

THE SEMIOTICS OF REVENGE
Subjectivity and Abjection
in English Renaissance Tragedy

by
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PREFACE

Several years ago, as a member of the "emblematics team" of the English Department at Attila József University, I embarked upon a project which was inspired by my professors of Renaissance literature and iconography - Dr. Tibor Fabiny and Dr. György Endre Szőnyi. My intention then was to investigate how the *emblematic logic* of staging and reception shaped what I called the experience of testimony in English Renaissance theatricality. I thought that the understanding of this emblematic cognitive system and the theatrical *hermeneutics of being a witness* could bring us closer to a general theory of tragedy based on the concept of testimony.

The project soon turned out to be too ambitious and I realized that it had to incorporate not only emblematics and Renaissance studies but also more general theoretical foundations in *the semiotics and the genealogy of the speaking subject*. In the process of textual analysis, *abjection and violence* appeared to be constitutive representational techniques in the tragedies of the English Renaissance, and semiotics became my critical apparatus. For this, I am greatly indebted to my professors in the English Department at the University of Oregon, Prof. Linda Kintz and Prof. George Rowe, whose courses served as my first introduction to the field of Renaissance and poststructuralist theories of subjectivity. I am grateful to all my colleagues and professors at both universities for their instructions and help; special thanks are due to Dr. Zoltán Szilassy at Lajos Kossuth University for his scholarly advice and insight and to Thomas Williams for his painstaking assistance in reading and re-reading the manuscript. While doing research at my home institution, I received financial support from the *Pro Cultura Hungarica Foundation*, which provided me with a six-month regular scholarship.

The present collection of originally independent essays is a partial outcome of the yet unfinished project. They focus only on *revenge* as a thematic and dramaturgical technique used to problematize the changing notions of subjectivity. My aim was to combine them into a coherent argumentation which could be further developed into a theory of that experience of testimony which, I believe, is constitutive of all theatrical contexts.

These writings are dedicated to my wife Anikó and to my friends in the *deKON Group* at Attila József University: Endre Hárs, Annamária Hódosy, Sándor Kovács s.k., Ferenc Odorics and László Szilasi.

I

INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity and identity are problematized in English Renaissance tragedy in complex metatheatrical frameworks through the metaphor of *authorship*. 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, and the course of role-playing, aimed at the fulfillment of the task, becomes a testing of the subject's ability to preserve his/her original, authentic identity. The fashioning of 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. What we find in these plays is a radically negative answer to Orthodox Christian and humanist ideas of innateness and the self-identity of the subject.

The aim of the present study is to reinterpret facets of this metatheatrical aspect in English Renaissance tragedy from a semiotic point of view. It should be noted at the very beginning that the semiotics applied here is not the linguistic structuralist analysis which usually lends itself to the examination of theatrical deixis and stage representation although some of the chapters here will involve a focus upon the logic of representation in the emblematic theater. Rather, I intend to examine the characters and their interpersonal situatedness from the theoretical angle of the *semiology of the speaking subject*, as constituted in and through historically specific discursive practices that govern the circulation of meaning in society and the construction of available positions necessary for the subject to predicate identity and context. I argue that a semiotic approach to the metatheatricity of these dramatic texts reveals hitherto untheorized perspectives that are significant markers of a decisive turn in the historical typology of world models and early modern culture.

Interpretations in this essay 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,

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the dimensionality of stage-audience interaction, and *the hermeneutical experience of testimony* can only be revealed through an investigation of the *performance text*.

In the chapters that follow I will attempt to show that a semiotic approach to English Renaissance tragedy can bring us to a more complex understanding of:

- the function and logic of the *metatheatrical perspective*, which is constitutive of both the thematic and the dramaturgical structure of the plays;

- the nature and the crisis of the *emblematic theater*, which is based on a metaphorical cognitive system and a special semiotic readiness on the part of the audience;

- the pervasive and growing presence of the *macabre* and the *abject* in Renaissance tragedy, which has traditionally led critics to dismiss later Jacobean tragedy on the basis of critical commonplaces about decadence and perversion; and

- the much-debated *indeterminacy of meaning* which I maintain is characteristic not only of Shakespearean but of Renaissance drama in general.

These aspects of the texts manifest the presence and competition of two radically different world models at the turn of the 16-17th 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 the medieval vertical world model, and the Enlightenment-type horizontal world model. The organic, hierarchical view is based on what Lotman calls high-semioticity,¹ and its semiotic attitude to reality studies every element of the universe as an inscribed sign which is granted 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.

In the horizontal, syntagmatic world model the sign becomes passive and ultimately suspicious. Elements of reality should not be investigated for their position in a signifying system of correspondences but for their material imbeddedness 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 appearance of the *Theater of the World* metaphor; role-playing,

¹ LOTMAN 1977.

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 simultaneous foregrounding (expenditure) and suppression (containment) of new signifying practices that rewrite the discursive rules of relationships 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 semiosis can also be discussed in terms of this shift 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 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 gives rise to an ambiguity, a specific semiotic polyvalency which is a constitutive facet of the plays I will examine.

