



**Contrasting the Early Modern and the Postmodern
Semiotics of Telling Stories:
Why We Perform Shakespeare' Plays
Differently Today**

Attila Kiss

Foreword by György E. Szőnyi

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For Anikó, Anna and Márton

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FOREWORD

It is my particular pleasure to introduce Attila Kiss' work in this volume. While still a student, he "socialized" himself into those iconographical-iconological studies which have characterized our work in Szeged since the early 1980s. Today, he is a senior and leading member of the "Szeged school," which runs the Research Group for Cultural Iconology and Semiography.

We have a common platform of thinking, but Attila Kiss also has his own very characteristic theory and interpretive approach to literary works and cultural representations. Our understanding of cultural representations uses and critically expands Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as "the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves." In this definition, "stories" refer to *textuality*, *narrativity* and *fictionality*. Thus, culture has a textual as well as a communicative character – it can be described, it can also be told. Moreover, as we "tell culture," our narrative will inevitably have made-up elements, and consequently culture can be seen as a constructed reality.

"Tell about ourselves:" this expression means *self-reflexivity* and *self-representation*. The "stories" reflect on the speakers/narrators. What is more, they are in reciprocal relationship with the creation of the subjectivity of both the storytellers and those who listen to these stories.

“Tell [the stories] to ourselves:” this phrase reveals that the “we,” a certain community, uses and circulates an ensemble of stories among themselves. For what purposes and with what results? These common and shared stories lay the groundwork for the identity of that community; by the help of these stories the receivers recognize themselves as members of that given community. This recognition happens as a result of interpretive work; the community that possesses the stories thus functions as an *interpretive community*.

On this basis I suggest that the “telling of stories” is in fact nothing else but *cultural representation*: it is a social practice by which the interpretive community represents its own culture. *To sum up, culture thus is a social practice of representations by the help of which a community constructs, interprets, and operates its own identity.*

The next logical question is: *In what ways can we tell stories?* We can tell stories by means of words (obviously), but also by pictures, gestures, songs, music, dance, etc. Text in the narrow sense is not an obligatory medium of storytelling, that is, cultural representation. We have to recognize that cultural representation has a *multimedial and intermedial* character. It is enough to think of the interaction of words and images in medieval heraldry or in the Renaissance emblems, of Shakespeare's or Wagner's *Gesamtkunst*-theaters, or of the filmic representations from the early 20th century onwards. The question of mediality has become crucial in the examination of cultural representations. While structuralism tried to find and describe the differences between visual and verbal representations, the more recent, usually pragmatics-based theories, pay greater attention to the combination of the different media. In this context the ancient maxim – *ut pictura poesis* – has gained new significance. By conclusive definition then, *culture is a social practice of multimedial, self-reflexive, and narrative representations by the help of which a community constructs, interprets, and operates its own identity.*

In his semiographic studies Attila Kiss pays close attention to the above described mechanisms. But he takes a further step and focuses his attention on the

subjects who “tell the stories” and who “listen to them,” and he tries to understand the relationship between subject and representation. One of the crucial questions seems to be whether the subjects create the representations or vice versa, the subject being constructed in the process of representation. This question directly connects Kiss' investigations to the most vexing questions of contemporary cultural and literary theory.

After having read Jean Baudrillard, or W. J. T. Mitchell, one cannot relate any longer to cultural representations as customarily treated by “classical” literary- or art historians. Those scholars had confidence that analytical interpretation would ultimately lead to the “perfect reading,” thus acquiring the Meaning of the work. Today interpretation cannot have the comfort of this certainty. Attila Kiss speaks from this position, and his postsemiotic theory is situated among the coordinates of Lacan, Kristeva, Žižek, Foucault, Althusser and Baudrillard. Kiss stands at the end of a long paradigm shift which has progressed from the giving away of the idea of the integral creative self (authorial intention) at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the questioning of the possibility of identifying a distinctive and recognizable artistic quality or structure in cultural representations (with this the structuralist project was subverted by Deconstructionism), to a postmodern discourse about the ultimate disintegration of the autonomous self.

According to this logic, all the elements of the famous Jacobsonian model of communication (*sender – message – receiver*) have been undermined: first the integral identity of the author, next the ontological identity – that is, the meaning – of the message, finally even the last resort: the idea of the receiving subject, who could make sense of the fragmentary and distorted representations of a chaotic world. For Kiss the relevant questions are: who reads, and who perceives anything as cultural representation?

The postsemiotics of Attila Kiss includes the psycho-semiotics of the self, the subject that does not appear to have existed *ab ovo*, but rather to have been constructed by and in the language of social practice, those discourses that

circulate and maintain ideologies. While social signification constitutes the macrodynamics of the subject, its microdynamics should be looked for in the psychic- and psychosomatic realms. This is what has turned Kiss' attention toward the semiotic aspects of the sublinguistic, nonverbal representations.

The author has found the best testing ground for his theoretical concerns in the cultural representations of two historical periods, the protomodern and the postmodern, especially in their dramatic works. First, he recognized that both historical periods have been characterized by an epistemological crisis which arose from questioning the earlier conceptual paradigms and the absence of a new, stable world model. The next step was to register that what we encounter here has not been simply a social practice, but at the same time a very complex annihilation and reconstitution of the interpreting subject who in the proto- and postmodern theater also becomes a witness.

Semiography, as understood by Kiss, has to go hand in hand with psychoanalysis and postsemiotics in order to understand the representational logic of those periods under investigation, and at the same time to understand the effect that is exerted on the spectator in these historical-cultural contexts. In relation to the epistemological crisis and the general uncertainty of both the early modern and the postmodern, the hierarchical order of the Middle Ages or the Enlightenment has repeatedly been replaced by the representation of violence, heterogeneity, abjection and anatomization. These liminal realms of representation comprise the dominant themes of this book, developing from general semiotics to theorizing about the role of the body in fantastic, violent, and consumerist contexts.

Beyond the theoretical grounding of the postsemiotics of the subject and the analysis of the early modern self, Attila Kiss offers inspiring close readings of a number of early modern English plays, including Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*, Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and others. The book also contains interpretations of postmodern works, such as Caryl Churchill's play *Cloud 9*, David Cronenberg's 1996 adaptation of J.

G. Ballard's novel *Crash*, or the experimental films of the Hungarian director Gábor Bódy.

Although one argument of the book is that there are strong parallels between the protomodern and postmodern anxieties and thus their representations, too, Kiss never becomes a voluntarist interpreter who would enforce a thesis that these two periods be the same or interchangeable, and he never misrepresents a work for the sake of his reading. By getting acquainted with these readings one does not develop a deeper or radically novel understanding of early modern culture and their various representations. Rather, a revelatory insight is provided about how we, postmodern interpreters, see that bygone world. This is not traditional cultural history, but rather philosophically informed "cultural studies" in the most pertinent sense of the word.

I am sure that the author's wit, style, and easy-going discourse will make this book enjoyable and memorable reading for all interested in literary and cultural theory as well as in plays and film, old and new.

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Preface and acknowledgments

One of the first intercultural lessons I was taught in the semiotics of theatrical symbolism and diversity took place when I invited a Chinese theatrical specialist to lecture at the University of Szeged on the problems of adapting Shakespeare to the Eastern stage. My friend from Shanghai explained to my English Renaissance Drama class that staging Shakespeare in an Eastern theater poses questions that will prove at least as difficult and complex as the political sensitivities of Western cultural imperialism. Othello is obviously a man of the seas, and this might impose certain difficulties upon the Chinese director. The real problems arise, however, from the meeting of the culturally specific horizons of symbolical codes. Our guest lecturer continued to explicate that Othello is an acclaimed general, and this must be represented by the color red on the Chinese stage. At the same time, he is a black person, but the color black very emphatically represents wickedness and evil spirits in Chinese symbolism. To further complicate the matter, if we venture to employ both markers on Othello, that is, the colors red and black, the creature we will represent in the most straightforward manner will be a eunuch, and nothing else.

Participants in my seminar were amused to see the difference in cultural decoding, and I was further encouraged to carry on with my comparative research

project in the study of early modern and postmodern dramatic and theatrical representational techniques. The chapters that comprise the present volume were originally individual articles which, I believe, are now brought into a collection united by the critical perspective of semiography. I feel fortunate and honored to have a long list of people who have assisted me in the past twenty years so that this project could yield results applicable in the teaching of English Renaissance and postmodern theatricality.

I am grateful to a great number of people who gave me assistance and inspiration during the time this volume has been in the making. My interest in the semiotics of drama was ignited by the Shakespeare seminars of Tibor Fabiny. My mentor, colleague and friend György Endre Szőnyi continued to fuel this interest and has never failed to be of invaluable help ever since. Patricia Parker and George Rowe gave me insight and encouragement; Linda Kintz and Richard Stein taught me how to employ the “third eye” of critical scrutiny. Péter Dávidházi and István Géher set me an example of the critical stance I strive to master, and Géza Kállay provided me with the warmth and depth of friendly conversations that have provoked many of the thoughts that hereby follow. Elizabeth Driver has been of invaluable help as the reader of the various versions of the manuscript.

My special thanks also go to Tamás Bényei, Kent Cartwright, Jorge Casanova, Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, Mária Barcsák Farkas, József Farkas, György Fogarasi, Izabella Füzi, Endre Hárs, Annamária Hódosy, Lídia Horváth, Anna Kérchy, Holger Klein, Sándor Kovács, Zenón Luis Martínez, Ágnes Matuska, Ferenc Odorics, Jolán Orbán, Jon Roberts, Bálint Rozsnyai, Nóra Séllei, Stuart Sillars, László Szilasi, Erzsébet Szőkefalvi-Nagy, Etelka Szőnyi, Helen Whall, and Rowland Wymer.

To conclude with the most important, my wife and children have been an inexhaustible resource of energy and support. This book, which bears the trace of their participation in every chapter, is dedicated to them.

Parts of this book appeared earlier (in a less argumentative form) in my first attempt to give an account of the semiotics of the early modern emblematic theater (*The Semiotics of Revenge. Subjectivity and Abjection in English Renaissance Tragedy*. [Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae, Papers in English and American Studies V. Monograph Series I.] Szeged: JATE Department of English and American Studies, 1995). This volume has gone out of print and, since it has been in use as a course book, I decided to include revised parts of it in the present collection.

Earlier versions of other chapters originally appeared in the following publications:

“Cinematographical Anatomy: Bódy Gábor’s Stage of Consciousness.”

Apertúra Fall 2008 [IV.1.] <http://apertura.hu/2008/osz/english>

“The Semiography of Iago, the Merchant of Venice.”

International Journal of the Humanities. Vol. 5. No. 6. 2007. 95-101.

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“From Image into Word: The Semiography of *Titus Andronicus*.”

Interfaces. Image Texte Langage. No. 25. (2007) *Envisioning / Envisager Shakespeare*. [ed. Helen M. Whall] 91-106.

“The Semiography of the Fantastic Body.”

In Sabine Coelsch-Foisner (ed.) *Fantastic Body Transformations in English Literature*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006. 31-44.

“The Semiography of Representational Techniques in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama.”

In Sabine Coelsch-Foisner – György E. Szőnyi (eds.) *“Not of an Age, but for All Time”*: *Shakespeare across Lands and Ages*. Wien: Braumüller, 2004. 123-136. [Copyright Braumüller 2004]

“Cloud 9, Metadrama, and the Postsemiotics of the Subject.”

The AnaChronisT. 2003. 223-232.

“My Choice: The Discourses of Consumerism and the Constitution of the Subject.”

Semiotische Berichte. 1-4/2000. 133-146.

“The Body Semiotic in the Theater.”

In *Sederi XI*. ed. Pilar C. Domínguez et.al. (Revista de la Sociedad Espanola de Estudios Renacentistas Ingleses, 11), Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002. 13-24.

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Introduction: The Aims of Semiography

The interpretive perspective that informs the writings in the present volume emerged from a series of encounters I had with particular cultural representations from the mid – 1990s onwards. These representations were all characterized by an anatomical curiosity, a certain thematization of corporeality and inwardness which established an affinity, a parallel between the early modern and the postmodern. The first in this series of encounters occurred when I entered the building of the main library at the Bloomington campus of Indiana University in 1996, and I caught sight of a large poster advertising a local performance of *Coriolanus* with the subtitle: “A natural born killer, too.” I was amazed to see that the title of Oliver Stone’s cult film was used as a marketing technique for the theatrical production of a Shakespearean drama, a postmodern cultural commodity. A few years later in the library of the University of Hull I was reading articles about ambulances lining up in front of a London theater playing *Titus Andronicus*, waiting for members of the audience who needed first aid after vomiting or fainting. A couple of years passed, and I ventured to watch the exhibition of the theatrical anatomist Gunther von Hagens in Vienna. I read his program about the travelling world exhibition of corpses, body parts and organs, and his

determination to stage public autopsies and to start an anatomical theater in London. Not much later, in 2001 I saw posters in Hungary in a cinema plaza with Hannibal the Cannibal staring at me from beneath the great big title TITUS. This poster advertised Julie Taymor's spectacular, postmodern film adaptation of Shakespeare's first and bloodiest tragedy, featuring Anthony Hopkins who, by then, had already established his reputation in another uncomfortably anatomical film about the psychopath doctor. By that time, I had already been researching the reception history of *Titus Andronicus*, and I realized that, after the total absence of the play in Hungary for almost one hundred years, four different and quite experimental productions of *Titus Andronicus* were performed on the Hungarian stage within less than ten years.

The writings that follow in this volume focus on this affinity between the early modern (or protomodern) and the postmodern. They are grounded in the interpretive procedures of semiography, and they aim at explicating the historically specific techniques that are employed in early modern and postmodern cultural representations. More specifically, I will be focusing on dramatic texts, theatrical performances and cultural practices that thematize, reproduce or disseminate the cultural imagery, the world model and the dominant identity patterns of a particular society. Semiography recontextualizes the findings of iconographical and iconological research in the new theoretical framework of the postsemiotics of the subject and the poststructuralist theories of signification and mediality. Relying on the critique of ideology, semiography endeavors to understand cultural representations by mapping out the ideologically specific semiotic logic that governs the social circulation of symbols and images.

This volume is presented as a summary of the investigations that I have been engaged in during the past ten years through the activities of the Research Group for Cultural Iconology and Semiography (REGCIS) in the English Department of the University of Szeged. The REGCIS group was founded by

researchers working in the fields of iconography, iconology and postsemiotics. The interdisciplinary program of the group is grounded in the poststructuralist theories of visibility and the postsemiotics of the speaking subject, and it unites the traditions of the semiotic and iconographic workshops that have been functioning in the Szeged school for several decades now.¹

The introduction of semiographic methodology relies on the multimedia research and projects that I have been carrying out or supervising in the English Department of the University of Szeged, applying a *performance-oriented semiotic approach* to the dialectic of dramatic text and performance text. These projects produce interactive multimedia versions of dramatic texts and they employ a multiplicity of sign channels (text, image, film, sound, movement, music, icon, emblem, etc.) to interpret and demonstrate in a hypertextual system the polysemous representational logic of the theater, which also operates through several sign channels. Within the framework of these projects I have been investigating the analogies between early modern (or protomodern) and postmodern dramas and theatrical practices from the perspective of theater semiography. My analysis contends that the world models of the two historical periods reveal semiotic similarities. These analogies and parallels are revealed in the representational techniques of early modern and postmodern dramas when we apply the semiographic approach and understand the dramatic texts on the basis of a *representational logic* that is always grounded in the semiotic disposition of the historically specific age. I employ the concept of the semiotic disposition on the basis of the semiotic typology of cultures, referring to those beliefs and attitudes which determine the ideas of a culture about signification and the meaningfulness,

¹ Publications of the workshops include Attila Kiss - György Endre Szőnyi, ed., *The Iconology of Gender I-II* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2008); Márta Barótiné Gaál - Attila Kiss - György Endre Szőnyi, ed., *The Iconography of the Fantastic* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2002); György Endre Szőnyi - Rowland Wymer, ed., *The Iconography of Power. Ideas and Images of Rulership on the English Renaissance Stage* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2000).

the signifying capacity of the elements of reality and the human being.² For understanding drama, it is crucial to have knowledge of the representational logic of the theatrical context in particular and the cultural context in general, because the structure of the dramatic text withholds a substantial amount of information. These blanks can be filled in when the text is inserted into the theatrical context of reception. This is where the performance text comes into being, and this context, be it an actual theater, a stage hypothetically constructed in the imagination of the reader, or a multimedial experimental adaptation, always operates according to a representational logic that is determined by the fundamental semiotic disposition of culture.³

Through analysis of dramas, stage productions and cultural representations, my aim in this volume is to show that both the early modern and the postmodern period are characterized by an epistemological crisis which arises from questioning the earlier conceptual paradigms and the absence of a new, stable world model.⁴ Early modern culture starts to distrust the high semioticity which determined the medieval world model and considered the universe as an ordered hierarchy of interrelated meanings and symbolic correspondences. In a similar fashion, the postmodern brings about a crisis of the unfinished project of

² For the concept of the semiotic typology and the semiotic disposition of cultures, and the clash of opposing world models, see Jurij M. Lotman. "Problems in the Typology of Cultures." In Daniel P. Lucid, ed., *Soviet Semiotics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 214-220.

³ For the concept of representational logic and its possible reconstruction for the Renaissance theater, see Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

⁴ For the epistemological crisis of the early modern period, see W. R. Elton. "Shakespeare and the Thought of His Age." In Stanley Wells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 17-34. For the concept of the postmodern as an epistemologically critical period I rely on Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984). "What we have here is a process of delegitimation fueled by the demand for legitimation itself. The "crisis" of scientific knowledge, signs of which have been accumulating since the end of the nineteenth century, is not born of a chance proliferation of sciences, itself an effect of progress in technology and the expansion of capitalism. It represents, rather, an internal erosion of the legitimacy principle of knowledge." 39. For the epistemological crisis as collapse of knowledge also see Cristina Grasseni. "Learning to See: World-views, Skilled Visions, Skilled Practice." In Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch and Judith Okely, eds., *Knowing How to Know. Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present* (Berghahn Books, 2008), 151-172.

modernity which was established on the mechanical world model and the rationalism of the Enlightenment.⁵ When we insert the dramatic texts into the representational logic of the theater that functions according to the semiotic world model or the semiotic crisis of the particular age, we realize that both protomodern and postmodern plays use comparable representational strategies to thematize the dilemmas about the identity of the human being and the possibility of knowing reality. The quakes in the metaphysics of semiosis and the guarantees of meaning are processed in similar ways by the plays of the English Renaissance and the dramas of the postmodern experimental theater. As a typical result of the epistemological crisis, plays such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the early modern canon, or Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* in the postmodern canon all present a world where the guarantees of meaning and knowledge have been unsettled, and they portray the character as a heterogeneous structure divided from within, constituted at the meeting point of external determining factors and discourses. I have selected these plays as examples for the ensuing investigations because they very explicitly display the representational techniques at stake. The representability of reality and the human being's capacity to know reality are equally questioned in these two periods of transition. As a result, the early modern and the postmodern theaters endeavor to produce a context for total communicative effect. They employ specific representational techniques in order to exert an effect on the spectator. With these techniques, it seems possible to move beyond the uncertainties of socially posited meanings, and arrive at a new experience of involvement and witnessing. After theoretical introductions that will

⁵ The idea of the "unfinished project of modernity" was established by Jürgen Habermas. See "Modernity Versus Postmodernity." *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981), 3-14. For a discussion of the failure of the project of the Enlightenment and Habermas's concepts, see Maurizio Paserrin d'Entrèves – Seyla Benhabib, eds., *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997).

establish the foundations of semiographic methodology, I will move on to a more detailed interpretation of these plays.

The epistemological uncertainties of the early modern and the postmodern give rise to a characteristic inwardness, an anatomical interest and an anatomical desire that are behind several representational techniques that have long been held characteristic of the dramas and theaters of these two periods. It is this anatomical perspective that I will scrutinize through discussing *the semiography of violence, abjection and the fantastic* which are characteristic of the traditions of early modern drama, particularly tragedies, and which survive mainly in the postmodern experimental theater, performance art and certain subgenres of cinema. Besides these typical techniques of tragedy, we can also notice the survival of the romance tradition which aspired to a different mode of totalization: the elaborate fantastic imagery in postmodern multiplex cinemas and in the labyrinthine malls and plazas establishes the magic, enchanted islands of consumerist culture.⁶

The primary theoretical argument of semiography is that a psychoanalytically informed postsemiotics of the subject is indispensable for understanding the *effect* that is exerted on the spectator by the representation of violence, heterogeneity, abjection and anatomization.⁷ The abjection of the body, the decentering of character integrity, and the thematization of corporeality deprive the receiver of expected, fixated, stable identity-positions. My contention is that behind such techniques of pluralization, desubstantiation and theatrical totalization we can discover the uncertainty and the epistemological crisis of the early modern and the postmodern period, since these techniques can all be interpreted as attempts to perfect the power, the effect of representation, and they test the limits of established and possible meanings. As a result of the

⁶ I wish to thank György Endre Szónyi, my colleague and co-founder in the REGCIS group, for this important insight.

⁷ The concept of the abject will be employed throughout this book on the basis of Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982). A more detailed explication of the abject will follow in my presentation of the microdynamics of the subject.

characteristics of the genre itself, the theater is a social practice which is the most sensitive to questions concerning the status, the efficiency of the sign and representation. It is an essential characteristic of the theater, as well as the dramatic text designed for stage production, to address and thematize representational problems, since the theater itself is a game which is played against an irresolvable representational dilemma, i.e., the impossibility of total presence. The theater attempts to conjure up the presence of that which is absent; the belief in the possibility or impossibility of such an endeavor defines the *semiotic disposition* of the particular culture. In the course of a crisis in the world model and the semiotic disposition which govern epistemology, the theater will thematize the problems of signification, and it will also explore representations that are more effective than the signifying techniques provided by the available and exhausted traditions.

To elucidate the parallels of the early modern and the postmodern within the framework of semiographic research, I will rely on the postsemiotics of the subject. This complex account of the socially positioned human being is necessary to see how specific representational techniques work by exerting effects on the heterogeneities in the psychic as well as the social constitution of the subject. Through this postsemiotic perspective we can explicate the growing affinity with which the postmodern turns to the emblematic-anatomical drama and theater of early modern culture through various adaptations and reinterpretations. After introducing the postsemiotics of the subject, I will explicate the other two pillars that semiography rests upon: the performance-oriented theater semiotics and the poststructuralist theory of visual and emblematic representation. Thus, the frame of reference for this book is marked out by the three constitutive turns of the poststructuralist period: the linguistic or semiotic turn, the visual turn, and the corporeal turn. By the late 1990s, these shifts in critical thinking also established a perspective for future progress and direction to move beyond the frontiers of the postmodern.

The Postsemiotics of the Subject

In the early 1970s a renewal of semiotics was initiated by theoretical discourses that combined the findings of psychoanalysis, post-Marxism and post-Saussurian semiology. This new semiotic perspective laid emphasis on the material and social conditions of the production of meaning, and the participation of the human being in the process of that production. The implications of this *postsemiotics* of the subject have been far-reaching and have proven indispensable to any orientation of critical thinking ever since. Looking back now at the emergence of the postsemiotic attitude from today's horizon, we are aware that many of these critical considerations have since become trivial. Any move beyond the achievements and commonplaces of poststructuralism, however, must be grounded in a solid grasp of this complex theory of the human being.

As Julia Kristeva argues in her originative article, theories of the subject can be grouped into two types: theories of the enunciated and theories of enunciation.⁸ The first orientation, concentrating on the enunciated, studies the mechanical relationships between signifiers and signifieds, and it considers the

⁸ Julia Kristeva. "The Speaking Subject." In Marshall Blonsky, ed., *On Signs* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 210-220.

subject as the controller of signification. The subject in this traditional semiotics is a self-enclosed unit which is in possession of the linguistic rules, and always stands hierarchically above the elements of meaning production, as a guarantee and origin of meaning and identity. In short, this tradition is grounded in the phenomenological abstraction of an ego which is the heritage of the Cartesian “cogito.”

Theories of enunciation, on the other hand, investigate the constitution and production of the above elements of *semiosis*, which are no longer considered to be units or monads, but rather non-stable products in the heterogeneous signifying process. The “Freudian revolution” brought about a decisive turn, an inversion in the relationship between signifier and subject, and led to the realization that the subject is a heterogeneous structure in which several modalities of signification are simultaneously at work. Since these are not all rational modalities, it follows that the subject can no longer be the exclusive governor of meaning. As Kristeva states,

The present renewal of semiology considers sense as a signifying process and a heterogeneous dynamic, and challenges the logical imprisonment of the subject in order to open the subject towards the body and society.⁹

These semiotic heterologies, i.e., the postsemiotic theories of enunciation, revealed by the mid-1970s that two critical perspectives must be joined in a new complex theory that can account for the heterogeneity of the subject and the signifying process. It would be too ambitious for the present endeavor to survey the various trends and findings that are involved in this account. Instead, I will rely on two decisive theoretical oeuvres that started to shape the development of these two orientations. I will use Julia Kristeva’s work to explicate what I am going to call the *microdynamics of the subject*, while the writings of Michel Foucault will serve as a basis for my account of the *macrodynamics of the subject*. As Anthony Elliott puts it in his rich and excellent overview of the developments

⁹ Ibid., 219.

of the theories of the subject, these two directionalities have produced the most articulate investigation and critique of the interrelationship between the human being and its socio-cultural environment.

...the theoretical approaches of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School on the one hand, and Lacanian, post-Lacanian and other associated poststructuralist positions on the other, stand out as the most prominent intellectual and institutional evaluations of the self and society. Indeed, they represent the two broadest programmatic approaches in social theory on these questions and issues. Through different political vocabularies of moral and emancipatory critique, these approaches highlight that modern social processes interconnect in complex and contradictory ways with unconscious experience and therefore with the self.¹⁰

Michel Foucault repeatedly points out in his archeological and genealogical surveys of the history of subjectivity that the notion of the *individuum* is a relatively new phenomenon in Western civilization, emerging in the eighteenth century together with the advent and the settling in of the Enlightenment world model. “Before the end of the eighteenth century, *man* did not exist – any more than the potency of life, the fecundity of labor, or the historical density of language.”¹¹ This argument can be joined to Jurij Lotman’s semiotic typology of cultures and the proposal of Julia Kristeva which suggests a typology of subjectivities on the basis of their historical specificity. As a result of this combined perspective, we will observe that semiotically stable world models result in an understanding of the human being as a compact, self-identical entity which has an inherently guaranteed signifying potential, such as the iconic subject of the medieval high semioticity or the self-identical, sovereign Cartesian subject of modernism. The epistemological crisis of cultures with an unstable semiotic disposition, however, results in questions about the meaning, the self-identity, the homogeneity of the subject. In the subsequent chapters, I will trace how this

¹⁰ Anthony Elliott, *Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition. Self and Society from Freud to Kristeva*, (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), 2.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 308.

disposition informs the dominant theater model of a historically specific culture, but this must be preceded by an account of the way this “renewal of semiology” has produced a new understanding of the relationship between meaning, signification and the human being. My account of the complex theory of the constitution of the subject cannot endeavor to even partly cover the manifold web of postsemiotic critical orientations, but I consider it indispensable to touch upon the main constituents of the theory which has become an organic part of the way we conceive of the human in poststructuralism and after.

1.1. The Constitution of the Subject

The poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity is grounded in the realization that the human being is subordinated to external social and internal psychic forces that produce the socially posited human being as a subject. The constitution of this speaking subject is determined by historically specific discursive technologies of power. These technologies establish institutionalized sites of discourse where the circulation of possible meanings in society is governed. The discursive practices create ideologically situated positions where the subject must be situated in order to have access to discursive, socially produced versions of Reality, and in order to be able to have access to language which is necessary for the predication of identity. Thus, subjectivity is a function and a product of discourse: the subject predicates his or her identity in a signifying practice, but always already within the range of rules distributed by ideological *regimes of truth*. The Cartesian hierarchy between subject and language undergoes an inversion: instead of the human being mastering and using language as a tool for cognition, the subject becomes a function, a property of language.

This thesis implies that the status of the subject in theory is first of all a question of the *hierarchy between signification and the speaking subject*. Since the 1970s, poststructuralist developments in critical theory have relied on the

common goal of “theorizing the Subject,” establishing a complex account for the material *and* psychological constitution of the speaking subject, i.e., the human being positioned in a socio-historical context. Although they have been employing various strategies (semiotic, psychological, political, moral-ethical aspects, etc.), they have all strived to *decenter* the concept of the unified, self-sufficient subject of liberal humanism, the Cartesian ego of Western metaphysics.

The Cartesian idea of the self-identical, transhistorically human subject is replaced in these theories by the subject as a function of discursive practices. This project calls for a twofold critical perspective. On the one hand, we need a complex account of the socio-historical macrodynamics of the constitution of the subject. At the same time, we also have to work out the psychoanalytically informed microdynamics of the subject. This latter perspective traces the “history” of the emergence of subjectivity in the human being through the appearance and the agency of the symbol in consciousness. Since the symbol always belongs to a historically specific Symbolic Order (society as a semiotic mechanism), the social and historical problematization of the *macrodynamics* and the psychoanalytical account of the *microdynamics* of the subject cannot be separated. They are always two sides of the same coin: the identity of the subject coined by the Symbolic.

For a more detailed discussion of the macrodynamics and the microdynamics of the constitution of the subject, I am going to use a passage from Émile Benveniste as a starting point, a critique of which may highlight the most important points of theory.

It is in and through language that man *constitutes* himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in its reality which is that of being. [...]The ‘subjectivity’ we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to *posit himself* as ‘subject’. ...Now we hold that ‘subjectivity’, whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. ‘Ego’ is he who says ‘ego.’ That is

where we see the foundation of ‘subjectivity’, which is determined by the linguistic status of the ‘person.’¹²

Benveniste initiates a very important step in the theory of the subject. He reveals the fundamentally *linguistic nature* of subjectivity and he insists on language as the necessary logical and technical prerequisite for self-reflexivity. It is only through the verbal activity of our consciousness that we can conceive of our being different from the rest of the world, the result of which is that language becomes constitutive of both the object and the subject of the cognitive signifying process. Subjectivity, Benveniste contends, is not a natural, empirical entity, but a category which is only available and operational in the linguistic system that articulates the world for the user of that language in terms of the category of the “I” and the category of the “non-I,” that is, the rest of the world. “*I* can only be identified by the instance of discourse that contains it and by that alone.”

While drawing attention to a problem ignored by structuralism, Benveniste’s argument contains an essential contradiction which becomes the target of poststructuralist critique. He defines the psychic unity, the experience of self-identity in the subject as a product of signification, and at the same time he endows the subject with the ability to *posit himself* (herself not yet being within Benveniste’s scope) in this language. In this way, he presupposes a center, a unified consciousness *prior* to language, an independent capacity in the subject which would be capable of using language for self-predication. In short, his theory cannot account for *how* the subject becomes able to use the signifying system, or how the subject’s relation to that system is determined by the context of meaning-production.

To show how problematic the linguistic status of the subject is, it may suffice here to refer to Althusser’s theory of interpellation and ideological state apparatuses, to Foucault’s historicizing the technologies of power that govern the

¹² Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Miami UP, 1971), 228. Benveniste’s employment of the term *discourse* lays emphasis on the actual context-dependent operation of the Saussurean *parole* as opposed to the ideal notion of an abstract *langue*.

production of truth and subjectivity in society, or to the independence of the syntax of the Symbolic Order in Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹³ In poststructuralism, the subject is no longer a controller or autonomous user but rather a property and a product of language. Julia Kristeva's writings define the practice of semiosis, signification, as an unsettling process, which displaces the subject of semiosis "from one identity into another."¹⁴ Starting from a critique of Benveniste, postsemiotics needs to move beyond the limitations of structuralist semiotics to establish a theory which will explain the constitutive agency of language inside and outside the subject, as well as the agency of the subject in the linguistic process.

1.2. The Macrodynamics of the Subject

Postsemiotics employs two perspectives to map out how the social symbolic order becomes determinative of subjectivity from without and from within the human being. The relation of the subject to society and ideology is in the center of socio-historical theories of the subject. These theories start to scrutinize the subject from without, and they contend that technologies of power in society work to subject individuals to a system of exclusion, determining the way certain parts of reality are structured and signified as culture. They position the subject within specific sites of meaning-production, where socially prefabricated versions of reality are

¹³ For the idea of the materiality of ideology which permeates the minutest detail of our every-day reality to transform human beings into subjects, see: Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986), 239-251. For an encapsulation of Foucault's theory of the modalities of power and the production of subjectivity, see: Michel Foucault. "The Subject and Power." In Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 208-228. For a short explication of the synthesis of psychoanalysis and semiology, and the non-sovereign heterogeneous subject which is constituted through a psychic split, see: Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage." "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud." In Adams and Searle, eds., 734-757.

¹⁴ Cf. Julia Kristeva. "From One Identity into an Other." In *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), 124-147. I will later return to Kristeva's theory on the *subject-in-process* which is displaced from its fixed identity position by the unsettling effects of signification.

accessible. Power and knowledge in this way become inseparable, and the circulation of information about reality becomes constitutive of the way we perceive the world.¹⁵

In his project to draw a genealogy of the modern subject, Michel Foucault points out that the persistent concern with the individual in human sciences is a relatively new development, arising from a new need to categorize and structure reality and the place of the human signifier in it.¹⁶ This attempt is part of a new, syntagmatic world model which deprives the human being of its medieval high semioticity and subordinates the subject to a material and categorical position within a horizontal structure and a new paradigm of knowledge.¹⁷

In Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary technologies of power, knowledge and power become inseparably intertwined: truth-production about reality is always governed by historically specific modes of meaning-making activities. Technologies of power set up regimes of truth, i.e., any socially accessible knowledge of reality is always connected to discourse, and technologies define a regularity through which statements are combined and used. The distribution of power not only regulates the language of subjects but also functions as a micro-physics of power applying to the physical constitution of the subjects as well: bodies, not only knowledge of the bodies, are discursively produced as well. The technologies of power that organize discursive practices

¹⁵ For the inseparable reciprocity of truth and ideology, knowledge and power, see: Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (Pantheon, 1980).

¹⁶ "...in the general arrangement of the Classical *episteme*, nature, human nature, and their relations, are definite and predictable functional moments. And man, as a primary reality with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge, has no place in it. The modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology and a biology... - all these themes so familiar to us today and linked to the existence of the 'human sciences' are excluded by Classical thought. [...] as long as Classical discourse lasted, no interrogation as to the mode of being implied by the cogito could be articulated." Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 310-312.

¹⁷ I rely here on Lotman's "Problems in the Typology of Cultures." Subsequent chapters will address in greater detail his theory of the Medieval symbolical and the Enlightenment-type syntagmatic world models and the idea of high and reduced semioticity.

have a fundamental homogenizing role in society, subjectivizing human beings by the institutionalization of discourse in a twofold process: through a meticulous application of power centered on the bodies of individuals, these subjects become individualized and objectivized at the same time. Discourse confers upon the subject the experience of individuality, but through that very process the human being is turned into an object of the modalities of power.

Power/knowledge is operational through the following three main modalities: the *dividing practices* that categorize subjects into binary oppositions (normal vs. insane, legal vs. criminal, sexually healthy vs. perverse, etc); the *institutionalized disciplines* that circulate ideologically marked versions of knowledge of reality (scientific discourses are always canonized); and the various modes of self-subjection, a more sophisticated modality of modern societies through which the subject voluntarily occupies the positions where it is objectivized and subjected to power.

Different historical periods are based on different *economies of power*. The history of power technologies manifests a transition from openly suppressive, spectacular disciplinary strategies (public execution, torture, social spectacle and theatricality) into more subtle ways of subjection, when the discursive commodification of reality and subjectivity takes advantage of the psychological structure of the subject.¹⁸ Through the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, a new economy changes the *dimensionality of power* in society.

Earlier, power was exercised by disseminating the idea of the presence of power in society. Technologies of the spectacle displayed the presence of authority in social practices either directly (processions, Royal entries, allegories,

¹⁸ The discourses of commercialism, for example, are based on the dissemination of discourses in which the linguistic production of subjectivity confers the sentiment of identity on the subject (You can't miss this! You can make it! I love New York! I vote for Bush!), but at the same time this production positions the subject in ideologically determined sites. This *commodification of subjectivity* is not a result of violent exercise of power upon the subject; it is based on the idea of free subjects.

etc.)¹⁹ or indirectly, through displaying the ultimately subjected, tortured body in public executions. Here, the economy of power is vertical, because the subject relates to a hierarchy of positions at the top of which there is the Monarch, the embodiment of authority, who, at the same time, cannot directly penetrate the constitution of the subjects, since bureaucracy, state police, and confinement can never set up a system of surveillance that envelopes every subject.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the dimensionality of power becomes horizontal rather than vertical. New technologies of *categorization* aim at distributing power in every site of social discourses and they set up a new *hermeneutics of the self*.²⁰ Modern state societies indeed inherit this strategy from the Christian technique of confession: it is in this sense that Foucault defines modern societies as societies of confession. It becomes an incessant task of the subject to relate not to a metaphysical locus of authority at the top of a hierarchy but to its own selfhood. The subject, through a social positionality, is inserted into discourses that offer specific versions of knowledge of the self, and the subject scrutinizes itself all the time as to whether it produces *the right knowledge* about its self, body and identity. This technique was already constitutive of the Christian practice of confession, where the subject retells the stories of itself in the face of an absolute authority of salvation (the priest as an agent of God). The practice becomes more elaborate in modern culture, where the guarantor of salvation is the State.

¹⁹ Stephen Orgel, for example, argues that in the absence of a well-organized and disciplined central police in Elizabethan England, discipline was established by the incessant public display and dissemination of the spectacle, the image, the visual presence of (Royal and religious) power, which was internalized and felt by the subjects even if no immediate control was exercised over them. "Making Greatness Familiar." In David M. Bergeron, ed., *Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theater* (University of Georgia Press, 1985), 19-25.

