

Attila Atilla Kiss

The Visuality of the Other of the Subject in the Theaters of Anatomy

Absztrakt

This paper attempts to scrutinize the interrelationship between the postmodern renaissance of theatricalized anatomy and the subject's relation to the flesh of the Other, within the framework of what Jacques Derrida called the carno-phallogocentric order of our culture. I employ postsemiotic understandings of materiality and the concept of the suture to theorize the subject's experience of the look of the cadaver.

Szerző

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In addition to what we have just named (the proper name in exappropriation, signature, or affirmation without closure, trace, *difference* from self, desterrance, etc.), I would add something that remains required by both the definition of the classical subject and by these latter nonclassical motifs, namely, a certain *responsibility*. The singularity of the 'who' is not the individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering 'no'. Jacques Derrida ^[1]

Ethics is optics.
Emmanuel Lévinas ^[2]

A complex thanatological process reached its climactic point in the history of critical theories in the mid-1990s when, after the death of God, the death of the author and the death of the human as we knew it, the long-anticipated theoretization of the death of character also downed on poststructuralist critics. ^[3] By then, the subject had been subjected to a penetrating dissection by psychoanalytical and semiotic scrutiny, and this anatomy exerted an effect on understandings of the human being in all cultural practices and representations.

"It was anatomy, we may remember, that provided the model for the incisions and dissections that, like the slit eyeball of Bunuel's film, *Un chien andalou*, precipitated the modern – the rupture, cutting and tearing that have since been assumed as the virtual "structuration of structure" (Derrida) in the transgressive strategies of the postmodern. So far as anatomy tears open the organism and spatializes it, undoing appearance by dispersing interiority and displaying, instrumentally, its operable parts, there is this anatomical element in the technique of Alienation." ^[4]

Thus Herbert Blau defines anatomy as an attitude, a strategy which sets into motion those mechanisms that will lead to the advent of the postmodern – an inward, anatomizing look, a need to penetrate the surfaces, to dissect that which apparently holds a fixed position in a composite whole. Blau's allusion to Derrida is a fitting one, since deconstruction emerged and then reigned in post-structuralism as *the* critical practice that unveils and dismantles the inner motivations, biases, the ideologically solidified skeletons of systems – the "structuration of structure." ^[5] The anatomical interest of deconstruction has since then become general in critical theory, but

anatomy has not remained confined to the realm of philosophy – much the contrary, it has grown into one of the most dominant and all-penetrating investments of the postmodern. This emerging of the anatomical interest in the postmodern had been preceded by a long silence, a ban that had been imposed on the corporeal by the discourses of rationalism and subsequent ideologies of the bourgeois subject. My interest in the present paper is in the ways through which this anatomizing is related to the constitution of the subject and, more specifically, to the problems and crisis this postmodern subject faces in the present age.

Ever since the first anatomy lessons and anatomical theatres of early modern culture in Europe, the body has been operational with a gradually growing intensity in cultural representations as an epistemological point of reference in relation to which the identity and the capacities of the subject have been marked out by the dominant ideologies of society. The semiotic attitude to the meaning, the presence and the representability of the human body is indicative of the ways in which canonized concepts of subjectivity and identity are established in the historically specific society. Recent findings in cultural studies have repeatedly pointed out that the anatomical interest was characteristic not only of early modern culture. The severe mind – soul dualism which had been imposed on the sovereign subject by the discourses of Cartesian thinking kept the body and the corporeal marginalized for long period, but, by the time of the postmodern, one of the many turns that critical thinking has gone through is definitely the corporeal turn. This interest in the bodily constitution of the subject and the corporeal foundations of signification has been necessitated not only by the critique of phenomenology and the early findings of psychoanalytically informed postsemiotic theories, but just as well by the growing presence of the anatomized and displayed body in the practices of every-day life. The phenomenon that perhaps best characterizes the body in the cultural practices of postindustrial societies is the way it has been subjected to a process of anatomization and inward inspection. Anatomy has become an all-embracing and omnipresent constituent of the postmodern cultural imagery, and its growing presence has saturated not only the urban spaces where body representations are disseminated, but also the multiplicity of critical orientations that have been aiming at accounting for this postmodern interest and investment in the corporeal. The body is endlessly commodified, interrogated, dissected and tested in ways that are very often reminiscent of the early modern turn to the interiority of the human being.

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

I would like to start out from a proposition by Jacques Derrida, the philosopher invoked in the passage by Herbert Blau, the thinker who gave perhaps the greatest impetus to the post-Saussurean problematization of the decentered, non-originary subject. The proposition is part of

an interview where the motto of my paper is also taken from. In this dialogue, the interviewer Jean-Luc Nancy maintains that the subject is above all “that which can retain in itself its own contradiction,” and he thus posits the discussion in the context of the Hegelian heritage of Western philosophy.

