Identity Formation at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century: Intersubjectivity, Art, and Medicine in Siri Hustvedt's Works

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der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität
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von
Christine Marks
aus Essen

Mainz

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For my parents

Contents

1 Introduction

In their introduction to *The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the Twenty-First Century* (2009), Jacqueline Olds and Richard S. Schwartz observe that "Americans in the twenty-first century devote more technology to staying connected than any society in history, yet somehow the devices fail us: studies show that we feel increasingly alone. Our lives are spent in a tug-of-war between conflicting desires—we want to stay connected, and we want to be free" (1). In an era of increased tension between ideals of connectedness and independence, the work of American author Siri Hustvedt exhibits the inevitable interrelatedness of the human experience while advocating self-other relations based on dialogical intersubjectivity. Hustvedt's work stands as a defense of mutuality and personal interconnections in a culture that thrives on appearances, technological advancement, and consumer objects, a culture that fosters "the lapse or break that occurs in people when empathy is gone, when others aren't a part of us anymore but are turned into things" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 346). In her writing, Hustvedt illustrates the fatal implications of this tendency toward objectification as well as the redeeming moments of human connection and affirmation. The tensions between her characters are indicative of the conflictive state of identity conceptions in contemporary Western culture. While the ideal of personal autonomy has lost its ground in a variety of discursive fields that have promoted a reorientation toward relational identity concepts (psychoanalysis, feminist scholarship, autobiography studies, among others), the specter of the independent Cartesian self still haunts American society, which has always cherished the ideal of unbound individuality and independence.

In the Cartesian tradition, human identity relies on the dichotomy of self and other, on the partition between inside and outside. The very definition of identity, in the sense of a distinct, single self, is grounded in the exclusion of otherness and difference. Dichotomies, however, are subject to deconstruction, and partitions are rarely as impermeable as envisioned in their ideal form. Although this definition of identity presupposes distinct boundaries vital to the formation of an intact subjectivity, human experience is, as many critics have noted, full of moments of

indecisiveness during which identity borders are disrupted. Most prominently, Freudian psychoanalysis has unveiled the split between the conscious and the unconscious, leaving the self torn in a struggle between irrational drives and defensive mechanisms of repression. Moreover, contemporary theories have focused on the breaking down of rigid boundaries and the deconstruction of binary distinctions, such as inside-outside, self-other, presence-absence, prevalent in the dualistic logic of modern Western philosophy. Deconstructionists, psychoanalytic literary critics, and feminist scholars have challenged, from their respective perspectives, traditional Western conceptions of an autonomous subject.

Today, the Cartesian ideal of a self that is pure and autonomous, safely detached both from the body it inhabits and from other selves, has been shaken to the core. Through the cracks in the Cartesian shell, from the very core of the self, emerges the other. Rather than stressing individual power and independence, contemporary approaches in various disciplines outline an image of identity as relational, focusing on the interdependencies that shape identity and the physical connectedness between self and world. Models of relational identity envision self and other as interwoven in a web of mutually constructive relationships.

The move away from autonomy towards relationality was initiated in the field of psychoanalysis. In the 1940s and 1950s, object relations theorists such as Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, and D. W. Winnicott shifted the focus in psychoanalysis from the investigation of inner drives to the child's relation to his or her[1] environment, to the external and internal objects shaping her development. John Bowlby's attachment theory further heightened the awareness of the infant's primary need to relate to other people. The increased interest in the child's relations with others coincided with a centering on the mother-child relationship as the principal object of research.

Postmodernist thought has contributed to redefinitions of selfhood as a fluid and flexible entity mediated through continuous interaction with the envi-

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[1] For readability's sake, I will hereafter switch between "his" and "her," "he" and "she," etc., kindly asking the reader to imagine that whenever I refer to the self or the other or the child or other non-gendered concepts, both genders are included in either the masculine or the feminine form.

ronment, undermining established conceptions of atomistic autonomy and self-coincidence. As Susan Stanford Friedman underlines in her definition of relational identity, it "depends upon a point of reference; as that point moves nomadically, so do the contours of identity" (*Mappings* 22). According to Friedman, "structures of power" (*Mappings* 22), especially those delineating identity borders with regard to gender and race, determine the shifting nature of the self, and the contours of the self are shaped by interpersonal relations. The deconstruction of the self-sufficient, intact and centered subject is based on "an ontological rejection of the full subject," and a refusal of "the tyranny of wholes" (Hassan 37). The self thus has come to be defined as "a synthetic construct, a crossing point of public interpretation where waves of cultural and linguistic meanings intersect" (Fox 25). The postmodern self, as Jean-François Lyotard describes it in his *The Postmodern Condition*, ". . . doesn't amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (15).

Furthermore, the new focus on the role of the mother as a nurturer and caregiver discovered in relational psychoanalysis has since become a central asset in feminist critiques of autonomous, male-dominated ideals of identity. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982), for instance, define feminine identity as being in principle more relational than masculine identity. Both works emphasize that social constructions of feminine identity promote compliance, relatedness, and permeability.

While feminist scholars of life writing were first to apply relational identity concepts to women's autobiographical writing in the 1980s,[2] the exclusive allocation of relational traits to feminine identity has been revised and extended to a gender-transcending concept. Paul John Eakin, who established the concept of relational identity in autobiography studies in his *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999), claims that, although the "myth of autonomy dies hard" (43), "*all* identity is relational" (43; emphasis in original). Eakin quotes the German sociologist Norbert Elias: "'The interpersonal functions and relations that we

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[2] See, for example, Mary G. Mason's "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers" (1980) or Susan Stanford Friedman's "Women's Autobiographical Selves" (1988).

express by grammatical particles such as 'I,' 'you,' 'he,' 'she,' 'we' and 'they' are interdependent. . . . each 'I' is irrevocably embedded in a 'we'" (*Lives* 63).[3] The interconnectedness of self and other and the interpersonal component of identity are thus foregrounded in autobiography studies. Mark Allister follows Eakin's approach, underlining that both men and women may have relational identities: "The extent to which humans view themselves as having autonomy or being entwined in a network of relationships is a spectrum (not an either/or box), and individual men and women fall across this spectrum" (16).