²⁰ Instead of direct force, the horizontal distribution of power chiefly aims at urging the subject to internalize a detailed categorization of rules, possibilities, legalities, limits, and Foucault's genius was manifest mainly in observing the historical specificity of these every-day techniques. He notes, for example, how the commands to regulate body movements in the Prussian army for simple rifle drills become infinitely more detailed than earlier on in any army. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), "Docile Bodies." 135-169. For the idea of self-hermeneutics and the society of confession: "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth." *Political Theory* 21. 2. (May, 1993): 198-227; "Sexuality and Solitude." In Blonsky, ed., *On Signs*, 365-372.

Early modern culture, like England at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, proves to be a period of transition, in which different modalities of power manifest themselves in social antagonisms that rewrite the discursive rules of authority and subjection. The idea of subversion and its containment in Renaissance discourses proved to be an especially rewarding field of investigation for the New Historicism when reinterpreting the period. Stephen Greenblatt owed much to the Foucauldian idea of self-hermeneutics when he established his concept of *self-fashioning* in the founding text of the New Historicism. Even more importantly, he also directed attention to the parallel between the early modern and the postmodern:

Above all, perhaps, we sense that the culture to which we are so profoundly attached as our face is to our skull is nonetheless a construct, a thing made, as temporary, time-conditioned, and contingent as those vast European empires from whose power Freud drew his image of repression. We sense too that we are situated at the close of the cultural movement initiated in the Renaissance and that the places in which our social and psychological world seems to be cracking apart are those structural joints visible when it was first constructed. In the midst of the anxieties and contradictions attendant upon the threatened collapse of this phase of our civilization, we respond with passionate curiosity and poignancy to the anxieties and contradictions attendant upon its rise. To experience Renaissance culture is to feel what it was like to form our own identity, and we are at once more rooted and more estranged by the experience.²¹

Our current postmodern period faces similar challenges. The unsettling of the “grand narratives” and constitutive beliefs of the project of the Enlightenment has brought modernity to a halt, where we are again trying to map out new

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1980), 174-175. The British Cultural Materialism, upon its emergence, was equally indebted to a Marxist and Foucauldian critique of ideology, see especially: Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985). In his Introduction to the volume, Jonathan Dollimore writes: “Three aspects of historical and cultural process figure prominently in materialist criticism: consolidation, subversion and containment. The first refers, typically, to the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself; the second to the subversion of that order, the third to the containment of ostensibly subversive pressures.” *ibid.* 10.

epistemological methods to explain our relation to the world and society around us. The questioning of former paradigms of knowledge results in an epistemological crisis, which manifests several analogies with the uncertainties of the early modern period, and which will be the topic of subsequent chapters.

The historicization of the constitution of the subject sheds light on the logic of discursive practices that structure a system of subject positions and the formation of social identities in these positions. However, this approach does not penetrate the structure of the subject itself, the mechanism which uses language to predicate identity in ideologically determined ways. We also have to account for how the subject becomes able to use language, and how the intervention of the symbolic system in the psychosomatic structure of the subject produces specific subjectivities.

1.3. The Microdynamics of the Subject

As has been pointed out, the postsemiotics of the subject must be a theory of enunciation which conceives of semiosis as a heterogeneous process of the production of meaning. This understanding of the heterogeneity of the human being is a radical critique of the Cartesian subject, and its psychoanalytical model was offered on Freudian grounds by Jacques Lacan as a “marriage” of psychoanalysis and semiotics. For Lacan, the subject as an inherently and irredeemably split structure cannot act as a sovereign controller of meaning and identity.

Lacan’s re-reading of Freud argues that the subject is constituted through a series of losses: systems of differences are established in consciousness at the expense of the suppression of primary drives.²² The human being must become able to relate to itself as something separate from the outside reality, from its

²² Jacques Lacan. “The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious.” In *Écrits. A Selection* (London and New York: Routledge, 1977), 292-325.

immediate environment, because this is the necessary condition for auto-reflexivity that constitutes subjectivity. In order for this separation to become operational, the subject must be inserted into a signifying system where it is absent from the signifier, in order for the signifier to function as something the subject can employ as a medium with which to point at itself. The signifier appears to establish contact between the subject and the reality, but in its actual operation the signifier much rather represents the subject for other signifiers in a chain of signifiers and signifying positions. In this way, the formerly symbiotic environment of the human being, the Real is irrecoverably lost, separated from the subject, and the signifier emerges as a stand-in for the lost objects of demand and drive energies that are transposed into the unconscious through primary and secondary repression. The subject, i.e., the signified of this psychoanalytic model, glides on the chain of signifiers and will never reestablish direct contact with reality.

It follows that the constitution of the subject is a graded process of differentiation, which works against the human being's primary, fundamental feeling of being identical with reality, with the mother's body, with the environment. The first structures of *difference* are results of the territorialization of the body. Edges and zones of excitement are engraved on the baby's body according to rules that are always symbolic, since the care of the body is socially encoded and gender-specific. A logic of introjection and projection develops in consciousness, based on the circulation of stimuli around the erotogenic orifices of the body, and this logic begins differentiating the body from the outside. The oral, the anal and the genital orifices transform the body into a map with limits and borderlines. The first decisive differentiation follows after this as the result of primary repression, which is the abandonment of *identifications* with the Mother and the outside, with the objects of demand. Through the mirror phase the child recognizes its image in the mirror of the social space around itself, considers that image as a homogeneous, separate entity with which it identifies, and thus internalizes a sentiment of the body as different from the outside. At the same

time, this abandonment or sublimation is only possible through the repression of this trauma, and the primary repression during the mirror phase articulates the unconscious, a split that constitutes the inherent heterogeneity of the subject.²³

This otherness, the basis of the ego is, of course, a misrecognition, but it is further solidified by secondary repression, when the subject occupies a social positionality whose value is determined by the key-signifier of binary oppositions: the Name of the Father or the Phallus. During this stage of Oedipalization, the mother as an object of desire is replaced with the envied position of the father, the wielder of phallic, symbolic power. The subject learns to rechannel its desires through a detour, because the lost object of desire, the Mother (a general metaphor for the lost Real), is only accessible through the position of the Father (a general metaphor for the center in the system of social signifying positions). In this way, the subject is inserted into the language spoken by its environment, but also into the language of positionalities which is the symbolic order of society. In this order, the subject's position receives value only in relation to the key-signifiers of binary oppositions (having or not having the Phallus, controlling or not controlling the discursive space, etc.).

It follows that the fundamental experience of the subject is that of lack. The signifier emerges in the place of the lost non-subject, the mother, in the site of the Other, as the only guarantee for re-capturing the lost Real, and the desire to compensate for the emergent absences or lacks within the subject will be the chief engine of signification. The subject endows the Other as the site of the signifier with the capacity to re-present for itself the lost objects of desire. This is why it is crucial that the subject should be absent from the signifier. The signifier must be

²³ "What is therefore at issue in sublimation, as we understand it here, is neither simply nor necessarily the 'desexualization' of drives, but the establishing of a non-empty intersection between the private world and the public world, conforming 'sufficiently as to usage' to the requirements posited by the institution of society as this is specified in each case. This implies, generally, a conversion or a shift of aim for drives, but always and essentially a shift of object in the broadest sense of the term. What was the 'object' of the preceding phases must be taken by the psyche in another mode of being and in other relations --thus it is henceforth another object, because it has another signification..." Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), 313.

different from the subject in order for the subject to refer to itself through this operation as someone other than the Other. However, as has been seen, the signifier does not recapture the Real for the subject; it will only relate the subject to other signifiers in the chain. It follows that the agency of the signifier has an autonomous order which is not controlled by the subject - the split subject which is finally constituted through absence and the repression of drives into the unconscious.

The subject's conscious modality, according to Lacan, flees from the unconscious; the subject does not dare to face the contents whose repression constitutes the seeming solidity of its identity. If we relate this psychoanalytical microdynamics of the subject to the socio-historical account of its constitution, we see that the intervention of ideology, the penetration of the Symbol into the psychic structure of the subject is experienced as a traumatic event, setting up a fundamental wound, a *traumatic kernel* in the subject. Ideology, however, does not offer itself as an enforced reality but as an escape from the Real of our desire which the conscious avoids and refuses to face. Ideology becomes the exploitation of the unconscious of the subject — it offers ideologically overdetermined, prefabricated versions of the Real where the subject can “take refuge” and enter positions from which an identity can be predicated as opposed to the heterogeneity of the drives and the otherness of the body.

This outline of the theory of the subject has been necessarily fragmental and condensed, but I deem it indispensable to the background against which notions of the subject in protomodern and postmodern cultural representations will be investigated in the subsequent chapters. It also helps us to arrive at a semiotic problematization of the concept that is one of the most pervasive and problematic motifs in these representations: the concept of *the body* in semiosis and of the materiality of meaning-production.

The body, the corporeal, is one of the most extensively theorized issues in poststructuralist critical theory, and it is a central concept in Julia Kristeva's theory of the speaking subject as a *subject-in-process*. The attempt to involve the material and corporeal components of signification is part of an overall project to account for the positionality and psychosomatic activity of the subject in the historical materiality of the social environment. This semiological attempt sets out with a critique of the transcendental ego of phenomenology, which Kristeva considers an abstraction basically identical with the Cartesian ego of the cogito. As opposed to the positioning of this abstraction in practically all the various traditional forms of the human sciences, signification for Kristeva is not simply representation (e.g., a mechanistic understanding of the text conceived of as an interaction between linguistic units, rules and the idealistic monad of a consciousness), but an *unsettling process*. The positioning of identity is always merely a transitory moment, a momentary freezing of the signifying chain on which the subject travels: signification posits and cancels the identity of the subject in a continuously oscillating manner. The subject of semiotics is a subject-in-process, and the amount of *symbolic fixation* depends on how successfully the signifying system suppresses those modalities in the consciousness of the subject which are heterogeneous to identity-formation and symbolic predication. Postsemiotics and the poststructuralist linguistic theory of pragmatics must inevitably move not only to the fields of social discourse, but also into the terrain of that which precedes and surpasses language inside the subject.

But language [*langage*] – modern linguistics' self-assigned object – lacks a subject or tolerates one only as a transcendental ego (in Husserl's sense or in Benveniste's more specifically linguistic sense), and defers any interrogation of its (always already dialectical because trans-linguistic) 'externality'.²⁴

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia U P, 1984), 21.

In this theory of the constitution of the subject, the signifying process, *signifiance*, has not only one but two modalities. Meaning is generated in the *symbolic modality*, in relation to the central signifier (Phallus) and according to linguistic rules of difference, at the expense of the repression of the heterogeneity of corporeal processes and drives. The “battery” of signification and desire, however, is a dimension of the psychosomatic setup of the subject called the *chora*: here the unstructured, heterogeneous flux of drives, biological energy-charges, and primary motilities hold sway in a non-expressive, i.e., non-signifying, totality.

The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign); nor is it a position that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position. Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm. [...] The theory of the subject proposed by a theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which significance is constituted.²⁵

This unstructured heterogeneity of drives and corporeal fluctuations is re-distributed or rather suppressed when the subject enters the symbolic order. The signifier will emerge as a master of drives and heterogeneities, but at the same time the agency of the signifier itself depends on the energies of the semiotic *chora* as its suppressed opposite and material basis. The logic of introjection and projection within the primary processes is repeated in the logic of predication and negation on the symbolic level. The semiotic and the symbolic modalities of signification are always simultaneously at work, and the discursive predication of identity (the unity of the I as opposed to the indirectly signified Other) is only effective as a momentary pinning down of the signifying chain.

²⁵ Ibid., 26. [I.2. “The Semiotic *Chora* Ordering the Drives.”] Kristeva emphasizes the importance and indispensable function of the Husserlian *thetic break* as the articulation of the difference between ego and other, but she also stresses the need for theory to move beyond this threshold to those processes that *precede* the thetic break.

Certain signifying practices and “marginal discourses,” however, threaten the symbolic (that is, ideological) fixation of identity by breaking the symbolic, grammatical rules of discourse. They transgress the categories of the linguistic norm, *foreground* suppressed dimensions of the experience of the body, and put the subject into crisis by bringing it to a halt, or to the borderlines of meaning. The foregrounding of the semiotic modality of signification through rhythm, the violence of linguistic logic, code-breaking or the abjection of the symbolically coded object (e.g., the body), deprives the subject of its comfortable linguistic self-identity, connecting it back into corporeal motility and the “pulsations of the body.”

The body, the material basis of signification, is always the opaque, suppressed element of semiosis. It is the body which speaks, but the identity of the speaking subject is always predicated as opposed to the otherness, the heterogeneity, of that body. Historically specific discourses contain and suppress this experience of the body through different technologies, and one of the specific semiotic achievements of the syntagmatic world model is the construction and dissemination of a “modern” understanding of subjectivity through the expulsion of the experience of the body from the dimensions of discourse.²⁶

In Kristeva’s semiotic model, the first splitting of the semiotic continuum by symbolic positioning does not occur only with the decisive mirror phase but has a more inherent and earlier source in the corporeality of the body itself. The first sites of difference in consciousness are articulated by the agency of *abjection*. The logic of mimesis, constitutive of the mirror phase, is preceded by the logic of rejection: “repugnance, disgust, abjection.” Looking at it from a hypothetical angle *preceding* the mirror phase, abjection is the response of the body to the threat of engulfment imposed on it by the Outside. The Other penetrates the

²⁶ This is the heart of the argument in, for example, Francis Barker’s account of the birth of the hollow subject of modernity in his *The Tremulous Private Body. Essays on Subjection* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984). I will later rely on Barker’s analysis of the treatment and containment of the body when I scrutinize the clash of two world models and the similarities between the protomodern and the postmodern.

subject (which is not yet one), whose rejection marks out a space, a demarcated site of the abject, but, at the same time, this site can now serve to “*separate* the abject from what will be a subject and its objects.”²⁷ Looking at it from the angle that follows Oedipalization and the subject’s positioning in the Symbolic Order, the abject is always that which is a *non-object*, a non-signifiable other for the subject. In the sight of the abject, meaning does not emerge, and the identity of the subject collapses: the borderline subject is brought back to its heterogeneous foundations with no symbolic fixation to mark out the poles of its subjectivity. The body as such is an example of the abject, but the most pure instance is the abjected body, the mutilated, dissolving, or rather the wholly other body: the corpse, the *cadaver*.

Everything that is improper, unclean, fluid, or heterogeneous is abject to the subject. “Abjection is above all *ambiguity*.”²⁸ The ambiguous, the borderline, the disgusting do not become an object for the subject because they are non-signifiable: *without an object*, the subject’s desire for meaning is rejected, and it is jolted out of identity into a space where fixation and meaning collapse.

Claude Lévi-Strauss and the semiotic orientation of structuralist anthropology have already demonstrated that culture as a semiotic mechanism is articulated like a language. The social structure is a system of interrelated signifying positions that differ according to the various amounts of power invested in them in comparison to a center. This system of differences is governed by key signifiers (incest, fetish, Phallus, Name-of-the-Father). One of the most important dualities that define culture - as opposed to the non-signified, the non-culture - is organized by the logic of the abject. Specific sites of reality (the sexual and corporeal body, the unclean, the feminine, the insane, the deviant, etc.) have always been ritualistically expelled from the scope of the symbolic primarily because culture defines itself through a logic of opposition: we are everything that is contrary to these.

²⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

In light of the above, the staging of the abject body, the anatomization of corporeality, the thematization of violence in protomodern and postmodern cultural representations in general, and in drama and theater in particular, can be examined as a *representational technique*, an attempt to transgress, subvert or unsettle the dominant discourse, as well as a strategy to formulate possibilities for a *totality of representation* in an age of representational crisis and uncertainty.

2

The Early Modern Subject

In this chapter I will delineate a theory of the subject in early modern English drama on the basis of the theoretical considerations formulated in the postsemiotics of the constitution of the subject. I will focus on the changing ideas of signification at the point when the symbolic world model starts to be unsettled and replaced by the syntagmatic world model. I am going to lay special emphasis on the transformation of representational techniques in the theater. This transformation reflects the re-evaluation of the human subject's position in the textuality of the world and its relation to reality, authority and ritual.

According to Robert Knapp, the appearance of literariness in dramatic form has to do with the emergence of professional theaters, and, primarily, with a change in the concepts of the *nature of representation* itself. This change assigns a new social status to dramatic (and artistic) discourse and inevitably connects it with politics, ideology and the idea of *authority*. In order for the audience to engage in an understanding proper or interpretation of dramatic or theatrical representation, the complete religious overcoding of such representations has to ease up.

Interpretation cannot occur where there is no puzzle as to meaning and application, yet these plays [i.e., medieval liturgical dramas – A.K.] seem so insistent about their disclosure and its use as to deprive an audience not only of enigma but even of the freedom to misread, thus nearly forestalling reading (as opposed to mere decoding) altogether.²⁹

Dramatic representation undergoes a radical change as theatrical Renaissance drama develops from, and as a counterpart of, medieval and early Tudor “narrative” drama. Medieval religious drama reports things, narrates a typological story that the whole audience is familiar with and part of. Renaissance drama emerges as a *mimetic art*, an art of doing, rather than reporting, which explores a different relationship between actor and individual *persona*, surface and reality, being and meaning, stage and audience. The transition from purely religious drama and emblematic interlude into literary drama and theatricality is part of a semiotic transformation in which the favorite metaphor of medieval epistemology, the “*book of life*” gives way to the Renaissance metaphor of the “*theater of the world*.” This replacement stems from changing ideas about the very nature of reality and also of signification, i.e., knowing and representing that reality. Art as representation appears in European culture at the same time when Shakespeare and his contemporaries are active, and a semiotic analysis of the history of the above-mentioned key metaphors explains the appearance of this new idea of representation which is bound to a new concept of authority.

In medieval theater, dramatic world and doctrine are inseparably bound together. Mysteries, moralities and miracles reveal the faithful image and likeness of God. The religious content of this drama strangely reverses the actor-audience relationship: the play becomes a reading of the world, and “the audience constitutes the material and active sign of which the plays are spiritual and eternal sense.”³⁰ Medieval drama, through the primary *figura* and all-generating trope of Christ, enacts the union of flesh and spirit, of the signifier and the signified, which is promised by God, the inscriber of all signs. In this world-view, we ourselves

²⁹ Robert Knapp, *Shakespeare - The Theater and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

and all the elements of reality are non-unitary signs in a larger body of writing, whose “letters” all point towards the ultimate signifier. This view of language and life, the idea of an “all-encompassing textuality” is based on what is generally referred to as the organic, symbolical world picture of the Great Chain of Being.³¹ Semiotically speaking (according to the tripartite typology of Peirce), however, it is actually grounded in the *logic of the icon*. In medieval *high semiotic* the elements of reality as icons in the textuality of the world are in a *motivated, direct* relationship with universals and with the generating figure of the Absolute, or Christ, who is the pure manifestation of the union of Flesh and Spirit, signifier and signified.³² This philosophy (which will be attacked later by nominalism and reformed theology) offers the task of becoming God as the only step out of this textuality, the Book of Life. Thus, medieval drama aims at *transparency*; it does not impose an interpretive task on the audience; it reports and presents rather than imitates. Yet this transparency is illusionistic since religious drama always copes with a “representational insufficiency,” for Christ can never totally be present, the restoration of the unity between flesh and spirit can never really be achieved on the stage. The transparency of representation becomes *problematized* once the Book of Life metaphor gives way, in Protestantism, to the question whether a human being has signifying value at all. Medieval drama cannot become literary because it fails to raise the *interpretive instinct or challenge* in the audience. No great drama exists without a possibility for heroism, for individual responsibility and change on the stage and some possibility for misunderstanding on the side of the audience (as opposed to pure didacticism and transparency of representation). However, this individual responsibility, which is the ground of the psychological

³¹ For an explanation of the Great Chain of Being we can still rely on E. M. W. Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Macmillan, 1946). Although Tillyard’s book has been one of the primary targets of the New Historicism, and his ideas about the English Renaissance as the last upholder of the harmony and order of the Medieval heritage of early modern Europe have provided a distorted and biased picture of the Elizabethan period, his explications, handled with due criticism, are still important sources of information.

³² Julia Kristeva explains the emergence of Renaissance writing as a shift from the logic of the motivated symbol into that of the unmotivated sign. “From Symbol to Sign.” In Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*. ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 62-73. I am relying on Lotman’s “Problems in the Typology of Cultures” for the idea of *high semiotic* in the Medieval world model.

realism of later plays, necessitates self-knowledge and a scrutiny of identity. Commenting on the theological conflicts between old Catholics and new Protestants, Robert Knapp summarizes the deepest ontological and epistemological question of this transitory period:

...the basic issue is a semiotic one: what kind of a sign is a human being, how does that sign relate to the will of both speaker and hearer, and who is to be credited with the intention which any sign presumably expresses?³³

Does the human being carry semantic value? Is it a sign or a writer of signs? Is it writing or just being written? These are the questions that effect the development of a new theatrical discourse, which is based on a new idea of textuality.

Before Elizabethan “literary” drama emerges in its full, the characters of medieval drama on the stage are symbols (in Kristeva’s sense of the term), not real individuals. The relationship between person and figura, character and universal idea is ontological, based on an intrinsic analogy: Cain and his men are all *members* and *images* of Satan, or the great kind, the Vice.

Thus to reverse the normal polarity of actors and audience has the advantage of giving proper weight to the prophetic aspect of this theater. Far from encouraging us to see our own reality mirrored on stage, both mysteries and moralities plainly urge us to take them as the reality for which we are the imperfect and distracted sign.³⁴

Reformed theology and Protestantism, on the other hand, reject intrinsic natural analogy in man with these kinds, and therefore Tudor drama (even the interludes) relies on an *external* likeness between character and person: the relationship is not ontological, but rhetorical and imitative, and so new concepts of representation and *mimesis* can emerge. Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Edmund in *King Lear* or Vindice in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are no longer “parts”

³³ Knapp, *Shakespeare – The Theater and the Book*, 104.

³⁴ Knapp, 50.

of Revenge or the Vice. Protestant theology, in order for the image of God to be pure, makes the human signifier a passive unit which does not intrinsically signify or refer to something else. The motivated relationship between the Absolute and the signifying capacity of the subject is denied. This new theology, of course, provides a radically different context for the problem of human action itself, imposing a greater individual responsibility on the person, and many critics interpret this solitude and helplessness as the source of a radical humanism in early modern drama.³⁵ Protestantism endows faith and prayer with all the powers to assist the human being in its relationship with God, but it simultaneously does away with all intermediaries, catalysts of communication and assistants that used to mediate between the heavenly and the earthly spheres. The highly apocalyptic atmosphere of the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often suggests that the human being appears to be left alone in a cruel and incalculable universe. This uncertainty is further intensified by the changing understanding of death and the afterlife. Passing away terminates an individual history which thus receives greater importance, especially since the denial of Purgatory by Protestantism inserts a radical discontinuity between life and afterlife.

The ending of Purgatory thus caused grievous psychological damage: from that point forward the living were, in effect, distanced from the dead. [...] To balance the traumatic effect of the loss of Purgatory the Protestant churches gradually developed the theory of memoria, which stressed the didactic potential of the lives and deaths of the virtuous.³⁶

³⁵ See, for example William R. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (University of Kentucky Press, 1988). Elton argues that the absence and silence of transcendental or divine forces in *King Lear* is indicative not only of the epistemological and theological uncertainties of the English Renaissance but also of the independence and autonomy that Shakespeare's humanism grants for the human being. Harry Keyishian also comments on the questioning of divine providence with reference to Elton: "As W. R. Elton and others have convincingly argued, the role of divine providence in human affairs was coming to be questioned (if discretely) even among the community of Christian believers. [...] explanations could encourage victimized individuals to take justice into their own hands rather than to wait for providence to manifest on their behalf." Harry Keyishian, *The Shapes of Revenge. Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 11.

³⁶ Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 27-28.

The early modern Protestant can only rely on itself and its faith: this can obviously result either in an increased dignity or a radical desperation.³⁷

Protestants sought to establish for all the faithful an intense and personal relationship between the individual and God. They were not content that religion should consist of causal or external observance. Hence the attack on the mediatory functions by which the Church had traditionally interposed itself – saints, the Latin Bible and ritual, the priest, indulgences. [...] But by taking from the Church the responsibility for the quality of the relationship between people and God the Reformation placed a burden upon every believer. How can one gain God's favour? The only safe answer was that one can't: one can be pleasing to God only through God's extraordinary generosity.³⁸

The “readable,” medieval world of guaranteed interconnections and motivated meanings gives way to a dramatic reality, and a new *semiotic anxiety* emerges because of the dissonance between desire and actuality. Once this anxiety and desire are suppressed and contained in new discursive practices, the foundations of modernism are laid. Instead of the symbol (i.e., the motivated, metaphysical sign in semiotic terms), as Kristeva would say, the sign (i.e., the unmotivated symbol of semiotics) emerges as a non-motivated element in a horizontal system of cause and effect relationships. Formulated in the Peircean typology, we are moving from an iconic world model towards an indexical world model, where the relationship between elements of reality as signifiers and a presupposed origin of creation is causal, but no longer so direct and motivated as it used to be.

The shift from a transparent, narrative mode of dominant representation to a dramatic, theatrical mode replaces ritual with *ideology*. The gap in the semiotic field between experience and reality, being and meaning, history and ideas opens up, and, as a result, there arise a number of ideological discourses to *control*

³⁷ Jonathan Dollimore identifies this despair as the main reason for the radical and anti-essentialist nature of English Renaissance tragedy in *Radical Tragedy. Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³⁸ Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England 1560-1660* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), 7-8.

representation, to contain within limits more radical practices that aim at subverting the metaphysical structure of authority still based on the vertical world model. Censorship becomes one of the most important technologies of power to control the circulation of possible meanings. Francis Barker argues that early modern discursive practices are based on the very idea of the narrative, i.e., the belief that the meaning of reality is representable and controllable through language, and these new discourses will define their very mode of existence in relation to censorship and surveillance.³⁹

According to Knapp, this uncertainty and the semiotic anxiety produce a *desire* (for the Real, for authority, for the Other, for the Absolute with which the subject no longer has guaranteed and mediated contact) which enters the new drama in three new themes: the production of corpses, the love of women, and violent, disruptive theatrical rhetoric. The semiotic nature and grounds of these themes can now be investigated in light of the above delineated semiotic metamorphoses, in order to see how the theater endeavors to address the epistemological question “it can best model.”

During the late sixteenth century, when a whole new generation of intellectuals had received a humanistic and Protestant training in governing themselves by the elaborated code of the book....; when new versions of old kinds of authority – patriarchal, political, theological, mercantile – were being put forward; when English actors found themselves in need of new authority (both political and literary) in order to occupy their newly cleared and commercialized space for drama: this was a moment when the two axes of language could display themselves in the structure and subject matter of that most public of arts, the theater. For the issue so visibly in question at this moment – perhaps the most fundamental of all personal and social issues – was just the one that theater can best model: the question of whether an individual actor is a nonunitary sign in some larger writing, or himself (herself being interestingly problematic...) a writer of signs.⁴⁰

³⁹ Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*. Chapter I. 13-29.

⁴⁰ Knapp, *Shakespeare – The Theater and the Book*, 130.

Renaissance drama was designed for a live theater that aimed at involving the audience in the experience of representational attempts to get beyond the epistemological uncertainties and questionable meanings surrounding the subject, to envelop the spectator in a complex effect the meaning and relevance of which were unquestionable. This attempt was chiefly realized through the *logic of involvement* which was based on long-established traditional techniques of stage-audience interaction. As Robert Weimann explains in his seminal study on the popular traditions of the early modern theater, the agents of audience involvement (such as the figure of the Vice as an engine of action) were active in the frontal, interactive part of the platform stage which he calls *platea*. The more mimetic, self-enclosed enaction was taking place in the interior of the stage which Weimann calls *locus*. The Elizabethan theater inherited these arrangements from the late medieval mystery and miracle plays, through the dramaturgically more complex morality plays.

The relationship between *locus* and *platea* was, to be sure, complex and variable...But as a rule the English scaffold corresponds to the continental *domus*, *tentus*, or *sedes* which delimit a more or less fixed and focused scenic unit. [...] Unlike this *loca*, which could assume an illusionary character, the *platea* provided an entirely nonrepresentational and unlocalized setting; it was the broad and general acting area in which the communal festivities were conducted.⁴¹

Platea-oriented characters in early modern English drama continue the tradition of the medieval morality plays to transpose the world of the drama onto the world of the audience, very often directly addressing the spectators. This characteristic feature of the English Renaissance theater worked according to two basic modes, both of which actually aimed at an unsettling and a reconstitution of the spectator's *identity* through the theatrical experience.

⁴¹ Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 79. For a performance-oriented and semiotic reading of the traditions and capacities of the Vice, see Ágnes Matuska, *The Vice Device: Iago and Lear's Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2010). I am grateful to Ágnes Matuska for her valuable insights into the logic of the Vice during our consultations.

The logic of comedy is based on the carnivalesque involvement in laughter and reveling: the foregrounding of joy and the practice of laughter unsettles the identity of the spectator. Eros, the metaphor for desire and fertility, liberates the flesh from the symbolic position, from the law of the father, and the concrete rhythm of laughter is propelled by the agency of the semiotic modality of the subject, now breaking to the surface. In comedy, the body speaks in laughter. On the metaphorical level, this involvement celebrates the communal belief in the reintegrative capacity of society and the human being's ability to solve social problems collectively.

Tragedy, on the other hand, involves the spectator in the theatrical experience of *testimony*, which is the act of bearing witness to the *sacrifice*, the foregrounding of death. The actor in tragedy tries to dominate the flesh around him, so he produces corpses (or tries to grasp the body in its non-symbolized reality) since Death comes closest to the wholly Other, the wholly Real. In the Lacanian sense all signification is grounded in the foregrounding of absence, of something which is lacking, and thus the cadaver is the pure signifier since it achieves the greatest intensity in signification by signifying the absence of life. The corpse, the abject body, dissolves the distinction between signifier and signified, representation and reality. It rejects symbolically codified social meanings that are based on the absence of the represented thing and deprives the subject of its identity: the corpse does not signify — it “*shows*.”⁴² The theatrical semiotics of testimony, the experience of being a witness depends on the unsettling of the subject's identity.⁴³

Sexuality, the body and disruptive discourse: all being present both in Renaissance comedy and tragedy, they participate in a semiotic attempt to devise representational techniques that surpass the very limits of representation and

⁴² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

⁴³ For an excellent application of the theory of abjection to the problematic of catharsis and tragic experience in Renaissance tragedy, see Zenón Luis-Martínez, *In Words and Deeds. The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2002), esp. I.2. “The tragic experience: catharsis, the uncanny, and the abject.” 52-62.

appear to establish an immediate access to the Real. Later on, in the mannerism of Stuart drama this attempt indeed will gradually turn into an ironic and also subversive denial of the possibility of such totalizing techniques. In order to trace the emergence of this irony, however, we have to examine in greater detail the theatrical logic of stage representation in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and theater, as well as the relationship between theater and authority. In the early development of Elizabethan drama, the emblematic theater relies on the iconographic traditions and aims at constituting a totality of representational effects in order to establish some immediacy of experience in response to the epistemological uncertainties. Following these attempts, in the period of a gradual transition from emblematic into photographic theater, the real subversive power of the theater will be not merely in the questioning or critique of ideology and authority, but in the problematization and negation of total representational techniques in which all ideologies and power structures are grounded. This is the semiotic perspective which gives us, I believe, a more subtle and semiotic understanding of theatrical subversion commonly theorized in the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. It is from this perspective that we can understand *Titus Andronicus* as something more than mere sensationalism, this helps us interpret *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a mock metadrama which parodies earlier stage effects and philosophizing, and this will reveal how the macabre techniques of *The Duchess of Malfi* ironically reflect on earlier representations of corporeality and dying.

A semiotic analysis of the three themes introduced above will inevitably lead to debates about the nature of representation in English Renaissance drama. Arguments about the dominance of the word or the image on the Renaissance stage of course pertain to the questions of staging the corpse, the sexual body or the questioning of the power of discourse. At the same time, I think the peculiarity of early modern English stage history is that Elizabethan plays start foregrounding those traditional emblematic ways of representation which will get exhausted and which will be short-circuited and criticized by Jacobean and Caroline drama, thus

providing a negative semiotic answer to the epistemological uncertainty of the turn of the century. However, the undecidability, the *play* between meaning and the questioning of that meaning keeps creating a special theatrical effect in these plays which involves the spectator in the semiotic experience of *jouissance*.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “In Julia Kristeva’s vocabulary, sensual, sexual pleasure is covered by plaisir; ‘*jouissance*’ is total joy or ecstasy (without any mystical connotation): also, through the working of the signifier, this implies the *presence of meaning* (*jouissance* = j’ouis sens = I heard meaning), requiring it by going beyond it.” Introduction by Leon S. Roudiez to Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 16.

The Semiotics of the Emblematic Theater

In order to see the early modern problematic of representation and the themes of the subject, abjection and the body in their social and theatrical context, it is indispensable to discuss the semiotics of the emblem and emblematic representation, since the emblematic mode of thinking was constitutive of the *representational logic* of the contemporary stage as well as the intensified semiotic activities of the Renaissance in general.⁴⁵

There is a long-established debate in Renaissance criticism about the importance of the visual in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater. Besides writings defining the theatrical representations of the late 16th century as essentially verbal in nature, we have an increasing number of iconographic and semiotic studies investigating the visual, emblematic strategies of encoding and decoding in

⁴⁵ For the emblematic as typical of the early modern paradigm of thinking and seeing, see: György E. Szönyi. "The 'Emblematic' as a Way of Thinking and Seeing in Renaissance Culture." *e-Colloquia*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2003) (<http://ecolloquia.btk.ppke.hu/issues/200301/> access: January 11, 2010). I am going to treat the emblem as a typical example of those intensified semiotic activities that emerge in society in epistemologically unstable periods to search new methodologies of knowledge and representation. For the concept of the intensified semiosis in culture, see Jurij M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspensky. "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture." In Adams and Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965*, 410-422.

dramatic performances of the period. In these approaches the focus on dramatic text is replaced by what can be defined as the *performance text*, a hypothetical reconstruction of the original staging and enactment, which employed the playwright's text as a skeleton to be completed through the multiplicity of sign channels that are at work in the theater. This reconstruction is always necessarily hypothetical, since we never have total access to the codes of the contemporary theatrical meaning-production, and our understanding of the early modern theater will inevitably bear the signs of our own historical horizon of expectations. However, in the absence of such a reconstruction, the dramatic texts are almost impossible to activate since they were all systematically designed and intended for the contemporary stage, a stage that was essentially emblematic in nature. Glynne Wickham was one of the first scholars to emphasize this emblematic logic:

...both the landscape settings of the Masks and the photographic realism of television must be erased from our minds if we wish to resume contact with the Elizabethan theatre and its methods. We must contrive to forget these images of actuality which have, for so long now, invited audiences to accept things seen and heard on stage or screen at their face value. Instead we must try to substitute a vision of actors and dramatists working in a theatre that was as acutely alive to the phenomena of actuality as we are, but which preferred to devote its energies to interpreting these phenomena as emblems of the spiritual realities behind them. Secular the Elizabethan theatre undoubtedly became as a result of state censorship: but the emblematic form of dramatic art which is presented to its audiences was recognizable still as a legacy from the theatre of worship that had developed in the Middle Ages.⁴⁶

In the general semiotics of drama and theater, the performance text is a complex macrotext, interpreted by a system of codes shared by both actors and audience. A performance-oriented semiotic approach restores the dramatic text to the special *theatrical logic* of the age on the basis of these code systems. This logic includes not only the various techniques of staging, verbal and visual

⁴⁶ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300 to 1600. Volume Two 1576 to 1660, Part I* (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 9.

enactment but also the spectators' interpretive practices and *semiotic attitudes* to the theatrical experience and to reality in general. The theatrical logic of the Renaissance stage to a large extent relied upon a special semiotic consciousness and upon the emblematic horizon of expectations of the audience. If we do not understand this, our readings and reinterpretations of Renaissance drama can only be partial and limited.⁴⁷

In this chapter I attempt to problematize the semiotics of this theatrical logic and to theorize the connection between Renaissance emblem literature and the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage as a typically semiotic phenomenon, which occurs in a period that witnesses the meeting of two competing world models – the earlier Medieval world model being questioned and unsettled, and the new Enlightenment-type world model being just emergent. I will argue that the emblem as a genre and the emblematic strategies of the theater participate in the same *semiotic endeavor* which characterizes the cognitive system of the early modern period in England. In order to situate the emblem and the emblematic theater within the semiotic practices of the English Renaissance, we will have to clear up some confusion in terminology, which is mainly due to the common failure in criticism to distinguish between metaphoric, symbolic and emblematic ways of representation.

The classical three-piece emblem gained immense popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries chiefly through the several editions of Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum Liber* of 1531, which consisted of 212 Latin emblems,

⁴⁷ For the semiotics of drama and theater I rely on Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), and Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). I employ the concept of the representational logic of the stage on the basis of Alan Dessen's idea that early modern plays employed codes and instructions that made full sense to the contemporary actor or spectator, but may make little sense to us. This theatrical vocabulary, a large part of which is indeed emblematic, must be studied in order for us to be able to activate these texts. Dessen, like many other performance-oriented interpreters, contends that "...Shakespeare was crafting theatrical scripts rather than literary texts; the stage directions and other signals in those scripts were directed not at us but at players, playgoers, and readers who shared a language of the theatre easily lost or obscured today." Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary*, 39.

each with a motto, a picture and an epigrammatic text. The emblem was neglected for quite some time in literary criticism, and it was not until the revival of interest in emblematology and the critical studies of the 1970s that some scholars started to define it as a separate genre with distinctive characteristics. From a semiotic perspective, the emblem is a representational curiosity. It consists of an *inscriptio*, a *pictura* and a *subscriptio*, thus employing *different sign channels* to convey a complex meaning which is to be deciphered through the contemplative and simultaneous reading of the particular channels. Often the content is a mixture of classical mythology, Christian doctrine and esoteric teachings. To take an example, Emblem 8 of Alciato's collection (here from a 1621 edition) with the motto "Where the gods call, there one must go" represents Mercury, the messenger of the gods, awaiting those who desire the presence and wisdom of the divine God.

