. In effect, the cocktail-physiology with its disproportionate focus on the (masculine) *I-eye* turns out to be flawed. The party-body is only sighted through a filmic filter and in parts or obsolete “traces”, as a complete view proves impossible. The play involves a reinterpretation of the senses, which tones down the importance of the visual field for a less clearly demarcated ‘lived’ corporeality reminiscent of Irigaray’s theory of the dynamically porous membrane. At the same time, bracketed (*corpo*)(*reality*) comes to blur the border between reality and unreality/irreality as well as between presence and absence. In its communally staged aspect, the cocktail-body seldom appears in the nude. In effect, despite attempts to undress the body to its (en)trails, the body in contact with the falsifying senses of other bodies is bound to appear in a theatrical and innately fictitious costume.

*The Cocktail Party* thus keeps struggling with a (corpo)reality which is too enormous and amorphous for its tightly trimmed cocktail-party skin. As the cocktail-etiquette does not allow for stretching the borders, the party and the play itself move to the margins and exist increasingly in the creases and wrinkles *between* the cocktail-parties and the conventional drawing-room drama. Similarly, in its relation to the spatiotemporal dimension, the body is realised as a journey and exists in an intermediary position, which defies dichotomous polarisations. On the individual plane, the expression of this constant phenomenological *inbetweenness* is made in terms of ageing and sickness. The (patho)logical body also becomes a pathway to a personal, accelerated sense of the temporal dimensions.

Paradoxically enough, the body thus provides the ligature or umbilical cord to communication between the binary borders that initially enslave it. The (corpo)real allows for the concept of (internalised) alterity without the need to resort to conclusively cloven polarities. Not only does the journey chop down dichotomies, but it also splits them into uncountable pluralities. In *The Cocktail Party*, the body (or bodies) can thus be said to combine the subject and object positions, thing and thought, presence and absence, and ultimately life and death. The concept of the fluid and fragmented body has close similarities and parallels in the play's structure. Cocktail-(corpo)reality serves as the key to explaining the metatextual lumps as well as the transfusions between different literary genres. In the narrative universe of *The Cocktail Party*, beginnings and ends are then no longer singular, and they may appear in an uneven proportion. Rather than embracing a categorical denial of the body based on dualistic divisions, *The Cocktail Party* can thus be shown to constitute a deconstruction and subsequent (re)definition of the (corpo)real. The body is not sloughed off as a relic, but it is actually revitalised and brought to the fore in relation to several of the central concerns of the play. Thus, the body is no mere cosmetic addition to *The Cocktail Party* but forms parts of its functional flesh.

One of the major flaws of this study undoubtedly remains that it suffers from the same anorexic and bulimic tendencies that it diagnoses at the core of the cocktail party ritual. Consequently, it runs the risk of dissolving into a quick sampling of several assorted cocktail dishes without providing the opportunity to delve deeper into the topics it raises or to monitor the implications more closely. In this cocktail mixture, theoretical considerations inevitably re-



main isolated crumbs without any detailed elaboration or digestion, which would have followed from a close comparative concentration on only one theory or intertextual source. Within the course of this body-study, I have only briefly nibbled at, for instance, the possibilities for a close reading of Eliot's drama offered by the concepts of the 'anorexic' and 'bulimic' text as laid out by, among others, Anderson (1988), Bordo (1993), Heywood (1996), and La-hikainen (1998).

A broad contextualisation of corporeality in Eliot's time as well as an assessment of Eliot's contact with phenomenology and its philosophical precursors and siblings, such as F. H. Bradley, is lacking in this study. On the one hand, then, my reading threatens to boil down to a nebulous collection of various "tit-bit[s]" (*Cocktail* 355) and oddities without any clear bone structure or detailed analysis to support it. On the other hand, however, this inconclusive and arbitrary sampling matches the view of the body propounded in the play and the challenge it poses to the body as something unitary, constant, and conclusively defined. The borders of the cocktail-body are not givens, and they feed on their own transgression.

To judge from *The Cocktail Party*, the body persists in Eliot's work like an ache that varies in intensity but does not go away. Throughout this study, reminiscences from other works by Eliot have resurfaced or even forced an entry. Eliot's organic world-word indeed seems to call for such connections and comparisons. A way forward would then be to explore if a similar focus on the (corpo)real can be extended to Eliot's drama or his other works, with a possible angle against the wider literary and cultural era. Another comparative path forward might entail limiting the exploration to diverse theorists and select slices of corporeality or bringing different body images together in an extended reading. In addition, *The Cocktail Party* calls for an investigation of the physical dimensions of actual productions or performances of the play and of the way in which the stage relate to the literary plane. In effect, my scratching at the epidermis of the body or the bodies in Eliot's work also suggest that corporeality may be a tool to explore the tension between poetry and drama prevailing throughout Eliot's oeuvre and to weigh the differences and similarities between genres, while allowing for fluctuation in the (re)definition of these genres.

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