Siri Hustvedt's Interdisciplinary Approach to Relational Identity

The work of the American author Siri Hustvedt constitutes a new building block in the ongoing reconfiguration of identity as relational and connected. Hustvedt interrogates the crossing points between self and other and highlights the "fabric of relations" (Lyotard) from which selves emerge. The author conjoins personal experiences with philosophical, medical, aesthetic, and neurobiological discourses in her fictional and nonfictional works to shed new light on self-other relations and subjectivity. The great achievement of Hustvedt's works is the creation of relational models of identity by way of interconnecting these various disciplinary discourses, thus opening up new avenues to understanding the self.

Hustvedt was born in Northfield, Minnesota, in February 1955. Hustvedt's parents, Lloyd Hustvedt and Ester Vegan, both have Norwegian roots; while her father grew up in Minnesota, her mother lived in Norway until the age of thirty, when she immigrated to Minnesota. Hustvedt has three sisters: Liv, Asti, and Ingrid. Early on, Hustvedt became deeply immersed in literature, reading classics

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[3] Elias, in the postscript to his *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, throws a critical glance on Western civilization's privileging of the individual and the idea of a "homo clausus": "The conception of the individual as *homo clausus*, a little world in himself who ultimately exists quite independently of the great world outside, determines the image of human beings in general. . . . his core, his being, his true self appears likewise as something divided within him by an invisible wall from everything outside, including every other human being.. . . But the nature of this wall itself is hardly ever considered and never properly explained. Is the body the vessel which holds the true self locked within it? Is the skin the frontier between 'inside' and 'outside'? What in the human container is the container, and what is the contained?" (472).

like *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and *Wuthering Heights* at the age of thirteen (cf. *Yonder* 27). She attended St. Olaf College in Minnesota and moved to New York in 1978 in order to get a Ph.D. in English at Columbia University. In 1982, Hustvedt married the writer Paul Auster, with whom she has a daughter, Sophie, who is now a singer and actress. Hustvedt and Auster live together in Brooklyn.[4] She has written five novels (the fifth, *The Summer without Men*, is scheduled to be published in 2010), three essay collections (one of which deals exclusively with painting), a book of poetry, a memoir (to be published in March 2010), and a number of contributions to periodicals, online magazines, and anthologies.

During her studies at Columbia University, Hustvedt acquired many of the ideas she later developed in her fictional writing. In her unpublished dissertation thesis**,** *Figures of Dust: A Reading of* Our Mutual Friend (1986), Hustvedt examines Charles Dickens's novel for elements of fragmentation, ambiguity, and boundary dissolution. For example, she names Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage and M. M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogical Imagination* as two of the major influences in her interpretation of Dickens—both thinkers have continued to influence Hustvedt in her later writings. Hustvedt also quotes Mary Douglas's reflections on the metaphorical danger of margins, which the British anthropologist famously developed in *Purity and Danger*—another key concept of Hustvedt's later works.[5]

In *Figures of Dust*, Hustvedt notes that in Dickens's fictional worlds, "[t]he border between self and outside world is often blurred" (5) and reads *Our Mutual Friend* as a novel in which personal identity "is a very delicate thing, caught up in a drama of sliding borders and meaningless signs that calls into question the notion of an a priori self" (5). Hustvedt furthermore already states what is to be one guiding concept of all her future work to this point: "There can be no 'I' without a 'you'" and "a whole identity is dependent on the recognition of another person" (9). The same observation can be made about Hustvedt's own fiction, which is

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[4] Most of the information is available through Hustvedt's own autobiographical essays and interviews.

[5] See Chapter 4.3 of this study.

consistently concerned with the fragility of identity boundaries and the negotiation of subjectivity in self-other relations. In her work, Hustvedt sets out to dive deeply under the surface of this seemingly simple statement, into an intriguingly dense space of philosophical, medical, and aesthetic discourses, always coming up with new material to be woven into her construction of intersubjective and relational identity.

In Hustvedt's novel *What I Loved* (2003), the character Violet advances a theory of "mixing," according to which self and other overlap and cannot be separated. In a key passage, Violet makes the observation that "'It isn't: I think, therefore I am. It's: I am because you are'" (91). This defiance of the Cartesian self lies at the center of Hustvedt's writing project, as she consistently discloses the self's relatedness to the world and others. This study sets out to explore the repercussions of this idea of mixing in Hustvedt's negotiation of relational identity and the boundaries of the self. In her work, Hustvedt discloses the manifold interdependencies between self and other and strives to develop a dialogical model of selfhood. She highlights the fragility of identity constructions, always showing the self in relation to the other and emphasizing moments of transgression and undecidability, moments in which the 'I' cannot find a clear distinction from the 'we' of its personal past and social environment. Hustvedt's interest lies in those moments when what is usually perceived as a barrier established between inside and outside collapses, when the self becomes trapped in an overstimulation through the environment, and when identities get absorbed by the outside and overwhelmed.

