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Double Anatomy in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama

Second, revised and enlarged edition of
The Semiotics of Revenge
Subjectivity and Abjection in English Renaissance Tragedy [1995]

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I

"To Know the Author Were Some Ease of Grief."[1]
Early Modern Tragedy and the Constitution of the Subject

Poststructuralist theories of the constitution of the subject have exerted such a diverse and decisive influence on Renaissance scholarship that readers and interpreters of early modern English drama might be taken by surprise when they encounter Hieronimo's outcry in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. The protagonist of this sixteenth century revenge play, so parental for all subsequent productions of the genre, verbalizes with an extraordinary postmodern insight the problematic which is also central to the epistemological concerns of the early modern subjet.[2] Who is the author? Hieronimo's question does not only pertain to the murderer of his only son. The scope of this scrutiny is cosmic. Who is the authoritative controller of meanings, productions, destinies and identities in the social circulation of texts, discourses, and signs?

Subjectivity and identity are problematized in English Renaissance tragedy in complex metatheatrical frameworks through the metaphor of authorship, which establishes a dramaturgical scenario that keeps recurring throughout the early modern period. The protagonists of these dramas are subjects whose identity is constituted in relation to a task which places them in a situation where they must occupy positions of authorship as opposed to others who do not control the discursive space around themselves. The task almost always involves the taking up of some new identity, often one opposed to the original personality of the actor-character. Role-playing, which is aimed at the fulfillment of the task, becomes a testing of the subject's ability to preserve an original, authentic identity. The fashioning of

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[1] *The Spanish Tragedy*,. Hieronimo, II.v.40. References are to Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy.* ed. J. R. Mulryne (The New Mermaids. London: A & C Black, 1989).

[2] See, for example, the two seminal articles of the poststructuralist critique of the author function: Roland Barthes. "The Death of the Author." In *Image – Music – Text* (Fontana Press, 1993), 142-148; Michel Foucault. "What Is an Author?" In Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle eds., *Critical Theory since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State U. P., 1986), 138-147.

the new identity results in the assimilation, or the fusing together, of the earlier and the new, fake personalities, and by the end of the dramatic action the protagonist faces an identity crisis in which, retrospectively, even the reality of some initial, self-sufficient identity or self-presence becomes questionable. The promise of the fully self-realized, self-transforming Renaissance individual gradually turns into a laboratory of identity in which we are witness to the disintegration of the protagonist's consciousness. What we find in these plays, then, is a radically negative answer to the questions about contemporary essentialist humanist ideas of innateness and the self-identity of the subject.

In order to scrutinize the strategies and the logic of these English Renaissance laboratories of the self, I rely in this volume on the interpretive methodology of semiography. The primary theoretical argument of semiography is that a psychoanalytically informed postsemiotics of the subject is indispensable for understanding of effect that is exerted on the spectator by the representation of violence, heterogeneity, abjection and anatomization.3 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 both 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 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

[3] 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.

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: performance-oriented theater semiotics and the poststructuralist theory of 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.

Interpretations in the following chapters will focus on the plays as dramatic texts written for performance. A performance-oriented semiotic approach restores the texts to the (hypothetically reconstructed) original theatrical logic of the specific age in which these texts functioned fully only on the stage, where the multiplicity of sign channels and the traditions of involvement and presence actualized potentials of the dramas that remain inactivated in reading. The system of emblematic connotations, the dimensionality of stage-audience interaction, and the theatrical experience of testimony can only be revealed through an investigation of the performance text.

The early modern texts manifest the emergence and growing presence of two radically different world models at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, and changing but as yet unsettled ideas about the nature of signification and the signifying capacity of the human subject.

In a semiotic typology of cultures, the late Renaissance in England witnesses the clash of two competing world models. The religious medieval, vertical world model is still very much in place, but it becomes gradually questioned, unsettled, problematized, because the first signs of the new Enlightenment-type horizontal world model begin to emerge. The earlier world model is inherited by the Renaissance from the Middle Ages: its organic, hierarchical view is based on *high semioticity*,[4] and its semiotic attitude to reality studies every element of the universe as an inscribed sign which possesses an inherent signifying capacity, being the emanation, the written sign of the Absolute. The dominant metaphor of this paradigm is the Book of Nature: the *Specula Mundi* tradition relates to the world as an open book, the elements of which can be interpreted on several potential levels of meaning.

The new horizontal, syntagmatic world model will settle in only by the time of Cartesian rationalism and the new bourgeois society, but the questions which dislocate the organic world model already anticipate its coming. The sign in the syntagmatic world model becomes passive and ultimately suspicious. The advent of early empirical scientific observation establishes a new epistemological attitude according to which elements of reality should no longer be investigated for their position in a signifying system of correspondences, but rather for their material embeddedness in a link of cause and effect relationships. Thus, the great ladder of the Chain of Being falls flat, and a new semiotic attitude develops according to which the sign should stand as naked as possible. The transition into this cognitive paradigm is marked by the intensified presence of the Theater of the World metaphor; role-playing, self-fashioning, social theatricality, dramatic testing of appearance and reality reflect the epistemological uncertainty of the period. The theater becomes the institutionalized site for the thematization of new signifying and social practices which sometimes exercise a subversive capacity, as they scrutinize the relationship between authority and representation, subject and power, body and ideological positionality.

The changing role of the theater in public life and the metamorphosis of theatrical representational techniques can be discussed in terms of this

[4] For the concept of high semioticity in the semiotic typology of cultures, I rely on Jurij M. Lotman. "Problems in the Typology of Cultures." In Daniel P. Lucid, ed., *Soviet Semiotics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 214-220.

gradual transition from a vertical into a horizontal world model. It is this transition that actually gives rise to literary drama and psychological dramatic representation. Renaissance tragedy is situated in this metamorphosis as a peculiarly transitional mode which is mid-way between the transparency of medieval allegorical performance and the realistic stage techniques of the 17th and 18th centuries. The process of re-orientation from emblematic theater to photographic theater is still in a balanced state in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and the presence of radically different theatrical practices and cognitive systems establishes an ambiguity, a specific semiotic polyvalence which is a constitutive facet of the plays I will examine.

The themes favored by Renaissance tragedy, especially the revenge motif, serve to create situations in which the rules of meaning-creation and identity-formation can be tested. A semiotic approach to these themes and the logic of metatheatricality must investigate dramatic characters and spectators as speaking subjects, as elements in the process of semiosis. We also need to investigate the techniques of stage representation that are used to foreground problems of signification, mapping out the relation of theatrical practices to the ideological technologies that incorporate or fail to contain them. Thus, the metatheatrical perspective and the revenge theme can be interpreted as a dramaturgical framework which turns Renaissance revenge tragedies into laboratories of identity.

The study of the stage-audience dynamic in this dramatic and theatrical laboratory necessitates a theory of the theatrical representational logic as well as a theory of the spectator as a speaking subject. In what follows I am going to explicate these questions through the terms of the postsemiotics of the subject.

II
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. When we back now at the emergence of the postsemiotic attitude from the horizon of the new millennium, 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.5 The first orientation, concentrating on the enunciated, studies the mechanical relationships between signifiers and signifieds, and it considers the 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,

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

> "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."6

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 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 o 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." 7

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,

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[6] Ibid., 219.

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

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".8 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 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.

II.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

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

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.'"
> (Problems in General Linguistics)9

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 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

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[9] Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Miami University Press, 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.*

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 production of truth and subjectivity in society, or to the independence of the syntax of the Symbolic Order in Lacanian psychoanalysis.10 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."11 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.

II.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

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[10] 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.

[11] 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.

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 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.12

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.13 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.14

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-

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[12] 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).

[13] "…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.

[14] I rely here on Lotman's "Problems in the Typology of Cultures." Later I 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.

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 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.15 Through the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, a new economy changes the dimensionality of power in society.

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[15] 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; much rather it is based on the idea of free subjects.

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, pageantry, Lor Mayor's shows, etc.),16 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.17 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

[16] 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.

[17] 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 mainly lied 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.

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.

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."18

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[18] Stephen Greenblatt, R*enaissance 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

Our current postmodern period faces similar challenge. 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 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.

II.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.

Foucauldian critique of ideology, see especially: Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 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.

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.19 The human being must become able to relate to itself as something separate from the outside reality, from its 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

[19] 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.

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 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.

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 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'."20

In this theory of the constitution of the subject, the signifying process, significance, 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 psycho-somatic 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

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

no thesis and no position, the process by which significance is constituted."21

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.

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

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[21] 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.

through the expulsion of the experience of the body from the dimensions of discourse.22

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 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."23 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."24 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

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[22] 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.

[23] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 10.

[24] Ibid., 9.

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.

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.

III
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." 25

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

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

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."26 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 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.27 Semiotically speaking (according to the tripartite typology of Peirce), however, it is actually grounded in the logic of the icon. In medieval high semioticity 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

[26] Ibid., 50.

[27] 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.

of Flesh and Spirit, signifier and signified.28 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 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?"29

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.

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[28] 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 semioticity* in the Medieval world model.

[29] Knapp, 104.

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."30

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" 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.31 Protestantism endows faith and prayer with all the

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[30] Knapp, 50.

[31] 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

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."32

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.33

> "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

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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.

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

[33] 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).

> 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."34

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 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. 35

According to Knapp, this uncertainty and semiotic anxiety produces 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

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

[35] Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body.* Chapter I. 13-29.

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."[36]

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 is 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.

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[36] Knapp, 130.

> "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 borad and general acting area in which the communal festivities were conducted."37

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.

Figure 1.
This is the only extant authentic contemporary representation of an Elizabethan public playhouse. The Swan Theatre was one of the most popular theatres of Shakespeare's time in London. The elevated platform stage, the circular galleries and the arena space in front of the stage are all characteristic features. The stage reaches out into the space of the spectators to the actors maintain live interaction with the spectators, establishing an interactive *platea* and a more withdrawn *locus* location. The entry of the trap door is under the chairs in the middle of the acting area.

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

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[37] 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, 2009). I am grateful to Ágnes Matuska for her valuable insights into the logic of the Vice during our consultations.

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 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."38 The theatrical semiotics of testimony again depends on the unsettling of the subject's identity.

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 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

[38] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

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*.[39]

[39] "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.

IV
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.40

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 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 playmaker'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:

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[40] For the emblematic as typical of the early modern paradigm of thinking and seeing, see: György E. Szőnyi. "The 'Emblematic' as a Ay of Thinking and Seeing in Renaissance Culture." *e-Colloquia*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2003) http://ecolloquia.btk.ppke.hu/ issues/200301/ (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.

> "…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."41

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 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.42

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

[42] 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 and reconstructed in order for us to be able to activate these texts. Dessen, like many

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, 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.43 From a semiotic perspective, the emblem is a representational curiosity. It consists of an *inscriptio*, a *pictura* and a

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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.

[43] 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).

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
Qua 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.44

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. 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

[44] http://www.mun.ca/alciato/fr-l030.html (access January 30, 2010)

exegetical methods."45 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." 46

The emblem tradition had a powerful presence in early modern England as well, an outstanding example of which is Geffrey 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 reproduce here is independent of Alciato and employs a commonplace that is also a recurring motif of early modern tragedies: "Truth is the daughter of time."

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[45] Dietrich Walter Jöns, *Das "Sinnen-Bild." Studien zur allegorischen Buildlichkeit bei Andreas Gryphius* (Stuttgart, 1966), quoted in Fabiny, ed., *Shakespeare and the Emblem*, 7.

[46] Thomas A. Sebeok, gen. ed., *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter; Second edition, 1994), Vol. I. 221. The dictionary entry "emblem" also notes 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*." Ibid.

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.

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 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."47

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

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[47] 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).

activity, an epistemological quest which manifests itself in the attempts to devise new ways of signification and approaches to reality.[48]

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.[49] 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,"[50] 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 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

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[48] Lotman and Uspensky. "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture." 410.

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

[50] 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.

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.51 I would still like to argue that this problematization does not diminish the importance of the iconographical and social traditions of visuality 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.

Figure 2.
"Homo microcosmus:" the central thesis in the teaching about the Great Chain of Being is the interrelation between the local and the cosmic, the small and the universal, the microcosm and the macrocosm. A proliferate representation of this Neoplatonic idea is the human being as microcosm.

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.

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[51] 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).

This terminological confusion calls for a new definition of emblematic decoding.

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."[52] Images of the dance 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*.[53] 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 associations; as a mirror, in

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

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

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.54 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.55 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.56

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,57 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. This interactive nature of the emblematic theater imposed a complex semiotic task on the audience,

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[54] 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.

[55] "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot." *King Lear*, Cornwall, III. 7. 68.

[56] 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.

[57] *Henry V*, Prologue, 8-18.

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.58 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 my 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."59

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 in the performances, even if these were not

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[58] Dieter Mehl. "Emblems in English Renaissance Drama." *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 2 (1969), 39-57.
[59] Reibetanz. "Theatrical Emblems in *King Lear*." 42.

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"60 but also the character and the play as a whole. Through the images of blindness, folly, suffering, and fallibility, the character of Lear is

[60] Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, Chapter 4.

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 desemioticize 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."61

The preconditioning motto "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem" above the entrance to the Globe theater emblematized the nature of most of the early modern 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 semioticized every element of the stage on different symbolic levels.

Figure 3.

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[61] Wickham, *Early English Stage, 1300 to 1600. Volume Two 1576 to 1660, Part I,* 155.

Hypothetical reconstruction of the Elizabethan public playhouse. The circular structure itself was representative of the entire universe on the basis of the microcosm-macrocosm philosophy. The name of Shakespeare's theater is also indicative of this idea: the spectator in the Globe Theater entered a cosmic space.

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."62

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

[62] *Henry V*, Prologue, 8-18.

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."[63]

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,

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

and the stage history of Shakespearean plays highlights the ideological appropriations of the theatre. 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 (so constitutive in, 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.64

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 15th 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 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

[64] Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 22-23; 59.

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 threaters.

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 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, 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.

Figure 4.
Mondino de Luzzi's "Lesson in Anatomy" from the 1493 publication of *Anatomia corporis humani*. The professor does not yet touch the corpse, and the dissection is carried out by the surgeon.

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 follows. 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.

Figure 5.
The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius's work *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) revolutionized the study of the human body. Vesalius appears almost to hug the corpse: he introduced a radically new attitude towards the body as an object of scrutiny, establishing a close contact with the corpse to be opened and dissected. In order to facilitate his examinations, Vesalius suspended the body vertically.