**Alciati *Emblematum liber viii*
Quà dii vocant, eundum**

In trivio mons est lapidum: supereminet illi
Trunca Dei effigies, pectore facta tenus.
Mercurii est igitur tumulus: suspende viator
Serta Deo, rectum qui tibi monstret iter.
Omnes in trivio sumus, atque hoc tramite vitae
Fallimur, ostendat ni Deus ipse viam.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ For the complete emblem with the visual *pictura*, consult: <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=A21a008> (access: January 20, 2010).

Semiotically, the emblem manifests a fundamental *semiotic desire* to devise a complex sign which is so polysemous that it transcends our normal epistemology and establishes direct contact with reality or the Absolute.⁴⁹ As a genre and a meditational object, the emblem is what Dietrich W. Jöns calls the “last spiritual attempt to conceive of reality in its totality through exegetical methods.”⁵⁰ The peculiar multi-channeled semiotic nature of the emblem is also noted in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*:

Whether pictorial, verbal, or gestural, the idea of the emblem corresponds to an apparently fundamental semiotic longing, that the mind may devise a sign so polysemous and multivalent, yet so evident, that it will transcend our normal epistemological processes.⁵¹

The emblem tradition had a powerful presence in early modern England as well, an outstanding example of which is Geoffrey Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes* (Leiden 1568), which was the most important reception of Alciato's *Emblematum Liber*. Whitney included the English translation of 87 emblems from Alciato's collection, but the one I would like to take as an example here is independent of

⁴⁹ For the emblem as a separate genre, see Tibor Fabiny. “Literature and Emblems. New Aspects in Shakespeare Studies.” In Tibor Fabiny, ed., *Shakespeare and the Emblem: Studies in Renaissance Iconography and Iconology* (Szeged: Attila József University, 1984), 7-56; Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), esp. Ch. I. “The Emblem.” 3-53; *Emblem Theory. Recent German Contributions to the Characterization of the Emblem Genre* (Nendeln / Lichtenstein: KTO Press, 1979); Pa International Emblem Conference 1995 Pittsburgh - Michael Bath - Daniel S. Russell, *Deviceful Setting: The English Renaissance Emblem and Its Contexts* (AMS Press, 1996).

⁵⁰ Dietrich Walter Jöns, *Das “Sinnen-Bild.” Studien zur allegorischen Bildlichkeit bei Andreas Gryphius* (Stuttgart, 1966), quoted in Fabiny, ed., *Shakespeare and the Emblem*, 7.

⁵¹ Thomas A. Sebeok, gen. ed., *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter; Second edition, 1994), Vol. I. 221. “Emblem.” The dictionary entry also notes here that the emblem represents the typically Neoplatonic endeavor to condense as much meaning into a sign as possible in order to reach to the Absolute. “...Ficino argued that whereas the human mind can grasp only sequentially the various propositions of a symbolic image, the divine Mind can encompass their totality simultaneously. Thus the more meanings one might instantly and intuitively perceive in an emblem, the higher one raised one's mind toward participation in the divine *Mens*.”

Alciato and employs a commonplace that is also a recurring motif of early modern tragedies: "Truth is the daughter of time."

Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes* 4

Veritas temporis filia

Three furies fell, which turne the worlde to ruthe,
Both Envie, Strife, and Slaunder, heare appeare,
In dungeon darke they longe inclosed truthe,
But Time at lengthe, did loose his daughter deare,
And setts alofte, that sacred ladie brighte,
Whoe things longe hidd, reveales, and bringes to lighte.

Thoughe strife make fier, thoughe Envie eate hir harte,
The innocent though Slaunder rente, and spoile:
Yet Time will comme, and take this ladies parte,
And breake her bandes, and bring her foes to foile.
Dispaire not then, thoughe truthe be hidden ofte,
Bycause at length, shee shall bee sett alofte.⁵²

There are several interpretive traditions behind this endeavor in the emblem, and as a semiotic attempt it is located within a historical process of the transformation of ideas about signification and world-textuality during the late Renaissance, delineated in the preceding chapters. Besides the *high semioticity* of the medieval world model and the Neoplatonic emphasis on the power of the *visual* sign as opposed to verbal representation, we have in the late Renaissance the emergence of a new, skeptical semiotic way of thinking. A transition commences from the dominance of the motivated symbol into the dominance of the passive, unmotivated sign. Earlier on, the universe as an ordered hierarchy of symbolical correspondences was conceivable and comprehensible through the multiplicity of meanings that constituted a chain. The meaning of this chain of vertical interconnections was guaranteed by the Absolute. Foucault describes this

⁵² For the complete emblem with the visual *pictura*, consult: <http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/whitn004.htm> (access: January 20, 2010).

pan-metaphoric analogical world model in terms of the all-enveloping idea of the similitude:

Let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning, hermeneutics; let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to distinguish the location of the signs, to define what constitutes them as signs, and to know how and by what laws they are linked, semiology: the sixteenth century superimposed hermeneutics and semiology in the form of similitude. To search for the meaning is to bring to light a resemblance. To search for the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike. The grammar of beings is an exegesis of these things.⁵³

With the advent of the mechanical world model, belief and trust in the divinely motivated meanings of correspondences start to fade, and the new, gradually emerging epistemology looks for single, reliable meanings that are to be collected through empirical observation and tested through rational reasoning. At the end of the sixteenth century the transition starts to occur. The former religious - symbolic world model is still very much in place, but it is dislocated by the signs of the new syntagmatic world model, resulting in an all-embracing epistemological and representational uncertainty. The interpretive uncertainty of the age is expressed by the changing concepts of representation: the “Book of Nature” of the *Specula Mundi* tradition, which had been one of the favorite metaphors of the Middle Ages, is replaced by the revival of the classical commonplace about the “the theater of the world.”

This gradual process of the competition of two opposing world models is understandable through the semiotic typology of cultures. Culture, which is a semiotic process that structures reality, suffers a crisis when a dominant world model is replaced by another. This crisis, according to Jurij M. Lotman and Boris Uspensky, is accompanied by an *intensified semiotic activity*, an epistemological

⁵³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 29. For the idea of panmetaphoricity as the belief in the guaranteed meaning and interrelatedness of every element of reality, see Miriam Taverniers, *Metaphor and Metaphorology. A selective genealogy of philosophical and linguistic conceptions of metaphor from Aristotle to the 1990s* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2002).

quest which manifests itself in the attempts to devise new ways of signification and approaches to reality.⁵⁴

I contend that the emblem can be defined as a genre emerging in the intensified semiotic activity of this epistemological crisis. It is a *compound sign* which indicates the triumph of the *image* in the midst of methodological debates about the power of visual versus verbal representation in the early modern period. In sixteenth century England, we have a vast number of symbolic representations continuously circulated in society. Medals, devices, *impresas*, emblems, occult diagrams and hieroglyphs, pageants, and exegetical illustrations all manifest the Neoplatonic belief that the *pictura* has more power to establish a dialogue with the Absolute.⁵⁵ This belief is the foundation of that early modern representational boom against which iconoclasm will launch a major attack later on. It should be noted that the traditions of the *spectacle* were of course deployed as one of the most important *technologies of power* in Elizabethan England, “making greatness familiar,”⁵⁶ and current discourses on the English Renaissance are greatly indebted to the findings of the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism which provided us with a more complex view of the antagonisms of the age through the perspective of the critique of ideology. Nevertheless, I believe that the various traditions of the spectacle also need to be scrutinized through the semiotic typology of early modern culture, and this scrutiny will cast new light on the emblem and the influence it bears upon the theatrical representations of the age.

We have discovered an attempt in the semiosis of the emblem to convey a complex, totalizing, multi-leveled meaning, and this strategy is constitutive of the Tudor and the Stuart stages as well. The pan-metaphoric attitude to reality has long been held accountable for the *emblematic horizon of expectations* in the Elizabethan audience. This analogical world view, with the Neoplatonic

⁵⁴ Lotman and Uspensky. “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture.” 410.

⁵⁵ See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 61, 63.

⁵⁶ See Orgel. “Making Greatness Familiar.” Orgel, like the New Historicism in general, understands social spectacle and theatricality as a technology of power which puts the visual presence of authority on display so that it is internalized by the docile subjects.

philosophy of the interrelated microcosm and macrocosm in its center, was an integral and central constituent of the early modern world model, and it provides the foundation of the Tillyardian ideas about the Elizabethan world picture as the last example of a vanishing, ordered and harmonious world picture. Such idealizations had been dominant until the middle of the twentieth century, and they have been rightly problematized in the general decanonization of Shakespearean drama and the new historicist approaches.⁵⁷ I would still like to argue that this problematization does not diminish the importance of the iconographical and social traditions of visibility in the period, and we lose sight of constitutive aspects of the early modern dramatic texts if we do not try to make them work according to the *theatrical logic* of the contemporary stage. This logic was still grounded in the high semioticity inherited from the Middle Ages, and it enabled the stage representation to use an extremely small number of properties to evoke a broad *context* of connotative references through symbolical meanings. This is what I define as the *emblematic logic of representation*, and this definition has to be based on a distinction between symbolic versus emblematic codes as well as a differentiation between emblematic genre and emblematic value.

Traditional approaches to emblematic theater identify representations of literary emblems in the dramatic text and argue that the emblematic allusion situates the scene in a broader symbolic context and provides a basis for a more complex meaning and reading. Nevertheless, they often speak about emblematic representation when there is no literary emblem identifiable on the stage or in the text, or when it is difficult to see why they call the meaning emblematic instead of symbolic or metaphoric. This terminological confusion calls for a new definition of emblematic decoding.

⁵⁷ See Robert Weimann. "Shakespeare (De) Canonized: Conflicting Uses of 'Authority' and 'Representation'." *New Literary History* 20.1. 1988. 65-81. For a radical criticism of "Tillyardism" and a more critical concept of the Renaissance subject see: Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, and Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

Following the investigations of Glynne Wickham and Peter M. Daly, I define the emblematic code as one which *assigns a context of symbolic connotations* to a sign in order to enlarge its scope of possible meanings. In the theatrical performance text, literary emblems become important subtexts when they are identified by the spectator as a symbolic or moral commentary on the meaning of the scene, opening up a broader context of associations. This is, for example, how the *memento mori* tradition is evoked in Falstaff's words "do not speak like a death's head: do not bid me remember mine end."⁵⁸ Images of the *danse macabre* or "the gate of the underworld" are associated with Hamlet's jumping into the grave of Ophelia. However, there does not necessarily have to be a literary emblem behind the theatrical representation in order for the audience to start the process of symbolic – emblematic decoding. Upon witnessing Kent put into the stocks, contemporary spectators had the necessary repertoire of codes to interpret the scene as the familiar image of Truth subdued and put into the stocks – a very popular pattern in Tudor interludes and emblematic representations. This identification sets off a *dissemination* of symbolic references, ranging from traditionally circulated representations of Truth to the tradition of the commonplace *Veritas Filia Temporis*.⁵⁹ The allusion to the "Truth is the daughter of Time" imagery, which is persistent in *King Lear* and in Shakespearean tragedy in general, creates new ways to interpret the scene.

When an indexical code enables the spectator to identify the representation of a sword as an attribute of the King, a symbolic code gives the sign the connotation of nobility and honesty. The emblematic code situates these connotations within a network of references so that the sword can represent not only Monarchic but Godly authority as well as the attribute of Justice as opposed to the "corruption" of the dagger. Furthermore, in its emblematic stage use the sword can easily be employed as a cross, with all its religious and providential

⁵⁸ *Henry IV Part 2*, 2. 4. 218. All references to Shakespearean plays are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*. ed. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).

⁵⁹ See Tibor Fabiny. "Veritas Filia Temporis. The Iconography of Time and Truth and Shakespeare." In Fabiny, ed., *Shakespeare and the Emblem*, 215-274.

associations; as a mirror, in which the ruler can behold his or her image in an event of self-examination; or as an emblem of the entire country.

Allan Dessen warns us that only the potential pragmatics of the stage can govern the workings of these connotations since it is exactly the *semiotic polyphony* of the verbal and visual texts of the theater which activates these potentialities.⁶⁰ Important meanings and associations are lost or suppressed if the emblematic values of signs are not taken into consideration in the theatrical production. We have seen different ways of staging the scene in *King Lear* when Gloucester is blinded. In film adaptations as well as stage productions Cornwall is presented using various tools for this representation of horror: he employs a metal spoon, his fingers, sharp objects or weapons. However, these solutions ignore the fact that there is explicit reference in the text to how Gloucester's head is stamped on, that is, his eyes are kicked out.⁶¹ If the visual representation avoids this image of stamping on an old, venerable patriarch's head, the scene fails to participate in a network of connotations or references to the head as emblematic of respectability, of the Christian bond which ties the young to the old or man to order. In short, and in my definition, in the above mentioned staging the scene fails to achieve its full emblematic status.⁶²

The prologue in *Henry V* is our most often quoted source of information on how the emblematic stage representation in Elizabethan drama relied on the "imaginary forces" of the audience,⁶³ presupposing the collaborative, imaginative participation of the spectator. The *theatrical interaction* between stage and auditorium was a long-established tradition, and specific *agents of involvement* were responsible for maintaining audience participation in Shakespeare's theater.

⁶⁰ Alan Dessen. "Shakespeare's Patterns for the Viewer's Eye: Dramaturgy for the Open Stage." In Sidney Homan ed., *Shakespeare's More Than Words Can Witness: Essays on Visual and Nonverbal Enactment in the Plays* (London – Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980), 92-107.

⁶¹ "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot." *King Lear*, Cornwall, 3. 7. 68.

⁶² For the importance of emblematic images and the *emblematic tableaux* in *King Lear*, see also John Reibetanz. "Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*." In Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff, eds., *Some Facets of King Lear: Essays in Prismatic Criticism* (London: Heinemann; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 39-57.

⁶³ *Henry V*, Prologue, 8-18.

This interactive nature of the emblematic theater imposed a complex semiotic task on the audience, and in performing this task they did not simply decode but also *created or encoded emblematic meanings* on the basis of the polysemous potentialities of the actual stage representation. This semiotic disposition played a very important part in the strategies of interpreting the character or the play as a whole. Emblem studies, such as the groundbreaking article by Dieter Mehl on the emblems identifiable in Renaissance drama, have long observed the functional role of emblematic representations in early modern drama and the theater for which they were designed.⁶⁴ These descriptions, however, for a long time remained quite static and mechanical, without laying emphasis on the role of the spectators who were actively involved in the world of the play by the various techniques of code-sharing and stage-audience interaction. Commenting on the shortcomings of Mehl, John Reibetanz also stresses the participation of the audience in the decoding of emblematic value.

In every example adduced by Mehl, it is the characters who give full emblematic interpretations to objects or relationships around them. They give the impression of having themselves read emblem books. Our interest will be directed primarily towards those scenes where it is only the audience who perceives such emblematic meaning. These scenes are so constructed as to encourage *us* to trace emblematic figures, while the characters are unaware of them and are engaged in other activities. [...] the emblems we shall cite exist as emblems apart from any characters' consciousness, and require us to stand momentarily back from the action in order to perceive their outlines and their significance. Like set pieces, they briefly interrupt our involvement in the flow of events in order to foster a more profound involvement in the world of the play.⁶⁵

I subscribe to the point made by Reibetanz with regard to the active role of the spectators, but I would also go farther that this in arguing that the emblematic codes shared by both actors and audience enabled the theater-goers of Elizabethan and Jacobean England to actively produce, that is, encode emblematic meanings

⁶⁴ Dieter Mehl. "Emblems in English Renaissance Drama." *Renaissance Drama* 2 (1969), 39-57.

⁶⁵ Reibetanz. "Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*." 42.

in the performances, even if these were not directly intended by the playwright or the representation on the stage. The emblematic representational logic fostered this semiotic readiness in the audience, and the pan-metaphoric attitude which applied to the general view of the world was also active during a theatrical performance.

The development of characterization in the early modern English theater took place within the overall metamorphosis of ideas about the semiotic status of the human being as signifier in particular, and the textuality of the world in general. Earlier I attempted to summarize how, by the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the emerging syntagmatic world model starts gradually to desemioticize reality and the human being's place in it. The human being no longer has such an active semantic value which could automatically affect or manipulate God, the Ultimate Signifier. The sign in general starts to become more passive, less motivated, and the allegorical transparency of medieval semi-dramatic representations is replaced by mimetic, psychological characters and actions. This, however, does not yet result in the disappearance of symbolic values in the stage representation. The emblematic devices and systems of *decoding and encoding*, which were inherited from the medieval traditions, are at work *simultaneously* with the emergent and developing techniques of mimetic role-playing and, later on, with the questioning of emblematic correspondences. We have a peculiar *polysemy* of stage and character which is a result of the co-existence of the inherited allegorical - emblematic and the emerging syntagmatic modes of thinking.

Characters in early modern drama, more often than not, become both realistically psychological and emblematically complex, and this polysemy of characters is largely responsible for the *indeterminacy of meaning* in Renaissance drama. When we characterize Lear as the emblem of the human condition, we do not hunt for an emblematic literary allusion behind his figure. Rather, this emblematic interpretation is based on the audience's readiness to read not only the individual stage images but also the characters and the *totality of the drama* on

different levels. The spectators assign emblematic values to the psychological characters on the basis of the network of attributes they bear in the performance text. Thus, it is not only a pageant, a procession, or a masque that can become an “extended emblem”⁶⁶ but also the character and *the play as a whole*. Through the images of blindness, folly, suffering, and fallibility, the character of Lear is transformed into a complex emblematic representation of the human condition, and with the terminology of the emblem we can argue that this representation, the *pictura*, is commented on by the title of the play as *inscription*, while the entire verbal enactment is functioning as *subscriptio*. This emblematic value is constantly decentered and questioned by the new strategies of interpretation in the midst of epistemological uncertainties, which desemiotize the human signifier and deprive it of its former multileveled polysemous potentiality. Yet, a balance or rather an uncertainty is maintained between the two semiotic attitudes, situating the Renaissance stage at the starting point of a paradigm shift. It is this transition which is described by Glynne Wickham as the *transition* from emblematic to photographic theater. Wickham argues that this transition is indicative of the changes in the general modes of thinking that will, by the time of the restoration theater, discredit the earlier methods of the emblematic proliferation of meaning. The photographic or illusionistic theater is already indicative of the new discourses of the Enlightenment world model. However, as Wickham contends, at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this rivalry is still on:

...what we are really confronted with is a conflict between an emblematic theatre - literally, a theatre which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation - and a theatre of realistic illusion - literally, a theatre seeking to simulate actuality in terms of images.⁶⁷

The preconditioning motto “Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem” above the entrance to the Globe theater emblemized the nature of most of the early modern

⁶⁶ Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1600. Volume Two 1576 to 1660, Part I*, 155.

English theaters. The very structure of the Shakespearean theater was considered *the emblem of the entire universe*, and the representational techniques of the theater relied on the audience's emblematic way of thinking, which semiotized every element of the stage on different symbolic levels.

The emerging syntagmatic world model started a process which projected the vertical axis of cognition onto a horizontal dimension that was no longer grounded in correspondences or semiotic overcoding. With the rise of this new cognitive paradigm, the dominant techniques of theatrical representation also underwent changes. Emblematic stage properties and actions were replaced by an aim to create an illusion of reality, a photographically mimetic theatrical environment. At the same time, the appearance of the proscenium arch and lighting techniques alienated the audience from the world of the performance, and the close interaction between stage and auditorium started to dissolve. Still, before Inigo Jones's photographic backdrops appear on the popular stage, we have in the Shakespearean theater a strong emblematic tradition, involving the audience in a complex interpretive semiotic process of decoding and encoding. The "emblematic agreement" between actor and spectator — verbalized so explicitly in the Prologue of *Henry V* — is a special way of creating the aesthetic experience of involvement and presence, the production of which is an essential goal of the intensified semiotic space of the theater:

But pardon, gentles all,
 The flat unraised spirit that hath dar'd
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object..
 O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little space a million,
 And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
 On your imaginary forces work.

(8-18)

Naturally, my attention to the emblematic representational logic of the early modern theater does not aim at underestimating or discrediting the importance of a continuous reinterpretation and reformulation of the signifying potentials of early modern drama. We cannot but rely on our historically specific horizon of expectations when we attempt to understand Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and such an understanding will always be, in our case, characteristically postmodern. Nevertheless, if we desire to uncover the complexities of meaning encoded in the Renaissance texts, we must consider the peculiarities of the early modern stage. David Bevington sums up the case in his recent performance-oriented book as follows:

Shakespeare wrote for a presentational stage, and so we need to know more about the ways in which his theatrical environment worked for him, but the conclusion need not be that more recent productions should come as close as they can to replicating the effects called for in his scripts. The sumptuous pageantry of much nineteenth-century staging had its own esthetic rationale, and was avidly appreciated by large audiences. Film is so fortified with its own technical virtuosity that one can scarcely imagine an abandonment of its capabilities. Modern theater, too, has techniques of lighting, rapid shifting of scenic effects, and costuming that can be put to magnificent use. Shakespeare does need to be constantly reinterpreted, in theater, film, and television as in critical discourse. Film and television generally need shortened texts to keep overall length within acceptable limits and to give filming its opportunity to do the things it can do so well. At the same time, we need to acknowledge a tradeoff. Verisimilar effects ask less of the audience's active imagination. Film directs the viewer's eye to what the camera or the director wishes that eye to see, not permitting the freedom of choice given to a spectator beholding a stage production.⁶⁸

This is not to say, of course, that the audience in Shakespeare's time enjoyed a particular freedom in understanding the universe of the performances in a totally unbounded and individual manner. The ideological strategies and technologies of power that worked through cultural representations and social practices did not leave the institution untouched, and the stage history of

⁶⁸ David Bevington, *This Wide and Universal Theater. Shakespeare in Performance Then and Now* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9.

Shakespearean plays highlights the ideological appropriations of the theater. For example, it has been one of the objectives of Renaissance scholarship since the 1970s to disclose the relationship between Shakespeare's canonicity and the rivalry of word versus image in Renaissance drama. As Francis Barker argues, it is exactly Shakespeare's turn from the violence of the image (e.g., *Titus Andronicus*) to the dominance of the word which may account, among other things, for the canonization of his works later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — in a culture established exactly on the suppression and exclusion of the image and the spectacular (especially that of the visual *immediacy* of the body) from a discursive society.⁶⁹

Since the semiography of the (fantastical or abject) body as one of the focal points of my investigations will be recurring in this book, it is indispensable to take a closer look at the emergence of this body in the early modern. In the history of Western civilization, we know of three main cultural practices that publicly displayed the body. Two of these are well known - the public execution and the public playhouse were social forms of the ostension of the body. It is the third form which I would like to introduce here, and this is the anatomical theater, which had its start in the early fifteenth century, and was in its full vogue in the late Renaissance and the early seventeenth century. To introduce this cultural phenomenon, I will briefly refer to a number of representational traditions.

The body and the cadaver are the themes of several iconographic-emblematic traditions starting from the Middle Ages. The *memento mori*, the *ars moriendi*, the *exemplum horrendum*, the *contemptus mundi* and the *danse macabre* traditions all used representations in which the central element was the body as the metaphor of mortality and death. We can perceive a process of "purification" in these traditions, in which the closeness between the represented corpse and the contemplating subject is gradually reduced. The iconography of the cadaver goes through a metamorphosis as we move from the Middle Ages to the

⁶⁹ Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 22-23; 59.

Renaissance. The burial sculptures, reliefs and paintings used to display demonical, allegorical monsters, disemboweled bodies and abject creatures, but by the Renaissance these are transformed into the more grotesque and less abject skeletons of the dance of death, which directs mortals to the grave in a carnivalesque mood. By the end of the Renaissance, the crystal-clear emblem of the memento mori tradition will be an almost obligatory accessory on the garments of the aristocracy: this emblem is the skull. By this time the flesh, the really abject part, disappears from the bones. The body, however, remains a persistent spectacle on the stage of the public theater and the dissection table of the anatomical theaters.

The thematizing of the body, the production of corpses in the Renaissance theater will be a representational technique that aims at answering the epistemological crisis of the period. This practice does not only stage the commonplace skull of the memento mori, but it also experiments with the dissolving of the body and the staging of the abject through metatheatrical techniques in order to involve the spectator in a *totalizing effect*. Using and expanding the emblematic-iconographic traditions, the emblematic theater becomes a laboratory of signification where the *abjection of the body* tries to go beyond the binarisms and indeterminacies of appearance and reality, and through this effect it strives to establish the full presence of meaning. This is the body, together with the imagery of brutal violence, sexuality, mutilation and heterogeneous corporeality, that will be absent from the theater of the bourgeoisie, the new theater which will be based on the concept of the unified subject. Among other techniques, it is the presence of the *theatrical anatomy* that distinguishes the Renaissance emblematic theater from the photographic theater of stage realism, and this theatrical anatomy had a concrete practice to rely on.

Indeed, it was the social practice of the *anatomical theater* in which spectators could best experience the presence and the secrets of the body. By the Renaissance, the public anatomy lesson became an institutionalized social

spectacle, the popularity of which almost equaled that of the public theaters in London, for example. Just like the other traditions, the theater of anatomy also went through metamorphoses of a semiotic nature during the period between Mondino de Luzzi's lesson and Rembrandt's famous painting of *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Tulp* in 1632.

The first documented and important dissection was performed by Mondino de Luzzi in Bologna in 1315. This was attended only by medical students, but by the 1530s hundreds of people filled the permanent theaters of anatomy in Padua and Bologna. The dissection was done by a surgeon, and the professor himself presided over the action as a mediator between God, his Text and the corpse. The objective here was to demonstrate the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm: we find the same order under the skin as in the entire universe.

The anatomical theater was an epistemological breakthrough, since the interiority of the body had been a secret to the public eye in the Middle Ages, and it had only been revealed in accidents, executions or on the battlefield. However, the real purpose was not simply to open up and dissect the body, but the lesson and the procedure that follow. The anatomy is the act of reassembling the body after the dissection, according to strictly coded and ritualized steps. Although the Pope gave his consent to Mondino's dissection already, the process was still considered to be a kind of a violation upon the creation of God, so the ritual was understood as a public atonement for the epistemological curiosity which helped people peep under the skin of things.

By the sixteenth century, the dissection and the lesson are performed by the professor himself, who appears to identify with the corpse. The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius in the 1530s inserts the cadaver into a new verticality by hanging it on ropes to have easier access to the bones. In a certain perspective the dissected corpse is still alive in the anatomy theater, and the anatomy lesson becomes a drama in which the reconstitution of the body reveals the order, the telos of the structure. In this drama the anatomist is already more of a performer than a central figure of authority.

The changes in the format of the anatomy theater reveal changes in the general attitude to the presence and the nature of the body in culture. The heterogeneity of the body will be an unwelcome presence in the culture of the Enlightenment world model, which will try to cover the corporeal with new discourses of the cogito. A different drama is taking place in the anatomy lesson of Nicholas Tulp, as we see in Rembrandt's famous painting. The expression on the faces reveals not so much an epistemological curiosity but rather horror and distance: Tulp opens that from which the Cartesian subject will keep separating itself.

The changes in the theater of anatomy and its representations are parallel with the changes of the function of the body in the theater. Simultaneously with the decline of the interest in the theater of anatomy, the emblematic theater will gradually turn into a photographic theater by the eighteenth century, which puts the skin back on the represented characters. The abjection of bodies, the crossing of boundaries will no longer function as a representational technique in the new theater, since it wants to articulate homogeneous, compact subject positions for the spectators. The emblematic theater, however, still functioned as an anatomical theater which opened up the subject for its heterogeneity in the middle of the epistemological crisis of early modern culture. It is this anatomizing of the body which will be absent from the photographic theater.

As we move on in the development of early modern drama, the logic of emblematic representations turns more and more straightforwardly into an ironic questioning and suspension of that logic. It is not that emblematic characters or values disappear by the time we arrive at the Stuart stage. On the contrary, in many tragedies they are *multiplied* and foregrounded to an unprecedented extent, and the plays appear to indulge in the exuberant references to the *macabre*, the *memento mori* and the *ars moriendi* traditions. This often annuls the symbolic value, and the emblematic polysemy turns into its own unsettling or negation. Such a *short circuit of emblematic meanings* intensifies the semiotic uncertainty

of a universe in which there is no longer any metaphysical guarantee for the representational power of the symbol.

It will be the aim of a psychoanalytically informed semiotic study in the following chapters to discuss how the theatrical contexts of reception outlined above produce specific *subject positions* for the spectators. I would like to combine the findings of the postsemiotics of the speaking subject with the theory of the emblematic theater to show how the simultaneous foregrounding and questioning of emblematic values - together with the staging of abjection and violence - unsettle the identity of the receiver, producing a particular context for the theatrical reception. The corporeality of the early modern subject as well as the persistent anatomization of the dialectic between body and mind will be a constitutive element in this theater. This anatomization, amidst the epistemological insecurity of the social and intellectual climate of the early modern, establishes the ground on which I intend to base my comparison of the dramatic, theatrical and general cultural representations of the early modern (as protomodern) and the postmodern. I will employ the methodology of postsemiotics and semiography to identify and scrutinize those representational techniques of the two periods which turn the performance-text from mechanical representation into *signifiante*: a characteristic achievement of both the early modern emblematic and the postmodern experimental theater.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17. According to Kristeva, any signifying practice can be studied as a process of *signifiante* (i.e., a heterogeneous and generating *process* which involves both modalities of signification in the positioning and unsettling of the subject) and not only as a mechanistic generation of meaning. I imply here that both the early modern and the postmodern theater consciously play with this foregrounded nature of its discourse.

4

Genotheater and Phenotheater

When we survey the history of Western dramatic and theatrical practices, we find that the early modern and the postmodern period equally use a *self-reflexive theater* as a cultural mode of expression to set up laboratories in which the constitution of the heterogeneous subject can be scrutinized. Uncertainties as to the self-knowledge, the self-mastery and sovereign identity of the subject are the focus of these theater models, and they foreground the concept of a subject that is constituted at the expense of losses and through the internalization of pre-fabricated identity patterns. The thematization of self-fashioning in English Renaissance drama and the problematization of character desubstantiation in postmodern experimental drama can both be theorized through the postsemiotics of the heterogeneous speaking subject. In early modern England, new economic constellations, technological developments and political and geographical anxieties created a milieu in which social identity increasingly appeared to be a construct formulated on the basis of patterns available in public discourse, conduct books, manuals, and spectacular social manners. Stephen Greenblatt grounds his concept of self-fashioning in the analysis of these patterns:

The complex sources of this anxiety may be rooted in momentous changes in the material world: a sharp population increase, the growth of cities, the first stages of an ‘agrarian revolution,’ the rapid expansion of certain key industries, the realignment of European-wide economic forces. These changes were present in varying degrees to the consciousness of the men of the early sixteenth century; still more present, however, were shifts of societal definitions of institutions and of the alien, and it is at the intersection of these two, we have argued, that identity is fashioned.⁷¹

The epistemological uncertainties and the crisis in values of the postmodern period stem from antagonisms, anxieties and ambiguities comparable to the dilemmas of the early modern period. The unutterable terrors and consequences of the world wars challenged the belief in the self-perfecting capacity of society. The Freudian revolution unsettled the formerly stable and sovereign Cartesian subject, while the repercussions of quantum mechanics in the natural sciences questioned the omnipotence of empirical science in the knowing and mastering of reality. The aftermath of the Second World War established a postcolonial world where the former empires were left without the possibility of defining themselves in opposition to the colonial Other. The identity-crisis of European nation states developed together with the crisis of the notion of the human being, the social subject as it had been known before, and this crisis is spectacularly manifest in the metamorphosis of the ideas about the theatrical character. As Elenor Fuchs observes, the concept of the protagonist as sovereign subject is gradually replaced after modernism by the various forms of the plural, heterogeneous, desubstantiated character.⁷²

In a semiographic approach it is possible to set up a typology of the theater in which we can distinguish two basic theater types on the basis of the semiotic nature of representational techniques and the presence or absence of the metaperspectives. I will rely here on the textual typology of Julia Kristeva, who

⁷¹ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 88.

⁷² Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character. Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996), esp. Ch. I: “The Rise and Fall of the Character Named Character.” 21-35, and Ch. IV: “Signaling through the Signs.” 69-91.

distinguishes two layers or dimensions of every textual or representational practice on the basis of the differentiation of the symbolic and the semiotic, the two modalities of signification, delineated earlier on in the chapter on the postsemiotics of the subject. The genotext is the basis, the drive energy for the phenotext, at the level of which the linguistic positioning of the subject and the constitution of the category of the ego takes place.

In the light of the distinction we have made between the semiotic *chora* and the symbolic, we may now examine the way texts function. What we shall call a *genotext* will include semiotic processes but also the advent of the symbolic. The former includes drives, their dispositions, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents. The latter encompasses the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories: semantic and categorical fields. [...] The genotext can thus be seen as language's underlying foundation. We shall use the term *phenotext* to denote language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of 'competence' and 'performance.'⁷³

On the basis of this differentiation I will distinguish between two basic types of theaters. I am going to apply the name *genotheater* to the first type which operates with various techniques of the theatrical *metaperspective* and audience involvement, while *phenotheater* will be the designation of the second type, which tends to aim at photographic representation. The genotheater, similarly to the genotext, avoids or even destroys the illusion of the closure of signification and the seeming success of mimetic representation (i.e., the bridging of the gap between signifier and referent), and it employs self-reflexive strategies to continuously jolt the spectator out of the expected, comfortable identity-positions in which reality would appear to be representable and consumable.⁷⁴ As opposed

⁷³ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 86-87.

⁷⁴ My understanding of the metaperspective is similar to that of Judd D. Hubert, who argues that the meta is not merely a self-reflexivity in the drama or the theater, but a systematic problematization of the (im)possibility of (perfect mimetic) representation as such. In Hubert's terminology "...we can define or interpret it [metatheater] from three quite different perspectives

to this, it is exactly the unreflected, problem-free position that is offered to the receiver by the phenotheater, which communicates the ideology that reality is totally representable and manageable: it can be mastered through the linguistic competence of the subject. This ideology will be constitutive of the emergent bourgeois society in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and it will be the central technology of power in modern societies since it disseminates the (false and metaphysical) idea that meanings (and thus the ideologically produced and circulated discursive social knowledges) are stable, unquestionable, and represent the truth about reality.

Consequently, we can notice in the history of the theater that the genotheater, which reflects upon the epistemological and ideological implications of representation, gains power and dominance in those transitional historical periods that are characterized by Jurij Lotman as clash-points between conflicting or competing rival world models. The genotheater can be theorized as a social practice that participates in the *intensified semiotic activity* through which such periods strive to map out new ways of representing and getting to know reality.⁷⁵

The representational techniques characteristic of the genotheater do not aim at conjuring up the faithful image of a reality which is not present, and they do not tend to stage characters that are in full control of a mastered reality and identity. The presence they establish is not achieved by the deictic and photographic techniques of the stage, but much rather by the effects that the stage imagery exerts on the spectators through representational techniques such as the

insofar as the term “metatheater” or “metadrama” may simply refer to discourse concerning stage production embodied in the play, or, in a somewhat more complex manner, it may indicate that the play in question overtly or covertly shows awareness of itself as theater, or finally that the play as medium tends to substitute its own characteristic operations for, and sometimes at the expense of, whatever ‘reality’ it claims to represent.” *Metatheater: The Example of Shakespeare* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 139. This metaperspective as a scrutiny of the limits of signification is constitutive of the genotheater, and it is one of the most characteristic techniques of the early modern and the postmodern theater. For the meta also see Marie Lovrod . “The Rise of Metadrama and the Fall of the Omniscient Observer.” *Modern Drama*. Vol. XXXVII, no.3. (Fall, 1994), 497-508.

⁷⁵ I employ the concept of the intensified semiotic activity on the basis of Lotman and Uspensky. “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture.”

staging of the abject, tortured body and the desubstantiated and composite, heterogeneous, corporeal character-in-process. These representational techniques will be the focus of the following chapters.

As has been shown earlier on, protagonists in English Renaissance drama are situated at the beginning of the clash of two radically opposing world models, without having safe recourse to either. The metaphysics of the name no longer guarantees their identity, since the earlier, medieval transcendental motivation between the human being as signifier and the divine essence or inherent meaning as signified is questioned.⁷⁶ At the same time, the new tenets of rationalism and empiricism are not fully in place yet, so that old and new methodologies of knowledge, self-scrutiny and identity types are proclaimed and doubted simultaneously in the imagery of binary oppositions that surface persistently throughout the writings of the period: appearance versus reality, show versus substance, surface versus depth, identity versus disintegration.

The emblematic theater that activated the texts of English Renaissance drama did not aim at establishing a mimetic duplicate of the actual world. It rather involved the audience in a complex multilayered system of levels of meaning in which various iconographic and emblematic traditions were activated to achieve a total effect of meaning.

While the Elizabethan theater did not strive to create a visual illusion of actuality, it did attempt to imitate nature, albeit in poetically heightened terms. A platform stage capable of sustaining both illusionistic and nonillusionistic effects was indispensable to the interplay between realistic and stylized modes of expression, and between a new consistency of *mimesis* and traditional audience awareness. Once the tensions between these various theatrical modes were subsumed within flexible platform dramaturgy, an astonishing variety and richness of language naturally followed.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ For the problematization of the motivated metaphysics of the name and the inherent signifying value of the human being, see Franco Moretti. "The Great Eclipse: Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty." In John Drakakis, ed., *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Longman, 1992), 45-83. Serpieri relates the same problem to the clash between world models: Alessandro Serpieri. "Reading the Signs: Towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama." In John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 118-43.

⁷⁷ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, 216.