Yet, rather than confirming the death of the subject proclaimed by postmodernist registers, Hustvedt nevertheless allows for and insists on the necessity of an inner core of the self. There are many instances that illustrate the need for protective boundaries of the self against too much mixing. Although Hustvedt's concept of identity can safely be termed relational and intersubjective, there are just as certainly limits to the desirable degree of relationality. Hustvedt's repeated emphasis on the importance of a protected inner core and the recurring attraction that characters feel to other characters' secret, unrevealed inner places, show that Hustvedt does not promote a complete merging of self and other. A dialogical

model of selfhood requires a degree of separation between two subjects in order to create a space *in between* in which dialogue happens. In her writing, Hustvedt thematizes the movement between isolation and coalescence, closed and open bodies, autonomy and heteronomy. At times, the other is shown to be a potential source of terror in its penetration of the self; at other times, there are instances that display mutual love and affirmative interdependence.

The author's sensitivity toward the fragile and relational nature of the self is anchored in an embedding of the self in the body, fostering a conjunction of philosophical and biological investigations of the self. In her writings, Hustvedt reinforces "The notion that the body [i]s both an agent and an object of individual self-positioning" (Brandt 17). Hustvedt complicates this idea of self-positioning by drawing attention to the precarious instability of the subject's position—her characters' identities are frequently disrupted by the breaking down of the border between self and other. The body constitutes a medium of exchange between inside and outside, of communication between self and other. The author draws on phenomenological approaches to embodiment as well as medical discourses to elucidate the interconnections between embodiment and relational identity. Hustvedt's interpretation of the body and identity will be of particular importance in my reading of her reconstruction of hysteria and anorexia as disorders related to the boundaries of the self.

In addition, the body, perspective, and space are cornerstones in Hustvedt's ideas about vision and art. In *The Shaking Woman Or a History of My Nerves* (2010), Hustvedt refers to Edmund Husserl's distinction between two ways of experiencing the body—in German, the body can either be called *Körper* or *Leib* (90). "*Körper* is our physical body, a thing," she explains, "the one that can be seen from a third-person point of view in medicine and science as an inert object or 'it.' *Körper* is what can be dissected. *Leib* is the lived body, the animated first-person psychobiological experiencing being. We can find *Körper* in *Gray's Anatomy*. We find *Leib* in ourselves, the embodied 'I'" (*Shaking Woman* 90). This distinction can be applied to the various manifestations of the subject-object dynamics at play in Hustvedt's novels. As I will explore in more detail below, the relation

between self and other can either be characterized by an acknowledgment of the other as *Leib*—a lived being—or by reducing the other to a *Körper*—a dissectable object ready to be seized and controlled. This distinction will for example resonate in the contrasting interpretations of the gaze by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bakhtin, and Irigaray (see Chapter 3); whether self-other relations are portrayed as a struggle between subject and object or as a reciprocal exchange between two subjects oftentimes depends on the approach to the other as either *Körper* or *Leib*. In her fictional work, Hustvedt introduces both moments in which characters find themselves objectified by the other and moments of mutual acknowledgment of the other's lived being and celebration of intersubjective identity formation.

Collaboration between Author and Reader

Hustvedt's theory of intersubjective co-existence furthermore stimulates a rediscovery of the bond between author and reader. Hustvedt conceives of the work of art as a place of intersubjective mixing, as a collaboration between artist, model, and observer. This notion of a dialogical coproduction can also be applied to the author's creation and the reader's reception of the text. Reading, like observing a painting, happens in the space between the reader/viewer and the author/artist. Hustvedt reflects,

> All this—mixing—for me comes out of an idea of the between. The work of art is actually created in the act of viewing between the viewer and the thing that the viewer is seeing. The artist makes it … and then something else happens every time somebody looks at it, and that's a form of the between, it is a dialogical experience—reading, listening to music, or looking at a work of art. (Personal Interview 9 Dec. 2005)

Hustvedt's approach to the act of reading gives an impulse to reconsider the relationship between author and reader. If one applies Hustvedt's idea to literary criticism, the author must be re-established as a subjective presence in a dialogical method of producing the text. Hustvedt thus promotes what Jeffrey T. Nealon has called a "[d]ialogic intersubjectivity understood in terms of an impassioned play of voices" (33), a creative interaction between author and reader.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur also describes the creation of a fictional work as a form of play between self and other: "Whoever plays is also played: the rules of the game impose themselves upon the player, prescribing the to and fro and de-

limiting the field where everything 'is played'" (186). The reciprocality of this play, the to and fro between author and reader, express the shared power between author and reader—the play requires at least two players, and a space between in which meaning circulates. As in Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical structure of all language, the text occupies a space between the author and the reader—neither has complete control over its meaning. Bakhtin states, ". . . language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (*Dialogic* 293). Hustvedt follows Bakhtin in the positioning of language on the threshold between self and other. She states:

> "I" exists only in relation to "you." Language takes place *between* people, and it is acquired through others, even though we have the biological equipment necessary to learn it. If you lock a child in a closet, he will not learn to speak. Language is outside us and inside us, part of a complex dialectical reality betwee people. Words cross the borders of our bodies in two directions, outside in and inside out, and therefore the minimal requirement for a living language is two people. (*Shaking Woman* 55)

The author hence entrusts her work to the reader in a co-productive effort. The text dwells on a threshold of ambiguity between author and reader.

Reading, then, becomes yet another form of boundary crossing. As Hustvedt contends, "The closest we can get to this entrance into the other person's mind is through reading. . . . We have access to a stranger's internal narrator. Reading, after all, is a way of living inside another person's words" (*Shaking* 148). In an inquiry into the nature of storytelling and the role of the author, Hustvedt emphasizes the dialogical orientation of the author's words toward an imaginary reader:

> In language, we represent the passage of time as we sense it—the *was*. the *is*, the *will be.* We abstract and we think and we tell. We order our memories and link them together, and those disparate fragments gain an owner: the "I" of autobiography, who is no one without a "you." For whom do we narrate, after all? Even when alone in our heads, there is a presumed other, the second person of our speech. (*Shaking* 198)

Highlighting the self's need for a coherent narrative structure of personal events, Hustvedt gives expression to the other's significance in the narration of the self. Hustvedt here positions the intentionality of the text in the space between the author and the reader. The author depends on the reader as a necessary dialogical partner.