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.

Figure 6.
Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) is already representative of the detachment between the cadaver and the modern scientist, whose instrument touches the corpse as a prosthesis.

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 18th 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.

Figure 7.
Emblematic representation of the memento mori tradition from George Wither's *Collection of Emblems: Ancient and Modern* (1635).

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 theatric 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 *signifiance*: a characteristic achievement of the both the early modern emblematic and the postmodern experimental theater.[65]

[65] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17. According to Kristeva, any signifying practice can be studied as a process of *signifiance* (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 the theater consciously plays with this foregrounded nature of its discourse.

IV.
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."66

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-

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[66] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 88.

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.67

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 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 proceses 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

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[67] 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.

> 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'." 68

On the basis of this differentiation I will distinguish between two basis 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.69 As opposed 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

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[68] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 86-87.

[69] 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 thater, but a systematic problematization of the (im)possibility of (pefect mimetic) representation as such. In Hubert's terminology "…we can define or interpret it [metatheater] from three quite different perspectives 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.

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 (otherwise false and metapsysical) 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.[70]

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 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, 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.[71] At the

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[70] I employ the concept of the intensified semiotic activity on the basis of Lotman and Uspensky. "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture."

[71] 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: Allessandro Serpieri. "Reading

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 indispensible 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."72

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.

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the Signs: Towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama." In John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 118-43.

[72] Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, 216.

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 genotheater 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 genotheater also operates with representational techniques which are directed at the non-rational, psychic and corporeal modalities, in order to affect 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 decentering of the subject after modernity is 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, the 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 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.[73]

A similar irony can be perceived in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* where characters are constructed according to the technology of gender and

[73] Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*. Ed. and trans. by Carl Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984), 56. Although *Hamletmachine* is a text written by a German playwright, its translation (checked by Müller) has been so widely used in drama and theater studies and I consider it such a crucial achievement of postmodern literature that its inclusion in the present chain of interpretations will perhaps not prove illegitimate.

abjection. Black subjects are compelled to try to become white, female subjects are coerced 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.74

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 Günther von Hagens.75

Figure 8.

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

[75] In spite of the official prohibition, professor Günther 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. See http://www.bodyworlds.com.

The French body performance artist Orlan deconstructs the ideological representations of the commodified female body. From the ironized pathos of the first frames we are led to an even more ironic paraphrase of the emblematic figure of Botticelli's Venus.

Figure 9.
Londoners protest against the public dissection publicized by Günther von Hagens. The revival of the public anatomical tradition met with general social and political excitement.

Figure 10.
This cadaver, one of the most famous and infamous corpses in the exhibition of Günther von Hagens, is a unification of early modern and postmodern features. The basketball player is positioned over Leonardo da Vinci's well-known "Vitruvian man," emblematically expressing the corporeal interests of Renaissance and the postmodern.

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 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.

V
Identity and Authorship in *The Spanish Tragedy*

The indebtedness of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama to *The Spanish Tragedy* could hardly be overestimated and has rightly been pointed out in several critical essays.[76] The essential structural and thematic elements of Renaissance tragedy are all present in this pioneering work, and, except for the occasional imperfection and repetitiveness of the rhetorical devices, they are combined to create a tragic universe that already signifies or foreshadows the social antagonisms and semiotic dilemmas of early modern culture on several interpretive levels.

The very first lines of the play introduce us to a world of irreconcilable opposites. The binary pairs of soul and flesh, reason and passion, legality and secrecy are important not only because they set up the logic of contrariety that is constitutive of tragedy but also because — together with the repeated references to heaven and hell, above and under — they start building up the dimensionality and (vertical) multi-layeredness of the drama which will play a fundamental role in the complexity of the play's meaning.

As Thomas McAlindon points out, the idea of *discordia concors*, the universe built on the balanced fight and co-existence of opposites, was at least as important for Elizabethan cosmology as that of the *analogia mundi*, the hierarchical system of correspondences and analogies. The Renaissance inherited the theory of polarity from the Greeks and the Middle Ages and understood life not only as an ordained rite of correspondences in the great chain of being but also as an incessant tension and battle between the primal elements of the cosmos and between those of the human soul. Contrariety brings about change, but the violation of a balance of opposites, or the dominance of one of them, results in violent change, disorder, and chaos.

The fundamental duality in the human subject is, of course, that of reason and passion. Natural Law, an inherent capacity in the human being implanted by God, enables him/her to tell the difference between good and bad, lawful and unlawful. Reason is servant to conscience while passion is always the agent of will, and its purest manifestation on the English stage is ambition, the engine of numerous villain-actors. In the protagonists of

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[76] See, for example, Thomas McAlindon, *English Renaissance Tragedy* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 1986), Ch. 2.

Elizabethan revenge tragedy the balance of opposites is shaken, and the predominance of passion turns them into a split subject who oscillates between contrarious alternatives he/she is unable to choose between, since the role does not fit the personality.[77]

I emphasize that the character turning into a destructive agent is almost always an actor since this is part of a pervasive metatheatrical perspective, perhaps the most important and unifying dramatic technique of English Renaissance drama. This technique is already foregrounded in *The Spanish Tragedy* in a way which connects it to semiotic problems of the subject and its constitution in discursive practices. Also, I am concentrating on the revenge tragedy because the task and performance of revenge will be the most frequent thematic structure in the tragedies to investigate problems of the subject as built on contradictions. The immense popularity of the revenge theme cannot be accounted for simply by referring to a taste for blood and sensational horror on the part of the audience. It is used as a kind of laboratory to create situations for the human subject in which problems of identity-formation, self-forgetting, and self-fashioning can be tested.

Revenge in Renaissance society was treated as a revolt against the law of God and the order of timeliness; delivering justice was a privilege of the divine plan which unfolds through a natural sequence of time. The revenger, obsessed with the idea of retribution and assertion of self-identity, violates the divine strategy: revenge is a subversion of time, a hastiness resulting from the self overcome by passion. However, the problematic of the personality of the revenger has been oversimplified in criticism by ignoring its special status in a society based on the semiotic activity of differentiating between opposites: between the natural and the unnatural, the divine and the devilish, the clean and the unclean, the sane and the insane. The status of these polarities was codified by historically specific social discourses, but what is important for us here from a semiotic perspective is

[77] It is no wonder that reformed theology imposes a very strict prohibition upon any communication with the supernatural. The agents of the supernatural (usually those of the Devil) always find the *gates of passion* in the otherwise already split (i.e., not inherently clean, substantially not devoid of evil) subject through which they enter his/her mind to manipulate reason. The supernatural in Renaissance tragedy always presents a Protestant theological problem. For the problematic of the agency of the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedy, see Walter Clyde Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (*Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968).

that the successful containment of the opposite, the threatening “abnormal”, is a condition of the ability of the social structure not so much to suppress as to define and categorize it as separate, as something other, in a binary system of differences. The staging of revenge is truly subversive in a new historicist sense because the revenger is often the uncategorizable, the subject who is outside the categories of the social discourse, who transcends the logic of social and non-social. In short, the abject subject.

The bloody murderer, the rapist, the maniac are easy to ward off because they are clearly members of the set against which culture and the social subject define themselves and with which the subject feels no partnership whatsoever. But the revenger, as staged in Renaissance tragedy, is always the in-between: a split, heterogeneous subject who oscillates between alternatives in a realm where meaning collapses in a short circuit of object and non-object, sense and non-sense, a subject who draws sympathy and repulsion at the same time. The revenger has a seemingly legitimate cause for action, yet according to the Law he should not perform it; he should be conducting himself with self-discipline, yet he seems to sink more deeply in mental disintegration; he should assert his identity in the course of action, yet he is lost in an assimilation of his personality and the role, the mask. The revenger is cunning, and he is the uncanny of the drama. He does not revolt openly — he pretends; he does not negate — he violates the rule of language; he does not kill — he devises the performance of death. He is everything that is heterogeneous, ambiguous, borderline. Abject.[78]

The revenger, as the abject subject, performs abjection. He performs, that is, he stages abjection: the revenger is the metatheatrical agent of the abject in English Renaissance tragedy.

What I attempt to do in this chapter is draw an outline of the logic of this abjection in *The Spanish Tragedy*, a logic which will be employed so persistently throughout Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, and which participates in theatrical attempts to create an effect that unsettles the meaning-making activity and the identity of the spectator. The ironic problematization and emblematic use of the revenge as abject are not yet

[78] "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." Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 4.

fully present in the drama, but the theme itself appears in a metatheatrical framework that paves the way for Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy.

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the polarities introduced in the very first passages of the drama do not only set up a world of contrariety but also create a dimensionality for the play which works fully only on the stage. Renaissance plays, of course, always take place in the verticality that situates the subject in between the extremes of heaven and hell, the celestial and the underworld. However, *The Spanish Tragedy* takes advantage of this idea and builds up a stage world in which characters occupy different levels of verticality from which they attempt to spy on and manipulate each other.

The entire stage action is put into a constant ironic perspective by the presence of the Ghost and Revenge above everybody else. They are the representatives of the underworld, "the ambassadors of death", as G.W. Knight would probably put it, and they contemplate the action of worldly strife which the Ghost calls "the mystery."

"Here sit we down to see the mystery,
And serve for Chorus in this tragedy."
(I.i.90-91)

This already initiates the spectator to a drama in which the emphasis is not so much on the outcome as on the way characters act and reach the end. We learn at the very beginning that Bel-imperia will kill Don Balthazar, "the author of thy death" (I.i.87), so we have the detective story in which the reader can follow the sequence of intrigues in the story without having to bother about the end. Of course, it will be a surprise and it may create anxiety to see how Hieronimo devises his ingenious revenge, but the beginning preconditions us to pay attention to the manners and ironies of action.

Irony is created by the presence of the Ghost and Revenge residing above all the events because a good deal of the play is about how characters try to occupy positions in which they think they are above the others, they control them, they are in the position of being "the author" of others' fate. This does not always happen in a vertical economy, but the play also uses multi-leveled staging (e.g., Lorenzo and Balthazar above, peeping on the lovers in II.ii). When characters believe they are now in a higher position, the spectator is aware that they are indeed seen and presided over by the

agency of revenge, their knowledge is limited, they are still captured in a general economy of surveillance. They do not know "What 't is to be subject to destiny." (III.xiv.195)

A metaphorical reading of the quote cited above the title of this chapter may reveal the semiotic nature of the play's obsession with the idea of authorship in this vertical, hierarchical economy. The notion of the author has been extensively problematized in poststructuralist theory. The fact that textual productions (i.e., every signifying practice) are outside the scope and control of "the author," the writing or speaking subject, shows that we can never know who the author is. The signifying potential of the text can never be controlled by any kind of authority; when we think we are writing, it turns out that we are being written by the text; when we think we see others and control the play, a metaperspective reveals that we are being seen and the play (of the text, of the Signifier) controls us. The meta-position of the Ghost and Revenge maintains this perspective in the play. Characters on the stage can never construct a perfect metatext that could control all the other practices in the action. Indeed, it seems that "it were some ease" to know the author, or, even better, to become the author. However, this dimensionality of the play highlights the fact that there is no total authoritative position.

Except that of the Absolute. Since, above the meta-agents of revenge, there is supposed to be still one more level in the Elizabethan theater: that of God, the guarantee of true meaning, order and justice. However, this metaphysical center is already undermined in *The Spanish Tragedy* by the fact that Revenge seems to take that locus of absolute power, and it would be difficult to find any place for Godly providence in the drama. The absence of God and the heavenly sphere is conspicuous. In this respect, the play initiates one more important theme which will contribute to the real subversiveness of Renaissance tragedy: the displacement and questioning of any metaphysical center in general which could be the absolute guarantee of order, meaning, and authority in the universe or society. This questioning subverts the idea of metaphysical, transcendentally motivated power in the State or in authority and will reach its climax in Jacobean tragedy, where the chaos of life negates any transcendence. Later, I will discusse in psycho-analytical terms how ideology still takes advantage of such tragedies to use them as a "domesticated" representation of subversion and violence in order to contain

more dangerous impulses in subjects. As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, the "apparent production of subversion...is the very condition of power."[79]

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, revenge still seems to occupy a position of "absolute authorship," the ultimate writer of fates and director of subjects. The play does not totally severe ties with the idea of a governing center. But at the same time, this fact is a rather pessimistic answer to the question about the presence of order in the universe and the ability of the subject to shape his/her own destiny. It is not God's hand or the omnipotence of the Monarch that governs the events but a metaphorical representation of the most powerful passion in the human being: Revenge. The play is presided over by the representative of the underworld, who does not really have to become involved in the action because he is already inside the characters:

"Content thyself, Andrea: though I sleep,
Yet my mood is soliciting their souls."
(III.xv.19-20)

Revenge is the representative of the underworld, the images of which darkly dominate the world of the play. In psychoanalytical terms, he is a quite clearly drawn representative of the unconscious, whose contents here burst forward with uncontrollable energy and put the identity of the protagonist in the play into process.

In embarking upon the strategy to devise the means of his revenge, Hieronimo's aim will be to become one with revenge, to identify completely with the task, and he does this with repeated references to and invocations of the underworld. The "visitations" of hell upon Hieronimo begin immediately after the murder of his son:

"The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell,
And frame my steps to unfrequented paths..."
(III.ii.16-17)

Later he "rips the bowels of the earth," as if he were trying to penetrate the material surface of his existence, to internalize hell in himself, whose real agent, again ironically, is probably keeping an eye on him from somewhere above.

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[79] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, 65.

"And here surrender up my marshalship;
For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell,"
(III.xii.76-77)

However, identifying with the task is never easy, and not simply because evidence is not always at hand but because Reason advises the protagonist against usurping the role of God. This is the situation which starts the oscillation between alternatives in the character's mind, resulting in mental disintegration. A scheme employed with great regularity in Renaissance tragedy.