What are the sources and implications of this inner contradiction within the human being? Is there anything other than this inner contradiction that remains after the decentering of the non-originary subject? Derrida’s proposition is that a certain responsibility, a turning towards to Other, an answering to the call of the Other will have always been there as the act that lends the subject its own identity. Other than the tone this concept of the call shares with the thinking of Lévinas, there are two important circumstances which contextualize this remark and the perspectives it opens up. One is that Nancy’s interview with Derrida seeks an answer to the crucial question of the early 1990s: “Who comes after the subject?” Starting in the 1970s, the realizations of (post)semiotics and the critique of ideology gradually established the problematic of the constitution of the heterogeneous subject as a question that no critical orientation can since then leave unattended. ^[6] The macrodynamics and microdynamics of the subject have been persistently theorized by poststructuralism to the point when the question finally became: do we have to do without the subject? And what or who is to follow when the “exit the subject” sign comes up? Is the route of postmodern anti-essentialism going to take us from the death of the author all the way down to the death of the subject?

The other aspect of the situation we need to be aware of is that it is in this interview where Derrida proposed his envisioned project of research into the “*carno-phallogocentric*” order of our civilization: an order founded on a special relation to the flesh, the body, the corporeality of the subject’s own, and of the Other, which relation lends us the responsibility that is the foundation of any ethics. ^[7] Today, several years after Derrida’s death and seventeen years after the publication of the volume *Who Comes after the Subject?*, two conclusions are to be drawn.

On the one hand, no matter how liquidized and decentered, the subject is still present and will not have been terminated by the time of the ends of poststructuralism or postmodernism. On the other hand, one might ask immediately: alongside this anatomical remark by Derrida about the flesh and the responsibility for the being and the body of the Other, should we not also immediately problematize this concept of the “contradiction within the subject” as nothing else but the Other within the subject – as the Other which has always already preceded any act and any cognition by and of the subject. Should we not problematize this inherent self-contradiction as the *body*, the material foundation, the corporeality of the subject which is the foundation as well as the marginalized and ignored supplement of our subjectivity: the body which eats and is eaten, the body which is spoken to and the body which *does* the speaking. When we open up for a broader scrutiny of otherness, corporeality and materiality, we must observe the warning Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, has verbalized upon several occasions: concepts and stereotypes of otherness and the Other have been employed and simultaneously exploited, neutralized and extinguished in such a proliferate manner that to approach the problem will

always risk ignoring the very heart of it. However, it is also Spivak who draws our attention to the reason why Derrida was not very enthusiastic about the term “ideology”, and her explanation again throws light on the mind vs. matter, subject vs. body problematic:

I should perhaps add here that Derrida is suspicious of the concept of ideology because, in his view, it honors too obstinate a binary opposition between mind and matter. [8]



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

This obstinate binary opposition has been in the dissolving since the early nineties in critical theory, and perhaps the most conspicuous public sign of the wider cultural side of this process (other than the indefatigable vogue of soap operas on hospitalization, emergency rooms and surgery) is the fact that currently the most successful and popular sensation in the world is the travelling anatomical exhibition of specially prepared corpses directed by the German professor Günther von Hagens. “Body Worlds” was first on display in 1995, and today “Body Worlds 4” is on tour in Philadelphia, Toronto, Haifa, Zurich, Singapore and Cologne. [9] In the spring and summer

of 2008 the promenades of Budapest were flooded by hundreds of mega-posters about the anatomy-exhibition “Bodies. The Exhibition.” ^[10] This production is not identical with that of von Hagens, but it has been definitely inspired by his endeavor to bring anatomy back to the public domain, and it only took fourteen years, after von Hagens’s first uncertain but hugely successful attempt in Japan, for a spectacle like that to arrive in Budapest. As a rival to “Body Worlds”, “Bodies” has been on a world tour with stops in Madrid, Brussels, Budapest and London. The Other of the subject is back: the materiality of the human being is again in the forefront of public curiosity, and this curiosity is now satisfied in massive anatomical exhibitions and theatres that produce an effect of *involvement through alienation* very similar to the one described by Herbert Blau. ^[11] (See Figures 1-3) After the death of character, the new theater of the subject is the one which stages the other of the subject: the postmodern anatomy theater. ^[12] I would like to continue along the implications of this otherness.



The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius’s work De Humani Corporis Fabrica (1543) revolutionized the study of the human body. Vesalius appears almost to hug the corpse: he introduced a radically new attitude towards the body as an object of scrutiny, establishing a close contact with the corpse to be opened and dissected.