For real, psychological drama to appear, there has to be an interpretive task imposed upon the spectator, which is based on the dramatic characters' opportunity to act and behave in ways not fully determined by the logic of allegory in advance. The semiotic *transparency* of medieval (semi-)dramatic performances do not require such an interpretive effort of the audience: miracles, mysteries, and moralities as well as later Tudor interludes enact themes that are strictly coded and follow rules that set the fashion of the representation and the allegorical meanings in a non-alterable way. Everyman, Humankind, and Inequity are types, or "kinds", of principles and their actions *report* certain meanings rather than represent a singular instance of reality. The *typological logic* of allegory inverts the relationship of stage and audience: the world of the allegory becomes the authentic, "real reality", the dimension whose elements originate in the all-generative trope of the ultimate *figura*, Christ or the Absolute; and the world of the audience is understood as the dark, fallen, "unreal reality", a blurred image that we see "through a glass, darkly." Flesh and spirit can unite in allegorical representation, and the subject of "Imitatio Christi" is intended to fashion his/her identity according to that moral set forth in the drama. The problem of *re-presentation*, the gap between the *figura* of Christ and the figure on the stage is suppressed and does not become part of the scope of the play.

The *representational insufficiency* that is inherent in any theatrical representation is foregrounded only later, in Elizabethan drama, and it becomes an organizing

principle of the logic of these plays on several levels. Literary drama appears when characters are no longer abstract ideas but psychologically established subjects with personal responsibility and a chance to act in ways unforeseeable by the spectator. However, this dramatic logic always incorporates the problem of the gap between actor and role, dramatic illusion and reality, stage and audience. The theater either suppresses this representational insufficiency, constitutive of any semiotic practice, or uses it thematically to focus upon problems of signification. It is characteristic of English Renaissance drama that it *foregrounds* this gap in order to use the very theatrical context to investigate facets of the above-mentioned epistemological crisis. Renaissance drama imitates rather than reports, but the concept of mimesis here always works with a systematic questioning or shattering of dramatic illusion and verisimilitude.

Meta-drama acts out the unbridgeable gap between the symbol and the Real. The *self-conscious metatheatricality* of Renaissance drama serves to scrutinize from several aspects problems of the constitution of the subject and his/her discursive situatedness in the ideological efficiency of the Real. This practice indeed continues medieval traditions of involvement and stage-audience interaction, but it does not aim at enveloping the spectator in the metaphysical reality of allegory; it rather questions and *unsettles* the identity of the subject through the uncertainty established by the foregrounding of the problematics of show vs. reality, subjection vs. authority, role-playing vs. authentic identity, *writing as opposed to being written*.

The themes favored by Renaissance tragedy, especially the *revenge motif*, serve to create situations in which rules of discursive identity-formation can be tested. A semiotic approach to these themes and to the logic of metatheatricality must investigate the speaking subject as one element in the process of semiosis (rather than the *origo* of meaning), the relation of this theatrical practice to ideological technologies that incorporate or fail to contain them, and the techniques of stage representation that are used to foreground problems of signification. Thus, the revenge theme can be interpreted as a dramaturgical framework which turns Renaissance revenge tragedies into laboratories of identity.

In the present essay special attention will be paid to the theatrical treatment of the following semiotic issues:

- the human subject as a sign and his/her signifying potentiality;
- the turning of the traditions of the emblem (a genre which emerges as a special semiotic endeavor) and emblematic theater into an ironic questioning of these traditions;
- the logic of abjection and the staging of the body on the Renaissance stage;
- and the dramaturgical structure of *revenge tragedy* and tragedies of

consciousness in relation to the problems of authorship, here understood as a theatrical metaphor of the subject's (in)capacity to enter positions where he/she can master the discursive space of identity-formation.

Before a more systematic discussion of Elizabethan and Jacobean ideas about the semiotic nature of the subject and an analysis of the theatrical discourses that *invite* specific subject positions for the act of interpretation, it might be appropriate to delineate the basic points of a theory of the speaking subject, on which the understanding of the subject is based in this study.

II THE SUBJECT OF SEMIOTICS

The constitution of the speaking subject is determined by historically specific technologies of power that establish institutionalized sites of discourse where the circulation of possible meanings in society is governed. The discursive practices create ideologically situated positions which the subject must enter in order to have access to (a version of) the Real and in order to be able to predicate an identity and a context for that identity. Thus, subjectivity is a function and a product of discourse: the subject predicates his/her identity in a signifying practice but always already within the range of rules distributed by ideological "regimes of truth." The subject is 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*. Recent developments in critical theory share the common goal of "theorizing the Subject", that is, establishing a complex account for the material *and* psychological constitution of the human speaking subject as positioned in a socio-historical context. Although they employ various strategies (semiotic, psychological, political, moral aspects, etc.), they all strive to *decenter* the concept of the unified, self-sufficient subject of liberal humanism, often referred to as the Cartesian ego of Western metaphysics.

The Cartesian idea of the self-identical, transhistorically human subject is replaced by the subject as a function of discursive practices. This project calls not only for a complex account of the socio-historical macrodynamics, but also for the psychoanalytically informed microdynamics of the subject, which traces the "history" of the emergence of subjectivity in the human animal 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 historical problematization of the *macrodynamics* and the psychoanalytical account of the *microdynamics* of the subject cannot be separated and 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, let us take a passage from 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*)²

Benveniste initiates a very important step in the theory of the subject: he reveals the fundamentally *linguistic nature* of subjectivity. Rereading Saussure, Benveniste points to the absence of the referent in his theory of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified: although Saussure defines language as a signifying system of differential elements, he does not account for the fact that language has no direct access to reality. On the other hand, as Benveniste shows, it is only through verbal cognition that we can conceive of the Real, the result of which is that language becomes constitutive of both the object and the subject of the cognitive signifying process.

While drawing attention to a problem ignored by structuralism, Benveniste's argument contains an essential contradiction which becomes the object of post-structuralist critiques. He defines the psychic unity of 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, thus presupposing a center, a unified consciousness *prior* to language. In short, his theory cannot account for how the subject becomes able to use the signifying system, or how his/her 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 governing the production of truth and subjectivity in society, or to the independence of the syntax of the Symbolic Order in Lacanian psychoanalysis.³ In post-structuralism, 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 signifying process, which is constitutive of culture as a semiotic macro-text and of the human cognitive

² BENVENISTE 1971. p.228.