Thus, the protomodern emblematic theater is in a peculiar transitory situation: it employs the symbolical-emblematic techniques of representation which were inherited from the medieval traditions, but it uses these techniques in order to thematize and anticipate the emergent questions of a new, mechanical world model. The emblematic theater investigates those semiotic dilemmas that will be ignored by the later photographic-illusionistic bourgeois theater. Thus, this stage very much relies on the “iconographic-emblematic density” which is rooted in medieval high semioticity, but it does not activate these polysemous techniques in order to achieve some mimetic illusion, but in order to establish a semiotic totality of effect.

The attempt to realize the totality of theatrical effect can be interpreted as an answer to the epistemological uncertainties of the period. Amidst the speculations and philosophical questions about the order of the universe and the possibility of getting to know reality, the theater offers a site where the techniques of *emblematic density* and *audience involvement* provide the spectator with a promise of the *immediacy of experience* which is otherwise impossible to obtain. We need the postsemiotic viewpoint to investigate the spectator in its complexity as speaking subject in order to perceive the logic of this *totalizing semiosis*.

The English Renaissance emblematic theater, which stages characters as composite agents without originary identity, works as genothater to exert a total semiotic effect on the audience which results in the spectator being transformed into a subject-in-process. This *spectator-in-process* again and again occupies new positions and gains a metaperspective upon its own heterogeneity as well. At the same time, this genothater also operates with representational techniques which are directed at the non-rational, psychic and corporeal modalities, in order to effect more directly the psychosomatic structure of the subject. The representation of violence and abjection is a technique capable of involving the entirety of the subject in the process of semiosis, since experiencing the abject connects the subject back into the dimension of the suppressed memories of the body and the

motility of the drive energies. In this way, the theatrical representation achieves a more direct impact upon the material presence of the subject.

The production of the new, abstract subjectivity of rationalism and the project of modernity will be supported and enhanced later on by the photographic realism of the bourgeois theater, which participates in those social discourses that disseminate the misrecognition of the subject as the non-corporeal, compact ego of the *cogito*. This sovereign Cartesian subject reigned in Western philosophy until its major heir, the transcendental ego of Husserlian phenomenology, started to be questioned by the psychoanalytically informed theories of the microdynamics and the macrodynamics of the subject. The crisis and the decentering of the subject after modernity are thematized in postmodern experimental theater and drama in order to ostent the human being in its complex heterogeneity.

To introduce examples for the semiographic investigations that follow, I will enlist some representative pieces of protomodern and postmodern drama to demonstrate the operations delineated above, with special emphasis on the representation of violence as a totalizing semiotic effect, and the thematization of the constitution of the subject. After these examples I will move on to a more detailed analysis of the plays and the semiography of their corresponding theatrical techniques, such as the representation of the fantastic, the corporeal, the abject.

The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, the prototype of English revenge tragedies, introduces us into a universe in which we are taught the lesson that no total metaposition can be obtained by the role-playing subject, since the absolute position of mastery is already occupied by the allegory of Revenge, this metaphor of the unconscious and the supremacy of drives over the rational reasoning of the split subject. The revenger enters into a chain of roles, trying to control the discursive space around him through the production of corpses, since these

products, the signifiers of death, have the *most unquestionable meaning* in the cosmos of the play.

Shakespeare provides us with similar labyrinths of role-playing and identity crisis, but he gradually moves from a focus on the effect of visual and emblematic horror towards the thematization of the social symbolic order as an all-enveloping discursive power. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's earliest tragedy, the proliferation of emblematic images and the visual representation of violence and abjection simultaneously target the rational, iconographic decoding activity and the unconscious, psychosomatic reactions of the spectator. Shakespeare then gradually abandons this primacy of visual and emblematic density as a promise of total semiotic effect, and in the later tragedies the protagonist's most important recognition is that the word, the symbol, the skin of ideology impenetrably covers everything.

Later in Jacobean tragedy the multiplication of roles and metaperspectives often turns into a burlesque of the revenge tradition. Vindice in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* excels in a full-scale elimination of any original identity by transforming himself into an author-director-actor of revenge, while the systematic prolongation of the anatomical depiction of violence pushes the spectator to the limits of tolerable stage representation. When the Duke's mouth is rotting away, his eyes are starting to move out of their sockets, and his tongue is nailed to the ground while his soul is being tortured by the sight of the affair between his adulterous wife and his bastard son, the spectator falls into a gulf of undecidability that opens up between emblematic exuberance, psychic torture and absurdity.

The pluralization and desubstantiation of subjectivity and the representation of the abject both function as theatrical techniques of spectator involvement in postmodern experimental theater as well. As has been argued, the semiotic disposition of postmodern cultures faces dilemmas that show significant analogies with those of the early modern period. After the unsettling of an ordered

and teleological world model, the early modern as well as the postmodern period have to cope with the absence of a guaranteed epistemology. The unfinished project of modernity ends up in postmodern doubts about the enthusiasm of the Enlightenment heritage, while the status of the cognizing subject and its relation to reality become doubtful. The representational techniques of postmodern drama and theater, just like those of early modern drama, endeavor to affect the spectator through more than words, by decomposing the position of reception through the disintegration of the character positions and the fixed expectations in the horizon of meaning creation.

We get a comprehensive demonstration of the above in the one-act plays of Adrienne Kennedy, who seems to encapsulate the problematic of the postmodern in her extraordinarily condensed dramas. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro* the protagonist Negro-Sarah is accompanied by four other characters (Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba) which are each “one of herselfes” according to the stage directions.⁷⁸ In *The Owl Answers* all the characters are pluralized, composed of several emblematic identity types, such as the protagonist: “She who is Clara Passmore who is the Virgin Mary who is the Bastard who is the Owl”.⁷⁹ In this play it is not only the characters that are composite but the places as well. At the beginning of the drama “The scene is a New York subway is the Tower of London is a Harlem hotel room is St. Peter’s.”⁸⁰ In Kennedy’s plays the characters are portrayed as temporary meeting points of different *discursive identity traces*, composite subjectivities that feed on various traditions and emblematically powerful cultural imageries, markers of race, culture, religion and rank. Negro-Sarah and Clara Passmore desperately try to construct an identity of their own, which repeatedly turns out to be just a fragile intersection of intertexts. This intertextual identity foregrounds an awareness of the poststructuralist realization that subjectivity does not stem from an inherent

⁷⁸ Adrienne Kennedy, *In One Act* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1984), 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

originary and transhistorical core of the speaking subject. It is fabricated by the technologies of power that situate us in social positions in which we will have access to the traces of identity patterns that will add up to the masks we wear. Hence, these desubstantiated protagonists of postmodern drama are thrown into process, and they produce a theatrical effect that puts the spectator on trial and in process as well. Our meaning making activity, which is the precondition for the emergence of our ego-position, is destabilized through the ambiguities, pluralities and uncertainties in the labyrinth of names, references and multiple plot lines. Instead of aiming at any mimetic illusion that reality can be comfortably processed and handled through representation and closure by the self-sovereign subject, these plays thematize the heterogeneity of the subject and they deny any closure that could grant a teleological satisfaction for the reader.

Kennedy's dramas work against automatized meaning-creation, very much like the prototypical postmodern play, *Hamletmachine* by Heiner Müller. In this drama the protagonist stages an attack not only against his name which is emblematic of the Western canon and the cultural practices of identity-generation, but also against the very play in which he is embedded. Nonetheless, this metaperspective continuously reflects on the textual and ideological embeddedness of the Hamlet-character, and it reveals the irony that no subject can shake off the constraints and determination of the symbolic order, just as no character can break free from the play in which it happens to be raging against the play itself. "I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. [...] My drama doesn't happen anymore." As long as a dramatic character is in the process of saying this, the play, the generation of pre-manufactured identity patterns, will be inevitably going on.⁸¹

A similar irony can be perceived in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* where characters are constructed according to the technology of gender and abjection. Black subjects are compelled to try to become white, female subjects are coerced

⁸¹ Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984), 56.

to strive to become males, which results in their total blindness to the conditions of their subjectivity and the fact that they have already gone through a total metamorphosis. This transformation is foregrounded by the fact that the black character is played by a white actor, while the female character is played by a male actor. We are reminded here of the poststructuralist recognition that the precondition of any ideology is the subjects' total blindness to the nature and all-encompassing presence of that ideology.⁸²

I have selected the above examples to demonstrate how the postsemiotic perspective reveals that the heterogeneity of the subject, which is brought to the surface by the general epistemological crisis and the crisis of the ruling world model, is an extensively thematized problem in early modern and postmodern drama. It is this postsemiotic critical perspective that I will unite with the findings of iconology, emblematology and visual studies in the interpretive methodology of *semiography*. Similarly to early modern plays, the dramas in the postmodern non-classical experimental theater engage the technique of the pluralization of identity roles and the representation of violence and abjection. Absurdist drama launches the trend that problematizes the uncertainty or the loss of meaning and identity, which will run through Artaud's theater of cruelty, Kantor's theater of death, and the ritual self-mutilations of postmodern performances up to the French Orlan's artistically performed self-operations, the proliferation of forms of body art, and the new twenty-first century anatomical theater and exhibitions of the German professor Gunther von Hagens.⁸³

When we disclose the logic of the tradition of the spectacle and the representational techniques in the theater, the semiographic perspective we employ also reveals that it is not simply bad taste or the thirst for sensationalism

⁸² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 20-1.

⁸³ In spite of the official prohibition, professor Gunther von Hagens performed his first public dissection on November 19, 2002 in London, creating a postmodern revival of the tradition of the Renaissance anatomical theater. His traveling exhibition of dissected corpses keeps provoking world-wide criticism, acknowledgement and enthusiastic applause. I will dwell upon the early modern and the postmodern anatomical theater in the chapters that follow.

that makes the postmodern audience turn again with growing interest to those early modern tragedies, revenge plays and manneristic melodramas which have long been repressed in the modern canon. Through the analysis of the semiotic disposition in these two historical periods of transition and uncertainty, we gain a more accurate understanding of the reason that a play such as *Titus Andronicus* becomes again a well-liked drama for postmodern criticism, theater and film, although earlier several critics were determined to prove that ‘the genius of Shakespeare’ could not have much share in the writing of the play.

Before a more detailed interpretive focus on these plays, I would like to dwell on the *fantastic* as a peculiar representational technique which informs early modern as well as postmodern cultural representations, because I believe an understanding of the semiography of the fantastic will bring us closer to the representational logic of corporeality, violence and abjection, or desubstantiation and pluralization as well.

The Semiography of the Fantastic Body

At the outset, I will rely both on the idea and the various typologies of the fantastic in order to recontextualize them within the more recent horizon of poststructuralist critical thinking. In so doing I intend to realize a double objective. A strong emphasis will be placed on the necessity of opening up the field of iconography and iconology for psychoanalytically and semiotically informed critical approaches that incorporate the complexity of the receiving subject in their account of meaning production, be it verbal, visual, digital or multimedial signification. Together with this theoretical foundation, I also propose to map out the methodological pathways that a new semiographical-interpretive approach could take in combining the considerations of iconography, iconology, and semiotics. *Semiography* will be defined here, on the basis of the considerations of the theoretical introductory chapters, as an analytical method that revisits the findings of traditional iconographical and iconological investigation from the perspective of the semiotics of multimedial communication, and also employs the tenets of the postsemiotics of the subject in order to throw light on the heterogeneous processes involved in the macro- and

microdynamics of semiosis. If this takes us to a semiography of *fantasy as an effect* and the fantastic as a mode of socio-cultural expression, we will be better able to perceive how the combination of iconography and semiotics functions as an indispensable tool in cultural studies. Only in this way can we employ the procedures of iconographical analysis and the metalanguages of iconology and semiotics in describing the role of the fantastic in the complex cultural imageries of the postmodern.

In the second part of my analysis of the fantastic body, I will employ the semiography of the fantastic in order to investigate the various representations of the body and the corporeality of the speaking subject through the analogies that are manifest between the semiotics of early modern and postmodern culture. I will argue that the dissemination of cultural imageries of the fantastic or the fantasticated body are elements of a general semiotic attempt which tries to find answers to the epistemological crisis of the period.

5.1. The Semiography of the Fantastic

Recent poststructuralist attempts at defining the fantastic have shared the common goal of moving beyond the methodological limits of genre categorization in order to reveal the logic of the fantastic as an effect which emerges in the speaking subject and as a general operation that is always at work in the symbolizing social practices of culture. When we realize how its inner *hybridity*⁸⁴ makes the fantastic resistant to any rigid typology, we also observe that a semiotic understanding needs to relate this hybridity to the frequently observed operation in the fantastic which defines it as a continuous testing of the limits of the symbolic order that

⁸⁴ Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996), 7.

contain symbolization within ideologically determined borders. The attempt to map out and test the limits of cultural imagination, to “move beyond”⁸⁵ symbolic fixation makes the fantastic akin to those *marginal discourses* that work against the norms and categories of a dominant ideology. As Rosemary Jackson points out, “The literary fantastic is a telling index of the limits of the dominant cultural order.”⁸⁶ Semiography, of course, realizes that this applies to all representations of the fantastic and not only to the literary fantastic, but also gives us a warning against generalizations concerning this *subversive* power of the fantastic. It is true that the fantastic has long been operational in our culture as one of the most important sources of productivity and *praxis*.

However, even if the logic of the fantastic appears to be general in targeting the borderlines of the cultural imagination, we need to understand this logic in the broader framework of a *semiotic typology of cultures* and a poststructuralist critique of ideology in order to see how this subversive power might also inform dominant representational modes and not simply marginalized discourses. Iconography and iconology may be useful tools in showing that the attempt to move beyond the limits of conventional signification can become characteristic of dominant trends of culturally fixed symbolism as well as in the search for the perfect language in the epistemological crisis of early modern culture, or in the quest for total presence in postmodern experimental art. The postsemiotics of the subject contributes to such an understanding with a perspective that penetrates the very structure of the subject in which the fantastic produces an effect that, subsequently, often appears to be shared by dominant and marginalized practices as well. It follows that our task is to relate the workings of the fantastic to the general semiotic mechanism of culture, to problematize its non-mechanical relationship with ideology, and to account for the effect that

⁸⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁶ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 4.

representations of the fantastic produce in the psychosomatic heterogeneity of the subject.

The various perspectives that have been offered by the recent, psychoanalytically informed theorization of the fantastic all seem to relate the fantastic not only to a subversive operation, but also to a *quest*, an attempt to reach a totality which has been lost or which always appears to be beyond our reach. This idea of the quest inscribes the fantastic into the general attempt of the semiotic mechanism of culture to incorporate reality through signification. In this mechanism we have periods which rely on a stable semiotic disposition with a solid epistemology, and periods that will cope with a representational crisis and an uncertainty as to the possibility of getting to know and represent reality. The intensity of the quest for the immediacy of reality and the language that can secure this presence for us will depend on that semiotic disposition of culture which believes this immediacy either to be lost or, just the contrary, possible to establish through social signifying practices. This quest in culture is parallel to the quest inside the subject that aims at compensating for the *losses* (of the mother's body, of reality) and the split that constitutes the subject. In this respect, the fantastic is an intensification of that *compensatory mechanism* which is constitutive of all signification.

It is possible to conceive of the fantastic as a general attempt which is always present in culture, and aims at mapping out new ways of establishing a signification that goes beyond the limits of the conventional. The fantastic in this respect is a *semiotic endeavor* that offers itself as an alternative for those signifying practices that seek to make reality accessible. This quest is the belief in, and an attempt at *total semiosis*.

This semiotic perspective may clear up the uncertainties as to the subversive, extra-canonical or popular, canonical nature of the fantastic. Traditional ways of fixed symbolization may be arranged in new combinations and forms, and may participate in a general cultural attempt to use the fantastic in order to establish full semiosis and an immediacy of experience, such as the

proliferation of the multi-leveled visual representations, the Neoplatonic diagrams, the multi-channeled emblems, and the iconographic density of the emblematic theater in the Renaissance. The same attempt may be suppressed and kept out of the canon in the Cartesian tradition of the new philosophy of the Enlightenment which aims, above all, to circulate the belief in the total representability of reality and the compact self-mastery of the sovereign subject.

Nevertheless, until the crisis of the project of modernity, the fantastic has always served as a dimension of experimentation (be it canonical or marginalized), as a territory where signification may exert a total effect on the subject. When we are to account for this effect of the fantastic in semiography, we move beyond typologies of cultural semiotics and theories of canon-formation towards a postsemiotics that penetrates the heterogeneity of the subject where this effect *emerges*. It is also through the perspectives of the postsemiotics of the subject, with its foundation in the critique of ideology, that we can understand the new status of the fantastic in the postmodern, where it often appears to lose the subversive power customarily attributed to it.

In relation to the fantastic, postsemiotics picks up where Todorov left off in his typology when he emphasizes the point of *hesitation*, the moment of being lost that the receiver *experiences* in the face of the fantastic.

... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who *experiences* the event must opt for one of two possible solutions [...] The fantastic occupies the *duration* of this *uncertainty*.⁸⁷

Although Todorov does not fully comment on the *temporal* nature of this duration in the act of reading, he takes us to the crucial point at which we need to realize that the fantastic works by creating a peculiar *effect* in the *temporality of reading*, bringing about the dynamic temporality which was highlighted by

⁸⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland: Case Western UP, 1973), 25-6 (my emphasis).

reader-response criticism in moving beyond the static impression of formal, New Critical reading. We have to look for the logic of the fantastic in the operations that take place within the structure of the reader, and in order to do so we need to open up the subject as a receiver of the fantastic for its psychosomatic heterogeneity, where the *emergence of meaning* is theorized by postsemiotics.

All accounts of the fantastic dwell upon polysemy, ambiguity, hybridity, and hesitation as characteristic features that associate the fantastic with the grotesque, the Gothic, the supernatural, and the limits of genre categories. Neil Cornwell summarizes the main themes in the critical reception of Todorov's theory as follows: "Hesitation, ambiguity and the supernatural are therefore the key elements."⁸⁸ Wolfgang Kayser defines the grotesque in terms of its capacity to provoke "laughter, disgust and astonishment," as well as produce „the dream-like quality of a work and the unruly fantasy which creates its own world."⁸⁹ These categories of in-betweenness result in the difficulties of pinning down the phenomenon of the fantastic, and they provide a basis for Todorov to argue for the anti-generic nature of the fantastic as a *general mode*.⁹⁰ However, these categories also make the fantastic more understandable if we relate them to the general logic of meaning-creation in which the symbolic interrelationships of language constitute the surface where the categories necessary for identity can be fixed. When these binary categories and the grammar of language are violated, when meaning does not emerge in an unambiguous order, the subject's emerging fixation as self-identity is brought into crisis. Julia Kristeva accounts for the effect of marginal discourses (such as poetic language) through this crisis in

⁸⁸ Neil Cornwell, *Literary Fantastic from Gothic to Postmodernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 14.

⁸⁹ Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981), 30, 40, quoted by Cornwell, 7.

⁹⁰ "... Todorov ultimately moves beyond this. In my view it is only through his crucial differentiation between fantasy as genre fiction and the fantastic as a far more resistant, anti-generic mode that the real potential of this field has been fully opened up for the challenge of critical theory." Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, 6.

signification, and this is where the general logic of the *abject* as (cultural) in-between relates to the ambiguities articulated by the fantastic.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. [...] If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject.⁹¹

The fantastic puts the subject on trial and in crisis, just like the abject, because no unequivocal, categorical meaning emerges in the face of the fantastic. When the categories that are supposed to establish the ego-identity of the subject are transgressed or blurred, the other, non-symbolic modality of the subject is brought to the forefront: a dimension in the heterogeneity of the subject that is connected to the unstructured drive energies and the corporeality of the psychosomatic body. This modality, which Kristeva calls *semiotic*, receives its energy from the primary loss and the trauma that are constitutive of the subject: the loss of the mother, the symbiosis with reality, the immediacy of experience. Indeed, this is the quest we uncovered in the deep-structure of the fantastic: the attempt to move beyond the categorization of social imagery, to create an effect in the receiver that can mobilize energies that will produce an experience more totalizing than the conventional and the automatic. The in-betweenness, the heterogeneity are the constitutive operations which enable the fantastic to bring about such an effect, thus allowing for the psychically and corporeally motivated *genotext*, the Barthesian pleasure of the text to surface in the representation. Kristeva also relates and compares the abject to the presence and effect of the sublime in the heterogeneity of the subject:

⁹¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4-5.

If the abject is already a wellspring of sign for a non-object, on the edges of primal repression, one can understand its skirting the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other. The symptom: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire. Sublimation, on the contrary, is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being.⁹²

However, it is exactly this effect that can be deployed and exploited by ideology, and it is through the postsemiotics of the fantastic that we can understand the *ideological commodification* of the fantastic in postmodernism. Without a theory of the microdynamics of the subject that experiences the effect of the fantastic, we cannot account for the *all-pervasiveness* of the fantastic in postindustrial consumer culture. Instead of being marginalized or de-canonized, we find a proliferation of the fantastic in consumerism. A cultural practice disseminates complex imageries of the fantastic that envelop the subject in a constant pilgrimage towards the ever more fantastic.

The subversive power of the fantastic has long been explained by its being “a tear, or wound, laid open in the side of the real.”⁹³ However, when we relate the fantastic to the idea of *expenditure* in the way Bataille theorized it, we also have to insert it into the more subtle dialectic of expenditure and containment. As the arguments of post-Marxism and the New Historicism expose, every ideological establishment is grounded in the continuous production and containment of its own subversion. In the fantastic imageries of consumerism we discern the way ideology deprives the fantastic of its subversive potential by disseminating it as the primary object of desire. Slavoj Žižek explains this through the logic of “repressive desublimation.” In the heterogeneity of the subject, the

⁹² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11.

⁹³ George Bataille, quoted by Jackson, 22.

ego has the traditional role of mediating between the drive energies of the unconscious and the social laws of the superego. However, in a culture where enjoyment becomes a compulsion, a social constraint imposed on us by the *obligation to be curious*, the fantastic will become the (hyper)reality where we endlessly try to detect new sites of amusement.⁹⁴

The bourgeois liberal subject represses his unconscious urges by means of internalized prohibitions, while in post-liberal societies the agency of social repression no longer acts in the guise of an internalized law or prohibition which requires renunciation; instead, it assumes the role of a hypnotic agency which imposes the attitude of ‘yielding to temptation’, that is, its injunction amounts to a command: ‘Enjoy yourself!’ An idiotic enjoyment is dictated by the environs.⁹⁵

In the world of the *Matrix*, to take a cult film as an example from the past ten years of fantasy production, (hyper)reality and the fantastic overlap to a degree that the logic of subversion goes through an inversion: to be marginal would mean to avoid the quest for the fantastic.⁹⁶

When the society of affluence establishes a short circuit between the fantastic and commodity fetishism, the task of semiography is to unveil those ideological technologies that establish cultural systems of images in the fabric of commercialization and commodification. The analytical tools of iconography and iconology can here join the metaperspectives offered by postsemiotics to disclose the ways in which the marketing of the fantastic rewrites the meaning, the use and

⁹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 48.

⁹⁵ Slavoj Žižek. “Is There a Cause of the Subject?” In Joan Copjec, ed., *Supposing the Subject* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 94. For commodity fetishism and the politicization of enjoyment also see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). For fantasy as a political factor: *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1991).

⁹⁶ Baudrillard comments on the all-enveloping nature of fantasy in the hyperreality of consumerist postmodern society: “Surrealism remained within the purview of the realism it contested – but also redoubled – through its rupture with the Imaginary. The hyperreal represents a much more advanced stage insofar as it manages to *efface even this contradiction* [my emphasis] between the real and the imaginary. Unreality no longer resides in the dream or unreality, or in the beyond, but in the *real’s hallucinatory resemblance of itself* [emphasis in the original].” Baudrillard. “Symbolic Exchange and Death.” *Selected Writings*, 119-148, 145.

the effect of traditional as well as new cultural symbolism. This vast field now, of course, covers the commodification of sexuality in commercials as well as the deployment of the male gaze in the cinematic text, the marketing of fantasy in travel brochures as well as the politicization of idealized everyday life as a refuge from the threatening contents of the unconscious. If the analysis of cultural imagery is successfully united with the critical theory of postsemiotics, semiography offers us strategies with which to uncover the more latent logic of the fantastic in contemporary as well as earlier cultural representations.

5.2. Early modern and Postmodern Anatomies of the Fantastic Body

Undoubtedly, one of the most thematized constituents of the postmodern cultural imagery is the human body, i.e., the fragmented, mutilated, penetrated, tortured, extended, preserved, cloned body: *the fantastic body*. It is, of course, one of the most thematized concepts of poststructuralist critical thinking as well. In what follows, I will argue that the postmodern problematization of, and obsession with the often fantastic body is, to a large extent, an epistemological endeavor which reveals its semiotic nature, if we investigate it within the semiotic typology of cultures, where it shows analogies with the early modern anatomizing obsession with the limits and interior of the body. The anatomy theaters of the Renaissance will resurface in postmodern culture in the form of the cinematic industry and the new vogue of anatomical performances.

Several representations of poststructuralist theories of the body and the corporeality of the subject argue that the body in postmodern culture becomes an

apocalyptic body again.⁹⁷ But when was the time, the question emerges, when it was also apocalyptic? Where are the roots that feed this body? The ideological technologies of modernism constituted the bourgeois Cartesian subject at the expense of the suppression and demonization of the body.⁹⁸ This body resurfaces in the postmodern as the site of danger and potential crisis, the focal point of calamities that may befall our civilization. Since Foucault's introduction of the idea of the hermeneutics of the self, the care of this fallible, apocalyptic body has been conceptualized by theory as a central social practice through which ideological interpellation reaches out to the socially positioned and subjectivized individuals of Western society.⁹⁹ The representations of prefabricated patterns of body-identity are endlessly disseminated in postindustrial society. At the same time, with the advent of the postmodern, marginalized signifying practices (poetic language, the fine arts, performances, installations, experimental theater, film) started to deploy the body as a site of subversion, promising to go beyond or to dismantle ideological determination.¹⁰⁰

The apocalyptic discourse on the body may indeed be justified, but only partly. If we interpret the body as a semiotic social construct, I believe it is also possible to discern a less apocalyptic and more experimental and epistemological undertaking beneath the surface of the postmodern obsession with the status and the condition of the body. When the study of the various concepts of the body is situated within a semiotic and comparative study of cultural periods, we may also gain insight into analogies between historical periods, and the relationship

⁹⁷ Bryan S. Turner. "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body." In M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B. Turner, eds., *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (London et al.: Sage Publications, 1991), 1-36, 3.

⁹⁸ On the construction and the hollowness of modern subjectivity see Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 33: "At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing."

⁹⁹ For the hermeneutics of the self, see Foucault. "Sexuality and Solitude."

¹⁰⁰ For an excellent overview and application of the theories of the interrelationality of body, subjectivity and identity, and for the concept of coproreagraphy as a theory of the agency of the somatic in semiosis and narratology, see Anna Kérchy, *Body Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter. Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

between culture-specific representations of the body and the general semiotic disposition of culture comes to the foreground.

My contention is that the postmodern scrutiny of the body is comparable to the early modern anatomical turn towards the interiority of the human body:¹⁰¹ in both historical periods the *body is a territory of the fantastic*, an epistemological borderline, a site of experiments in going beyond the existing limits of signification. In short, postmodern anatomies are grounded in an epistemological crisis which is very similar to the period of transition and uncertainty in early modern culture, when the earlier “natural order” of medieval high semioticity started to become unsettled, and the ontological foundations of meaning lost their metaphysical guarantees. It may certainly be argued about any cultural-historical period that it is an age of transition and crisis, but I believe the analogies between the epistemological uncertainties of the early modern and the postmodern lend themselves to a more articulate comparison. If we want to mention only one of the numerous resonances, we might recall that the way Montaigne introduces skepticism and relativism into the early modern discourse on the nature of human knowledge is very similar to Lyotard’s argument on delegitimization and the crisis of the grand narratives of Western culture, or the way Feyerabend takes a stand against method.

Several poststructuralist studies of the semiotics of culture have recently focused on the affinity that has emerged in the postmodern towards those practices of early modern culture which were groundbreaking or subversive in their own time.¹⁰² At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these practices were simultaneously mapping and thematizing the technologies of identity and the interior spaces of the body. The fusion or the coming closer of cultural registers in consumerist culture makes this affinity between the early modern and the

¹⁰¹ “... early moderns, no less than postmoderns, were deeply interested in the corporeal ‘topic’.” David Hillman and Carla Mazzio eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), xii.

¹⁰² “... it is an interesting sociological point that the Elizabethans had, like us, a penchant for gory entertainment.” Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), 107.

postmodern particularly manifest. The demarcation line between high culture and popular culture is less rigid, more difficult to draw, and easier to penetrate than before. Former cultural idols are marketed nowadays as generally accessible commodities. Shakespeare, for example, is adapted and appropriated in a multiplicity of commercial forms; the top products of Western art and literature are being reproduced in an all-embracing process of commercialization and tabloidization. Renaissance texts that for centuries were canonized as high literature now show up among the commodities of popular culture. This phenomenon of commodification is, of course, part of the process of decanonization and reCanonization which questions and revises the reading practices and standards of earlier canons.

The body as a territory of the fantastic appears to occupy a central locus in the vogue of these representations, and it is an object and a cultural phenomenon which also specifically interconnects the early modern and the postmodern. This interconnection has been a subject of critical interest since the early 1980s. By the 1990s, the human body had become an especially favored theme in the considerably extensive Renaissance scholarly literature on the “discovery” of early modern subjectivity and the social practices of self-fashioning. At the same time, as I have tried to delineate in the chapter on the microdynamics and the macrodynamics of the subject, it is of course also a focal point in poststructuralist theories of the split and psychosomatically heterogeneous subject.

In his article “Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body,” Bryan S. Turner contends that the crisis of instrumental rationality results in the postmodern questioning of the grand master narratives of Western culture, and this crisis is comparable to the climate of the manneristic period of early modern culture. Other critics argue that the Baroque is a response to the crisis between the cultural and individual that the reformation brought about in Europe.¹⁰³ Thus, the parallel between early modern and postmodern is conceivable on the basis of

¹⁰³ E.g., Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (London et al.: Sage Publications, 1994).

reasons that can actually be interpreted, on a general level, as signs of an epistemological crisis in both periods.

We see in the postmodern that the scrutiny and the visual representation of the body appear not only in critical literature, but in general cultural practices as well, especially when we consider the fantastic or fantastically body. The cultural imageries of malls, shopping centers, plazas, movie productions, exhibitions are loaded with representations of the fantastic body that establish a parallel between early modern and postmodern representational traditions.

There is new affinity emerging in the postmodern towards cultural practices and texts of early modern culture that scrutinize and thematize the interiority of the human body through surgical or representational means of violence. In these practices the anatomized, transformed, dissected body functions as a *site of marvels*, as a territory of wonders and frontiers. Here I would like to dwell upon the artistic and epistemological implications of those anatomical representations of the body in the postmodern which also testify to an anatomizing obsession very similar to the Renaissance curiosity for interiorities. My argument is that it is possible to interpret certain practices in the postmodern turn towards the body as a typical revival of the anatomy theaters of the early modern period, and that these practices are involved in a process of mapping out new ways of representation and new methods of getting to know reality, similar to the epistemological intentions displayed by the anatomizing modes of thought in the Renaissance.

The most obvious site of the representation of the body in early modern England is the public theater, with its often fantastic, dismembered, tortured, dissected human bodies. The Renaissance attempt to realize the totality of theatrical effect can be interpreted as an answer to those epistemological uncertainties of the period which resulted in a fundamentally unstable semiotic disposition of the culture. Against the backdrop of the speculations and philosophical questions concerning the order of the universe and the possibility of getting to know reality,

the theater offers a site where the techniques of emblematic density and audience involvement provide the spectator with the promise of a more direct access to reality, an *immediacy of experience* which is otherwise impossible to obtain. Thus, the testing of the body as a site of the fantastic and a borderline of meanings is an example of the *hybridity* and the *quest* that characterize the fantastic.

At the same time, the staging of violence and the violated body was also informed by a keen interest in the interiority, the corporeality of the human being as the site of the emergence of subjectivity, the new, early modern type of identity. As much recent criticism has argued, the idea of identity as something interior to the human being is a new phenomenon in early modern culture. It signals the advent of the subjectivity underlying the “cogito” that later emerges with Rationalism and the Cartesian discourses. This *process of interiorization* is a challenge that many characters of English Renaissance drama fail to meet: they oscillate between alternative types of subjectivity as in-between, abject subjects.¹⁰⁴ Violence not only opens up the corporeal interiority of the human being, it also dissects the consciousness: the anatomization and representation of the wound in the psyche of these characters reveal them as split subjects.¹⁰⁵

This cultural challenge or ideological commandment is also thematized in postmodern literature. The pluralized characters of postmodern drama and fiction will fall victim to the same failure: they are unable to internalize the cultural patterns of a compact, homogeneous identity. However, the failure often takes the shape of purposeful resistance or subversion as well, and the staging of the abjected body functions as a site of resistance, as a promise to go beyond ideological determination, to arrive at the flesh as a place of authenticity and self-presence.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Neill calls this “the new discourse of interiority.” See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 159.

¹⁰⁵ “The thinking thing, when it began to think, found not repetition and hence similarity, but chaotic divergence, asymmetry, a collection of pieces. Out of this collection of pieces it would, eventually, be possible to manufacture an assembly – a human being which, possessing the form of humanity, was nevertheless understood as essentially split.” Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 146.

Thus, the representation of violence and the promise of unquestionable meaning are answers to the epistemological uncertainty of the age. They are accompanied both in the early modern and the postmodern by a cultural urge to move beyond façades, to penetrate surfaces, to dig into wounds. These are wounds that the subject had been prohibited from testing in the early modern period, or wounds that had long been forgotten by the end of the unfinished project of modernism.

As I already introduced in the chapter on the emblematic theater, the spectacular mass entertainment to disseminate the vision of the disciplined body was the public execution. In addition to this, in early modern culture two popular institutions worked to satisfy this curiosity. Real wounds and surgical interventions revealed the secrets of the body for the general public in the anatomy theater, while emblematic wounds on metaphorical bodies thematized this cultural interest in the emblematic public theater.¹⁰⁶ The combination of semiotics and iconography enables us to discern that in various trends of English Renaissance literature we have a special union of the two practices. Early modern culture takes great interest in interiority as the locus of the secrets of identity. A very telling example of this is the way Sir Philip Sidney writes of comedy and tragedy in *The Defence of Poesy*:

So that the right use of Comedy will, I think, by nobody be blamed, and much less of the high and excellent Tragedy, that *openeth the greatest wounds*, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue ...¹⁰⁷

Sidney argues for proper literature to open up the traumatic, ulcerous wounds in the body of society: literature, according to the early modern argument, should be anatomical and analytic, like the process of dissection. This anatomical

¹⁰⁶ For a history of the anatomy theater and its ritualized theatricality see Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*. esp. Ch.3. "The Body in the Theatre of Desire." 39-53. For the analogies between the anatomy theater and the public playhouses see Hillary M. Nunn, *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy* (Ashgate, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Sir Philip Sidney, *Selected Writings*, ed. Richard Dutton (Manchester and New York: Fyfield Books, 1987), 124 (my emphasis).

zeal starts to be repressed with the advent of Cartesian philosophy and the bourgeois establishment, when linguistic reasoning becomes the skin on the ego, the 'shell' encapsulating the modern subject. Consequently, the tissue that covers the ulcers in the subjectivity of the early modern subject and in the body of society is the tissue of discursive self-fashioning, on the one hand, and that of civilized order, on the other. This tissue of the symbolic separates us from the secrets of our maternal and libidinal corporeality, the simultaneously attractive and repulsive presymbolic memories of the womb as preserved in our own (largely unconscious and uncontrolled) interiority. When early modern drama presents persistent images of inwardness, this is not only to uncover and publicly heal the ulcers in the body politic, inwardness is also staged because of the keen self-anatomizing interest of the early modern subject.

Turning again to the era of the postmodern, we realize that anatomy or self-anatomy constitutes the center of attention in postmodern performances, artistic productions, stagings, happenings, and cultural practices, and the anatomical concentration upon the fantastic body is especially thematized by visual and filmic media. The fact that Julie Taymor directed an often horrific and extremely spectacular feature film with leading Hollywood artists on the basis of Shakespeare's most widely criticized and condemned revenge tragedy is a clear sign of the postmodern interest in the body, but there are many better known examples, such as the films by David Cronenberg and Peter Greenaway, the anatomical performances of the body-artists Orlan and Finley, and the public autopsies of Gunther von Hagens.

The subject's relation to the body in the postmodern is rendered uncontrollable because of the panic created by the threat of the potential inner vacuum of the postmodern subject,¹⁰⁸ which results in the incessant testing and appropriation of the body. At the same time, it is also used as a rich source of experience that

¹⁰⁸ I am indebted to Ágnes Matuska for this insight. For the relationship between the subject and representational crisis, see her article "An Ontological Transgression: Iago as Representation in its Pure Form." *The AnaChronisT* 2003, 46-64.

would possibly bring us beyond ideological determination, towards a more direct experiencing of ‘some authentic reality’ in the Artaudian sense.¹⁰⁹ It is only later, and mostly in theory, that the semiotic impossibilities of such an undertaking begin to be thematized.¹¹⁰

In his article on the early modern anatomical theater, Luke Wilson notes that the real function of the dissection in the theater of anatomy was to reconstruct and to restore to order that body in the interior of which supposedly resided the secret of life.¹¹¹ In the postmodern this testing of the unknown and enigmatic is turned into a theoretical and performative anatomization of the long forgotten body. However, as for the practice of everyday life and the heterological perspective, we should also be aware that this body of the “high postmodern” is a resource of endless enjoyment for the fatuous subject of consumerism.¹¹² The *fantasticated* or *idealized body* is the ground of an ideological misrecognition through which the subject is captivated by the promise of the marvels of the body as a site of pleasure, a refuge from ideology. Such refuges, however, always turn out to be cultural practices that the ideological establishment allows in order to produce and simultaneously contain its own potential subversion. After the 1980s, postmodern performance theories and practices finally come to the realization that it is utopian to believe in the non-ideological experience of an immediate corporeal presence. Both the knowledge and the experience of the body are always mediated. In this respect we might indeed contend that postindustrial society has been turned into a medialized anatomy theater in which the body has

¹⁰⁹ See Antonin Artaud’s idea of the theater of cruelty and the immediacy of experience in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938).