In order to facilitate his examinations, Vesalius suspended the body vertically.



Although the various administrative and religious authorities launched a vigorous propaganda against the event, von Hagens performed his first public dissection in 2002 in London. During the multimedially thatricalized performance, one of the spectacles was a huge reproduction of Rembrandt’s The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Tulp. Tulp is a representative of the new bourgeois attitude with his detached attitude towards the corpse – unlike von Hagens, who penetrates the flesh with all his thrust.

As has been mentioned, this emerging of the anatomical has long been in the making, strongly related to questions of otherness and the Other of the subject. Now that the re-emergence of ethical or moral philosophy provides us with a chance to have a meta-perspective upon the past

30 years, I believe it is arguable that the three most influential discourses of poststructuralist critical thinking appear to have been converging since the early 1970s chiefly around two concepts, two critical phenomena: the idea of materiality and the idea of the Other. Deconstruction, psychoanalysis and the post-Marxist critique of ideology have jointly established a transdisciplinary ground for a complex account of the signifying practice and the speaking subject's positionality within the symbolic order by theorizing these categories.

As for *materiality*, the term proved to be primarily applicable not to the empirical status of the "actual world" or the Husserlian "lifeworld", but much rather to the materiality of the two foundations of the process of signification: that of the speaking subject, and that of the signifying system, or language, respectively. Cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, postcolonial studies, or literary anthropology have all successfully profited from this convergence, but critical scrutiny may and should also be directed to the antecedents, the chronological forerunners of this material affinity.

As for the problematization of the *Other*, poststructuralist critical thinking has thematized the dialectical concepts of antagonism and reciprocity, subversion and containment, hegemony and liminal marginality by situating two agencies of Otherness in the focus of scrutiny. One of these is the Other of culture: the marginalized, the disprivileged, the subaltern. Another one is the Other of the subject: the body, the cadaver, the somatic heterogeneity of the corpus. ^[13]

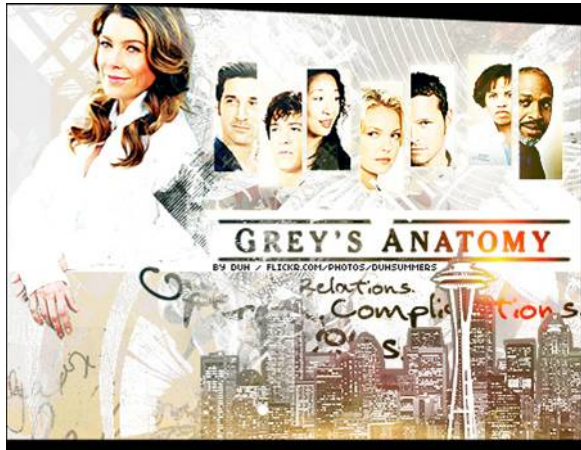
The political and cultural intensities of the past two decades have kept both of these instances of Otherness in the forefront of cultural curiosity, also establishing a new kind of connection between the two within the framework of the epistemological crisis of the postmodern.

The ideological tech-nologies of modernism constituted the bourgeois Cartesian subject at the expense of the suppression and demonization of the body. ^[14] This body initially resurfaces in the postmodern as the site of danger and potential crisis, but then it gradually turns into a site of attraction and unveiled secrecy. Since Foucault's introduction of the idea of the hermeneutics of the self, the care of this fallible, apocalyptic, hidden body has been conceptualized by theory as a central social practice through which ideological interpellation reaches out to the socially positioned and subjectivized individuals in Western society. ^[15] The representations of prefabricated patterns of body-identity are endlessly disseminated and commercialized in postindustrial society. At the same time, formerly marginalized signifying practices (poetic language, the fine arts, performances, installations, experimental theater, film) started to deploy the body as a site of subversion, promising to go beyond or to dismantle ideological determination.

As much critical literature has argued recently, the postmodern scrutiny of the body is comparable to the early modern anatomical turn towards the interiority of the human body. ^[16] In both historical periods the *body is a territory of the fantastic*, an epistemological borderline, a site of experiments in going beyond the existing limits of signification. In short, postmodern anatomies are grounded in an epistemological crisis which is very similar to the period of transition and

uncertainty in early-modern culture, when the earlier “natural order” of medieval high semioticity started to become unsettled, and the ontological foundations of meaning lost their meta-physical guarantees.

The question of materiality and the question of the Other, then, converge these days in a social-cultural practice which re-emerges in the postmodern perhaps as a response to the epistemological uncertainties and philosophical challenges of the age. This is how we arrive at the “postmodern renaissance” of anatomy. (See Figures 4-5)



An example of the mediatized anatomy vogue – one of the most popular hospital soap operas with anatomy in its title.



