

Menstrual blood and the scene of a crime

Margaret Gibson

School of Sociology, University of New South Wales

In feminine product advertisements, menstruation blood is that which cannot be seen to be seen. An advertisement on Australian television suggests a possible semiotic link between menstrual blood and the blood trace of murder. The commercial implicates the viewer in the narrative as a detective able to reconstruct the missed scene of an apparent crime. This paper explores various links between menstruation, murder and transgressions of law. Taking up Luce Irigaray's interpretation of patriarchy as the law of the father, it argues that the hiding of menstrual blood represses a debt to the maternal. The sight of menstrual blood is a guilty reminder of this debt which exposes the murderous fiction of paternal autogenesis. It is argued that this repression is a moral blind spot and guilty blood trace which the law of the father institutes and enforces. The symbolic richness of this advertisement potentially subverts and exposes a patriarchal economy of blood debts and primal crimes.

Before the first word of the first chapter something happened, but no one knows what, apparently not even the narrator. A dim focal point exists, as yet unrecognized, whither and thither the entire truckload of ensuing events is mobilized—a crime, usually murder, precedes the beginning.—Bloch 1988, 249

In an advertisement shown on Australian television and in cinemas, a menstruation pad is used to absorb the evidence of the spilt blood of a crime, or so it appears. The semiotic link between menstruation and crime will be explored in this paper, but the site of this link is also an issue because the advertisement is structured around missed scenes which function as open spaces of construction and identification. And this is where the crime story is written.

The advertisement was made for the brand of Libra Ultra Thin pads. It has been shown regularly on Australian television for the last two years. It was first broadcast at the end of 1996 and continues into 1998.¹

The work of textual production takes place in the relationship between the text and the reader, although these are neither discrete nor singular textual relations. In terms of the politics of advertising and its representations of

women, the commercial undercuts the moral ground of viewers who believe they can distance themselves from the work of textual production. For viewers are “implicated” in the narrative construction of this advertisement according to the identifications they are capable of producing. The compositional strategies of this advertisement not only demand an act of creativity from viewers, but potentially confront them with the question of what it *is* they think they are identifying or conversely, what they don’t know they are identifying, or further still, what they are capable or incapable of identifying. There have been official complaints about this advertisement, perhaps because people imagined, as one woman I met at a dinner party did, that the substance shown in the advertisement *is* blood.²

In this advertisement blood functions as a trace structure linking or mixing the genres of crime and detective fiction³ to or with the genre of menstruation product advertisements. A semiotic chain is formed between the idea of the trace of blood as a sign of crime and criminal evidence, and the trace of blood as evidence that a woman is bleeding. Is this advertisement suggesting that menstruation is a crime or is the crime in the discovery or association? Does an effective menstruation product conceal this crime? Within these initial interpretative frames and questions, the further questions emerge: What does it mean to form an association between menstrual blood and a murderous crime? What is the relation between menstrual blood and the law? What is the status of the menstruating body before the law?

Spilt menstruation blood and the blood of murder are both contaminated and contaminating trace substances. Anthropological and feminist research in the area of menstruation, provides a number of cross-cultural examples of the social regulation of menstruation according to taboos on sexual contact and food preparation.⁴ In feminist readings of Freud, particularly Luce Irigaray’s, menstruation figures as the blood trace of the psychic castration of the feminine in and by a masculine economy of sexual difference. In this masculine viewpoint or blindspot, the feminine is symbolically castrated, and figured as lack and as “nothing to be seen” (Irigaray 1985, 48–50).