It is very interesting to note that the most comprehensive details of Hieronimo's tortured mind, pictured as a representational problem, are given in a scene that is the longest of the "additions," passages built in the play later. In the "painter scene", Hieronimo presents the painter with the fundamental representational problem: is it possible to depict, that is, to re-present perfectly the abjection of the tortured mind? Is it possible to bridge the gap between reality and interpretation? The desperate deixis of the lines intensify the attempt at full representation:

"There you may show a passion, there you may show a passion!...Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell, invocate heaven, and in the end leave me in a trance — and so forth."
(4th addition, 151-157)

However, the potentialities of the scene come to surface again only if we try to make it work in actual performance. The power of the action here depends on what Hieronimo is actually doing while he pictures the setting of his rage, for he himself should be raging during the scene. He does not simply re-tell the story of his finding the dead body of his son. He re-enacts the events, and he does so (in my hypothetical interpretation) for at least two reasons. First, it is an occasion for him to release all the tension that has been accumulating in him, a chance to become really mad and incite himself to the act of revenge, which he otherwise is still too careful to do. Second, the scene is situated in the metatheatrical and semiotic problematics of the play. Hieronimo knows that total representation is impossible, so he turns

himself into the picture, into a living emblem of madness, and acts it out in order to reduce the representational insufficiency of the would-be painting. But, in so doing, he takes up a role, and tries to identify with it as completely as possible, and this provides the irony of the scene since this is the tragic mistake the revenger always makes. He surrenders his identity for the sake of the role, loses himself, and the radical self-assertions of revenge tragedies are in fact manifestations of disintegration ("Know I am Hieronimo"; "Tis I, Hamlet, the Dane;" "Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I.").

It is not by chance that the scene is an addition inserted a little later, that is, exactly when the epistemological dilemmas of representation, signification, and role-playing reach a climax. Criticism usually argues that the scene should be ignored in performance since it breaks the continuity and rhythm of the original. In my view, this is to miss the meaning of one of the most powerful scenes in the play.

At the end of the scene Hieronimo also suggests that the real torment is not in raging or madness but in the state of being in-between.

"As I am never better than when I am mad; then methinks I am a brave fellow, then I do wonders; but reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell."

(4th addition, 159-162. my emphasis)

Hell is in the hero's mind, but, in fact, it is not the underworld but being in-between: neither sane nor mad, neither world nor underworld. Tortured, hurt, oscillating without borders. Abjected.

As already mentioned, the scene also participates in the metatheatrical framework, for here Hieronimo is playing. What is more, he believes he is the real author and controller of this role and scene since this is his attempt — but, once more, he is mistaken, since the role is already above him, overpowering the revenger, silently contemplated by the metaphor of the role, Revenge itself.

After this intriguing scene, Hieronimo enters in III.xiii. reading Seneca, but again the lines are metatheatrical since it is here that Hieronimo identifies completely with the task of revenge, and through the words commits the greatest blasphemy. "Vindicta mihi!" — these are the words of the Almighty, whose privilege it is to take revenge, and Hieronimo in this soliloquy thinks he can enter the position of the Great Scriptor. He does so in a theatrical way: he becomes author of a/the play in which the characters

are too ignorant to see the nature of their imposed roles. "Author and actor in this tragedy" (IV.iv.150), Hieronimo becomes the director who shapes the sequence of events, and he will be the author of others' deaths. However, the tragic irony reaches its climax here, for the role, that is, the text, the production, is again hierarchically above the author. Hieronimo is merely acting out a role in a play whose real author is not him, but Revenge, and in which his imaginary authorship does not assert but radically disintegrates his identity.

Hieronimo introduces his theatrical skills as early as Act I Scene 5 as a director of the masque which "contents the eye of the king." However, he is not only the director but also the interpreter of the performance, he mediates meaning between the world of the masque and the world of the play. The play-within-the-play technique is employed here, as always in Renaissance drama, to comment on the multi-layeredness of the entire dramatic action. In this scene Hieronimo, as an interpreter between worlds, occupies a position in regard to meaning which is hierarchically above the other characters. In the metatheatrical framework, this is the position which every character tries to occupy in the play which is based on the difference between levels and gazes. The world of the revenger is the highest level because he is the most cunning actor and pretender: his strategies will finally overcome everybody. He is also the most active agent of involvement, his soliloquies involve the audience in the play by initiating them into knowledge the other characters do not possess (although *The Spanish Tragedy* does not employ this technique as systematically as subsequent plays). All the other characters strive to enter the highest position where they could become "the author of others' death." Almost everybody is engaged in some strategy of taking revenge: Hieronimo against the murderers of his son, Balthazar against Horatio, Bel-imperia against Balthazar, Villuppo against Alexandro. The tragic irony is always created by the fact that the subjects involved in this intricate web of revenges never possess a meta-perspective from which they could see and manipulate all the others. That meta-stance is granted only to Revenge, who, again ironically, is inherent in every subject and represents that unconscious agency which is beyond the control of the subject.

That irony is constitutive of the tragedy is also manifest in one of the dramaturgical turning points, the murder of Horatio in II.iv. The "kiss in the arbour scene" is an extended emblem of the Neoplatonic idea of death-in-love so common in the Renaissance. Everything depends, again, on the logic

of staging. The rhetoric Horatio and Bel-imperia use is definitely metaphorical of love-making and the careful planning of the perfection of the act:

"O, let me go; for in my troubled eyes
Now may'st thou read that life in passion dies.
O, stay a while, and I will die with thee;
So shalt thou yield, and yet have conquered me."
(II.iv.46-49)

The kiss as metaphor of death-in-love is here turned into death as metaphor of orgasm: the lovers are approaching the climax "entwined in yoking arms", as parts of the arbor entwine each other. The scene has a double effect.

If it is staged as real or almost open love-making, it turns the arbor scene and the "kiss" as emblem of pure love into a manifestation of violent sexual passion, which indeed is congruent with the logic of the entire play, obsessed with violence and perversion. This problematization or destruction of pure values was already introduced with Bel-imperia's morally very questionable decision to love Horatio merely in order to take revenge upon "the author of Andrea's death":

"Yes, second love shall further my revenge!
I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,
The more to spite the prince that wrought his end."
(I.iv.66-68)

Even more important, the love-making scene with the metaphor of orgasm-as-death in its center is immediately turned into a real staging of death. With a sudden reversal, it is really death that comes to Horatio: the one who wanted to penetrate and die in the perfection of love is now penetrated and dies in the perfection of physical death. Balthazar and his fellow villains do not simply murder him — they kill him "perfectly": they hang him and stab him repeatedly. Horatio "erected" and penetrated several times. A cruel mockery of love-making.

"Ay, thus, and thus: these are the fruits of love."
(Lorenzo, II.iv.55)

The two kinds of death are similar to the extent that they both imply the relinquishing of identity, and they establish a direct contact with reality, the unknown. With "death in love", orgasm is the mutual abandonment of two people's identities in an experience when it is the immediacy of the body that speaks. With real death, the dying one also experiences the unknown, and the condition of this experience is again the leaving behind of identity. The difference is that here the subject does not return. In later Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy sexuality and the prolonged process of dying will become favorite themes to investigate the limits, the border-lines between life and death, the known and the unknown, identity and non-identity.

The spectacle of death is staged in the greatest complexity in Hieronimo's final play, the perfection of revenge, which, for him, is the perfection of authorship since not only is he the all-powerful author and director of the tragedy they act out but he also becomes the author of death, the producer of corpses.

The corpse, in the Lacanian sense, is the pure signifier, the thing which represents most perfectly since it is the thing it is supposed to represent. For Lacan, the sign is always the symbol of lack; it is the symbol of the absence of the thing it stands for. The perfect signifier as absence is thus the corpse because the dead body is the manifestation of the total absence of life. Also, in a Kristevan sense, the corpse is one of the most "powerful" signifiers since it does not re-present, but shows, presents death in its immediacy. The corpse seems to be a form of spectacle in Renaissance tragedy which bridges the gap between signification and reality and achieves perfect representation.

It is indicated elaborately in *The Spanish Tragedy* that Hieronimo devises the courtly play with great care and with several intentions in mind. He insists that the tragedy should be performed in different languages so that it becomes the fall of his enemies and the representation of the confusion and corruption of the world at the same time:

"Now shall I see the fall of Babylon,
Wrought by the heavens in this confusion."
(IV.i.195-196)

Nonetheless, Hieronimo may be the author of death but not the total author of the play and the events. His tragic blindness makes him unable to see that he is not an agent of the heavens but one of hell. The play also goes beyond his representational control, as he admits when he takes the role of the interpreter again after the performance, and explains the death of Bel-imperia:

"For as the story saith she should have died,
Yet I of kindness and of care to her,
Did otherwise determine of her end;
But love of him whom they did hate too much
Did urge her resolution to be such."
(IV.iv.141-145)

It turns out that Hieronimo's authorial power is still limited, and he cannot determine everybody's end.

In his interpretation, when he reveals the meaning and the cause of the tragedy to those who always need interpretation to understand, Hieronimo displays the ultimate spectacle of abjection: the corpse of his son, which is now probably in the process of decaying.

"See here my show, look on this spectacle!
Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
Here lay my treasure, and here my treasure lost;
Here lay my pleasure, and here my pleasure bereft:
But hope, heart, treasure, joy and bliss,
All fled, fail'd, died, yea, all decay'd with this."
(IV.iv.89-95)

It turns out that Horatio's corpse has certainly been the cause, the generating figure of all the other corpses in the play. With the death of Horatio, all meaning has decayed for Hieronimo in the world, as all meaning collapses now, at the moment which the intensified deixis of the lines point to, in the sight of the abject. On a metaphorical level, the multiplication of corpses and the staging of the central, abject, terrifying cadaver show that in this world (and, indirectly, in the world of the involved

audience) authority as a metaphysical locus of order has been replaced by the agency of death and the underworld.

When the stage is littered with corpses, the revenger realizes that the play is over, his part has come to an end, and he steps off the stage. Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* is prevented from committing suicide, yet he makes every effort to maintain his authorship and his control over the representation. He bites out his tongue in order to become a mute body who no longer reveals its secrets. Again, it is in the later, added version of the last scene that we find the explicit meta-theatrical reference to the end of the revenger's role-playing:[80]

"Now to express the rupture of my part,
First take my tongue, and afterward my heart."
(5th addition, 47-48)

The protagonist's last, desperate act also participates in the thematized interrogation of representation and control in the play. Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* never stops talking about the fact that he should actually be somewhere else: not in this world of corruption and loss but in hell. The world of the "mystery" in fact turns into hell for him, and he does everything to transform it into hell for the other subjects as well. Hieronimo's logic is that of displacement: he strives to displace, to transform everything in a world where he is ultimately out of place. Identity, position, and integrity for him are radically dislocated, put into process. As long as he is in this world, he is a split subject. His biting out of his tongue is his final, ultimate negation and transgression of the world which holds him captive and which he aims to subvert. In a world which seems to be constituted on the discrepancy between word and thing, discourse and reality (talk of love vs. death instead of love, courtly entertainment vs. bloody murder, confusion of languages vs. real meaning and interpretation), the subject is defined as a speaking subject, and this code is what Hieronimo

[80] The so-called "additions" are usually grouped at the end of critical editions of *The Spanish Tragedy*. There is evidence that these additions were inserted into the original text in 1602 to replace parts of Kyd's text which were felt to be old-fashioned. I would like to emphasize the importance and the value of this "textual correction" since the new parts so pregnantly demonstrate the semiotic and representational dilemmas at the turn of the century.

finally transgresses by turning himself into a mute body. Writing as opposed to speech turns into death in his hands.[81] Hieronimo here seems to achieve perfect representation at the expense of his own subjectivity: his body materially represents his transgression. In the interrelated framework of motifs including problems of representation and the gap between seeming and reality, often foregrounded emblematically (the arbor scene, the painter scene, the emblematic masques), Hieronimo here turns himself into the pure emblem of his revolt, into the image which surpasses discourse.

Nevertheless, even if Hieronimo maintains his unviolated authorship to the end, the performance of revenge results in the loss of his identity, which is indicated once again by a motif characteristic of Renaissance drama. Through the course of role-playing, the actor-villain identifies so much with the role that he will be unable to stop playing it. After biting his tongue out, Hieronimo has no reason whatsoever to kill the Duke with the knife he ingeniously obtains "to mend his knife." This already is a result of the compulsion to carry on with his role, to produce more corpses, to indulge in a seeming control over the other subjects. Yet, as we have seen, the real agent, the all-powerful author was not Hieronimo but Revenge, the metaphorical representation of the underworld, the passion of the unconscious. "The rest is silence", that is, the rest now belongs to the underworld, where Revenge takes over the real directorship:

"For here though death hath end their misery,
I'll there begin their endless tragedy."
(IV. Chorus, 47-48)

The Spanish Tragedy uses the revenge theme in a metatheatrical framework in order to foreground with tragic irony the fact that full representational control is never possible, the position of unconditional authorship always turns out to be relative, and meaning (representation, play, fate, destiny) elude the regulative capacity of the subject. With this framework and complex irony, *The Spanish Tragedy* introduces the themes which will be employed in Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy with more radical overtones. The decentered protagonist of the play is the prototype of Tudor and Stuart tragedies that interrogate and question the

[81] This motif of writing with, in, and through the body ("writing in wounds") will be thematized later in, e.g., *Titus Andronicus, The Duchess of Malfi, Bussy D'Ambois*.

idea of the self-identical, metaphysically human subject of Christian essentialism.82 In Catherine Belsey's terms, in *The Spanish Tragedy* the discrepancy between the subject of enunciation (Hieronimo as character) and the subject of the utterance (the subject Hieronimo's discourse denotes) is already so substantial that the subject position it offers for audience identification through involvement is one of unsettled, discontinuous, questionable identity.83

[82]See Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy. Religion, Ideology and Power in theDrama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,* 1984), Ch.10/1. "Tragedy, Humanism and the Transcendent Subject."; Ch.10/2. "The Jacobean Displacement of the Subject."

[83] For a discussion of how texts offer specific subject-positions for the receivers, see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), Ch.I. "Introduction: Reading the Past." 1-12.

VI
"Words, words, words."[84]
The Surface of Things in
Titus Andronicus and *Hamlet*

Thing and nothing, substance and show: the penetration of the surface of things to reach some authentic meaning is a goal pursued by Shakespearean characters in such a thematized fashion that any study of its logic risks falling into the enumeration of critical commonplaces that have been produced about the topic. However, little attention has been paid to the semiotic nature of the pilgrimage of these characters from the no-thing to the thing in relation to the constitution of their identities as speaking subjects, articulated through the difference between the materiality of the thing and the materiality of the Signifier. The body seems to occupy a peculiar role in this epistemological problem: through the motifs of mutilation, torture, infection, and decay, these plays foreground that "opaque element of signification,"[85] the sentiment and the agency of the body which is the material basis of the signifying process. The protagonists of Shakespearean tragedy strive to uncover the true foundations, the real body of signification, through the testing of the corpus only to reveal in the end that the impenetrable materiality of the word, the signifier, prevails even over the materiality of the physical body. This revelation subverts the idea of a metaphysically motivated relationship between body and identity, i.e., the meaning of that body. Indirectly, Shakespearean tragedy is the negation of the transcendental logic of the "body politic." "The sovereign is the missing element, the impossible being in Shakespearean tragedy."[86] But not only the monarch: nobody can be sovereign of his/her body and its meaning.