The “Body Worlds” exhibitions present the most extreme visions to the spectator – this corpse of a woman is on display with an almost mature child in the uterus.

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

...I would still try to link the question of the ‘who’ to the question of ‘sacrifice.’ The conjunction of ‘who’ and ‘sacrifice’ not only recalls the concept of the subject as phallogocentric structure, at least according to the dominant *schema*: one day I hope to demonstrate that this *schema* implies carnivorous virility. I would want to explain *carno-phallogocentrism*...the idealizing interiorization of the phallus and the necessity of its passage through the mouth, whether it’s a matter of words or of things, of

sentences, of daily bread or wine, of the tongue, the lips, or the breast of the other. ^[17]

My contention is that within the sacrificial connotations of this carno-phallogocentrism, we must also calculate the twofold connection of the subject to the practice of eating and eating well. The carnivorous relation ties the subject to the flesh of the other, but also at the same time to its own flesh, its own other, to the flesh within, and it is through this double relation that the subject realizes the presence of its own otherness in the image of the flesh of the other. When facing the corporeality of the Other in the food on my table, in the wounded and mutilated body of the soldier in the battlefield, the invalid in the hospital or the cadaver in the grave, or, for that matter, in the plastinated corpse of the postmodern anatomy theater, I come face to face with that which is other in me. Such a witnessing of otherness and self-otherness is indeed critical for the subject and might result in the unsettling of its identity, as Julia Kristeva has elaborately explicated this experience in her theory of abjection. ^[18] Yet, other than the subject being put on trial and thrown into crisis, the witnessing of the Other through corporeality as the other in me might also result in the subject's opening up for the responsibility that the call of the Other evokes. As the various images of death in the *memento mori* and *ars moriendi* traditions functioned in early modern culture as agents of Death the Great Leveler, so the corpses in the postmodern anatomy exhibition may unveil the sameness of the subject and the Other by the ostension of that which is other in both: the corporeal, bodily foundations of our subjectivity. In this respect, postmodern anatomy goes beyond a mere catering for the sensationalism and curious appetite of the general and alienated masses of consumerism, and it can start functioning as an inspiration of that Derridean "certain responsibility."

Sadly, the dissemination of anatomical representations of the "flesh within and without the subject" does not merely operate with static and carefully prepared corpses in the postmodern exhibition halls and public autopsies. The inventory of today's anatomical representations is not complete without mentioning the images of terror, genocide, mass destruction and mass graves: cultural representations which are disseminated, exploited, distorted, manipulated and appropriated with unprecedented speed and intensity. Within fragments of a second one can search and find thousands of such representations on the internet, and the media is saturated with images of corporeality which have been taking a more and more anatomical, dissective, penetrating and horrifying directionality in the past ten-fifteen years. The early modern anatomical interest now has a proliferating renaissance in the postmodern. (See Figures 6-11)



A typical iconographic representation of the medieval and renaissance memento mori moralization is the danse macabre, which shows the leveling power of death in taking away people from all walks of life.



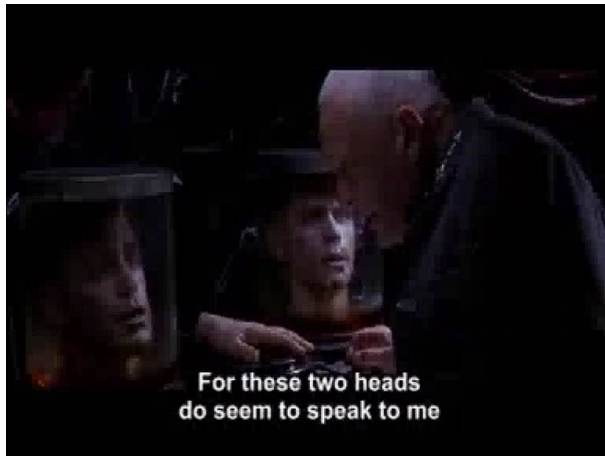
Early modern memento mori – iconographic device on top of a Renaissance tomb.



Postmodern memento mori – inspectors of the UN checking a mass grave after the Balkan wars.



Postmodern memento mori – a skull in a recently exhumed mass grave.



Heads: Titus Andronicus, the fallen patriarch contemplates the severed heads of his two executed and mutilated sons in Julie Taymor's movie Titus: this postmodern adaptation provided a spectacular version of Shakespeare's bloodiest and most anatomical tragedy through a special sensitivity to the networks of emblematic images and system of perspectives and looks.