³ See Bibliography on the relevance these theories bear upon the present study.

system as a basically unsettling one, displacing the subject of semiosis "from one identity into another."⁴

The macrodynamics of the subject

The relation of the subject to society and ideology is in the center of socio-historical theories of the subject. 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: power and knowledge become inseparable; the way information is circulated becomes constitutive of one's "personality."

In his project to draw a genealogy of the modern subject, Michel Foucault points out that the persistent concern with the individual in the 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. This attempt is part of a new, syntagmatic world model which deprives the human being of its medieval high semioticity and subjects him/her to a material and categorical position within a horizontal structure.

In Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary technologies of power, knowledge and power become inseparably intertwined: truth-production about reality is always governed by historically specific modes of meaning-making activities. Technologies of power set up regimes of truth; 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, subjecting 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 objectified 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.

The three main modalities of power/knowledge are: 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

⁴ Cf. KRISTEVA "From One Identity into an Other." In: KRISTEVA 1980. pp. 124-147.

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 s/he 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 strategies into more subtle ways of subjection, when the discursive commodification of reality and subjectivity takes advantage of the psychological structure of the subject.⁵ Through the course of the 17th-18th centuries, a new economy changes the *dimensionality of power* in society.

Earlier, power was exercised by disseminating the idea of the presence of power in society: technologies of the spectacle displayed the presence of authority in social practices either directly (processions, Royal entries, allegories, etc.)⁶ or indirectly, through the displaying of the ultimately subjected, tortured body in public executions. Here the economy of power is vertical: 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. (Bureaucracy, state police, confinement can never set up a system of surveillance that envelopes every subject).

In the 17-18th 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*. 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 meta-physical locus of authority at the top of a hierarchy but to his/her own selfhood. The subject, through a social positionality, is inserted into discourses that offer specific versions of knowledge of the self, and the subject scrutinizes him/herself all the time whether s/he produces *the right knowledge* about his/her self, body and identity. This technique was already constitutive of the Christian practice of confession, where the subject re-tells the stories of his/her self in the face of an absolute authority of salvation (the priest as an agent of God). The practice

⁵ 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 it positions the subject in ideologically determined sites. This commodification of subjectivity is not a result of violent exercise of power upon the subject; it is based on the idea of free subjects.

⁶ Cf. ORGEL 1985.

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-17th centuries, proves to be a period of transition again, when 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.

The historicization of the constitution of the subject throws 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 into the psychosomatic structure of the subject produces specific subjectivities.

The microdynamics of the subject

According to Julia Kristeva, theories of the speaking subject can be categorized either as theories of the enunciated or theories of the enunciation.⁷ The former orientation studies mechanical relationships between the signifier and the signified and considers the subject as a controller of the production of meaning. The subject is a possessor of linguistic rules, a closed unit who always stands hierarchically above the elements of meaning-production (signifier, signified, grammatical rules, etc.): s/he is the guarantee, the *origo* of meaning and identity.

Theories of the enunciation are interested in the *production* of the above elements of semiosis that are no longer understood as monads, or units, but rather as unstable productions in a heterogeneous signifying *process*. The "Freudian revolution" introduced a decisive inversion in the hierarchy of the signifier and the subject. It became clear that the human subject is not a homogeneous unit but a system in which different modalities are always simultaneously at work. The subject as a heterogeneous system can no longer be the controller of meaning and identity.

Lacan's re-reading of Freud argues that the subject is constituted through a series of losses: systems of differences are established in consciousness at the

⁷ "The Speaking Subject." pp.10-11. In: BLONSKY (ed.) 1985. pp. 210-220.

expense of the suppression of primary drives and the loss of objects of demand.⁸ In order to be able to relate to itself as separate from the outside (a necessary condition for the auto-reflexivity of identity), the subject must be inserted into a signifying system where s/he is absent from the signifier. The signifier represents the subject for other signifiers in the chain (the Real having been ultimately lost, separated from the subject), and it emerges as a stand-in for drives 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 has no direct contact with reality.

The first structures of *difference* are results of the territorialization of the body, i.e., edges and zones of excitement that are always engraved on the baby's body according to symbolic rules (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 first decisive differentiation is the result of primary repression, which is the abandonment of *identifications* with the Mother and the outside, with the objects of demand. Through the mirror phase the child recognizes its image in the mirror of the social space around itself, considers that image as a homogeneous, separate entity with which it identifies, and thus internalizes a sentiment of the body as different from the outside.

This otherness, the basis of the ego, is 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. Through Oedipalization (i.e., the replacement of the mother as an object of desire with the position of the father, the wielder of phallic, symbolic power), the subject is inserted into the symbolic order of society, where his/her 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 site of the Other as the only guarantee for the re-capturing of the lost Real, and the desire to compensate for the absences within the subject will be the engine of signification. The subject endows the Other as the site of the signifier with the capacity to re-present for him/herself 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 him/herself as someone other than the Other. However, the signifier does not

⁸ Cf. "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious." In: LACAN 1977. pp. 292-325.

recapture the Real for the subject. S/he relates him/her to other signifiers in the chain; the agency of the signifier has an autonomous order which is not controlled by the subject, a split subject 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 his/her identity. If we relate this psychoanalytical microdynamics of the subject to the socio-historical account of his/her constitution, we see that the intervention of ideology 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 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 alterity of the body.