In *Moses and Monotheism* (1967), Freud links the fear of castration to the myth of the primeval horde where the Father as leader is murdered by the sons who want to take his place, and possess “his” women (1967, 102). Freud suggests that the male child fears castration by the father for desiring to take his place and sexually *have* the mother. Castration is a threatened punishment for breaking the taboo or law against incest. He argues further that the ritual of circumcision in Judaism is a symbolic enactment of castration, having its origins in the primal horde myth where the will of the father is sanctified through his murder (1967, 155–56). While Freud does not link murder to menstrual blood, his mythic tale of the origins of Judeo-Christian monotheism is certainly about the displacement of matriarchal figures of creation, authority and divinity. However, this is an untold crime story and is seemingly unimportant in his own account. The transition from polytheism, and the subsequent

deposing of matriarchal figures of authority and divinity, does not even seem to be a crime or indeed a possibly murderous transition. Freud explains the mythic origins of guilt, conscience and social order through a father-son story and yet the mother's murder, and the destruction of female goddesses which Merlin Stone researched (1976), seems to escape a debt of origin and the weight of guilt. The traces of goddesses and feminine sources of creation would seem to have no moral weight and are barely discernible traces in Freud's own mythic account which privileges father origins and blood debts. It is illuminating then, that in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud makes a comparison between the distortion of a text and murder: "The distortion ... is not unlike a murder. The difficulty lies not in the execution of the deed but in the doing away with the traces" (1967, 52).

In terms of originary narratives in the context of Judeo-Christianity, menstruation is usually traced back to the biblical story of the Edenic Fall. In this story, the blood trace of menstruation signifies the fall into reproductive existence and death. The pain of childhood is supposedly woman's punishment for transgressing the law prohibiting the consumption of "forbidden fruit." It is possible to link both these originary narratives of breaches of law, to the advertisement and its semiotic links between murder, menstrual blood and castration anxiety. This analysis will pursue these connections further as the crime story or stories unfold.

BLOOD DEBTS/CREDITS

Paul Ricoeur in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969) and René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (1989, 33–38) suggest that there is a kind of contagion between sexuality and murder—a mixing of genres. Ricoeur writes that they are "supported by the same play of images" and that "in both cases, impurity is connected with the presence of a material 'something' that transmits itself by contact and contagion" (1969, 29). I am calling this a trace. In Ricoeur's work this trace is spoken of as a quasi-material or quasi-physical something that transmits contagion as if by magic (1969, 35). Girard argues that the association between menstrual blood and murder might represent "some half-suppressed desire to place the blame for all forms of violence on women" (1989, 36).⁵

Menstruation blood and the blood stain of murder are both defiling substances. The blood trace of undiscovered and unpunished murder is one of the most powerful images of a trace which cannot, or rather should not, disappear. The murderous Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* are literary examples of haunted consciences figured through irrepressible blood traces. The "defilement that comes from spilt blood" Ricoeur writes, "is not something that can be removed by washing" (1969, 36). The guilty blood trace of repressed murder is presented in myths and literature as an indelible trace which haunts

individual and collective consciences, and remains irrepressible despite the distortions and concealments of memory and historical records.

Can the trace of murder disappear without a trace? In critiquing monotheism, feminist writers have raised the question of the mother's murder preceding a single monotheistic father origin.⁶ The crime of matricide is concealed and enacted by Judeo-Christianity and its claims of paternal autogenesis through a single masculine God-Creator. Christina Froula writes that, "The repression of the mother is the genesis of Genesis" (1983, 37). Her point is that we can never have Genesis as such and thereby begin at the beginning without there already being a trace of what that beginning relies upon as the condition of its possibility. This point has been made by Luce Irigaray and other feminists critiquing the repressed debt and credit trace of monotheism. In her essay on scenes of crime in Genesis and psychoanalysis, Susan Friedman asks: "If an originary narrative reflexively directs our attention to the story of its own production, is this scene of birth also the site of a death, a murder whose trace exists as an insistent return of the repressed?" (1993, 72). This question suggests that the murder of the original mother is an untraced trace—the missed, unconscious scene of a crime which was never a singular, originary crime story. This is similar to Irigaray's reading of the politics of menstruation blood and its concealment:

... blood is not so easily repressed. Its empire will be even greater as a result of the forgeries of maternal power that are to be turned out In the intimacy of the house, the privacy of the home, woman will hide away everything associated with blood. She will recognize its price only through humiliation and suffering. For the power of the female sex has to be conquered over and over again. The head of the family has to re-insure his potency. Every single day, therefore, he is enjoined to reappropriate the right to exploit blood and then, as a result, to get on to more sublime pursuits. The master is a vampire who needs to stay in disguise and do his work at night. Otherwise he is reminded that he is dependent on death. And on birth. On the material, uterine foundations of his mastery. Only if these be repressed can he enjoy sole ownership. (1985, 126-27)

The repression of menstrual blood can be interpreted as the concealment of a debt of origin to the maternal and women. The sight of menstrual blood is a guilty reminder of this debt to another creative source. As a surplus remainder, this blood is a failed conception, falling outside the father's appropriating and incorporating name. Monotheism and patriarchal law fear seeing this blood trace which brings to consciousness both the reality of death and the repressed trace of its originary crime.

THE ADVERTISEMENT

I will now construct a narrative of the advertisement's visual drama. In the opening frame of the advertisement, a tall, slim blonde woman in a business suit stands in an apartment doorway. She looks into a rather dishevelled, but

nevertheless glamorous, forties-style apartment. Cutting into this frame we see a man acting nervously and suspiciously in a nearby doorway. He quickly runs down the corridor. We do not know the connection of either to what has happened. We do not know what has happened. Is he the murderer, an accomplice, or is he an anxious witness who accidentally stumbled upon the crime scene? Has he seen the missed scene? Why is he running away? The apartment, its doorway (the threshold) and the dark corridors leading to and from it, can be read, rather dangerously, as sexual imagery of the female body.

Standing in the doorway, the woman looks to right and left, steps across the threshold into the crime scene and then proceeds to clean up the traces of evidence.

In the room there is a dead man in a suit lying on the floor, an overturned light shade and chair and a clear oval-shaped glass vase with red roses strewn near it. There is also an unbroken mirror on the floor.

Stepping over the dead body, the woman virtually stands over the man with her legs apart. We see his body framed through the inverted V of her legs. She looks formidable, threatening.... Is her sexed-body framed as deadly?

The woman drags his body out of the room. And we see this through the glass vase. In the next frame we see a police car pulling up outside the apartment block. They screech to a stop. We only imagine the sound because the only sound we actually hear is a rhythmic drum beat (suggesting a heartbeat) which builds suspense.

After disposing of the dead man down a waste or possibly a laundry disposal chute and straightening the bottom of her jacket to indicate a neat, tidy end to this part of the job, she confidently walks down the corridor and back into the apartment. Calmly, she proceeds to pick up various fallen objects in the room: the chair, the mirror—we see her briefly look at herself—the lamp shade, followed by the vase and red roses.

Cutting into these frames are the police moving closer and closer. They are running up the apartment steps and at this point are running down the corridor.

Next the woman sees a pile of money on the table. It is folded in bundles. It looks suspicious—a bank robbery, extortion or is it the result of a double-cross? She grabs her purse (a classic Freudian symbol of the feminine sexed-body) and slides the money into it. She has a packet of Libra pads in her purse with the money. Putting her handbag down, she notices she has overlooked one last trace of evidence. There is a liquid puddle on the floor. This is arguably the central moment of the commercial. It is also the only time in which the woman is momentarily anxious.

An interesting visual feature about this liquid puddle is that it has a thickness to it. Unlike the sanitized blue liquid in other menstruation pad advertisements, this liquid has body. One of the visual techniques of this advertisement is to make it impossible to identify the colour of the liquid. Because we cannot be

sure what this liquid substance is, we cannot be certain as to its source. Is it blood from the dead man's body, spilt water from the tipped-over vase, or is it spilt blood from the woman's menstruating body? Because we don't actually see any sign of water in the tipped-over vase, the assumption that the source of the spillage is water from the vase offers a connection that can be *read into* the advertisement. This connection is an invention, a piece of guess work. But it is also an act of repression or displacement because a source other than blood is being *imagined* as a connecting thread to fill in the missing scenes. Yet if we imagine this substance as water, avoiding its identification as blood, are we also dutifully upholding patriarchal law?