James W. Newcomb, in his introduction to Eugene Simion's *The Return of the Author*, states that the author has been "on the fringes of critical discourse" for

decades—starting with the New Criticism in the 1950s and ending up in more or less complete banishment from criticism in the late 1960s with Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Foucault's "What is an Author?" (1969) (see Newcomb 1-2). The dismissal of the author's presence has since been reviewed and partially revoked, especially due to the growing importance of autobiography studies and the return to ethics in literature (see Hoffmann and Hornung). Eugen Simion, in his *The Return of the Author*, opposes Barthes and Foucault and pleads for an acknowledgment of the author's existence in the work. He writes: "All art is essentially a 'human presence'; psychology, politics, and aesthetics are governed by the same subject, meeting and communicating within the same *human existence*" (91).

In Hustvedt's works, the reader feels this "human presence" and the drive to communicate thoughts. Hustvedt's authorial presence enters into a close connection with the implied reader. Simion's stance that "[t]he author does not vanish from sight as soon as the book has been completed" is particularly fitting for Hustvedt's writing, since she so deeply inscribes her fictional work with traces of herself. Hustvedt includes a wealth of personal material in her novels, and considers her narrators as "alter egos of some kind who embody complex parts of myself."[6] In a sense, Hustvedt's novels are all self-portraits. As Bill, a main character in her novel *What I Loved*, states: "'I realized that I was mapping out a territory in myself I hadn't seen before, or maybe a territory between her [Violet, his model and lover] and me'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 15). Hustvedt, in the same vein, maps out a territory between herself and her characters, and ultimately between herself and the reader.

The Novels

In her novels, Hustvedt emphasizes elements of intersubjectivity and investigates moments of boundary crossing and ambiguity. Hustvedt's first novel, *The Blindfold* (1992), stars Iris Vegan, a young Columbia graduate student, who

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[6] This is a quotation from a message that Hustvedt sent to the author on November 4, 2009.

finds herself on a quest for her own identity during which she goes through a series of relationships—all of which fall apart—and ends up fleeing from the novel "like a bat out of hell" (*Blindfold* 221). As the name Iris Vegan—Iris is Siri spelled backwards, and Vegan is Hustvedt's mother's maiden name—reveals, the protagonist is an alter ego of the author. The novel's plot is divided into four interlinked narratives, which are not organized chronologically. The novel starts out with Iris working for the mysterious Mr. Morning, who asks her to record descriptions of objects that belonged to a woman who was murdered in his building. As Iris's suspicions over Mr. Morning's involvement in the death of the woman grow, she ends up quitting the job without being paid. In the second narrative, Iris is involved in an unhappy love affair with Stephen, who introduces her to his friend George. George, a photographer, takes a picture of Iris that she later perceives as an assault on her identity, a complete distortion of herself. The episode centers on the photograph's effect on Iris's identity and her relationships with Stephen and George. The novel's third part describes Iris's struggle with a long and extreme bout of migraine. Her illness sends her into Mount Olympus hospital, where she has a moment of connection with Mrs. O, a deranged old woman. The last episode deals with Iris's relationships to Michael Rose, her professor, for whom she translates a German novella, *Der Brutale Junge*, into English, and Paris, a mysterious character who moves in and out of her life. The translation of the novella gradually takes over Iris's life and leads her to dress up as a man at night and behave like Klaus, the story's protagonist. The various assaults on Iris's identity leave her destabilized and fragile—she is an example of a self unable to find a healthy balance between self and other. Her attempts to relate to other people result in a decomposition of her own identity, which illustrates the need for an inner core that is protected from outside forces.

The Enchantment of Lily Dahl (1996) is set in Webster, an imaginary town in Minnesota. The protagonist Lily, a young actress who works at the Ideal Café, starts an affair with Ed Shapiro, a painter from New York taking temporary residence in the small town to do a series of portraits of Webster locals. The story develops into an uncanny mystery embedded in town folklore, as mysterious sight-

ings of a man walking around with a corpse that looks like Lily are reported. Lily sets out to solve the mystery, which does not come to a happy ending. A coming-of-age story, *Lily Dahl* interrogates identity, representation in art, the voyeuristic look, the meaning of language, and life in a community. Hustvedt explains that the narrative "is organized by Lily's menstrual cycle, during which she misses one period, a traumatic absence" and "everything relates to everything else" (Interview by Nissen 123). This study will focus on the novel's revaluation of the voyeuristic gaze as a mode of breaking down the boundary between self and other.

While Hustvedt's first two novels are told from the point of view of young female narrators, her third novel, *What I Loved* (2003), introduces an aging male protagonist, the art historian Leo Hertzberg. The novel is set in the New York art world and deals with questions of identity, love, loss, art, social disorders, and perception, among other themes. Leo recounts his friendship with the artist Bill, which is shaped by their common love of art. Both men become fathers at almost the same time, and while Leo suffers the terrible loss of his son Matt at age eleven, Bill sees his son Mark grow into a lying and cheating, inapproachable adolescent. While Bill finds fulfilled love with his model and lover Violet after divorcing Lucille, Mark's mother, Leo's wife Erica moves from New York to California after their son's death. Violet writes books about hysteria and anorexia nervosa,[7] which lead her to develop her theory of mixing, which is central to both Hustvedt's writing in general and to this study in particular. Hysteria and anorexia, according to Violet, are disorders that relate to the boundaries of the self—either exploding them or building them up—and they shed light on the mixed nature of the human experience in general.