This somewhat lengthy outline of the theory of the subject has been indispensable for us to see the background against which notions of the subject in Renaissance tragedy will be investigated and in order to arrive at a semiotic problematization of the concept which is one of the most pervasive and problematic motifs in these plays: the concept of *the body* in semiosis and of the materiality of meaning-production.

The body, the corporeal, is one of the central concepts in Julia Kristeva's theory of the speaking subject as a subject-in-process. The attempt to involve material components of signification and the question of the body as agent in 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. For Kristeva, signification is not simply representation (a mechanistic understanding of the text), 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: the amount of *symbolic fixation* depends on how successfully the signifying system suppresses those modalities in the consciousness of the subject that are heterogeneous to identity-formation and symbolic predication.

In this theory of the constitution of the subject, the signifying *process*, *signifiante* has not only one but two modalities. Meaning is generated in the *symbolic modality*, in relation to the central signifier (Phallus) and according to linguistic rules of difference, at the expense of the repression of the heterogeneity

of corporeal processes and drives. The "battery" of signification and desire, however, is a dimension of the psychosomatic setup of the subject called the *chora*: here the unstructured, heterogeneous flux of drives, biological energy-charges, and primary motilities hold sway in a non-expressive, i.e., non-signifying, totality. This unstructured heterogeneity of drives and corporeal fluctuations is redistributed 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, plugging him/her back into corporeal motility and the "pulsations of the body."

The body, the material basis of signification, is always the opaque, suppressed element of semiosis: it is the body which speaks, but the identity of the speaking subject is always predicated as opposed to the otherness, the heterogeneity, of that body. Historically specific discourses contain and suppress this experience of the body through different technologies, and one of the specific semiotic achievements of the syntagmatic world model is the construction and dissemination of a "modern" understanding of subjectivity through the expulsion of the experience of the body from the dimensions of discourse.⁹

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 source in the corporeality of the body itself. The first sites of difference in consciousness are articulated by the agency of *abjection*. The logic

⁹ Cf. BARKER 1984. In the subsequent chapters, I will refer more elaborately to Barker's analysis of the treatment and containment of the body at the turning point of the two world models.

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."¹⁰ 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, 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*."¹¹ 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 s/he is jolted out of identity into a space where fixation and meaning collapse.

The semiotic orientation of structuralist anthropology has already demonstrated that culture as a semiotic mechanism is articulated like a language: it is based on systems of differences, and the binarisms that hold the structure together are 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 body, the unclean, the feminine, etc.) have always been ritualistically expelled from the scope of the symbolic first of all because culture defines itself through a logic of opposition to these.

In the following chapters, the staging of the abject body and of violence in Renaissance tragedy will be examined as a *representational technique*, an attempt to transgress and subvert the dominant discourse, and also as a means to formulate modes of *perfect representation* in an age of representational crisis and uncertainty.

¹⁰ KRISTEVA 1982. p. 10.

¹¹ KRISTEVA 1982. p. 9.

III

THE SUBJECT OF THE RENAISSANCE

In this chapter I will delineate a theory of the subject in Elizabethan and Jacobean discourses on the basis of the theoretical considerations formulated in the semiotics of the constitution of the subject. I will focus on the changing ideas of signification at the turning point of the symbolic and syntagmatic world models with special attention to 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 his/her relation to reality, authority and ritual.

According to Robert Knapp¹², the appearance of literariness in dramatic form has to do with the emergence of professional theaters, of the literary institution as such, but first of all with a change in 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*.

Dramatic representation undergoes a radical change as ("really 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 the whole audience is familiar with and part of. Renaissance drama emerges as a *mimetic art*, an art of doing, rather than reporting, which explores a different relationship between actor and individual *persona*, surface and reality, being and meaning, stage and audience. The transition from purely religious drama and emblematic interlude into literary drama and theatricality is part of a semiotic transformation in which the favorite metaphor of medieval epistemology, the "*book of life*", gives way to the Renaissance metaphor of the "*theater of the world*". This replacement stems from changed ideas about the very nature of reality and also of signification, that is, knowing and representing that reality. Art as representation appears in European culture at the same time as Shakespeare writes, 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

¹² KNAPP 1989.

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"¹³. 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 the *logic of the symbol*: in medieval *high semioticity* the elements of reality as symbols in the textuality of the world are in a *motivated, direct* relationship with universals and with the generating figure of the Absolute, or Christ, who is the pure manifestation of the union of Flesh and Spirit, signifier and signified.¹⁴ 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* in the audience. Without a possibility for heroism on the stage and some possibility for misunderstanding among the audience (as opposed to pure didacticism and transparency of representation), no great drama exists. "The basic issue is a semiotic one: what kind of a sign is a human being?"¹⁵ Does it 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.

In medieval drama, the characters 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

¹³ KNAPP 1989. p. 50.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the emergence of Renaissance writing as a shift from the logic of the motivated symbol into that of the unmotivated sign, see KRISTEVA "From Symbol to Sign", In: KRISTEVA 1986. pp. 62-73.

¹⁵ KNAPP 1989. p. 104.

his men are all *members* and *images* of Satan, or the great kind, the Vice. 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. Hieronimo, Edmund or Vindice are no longer "parts" of Revenge or 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.

The "readable", medieval world 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, the sign emerges as a non-motivated element in a horizontal system of cause and effect relationships.

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, and, as Francis Barker shows,¹⁶ modern discursive practices, eg. that of the idea of the narrative, will define their very mode of existence in relation to censorship and surveillance.

According to Knapp, *desire* (for the Real, for authority, for the Other, with which the subject no longer has motivated contact) enters the new drama in three new themes: the production of corpses, the love of women, and violent, disruptive theatrical rhetoric. The semiotic nature and grounds of these themes can now be investigated in the light of the above semiotic metamorphoses.