In seeing the puddle, the woman quickly grabs a menstruation pad from her bag and rushes over to the spillage.

Her pad completely absorbs the liquid. It disappears without a trace.

Of course we the viewers have seen this last trace of evidence and yet we don't know exactly what it is we've seen. In a split second after this miraculous absorption, the police rush in and the woman turns around ready to face the law and the drum beat stops.

MISSED SCENES

Blood is the repressed and displaced centre of identification in most, if not all, feminine product advertisements. The expected repressions and displacements of blood self-consciously inform the narrative strategy of this advertisement, leaving certainties of identification ultimately open-ended. This displaces, or at least complicates, a single centre of identification because even if this centre is blood, the question of whether blood is ever simply blood, that is, purely unmarked and uncategorised, is open to question. If the centre of identification is blood, whose body is it from (there are at least two bodies) and what is the moral status of the blood and the bodies? The entire advertisement is structured around a missed first scene which positions the viewer as a detective who can reconstruct the missed scene of the crime. The advertisement works with the tropes of crime and detective fiction (e.g. crime doesn't pay, ideas of traces, clues, leads, evidence, frame-ups) but also works against the genre because in the end, law and order is not restored. The crime, if there is a crime, isn't even discovered by the law, so in the end, there is perhaps nothing to be solved.⁶

The advertisement's crime story, which is perhaps really a composite of interpretative frames, is about framing and a subversive woman who inhabits a space between—she is neither completely in-the-law nor an out-law. This woman doesn't need protection—it is not this kind of sanitary pad advertisement. And yet the pad is very protective but not for the usual reasons. It protects her from the law but it also protects the law from the menstruating woman.

Made in the style of 1940s Hollywood film noir, the woman in this commercial embodies the figure of the *femme fatale* who is central to this

crime/detective story genre. In *Women in Film Noir*, a collection of essays from different contributors, Ann Kaplan describes the *femme fatale* as “desirable but dangerous to men” (1989, 2). The *femme fatale* tends to “emerge from shadows.” Her face, as Christine Gledhill remarks, is often photographed without filters appearing “harsh and white” (1989, 19). Janey Place in her essay, suggests that the heroine’s main goal in film noir is an independence which is “irredeemably sexual” and that “the insistence on combining the two (aggressiveness and sensuality) in a consequently dangerous woman is the central obsession of film noir” (1989, 46–47).

When watching menstruation product advertisements we the viewers, and in particular women, know we are being discreetly addressed. We also know how to identify the displaced signs of menstruation blood and recognise the standardised codes of freedom, protection, cleanness, dryness, comfort and security. In this example we are addressed as “knowing” readers of the “signs” of blood in this advertising product genre. In other words, we are being provoked to think through, consciously and/or unconsciously, the repressions and displacements of menstruation advertisements, and to recognise the difference of this particular commercial.

The discreet use of colour in the advertisement only gradually becomes apparent. In fact its colour tones and shades constantly shift. We can make out the red roses, but the spilt blood and/or water is rendered unidentifiable in terms of colour, and this is where the desire to identify and form certainties is both produced and exposed in the same moment. The shifting colours and shades suggest that what is going on in this scene of missed scenes is neither black nor white. There is more going on than could ever meet the eye, especially the direct sight of blood.

The connection with blood is also made through a vase, an ancient symbol of the woman’s body which has been knocked over, in a struggle perhaps, spilling its contents of the red roses and water on the floor. In ancient Greece, according to Page DuBois (1991), the vase or *pithos* could contain terrible evils and danger (Pandora’s box). More positively, however, the earth, vase and women’s bodies were linked as they were seen as “hiding, containing, producing, and giving up substances that permit the continuation of human existence” (1991, 49). In the advertisement the roses and water could be read as forming a symbolic unity in signifying blood. The red roses also contextualise the murder as a crime of passion and we might assume that it was her lover that she dragged from the floor, disposing of his body.