Heads in the Balkan war – a soldier stampedes on the packaged severed heads of his enemies.

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

The problematization of the mutual interdependency of the psychic and the corporeal has a history which, of course, starts well before the poststructuralist addressing of the heterogeneous speaking subject. In relation to the classical philosophical dilemma of the reciprocity of theory and praxis, the symbolical and the material, one might recall the well-known Marxian thesis that the process of production will not only yield commodities for the subjects, but subjects for the commodities as well, also noting the various layers of this production. The Italian semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi was one of the first interdisciplinary thinkers to lay special emphasis upon the interrelatedness of the two aspects of this reciprocity, that is, the dialectic of subjective and linguistic materiality. His insistence on the “strong materiality” of the bodies of subjects, on the

one hand, and of the signifying process, or “linguistic labor”, on the other hand, has induced remarkable echoes in the discourse on materiality in recent critical practice. ^[19]

In his theory on linguistic alienation, Rossi-Landi makes a very remarkable note on the reciprocity of subjectivity and ideology. He argues that society employs the subject in the capacity of a tenant – that is, the technologies of power literally “employ” the human being as a “shell”, something within which they can become operative. This will of course rhyme with Luis Althusser’s concept of interpellation and Michel Foucault’s subversion, but it is Rossi-Landi who systematically directs attention to the materiality of *all* the players *and* channels involved in this relationality, since it is in this materiality that we can locate the source of production, change, or “practice.” With the concept of *praxis* we arrive at yet another pivotal concept of the poststructuralist critical universe. The insistence on materiality is crucial for a complex theory of the subject and practice because change does not stem from abstractions – it needs to feed on the alterability of the material elements of the system. At the same time, Rossi-Landi’s homology model already demonstrated the interrelatedness of economic and linguistic materiality and production. Étienne Balibar, in his theory of the constitution of the subject as primarily and above all the constitution of the political citizen, excels in explicating how the interrelatedness of the materiality of subjection and the materiality of production positions the subject in “a language of things” where “the articulation of commercial and legal forms of exchange [...] establishes individuals as carriers or holders of value.” ^[20] The materiality of this language can only be altered and redrafted, as Julia Kristeva contends again on an interdisciplinary ground of Marxism and psychoanalytical semiotics, if revolution in society is revolution in language.

What we call significance, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists – the subject and his institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring and de-structuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then – and only then – can it be jouissance and revolution. ^[21]

Thus, we see the postmodern subject enveloped by the symbolic order which is, on the one hand, an order of differential symbolic values but also, on the other hand, an order of a language which has an insurmountable materiality: a language of things. Rossi-Landi’s metaphor of the tenant and the shell reminds us of Norbert Elias and his formulation of the *homo clausus* in *The Civilizing Process*: what is the shell around the human being, and what is it that is locked up in this shell which emerges with the advent of the bourgeois subject? ^[22] The convenient poststructuralist answer used to be that the shell is the symbolic order, and the inside is a great big vacuum, as Hamlet realizes in the prototypical tragedy of subjectivity. However, as critical theory moves further on after the linguistic turn, we are less and less satisfied with the focus on the all-engulfing linguistic-ideological determinations of the subject, and, as the concept of the *homo clausus*

becomes impossible to maintain in the interrelationality of society, the materiality of the interiority of the shell becomes the target of scrutiny. A corporeal turn is necessitated after the linguistic turn, the postsemiotics of the subject must be grounded in a corporeal semantics, as Horst Ruthrof argues, among many other postsemiotic theoreticians, in his call for a *corposemiotic theory of meaning*,^[23] and thus our theories of the socially positioned human being take an anatomical direction. We reach the ends of a period which has been determined and characterized by the “error of Descartes”: a constitutive duality of the mental and the physical.

This is Descartes’ error: the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body.^[24]

Postsemiotics can no longer ignore the extralinguistic, the corporeal, the somatic, and it can no longer just dress it up in the panlinguistic shell of the prison-house of language either, even if the symbolic mediatedness of knowledge about that body will always radically prevent any immediacy of experience. At the same time, the human body becomes one of the most intensively disseminated cultural representations: eroticized, commodified, gendered, and gradually opened up. Just like in the early modern, the opening up of the human body becomes the site of an epistemological experimentation, the testing of borderlines, the probing of thresholds. Earlier on, in a period constituted by Cartesian rationalism, the ideologically marked out limits of knowledge used to exclude the reality of the flesh, the human being’s sovereign self-identity used to be conceived of in terms of the phenomenological abstraction of the transcendental ego, or, as Julia Kristeva’s characterizes philosophical reasoning before the corporal turn:

Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are [...] static thoughts, products of a leisurely cogitation removed from historical turmoil, persist in seeking the truths of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair, and the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a sleeping body – a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience. [...] the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the process pervading the body and the subject.^[25]

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

In all of these places certain theoretical assumptions are now taken for granted: a social constructionist view of language; the idea that realities and subjectivities are constructed in and by language; that subjects construct themselves and the worlds

they inhabit in their everyday uses of language; that power relations are constructed and deconstructed through these processes; that what we call the social and culture are similarly constructed and deconstructed; that this activity is characterized by narrativity, that changing narratives, telling stories differently, might change the social world and that the goal of work on and with language is a politics committed to social change through what Eco (1979) would have called a semiotic labor on and with texts.” [26]

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

We need, of course, to separate our understanding of the material from the empiricism of earlier philosophies of the subject, especially since a very intensive effort of the philosophy of subjectivity in the past 30 years has been invested in the non-empiricist understanding of materiality. We will recall Paul de Man’s insistence on the crucial differentiation between the materiality of the signifier and the materiality of that which it signifies. From this perspective, the materiality of language resides in the fact that it is always more than the subject, always beyond the capacity of the human being to master, to exhaust or control it. This surplus, the unmasterable leftover in language is what de Man calls “the brute materiality of the letter.” Along similar lines, psychoanalytical theory argues that “the traumatic kernel” of the subject is localizable in a materiality that is much more linguistic, i.e., symbolical, than empirical. [27]

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

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

Kaja Silverman in her book *The Threshold of the Visible World* explicates the concept of the suture by trying to solve the dilemma which has kept psychoanalysts pondering since Freud. How is it

possible to incorporate the idea of corporeality in a theory of the psyche and the ego, a theory which systematically distances itself, especially since Lacan, from the physical-biological reality.

Lacan insists even more emphatically upon a disjunctive relationship between body and psyche; identity and desire are inaugurated only through a series of ruptures or splittings, which place the subject at an ever-greater remove from need and other indices of the strictly biological. [28]

Silverman surveys recent theories of the moving image, where the suture is a technique of filmic language that is based on the employment of camera movement and scenes: it is supposed to suture, to inscribe the viewer into the universe of the film, and it urges the spectator to identify with the gaze that corresponds to the ideologically determined perspective of the camera. This identification is always ideological, since the gaze itself is dominantly male based and patriarchal, and it thematizes woman as an object of visual pleasure, as has been long argued by feminist film criticism. Furthermore, as Silverman contends in her book, if we consider the camera as the primary metaphor of the Gaze, we can also easily admit that the camera is not simply a tool but much rather a mechanism which is using the viewer-subject. "The camera is often less an instrument to be used than one which uses the human subject." (ibid. 130)

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

As has been briefly surveyed above, the groundbreaking observations of structuralist semiotics started in the 1970's to get transformed gradually into a postsemiotics that concentrates on the constitution and the heterogeneity of the speaking subject. Roughly in the same fashion there took place a revision and specification of the psychoanalytical considerations that had been, perhaps too hastily and mechanically, imported into film theory. One of these considerations is the logic of the suture, which had been borrowed from Lacan by early feminist film semiotics. The first poststructuralist film theories were equally affected by the semiotic and Marxist concepts of the *Tel Quel* group and the entire French scene, as well as the interpretive techniques of British cultural studies. In her classical article [29], Laura Mulvey argues that the activity of the filmic spectator can be traced back to the simultaneous operation of two drive energies: the scopophilic drive finds pleasure in the image and in voyeurism, but it presupposes a distancing from the object of seeing; at the same time, the narcissistic drive energy of the ego ideal works to identify the subject with the image, merging the spectator into the cosmos of the film. However, in both cases we see a realization of the law of phallogocentric society: the camera movement and the gaze offered by the camera always urge the viewer to identify with the dominant perspective of the male subject, and thus the subject is sutured by the chain of perspectives into a universe which is the duplication and the enforcement of the male-centered ideology of the actual establishment.

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

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

Žižek emphasizes that the suture which is constituted by the camera-perspectives cannot be conceived of as a mechanism that produces the closure of representation, a rounded-off, coherent, diegetic world, that is, a mechanism which transforms the spectacle into a visually complete cosmos. The shot – reverse shot operation of the camera has long been held responsible for a seeming closure: when the spectator thinks a perspective is missing from the cosmos of the film, this perspective is suddenly revealed by the reverse shot, establishing the illusion that the entirety of the field of vision is mastered by the spectator. (See Figures 12-13) While captivated by this illusion, the viewing subject remains blind to the fact that its vision is controlled by the camera. This results in the internalization of the ideological *gaze* which is represented by the camera perspectives.