Renaissance drama aims at involving the audience in the experience of representational attempts to get beyond the discursive embeddedness and limitations of the subject, to transcend the limits of language. The *logic of involvement*, based on traditional techniques of stage-audience interaction, works according to two basic modes, both of which aim at an unsettling and a reconstitution of the

¹⁶ BARKER 1984. Ch.I.

spectator's *identity*. This semiotic understanding of the theatrical experience points forward to a new theory of catharsis.

The logic of comedy is based on the carnivalesque involvement in laughter: the foregrounding of joy and the practice of laughter unsettles the identity of the spectator. Eros, the metaphor for desire, liberates the flesh from the symbolic position, from the law of the father, and the concrete rhythm of laughter is the agency of the semiotic, now breaking to the surface. In comedy, the body speaks in laughter.

Tragedy involves the spectator in the theatrical experience of being present to something, in the experience of *testimony*: 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, the pure signifier. 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*."¹⁷ The theatrical hermeneutics of testimony again depends on the unsettling of the subject's identity.

Astounding, violent rhetoric, characteristic of both comedy and tragedy, threatens to subvert the structural order of the symbolic, the fixation of meaning, of authority.

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 show up the most faithful image of the Real. This attempt indeed will turn into an ironic and also subversive denial of the possibility of such techniques, but in order to trace the emergence of this irony, we have to examine in greater detail the theatrical logic of stage representation in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as well as the relationship between theater and authority. In this period, which is a transition from emblematic into photographic theater¹⁸, the real subversive power of the theater is not in the questioning or critique of ideology and authority, but in

¹⁷ KRISTEVA 1982. p. 3.

¹⁸ WICKHAM 1963. p. 155. "...I wish to argue that 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."

the problematization and negation of total representational techniques in which all ideologies and power structures are grounded.¹⁹

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 problem of staging the corpse, the sexual body or the questioning of the power of discourse. I think the peculiarity of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean stages is that they foreground and undermine at the same time traditional emblematic ways of representation, 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 creates a special theatrical effect which involves the spectator in the semiotic experience of *jouissance*.²⁰

¹⁹ This would be, I think, a more subtle and semiotic understanding of theatrical subversion commonly theorized in new historicism and cultural materialism.

²⁰ "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 1980. p. 16.

IV

THE SEMIOTICS OF THE EMBLEMATIC THEATER

In order to situate the problematics of representation and the themes of the subject, abjection and the body more closely in a theatrical context, in what follows I will discuss the semiotics of the emblem and emblematic stage representation, since these signifying practices can be held to be representative of the semiotic activity of the Renaissance.

There is an ongoing debate in Renaissance criticism about the importance of the visual in Elizabethan 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 the focus of these approaches the dramatic text is replaced by what can be defined as the *performance text*, a necessarily hypothetic 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. 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 reinterpretations of Renaissance drama will fall subject to partiality.²¹

In this chapter I make an attempt to problematize the semiotics of this theatrical logic and to theorize the connection between Renaissance emblem literature and the Elizabethan stage as a typically semiotic phenomenon, which occurs in a period that witnesses the fusion of two competing world models. 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 late Renaissance in England. In order to situate the emblem and the emblematic theater

²¹ Cf. DESSEN 1980., WICKHAM 1963.

within the semiotic practices of the Elizabethan period, we will have to clear up the 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, popularized by Andreas Alciatus' *Emblematum Liber* of 1531, has been long neglected in literary criticism although recent studies sometimes define it as a separate genre with distinctive characteristics.²² It consists of an *inscriptio*, a *pictura* and a *subscriptio*, thus employing *different sign channels* to convey a complex meaning which is to be deciphered through the contemplative and simultaneous reading of the particular channels. From a semiotic perspective, 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 Jöns calls the "last spiritual attempt to conceive of reality in its totality through exegetical methods."²³

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 medieval theology and the Neoplatonic emphasis on the power of the *visual* sign as opposed to verbal representation, we have in the Renaissance the emergence of a new, skeptical semiotic way of thinking, the transition from the dominance of the motivated symbol into the dominance of the passive, unmotivated sign. At the end of the 16th century the symbolic and the syntagmatic world models are still simultaneously at work, and the interpretive uncertainty of the age is expressed by the changing concepts of representation: the "book of nature" metaphor of the *Specula Mundi* tradition is replaced by "the theater of the world."

Culture, as a semiotic process structuring reality, suffers a crisis when a dominant world model is replaced by another. This crisis, according to Juri Lotman, is accompanied by *intensified semiotic activity*, which gives rise to attempts to devise new ways of signification and approaches to reality.²⁴

The emblem can be defined as a genre emerging in the intensified semiotic activity of this epistemological crisis, a *compound sign* which, in the methodo-

²² FABINY, Tibor "Literature and Emblems. New Aspects in Shakespeare Studies." In: FABINY 1984., pp. 7-56., DALY 1979. "The Emblem." pp. 3-53.

²³ Quoted in FABINY 1984. p. 7.

²⁴ LOTMAN & USPENSKY 1986. p. 410.

logical debates about the power of visual versus verbal representation in the Renaissance, indicates the triumph of the former, the power of the *image*. In 16th-century England, we have the largest number of symbolic representations circulating 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. (Against this belief iconoclasm will launch a major attack.) Of course, the traditions of the *spectacle* were deployed as one of the most important *technologies of power* in Elizabethan England, "making greatness familiar,"²⁵ but if we examine them in the semiotic typology of Renaissance culture, we cast new light on the emblem and the influence it bears upon the theatrical representations of the age.