[84] *Hamlet*, II.ii.192.
[85] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 215.
[86] Moretti. "The Great Eclipse: Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty." 66.

In this chapter I propose to discuss in semiotic and representational terms some of the central motifs that recur in two Shakespearean tragedies. I will argue that the obsession with the dissolution, mutilation, and torture of the body — as well as the penetration of the surface of signification (metaphorically designated by the flesh) in general — is symptomatic of the semiotic desire to delve into the most fundamental yet unfathomable layers of meaning, to unite the word with the flesh (or to deprive the flesh of the word) as completely as possible.

Titus Andronicus abounds in scenes that multiply the images of horror in a continuously intensified rhythm of abjection. One bloody tableau follows the other, and the spectator can never be sure when the progression of events will reach the final spectacle, that of the utmost terror. Even nowadays many critics dismiss the play as a bloody, unstructured hash of terror and sensationalism. They are quick to point out that the sacrifices, traps, self-mutilation, and torture are beyond any tolerable point of verisimilitude or slightly realistic logic. The plot includes riddles that would seem very easy to solve, yet the characters delay in uncovering their meaning (e.g., Lavinia could easily write with her feet in the sand, yet that is not the solution the play chooses), and they engage in seemingly irrational or redundant action (e.g., the arrow-shooting scene, the prolonged, detailed depiction of the pit). However, for the critic trained in the emblematic logic of Elizabethan theater and contemporary attitudes towards the nature of representation, the entirety of the play suggests a consistent effort to present the scenes of abjection in order to foreground the attempt constitutive of the theater itself: to achieve an immediacy between representation and idea, spectacle and meaning. The components of scenes in Titus Andronicus are often arranged in a way that they take up symbolic values in a tableau in which the characters and objects cannot and should not be considered as realistic but rather as emblematic. It cannot logically be otherwise: in reality, men do not give their hands as letters, women do not immediately recover from mutilation as speaking images rather than howling, aching bodies. The play straightforwardly denies the logic of realism, but this does not mean that it cannot arrange its emblematic themes on other levels of meaning.

The beginning of *Titus Andronicus* depicts Rome itself as a mutilated body, setting up an imagery that will be pursued throughout the play.

"Be candidatus then and put it on,
And help to set a head on headless Rome."
(Marc. I.i.185-86)

This attempt to restore the body of the empire takes place in front of tombs, coffins, and the scene of sacrificial mutilation. Death lingers over the scene and suggests that the restoration carried out through more bloodshed and corpses cannot last long. The multiple references to the body provide it with a multivalent emblematic value, which contains the macabre picture of the entrails burning on the sacrificial fire as well as the body of Titus metaphysically becoming the potential head of the empire. Titus declines the offer, which is an act of blindness, turning to rage when his paternal authority is threatened. In a sudden outburst of passion, he kills his son who tries to block his way while Lavinia escapes with Bassianus. The unsound deed implies that Titus feels insecure, and before anything else he wants to preserve his fatherly position. Rome is a place where the meaning of subjects is defined by their metaphysical position in the social hierarchy, based on the Name of the Father as absolute signifier.

"What, villain boy,
Barr'st me my way in Rome?"
(I.i.290-91)

Once that position is unsettled, confusion follows since the metaphysical center that guarantees the motivatedness of relationships in the hierarchy no longer holds. In this context, then, there is little point in asking whether a father is capable of killing his son in such an irrational stir. It is the only logical reaction for Titus who, at this point, is still firmly embedded in his metaphysical thinking, just like Lear when dividing his kingdom.

Confusion certainly settles in, and Saturnius usurps the crown and further disintegrates the "body of Rome." The imagery of the play is increasingly dominated by lust and the violence of revenge: the intricate web of vengeance starts building up. There is reference early in the first scene to Titus losing himself although it will never be completely certain until the end whether he really goes mad or is just pretending.

"He is not with himself, let us withdraw."
(Quin. I.i.368)

At this stage, it is Tamora who is engaged in taking revenge, and it will be characteristic of the play's intrigue that Titus turns into a revenger playing against the other revenger, Tamora.

The first elaborately painted scene of revenge is that of the forest with the pit, a curiously central locus of the play, to the description of which entire passages are devoted. The pit is pictured by Tamora as a site of sheer abjection:

"Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds,
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven;
And they show'd me this *abhorred pit*,
They told me, here, at dead time of the night,
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
Would make such fearful and confused cries,
As any mortal body hearing it
Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly."
(II.iii.96-104, emphasis mine)

These images clearly link the pit in the depth of the dark and desolate forest to the underworld, whose manifestations the subject is unable to face because they threaten, dissolve, throw into crisis the integrity of the mind.

More importantly, in the next lengthy description provided by the trapped Martius and Quintus, the pit is not simply described as an opening to hell, but as a "fell devouring receptacle", directly related to the generating womb now swallowing up its victims:

"Reach me thy hand, that I may help you out,
Or wanting strength to do thee so much good,
I may be pluck'd into the swallowing womb
Of this deep pit."
(Quin. II.iii.237-40, emphasis mine)

The traditional emblematic meaning of the pit here is of course the gate to the underworld, the hell-mouth, and the trapdoor is probably employed in its staging. Nonetheless, through its attributes as receptacle and the womb of the earth, it becomes at the same time a negative emblem of that generating force of drives and suppressed energies in the

unconscious to which these characters now return, being trapped by their passions. The pit is also a sacrificial place where Bassianus lies "like a slaughtered lamb" (II.iii.223): Martius and Quintus — who were so engulfed by the passion of revenge on the Goths at the beginning of the play — here get trapped ironically in the emblem of those passions, the gaping wound on the surface of the earth which leads to unfathomable depths, and they fall victim to Tamora's revenge. It is as if the semiotic *chora* — the generating but always threatening receptacle of drives and heterogeneous energies — were swallowing up the subjects who gave way to the bursting up of those drives in their consciousness at the beginning. The pit as a womb is linked to the feminine lust of Tamora who uses it, and who, together with the darkness and baseness of Aaron, represents allegorically the passion of revenge. The twist is tragic and ironic at the same time, as it usually is in Renaissance tragedy: Quintus and Martius as revengers now fall subject to revenge, here symbolized by the swallowing mouth of the underworld and the unconscious. Later on, in a logical sequence, the revengers Demetrius and Chiron will return to their generating source, Tamora's body. But, even if Tamora seems to be an allegorical condensation of passion and revenge, the wielder of power, she herself cannot control the agency of Revenge which is beyond the limits of the subject. Exactly as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, here again Revenge is an uncontrollable force and may metaphorically stand for the energy of the unconscious which is beyond any regulation and authorship, above and beyond the subject whose identity depends on the successful repression of these energies. Renaissance revenge tragedy foregrounds the fact that the subject which gives way to these contents will be swallowed up by their heterogeneous and unsettling energy. The subject is a heterogeneous process and produces its identity through discourse in which it can "look upon itself." Once that discourse and the discursive order of things are violated, the subject does not come into being: this is the point these plays foreground through the violation in and of plot, imagery, emblem, and discourse.

With her tongue torn out and hands cut off, Lavinia ceases to be a speaking as well as a writing subject. She is turned into an object for which characters try to construct different interpretations, but they are unable to relate to her until she becomes a text for them again, a text whose meaning the speaking subject could verify. Lavinia's diminishment is carried even further by rape: not only her identity but her body is taken away from her since her chastity was the only guarantee for the potential commodification of her body in a patriarchal order. Deprived of signification and a body that could be meaningful, Lavinia is transformed into pure negativity and — through that complex negativity — a walking emblem of abjection.

Yet, with Lavinia's transformation, metaphorically, the very idea of harmony in language and the social order is expelled. Marcus describes her original state as a personification of artistic harmony:

"O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute,
He would not have touch'd them for his life!
Or had he heard the heavenly harmony
Which that sweet tongue hath made,
He would have dropp'd his knife, and fall asleep..."
(II.iv.44-50)

With order and language gone, new ways of signification are needed, and the play starts focusing on the mute body speaking. Titus talks about creating a new order of signification in a world where the rule of the father and the metaphysics of symbolization have been violated and replaced by the passion of the body:

"Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
But I, of these, will wrest an alphabet..."
(III.ii.42-44)

References to the problem of communication become more frequent. Titus, in an attempt to save his sons, hastily has his hand severed (in the play's logic this does not, and should not, create a problem in terms of physical realism), which he sends to Tamora, currently occupying the position of authority, as if it was a letter. The letter does not fulfill its task, and is returned, becoming an emblem (again, through its negativity) of the failure of writing, communication, and, indeed, amity. Next, Titus makes a try with the Gods. In the arrow-shooting scene he disseminates his woe in letters aimed at the gods, but once more the letters are diverted from their route and all meet in the court of the emperor, the locus of tyrannous power which has replaced the transcendence of the order of the missing gods.

Before this, in one of the grisliest scenes, Lavinia carries Titus's severed hand in her mute mouth off the stage. It is difficult to imagine a picture more horrifying and repelling: the hand of the father between the teeth of the mute daughter of negativity.

"Come, brother, take a head,
And in this hand the other will I bear;
And, Lavinia, thou shalt be employ'd;
Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth."
(III.i.279-82)

The picture is ghastly and subversive at the same time. Titus's severed hand is not only the emblem of the breakdown of communication but also an emblem of patriarchal order which has been violated in the world of the play. The hand of the Father, a metaphor of phallic power, is here displaced to the mouth of the daughter reduced to sheer negativity, nothingness. No stage tableau could express more totally the confusion and the loss of original order, the replacement of the patriarchal Key Signifier by the destructive primary passions now symbolized by Tamora and her court.

Quite typically, the problematics of communication and of the misdirection of signification is inserted into a metatheatrical framework, just as in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Lavinia reveals her "story" by pointing out the passage of the raped Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She could have found other and faster ways to try to communicate, but in the logic of the play this is the only "writing" that befits her case, since here it is foregrounded that the only chance for her to define and communicate her "new identity" is through a kind of intertextuality; and now she is no longer Lavinia but Philomela, whose story makes her self readable. Here the play takes up the idea that subjects are textual productions, a theme elaborated extensively in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, for example. Lavinia is an enigma before this scene; now she becomes a condensed representation of the fact that things are readable to us only through other texts that have already been produced.

In a network of role-playing, it turns out that nobody can master a position of absolute power and authority. Tamora who is comfortable in the knowledge that now she is the master-Revenger and actually turns herself into an allegory — will be cheated by Titus's role-playing and walks into the trap of the banquet he organizes. The multiplication of horror reaches its climax here. Titus makes the offspring of Tamora, the agents of passion and revenge, return to their generating source, to the body of allegorical Revenge. Tamora's body becomes the metaphor of those uncontrollable drives and primary energies that generate and swallow up the subject at the same time, a "receptacle" which is the material engine of signification and

the subject but which needs to be controlled, suppressed in order for the subject to become separate, homogeneous, self-identified. In the logic of the play, the pit, that "swallowing womb," typologically foreshadows the staging of Tamora's body as devourer of its offspring in the last scene.

The power of abjection is so intense in this scene because it is so close to the subject. The abjection of eating touches the very materiality, or corporeality of the human being. Food-loathing, according to Kristeva, is one of the most "archaic" experiences of the subject, the most primary agency of the abject setting up demarcation lines of separation and difference in the consciousness of the subject.87 The eating of human flesh, and even more, the eating of one's own children in the last scene of Titus Andronicus violates one of the strongest taboos of the symbolic order, transgresses the absolute difference imposed on the eatable and the non-eatable by civilization. Thus, the staging of abjection is capable of producing the most direct, immediate effect in the subject. As Tamora lifts the patties made of her children's blood and flesh to her mouth, the spectator faints in repulsion and disgust, his/her consciousness rejecting, escaping from the sight of what s/he actually is: blood, bones, flesh, liquids. No compact, unified, homogeneous subject exists in Titus Andronicus, and the staging of abjection unsettles the spectator's identity as well, foregrounding the suppressed materiality and unconscious energy of what constitutes the subject as a heterogeneous process in the first place.

The role overthrows Tamora as well as Titus. Seeing that his plan is coming to perfection, he can see everything only in terms of revenge, and with the fulfillment of the task, Lavinia's part as a mute witness and handicapped assistant (which is now the only legitimate reason for her being) is also over. Consequently, Titus kills her, and this is his last, insane attempt to assert his fatherly authority over the daughter, to place himself in a position of seemingly absolute authorship.

What we have in *Titus Andronicus*, in semiotic terms, is an attempt to create the immediacy of perfect representation through the staging of abjection, often with the help of complex emblematic tableaus. The logic of the play (the apparent nonsensicality of intensified horror) invites the audience to treat the scenes realistically and emblematically at the same time: the horror of mutilation and violence is there, but the mutilated characters are, at the same time, transformed into emblems that represent the values that are violated in, through, and by them. This enables them to continue to act as mutilated bodies that do not carry inherent, transcendental identities within themselves: they are what they are turned into by the role and the discourse, the "play" they participate in. Titus Andronicus tries to penetrate "the surface of things," to bridge the gap between the word and the thing and reveal a more direct, faithful image of reality by combining the immediacy of the body and the complexity of the emblem at the same time.

This attempt will be pursued in later tragedies with a more pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of achieving any immediacy with the Real at all. In Hamlet and King Lear, the Letter seems to cover totally the body and reality, and no attempt to penetrate that cover of discourse can arrive at a direct relationship with the thing.88 The thing is the discourse itself — the understanding of this is the cause of Hamlet's disintegration, and the failure to understand this results in Lear's tragedy.

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[87] Kristeva, *Powers of* Horror, Ch. I. "Approaching Abjection."

[88] When Lear contemplates Edgar and says "Thou art the thing itself." (III.iv.106), he is still tragically wrong. Later, during the abjection of the trial scene, he tries to go deeper than the naked skin, and sets out to "anatomize" the daughters.

In the rest of the present chapter I will concentrate on particular scenes in Hamlet in order to demonstrate how this tragedy takes up the same representational problems examined in Titus Andronicus with an intensified but, at the same time, different semiotic attitude.