Second perspective in the shot – reverse shot technique. Second perspective in the shot – reverse shot technique.

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

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

Conceived in this way, the point de capiton enables us to locate the misreading of suture in Anglo-Saxon deconstructivism; namely, its use as a synonym for ideological closure. It is therefore not sufficient to define the King as the only immediate junction of Nature and Culture; the point is rather that this very gesture by means of which the King is posited as their “suture” de-sutures all other subjects, makes them lose their footing, throws them into a void where they must, so to speak, create themselves. [30]

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

experimental film, while it is usually concealed and suppressed in the classic realist film of the Hollywood tradition.

Žižek's radical interpretation of the suture will yield new insight if we apply it to the postmodern vogue of anatomy, the voyeuristic interest of subjects in their own corporeality and the dissemination of the representations of the body. Until now, Kristeva's theory of the abject as the most archaic experience of the subject in *Powers of Horror* established the primary theoretical ground for us to understand the way in which the image of the cadaver, the heterogeneous, uncontainable body connects the subject back into the real of those unstructured drive motilities through the repression of which the abstraction of the ego is maintainable. The metaphysical values and ideological categories of the symbolic order establish those points of the suture which envelope the speaking subject's heterogeneous corporeality into the abstraction of the transcendental ego: the symbolic order sutures us into an abstract system exactly because it unsutures us, deprives us of our real footing, our materiality. When the sentiment of the body, the always-present and always-ignored, suppressed foundation of our existence is brought to the surface by representations of corporeality, the seam of the suture on the subject is broken exactly because we all of a sudden grasp onto something which surely gives us a ground, we peep through the boundaries of the shell in which our self-awareness as *homo clausus* is encapsulated. We are reconnected with that which should be only too familiar, and from which we have been alienated.



Heads in the "Body Worlds" exhibition – many of the corpses prepared by von Hagens have a special power through the look that stays with them even after plastination. This certainly demands special effort from the plastination team and a targeted purpose from the director.

At this point we arrive at my second motto, the by-now classical definition of ethics as optics by Emmanuel Lévinas, the philosopher of the face of the Other. Lévinas establishes the core of his ethical philosophy on an understanding of the Other whose face interpellates me and compels me to turn towards that face. This is the moment of responsibility, the dawn of the most fundamental relationality which has an optical nature that encompasses our entire existence. Seeing, vision as such is the foundation of ethics, and this provides the cadaver in the postmodern anatomy theater with an extraordinary unsuturing power. The look in the eyes and in the flesh of the corpse instructs the viewing subject, before anything else, that the very field of vision for the human

being is inseparable from ethics, because the face of the cadaver, the face of the Other is one that we also have inside. (See Figure 14) When we encounter the cadaver and we look the corpse in the eye, we see ourselves looking, but not in a simple mirror, since this mirroring is our very corporeality. Sadly, the body of the dead subject displayed in front of me establishes this optical power with much greater intensity than any other visual effect, be it a painting, a photograph, a moving image or the most emblematically complex cultural representation.

If this encounter can be conceptualized as the subject's witnessing of its own contradiction, its own Other, then we are brought back to the Nancy – Derrida interview I departed from in my first paragraph, and the question we face is the following: is the dissemination of corporeal representations in postmodern culture only a commodification of the fantastic, or is there in this anatomical vogue a new manifestation of the ever-present need of the subject to come to terms with its unsuturedness, with its separation from its corporeal grounds, from the Other within? And if this postmodern anatomico-corporeal affinity does carry an epistemological stake, how do we conceive, in the light of all this, of the fact that the unthinkable and impossible happens again and again even in our time, and the iconography of the early modern *memento mori* is now echoed and appropriated by the commercially disseminated image of mass graves and mutilated cadavers? We can only hope that the anatomy exhibitions and traveling autopsies of the third millennium will not merely proliferate as consumerist sensations, but will also be efficient in activating in the subject that "certain responsibility" which is to prevent us from going into the military extremities of our carno-phallogocentric cultural order.

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Jegyzetek

1. Jacques Derrida. "‘Eating Well’, or the Calculation of the Subject: An interview with J.-L. Nancy." In: Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.) *Who Comes after the Subject?* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 96-120. 100.
2. Emmanuel Lévinas. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 29.
3. Cf. Elenor Fuchs *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), esp. Ch. I: „The Rise and Fall of the Character Called Character.” 21-36.
4. Herbert Blau. "The Surpassing Body." *The Drama Review* (1988-), Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), 74-98. 82.
5. Cf., among others, Derrida's by now classical critique of the idea of structure, which is expanded to a critique of archeology which cherishes the idea of a finite, teleological dissection of time: "This is why one could perhaps say that the movement of any archeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure from the basis of a full presence which is out of play." "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Writing and Difference*. (trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1978), 278-294. 278.
6. The international review of philosophy *Topoi* had an entire special issue (September 1988) on the French deconstructive critique of subjectivity, which was followed by an expanded issue of *Cahiers Confrontations*

edited by René Major (20, Winter 1989, this is where the Derrida article originally appeared). The most complete collection *Who Comes after the Subject?* came out after these in 1991 edited by Cadava, Connor and Nancy.