The Sorrows of an American (2008) is a novel about loss, trauma, grief, secrets, and desire. *The Sorrows of an American* triangulates the terror of World War I, the trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the sorrows of personal loss. It is a fictional version of a grief narrative, since Hustvedt transfers her personal experi-

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[7] Violet's dissertation on hysteria is based on Hustvedt's sister Asti's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "Science Fictions: Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'eve future* and Late-Nineteenth-Century Medical Constructions of Femininity" (see Hustvedt's Acknowledgments in *What I Loved* 370).

ence of losing her father into the protagonist Erik's—whom she thinks of as her imaginary brother (*Shaking Woman* 5)—struggle to come to terms with the loss of his father. Including original passages from her father's memoir, Hustvedt conceives of the novel as a collaboration between herself and her father (*Sorrows* 306). The story follows Erik, a divorced psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, as he tries to come to terms with his father's death and with his own loneliness. His sister Inga and his niece Sonia also struggle through a period of grief after having lost their husband and father, the writer Max Blaustein. In addition to the personal trauma of bereavement, Sonia is deeply traumatized by witnessing 9/11. Erik falls in unrequited love with his new tenant, the Jamaica-born Miranda Casaubon,[8] who moves into the garden apartment of his house together with her daughter Eglantine. While Eglantine and Erik become good friends, Erik's desire for Miranda is never fulfilled. Eglantine's father, Jeffrey Lane, who separated from Miranda before their daughter's birth, is an artist who takes photographs of people without their consent. Throughout the novel, moments of despair and loneliness are balanced by close connections between family members and friends. In a grand finale, Hustvedt brings together the various threads of narrative in one incantation, a moment which resonates with memories of the deceased and ends on a notion of both loss and rebirth.

Nonfictional Work

In two essay collections, *Yonder* (1998) and *A Plea for Eros* (2006), Hustvedt assembles autobiographical essays, reflections on themes such as language, desire, and gender, life in New York and Minnesota, her Norwegian heritage, cross-dressing, and interpretations of literature by Scott F. Fitzgerald, Henry James, and Charles Dickens. A third collection, *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting* (2005), focuses exclusively on painting. Hustvedt ventures into the

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8 The name evokes Shakespeare's Miranda, who exclaims: "O brave new world, that has such creatures in't!" and Edward Casaubon of *Middlemarch*, whom protagonist Dorothea marries in the hope of acquiring some higher wisdom, only to discover that he is just an old man whose studies bring more confusion than enlightenment. Miranda's name thus already foreshadows both Erik's infatuation with her and the ensuing disappointment of his desire.

worlds of Goya, Vermeer, Chardin, Giorgione, and other painters, scrutinizing specific artworks from a very personal perspective, highlighting moments of intersubjectivity. Hustvedt's theory of art as a collaboration between the artist (the author, the painter) and the recipient (the reader, the observer) opens up new ways of thinking about art perception.

Most recently, Hustvedt has written *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* (to be published in March 2010), an account of her quest to explore a series of seizures of uncontrollable shaking she suffered after her father's death. In her attempt to find out the origin of this shaking, Hustvedt goes on a journey of the body and the mind, combining her own experiences at various medical inspections with case studies, philosophy, and other medical information.

Literature on Hustvedt

Literary criticism on Hustvedt's works so far has been surprisingly sparse and has hardly investigated Hustvedt's inclusion of medical and neurobiological discourses that are so formative to her rethinking of identity. The few articles reviewed below all provide intriguing insights into Hustvedt's works, yet naturally cannot achieve the scope of a full-length study. Of these publications, Hubert Zapf's essay "Narrative, Ethics, and Postmodern Art in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*" (2008) bears the closest affinity to this study. Zapf observes a return to ethics in recent literature—in what he calls the "after postmodernism" period[9]—which is marked by "a new attention to the relationship of texts to concrete, biographically embedded subjects and to the wider context of the intersubjective life-world" (171). This shift away from "pure self-referentiality" to "a constant and complex mediation between signifier and signified, subject and experience, text and life, aesthetics and ethics" (171) is epitomized, as Zapf argues, in Hustvedt's novel *What I Loved.*

Claudia Öhlschläger dedicates a chapter of her work on voyeurism and the construction of gender, *Unsägliche Lust des Schauens* (1996), to Hustvedt's novel

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[9] Gerhard Hoffmann and Alfred Hornung have noted a "moral turn of postmodernism" in the 1980s (v)—the turn to ethics thus already originated in postmodern literature.

The Blindfold. Öhlschläger accuses Hustvedt of reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes in portraying Iris as a powerless and naïve victim of the male gaze.[10] Öhlschläger furthermore links Iris's hysterical behavior regarding her photographical representation with Jean-Martin Charcot's hysterical patients at the Salêptrière, thus foreshadowing Hustvedt's later investigation of hysteria and photography in *What I Loved.*

In her article "Gendering Curiosity: The Double Games of Siri Hustvedt, Paul Auster and Sophie Calle" (2000) Elizabeth Bronfen interprets Iris's own fascination with the identity of the dead woman whose objects she is supposed to describe as a form of gendered curiosity that she shares with the French conceptualist Sophie Calle. Bronfen also analyzes Iris's encounter with the photographer George and her horror of a specific photograph he takes of her. Bronfen furthermore analyzes Iris's identification with the protagonist of *The Brutal Boy* and her ensuing cross-dressing as a hysterical re-enactment and translation of her own self into a fictional character ("Gendering" 286). Hustvedt's character Violet connects hysterical identity to the Pygmalion myth—another myth of the creation of a female out of non-living substance. Bronfen closes her assessment of Iris with the conclusion that Iris's hope at the bottom of the box is her ability to put a halt to her existence as "the fetishized object of male curiosity" ("Gendering" 290).