The attempt, discovered in the semiosis of the emblem, to convey a multi-leveled meaning is a strategy constitutive of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage as well. A panmetaphoric attitude to reality has long been held accountable for the *emblematic horizon of expectations* in the Elizabethan audience. Although this hypothesis is problematized in the recent decanonization of Shakespearean drama,²⁶ we lose sight of important aspects of these texts if we do not make them work in the theatrical logic of the contemporary stage. This logic enabled the stage representation to use an extremely small number of properties to evoke a broad *context* of connotative references. This logic I define here as emblematic, and this definition has to be based on a distinction between symbolic versus emblematic codes as well as a differentiation between emblematic genre and emblematic value.

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

Following the investigations of G. Wickham and P.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 performance text, literary emblems become important subtexts when they are identified by the spectator as commentary on the meaning of the scene, opening up a broader context of

²⁵ ORGEL 1985.

²⁶ Cf. WEIMANN 1988. For a radical criticism of "Tillyardism" and a more critical concept of the Renaissance subject see DOLLIMORE 1984. and BELSEY 1985.

associations, for example, that of the "memento mori" tradition in Falstaff's words "do not speak like a death's head: do not bid me remember mine end"²⁷ or that of the "dance macabre" or "gate of underworld" images in Hamlet's jumping into the grave. However, there does not need to be a literary emblem behind the representation of Kent put into the stocks for the audience to be able to interpret this scene as the familiar image of Truth subdued and put into 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 *Veritas Filia Temporis*.²⁸ The allusion to the "Truth is daughter of Time" imagery, which is a persistent one 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, a mirror, or an emblem of the 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 spectacular texts of the theater which activates these potentialities.²⁹ We have seen different stagings of the scene in *King Lear* when Gloucester is blinded. Cornwall is staged using various tools for the representation of horror: spoons, fingers, metal objects. Yet there is explicit reference in the text that Gloucester's head is stamped on, that is, his eyes are kicked out.³⁰ 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 emblematic status.

²⁷ 2H4 2.4.218.

²⁸ Cf. FABINY, Tibor "Veritas Filia Temporis. The Iconography of Time and Truth and Shakespeare." In: FABINY 1984. pp. 215-274.

²⁹ DESSEN 1980.

³⁰ "Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot." (Cornwall, 3.7.68.)

Emblematic stage representation in Elizabethan drama relies on the "imaginary forces" of the audience,³¹ presupposing the collaborative, imaginative participation of the spectator. The *theatrical interaction* between stage and auditorium, based on the tradition of audience participation in Shakespeare's theater, imposes a complex semiotic task on the audience through which they do not simply decode but also *create or encode emblematic meanings*. This semiotic disposition played a very important part in the strategies of interpreting the character or the play as a whole. The development of characterization in English Renaissance theater is part of an overall metamorphosis of ideas about the semiotic status of the human being as signifier in particular and the textuality of the world in general. In Chapter III I tried to summarize how the 16th century, Protestant theology, and the emerging syntagmatic world model desemiotize reality and humankind's place in it. The human being no longer has an active semantic value, which could automatically refer to and manipulate God, the Ultimate Signifier. The sign becomes passive, unmotivated, and the allegorical transparency of medieval semidramatic representation is replaced by mimetic, psychological characters and actions. This, however, does not yet result in the semiotic iconization (in the Piercian sense) of the stage representation. The emblematic devices and systems of encoding are at work *simultaneously* with the developing techniques of mimetic role-playing and the questioning of emblematic correspondences. We have a peculiar *polysemy* of stage and character which is a result of the inherited allegorical-emblematic and the emerging syntagmatical modes of thinking.

This polysemy of characters, now both realistically psychological and emblematically complex, is largely accountable 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 scenes but also the characters and the totality of the drama, on different levels. To the psychological character, the spectators assign emblematic values on the basis of the network of attributes s/he bears in the performance text. Thus, it is not only a pageant, a procession, or a masque that can become an "extended emblem"³² but also the character and the play as a whole. Through the images of blindness, folly, suffering, and fallibility, the character of Lear is transformed into an emblematic representation, and, to recall the terminology of the emblem, this representation is commented on by the title of the play as *inscriptio* and the verbal enactment as *subscriptio*. This emblematic value is

³¹ H5, Prologue, 8-18.

³² Cf. DALY 1979. Ch.4.

constantly *decentered and questioned* by the new strategies of interpretation, which desemiotize the human signifier and deprive it of its multileveled polysemous potentiality. Yet a balance or rather an uncertainty is maintained between the two semiotic attitudes, situating the Renaissance stage at the point of *transition* from emblematic to photographic theater.

The Shakespearean theater, with its very structure as the emblem of the universe and its preconditioning motto "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem" above the entrance to the Globe theater, relies on the audience's emblematic way of thinking, which semiotizes every element of the stage on different levels.

With the rise of the syntagmatic world model, which projects the vertical axis of cognition onto a horizontal dimension with no correspondences or semiotic overcoding, the dominant techniques of theatrical representation change. Emblematic stage properties and actions are 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 alienate the audience from the world of the performance, and the close interaction between stage and auditorium dissolves. Still, before Inigo Jones' 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 context of reception in 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."³³

It is one of the objectives of recent Renaissance criticism 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

³³ H5, Prologue, 8-18. References to Shakespearean plays are from SHAKESPEARE 1972.

from the violence of the image (e.g., *Titus Andronicus*) to the dominance of the word which may give one reason for the canonization of his works later in the 18th-19th 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.³⁴

The logic of emblematic representation turns more and more straightforwardly into an ironic questioning and suspension of that logic in Jacobean drama. It is not that emblematic characters or values disappear from the stage; on the contrary, in many tragedies they are *multiplied* and foregrounded to such an extent (especially in the context of the *macabre*, the *memento mori* and the *ars moriendi* traditions) that the emblematic value turns into its own negation. It intensifies the semiotic uncertainty of a universe in which there is no longer any metaphysical guarantee for the representational power of the symbol.