I would argue that the moment at which we see the spillage on the floor we are faced with a cluster of identifications and sources where each potentially displaces the other as the “real” crime story and centre of identification. The liquid is either water or blood—if water, a metaphoric displacement of her blood and menstruating body. If it is blood, the source could be his or her body. His bleeding body could be representationally substituting for hers and hers for his. His bleeding body could be the menstruating body—a reading where a male body is representing menstruation. In fact there might not be a

single, hidden centre of identification that is *the real thing or the truth* behind all the representational displacements or substitutions. There may be no kernel of truth nor a single crime story.

The representational mixing up of bodies and blood sources through these substitutions and displacements creates fluidity in identity and a boundary openness between his and her body. This dead man's body is not conventionally masculine in terms of constituting and *assuming* a masculine identity through a protective border that aims to exclude and limit the trace of the feminine. Like the menstruating body, his body is fluid and leaky and could in fact be the only body that is bleeding.

If the spillage is read as water from the vase and interpreted as a representational displacement of blood, even though the vase could also symbolise her body, then it is my reading that in fact is producing a distance and indirect relation through this interpretative strategy. In shifting the identification back to blood, the pad which soaks up the blood could be read as an example of contiguity, a tactile metaphoric association, where the bloodied pad, by association, touches her body.

And as the police rush in, she turns to face them with no apparent signs of guilt or shame. After bursting through her apartment door, the law enforcers expect to catch her out, but find, to their surprise and disappointment, no evidence to prove their suspicions of crime. The police seem quickly convinced, failing to search for evidence, and leave the apartment, while the woman appears cool, collected and guiltless.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud argues that in many languages conscience and consciousness are synonymous (1983, 67–68). The existence of an internalised social-psychological mechanism called “conscience” is necessary in order to have guilt feelings. Both guilt and shame require an awareness of self in relation to others. Shame, however, suggests different kinds of feelings such as humiliation, embarrassment, and a sense of disgrace. Guilt seems to be more seriously weighted, being applied to crimes and the crime of murder. Judeo-Christianity has associated shame quite specifically with matters of sex, the covering of sexed-bodies, and menstruation. Is this a guilty crime, a shameful crime, is it both or neither? One can detect a wry smile coming over her face as if to say, I know, and you know, that I have outsmarted you.

After she has wiped up the last trace of evidence and the ambiguous liquid is absorbed into the pad, we do not know where this trace has gone. Where is the pad traced with blood (?) and why does it escape the eyes of the law? Has she got something to hide or do the police in fact have something to hide by not searching for a trail of evidence which they might in fact prefer to miss identify? But if they found blood could they even make an identification or is *this* blood object, formless, chaotic residual matter?

Does the woman's body escape the law? Is it even her crime? Sophie Laws, in talking about advertisements for sanitary products, highlighting the word sanitary, speaks of the language of protection and asks, “Who or what

is to be protected with 'sanitary protection'?"(1990, 4). Laws thus identifies the fear of contamination implicit in the language of sanitation and protection. Blood can be figured as both pure and contaminating. And menstrual blood is doubly figured as both sacred and accursed in being the source and sign of life and death (Delaney, Lupton and Toth 1976, 15). If the blood of the murdered man is a metaphorical substitution or displacement of her blood then why should a crime be linked to her body and its periodic blood flows? The hiding of menstruation blood, as if it is a shameful secret, is the law's doing. It is perhaps hidden from men in order to protect against castration anxiety. For the trace of blood, if followed, might lead to the body he fears to see. As Luce Irigaray tells us, castration anxiety is protected and sustained in and by the blind spot of symmetry in which "another sex" is feared, refused and rejected (1985, 55). For to castrate woman, she writes, "is to inscribe her in the law of the *same* desire, of the *desire for the same*" (1985, 55).