¹¹⁰ See Jacques Derrida. “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation.” In *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), 232-50 for a critique of the belief in the closure of representation. Derrida’s writing has since become the starting point for poststructuralist theories that reject the idea of the establishment of full presence or unmediated experience on the stage, an idea which served for a long time as the basis of the “ontological theaters of the self” (Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 48).

¹¹¹ Luke Wilson. “William Harvey’s *Prelectiones*: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy.” *Representations* 17 (1987), 62-95, 70.

¹¹² For the logic of enjoyment as political exploitation, see Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*.

once again been neutralized. The charms of the *fantasticated* and *commodified body* are disseminated endlessly in commercials, multimedia messages and technologies of commodification, but the subversive potential of this fantastic body has been largely neutralized by consumerist ideology that exploits the fantastic. However, there is also a current, ongoing *radicalization* of postmodern anatomy, such as the anatomy theater of Gunther von Hagens, whose attempts still represent the postmodern epistemological curiosity that is an echo of the early modern anatomizing mode of thought.

The semiography of the fantasticated body has established the critical perspective which is necessary for us to revisit the early modern English tragedy which has fuelled the most heated debates and critical controversies: a play which critics tried, for a long time, to dissociate from the name of William Shakespeare.

5.3. Abject Bodies:

Titus on the Early Modern and Postmodern Stage

Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare's first tragedy, abounds in the images and emblematic image clusters of violence, horror, mutilation and abjection, thus committing itself to the idea of the spectacle, the representation of the visual image. In its dramaturgical focal point in Act III scene 1 we find the *emblematic stage tableau* where the mutilated Lavinia, as the outcast of the patriarchal system, carries in her mouth the symbol of the phallic order, the hand of the father, in this way totalizing the imagery of chaos which is so persistent in the play. Here, Shakespeare is still committed to the tradition which is also observed by the majority of English Renaissance and mannerist dramas. The semiotic

density of the emblematic stage is produced by the spectacle, the all-enveloping visual effect, the narrated and depicted abjection. Well-known protagonists of English Renaissance drama belong to this tradition. Hieronimo in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* appears on the stage with the decomposing corpse of his diseased son, before biting his tongue out to reserve all possible meaning to himself in a universe where language has become utterly unreliable.¹¹³ Christopher Marlowe's Faustus is torn into pieces by devils after a prolonged scene of mental and physical agony, Tamburlain is indulging in the proliferation of violence, while John Webster sets body parts on journey in *The Duchess of Malfi* and Thomas Middleton's revenger follows the itinerary of a skull which becomes his fetish in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. No wonder these plays were not granted high places in the canon that was later established to serve the emerging bourgeois taste of the eighteenth century. An artificially constructed mythical image of Shakespeare could become the cornerstone of that canon, and this image was made possible by the fact that he gradually turned from the power of the image and the spectacle of horror towards the thematization of the rule of the word and social discourse.

A comparison of *Titus Andronicus* with *Hamlet* reveals that in the latter drama the spectacle of the abjected and violated body no longer offers the promise of more direct experience that would surmount the uncertainties of semiosis. For Hamlet, the word, the codes of the symbolic order impenetrably cover all the phenomena of the world, and the uncertainty or ambiguity of those codes cannot be overcome through a formerly fashionable theological recourse to transcendental guarantees, or some seemingly direct experiencing of reality through the ostentation of violence. Nonetheless, the effect of abjection is still powerfully present, since Hamlet himself as a character becomes an agent of

¹¹³ "If the play precedes *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris* it contains the first Machiavellian villain; if it precedes *John a Kent* and *John a Cumber* it contains the earliest modern play-within-play; and if it precedes *Titus Andronicus* it may also be styled the first modern revenge tragedy. Given a date before 1587 and *Tamburlaine*, one might incontrovertibly call Kyd's play the first extant modern tragedy, without qualification." Arthur Freeman, *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems* (Oxford, 1967), 70-71.

abjection, but this, of course, was largely ignored by the rhetorical and character criticism that canonized Shakespeare. No metaphysical center exists any longer in the universe of *Hamlet* which would guarantee a transcendental inner core identity for the human being. Oscillating between the feudal, military heritage of his father, and the new reality-patterns of the humanist world of Wittenberg, Hamlet is transformed into an extended emblem of ambiguity and uncertainty, an in-between subject which we can also consider the prototype of “the hollow subject of modernity.”¹¹⁴ It is the original heterogeneity and previously so spectacular corporeality of this subject that later on the Cartesian discourses of rationalism will be continuously trying to suppress and contain. The discourses of bourgeois ideology on the self-mastery and self-identity of the *individuum* will constitute a dominant technology of power up until the postmodern, when the body, the spectacle of its decomposition and the deconstruction of essentialist identities once again become the fields of experimentation for renewed attempts to move beyond the power of ideological containment, to penetrate the linguistic skin on the word and our subjectivity.

In *Titus Andronicus* the focus is still on the spectacle of the body, and this is part of the reason why the play has gone through a peculiar revival and renaissance in the past twenty years when corporeal semiotic theories rediscovered the early modern trend of revenge plays and theatrical horror. New perspectives are now applied to the much debated interrelationship and hierarchy of word and image, of verbal and visual representation in the early modern emblematic theater of the English Renaissance. Instead of polemic discourses on whether speech overruled spectacle, or whether costumes were more important than actual bodies, a significant amount of critical literature recently has begun focusing on an understanding of the representational logic of the complex effects in the emblematic theater. By the 1990s, the human body had become a specifically favored theme in extensive literature on the “discovery” of early

¹¹⁴ Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 28-37.

modern subjectivity and the social practices of self-fashioning. However, such, scrutinizing and iconographic representations of the body appear not only in scholarly literature but in general postmodern cultural practices as well. The cultural imagery of malls, shopping centers, plazas, movie productions, and exhibitions is loaded with representations that establish a parallel between early modern and postmodern representational traditions. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* has definitely become famous again in the postmodern as one of the most excessive early modern representations of violence and suffering in relation to corporeality.¹¹⁵

After several centuries of canonical resistance, critical puzzlement and straightforward rejection, a revival of interest in Shakespeare's earliest tragedy began in the 1970s.¹¹⁶ The rehabilitation of *Titus Andronicus* and other tragedies of revenge and violence can be accounted for by several critical discourses that have been able to address issues which are thematized by English Renaissance drama, but remained unnoticed or deliberately ignored by earlier critical tastes. Feminists and cultural historians as well as interpreters of rhetorical and iconographic traditions have mapped out various implications of the play, transforming it from what T. S. Eliot considered as one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written into a drama of extensive visual ingenuity. Michael Hattaway believes the play is "arguably the first 'Gothic' work in the language"¹¹⁷ and, in an elaborate but very telling judgment, Alan Dessen contends that *Titus*

¹¹⁵ The theme of identity crisis closely relates the early modern revenge tragedies to postmodern plays, where we also encounter the recurring motif of commodified and decentered subjectivities. Harry Keyishian finds an interesting explanation for the intensified presence of violence within the general theme of identity crisis: he argues that suffering in *Titus Andronicus* becomes an instrument of self-expression and the assertion of self-identity. "In Titus' desperate circumstances, finding himself prey to chance and circumstance, suffering itself has become a means of asserting selfhood." Keyishian, *The Shapes of Revenge. Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare*, 46.

¹¹⁶ The emblematic representational logic of the play and the photographic-realistic horizon of expectations of the modern audience have been so incompatible that, as James Calderwood comments, critics often wished to see Shakespeare's hand severed instead of that of Titus. Calderwood quoted by Philip C. Kolin. "*Titus Andronicus* and the Critical Legacy." In Kolin, ed., *Titus Andronicus. Critical Essays* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 3-58, 3.

¹¹⁷ Michael Hattaway. "*Titus Andronicus: Strange Images of Death.*" In *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989), 186-207; 127.

Andronicus is “a pre-realistic, Ovidian-Spenserian, stageworthy revenge tragedy that, in a variety of ways, *resists* ‘our’ theatrical, critical, and editorial ways of thinking.”¹¹⁸

As for these new critical discourses, I think this resistance within drama has been best managed by those performance oriented semiotic approaches which restore the dramatic text to the representational logic of the stage for which it was designed.¹¹⁹ As has been outlined earlier, the methodology of semiography is also grounded in this approach. The famous or infamous scenes of the play that may provoke rage, disgust or even laughter in the modern audience will establish a network of interrelated image clusters when they are interpreted according to the representational logic of the Renaissance emblematic theater. One of the major challenges directors had to face when staging *Titus Andronicus* was, of course, the representation of excessive violence. Yet stylization through symbols or the naturalism of buckets of fake blood equally appears to miss the nature of drama.¹²⁰ The codes of realistic, photographic bourgeois theater, even if they are filtered through symbolism, do not provide the modern spectator with a clue to understanding scenes such as the discovery of the mutilated Lavinia.¹²¹ In this

¹¹⁸ Alan Dessen, *Titus Andronicus. Text in Performance* (Manchester, New York: Manchester UP, 1989), 4.

¹¹⁹ The importance of the representational logic of the theater, which is grounded in the general semiotic disposition of culture, has been emphasized by Alan C. Dessen in several writings. See his *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*, and *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary*.

¹²⁰ A good example for the technique of stylization is from the performance of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, where Chiron and Demetrius pull long red cordons out of the sleeves of Lavinia's dress so that in the end she looks like “a giant wounded butterfly, with wings of ‘blood’ covering the stage.” Joel G. Fink. “The Conceptualization and Realization of Violence in *Titus Andronicus* [1988].” In Kolin, *Titus Andronicus. Critical Essays*, 462. A parody of realistic effect is the staging by William Freimuth (Source Theatre Company, Washington D.C., 1986), in which a technician hands bibs and napkins to the spectators sitting in the front rows, while the deafening noise of sawing is heard from the backstage, indicative of the process in which the limbs of Alarbus are severed for the sacrifice. Alan Dessen, *Titus Andronicus. Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1989), 111.

¹²¹ This, of course, applies to English Renaissance drama in general, and, as Alan Dessen observes, to dramas of the 1580s and 1590s in particular. “[...]the modern interpreter must confront a different pre-realistic sense of style, an alternative approach to dramatic speech or rhetoric (typical of early Shakespeare and the drama of the late 1580s and early 1590s, including *The Spanish Tragedy*.” *Elizabethan Stage Conventions*, 54.

dramaturgical turning point of *Titus Andronicus*, Marcus, before he would engage in real action, spends forty-seven lines describing the horrifying image of his niece who had been raped by Tamora's sons, men who had also chopped off her hands and cut out her tongue. The rhetorical exuberance appears totally unfitting for a situation in which every nerve in the body cries out, as actor Terry Craft said in describing a rehearsal experience, "Get first aid!" Our understanding of this stage representation will be different, however, if we interpret Lavinia's mutilated body as an extended emblem of woe, a *tableau miserabilis*, in the interrelated images of the emblematic stage of *Titus Andronicus*. This emblematic tableau is simultaneously created by the visual image and the rhetorical description on the "empty stage" of the English Renaissance theater, where the imagination of the audience was supposed to "piece out" the imperfections of the representation. This imaginative labor was assisted by the juxtaposition of emblematic image and rhetorical commentary, inviting the spectator to embark upon a semiotic effort. This interpretive effort is similar to the one which is also required by the contemplative understanding of the classical three-piece emblem, an understanding which then will not be hindered by questions such as how Lavinia could survive such an immense loss of blood, or why her uncle does not immediately administer first aid.

Sidney referred to the ulcers in the body of society in his *Defence* – these ulcers proliferate in Shakespeare's revenge tragedy. The tissue of the symbolic separates us from the secrets of our maternal and libidinal corporeality, the repressed ulcers of our memories, the simultaneously attractive and repulsive pre-symbolic memories of the womb as preserved in our own interiority. So, when early modern drama presents persistent images of inwardness, this is not only to uncover and publicly heal ulcers in the body politic; inwardness is also staged because of the keen self-anatomizing interest of the early modern subject. Thus, through a semiographic (i.e., postsemiotic and iconographic) perspective, *Titus Andronicus* is an emblematic theater of anatomy, in which, according to the argument of the present essay, one of the most systematic image networks is that

of the abjection or problematization of identity and gender roles through emblematic images.

It is a critical commonplace that curiosity towards and fear of the interior tend to turn the female body into an emblem of menace, monstrosity and otherness on the English Renaissance stage. The female body acts out those gender roles that are inscribed into it by the patriarchal order, and the subversive capacity of these plays is often due to the attempts female characters make to transgress the boundaries of these roles. In *Titus Andronicus*, a network of emblematic images represents and problematizes both male and female gender roles, and their system reveals itself if we activate the dramatic text in a hypothetical reconstruction of the original emblematic theater.¹²²

In the opening scene, we see a Rome which is represented verbally as an immense mutilated female body. The “glorious body” (1.1.190) of Rome is wounded. This mutilated body, and the severed limbs of Alarbus, the pleading hands of Tamora and Titus’s son-slaying hand introduce the emblematic imagery of violence and abjection at the very beginning of the tragedy. Alan Dessen also emphasizes the importance of the initial stage imagery of the hands, which will later be continued in the severing of Titus’s hands. Headless Rome is constantly referred to as “she” who needs restoration of order in a situation that is characterized by rivalry, uncertainty, loss. This female body, which is supposed to be maintained by the male authorities of civilized order, is now mistreated, dysfunctional, and it opens up its generating and consuming womb in the image of the tomb of the Andronici. The womb and the tomb become systematically interrelated in the play, and they establish a complex emblem of that desired and at the same time threatening maternal chora which is expressed in the image of the

¹²² As James Cunningham contends, feminist criticism might not prove the best to investigate the abjection of gender stereotypes in the play, since *Titus Andronicus* does not restore the sovereignty or subversive power of woman. Instead, it problematizes the categories of gender in general. James Cunningham, *Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Modern Critical Theory* (London – Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1997), 176-177.

“swallowing womb.”¹²³ As has been noted earlier, in Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection and the subject-in-process, the chora is container of pre-symbolic drives, of psychic and corporeal energies, and it is not gender specific, but contains those archaic experiences that are imprinted on us as the memory of the symbiotic unity with the mother’s body. As the incest taboo and the fear of castration separate us from this origin of our existence, the image and the body of the mother become marked, signified, inserted into the symbolic order as other, abjected, that is, coded by gender.

A traditional iconographic image of this gendered symbolization of generative and destructive femininity is the *vagina dentata*, which is represented in the dramaturgically central scene of *Titus Andronicus* in the image of the pit. The pit as swallowing womb, trap, and burial tomb, as *vagina dentata* is the second in the sequence of four emblematic scenes (the tomb, the pit, Lavinia’s mouth and Tamora’s mouth) that set up the dramaturgical rhythm of the drama. The visual connection between the scenes is solidified by the fact that, in all probability, the trap door of the emblematic stage was used in their representation. The first scene in this emblematic sequence is the trap door as the tomb of the Andronici and the womb of Rome; the second scene is the trap door pit dug by Aaron to entrap the sons of Titus. Many critics have noted the sexual and gendered aspects of the description of the “abhorred pit” (2.3.98), the “subtle hole [...] / Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars, / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood” (2.3.198). However, it has generally remained unnoticed that Tamora’s description which introduces the image of the pit as

¹²³ For the interrelated images of the womb – tomb - pit imagery, see Karen Tatum. “Lavinia and the Powers of Horror in *Titus Andronicus*.” *Egotistics*, Vol. 1.1, 2000. (<http://www.bama.ua.edu/~ego/vol11/11tatum.html>, access: January 25, 2010), and also Marion Wynne-Davies. “‘The Swallowing Womb’: Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*.” In Valerie Wayne, ed., *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 129-15. Alan Dessen also draws our attention to the importance of these image clusters, pointing out that the realization and understanding of these networks necessitate a performance-oriented approach: “Such analogous actions can also be seen or inferred in Shakespeare’s (and other Elizabethan) plays, but today’s reader or playgoer is less likely to catch such link sas originally scripted when the original signals are not heeded.” Dessen, *Titus Andronicus. Shakespeare in Performance*, 82.

womb closely resembles the words Titus says about the tomb of his family: an intensified dramatic deixis turns these two scenes into the most concentrated deictic parts of the play, both scenes focusing on the trap door of the stage. Titus says of the tomb at the beginning of the play: “[...] repose you here in rest. / [...] Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells, / Here grow no damned drugs, here are no storms, [...] rest you here” (1.1.153). However, this is so only as long as the living and the dead are respected and order is maintained. In the chaos of Rome, initiated by the senile, impotent, blind and miscalculated decision of Titus, the tomb which is supposed to help us come to terms with the dead now easily turns into the threatening, engulfing womb of Rome, starting to eat up its corrupt offspring. The deictic “here” dominates the speech of Tamora as well, when she depicts the pit as a Gorgon’s head:

These two have ‘ticed me hither to this place. [...]
 Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds,
 [...] here at dead time of the night
 A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
 Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins
 [...] make [...] fearful and confused cries [...]
 they would bind me here.

(2.3.97-111)

In the vertical tripartite dimensionality of the emblematic stage, the trap door was the symbol of the gate of the underworld and thus, in a psychoanalytical reading, it also signifies the dimensions of the unconscious. Considering medieval and early modern folklore which connected the female genitalia with the mouth of hell, we see that the various associations of the underworld, the maternal chora, the protective and potentially destructive womb, and female sexuality are all condensed into the complex emblem of the pit as *vagina dentata*. However, it is also worth noticing how Tamora conjures up verbally this image of the horrid scene. Her two speeches in the scene are seemingly totally incongruous. First, when approaching Aaron, her lover, she speaks of the forest as a place for

amorous entertainment; she cannot wait to have sex with the Moor in the forest, a place which can indeed be a conventional emblem of fertility. Then, upon enticing her sons to revenge, she describes the same location as a horrible, hellish location with the abhorred pit in the center. We know that, rhetorically, Tamora employs two clichés here, the topos of the *locus amoenus* and that of the *locus horribulus*, but it is very strange to have two opposing descriptions of the same place so closely following one another. Tamora is able to turn the same scenery into two different and contrary locations through her rhetorical performance, combining *ut pictura poesis* with the iconographic method of interpreting signs *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem* simultaneously.

This rhetoric is possible and needed on the almost bare emblematic stage, but the fact that Tamora so displays the potential power of rhetoric transforms her into an artist, almost a magician who manipulates our feelings and perception. Here Tamora displays that capacity which makes her the most dangerous agent in the web of revenges, i.e., her capacity to transgress categories, move beyond categories, including gender stereotypes as well. Tamora and her prosthesis Aaron together represent an agency of abjection which penetrates the sick body of Rome, leaving greater and greater wounds. They are difficult to categorize in terms of gender stereotypes: Tamora can be very motherly and yet can present a very cold, rational male reasoning as well; Aaron is often very much like a male warrior but at other times he displays features of eroticism and tenderness that are traditionally attributed to woman. Their survival capacity in the Roman environment is due to this ability to penetrate the categorical borderlines: in Kristevan terms, they are ambiguous, non-structural – abject. They penetrate gender categories, unlike the other Roman characters, which gradually go through a process of losing all their gender markers. Titus desperately tries to secure his role as a patriarch after refusing the imperial diadem, and in so doing he embarks on a series of mistakes that will result in his being reduced to a suffering human being. Lavinia's gender-determined signifying capacity is reduced to zero when her commodity value as a woman is diminished by the rape; in a second step she

is further diminished by a second metaphorical rape when she carries her father's hand off the stage in her mouth, bringing to a climactic point the images of chaos and the fall of patriarchal order. She is even more reduced for a third time in the scene when she guides with her mouth the stick with which writes, conforming through this metaphoric image to the patriarchal prerogative of signification according to the symbolic codes and intertexts of culture. These characters gradually lose their gender potentials, and are turned into suffering, opened bodies, festering wounds on the already ulcerous body of Rome.

Tamora, however, has no exemption from the logic of revenge tragedies: she commits the mistake which is typical of revengers who start believing they have finally occupied a metaposition above the other characters. The allegorical revenge scene, in which she approaches Titus with her two sons, foregrounds a realization that, although she believes she can usurp the role of Revenge, this metaposition is not granted to any of the human agents. As that prototypical revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy* had already thematized, so too *Titus Andronicus* makes clear that the spirit of revenge, the passion that turns to an avalanche of destructive forces in revenge tragedies, always resides within the human beings, "motivating their souls" beyond their capacity to control the unleashed forces. Tamora, the most ingenious manipulator and gender-transgressor of the play, commits a mistake when she thinks she is already equal with revenge: it is this mistake that brings her sons into Titus's web of revenge, and not any ingenuity by Titus. When caught in Titus's plot, she will start doing things that are beyond her capacity to control; her vaginalized mouth, her vagina dentata, will eat up those agents that she has sent out into the world of Rome from her womb of revenge.

The play's general images of blood become concentrated in the images of Lavinia and Tamora's vaginalized bleeding mouths. This parallel in imagery established between two, otherwise opposite characters indicates the fact that a general, all-encompassing power, a non-gender-specific pre-symbolic energy will start to emanate from the suppressed depths, the tombs and wombs of our culture,

if order no longer separates us from the sway of drive energies, if our passions give opportunity to the tombs of our dead to turn into the womb of unstructured, libidinal nature. As Luke Wilson notes in his article on the anatomical theater, the real function of dissection in the theater of anatomy was to reconstruct and to restore into order that body in the interior of which there resided, supposedly, the secret of life.¹²⁴ In such terms, *Titus Andronicus* as an emblematic anatomy theater can be interpreted as a process in which the body of Rome as an emblem of civilized culture is dissected and then cured, healed and restored to order. This restoration is, however, not due to the ingenuity of the characters because, as agents of revenge, they are subordinated to that higher power of passion symbolized by the Allegory of Revenge itself. That passion threatens to erupt any time and begin eating parts of the world to which it had earlier given birth.

Within Shakespeare's oeuvre, we can clearly identify a gradual move from the dominance of the spectacle towards the dominance of discourse, from "abhorred pits" towards "words, words, words." The fact that *Titus Andronicus* was persistently ignored by criticism for such a long time is clearly explained by drama belonging to that vogue of the image which was later replaced by poetic and philosophizing discourse as the primary representational technique. We had to wait until the institutionalization of the poststructuralist semiotic theories to have a proper insight into the production of special effects in the visual theatrical traditions, and this intellectual shift has also brought about a rehabilitation of "spectacular" plays such as *Titus Andronicus*.

The history of the productions and adaptations of Shakespearean drama also illustrates the trend in which the technologies of canon-formation marginalize plays that do not conform to bourgeois taste, such as those revenge tragedies written by Shakespeare's contemporaries. The importance of plays such as *Titus Andronicus* is later minimized even within the most favored Shakespearean canon as well, since they do not obey the value patterns and stereotypes that are

¹²⁴ Luke Wilson. "William Harvey's *Prelectiones*: The Performance of the Body in the Renaissance Theater of Anatomy."

disseminated about the “Bard of the Elizabethan Age.” In the postmodern, however, because of a similarity in the semiotic disposition of the periods, a new sensitivity and receptiveness emerges towards early modern plays that work as *texts for the genothearer*, and problematize the questions of epistemology and the constitution of the subject through the power of the image and the spectacle.

The number of new stagings of *Titus Andronicus* has been steadily growing since the 1970s as critical approaches start to rehabilitate and reinterpret the play through the perspectives of feminism, postcolonialism and performance theory. “The dramatic rise in favor of *Titus Andronicus* among critics and directors has – perhaps not coincidentally – closely paralleled the growth of feminist Shakespeare criticism” – says Deborah Willis at the beginning of an essay which provides a comprehensive overview of recent critical revivals.¹²⁵ So it is that Julie Taymor came to direct her monumental movie *Titus*, and Eastern European companies allowed a place for the play in their repertoire. My contention, however, is that the feminist perspective does not fully encompass all the interpretive possibilities of “[...] the play’s vivid representation of Lavinia’s victimization and rape; its foregrounding of patriarchal attitudes; its monstrous, sexualized mother, Tamora; and its imagery of womb, tomb, and pit.”¹²⁶ It is through the perspective of semiography that we become able to account for the logic and appeal of the theatrical (and cinematic) effect of violence and abjection in this tragedy.

The move from discourse to spectacle, from word to image is perceivable even within the recent stage and adaptation history of *Titus Andronicus*. I have selected two dramaturgically crucial scenes that I am going to analyze in five subsequent realizations of the play, three of which were produced within the past ten years in Hungary (a theatrical phenomenon which testifies to the “postmodern

¹²⁵ Deborah Willis. “‘The gnawing vulture’: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53 (2002), 21-52.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

renaissance” of early modern anatomical tragedy even within the space of an East-Central European country).

In the first scene here considered (Act II, Scene 4), the mutilated Lavinia appears as a magnified emblem, a *tableau* of horror and suffering. Having lost her tongue, her hands and her chastity, she has been deprived of language, writing and honor, i.e., of all her signifying potentials. In the second scene that I have chosen (Act V, Scene 3), we see Tamora slain by Titus, her mouth spilling blood, which sets up a parallel with the blood her sons had shed in the ravishing of Lavinia and the blood that leaves Lavinia’s mouth. The macabre irony of inversion is that it is Tamora who swallows the blood of the sons in the form of the pie prepared by Titus, thus receiving back into her generating body those sons whom she had sent out into the world for destruction. Of the five interpretations of the play I list as examples here, three are attentive enough to recognize the emblematic parallel in the blood imagery of the two scenes.

The first production is the 1985 BBC film version (dir. Jane Howell), where the manner of performance is still unquestionably determined by the ideology of a conservative canon with its emphasis on Shakespearean rhetoric and language, on the importance of the word and eloquence. The film version employs very good focus on ritualistic elements in the play, on ceremonial circular marches, and on the killing of Tamora’s sons as a sacrificial offering of blood, but it does not (as it was probably not supposed to) pay sufficient attention to the potential images of abjection and horror, their possible emblems and impact on the spectator. Compared to later productions, Lavinia is a restrained, stagnant and docile daughter of sorrow here, and the parallel between Lavinia’s suffering and the scene with Tamora’s death is not established. The production does not really violate the borderlines of decent bourgeois taste; effect and meaning are supposed to be produced by language and poetic imagery.

The second production in chronological order is one staged by the Hungarian Csiky Gergely Theater of Kaposvár, Hungary (1997, dir. László Keszég), which utilizes the imagery of abjection much more systematically. After an elaborate mutilated dance of crawling and creeping around the entire space of the stage, Lavinia spits the blood from her tongueless mouth into the hands of Lucius, producing a mighty display of the constitutive image of the play. This stain, spat into the hands of a character who represents patriarchal order, has its visual rhyme in the blood ejaculating in repeated streams from Tamora's mouth at the end of the play. The imagery of tragic topsy-turvydom, the inversion of the order of the world, receives a magnified expression in the way the hand, the emblem of the law of the father, is stained by the diminished daughter. The backdrop to these scenes is a huge canvas with colors of blood-red and yellow; establishing an apocalyptic atmosphere of suffering.

Nevertheless, the postmodern audience had to wait until 1999 to witness a total reactivation of the traditions of the abject and the macabre as presented in Julie Taymor's movie *Titus*. In the first scene I am examining, Lavinia is shown with a sudden camera movement as a stiffened and blown up emblem of pain, pooring her blood from her screaming mouth towards the face of the spectator. This image of blood recurs in the second scene of the dinner with equal emphasis when the camera zooms in on the blood streaming from Tamora's mouth, establishing the interconnection of clusters in the systematic imagery of the play.

The fourth, experimental staging of the tragedy is from Shure Studio Theater Budapest (2001, dir. Péter Soós). The production employed a tight, gloomy, self-enclosed space, with several stage mechanisms that were based on the original representational logic of the early modern English emblematic theater. Aaron emerged from under the trap door at the beginning of the play as a representative of hell and actors performed continuous audience-engaging gestures while stylized stage objects functioned as emblems of meaning clusters.

The first scene we are dealing with here does foreground the idea of the hand of the patriarch besmeared by blood dripping from the mouth of the ravished woman, but Lucius treats Lavinia like an object, a commodity, even more than in earlier adaptations. In the dinner scene, Titus sits with a cane in his hand in the position of a clock ticking away the time left to the guests, and then bursts a balloon filled with water suspended over the head of Tamora, a ritualized metaphor for death in the production. The parallel in the blood imagery is not thematized here, but the Shure Studio production resembles that of the Csiky Gergely Theater, except that the general atmosphere is even more infernal and sinister.

The fifth production is a recent and very experimental 2004 Hungarian performance in the Castle Theater of Gyula (Gyulai Várszínház, dir. László Bocsárdi), an open air theater set in the inner yard of a brick castle on the Southern Great Plain of Hungary. The adaptation was a multimedia performance in which several pre-shot scenes of the play were projected onto a video-screen while characters spoke into camcorders and were also projected onto the screen, sometimes simultaneously with ongoing stage action. All this created an effect reminiscent of the emblematic theater's attempt to establish full semiosis, a totalizing theatrical effect brought about through the multiplicity of sign channels and iconographical representational traditions. The staging made use of the space, the walls, the very objects and utilities found in the yard; the dramaturgically central "pit" of the ravishing scene, for example, was represented by the great furnace in the wall of the castle. Lavinia emerges through this vaginalized furnace as if descending from the fire of hell, black as charcoal. However, she is also presented in an embryonic position, as if the furnace was also a birth canal giving birth to a new Lavinia, the result of the foul deeds of Tamora's sons. This representation intensifies the womb-like nature of the furnace-pit, and strengthens its role as an organic element in the womb-mouth-blood imagery of the play. In the dinner scene, a pre-shot film (video-projected onto the theater's back canvas)

is shown after the filmed massacre of Tamora's sons, itself shot in the local sausage factory. Tamora gulps the pie made of her sons' flesh, now herself becoming an all-devouring pit and an insatiable womb turned backwards, eating up the flesh to which it had earlier given birth. Thus, it is not only the blood imagery but also the mouth-pit-womb parallel that is thematized and emphasized in this production. The director ironically puts the pie-cutting knife in the foreground of the frame when Lavinia is stabbed by Titus.

These various postmodern productions and adaptations of Shakespeare's earliest tragedy all testify to a special affinity for the representational techniques of abjection, violence and anatomization. Their complex emblematic image clusters are based on an awareness of the visual effects that aim at going beyond the limitations of the rhetorical level. In other words, these performances possess an awareness of the importance of the way a Shakespearean play is supposed to go from word into image in an actual performance text. It is my conviction, moreover, that the systematic employment of abjection and spectacle in postmodern stagings and adaptations of early modern tragedy cannot be explained simply by a supposedly postmodern degenerate public taste, a perverted sensationalism that many critics liked to attribute to the spectators of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as well. Rather than being content with such trivialized responses, we should consider that these postmodern representational techniques function within the horizon of epistemological uncertainties and changing ideas about the nature of the human being and the nature of meaning. They aim at breaking through exhausted verbal, narrative traditions in order to produce a total effect upon the receiver. This was also the ambition of the early modern emblematic theater that condensed the iconographic traditions of the age and combined them with the representation of abjection and violence.

6

The Semiography of Iago, the Merchant of Venice

The history of *Titus Andronicus* is demonstrative of the ways in which the early modern emblematic theater employed the interrelated image clusters and the representational techniques of abjection and violence. In this chapter I will rely on the above delineated findings of semiography when I turn to another Shakespearean drama as rich in imagery and the problematic of the subject as was *Titus Andronicus*. My intention is to investigate the representation of the Other, the imagery of liminality and abjection in *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. In my opinion the problematic of subjectivity is dressed in this play not only in the image clusters of the Other, the alien, the exile, but also in an elaborate imagery of commercialism and Mediterranean exoticism, in spaces of liminality where Iago is active as an ingenious merchant trading in Othello, his exotic merchandise.

One of the most typical strategies of early modern English drama is the employment of a far-away, exotic land as a model for contemporary social conditions – a strategy which is simultaneously a maneuver to bypass censorship and a theatrical device to make the play and the performance more attractive and sensational. Perhaps the most systematically recurring distant and mysterious world in the dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries is the Mediterranean,

with its distinct and unique iconography. When we address questions about the reception of English Renaissance drama, we need to scrutinize the meaning-potentials of the sea and the Mediterranean in early modern drama in general, and in Shakespeare's *Othello* in particular. In so doing, we should not be content with reference to the storehouse of stock characters and set images such as the Machiavellian Italian villain, the merchant, the frontier separating Europe from the threatening Ottoman Empire, or the exotic merchant cities of the Adriatic. We should note an element that must have been attached to these stereotypical images of the Mediterranean in the early modern consciousness, and this element is the sentiment of envy propelled by the pressure of rivalry.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century, commercial and cultural centers such as Cádiz, Seville, Venice, Naples or Florence were already everything London was only dreaming of becoming, and there were also very prosperous Adriatic cities farther away that England scarcely had extensive knowledge of. Ragusa, the present day Dubrovnik, entered its golden age under the supervision of the Hungarian crown, when it managed to separate from Venice after the Treaty of Zadar in the middle of the fourteenth century. Its sailors reached lands as far as Peru, its merchants ventured to import luxury items that Western Europeans had not even heard of to the aristocratic palaces within the fortified walls of the port, and exotic gardens boasted with unique selections of botanical rarities. The Eastern Mediterranean connotes, more than anything else, the idea of commerce, international trade and a lively but risky exchange of commodities. The Eastern Mediterranean was not only one of the cradles of European civilization but also the most elaborate system of commodity exchange until the late fifteen hundreds. Into the image of this Mediterranean world we find projected all the early modern English sentiments of enchantment, excitement, contempt, and envy. There is corruption in those cities, and there is treachery on those merchant islands, but all that is there because the riches are also there. In this respect Shakespeare's "island plays" have much more to do with this "Adriatic or Mediterranean enchantment" than with the New World anxieties.

It should be little surprise, then, to realize that the ideas of commercial mediation, sales and revenues, cost and risk analysis permeate the cosmos of the Mediterranean places in the drama of the English Renaissance. However, we should also immediately notice that these ideas of exchange, interconnection, interaction, and fluidity are markers that apply to the very nature and operational logic of the early modern theatrical institution in general. As Margreta De Grazia argues,

The London theater, then, emerges as a locus of double convertibility: where actors change into characters (who often change into other characters) and where money converts into spectacle. The theater thus seems the perfect site for observing the Renaissance as Early Modern: the fluidity of both identities and commodities.¹²⁷

It is the concept of fluidity and liminality that will help us better see the analogies between the nature of the sea and the nature of the theater. I would like to connect two notions to demonstrate this: the topographical and cultural liminality of commercial centers on the one hand, and the liminality of the theater and the theatrical experience on the other. It will naturally follow that borderline persons of the sea, such as Othello, will represent in a condensed manner almost everything that the early modern theater experimented with. Othello will be the focus of my attention in the ensuing analysis, in which I will endeavor to decipher the iconography of liminality and the mercantile discourse that inform the universe of *Othello* and turn it into a typically Mediterranean play. However, Othello as one of the most extensively debated Shakespearean characters and as an emblem of the theatrical mechanism challenges the interpreter with extraordinary complexities of iconography and theater semiotics.

¹²⁷ Margreta De Grazia. "The Ideology of Superfluous Things: King Lear as Period Piece." In M. De Grazia - Maureen Quilligan - Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 17-42; 19.

It is so simple that we may forget to think of it, but for the English as an island nation, the idea of the Mediterranean as a maze of interconnected ports, islands, inlands and shores must have been something distant, exotic and culturally other, by its very topographical nature. England is encircled by water, while the Mediterranean is basically a vast territory of sea commerce encircled by land, and it has always been characterized by a quality of mediation. Already in various early modern writings it was pictured as a territory of interconnection between the West and the exotic, rich and threatening East. Ideally, it is a catalyst between different cultures and empires. In less ideal cases, it is a shield defending the values of Christianity against the barbarous herds of the uncivilized East.

The Italian cities, the Mediterranean loci and islands that so frequently inhabit Shakespearean and English Renaissance drama are doubly marked by this special in-betweenness. They are places in between two different universes, channel-like, culturally, intellectually and commercially canalizing the products of two civilizations; but they are also places in between value categories, simultaneously standing for the enchanted, the exotic, the wondrous, and the alien, the corrupt, the intruding.¹²⁸ In this respect, the idea of the Mediterranean thematizes the nature of the theater itself, and it is employed as a metaphor of the liminal, border-line social positionality of the early modern theater, which was situated on the *interactive margin* of society, while it also ceaselessly experimented with the phenomenon of unstable and heterogeneous, in-between human identities. Early modern drama as a laboratory of identity endlessly stages the epistemologically thematized tension between original identity and assumed role, honesty and self-fashioning, this tension being employed as a general

128 Alexander Leggatt argues that plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Timon of Athens* thematize the wall that is supposed to separate the city from the wilderness, civilization from barbarism, and that this wall repeatedly turns out to be porous, establishing interconnection between the two worlds. Such porosity, however, can also be dangerous, and *Othello*, I believe, embodies this kind of danger in Venice. See Alexander Leggatt. "The Disappearing Wall: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Timon of Athens*." In Tom Clayton, Susan Brock and Vicente Forés, eds., *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*. The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Valencia, 2001 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 194-205.

metaphor of the larger epistemological uncertainties of the period. When the early modern theater stages the Mediterranean together with the idea of travel, intermediacy, transition, catalyzation, it immediately becomes self-reflexive and provides itself with a theme to be used to stage its own socially catalytic nature. Set against the semiotically determined horizon of expectations of the audience, the figure of Othello is a condensation of all the above: an extraordinary amalgamation of the complexity of the Mediterranean, of the theater, and of the tension between role-playing and identity, outward sign and inner meaning.¹²⁹ I do not intend to dwell upon the truisms relating to the theme of surface and depth foregrounded in the tragedy of Othello, but I would like to rely on his figure as a representation of the ideas of liminality that create a meeting point for the phenomenon of the theater and the phenomenon of the Mediterranean.¹³⁰

Liminality is the *conditio humana*, says Helmuth Plessner, and this idea has been applied to understandings of the theater which thematizes this transitionality as the human condition itself. The theater, generally situated on the interactive borders of society, functions in epistemologically unstable periods both as a laboratory of the constitution of heterogeneous human subjectivity, and as a laboratory of the production of culture and the Other of culture. In the early modern period the theater performs an intensive anatomization of various forms and situations of liminality that are often extreme or intensified: different passages are scrutinized inside and among human beings, inside and among states,

129 Jonathan Bate argues that the audience members were well prepared and conditioned to interpret the figure of the moor on the English Renaissance stage according to a set rule of symbolism: "The Jew of Malta fulfills the expectations set up by its title. [...] An audience member going along to a new play called *The Moor of Venice* would therefore have had a similar expectation." (291). According to Bate "Shakespeare's *Venice* [...] will serve as a paradigm of global capitalism." (305) See his "Shakespeare's Islands." In *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, 289-305.