It will be the aim of a psychoanalytically informed semiotic study in the following chapters to discuss how the theatrical contexts of reception outlined above produce specific *subject positions* for the spectators. The simultaneous foregrounding and questioning of emblematic values - together with the staging of abjection and the violence of rhetoric - unsettle the identity of the receiver, producing a *subject-in-process*. This technique, which turns the performancetext from mechanical representation into *signifiante*, is the characteristic aesthetic achievement of Renaissance emblematic theater.³⁵

³⁴ BARKER 1984. pp. 22-23. 59.

³⁵ Cf. KRISTEVA 1980. According to Kristeva, any signifying practice can be studied as a process of *signifiante* (ie., a heterogeneous *process* which involves both modalities of signification in the positioning and unsettling of the subject) instead of as a mechanistic generation of meaning. I imply here that the emblematic theater consciously plays with and foregrounds this nature of its discourse.

V

"To know the author were some ease of grief."³⁶

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.³⁷ 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 diads 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

³⁶ Hieronimo, II.v.40. References to *The Spanish Tragedy* are from KYD 1970.

³⁷ See, for example, McALINDON 1986. Ch. 2.

purest manifestation on the English stage is ambition, the engine of numerous villain-actors. In the protagonists of 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.³⁸

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 problematics 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 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

³⁸ 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 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.

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.³⁹

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 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

³⁹ "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 1982. p. 4.

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 post-structuralist 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, transcendently 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 discuss 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."⁴⁰

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 sever 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

⁴⁰ GREENBLATT 1988. p. 65.

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.

"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, invoke 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 I.v. 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 metastance 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 harbour scene" is an extended emblem of the Neoplatonic idea of death-in-love so common in the Renaissance.⁴¹ Everything depends, again, on the logic of staging.

⁴¹ For the Neoplatonic idea of the relationship between love and death see PÁL, József, "Csókhálál (Egy szinkretikus motívum a XV. századi Firenzében)." In: FABINY & PÁL & SZÓNYI (eds.) 1987. pp. 5-20.

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 represent, 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:⁴²

"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

⁴² 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.

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, 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 finally transgresses by turning himself into a mute *body*. Writing as opposed to speech turns into death in his hands.⁴³ 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 inviolated 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

⁴³ 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*.

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 idea of the self-identical, metaphysically human subject of Christian essentialism.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Cf. DOLLIMORE 1984. Ch.10/1. "Tragedy, Humanism and the Transcendent Subject.", Ch.10/2. "The Jacobean Displacement of the Subject."

⁴⁵ For a discussion of how texts offer specific subject-positions for the receivers see: BELSEY 1985. Ch.I. "Introduction: Reading the Past." pp. 1-12.

VI
"Words, words, words."⁴⁶
**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" heroes 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,"⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ But not only the monarch: nobody can be sovereign of his/her body and its meaning.

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.

⁴⁶ Hamlet, II.ii.192.

⁴⁷ KRISTEVA 1985. p. 215.

⁴⁸ MORETTI 1992. p. 66.

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 primitivity 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.⁴⁹ 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 tableaux. 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

⁴⁹ KRISTEVA 1982. Ch.I. "Approaching Abjection."

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.⁵⁰ 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.

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.⁵¹ 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

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ BAYLEY 1981. Ch.III. "Tragedy and Consciousness."

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.

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."⁵²

The "too, too sullied flesh" 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

⁵² BARKER 1984. p. 25.

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.

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 desemiotized body. The violence that centers around 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.", 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. 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 Zeffirelli'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." However, this self-assertion is at the same time the final, radical relinquishing of his ideal identity, since as Andrew Gurr pointed out, the title "Hamlet, the Dane" belongs to the old elected king, the father, old Hamlet the King.⁵³ 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-

⁵³ This is a point Professor Gurr drew my attention to in a lecture on "Shakespeare's Theatre" in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, during the British Council's Conference on Literature Teaching Overseas, 1993.

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.⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁴ Cf. BARKER 1984. pp. 26—32.

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."⁵⁵ 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 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.

⁵⁵ BARKER 1984. p. 24.

VII

"The very ragged bone."⁵⁶

ABJECTION AND THE ART OF DYING IN *THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY*

Drama is always inherently a metadrama about the unresolvable 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.

"Metadramatic" performances play with this internal characteristic of the art and *foreground* the problematics that resides in identity and role-playing, reality and representation, involvement and the shattering of mimetical 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.⁵⁷ Those at the other extreme of the play's critical history defend the drama

⁵⁶ "The very ragged bone has been sufficiently revenged." Vindice, III.v.152. References to *The Revenger's Tragedy* are from TOURNER 1989.

⁵⁷ 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

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.⁵⁸

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."⁵⁹ 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*.⁶⁰ The

literature at all? I say it is a product either of sheer barbarism, or of some pitiable psychopathic perversion." In: ARCHER 1923. p.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: ELIOT 1951. pp. 189-90.

⁵⁸ 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 OLIPHANT 1921.) A major turning point in critical response came with Salinger's article in 1938. Salinger closely investigated the medieval semi-dramatic, dramatic, and moralistic traditions that inform the 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. (SALINGAR 1938.)

⁵⁹ Ben Jonson *Part of King James's Entertainment*, quoted by WICKHAM 1981, p. 66.