Like Bronfen, Christina Ljungberg brings together Hustvedt's, Auster's, and Calle's works in her article "Triangular Strategies: Cross-Mapping the Curious Spaces of Siri Hustvedt, Paul Auster and Sophie Calle" (2007). Ljungberg investigates the "narrated spaces" in which Auster's, Hustvedt's and Calle's texts "overlap and mirror each other" in a "cartographic exploration" (113). Ljungberg points out the various appearances that Calle, Auster, and Hustvedt make in each other's works; for example, Ljungberg spotlights Hustvedt's appearance as herself in Auster's *Leviathan*, discovers Calle's male alter ego in Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*, and reads Bill Wechsler as a personification of Paul Auster in *What I Loved* (cf. Ljungberg 112). Ljungberg applies concepts of performance, performativity, and liminality to her reading of the three artists' works. Ljungberg reads Hustvedt's

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[10] For a critical assessment of Öhlschläger's accusation, see Chapter 3.1.4 of this study.

concept of "Yonder," the neither here nor there, as an example of liminal space (117-118). The critic furthermore analyzes the relationship of photography and identity in *The Blindfold* by applying Susan Sontag's reflections on photography, which will also be part of my analysis (however, I also use Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* as well as a wider philosophical frame of vision and subject-object relations).

Susanne Wegener, in her article "Die 'Kulturelle Initiation' der Lily Dahl: Identität und Zeichen in Siri Hustvedts *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*," examines Hustvedt's second novel for the interconnections between cultural codes and subjectivity. Drawing on the semiotics of Umberto Eco and Charles Sanders Peirce, Wegener reads Lily Dahl as a character who is both topographically and biographically in a liminal position and interprets Lily's initiation experience in terms of culturally defined systems of representation (51). In her interpretation of symbolical value within *Lily Dahl*, Wegener weaves together several layers of cultural signification and mythology, from "*garbage archeology*" (56), palimpsest, and collage to the myths of Cinderella and Pygmalion (57). Wegener regards the character Martin Peterson as a collector of cultural codes who is obsessed with filling the ontological gap between the culturally coded sign and its referent (58). She furthermore interprets artistic representation in painting and performance and comes to the conclusion that one of the novel's central messages is that subjective reality is always produced through overlapping systems of signification.

Method and Chapters

This study goes beyond the present body of criticism on Hustvedt in its emphasis on the author's theory of mixing and in its particular focus on theories of the body that enrich her concept of relational identity. The following chapters will provide an interdisciplinary examination of identity formation in Siri Hustvedt's works. This study integrates intersubjective philosophy, philosophies of vision and the body, medical discourses, relational psychoanalysis, and neurobiological findings, providing an in-depth analysis of the underlying discursive threads woven together in Hustvedt's concept of intersubjective identity.

In this study, I am primarily concerned with relational conceptions of identity. For this reason, I forego a traditional chronological approach to Hustvedt's works, although I will comment on shifts and changing directions as well. Adopting a thematic approach to her work reveals the relations among and development of themes in the various novels and the interdisciplinary cross-sections. The single parts relate to each other in many ways, and thinkers like Bakthin or Merleau-Ponty appear in several chapters. Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective phenomenology (Chapter 2), for example, reappears in the discussion of vision and art as well as the investigation of anorexia nervosa and references to mirror neurons. Bakhtin's writings about self-other relations include his philosophy of dialogue (Chapter 2), reflections on the self and vision (Chapter 3), and the grotesque body (Chapter 4). On a thematic level, the idea of mirroring, for example, plays an important role in the chapter on vision and art, the chapter on psychoanalysis, and the concluding remarks on mirror neurons. Hustvedt's works do not lend themselves to a clear categorization, since it is one of her main goals to rediscover identity by making new connections between formerly disjointed discourses.

The second chapter introduces philosophies of intersubjectivity. The texts introduced here all measure the balance between identity and difference, between merging and incommensurability that Hustvedt negotiates in the various character constellations in her novels. The philosophers introduced in this chapter cover the distance between a clash of consciousnesses (Hegel) and an encounter of mutual completion (Buber and Bakhtin), granting access to a sense of self that is no longer anguished by otherness but instead accepts and welcomes the other as separate yet connected part of one's self-identity. I argue that Hustvedt's writing comprises constellations in which self-other relations are determined by struggle, appropriation and intrusion as well as intersubjective encounters characterized by a dialogical, harmonious complementation of self and other. The chapter begins with Hegel's philosophy of self-consciousness as a basis of modern Western approaches to self-other relations. Hegel's master-slave parable will be at the center of attention, since the dynamics of recognition developed here will play an important role in my analysis of vision and photography (Chapter 3; especially Lacan's

mirror stage and Sartre's concept of the look). Martin Buber's and M. M. Bakhtin's philosophies of dialogism provide models of reciprocal self-other relations. For both of them, two is the smallest unit of life—identity without relation and dialogue is basically impossible. Edmund Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective phenomenologies are examined with a special focus on their interpretation of the self's embodiment and the relation to other embodied consciousnesses. This chapter serves as a theoretical basis to which the study returns throughout to elucidate intersubjective connections in Hustvedt's works.