7. Derrida. "Eating Well." 101.
8. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "The Politics of Interpretations." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (September, 1982), 259-278. n.2.
9. See <http://www.bodyworlds.com>. A google search on "Gunther von Hagens" or "Body Worlds" produced 102.000 hits a few years ago, while today the same search results in more than 2000000 hits. I will quote only one example from the media publicity: "BODY WORLDS is the most highly attended touring exhibition in the world, having attracted nearly 25 million visitors around the world. The striking organs and whole-body plastinates in BODY WORLDS 4 derive from people who have, in their lifetime, generously donated their bodies for Plastination, to specifically educate future generations about health. More than 8,000 donors including 103 Britons have bequeathed their bodies to von Hagens' Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany. The first lecture is on 1 April by Nigel Meadows, HM Coroner: The Role and Powers of the Coroner in Relation to a Deceased Person's Body, and will last 1 hour. Admission is £5.00 per person or £2.50 with a BODY WORLDS 4 exhibition ticket. Limited on-site car parking £3.00 per car. Cash Bar. All exhibitions are held in the Special Exhibitions Gallery, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefield. For evening events, doors open 6.30pm. Numbers are limited, so please buy your tickets in advance." <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/101726.php> Access: November 2, 2009.
10. See <http://www.bodiestheexhibition.com>.
11. At the time of my writing these lines in the library of the Warburg Institute in London, three blocks from here an exhibition on "The Exquisite Human Body" is about to close in The Wellcome Institute. I should note that significant attempts have also been made in Hungary to produce multimedial representations on the basis of research in the history of anatomy and corporeal imagery. See the materials edited by Péter G. Tóth at <http://www.emberborbekotve.hu/>.
12. On November 20, 2002 von Hagens performed his first public autopsy in a make-shift anatomy theater in London. Four hundred spectators squeezed into the room designed for two hundred, but four hours after the dissection another 1.4million viewers had the chance to witness the images of the materiality of the body, broadcast by Channel 4. For the theatrical anatomy of von Hagens see Hillary M. Nunn. *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy* (Ashgate, 2005), 196-200: "Casting the Dead."
13. See Bryan S. Turner. "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body". In *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 1-36.
14. On the construction and the hollowness of modern subjectivity, see Francis Barker. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*. London and New York: Methuen, 1984.
15. For a concise version of Foucault's idea of the hermeneutics of the self, see: Michel Foucault. "Sexuality and Solitude". In: *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 365-72.
16. "... early moderns, no less than postmoderns, were deeply interested in the corporeal 'topic'." *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), Introduction, xii.
17. Derrida "Eating Well. 113.
18. Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1982). For the questions of

- the Other and otherness in the subject also see her *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press, 1984).
19. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. *Language as work and trade. A semiotic homology for linguistics and economics*. (South Hadley, 1983).
 20. Étienne Balibar. "The Infinite Contradiction." *Yale French Studies*, No. 88, *Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and the Labor of Reading* (1995), 142-164. 156. For Balibar's theory of the subject as citizen see "Citizen Subject." In: *Who Comes after the Subject?*, 33-57.
 21. Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. (New York: Columbia U. P., 1984), 17.
 22. Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd ed., 2000, orig. 1939), 471-75.
 23. Horst Ruthrof. *Semantics and the Body. Meaning from Frege to the Postmodern* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). For an excellent application of corporeosemiotic considerations see Anna Kérchy. *Body Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter: Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
 24. Antonio Damasio. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Putnam's, 1994), 249. For the emergence of anatomical interest and inwardness in early modern culture, preceding the solidification of the *homo clausus*, see: Michael C. Schoenfeldt. *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England. Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), Hillman, David – Mazzio, Carla (eds.) *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1977), Sawday, Jonathan. *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
 25. Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 15.
 26. Terry Threadgold. Cultural Studies, Critical Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis: Histories, Remembering and Futures." *Linguistik Online* 14, 2/03.
 27. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London – New York: Verso, 1989), esp. Chapter I: "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"
 28. Kaja Silverman. *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 9.
 29. Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18.
 30. Slavoj Žižek. *For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London – New York: Verso, 1991), 19.

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