130 Bate also notes the analogy between islands and Shakespearean drama: "[Shakespeare] was interested in islands because they constitute a special enclosed space within the larger environment of politics, perhaps a little like the enclosed space of the theater within the larger environment of the city." (290) If the theater is an island, it is one which is a point of connection between lands, countries, nations, and routes of commercial, intellectual, political trade.

countries, lands. The sea and figures of the sea are thematic metaphors of this liminality, arousing or answering to the curiosity of the early modern spectator. In my reading of *Othello* I will employ semiography as an interpretive combination of iconography and postsemiotics in order to investigate the construction of the liminal figure of Othello as a Moor between black and white, between Christian and pagan, as well as a man of the sea between lands: a condensed figure of the contained culturally other, the in-between.

After all the commercial discourse that dominates these plays, it is quite a surprise to see that Shakespeare himself proves to be a very bad merchant at the beginning of *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*. He appears determined to sell the early modern audience a commodity that is almost impossible to sell. I do not need to quote the bulky critical literature on the symbolically determined iconography of the Moor to see that Othello's black figure was decoded by the English Renaissance audience in a way as determined and rigid as the symbolic codes of the Chinese theater, which might turn Othello into a eunuch if the director is not careful.¹³¹ Shakespeare is coming out with a character that the spectators will not buy because it is in utter contradiction to everything they rely on in their horizon of expectations. Shakespeare certainly knew that an honest blackamoor, a heroic Ethiopian, a diligent and devotedly Christian black will not sell easily in London at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, he experiments with the paradox because, as we will witness in the long run, he provides us with a very Montaignean lesson in the marketplace where Othello is an ambiguous and fantastic merchandise.

As I argued earlier in my chapter on the semiography of the fantastic, the fantastification of subjectivities and bodies is a frequent representational technique in literature in general and in Shakespearean drama in particular, and I think the

131 For the iconography of blackness and black characters on the stage, see, for example, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face Maligned Race. The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge - London: Louisiana State UP, 1987).

character of Othello as such definitely falls within this category. The double nature of the fantastic is especially manifest in Othello's fantastic character: it appears as a potentially subversive element in Venetian society and as the embodiment of the threats and dangers that England had to face at a time of colonizing expansion, but this subversiveness is contained within the cosmos of the play and does not become operational and effective in relation to the actual reality of the audience. In any case, the hybridity and liminality of the abject, fantasticated image of the black is itself an example of the representational power of the early modern theater.

From Arnold van Gennep through Victor Turner to Helmuth Plessner and Erika Fischer-Lichte, liminality has been conceptualized as the condition of in-betweenness, border-crossing, as the rite of passage that is constitutive of the human condition, the ability of the human being to develop self-reflexivity.¹³² Since the crossing or violation of identity categories, roles and subjectivity patterns is also at the heart of the theatrical operation, Erika Fischer-Lichte rightly argues that Plessner defines the anthropological condition of the human being as a theatrical situation. The theater symbolizes and thematizes the *conditio humana* because everything in the theater is focused around the idea of identity change and transition. My contention is that the early modern theater as a market-place of identity patterns and fantastic modes of entertainment, as a commodity exchange of the cultural imagination, functioned very similarly to the role of the sea as a complex arena of interconnecting routes between cultures, lands, identities and anxieties. The passage between islands and shorelines, continents and empires of radically different natures is comparable to the shifts between identities and roles in the theater, where the specific culture sees its own image reflected and problematized in the mirror of theatrical border-crossings.

132 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Aldine Transaction, 1995); Helmuth Plessner *Gesammelte Schriften 8. Conditio humana* (Suhrkamp, 2003).

Theatrical representations of the culturally Other function perhaps the most intensively through their iconography as agents thematizing these rites of passage and liminalities. Othello's case is so special because he falls within the category of the contained Other who, nevertheless, remains an incessant threat, a potential danger that looms within the structure of the society. He functions within Venetian society as an emblem of the suppressed, dark colony of the collective consciousness of the culture, as the unconscious in the psychoanalytical paradigm of the constitution of the subject. His character represents and condenses various types of passages, and as such he can be surely defined through Kristeva's category of the abject: that which is in-between, borderline, ambiguous, the element which violates the limits and categories of the structure. Kristeva defines the abject as that which is primarily ambiguous and observes no categorization or borders and, to say the least, Othello is ambiguous.¹³³

The ambiguity results from the tension between the extremely rigid negative iconographic determination of the Moor as non-Christian, Other, dangerous and barbarous, and the positive moral-cultural attributes Othello is endowed with in the beginning of the play.¹³⁴ We are told that, as a faithful servant to Venice, Othello is hosted and contained within the body of Venetian society, but we are also immediately exposed to all the negative markers that were almost automatically assigned to the figure of the Moor in the code system of early modern England.¹³⁵ The shower of pejorative labels Brabantio casts upon Othello perfectly sums up the prejudices and general assumptions of the theatrical audience. Even if, by the time of *Othello*, the audience of the London theaters had already been witness to positive images of the converted and "domesticated" Moor, the automatism of Christian religious iconography was probably much

133 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 17.

134 Stephen Orgel says "Shylock touches upon profoundly ambivalent attitudes in all of us." I believe a similar kind of ambivalence also characterizes the audience's initial reaction to Othello. See Stephen Orgel. "Shylock's Tribe." In *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, 38-53; 53.

135 As Michael Neill says, Othello is "anomalous," and his "story of capture [...] belongs not to the industrialized human marketplace of the Atlantic triangle, but to the same Mediterranean theater of war as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus." See his "'His master's ass': Slavery, Service and Subordination in Othello." In *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, 215-229; 217.

stronger than the memory of those few instances. As Jonathan Bate argues, Othello is a converted blackamoor and the play is the process of his re-conversion.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the image of the converted Other does not put suspicion to sleep, as is the case in Venice as well. Othello is tolerated, appreciated and honored only as long as he is reliable and immaculate to the maximum degree. As soon as something is amiss around him, he is instantly just a black ram wreaking havoc in the stables of God's white Christian civilization.¹³⁷

Thus, Othello, as the contained and domesticated Other surely takes the contemporary audience by surprise, since the representation deprives the audience of the possibility of satisfying the expectations they have on the basis of their cultural repertoire, their horizon of expectations. However, even if Shakespeare appears to be a bad merchant in the beginning, he invents his servant, his commercial aid in selling the dubious commodity of the whitened Moor. On the surface dramaturgical level, *The Tragedy of Othello* is largely about the sophisticated process through which Iago reshapes Othello as a trade item into a form which is marketable for the general public, an image of the Moor which meets their expectations, which sells easily. This trading in Othello is typically commercial and befits the Mediterranean atmosphere of Venice where everything depends on the successful maintenance of transactions and proportions.

R. Chris Hassell notes how the central merit – grace issue of the reformation informs the tragic universe of Othello through the constitutive imagery of *psychostasis*, the weighing of souls, a key element in the iconography of justice and the Last Judgement.¹³⁸ I think this element of Christian theology and iconography is what goes through a profound commercialization, and the end

136 Bate, 305.

137 "If not a victorius warrior, then Othello is nothing." Charles Marowitz. "Shakespeare's Outsiders." In *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, 206-214; 210. Marowitz is indeed right to ask at the very beginning of his essay: "If Shylock is the black sheep of the Venetian community, what are we to call Othello, that other great misfit from the same city?" (210) If Othello's "power-to-deliver-the-goods" is questioned, his market value disappears and he falls back into his original category of the fantastic abject. Note that Marowitz is also employing mercantile terminology.

138 R. Chris Hassel Jr. "Intercession, Detraction and Just Judgment in Othello." *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 35.1 (Spring 2001), 43-68.

result is a *mercantile psychostasis* through which Iago profanes the originally moral – ethical idea.

The procedure is two-sided: Iago engages in a long process of working on Othello in order to sell him his own merchandise, his version of reality, and this reality happens to be a woman, an exchange commodity that functions as one of the most powerful tokens of the patriarchal establishment. Surveillance of marriage contracts solidifies and maintains the feudal, patriarchal order.¹³⁹ At the same time, Iago is gradually turning the character of Othello into a version which will be more readily purchased by the early modern English audience, as if he were commissioned by Shakespeare, the director of this imaginary commodity exchange. The play, apparently, is about the production of an Othello that will finally legitimate the biased expectations of the spectator. Iago successfully employs the art of conviction and persuasion, a rhetorical technique most typically employed in the marketplace in acts of bargaining. And bargaining of a special sort we have right at the beginning of the play, which introduces us into a detailed description of weighing, measurements, proportions. It is all about justice, one could safely say, but, in the world of Venice and in the highly commercialized region of the Mediterranean, justice translates into exchange value, market value and measurements. “Put money in thy purse!” – Iago’s commandment, repeated eleven times at the end of Act I Scene 3 can be read as a slogan that applies to the entire world of Venice.

The mercantile imagery of *Othello* is manifest from the very first lines of the play, and the old argument that the initial sentences of a Shakespearean drama encapsulate the essence of the entire play also applies to *Othello*, since the very first object named by Roderigo in the first three lines of the tragedy is nothing else but a purse:

[Tush,] never tell me! I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

139 “What matters is less the issue of Othello’s blackness in itself than the undoing of patriarchal authority and succession threatened by his unlicensed liaison.” Neill, *Issues of Death*, 218.

This purse, Jan Kott would perhaps say, will never disappear from the stage of *Othello*. What we have in the initial dialogues of the play is a discourse of trade, accounting, and finance. Iago accuses Othello of unjust market behavior, non-compliance with the rules of trade. I only quote some expressions from Iago's list of grievances: "I know my price, I am worth no worse a place." (11) "I... must be belee'd and calm'd / By debtor and creditor..." (31) The disappearance of Desdemona is also communicated to Brabantio with commercial terms, as theft, robbery, as a loss in the inventory.

It is ironic how the metatheatrical perspective of the play establishes a link between Iago and Othello. The famous self-proclamation of Iago as a pretender, a selfish and conceited actor and simulator actually applies to Othello as well. Iago's "I am not what I am" could also be announced by Othello, meaning that he is not what his looks suggest. Othello repeatedly proclaims that he wants to avoid role-playing, pretence, self-fashioning. He declares himself a straightforward soldier, but, ironically, he constantly has to fight the role, the category, the symbolical garment in which his context dresses him. Iago, on the other hand, wears no visible mark of his dark intents, he displays signs of loyalty and attachment, but these are "indeed but sign" (1.1.157), and they function as an elaborate masquerade of roles. Othello wears a mask of stigmatization, no matter how much he tries to avoid role-playing. Iago is seemingly white and devoid of false pretence, while in reality he is but a multiplicity of masks.

Thus, in the mercantile world of Venice, Iago might think he has successfully demonstrated that we can never be sure about the inner threats posed by the contained abject. The danger emanating from the culturally Other will always be there, liminal characters will forever remain liminal, no matter how much the alien gets assimilated. This is indeed a xenophobic lesson that would, alas, sell very easily in many parts of our present day Europe as well, the Mediterranean not excluded. However, this is the very point where *The Tragedy of Othello* goes beyond the mercantilism of Iago; the xenophobic stance is what

Shakespeare surpasses and deconstructs precisely by employing Iago as his merchant. Iago might be a very good retailer, an ingenious gossip, but he is a very poor reader of Montaigne. Through his own sophisticated, painstaking and psychologically masterminded work, it is not Othello's originary, innermost, naturally given corruption and bestiality that Iago proves in the end, no matter how much the audience, on the surface level, might indulge in seeing proof which might legitimate that prejudiced expectation. After the first shock, the spectator will realize a different moral. What the play really demonstrates is the Montaignean idea that the self, our innermost subjectivity is in a flux, in constant metamorphosis, context-dependant, fabricated. Robert Elrod argues that in his early writings, Montaigne's exploration of the self seemed to result in its dissolution, as if the self-identity of the subject was grounded in a huge vacuum.¹⁴⁰ However, Elrod also finds that later Montaigne appears to emphasize the possibility of some inner core, which is nothing else but the growing self-consistency one might attain through reflecting upon his or her own different social selves.¹⁴¹ I believe Shakespeare, establishing a borderline world of liminalities through the theatrical representation of a Mediterranean Other, first tricks the audience into a comfortable position of reinforced xenophobia, and then dislocates and deconstructs that position in order to provide us with an exercise in the self-reflexivity of the sort Montaigne called for.

140 This is indeed a very postmodern realization, which Francis Bacon in his *The Tremulous Private Body* sees manifest in the character of Hamlet as the prototypical early modern subject.

141 Robert Ellrod. "Self-Consistency in Montaigne and Shakespeare." In *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, 135-155; 143.

***Hamlet* and Cinematographical Anatomy:
Gábor Bódy's Stage of Consciousness**

The theater – film interface has never been more important than today, when studies in mediality give new impetus to the postsemiotic theories of adaptation and representational logic. Film theories have amply benefited from comparative investigations into the analogies and differences between theatrical and cinematic representational techniques. Is it the semi-ritualistic and incorporating totality of theatrical involvement or the agency of the gaze that bears a greater effect on the psychosomatic heterogeneity of the subject-as-spectator? Where does the multimodality of semiosis attain greater efficiency in establishing, problematizing or negating the immediacy of experience? Such interrogations have become common in the study of the relationships between theater and film during the past twenty years, but, as I already argued in my introduction of the semiographic methodology, this critical perspective already had been preceded by an important turn towards performance oriented interpretations in theater studies. My focus here will be on Shakespearean scholarship and the reinterpretations of the early modern theater, as well as the bearing these new findings had on filmic

representation. I intend to establish a connection between the two fields by analyzing a production by the pioneering figure of experimental Hungarian theater and film, Gábor Bódy. The cultural practice and public spectacle of anatomy, introduced earlier in relation to the fantastic and *Titus Andronicus*, will be the example which will connect in my argumentation the early modern and the postmodern, as well as the theatrical and the cinematic. I would like to shed light on how Bódy's work can be interpreted as a peculiar premonition of critical trends that emerged after his productions.

Performance-oriented semiotic approaches have become widespread and diverse in Shakespeare studies since the late 1970s. The word versus image, verbal versus visual debate about the early modern theater took a decisive turn with the canonization of the approaches that investigate the material conditions and the representational logic of the emblematic theater, the semiotic space for which English Renaissance dramas were specifically intended and designed. From Glynne Wickham's early accounts of the emblematic stage properties¹⁴² to Robert Weimann's seminal contention about the difference between the *platea* and the *locus* of stage representation,¹⁴³ and Alan Dessen's attempts to recover Shakespeare's theatrical vocabulary¹⁴⁴ for the modern spectator, these studies made it indisputable that we need to attempt to restore these plays to the hypothetically reconstructed original theatrical *representational logic*. It is on the basis of this logic that the action, the symbolical-iconographical networks of connotations and the emblematic codes can be activated. The representational logic of the stage is crucial in the understanding of any drama, since the dramatic text, as a characteristic feature of the genre itself, hides a significant amount of information, and these blanks are filled in when the text is directed and actualized in the theatrical production. This actualization is even more crucial in the case of

¹⁴² Wickham, *Early English Stages. 1300 to 1600*.

¹⁴³ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, 73-85.

¹⁴⁴ Dessen, *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters; Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary*.

the early modern emblematic theater, where the stage properties, the proximity of the objects, the directionalities all participated in a network of symbolical connotations. As I have been arguing along the lines of a semiographic perspective, we certainly miss a great part of this emblematic polysemy if the contemporary iconographic, theatrical or religious traditions of understanding are not decoded in our reading of the plays, and this decoding inevitably necessitates the observation of the theatrical space as it is implied by the text.

The performance oriented approaches have usually taken into consideration the importance of the horizontal dimensionality of the early modern stage, which is comprised of the representational place of the *locus*, and the interactive, liminal space of the *platea* that functioned as the dimension where the world of theatrical illusion and the world of actual reality melted and fused into one-another, posing questions about the individual autonomy and self-presence of both of these worlds.¹⁴⁵ One of several complex examples of the use of this horizontal dimensionality is when Puck at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dissolves both the world of the play and the world of the audience in his final dream-casting monologue. Less attention has been paid, however, to the equally important and constitutive *vertical dimensionality* of the acting space, which inserted each and every early modern play into a cosmic, universal perspective. In this dimensionality, the action and the semioticity of the drama stretched out between the underworld and the high heavens, representing the analogous and vertical world model which was inherited through the medieval origins of the Renaissance theater. The early modern theater itself, grounded in the analogous mode of thinking and the microcosm – macrocosm philosophy, was primarily considered as a huge emblem of cosmic order and universal harmony. The spectators in the Globe theater could feel that they were part of a microcosmic laboratory of the world where they were witnesses to various investigations into comic issues. At the same time, it was exactly because of its

¹⁴⁵ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, 212.

primary emblematic meaning of order that the English Renaissance theater could also represent chaos, disharmony and misrule. An often-recurring technique to foreground images of cosmic and social disorder is when the verticality of the theatrical space goes through an inversion. This inversion is a characteristic attribute of the carnivalesque, but it often results in much more than mere topsyturvydom or disorder. The eruption of sexual energy on May Day or the damaging chaos of evil in the world of *Macbeth* where “Fair is foul and foul is fair” are visions of disorder and misrule indeed, but even more spectacular and effective are, I think, those instances when the positionalities in the verticality are inverted, and the metaposition on the top is occupied and usurped by representatives of the bottom, the underworld. The visual verticality of the theater could very powerfully represent such an inversion, which often resulted in an all-embracing tragic irony. The best early example for this *vertical inversion* is from the prototypical English Renaissance revenge tragedy, Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the metaposition of the heavens, from where the unfolding of some providential plan could be expected, is occupied by the Allegory of Revenge and the Ghost of Don Andrea. These two agents of the underworld must have reached their post in the contemporary staging ascending from below, through the trap door, probably to one of the balconies above the stage. Thus, representatives of the underworld here are metapositioned on the top – the transcendental position of God is dislocated, but the characters in the play are blind to this. In the intricate network of revenges the characters have to outdo the others in plotting and maneuvering. They are striving to achieve a position higher than all the others, but they are unaware of the fact that the seat of the best revenger, the position which they are fighting for has already been irrevocably occupied.

We find that a similar vertical inversion is constitutive of the world of a great number of other plays, mainly tragedies. In *Hamlet*, the Ghost is an agent which is active both above and below, leaving no place for a divine transcendental reference point, and this omnipresence of the Ghost is often properly staged in postmodern adaptations as well (e.g., in the stage production of Gábor Bódy

which I will analyze later). In *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron emerges from below and later very often possesses the highest metaposition, as it is also powerfully emphasized in Julie Taymor's postmodern film adaptation, where Aaron is granted the only location of metaperspective upon the entire environment of the film. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the skull of Gloriana is introduced by Vindice at the beginning of the play as a representative of the underworld, coming back to haunt the corrupt court, and later, having been ostensibly shown and raised above all other things by Vindice, it becomes the all-generating agent of the tragedy. Whenever we read these early modern plays, we need to make an effort to establish an imaginative staging in our interpretation in order to position the action in the semiotic space of the theater. Thus, the initial monologue of Gloucester in *Richard III* will lose its most important implications if we do not picture him in the position of the Vice, acting as an agent of involvement on the interactive margin of the stage, in continuous and vibrant contact with the spectators. Similarly, Vindice at the beginning of his tragedy is best visualized, again on the basis of contemporary emblematic codes and stage conventions that I investigated in my chapter on the emblematic theater, as an agent of the *memento mori* tradition who, at the same time, does not simply act out the standard moralizing, but also superimposes the iconographic skull over everything else in the entire world, establishing yet another instance of inversion. Death's head, the skull, recuperated from the grave, the underworld below, achieves a position on top of the world.

Inversion and the ensuing disorder are often represented in English Renaissance tragedy with anatomical precision and through anatomical imagery. Anatomical attention focuses on the way the human body can be opened up to reveal the secrets of some hitherto unknown reality. The number of studies on the presence and history of anatomy in early modern English culture has been growing since the late 1980s, revealing the close connection between, and the parallel development of, the anatomy theater and theatrical playhouse. As Hillary

M. Nunn argues in one of the most recent volumes, “In early modern London, public interest in human dissections and playhouse dramas developed nearly simultaneously.”¹⁴⁶ Anatomization in general, however, had a much larger epistemological stake. The entire early modern period is characterized by an *expansive inwardness*: the term might sound paradoxical, but paradoxicality is a term that befits the age itself. New inventions, discoveries, epistemological frontiers are opened up, but all this is carried out with an intention to penetrate beyond the surface of things, to gain insight into the depth behind the façade of the world, to arrive at some immediacy of experience, at some knowledge in a time of uncertainties. This inwardness is constitutive of the imagery and the dramaturgy of the plays that were designed for the theaters of the time by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The disruption of harmony and order is investigated in a world where physical and mental wholeness is mutilated, opened up, penetrated and dissected. Limbs and body parts are dispatched on various itineraries, but the all-encompassing inwardness does not only aim at the corporeal level. We are also introduced again and again, as if in a psychic laboratory, into the anatomization of the mental processes as well. Early modern drama employs a double anatomy: a simultaneously corporeal and mental dissection tests the thresholds of meaning, knowledge and identity.

One special instance of this twofold dissection is Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, a tragedy of consciousness in which the imagery of dissection actually turns the play into a continuous vivisection of the protagonist. We are witnessing a self-anatomy, full of images of the body, the flesh, decay, corruption, disease, all filtered, processed and magnified through the mind of the early modern subject. Too much has been written about the pervasive presence of the body and the mind in *Hamlet* for me to enlist the ways in which this presence informs the play. In the book which will be undoubtedly canonized as one of those that solidified the

¹⁴⁶ Nunn, *Staging Anatomies. Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy*, 4. For the interrelated history of the early modern anatomy theater and public playhouses, see Hillman and Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, and Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts*.

interest in early modern anatomy, Jonathan Sawday points at the move from public autopsy to the more developed form of the public spectacle: the self-dissection of the anatomist. “The science of the body was to become not something to be performed only on dead corpses removed from the execution scaffold, but on the anatomist’s own body.”¹⁴⁷ The self-dissection of the anatomy theater finds its parallel in the twofold self-anatomy of the protagonist in early modern tragedy.

Within the framework of this *double anatomy*, I would like to dwell on one peculiar postmodern transmediation, a stage and a film adaptation of Shakespeare’s tragedy, directed by a Hungarian postmodern experimental director. Gábor Bódy’s stage production of *Hamlet* was a groundbreaking endeavor by the pioneering director who renewed Hungarian and East-Central European cinematography by the employment of semiotic theory, video technology and a theory of his own about seriality and the attribution of meaning in cinematic productions. Bódy was chiefly an expert and a great innovator in cinematography, but he also worked occasionally for the theater.¹⁴⁸ He directed *Hamlet* for a theater outside the capital, but not much later the stage performance was used as a basis for a video film produced for the Hungarian public television in 1982. The object of my analysis here is the film version, which is the final product of a series of transmediations, starting from the dramatic text, once designed for an emblematic theatrical space, through the experimental staging to the video technique in which the *multimediality of representations* reaches its most complex level. In this production of 1982, acting as a harbinger of critical trends yet to come, Gábor Bódy introduces a number of interpretive insights which emerged only after the mid-eighties. Bódy employs the concept of the

¹⁴⁷ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 110.

¹⁴⁸ Interpreters of Bódy’s productions all emphasize his theoretical and technological innovations. András Bálint Kovács argues “Not only his artistic creation but also his quite significant theoretical writings prove that Bódy was one of the first filmmakers of international significance to realize and to foresee the important changes of technology and style caused by the end of modernism and the advent of the new media.” “Gábor Bódy: A Precursor of the Digital Age.” <http://www.nava.hu/download/kab/Body.pdf> (access: December 15, 2010).

tragedy of consciousness,¹⁴⁹ the cultural and theatrical tradition of anatomy and the idea of self-dissection, and combines them all in an experimental staging of Shakespeare's play. The central representational technique of his stage production is the spectacle of the entire theatrical space as a huge dissected human brain. The action of the tragedy unfolds within the labyrinthine tunnels and chambers of this brain-stuff, amidst glittering and greasy fibers, nerve-cells and blood vessels. Bódy does not simply foreground the traditional argument that the play might be read and staged as an extended internal monologue, taking place actually inside Hamlet's troubled mind. He combines this approach with a thematization of the ideas of anatomy, inwardness, materiality and heterogeneity, critical concepts that came into the forefront of Renaissance scholarship by the late eighties. Bringing together the theme of the tragedy of consciousness with the theme of anatomization, Bódy's production also pays attention to the representational technique of inversion, carefully positioning the actors and the symbolical properties on Hamlet's stage of consciousness in a way that observes the representational logic of the early modern emblematic theater.

The multiple references to the fallible human body and the agonizing, troubled human mind establish a ground for this theatrical vision, to the composition of which Bódy adds one more visual and interpretive element. In a world where spies and traitors corrupt the state and everybody is eavesdropping, Hamlet's stage of consciousness is also constructed as the cross-section of a huge ear. This mind-ear represents the all-penetrating insecurity and surveillance, but, at the same time, it also foregrounds the passing of the information through the ear to the consciousness of the character, the way, for example, in which Hamlet learns about the circumstances of his father's death. This information penetrates his mind through his ears in a fashion very similar to the way the poison entered his father's body through the ear. Hamlet acts and moves within this space in a

¹⁴⁹ John Bayley introduces the term and applies it to three of Shakespeare's great tragedies. "[...] *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* [...] all enter and possess the mind and instantly become a part of it. Indeed, immensely realistic as they are, they seem to take place in an area of thinking, feeling and suffering." *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 164.

way which suggests that, simultaneously, he is passing through various chambers and compartments of his consciousness, through different “volumes of his brain,” as if he was in a private memory-theater which he constructed for himself to keep track of his duties and remembering. The anatomical presentation of this idea establishes a close connection between the tragedy and the new tropological - poststructuralist interest in the material foundations of signification, in the unmasterable materiality of the letter, the signifier, the symbol. The epistemological scrutiny is a leading motif of the play: Hamlet, who knows no “seems”, who has “that within which passes show,” tries to penetrate the surface of things in order to arrive at the authentic meaning of his identity and the world around himself. It is not only the meaning of the Ghost which is dubious for him, but everything concerning the supposedly divine and providential nature of the creation and the human being. This testing of the epistemological boundaries finally finds its target in the very materiality of the human being as well as that of language. The line “oh that this too, too sullied flesh would melt” (1.2.129) is in the most organic relationship with Hamlet’s famous “words, words, words” (2.2.192): the materiality of the body and the materiality of language equally appear to conceal the immediacy of knowledge from the human being. Hamlet’s anatomical endeavor to dig down to the depths of both materialities results in a self-dissection which the great soliloquies take us through. This focus on the materiality of signification is emphasized when the Hamlet-actor (György Cserhalmi) is observing, feeling, caressing the pages and the very materiality of the books he is holding in his hands during the dialogue with Polonius, but, at the same time, the stage setting also directs our attention to the materiality of the human consciousness, as if the stage itself was “the volume of his brain.”

As has been noted, Bódy is careful to employ the vertical dimensionality which so importantly informed the world of the emblematic theater. A vertical framework is provided for the play by the omnipresence of the Ghost, who is supposed to dwell below but also appears from above, from the position which

should be the seat of the divine providential protection as it is expected by the human being.

The inversion of the heaven – earth – underworld verticality results, just like in other early modern tragedies, in a feeling of insecurity and disorder that infiltrates the entire play. When the story of the Ghost penetrates Hamlet's ears, Bódy employs the video-montage technique to represent how the character's identity is shattered and decentered by this visual and auditory experience.

In the course of the play, the various movements and actions are represented in a way as if the different parts of the protagonist's consciousness were activated and tested. Characters that fall will get entangled and locked up in Hamlet's nerve fibers.

At the climactic point of the gravedigger scene, Hamlet arrives at a limit he is afraid to probe: the gravedigger offers him the skull to have a closer look. Hamlet does not dare to touch the emblem of death, but extends the shovel instead, lets the gravedigger place the skull on the instrument, and starts contemplating the horrid object from a safe distance.

The skull becomes a sign of the final destination in Hamlet's journey of self-dissection. His poisoned and disintegrating consciousness, his body which he contemplates with contempt and his heterogeneous and decentered identity are all brought to a final realization in the face of this tangible, material presence of death. This realization is the one which is also proposed by Francis Barker in his reading of the drama.¹⁵⁰ After probing the frontiers and borderlines of meaning, Hamlet must realize that, in a world without transcendental guarantees and providential help, in the very depth of his subjectivity, there is a huge vacuum, nothing else. This realization helps him overcome his inability to act, and to traverse the psychic resistance which renders him inert and hesitant. In psychoanalytical terms, he is willing and ready to come to terms with his

¹⁵⁰ Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, 35.

unconscious, which is represented by his entry into the lower realm in the verticality of the play. When he cries out “This is I, Hamlet the Dane!” at the very moment when he is willing to identify with the title of his diseased father, he stands at the mouth of the tunnel which represents Ophelia’s grave, the entry into the underworld, the passage to his unconscious.

I believe the above considerations establish that Gábor Bódy’s stage production is a pioneering work which already anticipated the “corporeal turn”¹⁵¹ of poststructuralist critical thinking which was to take place in early modern studies somewhat later. Gábor Bódy realized or anticipated several of the critical and interpretive attitudes and findings of the past twenty years. In his very influential cinematic achievements which were to come after the production of *Hamlet*, Bódy never gave up his corporeal interest, and, among other films, we keep encountering a persistent anatomization of the body in *Psyché*, perhaps his most complex and monumental direction.

In the film version of *Hamlet*, the montage technique, the metallic and artificial sound effects, the lighting and the system of camera perspectives all add to his original theatrical and cinematographic interpretation of the tragedy, an interpretation which observed the representational logic of verticality on the emblematic stage and the early modern traditions of anatomization, inwardness and epistemological experimentation. Returning to my original proposition about the logic of inversion on the early modern stage, I contend that Bódy’s ingenuity is also manifest in the way he uses and further develops this representational technique. He employs the vertical directionalities in his production, and stretches out the underworld in the entire verticality of the play’s cosmos through the

¹⁵¹ I employ the concept on the basis of Horst Ruthrof, *Semantics and the Body. Meaning from Frege to the Postmodern* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). I think that this corporeal turn towards a “corposemantics,” as Ruthrof puts it, is at least as important in the poststructuralist critical scene as the all-determining linguistic turn earlier on, or the “visual turn” in mediality studies.

omnipresence of the Ghost's agency, through "the embassy of death,"¹⁵² which equally emanates from below and from above. At the same time, Bódy in his adaptation intensifies the anatomical nature of the play by producing one more "inversion." By locating the entire play in Hamlet's dissected and opened brain, he *turns the tragedy of consciousness inside out*: all the mental processes, all the onion-like layers and contents of consciousness are laid bare and visible. They are ostensibly foregrounded to the spectator as a representation, a reminder, a postmodern *memento mori* of our own heterogeneous materiality.

¹⁵² G. Wilson Knight. "The Embassy of Death: An Essay on *Hamlet*." In *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 17-49.

8

***Cloud 9* and the Semiotics of Postcolonialism**

How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?

Julia Kristeva¹⁵³

8.1. Drama Studies and Cultural Studies

The semiographic investigation of the problems of subjectivity, cultural identity and dramatic representation in the preceding chapters has explicated that dramatic literature is one of the most sensitive laboratories of cultural imagery. In what follows I would like to show that the comparison of early modern and postmodern representational techniques can establish a theoretical meta-perspective for us to better understand the logic of contemporary culture and the representation of cultural imageries in post-war drama. At the outset I will refer to my experiences

¹⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 182.

in the teaching of drama and theater semiotics in the University of Szeged in Hungary.

In the mid-1990s at the University of Sussex in Brighton I was pleasantly surprised to see that the course *Introduction to English Studies* included two lectures on the theories of the subject and their importance in cultural studies. In Hungary at that time we were just starting to work out our British Cultural Studies curriculum which, by now, inevitably includes terms that the Hungarian students of English had been exposed to only in graduate courses before: interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, postcolonialism, canon formation, decanonization, subjectivity. Indeed, an important change in the structure of new curricula has been the introduction of such terms right at the beginning of the program. It is not possible to approach the study of cultural formations without understanding the status of the subject in the semiotic mechanism of culture. Literature as a social discursive practice participates in the simultaneous circulation and subversion of identity patterns that social subjects are compelled to internalize.

I think it is arguable that the questions of the constitution of the subject and the cultural imagery of specific establishments surface with extraordinary intensity in dramatic literature and theatrical practice. The performance oriented semiotic approach to drama that I have been pursuing in this book reveals that the dramatic text by its very nature addresses the fundamental questions of subjectivity and representation. When it is staged in the actual theatrical context of reception or in the imaginative staging of the reader during the act of reading, drama can either thematize or conceal the representational insufficiency which is in its center. From a semiotic point of view this insufficiency means that it is impossible to establish the total presence of things that are absent, and for which the theatrical representation stands on the stage. However, it is this idea of presence that is foregrounded in the drama and the theater from the earliest mimetic theories up to the poststructuralist deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. The unbridgeable gap between the role and the actor, representation and

reality can be thematized by experimental drama or metadrama in general, but it can also be suppressed by the photographic tradition of the bourgeois theater. Drama can aim at turning the spectator in the theater into a passive consumer of an “authentic representation” of reality, or it can deprive the receiver of the expected, comfortable identity-positions, in order for the theater-goers to obtain a metaperspective on their positionality in the cultural imagery. Earlier in Chapter Four I argued that it is possible to work out a typology of theaters on the basis of the representational techniques in the theater that either create a comfortable identity position for the spectator, or try to unsettle this subject position, bringing the identity of the spectator-subject into crisis. I employed Julia Kristeva’s typology of signifying practices to define the first type as phentheater, and the second type as genotheater. It follows that the actual theater or drama model of a cultural period is always in close relation with the *world model* of the era, since the representational awareness, the high semioticity of the theatrical space always serves as a laboratory to test the most intriguing epistemological dilemmas of the specific culture. The beliefs, rules or ideological strategies of representation and knowledge can be generally concealed or latent in the every-day mechanism of culture, in the ideological unconscious of the subjects, but these strategies can be exposed immediately in the dense semiotic context of the theater since it is the issue of representation, or, more precisely, the representability of reality itself that is addressed and foregrounded in the theatrical performance. Genotheaters take advantage of this opportunity and do not try to cover up the representational questions of the theater by mimetic illusion. My argument is that this genotheatrical representational experimentation is characteristic of epistemologically unstable, transitory historical periods, such as the early modern and the postmodern.

I would like to demonstrate with the example of Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud 9* the way dramatic literature can address central problems of contemporary culture and cultural identity with metadramatic and genotheatrical techniques. I will rely

on the critical apparatus of the postsemiotics of the subject which I introduced earlier. As has been argued, the focal consideration of this theory is that subjectivity is a function and a product of discourse. The subjects internalize and act out identity-patterns in a signifying practice but always already within the range of rules distributed by ideological *regimes of truth*.

This thesis implies that the status of the subject in theory is first of all a question of the *hierarchy between signification and the speaking subject*. The postsemiotics of the speaking subject aims at *decentering* the concept of the unified, self-sufficient subject of Western metaphysics. It is this concept of the unified, homogeneous subject which served as a basis for the incomplete project of modernity and its belief in universal, institutionalized neutral knowledge and truth. It is this belief which, in turn, resulted in the *intellectual imperialism of colonialism*, a central theme in *Cloud 9*.

As I surveyed in my introduction to the postsemiotics of the subject, socio-historical theories of the subject map out the technologies of power in society, which work to subject individuals to a *system of exclusion*. They position the subject within specific sites of meaning-production: power and knowledge operate as an inseparable agency, and the various channels for the circulation of information become constitutive of the subject's personality. Every society is based on an economy of power with a specific *cultural imagery* which circulates identity patterns for the subjects to internalize.

When this historicization of the macrodynamics of the subject is employed together with the psychoanalytical and semiotic theories of the microdynamics of the subject, we see how subjectivity as the experience of being separate from the surrounding exteriority of the social environment emerges in relation to the key-signifiers (the Law, the Name of the Father, the Taboo, etc.) that work as stand-ins between the subject and the lost objects of desire. The signifier emerges in the site of the Other as a guarantee for us to be able to the regain the lost real, and the desire to compensate for the absences within the subject will be the fuel that propels the engine of signification. That inaccessible Other, in relation to which

the subject is always defined, will be the battery of our unconscious modality, which our consciousness will never be able to account for. It is the dark, mysterious and never-subdued *colony* of our subjectivity.

8.2. The Colonial Other

In the semiotic typology of world models, the history of Western civilization moved from the Medieval world model through the Enlightenment paradigm of modernism up to our age of postmodernism, which, in many aspects, corresponds chronologically to the beginning of *postcolonialism*. The theoretical questions revolving around the postmodern subject are greatly analogous with the issue of the *postcolonial subject*: a subject which can no longer define itself in opposition to the separated, abjected Other, that is, the colony.