Hamlet, obviously, is involved in an interpretative enigma that is related to the nature of the Ghost and the nature of reality at the same time. I would like to employ here a concept by John Bayley, who defines *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* as tragedies of consciousness. In these plays, the attention centers not so much on the intrigue and unfolding of the plot, but rather on the mental activities and inner transformations of the protagonist.[89] The play offers a penetration into the spiritual and cognitive transformations and processes of the hero; so consequently, soliloquies dominate the verbal dimension of the stage representation. Hamlet's mind is obsessed by conflicting interpretations of the apparition that imprints an indelible stamp on his consciousness, and this only intensifies his fixation in meditating on the dichotomy of appearance and reality, so conspicuously manifest in the court. For him, all the members of the social context he is part of are engaged in a discursive play which aims at hiding the real nature of their existence: corruption, ambition, immorality, infection, disease. Role-playing. Hamlet is the one who knows no seeming, no masking, who has "that within which passes show", or, at least, he hopes to possess such an identity. But the identity he predicates for himself through the rebelliously penetrating insight of a philosopher is radically incompatible with the task imposed on him by the visitation of his father's ghost. Hamlet is alienated from the Danish court not only because of its rottenness and its villain-ruler but also because it is a world he would like to leave behind altogether. It is the world where "violence prevails", and when violence is done, words can prevail, to employ Lorenzo's words from *The Spanish Tragedy* (II.i.108). It is a universe of ancient rules, patriarchal codes, and social taboos that are primitive and suffocating for his sensibilities. In such a society, Hamlet is an outcast by nature, and it is impossible for him to assert an acceptable identity. The task he receives from the ghost is an opportunity for such a self-assertion: revenge could indeed define him as Hamlet, the Dane. But, paradoxically, this is what Hamlet does not want to be. Performing what the ghost demands of him would inevitably place him back into the ancient order, the order of the Father, the frame of reference where the subject's identity is defined always in relation to the key signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, the center of meaning. With revenge, Hamlet would merely restore his position in a rigid system he wants to escape from, and he would certainly be exposed to the challenge of becoming a monarch, i.e., the transcendental subject — precisely what is missing from the imaginary universe in his mind. Hamlet is a religious subject, but he is also one who is deeply distressed by the indecipherability of the Absolute, the inaccessibility of the ultimate point and guarantee of meaning. His final statements sound more like self-persuasion than a proclamation of absolute belief. "The readiness is all": for the Protestant subject who has lost his inherent signifying capacity and direct interaction with God, there is nothing left but to be ready at any time.

The duty of revenge is alien to Hamlet's personality, but this is something his consciousness tries to suppress all the time since the denial of the order of revenge equals the disintegration of his identity in a context which does not yet offer other means of selfassertion. He passionately loves his father because his image is the focal point of his ego, but, at the same time, his suppressed "alter-ego" strives to separate from that image and break free from the Law of the father. The oscillation between these extremes results in a disintegration of his mind, a loss of self-control which is not only an affected madness but a truly unsettling factor. Hamlet, the would-be revenger, is the most complex example of the in-between subject on the Renaissance stage.

[89] John Bayley, *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 164.

Paradoxically, his escape from the act of revenge imposes the necessity of role-playing on him, an unwelcome compromise. He is trapped in a situation in which he cannot really account for his inability to act since the denial of revenge and of the order of the father is largely suppressed by his ego into his unconscious. The subject, as we know, flees from the desire of the unconscious, which it does not dare to face.

Hamlet's role-playing is not merely a method of gaining time in order to make sure about the truth of the ghost. It is also a play to delay the revenge, a technique to put off the performance of the duty he cannot relate to. This way he gets totally trapped in the world he despises so much. His role-playing alienates him from his own self, and it also intensifies the awareness of his being a misfit in Denmark.

In the Danish court, discourse serves to cover, to conceal the real nature of things, it is the vehicle of pretence. Hamlet's reaction to this surface is fittingly verbal, a discordant discourse which disrupts the seemingly coherent unity of the word in the court, and foregrounds the artificiality of language that other subjects use to wrap up their reality. The word is the thing for Hamlet which separates the subject from the real, the truth from falsehood; it is the ultimate agent of deception. He deliberately communicates with people in the court in a way which confuses them, deprives them of the possibility to relate to Hamlet or to themselves in that discourse in a meaningful, homogeneous way.

Interestingly, Hamlet abounds in references to the body that lies beyond the layer of discourse, the body whose meaning is only secured by the word that covers it. In his attempt to penetrate the surface, to get beyond the show and grasp at the real, it is the materiality of the body that Hamlet arrives at.

> "The Jacobean body...is distributed irreducibly throughout a theater whose political and cultural centrality can only be measured against the marginality of the theater today;...In the fullest sense which it now possible to conceive, from the other side of our own carnal guilt, it is a corporeal body, which, if it is already touched by the metaphysics of its later erasure, still contains a charge which, set off by the violent hands laid on it, will illuminate the scene, incite difference, and ignite poetry. This spectacular visible body is the proper gauge of what the bourgeoisie has had to forget."[90]

The "too, too sullied flesh" (I.ii.129) that Hamlet calls upon to melt seems to be enveloped entirely by the signifiers of courtly power that maintain the metaphysics of meaning in Denmark, but his images of infection, disease, rottenness, and melting away as allusions to the rotten body beneath the facade of the word all add up to the conspicuous presence of the corporeality that for him cannot be fully contained by the symbolic discourse. Hamlet's awareness of the body is metaphorical of the epistemological uncertainty he represents. The transcendence of the body politic for him no longer holds, his logic is that of the unmotivated sign rather than that of the motivated symbol. However, the body — the uncontainable heterogeneous corporeality — is exactly the sentiment that the new discourses of modernity have to suppress, to ignore absolutely in order to create the ideological misrecognition of the subject as a unified, homogeneous speaker that is independent of the uncontrollable, sexual body. In Hamlet, the metaphysics of the body as a letter in the writing of the Transcendental is radically questioned; on the other hand, the presence of the corporeal is not yet contained and suppressed by the discourses of the new world model. Hamlet is the in-between, paradoxical revenger in an in-between world where it is not yet possible to take sides.

[90] Barker, *The Tremulous Private* Body, 25.

Nonetheless, if we examine the play in terms of the relation between spectacular image and word, Hamlet already signifies the emergence of the dominance of discourse over the conspicuous presence of the desemioticized body. The violence that centers on the displayed and mutilated body in *Titus Andronicus* is absent in *Hamlet*, and instead of the attempt to stage the immediacy of the body as a representational fullness, we have nothing but words. The ghost, the "ambassador of death", does present horrifying images of the tormented and abject body for Hamlet's mind but only by way of verbal description; otherwise, he is so much concealed in his armor that they cannot even see his face. The disintegrated body itself does not appear on the stage. Actually, the immediacy with the body could only be achieved by Hamlet through two actions he contemplates but evades: suicide and revenge. Suicide is excluded because of a still active religious coding, but also (and perhaps rather) because of the uncertainty of the afterlife. Revenge could turn Hamlet into an author of the corpse, a dominator of the corrupt flesh around himself, but, once more, it is a deed improper for his self-assertion. Thus, what Hamlet encounters all the time is the materiality of language instead of the immediacy of the Real and the body. He is caught up in the discourse he can disrupt only discursively: disrupt, but not penetrate. His famous comment delivered to Polonius, "Words, words, words." (II.ii.192) is a scene that very rarely receives adequate staging because it is not matched to the semiotic logic of the play. Hamlet is not being phlegmatic, melancholic, or simply cynical here. His cynicism is mixed by a frustration which results from his inability to escape the agency of the signifier, the sheath of discourse, beneath which, instead of the real, there is mere nothingness. Hamlet is talking about the nature of semiosis, the logic which Polonius is too stupid and conformist to understand. Hamlet is more aptly staged in a rage here than in his traditional condescending cynicism. A radical performance could indeed make him tear the pages from the book: the Book which here thus turns into an emblem of the textuality of the world that is now so disrupted and questionable in nature for Hamlet. If, instead of an absent-minded smile, he suddenly tried to stuff the pages into his or Polonius's mouth, that scene could certainly represent his attempt to penetrate the word, the surface of things, or make Polonius aware of the discourse at whose mercy he is. This is the discourse of power and self-fashioning which is replacing the metaphysical pantextuality of the world.

The point when Hamlet draws nearest to the body is the closet scene with his mother, one of the rather few perfect scenes in Zefirelli's film version, for example. Hamlet, already desperate, outraged, and impatient, gives way to the passion of his unconscious, whose metaphor and object of desire in psychoanalytical terms is the mother's body itself. This scene — if not the entire play — is certainly dominated by the surfacing and disrupting of the Oedipus complex. Hamlet's verbal and physical attack on Gertrude violates the taboo imposed on the mother's body by the Law of the Father. The ghost, naturally, reappears here in his "mind's eye", unseen by the queen: a projection of Hamlet's ego, constituted in relation to the order of the father, against which his self-tormenting passion revolts only unconsciously. Hamlet's ego interprets the apparition as a warning, a reminder of Revenge, which, throughout the play, is itself an extended emblem of the Phallus, the Name of the Father. The agency of the central signifier, whose assertion the initial encounter with the ghost serves, is in an incessant conflict with Hamlet's unconscious, and the process of oscillating between the alternatives disintegrates his identity.

The emblematic gravedigger scene stages Hamlet's changing relation to the idea of revenge in a very complex way. The grave, Hamlet's moralization over Yorick's skull, and the references to dying establish the emblematic frame of reference of the memento mori tradition. But more than this, Hamlet's jumping in and out of the grave becomes emblematic of the descent into the underworld and the return from the unknown, the other scene, the realm of the unconscious. It is exactly at this point that he announces the usual self-

proclamation typical of Renaissance revenge tragedy: "This is I, Hamlet, the Dane." (V.i.257) However, this self-assertion is at the same time the final, radical relinquishing of his ideal identity, since the title "Hamlet, the Dane" belongs to the old elected king, the father, old Hamlet the King. The scene, thus, condenses in one emblematic moment Hamlet's testing of his unconscious, his coming to terms with his desire to deny the law of the father, his recognition of the impossibility of that desire, and his final identification with the father and his commandment. This is Hamlet's re-oedipalization but at the cost of desires and aspirations for a new, different identity and at the expense of his identity in general. By this time, his balance and consciousness have been substantially unsettled through the course of mental oscillation and role-playing, and the identification with the father results from frustration and the realization of his failure. Hamlet, the Dane is what he did not want to become.

Yet the identification still does not compel him to act and carry the task to completion. Instead he cheats himself into a sense of security in providence although his line "...how ill all's here about my heart." (V.ii.212) suggests doubt. The "revenge" Hamlet performs is an accident which does not ensue from the deliberate decision of a firm subject. Hamlet, the subject-in-process, who never became a revenger, has failed to occupy a position from which he would have been able to control the formation of his identity. No matter that the stage is littered with corpses, he did not become an author since he is the archetype of the modern subject who realizes that he is not the origin of meaning. His in-betweenness represents the transition in which the security of the metaphysical symbol is already lost, and the ideological discourses producing the Cartesian subject's misrecognition of itself as a unified origin of meaning are not yet fully at work. Hamlet's endeavor to penetrate the surface of things, to get beyond the show and the discourse to an authentic body or subjectivity only comes to the realization that at the center of himself there is: nothing.91 The rest is silence, at least for Hamlet, since in no way will he be able to control the narratives that will circulate the versions of "his story." It will be Horatio's task to start the production of the discourse on Hamlet.

As has already been mentioned, the corporeality of subjects and of the body de-transcendentalized is a pervasive presence in Hamlet. But it is not staged with the logic of violence characteristic of Titus Andronicus since this time the Word already overpowers the Image and the discourse blocks the way from the immediacy of the body promised by the "full representation" of violence. This shift, this turning away from the spectacle of violence to the dominance of the word in Shakespearean drama is largely accountable for the later canonization of the Shakespearean corpus (especially the "great tragedies"), which has been defined as the greatest achievement of English Renaissance literature exactly in opposition to the spectacular sensationalism of other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights.

The Shakespearean canon (save some embarrassing exceptions, *Titus Andronicus*, for example) has served as a touchstone for a bourgeois ideology which was based on the suppression of the spectacle and of the material presence of the body. This body still surfaces in Renaissance tragedy with an insistence, but the fact that it is so often staged "in the process of its effective dismemberment no doubt indicates that contradiction is already growing up within this system of presence and that the deadly subjectivity of the modern is already beginning to emerge."92 What I attempted to show in the preceding chapters is that there is more than this brought into play in these tragedies. The testing of the body as well as the mutilation and abjection of the material basis of signification is staged as a semiotic attempt to penetrate the surface of things and go beyond the appearance to the presence of an authentic

[91] Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 26-32.
[92] Barker, 24.

reality, through the power of some full representation. The "great Shakespearean tragedies" already recognize the failure of such a representational undertaking, but as such they are quite distinct from the vogue of Jacobean tragedy still dominated by the spectacle of corporeality.

In the chapter that follows, I will examine *The Revenger's Tragedy* as one of the culminations of the tradition of abjection and violence presented in a metadramatic framework on the Renaissance stage.

VII
"The very ragged bone."[93]
Abjection and the Art of Dying in *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Drama is always inherently a metadrama about the irresolvable crisis of signification: the threatening but also nourishing gap between the signifier and the signified, our body and the Other, our never-ending attempt to grasp the destination of the gliding Signifier. Desire — which pours our discourse into this chasm gaping between the elusive Real and the imaginary structures maintaining our identities — is, by definition, in the center of dramatic art. The distance (or intimacy) between spectator and symbolic action re-enacts the split that separates the material and the meaningful, Chaos and identity, fluidity and the fixation of meaning. The thetic break that gives rise to duality and representation is problematized in multi-layered complexity by the theater, where identification and its suspension are constantly at work in the stage-audience and the actor-role dichotomies.

As I argued earlier in my chapter on the typology of genotheater and phenotheater, "metadramatic" performances play with this internal characteristic of the art and foreground the problematic that resides in identity and role-playing, reality and representation, involvement and the shattering of mimetic illusion. Thus, the desire for the Other, the motor of signification which creates and tries to bridge the thetic gap between self and real, is also the constitutive and focalized element of metadrama. The desire to uncover and picture reality in its totality, to discover a sign or a role that stops the dissemination of signifiers and excavates the heart of the Real (that is, the role, the mask, the body): this is what metadrama centers around, and this representational enigma is the reason why metadrama so often stages the Abject.