In the first part of Chapter 3, I connect the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's, the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's, and the Russian theorist M. M. Bakhtin's approaches to vision and the self and apply them to Hustvedt's novel *The Blindfold*. All three theories negotiate the relationship between subject and object in the dynamics of mirroring between self and other. The self is a hole in vision, which makes the other a powerful partner or antagonist in self-perception. In a discussion of photography in Hustvedt's works, I explain the potential of alienation and misrecognition in the photographic representation with the help of Roland Barthes's and Susan Sontag's theories. In the second part of the chapter, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and Belgian feminist psychoanalyst and linguist Luce Irigaray's theories of vision and touch are applied to vision and voyeurism in Hustvedt's novel *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl.* Finally, I reconsider Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and employ them in an interpretation of intersubjective art constellations in *What I Loved.* Hustvedt here introduces art as a collaborative act between self and other, a positive manifestation of mixing.

The fourth chapter explores the significance of physical boundaries to constructions of identity in *What I Loved.* After an introductory analysis of the self's relation to boundaries in general and women's particular transgression of the self-other boundary during pregnancy, the chapter will provide a detailed interpretation of hysteria and anorexia in *What I Loved* and interrogate the gender-specificity of these disorders. I interpret Hustvedt's approach to anorexia with the help of Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body and Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. Hustvedt defines both disorders as boundary-related: while hysteria entails an ex-

plosion of boundaries, anorexia is an attempt to close down the boundaries of the self.

In Chapter 5, I assess the relevance of grief and loss in Hustvedt's writing through the lens of relational psychoanalysis. I take up the relational models of psychoanalysis by D. W. Winnicott, John Bowlby, and Jessica Benjamin to examine moments of loss and grief in Hustvedt's *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American.* As pointed out above, the emergence of relational psychoanalysis effected a shift from autonomy to attachment that emphasized the importance of close relations to other people in a child's development. I point to lost connections between the characters—because of being abandoned in childhood, or because of a loved one's death—to illustrate the interwovenness of the characters' identities and the holes that the other's departure leaves in the self.

In the conclusion, I look back at the findings in the previous chapters and connect them with mirror neuron theory, providing an outlook into possible future cross-sections between identity, biology, and literature. Departing from Hustvedt's own connection of mirror neurons and Hegel's philosophy of recognition, the conclusion re-evaluates the idea of a mirroring of consciousnesses through the lens of this neurobiological phenomenon; furthermore, it reviews the development of Hustvedt's writing toward an increased integration of medical and neuroscientific knowledge.

The sum of these observations underlines Hustvedt's pioneering work in the field of identity research. As she progresses in her career as a writer, she probes deeper into the tissue of the self, integrating contemporary medical and neurobiological research as well as her expanding insights into philosophy. Hustvedt's novels are first and foremost novels of ideas; ideas which come to fascinating life in her characters, enticing the reader to enter the fictional space and participate as a recipient of these ideas through the lives of the characters. As noted, reading is another form of mixing, a communication between author and reader. As Hustvedt remarks about her own experience of reading: ". . . the more compelling the voice on the page is, the more I lose my own. I am seduced and give myself up to the other person's words. Moreover, I am often lured in by very different

points of view" (*Shaking Woman* 148). With her own compelling voice, Hustvedt seduces the reader as the various moments of mixing unfurl, the act of reading it-self unfolding as a moment of dialogical mixing.

2 Philosophies of Intersubjectivity

> "The world is mistaken. It imagines that the other takes something from us whereas the other only brings to us, all the time. The other is complex. He can be our enemy, and our friend." (Cixous, "Alterity: Being Human" 189)

In *The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves*, Siri Hustvedt contemplates the interconnectedness of self and other in an intersubjective sphere. She writes, "The subjective world is also an intersubjective world, the world of 'I' and 'you,' and drawing a line between the two isn't easy because others are *of us*" (90; emphasis in original). The absence of a clear demarcation line between "I" and "you" challenges the traditional notion of personal identity. Ideas of enclosure, clear borderlines, and personal autonomy are undermined by this interpenetration of self and other. The task of determining which parts of identity are shared and which are separate turns out to be all but impossible at times; a person is created in and through other people on many levels.

On the level of consciousness, does the self consume the other, negating the unique presence and difference of another being? Are subjects forever bound to clash in a struggle between identity and difference, between subject and object, or are there alternative encounters of mutuality? How can the subject confronted with another subject cope with or even profit from such confrontation? This chapter will introduce a variety of philosophies that help elucidate these questions regarding Hustvedt's work. All philosophies introduced here are relevant in their negotiations of the dichotomy between inside and outside, subject and object. These philosophical theories provide a range of interpretations concerning the degree to which a melting down of the boundaries between self and other is seen as desirable. In one conception of intersubjective relations the other comes to pose a

threat to selfhood, whereas in the next the other becomes an enriching component of a dialogical creation of self.

To Hustvedt, the German idealist philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel is a point of departure, the "modern foundation,"[10] of philosophies of self-other relations. Hegel's tracing of the mind in its evolution from consciousness to absolute spirit in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* introduces various forms of self-other relations, from the antagonistic struggle for recognition revealed in the master-slave stage to the possibilities of mutual recognition in love and family. Hustvedt's affinity with Hegel is particularly obvious in *What I Loved*, where Violet traces the move from autonomous to relational identity as realized in the paradigmatic shift from the Cartesian model of an autonomous *cogito* to Hegel's other-dependent concept of self-consciousness:

> "I've decided that *mixing* is a key term. It's better than *suggestion*, which is one-sided. It explains what people rarely talk about, because we define ourselves as isolated, closed bodies who bump against each other but stay shut.[11] Descartes was wrong. It isn't: I think, therefore I am.[12] It's: I am because you are. That's Hegel—well, the short version." (91)

Violet's theory of mixing embodies the philosophical core of relational identity formation: The individual self cannot exist without relating to an other, and therefore the Cartesian *cogito* with its implications of an *a priori* prestabilized existence of an immaterial, universal, and pure subject (see Krahl 20) is called into question.