This will take us back to the metaphor I introduced before: the unconscious is the mysterious, uncanny colony of our psychic apparatus. How can we translate this psychoanalytical formula into the semiotics of postcolonialism and postmodernism, the subject of which finds itself without that Other which has always served as a comfortable basis in opposition to which the Western identity could be secured?

If we interpret culture as a semiotic mechanism which defines itself in opposition to non-culture, that is, the non-signified, the non-signifiable or that which mustn't be signified, we find that the logic of the Symbolic Order always separates out a territory that is coded by taboos and is considered to be untouchable, impenetrable: *abject*. The abject, which I introduced in earlier chapters on the basis of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, is the radically other, the opposite of that symbolization within the structural borders of which the subject can predicate a seemingly solid and homogeneous, fixated identity for itself. Yet,

it is the abject which has a lot to do with the unconscious modality of the subject and of signification, and it is this unconscious disposition which contains the motilities, fluctuations and drives which provide the psychosomatic energy for the desire to signify. The subject separates itself from the abject, but at the same time secretly, unconsciously feeds on it. Structuralist anthropology showed a long time ago how the abject, let it be sacred or despised, serves to mark out the borders of culture. In a political sense, this becomes most visible in totalitarian systems, such as fascism or communism, which are strongly grounded in defining themselves as the opposite of the abjected Other.

As the postmodern subject finds itself to be a heterogeneous system without a core around which it could center itself, it (perhaps) learns to respect Otherness, since the subject itself is other, non-identical to itself, and cannot define an identity except in interpersonal and intercultural, historically specific social interactions. Similarly, postcolonial society needs to redefine itself, without relying on the abjected colony, against which the Empire engaged in brave missionary work to expand the borders of the one and only unified, homogeneous Western culture. But this is not as easy as it seems. What happens to a society if it loses its unconscious, its “uncanny colony?” What will be the borders within which it can mark out its identity? This is difficult to answer, especially if we consider that postcolonialism in no way means the end of colonizing practices. It is enough to think of the ideological colonization of minds through the media or the capitalist colonization of new markets which is far from being over.

8.3. Colonized Subjectivities

The play I am to scrutinize in the light of these postsemiotic considerations, Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, equally brings up questions of subjectivity, postcolonialism and postmodernism.

On the surface, the first part of *Cloud 9* is an almost didactic representation of the way identity is constituted according to the logic of the colonial mission. The Victorian family lives in the African colony according to the rules of cultural binarisms, and these rules define the native African as the abjected Other, the supplement of the big white Father, in opposition to which the privileged pole of the binarism, the white colonizer receives its heroic and "civilized" quality. "I am father to the natives here" - says Clive, the Victorian patriarch, who brings the Union Jack into the jungle to save the aboriginals from the darkness of heathen ignorance. However, as Churchill herself says in the introduction, it is not only the imperial politics of exclusion that we find working here. Besides the socio-political aspects of the macrodynamics of the colonizing/colonial subject, a perhaps even more important sexual politics is also at work. This articulates the colonial establishment as a patriarchal system in which the phallic position is wielded by the male, a representative of virile health, honesty, and intellect. This cultural image of the male finds its grounds of definition, its abjected Other in the figure of woman, representative of disease, lust, corruption, and threat. Churchill is careful to interrelate the concept of the colony and the concept of the feminine through a systematic imagery of darkness, fluidity, mystery. The natives, the colony are to white culture as woman is to man. It follows that, on the level of the microdynamics of the subject, the cultural imagery of the modernist, colonial mission invites the subject to define itself

through the suppression, the colonization of the feminine, the heterogeneous Other. “You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous” - says Clive to Mrs. Saunders (23).¹⁵⁴ “Women can be treacherous and evil” - says he to Betty, his wife. “They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that...we must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow us up.” (45) The family protects the subject from the female just like the Empire protects the nation from the colony. Even better, the white nation sets out to eat up, to contain the dark territory in order to prevent any dangerous attack.

I think, however, that the real point of the first part is on an even more subtle, linguistic level. *Cloud 9* shows how the identity patterns in this cultural paradigm are enforced and circulated in discursive practices, in linguistic norms and clichés that we unconsciously internalize. The entire language of Act I is patriarchal, male dominated. “Come gather, *sons* of England...The Forge of war shall weld the chains of *brotherhood secure*” (3, 5, emphasis mine) - goes the singing at the very beginning of Act I, setting up the discursive *technology of gender* which aims at desexualizing the human being and engendering it as a male subject. All the cultural values are defined in terms of the male as well: “(Betty to Edward) You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. No one will talk to you, you won’t be on the cricket team, you won’t grow up to be a man like your papa.” (40)

Only homosexuality is considered a greater perversion than being girlish. “I feel contaminated...A disease more dangerous than diphtheria” (52) - says Clive to Harry, enveloping the unnamable, the unutterable in an imagery of sickness, deviation from an original, healthy state of being. We find a similar occurrence when Betty is asked by Clive to give an account of the vulgar joke Joshua played upon her. She is unable to verbalize the event, because she just cannot violate the linguistic norms she is subject to. The words Joshua used should not form part of

¹⁵⁴ References apply to the following edition: Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (Revised American edition, New York: Routledge, 1988).

her vocabulary. In the world of the drama, just like in the cultural establishment of modernism, sexuality is something to be taken care of - it is the most important topic for the constant self-hermeneutics we need to exercise in the Foucauldian society of confession.¹⁵⁵

Identities are constituted here in an environment of incessant surveillance and self-surveillance, and this is especially manifest in the puppet show atmosphere of the first scene which can be felt if we stage the lines of the drama in our imagination. Clive, the patriarch, presents the characters of the drama as if he were the director and the presenter of a theatrical performance. The metatheatrical framework of the play even more strongly focuses our attention on the question of subjectivity as cultural, ideological product. Betty and Edward are played by a person of the opposite sex: the submissive wife is played by a man, and the doll-minding son is played by a woman. The cross-racial structure is perhaps even more powerful than the cross-gendering: the black servant Joshua is played by a white man.¹⁵⁶ These metadramatic markers are obvious only to the spectators who will see that these characters are totally blind to their identity, since they have no metaperspective from which they could see that ideology has already turned them into the thing they would so much like to be. This inversion breaks the mimetic illusion on the stage, the spectator clearly becomes aware that the theatrical representation does not simply want to be the replica of an absent

¹⁵⁵ See Jane Thomas. "The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Essays in Refusal." In Adrian Page, ed., *The Death of the Playwright? Modern British Drama and Literary Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 160-185. "Seen from a Foucauldian point of view, Act I becomes a series of confessions couched in both monologic and duologic form which interweave to form the network of power relations which constitute Victorian colonial society." (172)

¹⁵⁶ See Frances Gray "Mirrors of Utopia: Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock." In James Acheson, ed., *British and Irish Drama since 1960* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 47-59. "Churchill refuses to permit the 'male gaze' which renders man the subject and woman the (sexual) object. Betty is played by a man. He makes no attempt to disguise his maleness, nor does he make any parodic gestures of femininity; rather he incarnates the idea that „Betty“ does not exist in her own right. She is a male construct defined by male need." (53) See also Joseph Marohl "De-realized Women: Performance and Identity in Churchill's *Top Girls*." In Hersh Zeifman and Cythia Zimmerman, eds., *Contemporary British Drama, 1970-90* (London: MacMillan, 1993), 307-322. "Multiple casting and transvestite role-playing reflect the many possibilities inherent in the real world and conventional ideas about the individuality or integrity of character. The theatrical inventiveness of Churchill's comedies suggests, in particular, that the individual self, as the audience recognizes it, is an ideological construct." (308)

reality, and the concentration on the theme of identity is created and maintained from the beginning. The drama becomes a representation of how subjects subject themselves to the roles of the dominant cultural imagery. From a theoretical point of view, Churchill's play thus functions as *genotheater* which dislocates the spectator from the conventional identity-position in order to gain greater metaperspective on his or her ideological positionality.

This metadramatic perspective is present throughout the entire drama. In the second part it is only Cathy who is played by a man, but the mimetic illusion is again broken by lines such as those Lin says to Cathy when the girl tries on her beads: "It is the necklace from Act I." (72) Later on the Edward from Act I comes in. (99) The defamiliarizing effects encourage the spectator to approach the world of the play from a metaperspective. Of course, when we are reading the play, we continuously need to make an effort to create the representational logic of a potential staging, because it is only the staging that fills in the gaps of indeterminacies, of which drama has much more than narrative fiction.¹⁵⁷

Early, predominantly feminist readings of the play celebrated *Cloud 9* as an allegory of (female) sexual liberation. Act II takes place in the postmodern English society of the late 1970s, but the characters are only 25 years older. This cultural establishment seemingly does away with the taboos and codes of suppressed sexuality, and it may appear that the play becomes a celebration of the freedom of the postcolonial, postmodern subject.

This is, however, only the appearance. Homosexuality and bisexuality become accepted or tolerated practices in the London of the 1980s, but only on the surface. Homosexuals are still afraid of losing their jobs, bisexuals practice their sexuality as a political program, and towards the end of the play masturbation appears in Betty's monologue as the only authentic strategy of self-

¹⁵⁷ For the idea of theatrical metaperspective, see Lovrod. "The Rise of Metadrama and the Fall of the Omniscient Observer."

discovery and of becoming a “separate person.”¹⁵⁸ However, these practices, under the cover of liberalism, are still enveloped in a general discursive technology of power which disseminates the idea of sexuality as the central issue of our subjectivity, and through this they tie subjectivity to culturally articulated patterns of sexuality. The metaphysical binarisms seem to disappear, polymorphous sexualities and identity types replace the antagonism of the white culture and the colonial supplement of Act I. At the same time, these new identities are more instable than authentic, more fragmented than self-defined. The image of the Colony, the abjected Other is no longer present in opposition to which they could define themselves, but without this they become desubstantiated, hollow. These characters think they are freer than they were in Act I, but a more subtle cultural imagery infiltrates them even more completely than before. “Paint a car crash and blood everywhere” - says Lin to Cathy. Images of violence, immobility, mental stagnation dominate the consumerist world of Act II. The play does not grant us a happy vision of the “postcolonial subject”: the two Cathies embrace at the end of the drama, turning into a metadramatic allegory of the subject which is no longer a mere supplement, but will never become self-identical either in the network of cultural images of identity.

¹⁵⁸ “Churchill’s stage practice strongly resists the reading ‘one woman triumphs’, and she rejected alterations in the first American production which put Betty’s monologue at the end precisely because it encouraged this.” Gray, “Mirrors of Utopia: Caryl Churchill and *Joint Stock*.” 52.

Surface treatment: The Semiography of *Crash*

The image cannot be destroyed.
W. T. J. Mitchell¹⁵⁹

9.1. Cyborgs: Body Machines and Machine Bodies

The art of a historical period perhaps reveals the most about itself
when it publicly displays its attitude towards the body.

Béla Bacsó¹⁶⁰

As has been argued in the semiographic investigations of the preceding chapters, the body has been in the focus of poststructuralist critical thinking for several decades now, and it has been one of the central issues in the shaping of the

¹⁵⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell. "The Surplus Value of Images." *Mosaic A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 35, no. 3 (Sept, 2002): 1-23.

¹⁶⁰ „Egy kor művészete a legtöbbet talán akkor árulja el önmagáról, amikor a *tesz*hez való viszonyát "közzemlére" teszi." Bacsó Béla, *Kiállni a zavart. Filozófiai és művészetelméleti írások* (Budapest: Kijárat, 2004), 181. (*English translation mine*)

dominant discourses on the theories of the speaking subject. As a fundamental realization it has been established by postsemiotics that the theories of the ontology and the production of meaning cannot be content with the abstraction provided by the transcendental ego of phenomenology. This abstraction neglects to contextualize the speaking subject within the material conditions, the actual social constraints and the corporeal determinations of meaning production, and, because of its embeddedness in an ideological tradition, it does not go beyond the limitations of the Cartesian subject of Western metaphysics.¹⁶¹ The theoretization of the corporeality of the subject has also become indispensable because the body is the most “tangible” meeting point of the two great theoretical shifts that emerged by the mid 1970s: the linguistic and the visual turn. The two critical turns had different receptions chronologically, but they both decanonized with equal intensity the reigning theoretical assumptions, resulting in a new account of the relationship between subject and meaning.

The theoretical concentration on the body intensified the affinity for such parallelisms in the semiotics and the typology of culture which we can now investigate without the simplifications or universalizations characteristic of earlier structuralist or organicist models. The epistemology of the complex constitution of the subject has become, for example, one of the most important points of connection in the attempts to map out the analogies and parallels between the early modern and the postmodern period. My focus on the similarities in the representational techniques of early modern and postmodern dramas aimed at bringing these analogies to light. The unsettling of the medieval concept of the body was followed by its becoming heterogeneous and intriguing in the early modern period, and its being suppressed and ignored in the age of the

¹⁶¹ Kristeva writes about the philosophies of language that are still based on the phenomenological abstraction of the Cartesian ego as follows: “...static thoughts, products of a leisurely cogitation removed from historical turmoil, persist in seeking the truth of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair, and the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a sleeping body - a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience.” Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 13. In order to go beyond phenomenology, Kristeva actually lays down the foundations of postsemiotics by announcing the program of semanalysis, which aims at giving an account of the psychosomatic complexity of the subject.

Enlightenment. The process leads to one of the main traumatic points in the unfinished project of modernity, to the reemerging of the body as a presence which is impossible to erase. We can arrive at a more accurate view of the postmodern body through understanding the early modern epistemological and theological - thanatological crisis. The body is shining in front of us again with an intensity that produces an effect comparable to its first appearances on the dissection tables of the Renaissance anatomists, or behind the perspectographs of the early modern painters.

From the scene of dramas and theatrical representations I move in the present analysis to another mode, that of the filmic representation, which is perhaps the most powerful type of semiosis in our age. The corporeal turn has been as spectacularly present in postmodern cinema as the anatomized body was all-pervasive in the early modern public and anatomical theaters. Postmodern films tend to represent the body as the body of the scopophylic subject-spectator, together with its relations to the social context and the camera perspective, and then these relations are interpreted by postmodern directors as hierarchic systems of dependence. Matuska Ágnes has recently argued that we can gain significant insight from a comparative and contrastive analysis of postmodern film and early modern revenge tragedy when we are interpreting the thematizations of the body in the *Kill Bill* films by Tarantino.¹⁶² In her article Matuska detects analogies between the dramaturgy of Renaissance revenge plays that thematize the fusion of epistemological borderlines, and the *Kill Bill* films which unsettle the sharp separations of reality – fiction – metafiction. In my analysis here I set out to investigate a film by a director who, in my understanding, has also been paying

¹⁶² Matuska Ágnes. "A fikció szentsége: a *Kill Bill* és a reneszánsz bosszúdráma-hagyomány." *Apertúra* 2006 Tél (2. szám) (<http://www.apertura.hu/2006/tel/matuska>; access: January 30, 2010). Matuska argues that the "*theatrum mundi*" tradition had serious epistemological consequences in the thought of the Renaissance since it blurred the borderlines that were supposed to separate reality from fiction.

the most systematic attention to the problematic and fuzzy nature of such borderlines and thresholds of meaning and experience.

It would be difficult to recall a film from the mid-1990s with as great an effect as the controversy and critical debate provoked by the Canadian director David Cronenberg's *Crash*.¹⁶³ The opening night was repeatedly put off because of the passionate protests staged by conservative North American opponents. Masses of people walked out from the first screenings, and, at the same time, masses of people celebrated with loud ovation the daring, experimental, perverse, sharp and witty cinematic language which, by that time, was actually quite typical of Cronenberg. The film is an adaptation of the borderline – sci-fi – pornographic novel by the British writer James Ballard (1973). In the film, the protagonist called James Ballard (James Spader) is accompanied by his wife Catherine (Deborah Unger) in a journey of discovering analogies and connections between the body of machines and the machineries of bodies, between car crashes and erotic excitement, corporeal mutilation and sexual drive energy. In their quest they are guided and assisted by the fanatic Vaughan (Elias Koteas) who photographs crashes and reconstructs famous accidents with live participants, and leads the couple into the somewhat visionary or hallucinatory body-discoveries that are frighteningly bizarre in the beginning, and irresistibly tempting later on. In comparison to the original Ballard novel, Cronenberg provides a very restrained, almost chilly and bare visual version, yet his critics accused him of being immoral and perverse. Regardless of the controversial critical reception, the film has become a memorable production especially because of the masterly performance by Koteas.

Of course, by the time of the introduction of *Crash* in 1996, the concept of the machine body had become a thoroughly thematized and investigated issue of

¹⁶³ Claude Lalumière, for example, writes in *January Magazine* in February 2000: "I find nothing to admire in Cronenberg's posturing, safe, elegant, depoliticized, de-intellectualized and coldly humorless reading of *Crash*." (<http://www.janmag.com/artcult/crash.html>; access: October 16, 2009.)

critical theory in general, and of cultural studies, film theory and postsemiotics in particular. By then, Donna Haraway had already written the Cyborg-manifesto,¹⁶⁴ and the testing and questioning of the epistemological borderline between the machine and the organism had become an established practice not only in sci-fi theories, but also in the recent cultural theories which embedded the question in the broader semiotic-philosophical discourse on the body. The early reactions to the film are loaded with arrogant, outraged, annoyed and quite offended tones, enlisting charges against the production that range from immoral perversion through bestiality to boring stupidity. These reactions rely on the assumption that one generalization is sufficient to describe the totality of the film: an assumption that, in fact, the producers were actually also afraid of.¹⁶⁵ The more analytical and theoretical parts of the criticism aim at interpreting the film in the light of the earlier productions by Cronenberg, usually focusing on the themes of virtual- or hyperreality, abjection and the idea of the cyborg. They consider the cosmos of *Crash* as a manifestation of the surface mechanisms of that consumer society of high capitalism which has lost any feeling of depth, and in which the possibility of a direct, immediate experiencing of reality is irreparably taken away from the human being by the machine or the automobile, which gets inserted between the human body and reality. The reality which is experienced through the automobile in the film is reigning as a virtual reality, and the practices of mutilation, demolition, torture and violence, the aesthetics of the wound and the psychosomatic effect of abjection upon the subject all aim at breaking through this virtuality.

¹⁶⁴ Donna Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.

¹⁶⁵ "In a recent interview to an Italian magazine, the director has explicitly said that his American producer "is afraid." Afraid of what? Of the fact that the movie develops the theorem: car crash = death = mutilation = sexual excitement; surely a singular theory, but it seems to me that anybody has a right to his own tastes, or not?" Vittorio Curtoni. "The Cronenberg Syndrome." (http://www.agonet.it/cafe/dada/dada8/ar1_8.htm, access: October 24, 2009.)

However, in spite of the various interpretations relying on the theories of the abject, most of these approaches stop at the point of merely listing the effects of the different bodily fluids, sexual transgressions and mutilations, without discussing the agency of the abject in light of the fact that, in almost all of his films, Cronenberg systematically thematizes the transgression of the borderlines which constitute structures, or the violations of the surfaces that separate us from the threatening, unstructured Other.

The paradigmatic questioning of thresholds has been observed by some critical analyses in Cronenberg's works. The film *eXistenZ* can be approached on the basis of Haraway's ideas about the fusion of the borderlines between reality and virtuality, organic and mechanical, human and machine. Virilio's thesis on the postmodern ecstasy of velocity and Baudrillard's ideas about hyperreality and virtuality can also be applied together with the problematization of bodily horror. In opposition to these readings, however, I contend that Cronenberg is not trying to establish a sensationalist representation of horror. Instead, he uses the themes and images of sexuality, body horror, body machine and machine body in order to transgress or blur the borderlines between structures, and, through the meticulous examination of the moment of such border-crossings he aims at dislocating the identity position of the receiver. It is in this deployment of the effect where Cronenberg succeeds in giving an account of the mechanism of the effect of the abject.

Ágnes Matuska has already observed the similarities between early modern revenge tragedy and Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films. I maintain that the testing of borderlines is a common representational technique shared by early modern theatrical and postmodern cinematic representations. Abjection is not staged "just like that" in Renaissance revenge tragedy, either. Mutilated bodies, body parts chopped off and dispatched as letters, and decaying victims are again and again the focus of early modern anatomizing attention because these representations try

to give an account of the transition from life to death, from meaningful to unmeaningful, from structured to unstructured. More precisely, they aim at representing the prolonged investigation of the moment of such transitions. Under the effects of reformed theology and the new forms of subjectivity, the medieval tradition of the *ars moriendi* starts being questioned, and the human being's relation to death becomes an epistemological problem; it turns into a *thanatological crisis*. Hieronimo is crying from the depths of utter mental disintegration, Hamlet should long be stiff dead, Othello has already lost all his reserves of blood, Lavinia should long be a decaying cadaver; nevertheless, all these characters are still scrutinizing the mysteries of human existence through various refined methods of signification or in long monologues, swinging back and forth on the threshold separating life from death. This swinging, this *oscillation between the borderlines* that separate structures is thematized in Cronenberg's films through the *emblems of a postmodern ars moriendi*. *Crash* is part of this thematization, where the automobile does not get simply inserted between the human body and nature. Rather, it carries upon itself the human body and thus it becomes the surface, the borderline of the body, in order for the human being to experience the story of his or her own insatiable desire on its glassy, metallic surfaces.

9.2. The Abject

When understanding the agency of the abject, we have to be careful in handling Kristeva's concept since her discourse on abjection employs two perspectives, and it is not always automatically clear or manifest which aspect is at work.

As has been seen earlier, Kristeva distinguishes between two modalities in the psychosomatically heterogeneous system of the speaking subject. The semiotic modality is the non-structured totality of drive energies, desires,

repressions, physiological operations, motilities and corporeal rhythms, and it is from this dimension that the subject receives energy for the process of signification. In opposition to this, the symbolic modality is the linguistic binary system which relies on logical and predicative operations. This modality continuously articulates an identity-position for the subject, and the semiotic provides the fuel for the effort to reach this position, but, at the same time, it also threatens the symbolic fixation with its chaotic disorder.

In the dynamic interrelationship of the two modalities, the abject is the first, most archaic experience of the subject, the first instance in the system of differences: not yet a binary system that would rely on a subject – object opposition, but no longer the state of symbiotic union with the mother, either. The abject is the primal experience of being ejected, lost, wasted, being rejected by the system, but it is exactly from this experience that the binary dimension of the symbolic opens up. This is, then, the function of the abject *within* the history of the constitution of the subject.

There is also, however, another aspect of the operation of the abject, and this is localizable in the effect that the encounter with the abject exerts on the subject that is already constituted and fixated in an ego-position. The abject is the experience in relation to which there arises no meaning, no sign, and so the identity position of the subject is prevented from emerging, the borderlines, anchorage points of subjectivity get unsettled. From this perspective the abject is defined in the first place as something ambiguous, hybrid, heterogeneous, that which prevents the definition and establishment of structure, space, territory. It follows from this that the greatest effect the abject can exert upon the identity system of the subject is realized through the violation of the surfaces, through the transgression of the borderlines which separate structures, through the unsettling of the threshold that maintains the difference between inside and outside. Through this effect, the subject gets reconnected, plugged back into the pre-symbolic semiotic motility.

Perhaps it will be revealing to recall at this point Kristeva's example of the experience of the abject. She provides a very expressive account of food loathing: the moment when the skin of the milk gets stuck on her throat.¹⁶⁶ A thin surface, which gets in between other surfaces, does not allow for language to cover the experience and drives the ego into crisis. What we see in this example is an operation, an experience when the experiencing of abjection produces a crisis in the apparent homogeneity of the subject which has already been constituted. On the basis of all the above, we can arrive at the conclusion that the abject is an agency which is operational on the surfaces. My contention is that Cronenberg's *Crash* is a cinematic thematization of these surfaces and their violation, transgression. In order to understand this problematization of surfaces, we need a heterosemiotic theory which is capable of accounting for the "corporeal turn" which followed the linguistic and the visual turn.¹⁶⁷

9.3. Totem and prosthesis

We can apply the above considerations of the theory of the abject to the transgressive and sexualized imagery of the human body and the automobile, in order to understand the thematization of the violated body machines and machine bodies from the aspect of the abjected corporeality of the subject. This interpretive perspective will also enable us to avoid the automatism on the basis of which we

¹⁶⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Ruthrof, *Semantics and the Body*, 255. Ruthrof introduces the concept of the "corporeal turn" on the basis of which he argues for a "heterosemiotic theory" which would cut through the theories of various disciplines. He argues that "All natural languages are parasitic on non-linguistic sign systems. This is a deviation from an orthodoxy in semantics which says that meaning is a relation either between language and world or between linguistic expressions and the dictionary. Both views are rejected here. Furthermore, I advocate a position that opposes the stipulation of a neutral kind of sentence meaning. From the broad corporeal perspective chosen, linguistic meaning is regarded as the activation of language by way of non-linguistic sign systems which constitute the world the way we see it. In this general picture, metaphor is a construction which highlights the intersemiotic and heterosemiotic nature of all discourse." (144)

would immediately conceive of the automobile as an element within the mechanism of commodity fetishism.¹⁶⁸ The car should rather be interpreted as an always present and handy totem in the cultural imagery of the postmodern subject. The automobile in *Crash* is not an obstacle to the experience of reality, but an extension of the body, a *corporeal appendix* functioning as a prosthesis which is, at the same time, surrounded by a certain ritualized, religious adoration and worship. This *totemized prosthesis* becomes the real bodily borderline of the postmodern subject. This is the surface through which it is possible to experience and get to know reality, and the automobile will be the cultic object which has its various manifestations in the infinite number of individual cars. However, the general image, the *imago* of the car is all-powerful and impossible to erase.¹⁶⁹

Thus, when Cronenberg repeatedly thematizes the surfaces and the mutilations of the automobile which has grown as a second body around the human being, he is in fact focusing on the new borders of identity, the new skin of the subject. The new source of aesthetic pleasure in the film is the eroticism of the injury, the damage, or the mutilation of the body, but Cronenberg connects the

¹⁶⁸ It is exactly the corporeal element that the most recent postdeconstructive theories consider to be missing in the strategies of deconstruction. See Carl Raschke, *Fire and Roses. Postmodernity and the Thought of the Body* (New York: SUNY, 1996). "If the deconstructive imagination has not imagined the body, it has not imagined its own genealogy. It has neither felt the warmth of the fire nor smelled the fragrance of the rose. It has become the dead letter." (102) The body is thematized in *Crash* and in postmodern art in general as an excess which is impossible to contain, and Cronenberg's film systematically foregrounds this surplus of the body as its own excess. This is, in my view, a peculiar self-reflexivity in the film through the vision of excess about which Izabella Füzi argues that "...excess signifies elements which cannot be accounted for in interpretation or organized in patterns of style, connotation or narrative. In this respect "excess" could be a figure of the resistance exerted by the film text to totalizing interpretations." "Image and Event in Recent Hungarian Film (The Man from London, Delta, Milky Way)." In István Berszán ed. *Orientation in the Occurance* (Cluj-Napoca: KOMP-PRESS, 2009), 331-341; 333.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell proposes a revision of the relationship between image and totem in the interpretation of postmodern cultural imageries. "I propose that we reconsider the role of totemism alongside fetishism and idolatry as a distinct form of the surplus value of images. My aim in doing this is to flesh out the historical record of the overestimated image, and to offer a model that starts not with suspicious iconoclasm but with a certain curiosity about the way in which "primitive" forms of valuation might still speak to us 'moderns.' The introduction of totemism as a third term may also help to disrupt the binary model of art history that opposes an 'age of images' to an 'era of art' or (even worse) opposes 'Western' art to 'the rest.' Totemism, in fact, is the historical successor to idolatry and fetishism as a way of naming the hypervalued image of the other." Mitchell. "The Surplus Value of Images."

idea of experimental sexuality with the theme of damaged human surfaces in a way so that the surfaces of human beings keep contacting the surfaces of the machines, and the two kinds of surfaces keep being injured together. The systematic recurrence of the surfaces is also noticed and discussed by Christine Cornea when she interprets the human and mechanical characters of *Crash* as various extreme manifestations of the “terminal identity” which have been formulated by the postmodern subject positions. She argues that the surfaces of the human bodies appear in the film in such a way so that they can be understood as the extension of the mechanical environment.¹⁷⁰ The human being and technology grow into one union, but it is important to add to Cornea’s observation that this relationship also works the other way round: the surfaces of the machines in *Crash* can be interpreted as the extension or projection of the human bodies. The topic of the materiality of subjects and the possible subjectivization of machines can be connected again to one of the most important points in Haraway’s Cyborg manifesto, when she questions the merely constructivist body-concepts, which totally subordinate the corporeality of the subject to the creative force of the social discourse. Haraway contends that the discursive and the material, the metaphoric and the corporal function together inseparably. A recurring shot in the film is multi-lane highways being presented as the pulsating veins of the civilized metropolitan environment, with the cars that unite in one entity with the human beings that are traveling as blood cells in the spaces of speed.

The metaphor of this inseparable union is the car as the skin of the subject in *Crash*, the surface of real and significant contacts, and it is the injury of this surface that can exert the most powerful effect on both the characters and the spectators of the film.

¹⁷⁰ Christine Cornea. “David Cronenberg’s *Crash* and Performing Cyborgs.” *The Velvet Light Trap* 52 (2003), 4-14. “...the way in which the scene is set up encourages a viewing of the surfaces of their bodies and clothing as though these people were simply an extension of the surrounding mise-en-scène.”

The climactic point of the representation of the mutilated body-machine is when Ballard is examining the rupture which had been made by Vaughan's car on the side of his wife's car. During the camera movement the slit is gradually vaginalized, and the hand of the man is caressing the damaged surface of the car as attentively and thoroughly as he is surveying his wife's body which bears the blood-colored signs of Vaughan's animalistic and desperate sexual desire. The scene brings us to the point when we actually start expecting Ballard to reach into the vulva-like fissure.

This scene is part of a set of interrelated images, and it is preceded by three other scenes. In the first one Vaughan's immense car goes through the entrails of a car-wash, while Ballard is peeping into the rear view mirror to see as his wife and Vaughan are passionately and wildly having sex. The windows of the car are soaking in foam, Catherine is examining and kissing the scars on Vaughan's chest with almost ritual devotion, and the result of the fiercely passionate meeting of the two bodies is indicated by a sudden close-up on Catherine's hand which is wet and sticky with Vaughan's semen, caressing the leather upholstery of the car seat.¹⁷¹

In the second sequence of images, in one of the several lovemaking scenes in the interiors of various cars, Ballard tears open the stockings on the legs of the handicapped Gabrielle to reveal the horrid scar, which also bears the shape of a vulva: Ballard, in a state of worshipful excitement, buries his mouth in the wound.

¹⁷¹ Terry Harpold also focuses on the thematization of surfaces, but she interprets the semen on the basis of the Kristevan abject as the central agent of systematic abjection in Ballard's novel. "Dry Leatherette: Cronenberg's *Crash*." *PMC* 7:3 (May 1997) "The novel is a catalogue of crisis fluids: blood, vomit, urine, rectal and vaginal mucus, gasoline, oil, engine coolant. And most of all: semen; in dried, caked signatures on car seats, dashboards, stiffening the crotch of Vaughan's fouled jeans; drooling across the gradients of seat covers, streaking instrument binnacles, hanging from steering columns and mirrors. [...] Semen is, I would contend, the patently abject trace of phallic desire: a nugatory leftover of erotic satisfaction, obscene in its counter-utility, messy, smelly and sticky, unrecuperable in its organic extremity." Contrary to this, in Cronenberg's cinematic adaptation the fluids are replaced by the surfaces as the carriers of abjection, and, I believe, this produces an even more intensive and expressive effect.

In the third sequence of images the picture of Gabrielle's wound is followed by a new manifestation of the aesthetics of wounds: Ballard is admiring the traces of injuries that cover Vaughan's neck and face. After this worshipful adoration the bodies of the two men unite, buried inside the tissues of the automobile.

This is how we arrive finally at the image of the vaginalized wound on the surface of the car: a final metaphorization of the union and fusion of the human and the mechanical body.¹⁷²

Based on the above analysis I contend that, in spite of its vast inventory of wildness, sado-masochistic eroticism and mutilating injuries, it is not chiefly through the images of horror and bizarre sexuality that *Crash* aims at producing a totality of effect, but through the thematization of the violation of surfaces, the dissolution of thresholds, and the moments of penetration. In order to further demonstrate the experience of witnessing the abject on the surfaces, I would like to refer to one of the best known Hungarian performance artists. I believe it was Tibor Hajas who had the most accurate and refined conception of the abject in the entire history of European neo-avantgarde experimental performance art. In his actions he turned his own body into an object of systematic experimentation and mutilation, thematizing the meeting points of body surfaces and the surfaces of the environment. Many of his performances bear the title "surface torture" or "surface damage." In 1985 László Beke, the leading theorist of the Hungarian neo-avantgarde, and his colleagues shot a six-part experimental film entitled *Experanima*, in which one of the pieces called *The Room* commemorates the work of Tibor Hajas.

¹⁷² In his article, Mitchell connects the problematic of the living mechanical body with the power of images: the cyborg appears to fulfill the archetypal promise of the living image. "We live in the age of the cyborgs, cloning, and biogenetic engineering when the ancient dream of creating a "living image" is becoming commonplace. Benjamin's era of 'mechanical reproduction,' when the image was drained of its aura, magic, and cult value by mechanized rationality has been displaced by an era of 'biocybernetic reproduction,' in which the assembly line is managed by computers, and the commodities coming off the line are living organisms." Mitchell. "The Surplus Value of Images."

The film animates the objects that we see in the room Tibor Hajas used to live in, and its central scene is the composition in which we are watching from below a parchment-like sheet, which closely resembles the skin of a human being.¹⁷³ From the other side, from above, razor blades slowly cut into the sheet, making a screaming noise, and then stand vibrating in the transparent surface. The spectator-subject, “wrapped in the cover of the skin,”¹⁷⁴ is brought to the threshold of fainting.

In the film *Crash* this body borderline is dislocated and the automobile becomes the skin of the subject, so that the deepest experiences of the human being arise from the interaction with the car, with the machine. This theme is introduced at the beginning of the film by the image of the erect nipples of the heroine pressed against the cold metal surface of the airplane. This idea organizes the erotic and violent compositions analyzed above, and this thematization has its climactic point in the eroticized wound that we finally see on the surface of Catherine’s car. Cronenberg’s film abandons the methods employed by Ballard in his novel. Instead of presenting the great catalogue of abject fluids and discharges, sado-masochistic extremities and mutilated internal and external genitals, Cronenberg directs our attention to the relationship between the bodies of human beings and automobiles. This relationship is becoming more and more intimate, erotic and powerful, and, through the abjection of surfaces, it questions and unsettles the borderlines and boundaries which used to mark out the seemingly safe and guaranteed limits, categories and territorial borders of the subject before the postmodern.

¹⁷³ I owe special thanks to László Beke for information on *Experanima*.

¹⁷⁴ See <http://www.emberborbekotve.hu> (*Wrapped in Skin*: interdisciplinary multimedia project, access December 5, 2009).

Towards a Conclusion:

Double Anatomy and the Other of the Subject

in the Theaters of Anatomy

In addition to what we have just named (the proper name in exappropriation, signature, or affirmation without closure, trace, *difference* from self, destinerance, etc.), I would add something that remains required by both the definition of the classical subject and by these latter nonclassical motifs, namely, a certain *responsibility*. The singularity of the 'who' is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering 'no.'

Jacques Derrida¹⁷⁵

Ethics is optics.
Emmanuel Lévinas¹⁷⁶

The critical and theoretical questions, surveyed in the preceding chapters, that started to scrutinize the heterogeneity of the human being inevitably culminated in more than the postsemiotic accounts of the psychosomatic complexity of the

¹⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida. "'Eating Well', or the Calculation of the Subject: An interview with J.-L. Nancy." In Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy eds. *Who Comes after the Subject?* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 96-120. 100.

¹⁷⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburg: Duquesne UP, 1969), 29.

subject. The status of the human being as socially positioned subject became an ontological as well as an epistemological question.

Michael Neill, when introducing the concept of the new early modern “discourse of interiority,” also notes that the new dogmas of reformed theology lent new importance and meaning to the event of death. The human being started to relate to death as a singularity, as something which did not simply help us pass over to life that will finally be real, but also as a culmination of a process in time which attributes meaning to the singularity of the individual’s life. Death became a problem, a challenge – hence the elaborate tradition of the *Ars Moriendi* in the Renaissance, which attempts to process this thanatological crisis.¹⁷⁷

A very similar thanatological process accompanies the unsettling of modernity and reaches its climactic point in the history of critical theories in the mid-1990s when, after the death of God, the death of the author, the death of the playwright and the death of the human as we knew it, the long-anticipated theoretization of the death of character also dawned on poststructuralist critics.¹⁷⁸ By then, the subject had been subjected to a penetrating dissection by psychoanalytical and semiotic scrutiny, and this anatomy exerted an effect on understandings of the human being in all cultural practices and representations.

It was anatomy, we may remember, that provided the model for the incisions and dissections that, like the slit eyeball of Bunuel’s film, *Un chien andalou*, precipitated the modern - the rupture, cutting and tearing that have since been assumed as the virtual “structuration of structure” (Derrida) in the transgressive strategies of the postmodern. So far as anatomy tears open the organism and spatializes it, undoing appearance by dispersing interiority and displaying, instrumentally, its operable parts, there is this anatomical element in the technique of Alienation.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Neill, *Issues of Death*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ See Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 21-36; Adrian Page, ed., *The Death of the Playwright?: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1992); Michel Foucault. “What Is an Author?” In Adams and Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965*, 138-147; Roland Barthes. “The Death of the Author.” In *Image – Music – Text* (Fontana Press, 1993), 142-148.

¹⁷⁹ Herbert Balu. “The Surpassing Body.” *The Drama Review* (1988-), Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), 74-98. 82.