The Revenger's Tragedy has called forth an extraordinary range of critical attitudes. Some critics have condemned the play as an incoherent projection of an infected artistic mind, a decadent and immoral product of a pessimistic historical milieu.[94] Those at the other extreme of the play's critical history defend the drama as a moral allegory unified by the co-existence and synthesis of several traditions of representation, a rare masterpiece in the genre typical of Jacobean England.[95]

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[93] "The very ragged bone has been sufficiently revenged." Vindice, III.v.152. References are to Cyril Tourner (?), *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Ed. Brian Gibbons (The New Mermaids. London: A & C Black, 1989).

[94] Besides claims about the perverse multiplication of evil, the thematic incoherency, the abrupt and amoral ending, the agitated and segmented language, we have such extremes of critical evaluation as that of William Archer: "I will only ask whether such monstrous melodrama as *The Revenger's Tragedy*, with its hideous sexuality and its raging lust for blood, can be said to belong to civilised literature at all? I say it is a product either of sheer barbarism, or of some pitiable psychopathic perversion." In William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New* (London, 1923), 74. The critical discontent, if not hostility, towards the play was well summarized (and sanctified) by T. S. Eliot in his essay on Tourneur. Just as *Hamlet* failed to live up to the principle of the "objective correlative," *The Revenger's Tragedy* also proves to be a failure, since here the object exceeds the play: the drama is the expression of an immature, "adolescent hatred of life." "It is a document on one human being, Tourneur; its motive is truly the death motive, for it is the loathing and horror of life itself." In T. S. Eliot *Selected Essay*. 3rd edition (London: Faber, 1951), 189-90.

[95] Almost simultaneously with Archer's harsh criticism, Oliphant considers *The Revenger's Tragedy* as one of the most outstanding dramatic achievements of the Jacobean period and, indeed, of dramatic art in general. See his introduction to E. H. C. Oliphant ed. *Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists* (New York, 1921). A major turning point in critical response came with Salingar's article in 1938. Salingar closely investigated the medieval semi-dramatic, dramatic, and moralistic traditions that inform the

However, the play requires no defense. What it requires is a careful and comprehensive reading of its intertextual situatedness. To defend the unity of this play on the basis of its thematic structure and to argue that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the culmination of the danse macabre tradition in English literature is to miss the very point of the drama.

Jacobean drama was essentially a mode of entertainment; coherence and thematic unity were not the primary goals of the theatrical entertainer. A Jacobean play was designed to evoke the greatest possible variety of emotional and intellectual responses through the juxtaposition of allegory, symbol, parable, typology, emblematic stage action, masques, and *tableau vivants*. Indeed, we come closer to an understanding of English Renaissance drama if we think of it as one extended dramatic device "to present always some one entire body, or figure, consisting of distinct members...to the illustration of the whole."96 Thus, behind the seeming contradictions, arbitrary plots, and abrupt endings we may decipher a persistent referent in the play, which does not unite the drama but renders every part of it meaningful.

A great deal of criticism deals with the medieval and Renaissance traditions of representation that are so densely displayed in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.97 The pervasive presence of *memento mori* and *contemptus mundi* motifs, of the techniques originating in the *exemplum horrendum* and medieval homiletic moralizings is often meant to turn the fashionable revenge theme into a unified moral allegory, the Emblem of Evil in the corrupt City of Man. Strangely enough, the study of one particular moral and iconographic tradition which is related to all of the above-mentioned discourses is usually ignored in these interpretations. The a*rs moriendi*, the art of dying (well), has a very powerful line in the Western history of ideas, and, by the late Renaissance, it undergoes a representational metamorphosis which is of particular interest to Jacobean drama. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is not so much a culmination as a mixture of ironic and internalizing comments on the *memento mori*, and the screen upon which this satirical network is projected is the *ars moriendi*. At the same time, the thematic and purposefully disrupted structure of the play also displays a genuinely new and terrifying theme which is beyond any ridicule and provides the audience with an undecidability typical of English Renaissance drama. P. M. Murray calls *The Revenger's Tragedy* an Anatomy of Evil, but, I think, what we really have here is an anatomical imagery of the gap which stretches between the unrepresentable and the meaningful, a display of the process which is characteristic of the subject oscillating between identification and disintegration, which borders on the limits that divide the signifier and the signified. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a meta-dramatic study of the abject, where bodies dissolve, skulls are exhibited and produced, and we are jolted out of our identity to face of the truly Other, which fascinates and horrifies us.

It is only in ritual that the double paradox of representation seems to be resolved in sacred time. Magic conjures up the total presence of the Real, which is not represented but lived here, and, at the same time, the ritual agent is not coping with the split between identity and the mimetic role: the action is not symbolic but "real." In primitive societies, the central action of ritual is the sacrifice, where the violence of primary psychic processes is displaced onto a representable body, a circulated sign which becomes the primary signifier and the point

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universe of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and pointed out that the medieval morality play as well as the religious, homiletic, and allegorical traditions form the fundamental basis of the drama. L. G. Salingar. "*The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Morality Tradition." *Scrutiny* 6 (1938), 402-424.

[96] Ben Jonson *Part of King James's Entertainment,* quoted by Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 66.

[97] See, for example, Inga-Stina Ekeblad. "An Approach to Tourneur's Imagery." *Modern Language Review* LIV (1959), 489-498., Una Ellis-Fermor. "The Imagery of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy." Modern Language Review* XXX (1935), 289-301., S. Schoenbaum. "*The Revenger's Tragedy*: Jacobean Dance of Death." *Modern Language Quarterly* XV (1954), 201-07.

of reference for the maintenance of social identity.98 Dramatic art either suppresses the representational insufficiency arising from the gap in mimesis, or foregrounds it in metadrama, and involves the spectator in a game where borders merge and identities come into play.

What puzzles us in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the juxtaposition of the medieval allegorical tradition, where the transparency of meaning raises no interpretive challenge, and a psychologizing mimetic tradition, where role-playing and its meta-commentary do foreground an awareness of the signifying insufficiency. The allegorical frame of the play hides a laboratory where a Janus-faced agent investigates identities and anatomizes bodies. The axis of this frame rests on an introductory and a closing scene foregrounding problems of identity and a semi-ritual sacrifice in the central dramaturgical turning point of the play. In what follows, I will concentrate on these three points in the structure of the drama (Vindice's "descent" into the play, the murdering of the Duke, and Vindice's "self-murder" scene), but first we must turn to the history of dramatic modes in order to understand how the special irony of the drama arises from the above mentioned juxtaposition.

On the English Renaissance stage at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, the representation of violence centers with anatomical penetration upon the body. Flesh is tainted by poison, bodies are mutilated and disintegrated, tongues are nailed down and torn out, heads are crowned with hot iron and cut off, etc. The product of these practices is, of course, the corpse, but the cadaver itself would not so much have fascinated an audience which grew up on representations and everyday realities of death: epidemics, plagues, public executions, tortures, murders, high death rate, and an elaborate iconography of the dead body.99

As has been mentioned earlier, the appearance of three motifs signals the emergence of "literary" Renaissance drama after medieval allegory: corpses, the love of women, and the violence of language.100 However, we should not fail to see that it is not really the display of the corpse that intrigues the imagination of the spectator but the moments that witness the body turning into cadaver: the unsignifiable yet absorbing fluidity of the process that takes hold between the wholly other or unrepresentable and the still-meaningful. This is the process which marks the borders of identity and meaning, where the actor strives to arrive on the Renaissance stage. The anatomizing and dissolving of the body is a testing of the corporeal-material, an expulsion of signs in the face of the abject which does not represent but engulfs and repudiates the spectator at the same time: the casting away of the mask and the probing of identity. In order to dominate the flesh around him, the actor has to produce corpses because death is the pure signifier, the wholly other, which seems to suspend the insufficiency of representation for a passing moment. The staging of the abject is a prolongation of this lapse of time, a dramatic source of *jouissance*.

What are the traditions that lead to the staging of the abject in death in Jacobean theater? The picturing of death was always connected with the *ars moriendi* in the Middle Ages. The dying man received advice from a number of counselors gathering around the deathbed (cf. the ironic inversion in *Volpone*); allegories argued for his body and his soul, and the final representation of the corpse was often horrifying but also, because of its very nature, static. The *memento mori* was an integral part of the art of dying since the earthly pilgrimage itself was considered a preparation for that vital moment of passing over to the other side where all our sufferings are compensated for. Indeed, in medieval moralizing the walk of life

98 See Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, I/11. "Poetry That is Not a Form of Murder." 72-85.

99 For a study of the history of such representations, see Phoebe S. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Ohio State U. P., 1987).

100 Knapp, *The Theater and the* Book, 104.

turns into an expanded *ars moriendi*: since death is the possibility for salvation, it turns into a personified agent, loathed and desired at the same time. Dramatic action, unfolding in four dimensions, can problematize this point of passing over.

The iconography of the corpse undergoes a metamorphosis as we approach the Renaissance. The decomposing bodies, static replicas of the abject covered with snakes and frogs, turn into clean skeletons, and finally, after the skeleton of the late moralities and before the withered flower of Romanticism, we have the crystallized emblem of the Renaissance: the skull.

Nevertheless, we should always bear in mind that by this time the representation of death is such a commonplace that it always carries an ironic overtone. Attempts to explain, denote, internalize the unexplainable were so various and numerous in Elizabethan England that, for example, even whores wore medals with death's heads just in order to look like the real aristocrats, who displayed an immense variety of "death-accessories." It is arguable that the first pathetic appearance of Vindice with the skull in the Prologue of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is at least as laughable as frightening. The morbid is introduced later when we learn that the death's head belongs to the body of his beloved.

The process of transformation and sublimation also affects the agents of death. The demonic-allegoric crawling creatures and disemboweled corpses that inhabit early medieval engravings and tombs become the skeleton of the "dance of death," which is macabre and carnivalesque at the same time (a point often ignored in criticism), and summons people of all estates to the grave. The Skeleton is also one of the most popular abstractions on the medieval stage: Death now takes on a fiendish, mischievous character. It is not represented as an emblem of horror but becomes a threatening omnipresent potentiality: Death peeps over the shoulders of mortals, suddenly appears when least expected, and always comments on its strategies and plotting in extra-dramatic asides. *Ars moriendi*, by this time, is the ability to handle this potentiality in existence: "the readiness is all." (Hamlet, V.ii.221) Besides Death, there is only one character in medieval performance which is granted the same privilege of playing with and mocking the idea of death; which occupies the same platea-oriented mediatory space between stage and audience; and which, again, unites the macabre and the carnivalesque, the tragic and the ironic-comic: this is the figure of the Vice. Vindice's character is a condensation of all these traditions.

It is usually noted in criticism that Vindice appears at the beginning of *The Revenger's Tragedy* as the satiric presenter of the morality play, as the Vice who involves the audience in an extra-dramatic prologue from the very beginning. This and the title itself precondition the spectator and place the very nature of the play under question marks. Are we expecting a moral allegory, a series of plays-within-the-play, or a drama about how to play the Revenger? Yet, the beginning of the play presents an even deeper complexity.

It is generally left unmentioned that Vindice, besides being a *platea*-oriented Vice-like character, is staged exactly like the allegorical Death of moralities and interludes who directs everybody to a final destination in the grave. This is a very fitting role for Vindice, the Director, whose main preoccupation will be the manipulation and production of corpses. But, again: is Vindice playing a role, is somebody playing Vindice taking on a role, or are we manipulated into believing that actor, revenger, corruptor, and death are separate? We have to restore the original theatrical logic of these scenes in order to understand the layers of Vindice's figure.

After the commonplace but also cynical ("Four excellent characters!" I.i.5) moralizing with a dull skull in one hand (an *enumeratio* before symbolic action), Vindice becomes essentially grotesque, and, ironically, it is the grotesque that is capable of foregrounding the skull here. The death's-head is the skull of the Death-presenter's beloved: a most unusual and

morbid configuration, which would trigger as much laughter as terror among the contemporary audience. Precisely at this moment, Vindice turns the *memento mori* inside out: he starts a pathetic but really comic speech over the skull, which should definitely be staged so that the scene foregrounds its double nature: *memento mori* and its burlesque —"making death familiar."

As P. S. Spinrad points out, after the early Middle Ages the discourses about dying served to ward off the threatening presence of mortality, to internalize and thus neutralize the horror-capacity of death. By the time of the late Renaissance, and in the hands of Vindice, the skull becomes a memento mockery, a joyfully tragic game in the hands of the Vice, the great manipulator.101

While mocking the presence of death in the hands of Death, the initial monologue also sets off one of the most important themes of the play: the signifying potential of the material body and the marketing of commodified identities.102 Gloriana's most important signifying value here is a commercial one, and later, in the universe of the play, characters will be reduced to bodies that are exchangeable on the market dominated by the commerce of lust. When sexuality becomes equated with death in the drama, as early as the initial skull monologue, libidinal drives are superseded by the death drive in Vindice.

Vindice's invocation to Vengeance and tragedy (I.i.39-40) further complicate the nature of the dramatic action. Now he clearly occupies the position of the Director, the organizer of the performance, a role not alien to a Vice-like figure. But he is still outside the play: he is just about to enter, descend into the world of the Tragedy, a movement familiar from mythology, where mischievous super-natural agents trouble the lives of mortals. Vindice is not supernatural but meta-dramatic: he enters the dramatic world to test the nature of identities and to cast an ironical overtone on everything through the dilemmatic juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic. The central undecidability is whether he is still an actor-director at the end. With a tone of almost intimate personal attachment ("be merry, merry, / Advance thee, O thou terror to fat folks" I.i.44-45), Vindice "rolls" the skull, his real lover, into the world of the play and follows it promptly to pursue his primary drive: the production of skulls. This drive finds its Central Signifier in Gloriana's skull, which becomes the origo of meaning in the entire play, foregrounding the primacy of the death drive instead of the libidinal in the subconscious.

It must be the subject of a separate psychoanalytic study to show Vindice's relations to the sexual and diverse psychological processes that are at work in the play. We may note here, however, that Vindice's father has just died: the Law of the Father, the Phallus gives way to the Law of the Skull, a perverted version of a psychic return to primary drives. Vindice's mental processes are structured around images of death. His pursuit of death engulfs him in a process which deprives him of his original coherent (imaginary) identity, and it will never be clear when he turns from director into a victim of the avalanche of skulls he has started.