In this advertisement crime and detective fiction provide a narrative structure in which to tell another story—the repressed social and advertising story of women's menstruation blood as something which cannot be directly named and visually represented. The Australian Broadcasting Authority regulates the representation of menstruation products and their program time-slotting, according to certain discretionary codes.⁷ The sight of menstruation blood is a source of embarrassment and social taboo, and this is something that many feminine product advertisements represent and reinforce at the same time. The discretionary style of most menstruation product advertisements means that it is both avowed and disavowed as a kind of open secret. However, because this advertisement is self-consciously engaging with the limits and displacements of its own genre practice which is governed by advertising policy, the actual discretionary code is subversively exposed and rendered indiscreet. In other words, what the law or social codes seek to protect or hide is itself exposed.

This advertisement could be suggesting that within the symbolic law of a patriarchal order, the direct sight of unconcealed menstruation blood is a crime, and that crime pays when the last trace of transgressive evidence disappears. The money that the woman has "in the bag" along with her Libra pads after that last sign of transgression disappears is a complicated symbolic moment. The pad that absorbs the spillage on the floor, saves her from losing the money in the detection of her crime. The pad saves her from punishment and potential imprisonment, saving her life and money. Perhaps women gain when they successfully conceal their menstruating bodies. The Libra pad has not only been a "life saver"; it has been a profitable resource, reversing the moral cliché that crime doesn't pay. But in a single origin economy appropriated under the father's name, crime pays the father not the mother. The crime of patricide is founded on and by the crime of matricide. Thus the question and practice of hiding menstruation blood could be read, in the light of earlier comments on paternal autogenesis, as the concealment of the crime

of the mother's murder by the father-son economy. It is perhaps their guilty blood trace that is repressed in and by the prohibition on its sight. It is therefore not necessary to read it as the death of the father, through a failed conception, but of his birth in disembodied abstraction from the feminine-maternal.

In committing the perfect crime, the criminal wants to eliminate all traces and trails of evidence linked to his or her person. Like the perfect crime, the perfect woman makes the bloody trace of her menstruating body disappear without a trace. Stephen Heath in his essay "Difference" refers to the perfect woman relating this ideal to castration anxiety. Contextualising castration anxiety in terms of the depiction of nude women in Western art from the classical period, Heath writes:

what is ... presented in her representation is not any lack, not the lack [of a penis], but nothing, the fully intact, the body smooth without break, the scopophilic defence of 'beauty'. For beauty is exactly *the woman as all*, undivided in herself, the perfect image. (1978, 89-90)

In her concealment of the crime, the woman effectively upholds and undoes the law at the same time. She is both inside and outside the imagined boundaries of the law and this tension is not resolved by a conservative narrative resolution which would determine her moral status either way. Her wry smile at the police officers reveals that she knows her power resides in negotiating borders and suspending indefinitely the moment of clear-cut distinctions. In suspending the law of distinction (the bar), this woman avoids normalisation within the law as the transgressive yet to be reformed woman or the woman who is already good and law-abiding, and she also avoids the expulsive other side, which pathologises her as an outlaw.

Regardless of whether or not she is a murderer, perhaps the indirectly seen and/or imagined scene of this crime story is the bloody trace and wound of her own body. But this reading is itself constructing her menstrual blood and body as a negative wound, which is a possible, but certainly not a necessary path of interpretation. Does she get away with a crime that is, in fact, the bloody trace of her own body and its dangerous fluids? Perhaps this is the real crime, the impossible site/sight of sexual difference, that she manages to conceal just before the police rush in. This woman is already psychologically arrested by the law and is busy concealing the traces of her bodily difference. She literally takes the law into her own hands by wiping away the trace of her sexual difference. The sanitary pad is possibly acting as a veil which both hides and absorbs the trace of this difference that would expose her to castration anxiety and her to exclusion and punishment by failing to cover her tracks.