⁶⁰ See, for example, EKEBLAD, Inga-Stina 1959. "An Approach to Tourneur's Imagery" In: *Modern Language Review*, LIV, pp.489-498., ELLIS-FERMOR, Una 1935. "The Imagery of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy*" In: *Modern Language Review*, XXX, pp. 289-301., SALINGAR, L.G. 1938. "The Revenger's Tragedy and the Morality Tradition" In: *Scrutiny*, 6, 402-424., SCHOENBAUM, S. 1954. "The Revenger's Tragedy: Jacobean Dance of Death" In: *Modern Language Quarterly*, XV, pp. 201-07.

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 *Ars 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: 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 of reference for the maintenance of social identity.⁶¹ 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

⁶¹ Cf. KRISTEVA 1984. I/11. "Poetry That is Not a Form of Murder." pp. 72-85.

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 the following, 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 16-17th 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.⁶²

As mentioned in Chapter III, the appearance of three motifs signal the emergence of "literary" Renaissance drama after Medieval allegory: corpses, the love of women, and the violence of language.⁶³ 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 *Object* 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 Object* is a *prolongation* of this lapse of time, a dramatic source of *jouissance*.

⁶² For a study of the history of such representations, see SPINRAD 1987.

⁶³ KNAPP 1989, p. 104.

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 moralizings the walk of life 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 disembowelled 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 omni-present potentiality: Death peeps over the shoulders of mortals, suddenly appears when least expected, and always comments on its strategies and plottings in extra-dramatic *asides*. *Ars Moriendi*, by this time, is the ability to handle this potentiality in existence: "the readiness is all." 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.⁶⁴

After the commonplace but also cynical ("go...Four excellent characters") 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,

⁶⁴ Cf. DESSEN 1977, 1983.

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.⁶⁵

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*.⁶⁶ 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 supernatural 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

⁶⁵ I would probably stage Vindice kissing the skull during the "a usurer's son/ Melt all his patrimony in a kiss" 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.

⁶⁶ Cf. AGNEW 1986.

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.

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 problematics 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 plottings; the idea of Almighty Revenge is ridiculed by a dissemination of revenge schemes; the omni-present *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 losing 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 unnameable 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. *Ars Moriendi* 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.⁶⁷

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 Abject: 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" is Vindice's total

⁶⁷ Cf. KRISTEVA 1980. Ch.IV. "From One Identity to an Other." pp. 125-147.

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 ("we take the pattern/Of all those suits, the colour, trimming, fashion, / E'en to an undistinguish'd hair almost" V.ii.15-17.), who is already totally indistinguishable from those he murders. 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 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 am-

biguities, 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?"⁶⁸

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Malevole's answer to the question quoted in the title of the present chapter 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

⁶⁸ *The Malcontent*, Ferrardo, I.iii.35. References are from BROOKE & PARADISE 1933.

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 his/her inherent center and signifying capacity — the subject of the late Renaissance is a hollow, desemiotized 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 Foucault and Barker argue,⁶⁹ the *individuum* as a typically modern social construction enters the society of the 17-18th centuries exactly through the *suppression* of marginalities that are difficult to *contain* within 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 16-17th 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.

⁶⁹ FOUCAULT 1973, 1978a, BARKER 1984.

APPENDIX

"Under a Sun of Torture": Staging the Traumatic Event in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*

It is in postmodern drama that the problem of identity as a product of ideological discourses and the problem of the body as a potential site for resistance appear with as powerful an intensity as in Renaissance tragedy. In this final chapter I set out to interpret Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* as a play which foregrounds the semiotic and representational problems discussed in the preceding parts. Thus, the drama shows fundamental analogies with the epistemological dilemmas that are constitutive of early modern culture: Renaissance tragedy is representative of the beginning of that cultural practice the crisis of which is thematized in Müller's play.

In order to introduce the theoretical dilemmas presented by the play, I would like to refer to a critical commonplace which has become rather fashionable recently. Let us accept that Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* 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 practised upon the text is to theorize it. Thus, the present paper sets out on the basis of an unresolvable 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: can the drama as *representation* 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.

In the present chapter I would like to show 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 raises 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 unpenetrable 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*.

- On a 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.
- On a 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 him/her heterogeneous.

- 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.
- 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.⁷⁰ 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 speaking subject, where its position is very similar to thethetic 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 "post-modernist revelations" 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,

⁷⁰ ŽIŽEK 1989. Ch.I. "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"

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 disembowelled subject in *Hamletmachine* is not the immediacy of experience through the Presence of the body but the De Manian "brute materiality of the letter": 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." (HM 53)⁷¹ 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 cliché 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 ideological markers. The problem is whether the peeling of the marks off the body can arrive at any remainder.

"I dispensed my dead procreator." (HM 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

⁷¹ References to *Hamletmachine* are from MÜLLER 1984.

of old Hamlet), is dispensed. The future is prevented: "Tomorrow morning has been cancelled." (HM 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..." (HM 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." (HM 54) The text denies itself; after emptying all the markers it bears, the subject rejects its own presence: "My drama doesn't happen anymore." (HM 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 representation 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.⁷² 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." (MÜLLER 1984. Afterword.)

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

⁷² Cf. BLAU 1990. Ch.III. "The Most Concealed Object."

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." (HM 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 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: 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." (HM 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." (HM 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." (HM 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 liquify 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 him/herself as long as his/her 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.⁷³ 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/her discursive ideological positionality.

⁷³ Cf. DERRIDA, Jacques, "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation." In: *L'écriture et la différence*. Éditions de Seuil, Paris, 1967.

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