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[101] Spinrad, *The Summons of Death*, Ch. I. "Death Takes a Grisly Shape. Medieval and renaissance Iconography." 1-26. I would probably stage Vindice kissing the skull during the "a usurer's son/ Melt all his patrimony in a kiss" (I.i.26) lines. Besides its intensifying morbidity, this interpretation could function in the *typological* structure of the play, foreshadowing the demystification of the Neoplatonic kiss in the sexuality of the murder scene, and it would also make Vindice *identify* with the usurer's son, as indeed his mind is already infected by corruption.

[102] Jean-Christophe Agnew explicates the interrelationship between the theatrical and commercial forms of commodification in *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo- American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

His "entrance" to the play echoes the traditional typology of medieval (semi)dramatic representations, where the world of the allegorical play is considered to be the exemplary Reality, and the Real of the spectators but a corrupted world where we see through a glass, darkly. Vindice seems to offer an exemplum for the audience, a moralizing tragedy prepared by the Presenter, and it is the problematic of this task, this role-playing, that is at the heart of the play. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is about a dramatic failure: the director becomes entangled in his own ways of plotting; the idea of Almighty Revenge is ridiculed by a dissemination of revenge schemes; the omnipresent *memento mori* and the multiplication of *sententiae* become a laughable exuberance of hypocritical moralizing.

By the middle of Act III, when we arrive at the dramaturgical climax of the play in the murder scene, revenge-plots are multiple, lust and death dominate the imagery, and Vindice is "far from himself." As already mentioned, this loss of identity is complicated by the meta-dramatic perspective of the play: is it pretence and the difficulty of role-playing? Is it the director's identification with the creation of his mind? Or are we witnessing a meta-dramatic statement about the inescapable presence, necessity and ambiguity of self-fashioning on every level of reality? When the play's inside and outside satirically but also threateningly fuse, and the spectator is thrown into the process of indecisiveness: role and identity, involvement and the shattering of illusion, tragedy or macabre burlesque. An unnamable crisis of identity throws the spectator's identity into process. The act of producing corpses becomes an act of self-assertion because there are no identifiable human cores behind the masks that multiply in the drama and also because producing (and identifying with?) a corpse still offers a possibility for the witnessing of the Real and the total identification with a mask.

The poisoning of the Duke is the most explicit staging of the abject in the macabre world of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The body of the victim is turned with anatomical detail into a corpse, a Skull, and we are witness to the process in which language collapses and the Sign disintegrates into its unsignifiable materiality.

The signifying status of the human being was extremely problematic in the epistemological crisis of the late Renaissance when the vertical world-model of Medieval high-semioticity clashed with a new horizontal, syntagmatic model. In the first, Man is semiotically overcoded on several levels, and, like every element of reality in the Book of Nature, automatically refers to the ultimate Signifier, the Great Scriptor: God. Protestant theology shatters this semioticity and makes the human signifier essentially passive without any possibility to affect the Almighty in his decisions. The question becomes: are we writers of our fate, or are we passive signifiers, secretly written by the Ultimate Signifier (or, in contemporary terms: by the heterogeneous processes of the pre-conscious modalities of signification)?

Instead of moralizing on the theological positionality of the human signifier, Jacobean tragedy chooses to investigate the very materiality of the human signifier: it attempts to take us deep behind the sign, behind the flesh, to arrive at the Real, to capture the passing of meaning from the dead body in the process of dying at the prolonged moment of death.

We are witnessing the production of the Duke's corpse as if we were sitting beside the death bed of a dying man, to catch the last words that could reveal something about the enigma of the Other, of death. This is how the *ars moriendi* is turned upside down.

The Duke identifies with death in a morbid kiss of the skull: Neoplatonic Enlightenment is replaced by disintegration through poison. It is no wonder that the Jacobean stage favors poisoning so much: the decomposition of the flesh, of the integrated body, has to be part of the staging of the abject: the only state which takes us to a territory which is closest to the mystery of the unrepresentable. "Brooking the foul object" (III.v.202.) — horror fascinates and distances us at the same time: suddenly, we catch a glimpse of the Real behind

the diminished sign, and we are floating from "one identity to an Other" at the degree zero of signification.103

This epistemological answer to the Renaissance crisis is peculiar to late Renaissance English drama and is situated in the context of commonplace questions about show and substance, seeming and reality, role-playing and identity.

The spectator can hardly "decide" how to relate to this emblem of the collapse of language, an emblem of the sbject: a decomposing head (emblematic of reason, authority, Christian bond) with the tongue (discourse) nailed down by a dagger (villainy, corruption). Meaning escapes the viewer in the sight of the cadaver-in-process, which borders on but does not yet enter the realm of the unrepresentable. The subject-in-process approaches the Other most closely in the gaze of the body-in-process.

Vindice arrives at the climax of his self-assertion upon the disintegration of the Duke's body: the ecstatic outcry "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I" (III.v.165) is Vindice's total identification with the Role. However, this maintenance (and split) of identity borrows its integrity from the elimination of the Duke's identity: Vindice here also identifies with the Duke, which, again, typologically foreshadows his own "self-murder" scene, where his body is the corpse of the Duke.

The third pivotal point in the typological structure of the play, resting on problems of identity and role, is the beginning of Act V, where Vindice substitutes the corpse of the Duke for himself, to be murdered again. The scene is emblematic of Vindice's identity split, and his total distancing from an identifiable center in a maze of masks. However, these lines also contain a deep irony that is seldom recognized. Borrowing his new integrated identity from the Duke's death, Vindice (unconsciously) identifies himself with the Duke, whose body now really stands for him, but now he is too far from himself to realize the macabre irony of the situation. "I must kill myself": it is when his body arrives at the highest point of its signifying capability (when it is metaphorically identified with the Cadaver) that Vindice abandons himself totally: the scene enacts the paradox that the Human Signifier can reach the origo of meaning, the other side of the gap between sign and the Other, only when he/she is farthest from original identity and self. Vindice, after a series of identifications, ponders about the mirror-image of his own body, now no longer his: he has arranged for his own metamorphosis.

In the masque of revengers, when Vindice imitates the "intended murderers" in the greatest possible accuracy, he is already totally indistinguishable from those he murders.

"…we take the pattern
Of all those suits, the colour, trimming, fashion,
E'en to an undistinguish'd hair almost."
(V.ii.15-17)

Revenge as self-assertion becomes a relinquishing of identity.

Still, at the very end we are provided with one more enigma, which questions the entire nature of the play. Vindice departs for his execution in excellent spirits: the tragic moment is deconstructed, the fall of the protagonist is made ironically meaningless. It is true that, after putting an end to all possible revenge plots, and producing an arsenal of skulls, Vindice the Director has nothing to do on the stage. But is he contemplating his work from

[103] I employ Kristeva's concept of the subject who is put in process and on trial by the effect of significance. See her *Desire in Language*, Ch. IV. "From One Identity to an Other." 125-147.

the same meta-dramatic stance as at the beginning of the play? Is there a way to tell whether we are left with any identifiable trace that is continuous and is in connection with the figure who utters the first words on the stage? Or do we suddenly realize that Vindice's message is a way to ridicule of the *ars moriendi*: eliminate your identities in order to die joyfully?

Just as the revenge theme is turned into a macabre burlesque of revenge tragedy, the *memento mori* line culminates in a satire of the *ars moriendi* moralizing promised by the Presenter at the beginning. We are left with ambiguities, indeterminacies that dissolve our secure identities in the face of the lack of meaning. This indeterminacy, characteristic of English Renaissance tragedy in general and not exclusively of Shakespeare, allows for only one permanent trace in the drama: that of the meta-dramatic perspective, which arises from the paradox of existence that we never know if we are writing or being written.

VIII
"Who dost think to be the best linguist of our age?"[104]
Double Anatomy in Protomodern and Postmodern Drama

The question above is addressed to one of the most ingenious linguistic malefactors of English renaissance drama, and Malevole's answer is, of course:

"Phew! the devil: let him possess thee;
he'll teach thee to speak all languages most
readily and strangely; and great reason, marry,
he's travel'd greatly i'the world, and is everywhere."
(I.iii.36-40. my emphasis)

Indeed, English Renaissance tragedy represents worlds where language and discursive practices are ruled by the devil or his representatives. The discord in discourse is emblematic of the discord on all levels of existence: the universe, the court, the family, the subject all seem to be "out of joint." Malevole, as the protagonist of a tragically gloomy comedy in a corrupt court, can be the counter-example of the heroes of the tragedies examined in the preceding chapters. Comedy is based on the possibility of return: Malevole does not lose or dissolve his identity through the course of role-playing, while the subjects of the tragedies are unable to maintain and preserve an original identity to which they could return after the end of role-playing. However, the corruption and violence foregrounded in *The Malcontent* and comparable comedies offer us a representation of a society as questionable and discordant as that of the tragedies.

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to demonstrate that the violence of rhetoric, together with the violated, abjected body, is used as a representational technique in order to surpass the limitations of language, to involve the spectator in a theatrical experience which overcomes the insufficiency of representation. In this respect, the multiplication and exuberance of violence on the English Renaissance stage can be treated not as a decline into decadence and sensationalism but as an attempt to bring theatrical semiosis to perfection, to achieve the immediacy of experience.

The persistent metatheatricality of these attempts serves to provide an ironic framework in which the subjects of the tragedies can ultimately never become masters of their discursive space or of their identities. English Renaissance tragedy is based on an understanding of the subject that becomes foregrounded with the same intensity again only in postmodern literature and critical thinking. The subject is a product of discourse, and identity is always an ideologically determined formation the shaping of which is not altogether under the control of the individual. The epistemological and intellectual crisis of early modern culture deprives the subject of its inherent center and signifying capacity — the subject of the late Renaissance gradually becomes a hollow, desemioticized subject. This is why Hamlet can be considered the archetype of the postmodern subject who realizes that he is not the master of his identity. The subject must conform to the rules of the discourse, and the aim of social discursive practices in modern culture will be exactly to enforce in the subjects the misrecognition of their identities as stable and self-originated. As has been introduced in the introductory chapters on the basis of Michel Foucault's and Francis Barker's investigations, the *individuum* as a typically modern social construction enters the society of the 17th and 18th centuries exactly through the suppression of marginalities that are difficult to contain within

[104] John Marston, *The Malcontent*, Ferrardo, I.iii.35. References are to C. F. T. Brooke and N. B. Paradise eds. *English Drama 1580- 1642* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1933).

the symbolic order. The sexual, corporeal body is perhaps the most important of these. The expulsion of the body from social discourses defines corporeality as something radically Other, as opposed to which the subject should maintain an identity through a constant self-hermeneutics.

The turn of the 16th and 17th centuries is a peculiar period when this corporeality surfaces in social and dramatic discourses with an intensity which is no longer grounded in the idea of the body as a metaphysically motivated symbol, and which is not yet suppressed or contained as a sign by the new discourses of bourgeois ideology. This is why the body can be used on the Renaissance stage as the powerful signifier which best involves the spectator in a theatrical experience to test and investigate his/her discursive positionality.

I presented the observation in the introductory theoretical chapters that the epistemological uncertainties of the early modern and the postmodern establish peculiar similarities between the two periods. The growing postmodernist interest in the socially and discursively determined constitution of identity, in the corporeal – material foundations of subjectivity is indicative of a crisis of knowledge that is comparable to the early modern epistemological crisis. The Renaissance representations of inwardness, the *simultaneous anatomization of mind and body* are reverberating in postmodern drama, where the problem of identity as a product of ideological discourses and the problem of the body as a potential site for resistance appear with an intensity as powerful as in Renaissance tragedy. In this final chapter I set out to interpret two postmodern plays, Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* as plays which foreground the semiotic and representational problems discussed in the preceding parts. Thus, these plays show fundamental analogies with the epistemological dilemmas that are constitutive of early modern culture: Renaissance tragedy is representative of the beginning of the cultural practice the crisis of which is thematized in Müller's and Churchill's play.

VIII.1
"Under a Sun of Torture."
Staging the Traumatic Event in *Hamletmachine*

In order to introduce the theoretical dilemmas presented by Müller's *Hamletmachine*, I would like to refer to the critical commonplace that this drama is a systematic theatrical attempt to resist and deconstruct the automatized meaning-making strategies of society. In this case, the greatest possible violation that can be practiced upon the text is to theorize it. Thus, the present interpretation sets out on the basis of an irresolvable paradox: writing about Müller's text can only be successful if it ultimately fails and annihilates itself as theory. However, if we do manage to come up with a coherent interpretation of the text, this would falsify the above mentioned critical argument. Thus, the question becomes whether the drama as representation can go beyond the limits of ideologically determined meaning-generating practices, or, quite the contrary, it is exactly its own textual nature which prevents the play from getting outside the rules of textuality.

My contention is that, in spite of all the anti-coherency strategies, it is possible to construct a coherent reading of the play, so the alleged primary subversive attempt of the play fails. However, it is the understanding of this failure which brings us closer to the real subversive element in Müller's text. It is not that the drama (or the potential theatrical performance) goes beyond and deconstructs the textuality which holds the subject captive of representational rules. Rather, it is this textuality as such that *Hamletmachine* shows up and lifts from the automatism of signification. In this way, the drama and the interpretation of the

drama (which shows the nature of its textuality) both revolve around the same paradox: *Hamletmachine* demonstrates the impenetrable materiality of language, of the Signifier. This materiality is the reason why the representational attempts to go beyond or to master ideological meanings are destined to failure right from the beginning, since they all get caught up on the resistance in signification; at the same time, it is this resistance which transcends all the attempts of theory to exhaust and possess the materiality of the letter, the play of language and symbolization.

Such a paradoxical movement is constitutive not only of any theory, but of all our signifying practices in general. The paradoxical moment, a fundamental antagonism can be localized both in the speaking subject and in the Social as the locus of the productive: the Split which gives rise to endless signification. Theory - which problematizes and circles the unrepresentable void in a self-nurturing act - must demonstrate its failure in order to reveal the cause of its impossibility, which, at the same time, is its only ontological basis: the resistance to theory. The localization of this resistance (in language; in "matter"; in the Social), the experimentation with it in the "brute materiality of fact" is a thematizing force in Müller's work - perhaps the only one around which a theoretical attempt to discuss it can be structured.