In the last still frame of the advertisement the "stolen" money from the apartment is placed around the packet of menstruation pads in her handbag. Is it stolen money? Perhaps it is blood money owing to her as the profitable remainder of her infinitely unnameable status as woman, that she is making a claim on, thus taking this unnameable excess for herself. Menstrual blood

could also be read as a profitable remainder for women because as the shedding of a non-impregnated ovum, it falls outside the appropriating order of paternity and the name of the father. It is thus inconceivable to the law of paternity because of its unnameable status. Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* suggests that menstrual blood is disordering because it, like other substances, breaches the boundaries or imagined borders of the body by its flow (1979, 121–23). And Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror* claims that it is abject because it does not respect borders and that anything which “draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject” (1982, 4). But perhaps these readings submit women to a paternal law and order in which menstruation blood is disordering and abject precisely because it is outside the conception of a solid form and a proper name. I would prefer to read it as an exception to the law and the paternal name rather than a misconception because this “mis” turns menstruation into a failed conception. In the context of Western thought, Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* states that men’s bodies tend to be treated as solid and that their flows, particularly semen, are represented as

a mark of appropriation, as the production of a solid, with all its attendant rights and occasional responsibilities, men demarcate their own bodies as clean and proper. Moreover, through this dispossession or transmission of possession [the flow of semen] men take on the right of the proprietors of women’s bodies too insofar as women’s bodies are conceived as the receptacles of men’s body fluids and the nesting place of their product—the fetus. (1994, 201–202)

In this advertisement instead of being passively embarrassed, ashamed, and with something to hide, the woman is actively and openly deceptive. And instead of being passively contaminated and contaminating she is quite brazenly criminal because she is actively hiding and contaminating evidence—the spillage could be the dead man’s blood that she is putting on her menstruation pad. In so doing she is confusing the morality of the blood source and its legal status. In terms of the law of genre, Derrida (1992) argues that at the heart of the law there is always already contamination. He rhetorically asks whether it is impossible not to mix genres:

What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the *a priori* of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order and reason? (Derrida 1992, 225)

Her act of concealment is both a lawful and unlawful act, just like the crime of menstruation, which *must* be concealed. It must remain concealed, that is, a crime, in order that it should not be a crime. But perhaps the other reading is that it must be concealed in order to conceal another crime-scene.

Acknowledgements

Versions of this paper were presented at the Australian Sociological Association Conference held at Wollongong University, December 9–12, 1997, and “Rethinking

the Social"—a postgraduate conference held at Griffith University, July 1997. I would like to thank Andrew Metcalfe, Matthew Karpin and the *jigs* referees for their helpful comments. Thanks also to Dianne Metcalfe and Michelle Mullenger of Clemenger Advertising Melbourne.

NOTES

- ¹ There are three different length versions of this commercial—one sixty seconds cinema release version and two shorter television versions. The shorter television versions were often screened during the well know American soap opera, *Melrose Place*. This paper is based on the sixty second version. This commercial, titled "Sharon" (after the hollywood actress Sharon Stone), was made by Clemenger Advertising, Melbourne, Australia (for the company Sancella Libra). I am grateful to Dianne Metcalfe of Clemenger who informed me of the marketing aims of this commercial.
- ² It should be noted that since the beginning of 1998 the advertising industry has been self-regulated. The Advertising Standards Board, which replaced The Advertising Standards Council disbanded at the end of 1996, plays a mediating role in directing public complaints to the companies and businesses of the advertised products. This advertisement has, according to Ray Rust (Business Division Manager, Sancella Libra, 4 March 1998), had more positive feedback made directly to the company of Sancella than official negative feedback.
- ³ In defining the difference between the detective story and the crime story, Alison Young writes: "With the crime story, essential attributes are character, psychology and setting. The enigma or puzzle may be dispensed with altogether. That is, the reader may know from the outset who commits the crime, and suspense derives from the uncertainty of the criminal's future. The opposite is true for the detective story: the hidden identity of the criminal is the structuring motif of the text" (1996, 82–83). Young also states that these genres can be mixed and are not necessarily strictly bounded categories.
- ⁴ There is a vast amount of research in this area. Some sources consulted as background for this paper are: Douglas 1979; Buckley and Gottlieb 1988; Delaney, Lupton and Toth 1976; Martin 1992; Shuttle and Redgrove 1979.
- ⁵ Girard (1989) discusses the connection between menstrual blood and murder in a section entitled "Sacrifice." In his initial discussion of the connections between murder and menstruation, he writes: "Although menstrual bleeding can be readily distinguished from blood spilt in a murder or an accident and can thus be disassociated from those virulent forms of violence, it is in many societies regarded as the most impure of impurities. We can only assume that this extreme reaction has to do with the sexual aspect of menstruation" (1989, 34).
- ⁶ In his discussions of modernism and detective fiction, Jon Thompson writes that "one of the central conventions of detective fiction is the denouement in which the detective figure reconstructs the events leading up to the crime: in other words, there is the familiar "mystery" followed by the revelation of the "solution" (a misnomer, for often no solution is possible).... The effect of the denouement in crime fiction is to reconstruct the assumed reality by restoring to it a lost subtext" (1993, 120).