Thus Herbert Blau defines anatomy as an attitude, a strategy which sets into motion those mechanisms that will lead to the advent of the postmodern – an inward, anatomizing look, a need to penetrate the surfaces, to dissect that which apparently holds a fixed position in a composite whole. Blau’s allusion to Derrida is a fitting one, since deconstruction emerged and then reigned in post-structuralism as *the* critical practice that unveils and dismantles the inner motivations, biases, the ideologically solidified skeletons of systems – the “structuration of structure.”¹⁸⁰ The anatomical interest of deconstruction has since then become general in critical theory, but anatomy has not remained confined to the realm of philosophy - much the contrary, it has grown into one of the most dominant and all-penetrating investments of the postmodern. This emerging of the anatomical interest in the postmodern had been preceded by a long silence, a ban that had been imposed on the corporeal by the discourses of rationalism and subsequent ideologies of the bourgeois subject. Moving towards a conclusion on the connections between early modern and postmodern anatomies, my interest in this last chapter is in the ways through which this anatomizing is related to the constitution of the subject and, more specifically, to the problems and crisis this postmodern subject faces in the present age.

Ever since the first anatomy lessons and anatomical theaters of early modern culture in Europe, the body has been operational with a gradually growing intensity in cultural representations as an epistemological point of reference in relation to which the identity and the capacities of the subject have been marked out by the dominant ideologies of society. The semiotic attitude to the meaning, the presence and the representability of the human body is indicative of the ways in which canonized concepts of subjectivity and identity are established in each

¹⁸⁰ See, among others, Derrida’s by now classical critique of the idea of structure, which is expanded to a critique of archeology which cherishes the idea of a finite, teleological dissection of time: “This is why one could perhaps say that the movement of any archeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure from the basis of a full presence which is out of play.” “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.” In *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978), 278-294. 278.

historically specific society. Recent findings in cultural studies have repeatedly pointed out that the anatomical interest was characteristic not only of early modern culture. The severe mind – soul dualism which had been imposed on the sovereign subject by the discourses of Cartesian thinking kept the body and the corporeal marginalized for a long period, but, by the time of the postmodern, one of the many turns that critical thinking had gone through is the corporeal. This interest in the bodily constitution of the subject and the corporeal foundations of signification has been necessitated not only by the critique of phenomenology and the early findings of psychoanalytically informed postsemiotic theories, but just as much by the growing presence of the anatomized and displayed body in the practices of everyday life. The phenomenon that perhaps best characterizes the body in the cultural practices of postindustrial societies is the way it has been subjected to a process of anatomization and inward inspection. Anatomy has become an all-embracing and omnipresent constituent of postmodern cultural imagery, and its growing presence has saturated not only the urban spaces where body representations are disseminated, but also the multiplicity of critical orientations that have been aiming at accounting for this postmodern interest and investment in the corporeal. The body is endlessly commodified, interrogated, dissected and tested in ways that are very often reminiscent of the early modern turn to the interiority of the human being.

This chapter comments on the parallels and similarities between early modern anatomical representations and the intensified dissemination of anatomical images in the cultural imagery of the postmodern. The question that I set out to posit and contextualize is the following: what are the causes, implications and consequences of the new postmodern discourse on anatomy and the presence of the corporeal in cultural representations? What do these images reveal about the subject, the subject's relation to the Other and its own inherent otherness?

I would like to start from a proposition by Jacques Derrida, the philosopher invoked in the passage by Herbert Blau, the thinker who gave perhaps

the greatest impetus to the post-Saussurean problematization of the decentered, non-originary subject. The proposition is part of an interview from which the motto of my paper is also taken. In this dialogue, interviewer Jean-Luc Nancy maintains that the subject is above all “that which can retain in itself its own contradiction,” and he thus posits the discussion in the context of the Hegelian heritage of Western philosophy.

What are the sources and implications of this inner contradiction within the human being? Is there anything other than this inner contradiction that remains after the decentering of the non-originary subject? Derrida’s proposition is that a certain responsibility, a turning towards the Other, an answering the call of the Other will have always been there as the act that lends the subject its own identity. Besides the tone that this concept of the call shares with the thinking of Lévinas, there are two important circumstances which contextualize this remark and the perspectives it opens up. One is that Nancy’s interview with Derrida seeks an answer to the crucial question of the early 1990s: “Who comes after the subject?” Starting in the 1970s, the realizations of (post)semiotics and the critique of ideology gradually established the problematic of the constitution of the heterogeneous subject as a question that no critical orientation since then can leave unattended.¹⁸¹ The macrodynamics and microdynamics of the subject have been persistently theorized by poststructuralism to the point when the question finally has become: do we have to do without the subject? And what or who is to follow when the “exit the subject” sign comes up? Is the route of postmodern anti-essentialism going to take us from the death of the author all the way to the death of the subject?

The other aspect of the situation is that it is in this interview where Derrida proposed his envisioned project of research into the “*carno-phallogocentric*”

¹⁸¹ The international review of philosophy *Topoi* had an entire special issue (September 1988) on the French deconstructive critique of subjectivity, which was followed by an expanded issue of *Cahiers Confrontations* edited by René Major (20, Winter 1989, this is where the Derrida article originally appeared). The most complete collection *Who Comes after the Subject?* came out after these in 1991 edited by Cadava, Connor and Nancy.

order of our civilization: an order founded on a special relation to the flesh, the body, the corporeality of the subject's own, and of the Other, and it is this relation that lends us the responsibility that is the foundation of any ethics.¹⁸² Today, several years after Derrida's death and seventeen years after the publication of the volume *Who Comes after the Subject?*, two conclusions are to be drawn.

On the one hand, no matter how liquidized and decentered, the subject is still present and will not have been terminated by the time poststructuralism and postmodernism end. On the other hand, one might ask immediately: alongside this anatomical remark by Derrida about the flesh and the responsibility for the being and the body of the Other, should we not also problematize this concept of the "contradiction within the subject" as nothing else but the Other within the subject - the Other which has always already preceded any act and any cognition by and of the subject. Should we not problematize this inherent self-contradiction as the *body*, the material foundation, the corporeality of the subject which is the foundation as well as the marginalized and ignored supplement of our subjectivity: the body which eats and is eaten, the body which is spoken to and the body which *does* the speaking. When we open up for a broader scrutiny of otherness, corporeality and materiality, we must observe the warning Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, has verbalized upon several occasions: concepts and stereotypes of otherness and the Other have been employed and simultaneously exploited, neutralized and extinguished in such proliferation that to approach the problem will always risk ignoring the very heart of it. However, it is also Spivak who draws our attention to the reason why Derrida was not very enthusiastic about the term "ideology", and her explanation again throws light on the mind vs. matter, subject vs. body problematic:

¹⁸²Derrida. "Eating Well." 101. In a somewhat passionate critique of the thanatological discourse on the death and the return of the subject, Cornelius Castoriadis also emphasizes the issue of responsibility, which has been, in his opinion, generally absent from the poststructuralist theories of the human being. "All this talk about the death of man and the end of the subject has never been anything other than a pseudotheoretical cover for an evasion of responsibility--on the part of the psychoanalyst, the thinker, the citizen. Similarly, today's boisterous proclamations about the return of the subject, like the alleged 'individualism' that accompanies it, mask the drift of decomposition under another of its forms." "The State of the Subject Today." *Thesis Eleven* 24 (1989), 5.

I should perhaps add here that Derrida is suspicious of the concept of ideology because, in his view, it honors too obstinate a binary opposition between mind and matter.¹⁸³

This obstinate binary opposition has been dissolving in critical theory since the early nineties, and perhaps the most conspicuous public sign of the wider cultural side of this process (other than the indefatigable vogue of soap operas on hospitalization, emergency rooms and surgery) is the fact that currently the most successful and popular sensation in the world is the travelling anatomical exhibition of specially prepared corpses directed by the German professor Gunther von Hagens. “Body Worlds” was first on display in 1995, and today “Body Worlds 4” is on tour in Philadelphia, Toronto, Haifa, Zurich, Singapore and Cologne.¹⁸⁴ In the spring and summer of 2008 the promenades of Budapest were flooded by hundreds of mega-posters about the anatomy exhibition “Bodies. The Exhibition.”¹⁸⁵ This production is not the same as that of von Hagens, but it has been definitely inspired by his endeavor to bring anatomy back to the public domain, and it only took fourteen years, after von Hagens’s first uncertain but hugely successful attempt in Japan, for a spectacle like that to arrive in Budapest. As a rival to “Body Worlds”, “Bodies” has been on a world tour with stops in

¹⁸³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “The Politics of Interpretations.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (September, 1982), 259-278. n.2.

¹⁸⁴ See <http://www.bodyworlds.com>. A google search on “Gunther von Hagens” or “Body Worlds” produced 102.000 hits a few years ago, while today the same search results in more than 2000000 hits. I will quote only one example from the media publicity: “BODY WORLDS is the most highly attended touring exhibition in the world, having attracted nearly 25 million visitors around the world. The striking organs and whole-body plastinates in BODY WORLDS 4 derive from people who have, in their lifetime, generously donated their bodies for Plastination, to specifically educate future generations about health. More than 8,000 donors including 103 Britons have bequeathed their bodies to von Hagens’ Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany. The first lecture is on 1 April by Nigel Meadows, HM Coroner: The Role and Powers of the Coroner in Relation to a Deceased Person’s Body, and will last 1 hour. Admission is £5.00 per person or £2.50 with a BODY WORLDS 4 exhibition ticket. Limited on-site car parking £3.00 per car. Cash Bar. All exhibitions are held in the Special Exhibitions Gallery, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefield. For evening events, doors open 6.30pm. Numbers are limited, so please buy your tickets in advance.” (<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/101726.php> Access: November 2, 2009.)

¹⁸⁵ See <http://www.bodiestheexhibition.com>.

Madrid, Brussels, Budapest and London. The Other of the subject is back: the materiality of the human being is again in the forefront of public curiosity, and this curiosity is now satisfied in massive anatomical exhibitions and theaters that produce the effect of *involvement through alienation* very similar to the one described by Herbert Blau.¹⁸⁶ After the death of character, the new theater of the subject is the one which stages the other of the subject: the postmodern anatomy theater.¹⁸⁷ I would like to continue exploring the implications of this otherness.

As has been mentioned, this emerging of the anatomical has long been in the making, strongly related to questions of otherness and the Other of the subject. Now that the re-emergence of ethical or moral philosophy provides us with an opportunity for a meta-perspective upon the past 30 years, it is arguable that the three most influential discourses of poststructuralist critical thinking have been converging since the early 1970s chiefly around two concepts, two critical phenomena: the idea of materiality and the idea of the Other. Deconstruction, psychoanalysis and the post-Marxist critique of ideology have jointly established a transdisciplinary ground for a complex account of the signifying practice and the speaking subject's positionality within the symbolic order by theorizing these categories.

As for *materiality*, the term proved to be primarily applicable not to the empirical status of the "actual world" or the Husserlian "lifeworld", but rather to the materiality of the two foundations of the process of signification: that of the speaking subject, and that of the signifying system, or language, respectively. Cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, postcolonial studies, and literary

¹⁸⁶ At the time of my writing these lines in the library of the Warburg Institute in London, three blocks from here an exhibition on "The Exquisite Human Body" is about to close in The Wellcome Institute. I should note that significant attempts have also been made in Hungary to produce multimedial representations on the basis of research in the history of anatomy and corporeal imagery. See the materials edited by Péter G. Tóth at <http://www.emberborbekotve.hu/>.

¹⁸⁷ On November 20, 2002 von Hagens performed his first public autopsy in a make-shift anatomy theater in London. Four hundred spectators squeezed into the room designed for two hundred, but four hours after the dissection another 1.4million viewers had the chance to witness the images of the materiality of the body, broadcast by Channel 4. For the theatrical anatomy of von Hagens see Nunn, *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy*, 196-200: "Casting the Dead."

anthropology have all successfully profited from this convergence, but critical scrutiny may and should also be directed to the antecedents, the chronological forerunners of this material affinity.

As for the problematization of the *Other*, poststructuralist critical thinking has thematized the dialectical concepts of antagonism and reciprocity, subversion and containment, hegemony and liminal marginality by situating two agencies of Otherness in the focus of scrutiny. One of these is the Other of culture: the marginalized, the disprivileged, the subaltern. The other is the Other of the subject: the body, the cadaver, the somatic heterogeneity of the corpus.¹⁸⁸

The political and cultural intensities of the past two decades have kept both of these instances of Otherness in the forefront of cultural curiosity, also establishing a new kind of connection between the two within the framework of the epistemological crisis of the postmodern.

The ideological technologies of modernism constituted the bourgeois Cartesian subject at the expense of the suppression and demonization of the body.¹⁸⁹ This body initially resurfaces in the postmodern as the site of danger and potential crisis, but then it gradually turns into a site of attraction and unveiled secrecy. Since Foucault's introduction of the idea of the hermeneutics of the self, the care of this fallible, apocalyptic, hidden body has been conceptualized by theory as a central social practice through which ideological interpellation reaches out to socially positioned and subjectivized individuals in Western society. The representations of prefabricated patterns of body-identity are endlessly disseminated and commercialized in postindustrial society. At the same time, formerly marginalized signifying practices (poetic language, the fine arts, performances, installations, experimental theater, film) started to deploy the body as a site of subversion, promising to go beyond or to dismantle ideological determination.

¹⁸⁸ See Turner. "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body."

¹⁸⁹ On the construction and the hollowness of modern subjectivity, see Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*.

As much critical literature has argued recently, the postmodern scrutiny of the body is comparable to the early modern anatomical turn towards the interiority of the human body. In both historical periods the *body is a territory of the fantastic*, an epistemological borderline, a site of experiments in going beyond the existing limits of signification. In short, postmodern anatomies are grounded in an epistemological crisis which is very similar to the period of transition and uncertainty in early modern culture, when the earlier “natural order” of medieval high semioticity started to become unsettled, and the ontological foundations of meaning lost their metaphysical guarantees.

The question of materiality and the question of the Other, then, converge today in a social-cultural practice which re-emerges in the postmodern perhaps as a response to the epistemological uncertainties and philosophical challenges of the age. This is how we arrive at the “postmodern renaissance” of anatomy.

Anatomy as a cultural manifestation of inwardness and epistemological investigation emerged in the early modern period, and now, after the centuries of Cartesian suppression, it has its renaissance in the postmodern. The poststructuralist critical focus on the corporeality and heterogeneity of the gendered and ideologically positioned body, the social-anthropological theories of the interrelatedness of body and identity, the postsemiotics of the psycho-somatic foundations of semiosis are examples of this anatomical investment, just as much as the cultural representations of commercialized and commodified body images, anatomy exhibitions and public autopsies. However, amidst this new ecstasy of anatomization, we should not forget Derrida’s idea about the carno-phallogocentric order of our culture, since it will have far-reaching implications for today’s anatomy:

...I would still try to link the question of the ‘who’ to the question of ‘sacrifice.’ The conjunction of ‘who’ and ‘sacrifice’ not only recalls the concept of the subject as phallogocentric structure, at least according to the dominant *schema*: one day I hope to demonstrate that this *schema* implies carnivorous virility. I would want to explain *carno-phallogocentrism*...the

idealizing interiorization of the phallus and the necessity of its passage through the mouth, whether it's a matter of words or of things, of sentences, of daily bread or wine, of the tongue, the lips, or the breast of the other.¹⁹⁰

My contention is that within the sacrificial connotations of this carnophallogocentrism, we must also calculate the twofold connection of the subject to the practice of eating and eating well. The carnivorous relation ties the subject to the flesh of the other, but also at the same time to its own flesh, its own other, to the flesh within, and it is through this double relation that the subject realizes the presence of its own otherness in the image of the flesh of the other. When facing the corporeality of the Other in the food on my table, in the wounded and mutilated body of the soldier in the battlefield, the invalid in the hospital or the cadaver in the grave, or, for that matter, in the plastinated corpse of the postmodern anatomy theater, I come face to face with that which is other in me. Such a witnessing of otherness and self-otherness is indeed critical for the subject and might result in the unsettling of its identity, as Julia Kristeva has elaborately explicated this experience in her theory of abjection.¹⁹¹ Yet, other than the subject being put on trial and thrown into crisis, the witnessing of the Other through corporeality as the other in me might also result in the subject's opening up to the responsibility that the call of the Other evokes. As the various images of death in the *memento mori* and *ars moriendi* traditions functioned in early modern culture as agents of Death the Great Leveler, so the corpses in the postmodern anatomy exhibition may unveil the sameness of the subject and the Other by the ostension of that which is other in both: the corporeal, bodily foundations of our subjectivity. In this respect, postmodern anatomy goes beyond a mere catering for the sensationalism and curious appetite of the general and alienated masses of consumerism, and it can start functioning as the inspiration for that Derridean "certain responsibility."

¹⁹⁰ Derrida. "Eating Well." 113.

¹⁹¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*. For the questions of the Other and otherness in the subject, also see her *Strangers to Ourselves*.

Sadly, the dissemination of anatomical representations of the “flesh within and without the subject” does not merely operate with static and carefully prepared corpses in the postmodern exhibition halls and public autopsies. The inventory of today’s anatomical representations is not complete without mentioning the images of terror, genocide, mass destruction and mass graves: cultural representations which are disseminated, exploited, distorted, manipulated and appropriated with unprecedented speed and intensity. Within fractions of a second one can search and find thousands of such representations on the internet, and the media is saturated with images of corporeality which have been taking a more and more anatomical, dissective, penetrating and horrifying directionality in the past ten or fifteen years. The early modern anatomical interest now has a proliferating renaissance in the postmodern.

The question becomes: how can we simultaneously relate to images of anatomy in museum exhibitions and images of exhumed cadavers in mass graves? Within the universe of this postmodern anatomical gaze and anatomical production, how can we relate to questions of individual and cultural identity formation, at a time of emerging new nationalisms, and racial, ethnic, and sexual conflicts of interest? At the time of the emergence of anatomy in the early modern period, a commercially and culturally vibrant East-Central Europe was a mediating agent between Western and Eastern values and paradigms of knowledge, including medicine. Can East-Central Europe, in the 21st century, find its place and function again as a catalyst between Eastern and Western anatomical interests, investments and cultural practices? I cannot promise to provide even tentative answers to these questions, but I would like to further contextualize and situate the problematic of Otherness, materiality and responsibility in relation to these questions that are becoming our social reality in this part of the world.

The problematization of the mutual interdependency of the psychic and the corporeal has a history which, of course, starts well before the poststructuralist addressing of the heterogeneous speaking subject. In relation to the classical

philosophical dilemma of the reciprocity of theory and praxis, the symbolic and the material, one might recall the well-known Marxian thesis that the process of production will not only yield commodities for the subjects, but subjects for the commodities as well, also noting the various layers of this production. The Italian semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi was one of the first interdisciplinary thinkers to lay special emphasis upon the interrelatedness of the two aspects of this reciprocity, that is, the dialectic of subjective and linguistic materiality. His insistence on the “strong materiality” of the bodies of subjects, on the one hand, and of the signifying process, or “linguistic labor”, on the other hand, has induced remarkable echoes in the discourse on materiality in recent critical practice.¹⁹²

In his theory on linguistic alienation, Rossi-Landi makes a remarkable note on the reciprocity of subjectivity and ideology. He argues that society employs the subject in the capacity of a tenant – that is, the technologies of power literally “employ” the human being as a “shell”, something within which they can become operative. This will of course resonate with Luis Althusser’s concept of interpellation and Michel Foucault’s subversion, but it is Rossi-Landi who systematically directs attention to the materiality of *all* the players *and* channels involved in this relationality, since it is in this materiality that we can locate the source of production, change, or “practice.” With the concept of *praxis* we arrive at yet another pivotal concept of the poststructuralist critical universe. The insistence on materiality is crucial for a complex theory of the subject and practice because change does not stem from abstractions – it needs to feed on the alterability of the material elements of the system. At the same time, Rossi-Landi’s homology model has already demonstrated the interrelatedness of economic and linguistic materiality and production. Étienne Balibar, in his theory of the constitution of the subject as primarily and above all the constitution of the political citizen, excels in explicating how the interrelatedness of the materiality of subjection and the materiality of production positions the subject in “a language

¹⁹² Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Language as work and trade. A semiotic homology for linguistics and economics* (South Hadley, 1983).

of things” where “the articulation of commercial and legal forms of exchange [...] establishes individuals as carriers or holders of value.”¹⁹³ The materiality of this language can only be altered and redrafted, as Julia Kristeva contends again on an interdisciplinary ground of Marxism and psychoanalytical semiotics, if revolution in society is revolution in language.

What we call signifiante, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists – the subject and his institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring and de-structuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then – and only then – can it be jouissance and revolution.¹⁹⁴

Thus, we see the postmodern subject enveloped by the symbolic order which is, on the one hand, an order of differential symbolic values but also, on the other hand, an order of a language which has an insurmountable materiality: a language of things. Rossi-Landi’s metaphor of the tenant and the shell reminds us of Norbert Elias and his formulation of the *homo clausus* in *The Civilizing Process*. What is the shell around the human being, and what is it that is locked up in this shell which emerges with the advent of the bourgeois subject?¹⁹⁵ The convenient poststructuralist answer used to be that the shell is the symbolic order, and the inside is a great vacuum, as Hamlet realizes in the prototypical tragedy of subjectivity. However, as critical theory moves further along after the linguistic turn, we are less and less satisfied with the focus on the all-engulfing linguistic-ideological determinations of the subject, and, as the concept of the *homo clausus* becomes impossible to maintain in the interrelationality of society, the materiality

¹⁹³ Étienne Balibar. “The Infinite Contradiction.” *Yale French Studies*, No. 88, *Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and the Labor of Reading* (1995), 142-164. 156. For Balibar’s theory of the subject as citizen see his “Citizen Subject.” In *Who Comes after the Subject?*, 33-57.

¹⁹⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17.

¹⁹⁵ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd ed., 2000, orig. 1939), 471-75.

of the interiority of the shell becomes the target of scrutiny. A corporeal turn is necessitated after the linguistic turn, and the postsemiotics of the subject must be grounded in a corporeal semantics, as Horst Ruthrof argues, among many other postsemiotic theoreticians, in his call for a *corporesemiotic theory of meaning*.¹⁹⁶ Thus, our theories of the socially positioned human being take an anatomical direction. We reach the end of a period which has been determined and characterized by the “error of Descartes”: a constitutive duality of the mental and the physical.

This is Descartes’ error: the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgement, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body.¹⁹⁷

Postsemiotics can no longer ignore the extralinguistic, the corporeal, the somatic, and it can no longer dress it up simply in the panlinguistic shell of the prison-house of language either, even if the symbolic mediatedness of knowledge about that body will always radically prevent any immediacy of experience. At the same time, the human body becomes one of the most intensively disseminated cultural representations: eroticized, commodified, gendered, and gradually opened up. Just as in the early modern, the opening up of the human body becomes the

¹⁹⁶ Ruthrof, *Semantics and the Body*. For an excellent application of corporesemiotic considerations see Kérchy, *Body Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter: Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View*. Kérchy argues that the thematization of body, identity and text as culturally – ideologically fabricated and manipulated artifacts establishes an incessant self-reflexivity in Carter’s text which Kérchy thus calls *corporeographic metafiction* (76). This corporeographic intensity is one of the main constituents of postmodern narratives in general, and it informs the entire cultural imagery of the postmodern.

¹⁹⁷ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Putnam’s, 1994), 249. For the emergence of anatomical interest and inwardness in early modern culture, preceding the solidification of the *homo clausus*, see Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England. Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP., 1999), David Hillman – Carla Mazzio (eds.) *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*.

site of an epistemological experimentation, the testing of borderlines, the probing of thresholds. Earlier on, in a period constituted by Cartesian rationalism, the ideologically marked out limits of knowledge used to exclude the reality of the flesh, the human being's sovereign self-identity used to be conceived of in terms of the phenomenological abstraction of the transcendental ego, or, as Julia Kristeva's characterizes philosophical reasoning before the corporal turn:

Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are [...] static thoughts, products of a leisurely cogitation removed from historical turmoil, persist in seeking the truths of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair, and the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a sleeping body – a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience. [...] the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the process pervading the body and the subject.¹⁹⁸

The critical convergence around the material can no longer be separated from the considerations of the linguistic turn, but it will not be satisfied with the commonplaces it produced either. Terry Threadgold writes in an article of 2003 on the commonplaces of the poststructuralist stance:

In all of these places certain theoretical assumptions are now taken for granted: a social constructionist view of language; the idea that realities and subjectivities are constructed in and by language; that subjects construct themselves and the worlds they inhabit in their everyday uses of language; that power relations are constructed and deconstructed through these processes; that what we call the social and culture are similarly constructed and deconstructed; that this activity is characterized by narrativity, that changing narratives, telling stories differently, might change the social world and that the goal of work on and with language is a politics committed to social change through what Eco (1979) would have called a semiotic labor on and with texts.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 15.

¹⁹⁹ Terry Threadgold. "Cultural Studies, Critical Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis: Histories, Remembering and Futures." *Linguistik Online* 14, 2/03.

This semiotic labor may well be traced back to Rossi-Landi's idea of linguistic labor, in light of which the question becomes: how are the material, the corporeal and the linguistic interrelated in regard to the subject who is positioned in "a language of things?" Or, to venture an observation with reference to recent deconstructionist practice, are they one and the same?

We need, of course, to separate our understanding of the material from the empiricism of earlier philosophies of the subject, especially since intensive efforts of the philosophy of subjectivity in the past 30 years have been invested in the non-empiricist understanding of materiality. We recall Paul de Man's insistence on the crucial differentiation between the materiality of the signifier and the materiality of that which it signifies. From this perspective, the materiality of language resides in the fact that it is always more than the subject, always beyond the capacity of the human being to master, to exhaust or control it. This surplus, the unmasterable leftover in language is what de Man calls "the brute materiality of the letter." Along similar lines, psychoanalytical theory argues that "the traumatic kernel" of the subject is localizable in a materiality that is much more linguistic, i.e., symbolical, than empirical.²⁰⁰

I maintain, in light of the above theories, that the subject of present-day culture is enticed to bear witness to its own otherness and, thus, to its sameness with the Other in the cultural imagery of anatomization. In other words, postmodern anatomy establishes an effect in which the subject is compelled to experience and see the strong materiality of the language and the extralinguistic, into which its own subjectivity is inscribed – the flesh behind the face, the body behind the character, the tongue behind the speaker. In order to see, finally, how the anatomized postmodern subject catches a glimpse of this other side of itself which connects it to the Other as the source of a call for responsibility, and why this other side will always necessarily remain a language, I would like to dwell on the notion of the *suture* and its critique.

²⁰⁰ See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Chapter I: "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"

The Subject Desutured by Anatomy

The de Manian unmasterable superiority of the signifying system over the subject is at work in the agency of the *suture* as well, a much-debated concept in recent cultural studies, an operation that is constitutive of narrative as well as filmic, visual representations, and the study of which brings us closer to an understanding of the interrelated materiality of the subject and of language. This is crucial when we investigate visual representations of corporeality and anatomy in postmodern cultural imagery.

Kaja Silverman in her book *The Threshold of the Visible World* explicates the concept of the suture by trying to solve the dilemma which has kept psychoanalysts pondering since Freud. How is it possible to include the idea of corporeality in a theory of the psyche and the ego, a theory which systematically distances itself, especially since Lacan, from the physical-biological reality?

Lacan insists even more emphatically upon a disjunctive relationship between body and psyche; identity and desire are inaugurated only through a series of ruptures or splittings, which place the subject at an ever-greater remove from need and other indices of the strictly biological.²⁰¹

Silverman surveys recent theories of the moving image, where the suture is a technique of filmic language based on the employment of camera movement and scenes: it is supposed to suture, to inscribe the viewer into the universe of the film, and it urges the spectator to identify with the gaze that corresponds to the ideologically determined perspective of the camera. This identification is always ideological, since the gaze itself is dominantly male based and patriarchal, and it thematizes woman as an object of visual pleasure, as has been long argued by feminist film criticism. Furthermore, as Silverman contends in her book, if we consider the camera as the primary metaphor of the Gaze, we can also easily

²⁰¹ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London - New York: Routledge, 1996), 9.

admit that the camera is not simply a tool but rather a mechanism which is using the viewer-subject. "The camera is often less an instrument to be used than one which uses the human subject." (130)

Theorists of the suture also point out that the spectator is driven by the scopophylic drive for the image, but the perspective of the camera is always more and beyond that which can be occupied, appropriated by the viewer; it always transcends the subject, and actually occupies the position of the Other, the ever-missing Object of desire.

As has been briefly surveyed above, the groundbreaking observations of structuralist semiotics started in the 1970's to become transformed gradually into a postsemiotics that concentrates on the constitution and the heterogeneity of the speaking subject. Roughly in the same fashion, there was a revision and specification of the psychoanalytical considerations that had been, perhaps too hastily and mechanically, imported into film theory. One of these considerations is the logic of the suture, which had been borrowed from Lacan by early feminist film semiotics. The first poststructuralist film theories were equally affected by the semiotic and Marxist concepts of the *Tel Quel* group and the entire French scene, as well as the interpretive techniques of British cultural studies. In her classic article²⁰², Laura Mulvey argues that the activity of the filmic spectator can be traced back to the simultaneous operation of two drive energies: the scopophilic drive finds pleasure in the image and in voyeurism, but it presupposes a distancing from the object of seeing. At the same time, the narcissistic drive energy of the ego ideal works to identify the subject with the image, merging the spectator into the cosmos of the film. However, in both cases we see a realization of the law of phallogocentric society: the camera movement and the gaze offered by the camera always urge the viewer to identify with the dominant perspective of the male subject, and thus the subject is sutured by the chain of perspectives into a universe which is the duplication and the enforcement of the male-centered ideology of the actual establishment.

²⁰² Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18.

In this capacity, the concept of the suture certainly does not differ significantly from that of the narratological suture, which had already been used by earlier structuralist narratologies as well. It was used to define the system of perspectives which invites the reader to internalize unconsciously the subject positions that are offered by the text. However, deconstruction and the critique of ideology soon pointed out that these positions of focalization are always ideological, manipulated, and their operation relies on the logic of enunciation which has already been theorized by Émile Benveniste. They articulate a system of interrelatedness within which the positionality of the subject can also be marked out. Without such a positionality, there is no identity for the subject. This is why we can argue that the system of camera movement also establishes a separate language, a system of enunciation in the film.

However, the employment of the concept of the suture in film theory ignored or simplified some fundamental psychoanalytical considerations, and these were later problematized by Jean Copjec and Slavoj Žižek, among many others. Baudry, Metz and their contemporaries suppose a viewer in the cinema as a subject who recognizes, possesses and controls the visual image, and in this way they inevitably postulate a homogeneous, compact spectator who relates to the mirror-like screen as a superior agent. Žižek and the postsemiotics of the cinematic subject remind us, on the other hand, that Lacanian psychoanalysis always started out from a split, non-sovereign subject, so we cannot ground the dynamics of cinematic reception in mechanical drive energies and processes of identification. It is more proper to think of the spectator as one who suffers or goes through the spectacle of the film, one who exposes itself to the heterogeneity which will, in turn, engulf the spectator – as Silverman contends in the earlier quotation. In this way we can better understand, by way of analogy to narratology, that process in which the confusion of camera-perspectives or looks may deconstruct the subject position which is anticipated and expected by the viewer, or, for example, the way the polyphonic novel questions the automatism of reader-identification.

Žižek emphasizes that the suture which is constituted by the camera-perspectives cannot be conceived of as a mechanism that produces the closure of representation, a rounded-off, coherent, diegetic world, that is, a mechanism which transforms the spectacle into a visually complete cosmos. The shot – reverse shot operation of the camera has long been held responsible for a seeming closure: when the spectator thinks a perspective is missing from the cosmos of the film, this perspective is suddenly revealed by the reverse shot, establishing the illusion that the entirety of the field of vision is mastered by the spectator. While captivated by this illusion, the viewing subject remains blind to the fact that its vision is controlled by the camera. This results in the internalization of the ideological *gaze* which is represented by the camera perspectives.

In principle, it would still be possible to envisage the suture as ideological closure in this way, parallel to the operation of the “upholstery buttons”, “le point de caption.” The upholstery button is Lacan’s metaphor for the instance when a key signifier holds down and freezes the signifying chain, fixing the signifiers into a system, that is, into the symbolic order. However, this reading would ignore the fact that the suture which is produced by the key signifier is operational because it actually dislocates, or “un-sutures” the subject: it deprives the subject of its foundations that are presumed to be guaranteed in an automatized manner by the subject.

Žižek’s example for this operation is the King as key-signifier. The Monarch as an ideological key signifier connects the cultural-symbolical function (“being a King”) with natural determination (heritage, lineage, authority by birth), and in this way it produces in the symbolic order the suture that links the interconnections in the system of power relations. However, at the same time, it deprives the subjects of any foundation or prior meaning that may have been presumed by them for themselves. Thus, the ideological suture produced by the key-signifier is capable of working exactly because it un-sutures all the other subjects.

Conceived in this way, the point de capiton enables us to locate the misreading of suture in Anglo-Saxon deconstructivism; namely, its use as a synonym for ideological closure. It is therefore not sufficient to define the King as the only immediate junction of Nature and Culture; the point is rather that this very gesture by means of which the King is posited as their “suture” de-sutures all other subjects, makes them lose their footing, throws them into a void where they must, so to speak, create themselves.²⁰³

It is not impossible to apply this understanding of the suture to the operation of the camera which is interpreted as a metaphor of the Gaze, provided that the camera is not understood as an agency that produces the closure of representation, but rather as an agency that maintains the constant difference of the camera and the viewer. It thus deprives the subject of all prior ground or autonomy of perspective, turning it vulnerable to the un-suturing effects of the cinematic spectacle. Of course, this un-suturing agency of the camera is intensified and foregrounded in experimental film, while it is usually concealed and suppressed in the classic realist film of the Hollywood tradition.

Žižek’s radical interpretation of the suture will yield new insight if we apply it to the postmodern vogue of anatomy, the voyeuristic interest of subjects in their own corporeality and the dissemination of the representations of the body. Until now, Kristeva’s theory of the abject as the most archaic experience of the subject in *Powers of Horror* established the primary theoretical ground for us to understand the way in which the image of the cadaver, the heterogeneous, uncontainable body, connects the subject back into the real of those unstructured drive motilities through the repression of which the abstraction of the ego is maintainable. The metaphysical values and ideological categories of the symbolic order establish those points of the suture which envelope the speaking subject’s heterogeneous corporeality into the abstraction of the transcendental ego: the symbolic order sutures us into an abstract system exactly because it un-sutures us, deprives us of our real footing, our materiality. When the sentiment of the body,

²⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London – New York: Verso, 1991), 19.

the always-present and always-ignored, suppressed foundation of our existence is brought to the surface by representations of corporeality, the seam of the suture on the subject is broken exactly because we suddenly grasp onto something which surely gives us a firm ground, we peep through the boundaries of the shell in which our self-awareness as *homo clausus* is encapsulated. We are reconnected with that which should be only too familiar, and from which we have been alienated.

At this point we arrive at the second quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the by-now classical definition of ethics as optics by Emmanuel Lévinas, the philosopher of the face of the Other. Lévinas establishes the core of his ethical philosophy on an understanding of the Other whose face interpellates me and compels me to turn towards that face. This is the moment of responsibility, the dawn of the most fundamental relationality that has an optical nature that encompasses our entire existence. Seeing, vision as such, is the foundation of ethics, and this provides the cadaver in the postmodern anatomy theater with an extraordinary unsuturing power. The look in the eyes and in the flesh of the corpse instructs the viewing subject, before anything else, that the very field of vision for the human being is inseparable from ethics, because the face of the cadaver, the face of the Other, is one that we also have inside. When we encounter the cadaver and we look the corpse in the eye, we see ourselves looking, but not in a simple mirror, since this mirroring is our very corporeality. Sadly, the body of the dead subject displayed in front of me establishes this optical power with much greater intensity than any other visual effect, be it a painting, a photograph, a moving image or the most emblematically complex cultural representation.

If this encounter can be conceptualized as the subject's witnessing of its own contradiction, its own Other, then we are brought back to the Nancy – Derrida interview I departed from in my first paragraph, and the question we face is the following: is the dissemination of corporeal representations in postmodern culture only a commodification of the fantastic, or is there in this anatomical

vogue a new manifestation of the ever-present need of the subject to come to terms with its unsuturedness, with its separation from its corporeal grounds, from the Other within? And if this postmodern anatomico-corporeal affinity does carry an epistemological stake, how do we conceive, in light of all this, of the fact that the unthinkable and impossible happens again and again even in our time, and the iconography of the early modern *memento mori* is now echoed and appropriated by the commercially disseminated image of mass graves and mutilated cadavers? We can only hope that the anatomy exhibitions and traveling autopsies of the third millennium will not merely proliferate as consumerist sensations, but will also be efficient in activating in the subject that “certain responsibility” which is to prevent us from the military extremities of our carno-phallogocentric cultural order.

Expansive Inwardness

The main objective of this volume was to investigate how specific representational techniques are employed both in the early modern and the postmodern period in order to provide answers or reactions to the uncertainties of the epistemological crisis of the historically specific period. The thematization of violence, abjection and heterogeneity, the ostentation of the heterogeneity of the human being as a social positioned subject, and the foregrounding of the socially fabricated nature of identity are central strategies in Renaissance and postmodern drama and cultural representations. They participate in the all-embracing dissection and mapping of both the mental and physical, psychic and corporeal constitution of the subject. The attempts to penetrate the surface of things, to get beyond the skin of our socially – ideologically produced versions of reality are operational within the framework of a *double anatomy*, a twofold *expansive inwardness* which connects the early modern and the postmodern on the two respective ends of the period of modernity. If the early modern self-reflexive

anatomizing zeal of the Renaissance preceded that period which is then followed by the postmodern proliferation of theatrical metaperspectives, anatomy exhibitions and anatomical performance events, we have every ground to ponder where this present postmodern period as a transition takes us. This remains to be seen and investigated by the critical theories of the third millennium.

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