We can state in advance that *Hamletmachine* unavoidably remains captive of textuality on two levels. The first one is the thematic level: through the attempts to experience the immediacy of the decentered body, the subject cannot go beyond representation, since the signifier covers the body and all the experiences of the body as well. The second is the metadramatic level: the textual existence of the play itself keeps the drama within the limits of representation.

It follows that the theoretical question is how to unsettle the subject and deconstruct the play from within the text, staying inside the dramatic representation.

Hamletmachine as representation uses two strategies to unsettle the subject and make it heterogeneous. On the one hand, it presents an abject, in-between subject who deprives himself of all the social markers that define him as a subject, and then tries to arrive at the immediacy of experience through the abjection of the body. Since this experiment is always part of a re-presentation on the stage, the immediacy cannot be realized, and the abjection of the body can function only as a strategy to intensify the power of the theatrical effect.

On the other hand, the drama launches a more successful attack by transgressing the rules and conventions of reception, by bringing about a crisis in the identity of the receiver: as a deconstructive text it denies the receiver those conventional positions which confer the sentiment of subjectivity upon the subject in the process of reading or aesthetic reception.

Hamletmachine does not transcend textuality or the generation of meaning, but undermines the authority of the text and the author, exposing more clearly the textual social positions that are unavoidable.

According to Slavoj Žižek, the intervention of ideology into the psychic structure of the subject is experienced by the unconscious as a traumatic event, but, at the same time, Ideology offers itself not as an enforced reality but as an escape from the Real of our Desire which the conscious avoids and refuses to observe.105 This paradoxical event is the "ideological exploitation" of the subject: the psychic repression of desire, of semiotic motility and the experience of the Split finds a locus for displacement in the Symbolic Order, in Ideology. The traumatic kernel, the constitutive wound of the subject is the ontological basis of, and the fundamental resistance to, signifying practices: a residue, a leftover in language. The theoretical problem is the localization of this traumatic kernel in the constitution of the

[105] Žižek,*The Sublime Object of* Ideology, Ch.I. "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"

speaking subject, where its position is very similar to the thetic break discussed in French theories of the subject. Even if Materiality is defined as that which resists symbolization, and thus has nothing to do with empiricism, this wound, this cleft should be given a basis in a material account of the subject, a localization on the "bodily", psychosomatic level, which then will concern the body both on a biological-empirical and a symbolized plane. Of course, the cleft between these two is exactly the one between the signified and the referent: we can only hypothetically conceive of the empirical. Yet what happens in Müller's text is much more than "false empiricism": it is an exploration of the possibility for resistance in the body, which is constituted by the ideological network of social imagery.

The production of identity and of the body in history, politics, cultural codification, and (inter)textual traces is the problem *Hamletmachine* attempts to investigate. Why the relationship between identity and body? One of the postmodernist critical realizations is the finding that the (perversion, rejection, and sacrifice of the) body offers no escape from our pan-textual positioning: it is no place of resistance against the ideological machinery of the symbolic since the psychic and physical development and experience of the organism is governed by specific technologies, which manipulate all possible emergences of meaning. The immediacy of the experience of the body seems to offer an (ecstatic) withdrawal from the ideological. Yet, no matter how deeply we explore the material presence of the body through dissolving its symbolization and disintegrating its biology, the immediacy is not achieved. The "flesh" does not resist language. On the contrary, what we discover in the depth of the biological is still the same symbolic overcoding and the resistance of language, not of the body, to our theories. What we find in the intestines of the disemboweled subject in *Hamletmachine* is not the immediacy of experience through the alleged presence of the body but the "brute materiality of the letter" in the sense Paul de Man theorized it: the residue, the leftover which resists symbolization. We never arrive at the presence of the body since the letter not only covers it totally but is also its ontological basis, the locus of the productive from which practice and production emerges. The authority of the Letter can only be attacked from within: the deconstruction of meaning after and along with the deconstruction of the body in *Hamletmachine* is a confrontation with Ideology on several planes.

One of the fundamental attempts of Müller's text is to get outside of itself: itself unavoidably being a representation not devoid of ideology. Through its multi-layered references to the historical-political-literary canon it creates a complex referentiality which tries to eliminate itself through its exuberance: to undermine the authority of the text as such in order to deconstruct the authority of Ideology behind meaning.

The first theme which appears at the very beginning of the text is that of the construction of identity and the rejection of this identity: "I was Hamlet."(53)106 The extremely connotative nature of the name Hamlet serves several purposes: the tragic hero itself is representative of the theme of identity as manifested in literature, but it also refers to the machinery of the literary and socio-political institution which produces a cultural cliche out of this name. The name Hamlet is an emblematic condensation of imposed identity, canon-formation, interpellation, the linguistic positioning of the subject in society by the act of naming. The particular name here is extremely powerful, but this way it is capable of revealing that we are all Hamlets, that we all shape our identities according to available patterns of the social imagery. The rejection of this identity (I was Hamlet) is a fight with the Name: with the "procreators" (the Name of the Father), with history, with time and eventually with the body, which may appear to be something else than the crossing point of the above discourses but which also turns out to be the production and the bearer of these cultural and

[106] References are to Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984).

ideological markers. The problem is whether the peeling of the marks off the body can arrive at any remainder.

"I dispensed my dead procreator." (53) The rejection of the predecessors is a struggle against the historical situatedness and linearity: the past, which is constructed through the interpretation of the traces that arrive at us (here: the body of old Hamlet), is dispensed. The future is prevented: "Tomorrow morning has been cancelled." (54) All the text wants to concentrate on is the Presence of the present moment: the desperate deixis of the speech acts serves to conjure up this presence: "Now, I tie your hands...Now, I tear the wedding dress...Now, I smear the shreds...Now, I take you..." (54)

However, the present is not part of a linearity but only a momentary fixation at the crossing point of various discursive traces. After the rejection of linearity and history, even this present moment is deconstructed and denied: "I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part anymore." (54) The text denies itself; after emptying all the markers it bears, the subject rejects its own presence: "My drama doesn't happen anymore." (54) The meta-theatricality of these sentences is part of the self-reflexive nature of the text.

Hamletmachine tries to resist and avoid the emergence of any "coherent" meaning, coherence being an ideological containment which projects the notion of unified identity and structure onto that which is ultimately fragmented ("history", "identity", "the work of art"). The resistance against these technologies of containment and authority is the persistent act of fragmentation in the text, in which the very identity of the work dissolves.

The drama presents itself not as a self-identical Work of Art which is a re-presentation by the Author, but as a presence of the Textual itself. The incoherence, fragmentation of the play is part of the attempt to stage not a play but a text, the nature of a cultural practice. The theatrical experience here emerges not from a cognitive process but from the manifestation of the Text.107 The event that the Actor does not succeed in dissolving this text, the fact that even after the announcement of its end the Hamlet-actor is still part of the play-text manifests the resistance and the persistency of the Letter. The photograph of the author (which, in my imagined staging, should be that of the Hamlet-actor) is torn apart: the Author has no control or authority over the text: the text produces and then eliminates the writer. "Work toward the disappearance of the author is work against the disappearance of humankind."[108]

This event disrupts the automatized connection between representation and authority. It brings into crisis the spectator's meaning-making (or comfortable identity-producing) activity through the denial of automatic subject-positions that the spectator aims at occupying in the act of reception. At the same time, however, it also further complicates the question of the subject's ability to get beyond the textual, beyond the cultural production of manipulative meanings. After the rejection of the Name of the Father, history, the cultural canon, the linearity of time and the fabricated identity, the attention is focused on the body and its abjection.

The disruption of theatrical and ideological coherency starts focusing on the abjection of the body already in Act II, where Ophelia/Chorus/Hamlet is again introduced as a cultural emblem, the continual trace of the "Ophelia-identity": the psychotic woman always in the process of killing herself. However, this cliché also stages a revolt and stops the process constitutive of her identity: "Yesterday I stopped killing myself." (54) The props of her ideological captivity, the clothes, the bed, the chair, the table, the clock (waiting) are destroyed, and the abject body shows itself and its ideological markers (breast, thighs, womb) clothed in blood: the fluidity which defines her as the Other of society, the unstructured which

[107] See Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore - London: The Johns Hopkins U. P., 1990), Ch.III. "The Most Concealed Object."
[108] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, Afterword.

has to be contained, marginalized in symbolization. Fluidity escapes ideological containment and brings the spectator to the borderlines of meaning. This blood is not strictly feminine any more but participates in the theatrical abjection of the body which probes the limits of identity as dependant on meaning. Ophelia is still triumphant in her revolution, but Hamlet's revolution is eventually abandoned in the great self-annihilating monologue of Act IV. The actor/author wants to step out of the performance, but the theatrical space still controls him, and "Unnoticed by the actor playing Hamlet," the tools of ideology appear again (refrigerator, TV-sets – objects of consumerism).

The narrative about the revolution and the schizophrenic revolutionary subject is representative of the fundamental split of the subject. The intervention of ideology renders it impossible for the subject to be on both sides, to be contained by and to revolt against ideology at the same time, just like the symbolic positioning of the speaking subject renders it impossible to satisfy and contain desire simultaneously. The borderline is under erasure in the play here: "My place, if my drama would still happen, would be on both sides of the front." (56) The search for the authentic subject, after the overthrow of the authority of the male writer, converges toward the "undivided self," the disintegration not only of any identity but of the body as well. The opening of the flesh sealed by ideology is a desperate attempt to penetrate as deep into the abject as possible, to escape the symbolic coding by the mutilating exploration of the body. Nausea, blood, excrement become a privilege, a jump out of meaning.

"I force open my sealed flesh. I want to dwell in my veins, in the marrow of my bones, in the maze of my skull. I retreat into my entrails. I take seat in my shit, in my blood." (57) But the attempt is utopian: the drama is not happening, and the machine beneath the disintegrated body is incapable of action. The actor/author steps back into the armor of history, and kills his political predecessors: but, once again, inside the ideological.

The "revolution scene" contains precise references to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (the fall of the Stalin statue, the speech on the balcony of the Parliament, the first confrontations with the police), and the schizophrenic experience of the soldiers who were ordered to shoot at their own civilian fellow citizens. The actor/author wants to be on both sides, to bridge the gap in the divided self: "I see myself in the crowd pressing forward, foaming at the mouth, shaking my fist at myself." (56) The subject shaking his/her fist at him/herself is the one free of the antagonism of society, the one which is not alienated from him/herself through "misrecognition." *Hamletmachine* does not even pretend to be the drama of that impossible, unrepresentable subject; the drama negates itself ("My drama does not take place..."), but it does so in a narrative which still holds it within the boundaries of representation. As long as the character speaks, the play cannot step out of itself.

Does the fragmented text, then, offer itself as a site for resistance to ideology? Or is it the resistance of the text that is still controlling the actor/subject? The body is unable to get totally rid of its social markings; its total abjection may liquidize the identity of the spectator, but the actor himself survives only as a machine back in the armor, the ideological costume, without a meaningful future. Nausea, blood, excrement, fluidity become privileged sites of subversion in *Hamletmachine*, sites of potential extra-textuality. At this point, everything depends on the staging of the play, which should observe the internal logic of the play. According to the present interpretation, this logic does not allow the Hamlet-subject to dissolve and appear on stage as a really abject spectacle, drowning in blood. The Hamlet-actor, who has by this time become a Hamlet-machine, only narrates abjection, which can appear around him on the stage, but he himself stays isolated, separated from the immediacy of the experience, since his narrator-position keeps him captive of the textual space. This logic makes the drama and the Hamlet-subject in general the metaphor of the representing and

represented subject, who cannot be fully present to itself as long as its self-reflexive subjectivity is constituted by the actuality of discourse.

The scene of the Ice Age concludes Müller's anti-drama. The revolutionary attempt is seemingly transferred from Hamlet to the Other, the female Ophelia-identity. But Ophelia is bound. While Hamlet endures the millenniums in his fearful armor (my reading), the Body of the Other emerges as a possible site of productive resistance which is paradoxical: resistance as a denial of biological production, procreation. However, Ophelia's attempt, once more, is only a narrative: her prediction about the revelation of truth offered by death flies as an exalted and twisted propaganda-statement and she remains motionless in a deserted, apocalyptic space. The revolutionary and extra-textual subject, in the end, did not come into being.

Hamletmachine does not get beyond itself, beyond representation. It shows the impossibility of that presence on the stage which Artaud wanted to achieve in the theater of cruelty.109 However, the director can make use of the strategies of fragmentation offered by the text, and the performance can arrive at the full presence of the TEXT itself: baring the mechanism of Ideology, unveiling the logic of representation. In this respect, *Hamletmachine* realizes Brecht's idea of the theater as a locus of social productivity, and increases the spectator's awareness of his or her discursive ideological positionality.

I believe it is arguable on the basis of the investigations I have pursued in the present volume 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 employed 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 I argued that it is possible to work out a typology of theatres on the basis of the representational techniques in the theatre 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 phenotheater, 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

[109] See Jacques Derrida. "Le théatre de la crauaté et la cloture de la représentation." In: *L'écriture et la difference* (Éditions de Seuil, Paris, 1967). English translation: "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation." In *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: Chicago UP., 1978), 292-316.

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 theatre 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.

VIII.2
Cloud 9 and the Semiotics of Postcolonisalism

"How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did
not know one was a stranger to oneself?"[110]

To conclude the interpretive work I embarked upon in this volume, 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 that are very similar to the ones I observed in early modern dramas. I will keep relying 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 macrodymanics of the subject is paralleled by 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

[110] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 182.

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.

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 expect 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.

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 macrodymanics 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).[111] "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 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.[112]

[111] References are to Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (Revised American edition, New York: Routledge, 1988).

[112] 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)

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, the doll-minding son is played by a woman.[113] The cross-racial structure is perhaps even more powerful than the cross-gendering: the black servant Joshua is played by a white man.[114] 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 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.[115]

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.[116]

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[113] 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)

[114] See 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)

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

[116] "Churchill's stage practice strongly resists the reading 'one woman triumphs', and she rejected

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-discovery and of becoming a "separate person." 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.

VIII.3
Double Anatomy

The 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 ostention of the heterogeneity of the human being as a social positioned subject, and the foregrounding of the socially fabricated nature of identity are all strategies in Renaissance and postmodern drama that 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 inwardness which connects the early modern and the postmodern on the ends of the period of modernity. If the early modern self-reflexive anatomizing zeal of the Renaissance preceded that 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 postmodern period as a transition takes us. This is to be seen by the critical theories of the third millennium.

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)

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