- ⁷ Australian advertising policy in this area states that such product advertisements can only be broadcast during the day (when it is assumed that some women are working at home) and after 7.30 pm at night. These advertisements cannot be screened during G rating programs but are acceptable for those rated as PG, M and MA (see the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*, August, 1993: 21–22.) The broadcasting regulations practice the politics of concealing menstruation from “children.” But perhaps it is aimed at “protecting” boys from their menstruating mothers and sisters.
- ⁸ For a discussion of outlaw figures and the differences between men and women in these stories, see Graham Seal’s *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia*. On women outlaws, Seal writes: “The powerful cultural spaces allowed for women criminals in western folk and popular discourses are apparently restricted to those of the feared abomination (axe-murderer Lizzie Borden), the witch (Lindy Chamberlain) and the temptress (any number of female figures, beginning with Eve)” (1996, 194).

WORKS CITED

- Bloch, Ernst. 1988. “A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel.” *The Utopian Function of Art Literature: Selected Essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Buckley, Thomas, and Alma Gottlieb, eds. 1988. *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press.
- Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*. 1993. August: 21–22.
- Delaney, Janice, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth. 1976. *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1992. “The Law of Genre.” In *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge.
- Douglas, Mary. 1979. *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- DuBois, Page. 1991. *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1967. *Moses and Monotheism*. Trans. Katherine Jones. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1983. *Totem and Taboo*. London: Ark Paperbacks.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1993. “Scenes of a Crime: Genesis, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, *Dora*, and Originary Narratives.” *Genders* 17: 71–96.
- Froula, Christina. 1983. “When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy.” *Critical Inquiry* 10: 321–47.
- Girard, René. 1989. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Gledhill, Christine. 1989. “Klute 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism.” In *Women in Film Noir*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan, 6–21. London: British Film Institute.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Heath, Stephen. 1978. “Difference.” *Enclitic: Texts on and of Contemporary Critical Theories* 19, no. 3: 51–112.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

- Kaplan, Ann E. 1989. "Introduction." In *Women in Film Noir*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan, 1–5. London: British Film Institute.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.
- Laws, Sophie. 1990. *Issues of Blood: The Politics of Menstruation*. London: Macmillan.
- Libra Ultra Thins Advertisement: "Sharon."* 1996. Clemenger Advertising Melbourne, Australia.
- Martin, Emily. 1992. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Place, Janey. 1989. "Women in Film Noir." In *Women in Film Noir*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan, 35–67. London: British Film Institute.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1969. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Trans. Emerson Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Seal, Graham. 1996. *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Shuttle, Penelope, and Peter Redgrove. 1979. *The Wise Wound: Menstruation and Everywoman*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.
- Stone, Merlin. 1976. *When God Was a Woman*. New York: Dial Press.
- Thompson, Jon. 1993. *Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism*. Illinois: Univ. of Illinois Press.
- Young, Alison. 1996. *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations*. London: Sage Books.