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[10] In a personal interview with the author on December 9th, 2005, Hustvedt also confirmed her dedication to Hegel's philosophy: "You can go back to the Greeks and talk about dialogue, but I think the modern foundation of this for me is Hegel and self-consciousness. . . . After I finished my dissertation, I had always been terribly interested in Hegel and I had struggled and read and struggled and read the *Phenomenology* . . . . And my reading of Hegel - which is hardly my private reading - is very much influenced by Kojève, who wrote about Hegel in France after the war and had a tremendous effect on French theory. That rereading of Hegel is the central thing. All of these ideas come out of this new reading of Hegelian dialectics, the self and the other, which became so important. That is a kind of starting point."

[11] Violet's reference to the "isolated, closed bodies who bump against each other but stay shut" can be read as an allusion to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's monads. The German philosopher's monadology describes the universe as comprised of soul-like entities or "self-enclosed entelechies" (Solomon 197) that "have no windows through which something can enter into or depart from them" (Rescher 17). Leibniz's idea of the subject as monad is taken up by Edmund Husserl, whose theory of intersubjectivity will be illustrated below

[12] By positing the supremacy and independence of the mind, Descartes established a separation of mind from body: "His method enclosed consciousness in self-sufficiency: consciousness was made entirely immanent and capable of living its life independently of the body" (Navickas 5). In the Cartesian model, mind and body are like two clocks running parallelly and independently from each other.

The mixing of self and other can have both positive and negative consequences, since crossing the boundaries of the self can be performed both as an act of love and intimacy and as an act of hostile takeover. As Hubert Zapf points out, this ambivalence of mixing is felt throughout the novel:

> The ideology of individualism as a concept of modernity which was especially successful in America, is rejected here in favor of dialogic interdependence. This is by no means a naïve position, as Violet sees the dangers of "mixing" as well: the danger of losing oneself in the other, which has something threatening about it. Violet knows all this from studying the history of cultural pathologies on which she has been working for years, for instance hysterical phenomena of the nineteenth century or the phenomenon of eating disorders in the late twentieth century, which make the boundaries of individuals unstable and fluid. (184)

Zapf here also juxtaposes Hustvedt's idea of mixing with the ideology of an autonomous identity that dominates modern Western culture. Hegel, in his insistence on the other as formative and necessary element of identity formation, provides a basis for Hustvedt's alternative model of self. As Zapf points out, however, the mixing of identities is ultimately always connected with a destabilization of inside-outside boundaries, which can lead to a corrosion of the subject (see Chapter 4).

In addition to Hegel's concept of self-consciousness, the philosophies of dialogism of religious and anthropological thinker Martin Buber and the Russian theorist M. M. Bakhtin as well as the phenomenological approaches to intersubjectivity by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty inform Hustvedt's writing. Buber and Bakhtin share a positive approach to the presence of the other, both addressing possibilities of complementation and reconfirmation. For both philosophers, the only way of life worth living is in a dialogical relationship to the world. Monologue of any kind is a dead end for the human spirit. Both Buber and Bakhtin defend the credo of mutuality and communication against an idealized sense of individuality and autonomy, a credo that Hustvedt reinvigorates in her writing.

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both relate individual experience to kinesthetic sensation—to exist, for both philosophers, means first and foremost to be embodied, to perceive the world via one's body. Husserl, in his Fifth Cartesian Meditation, generates a model of intersubjectivity based on an analogical transfer between self and other: perceiving another body, one can infer the presence of another self-consciousness by an analogical transfer from one's own embodied con-

sciousness to the other. Merleau-Ponty accentuates the interconnectedness of self and other, regarding them as two sides of the same phenomenon, intrinsically tied together in a state in which the subject-object dichotomy is transcended, a notion that is particularly important in Hustvedt's theory of mixing.

2.1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Concept of Self-Consciousness: Between Domination and Mutuality

In his introduction to *Deconstruction in Context*, Mark C. Taylor assesses the lasting influence of German idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) due to the latter's preoccupation with the interrelation of difference and identity. Noting that Hegel, on the one hand, is the ultimate representative of a metaphysics of presence, he also stresses that, on the other hand, "Hegelian reason is fascinated by difference and is irresistibly drawn to the vertiginous question of the other" (Taylor, *Deconstruction* 4). The role of the other remains at the center of contemporary debate, and the Hegelian concept of the master-slave dichotomy and the battle for recognition retains its social and political validity. Taylor's statement that "[p]hilosophy begins and ends with the question of the other" (*Deconstruction* 4) can be said to find its moment of birth in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* the first major modern philosophical work struggling to come to terms with the presence of the other.

In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel aims at reconciling the self and the world in a phenomenology that transcends the unknowability of Kant's "thing-in-itself" and arrives at an all-encompassing theory of the spirit (as the German *Geist* is generally translated). Postulating the essential need for an other to enable the development of self-consciousness, his philosophy of spirit has had a lasting influence on the perception of subjectivity in Western culture. In his observations on the evolution of the human spirit from mere sense perception to absolute knowledge, Hegel became the first modern philosopher to manifest the social nature of self-consciousness. While his contemporary and fellow idealist philosopher Fichte still claimed: "Nothing is more insupportable to me, than to be merely by another, for

another, through another; I must be something for myself and by myself alone" (95), Hegel came to a very different conclusion in his *Phenomenology of Spirit.* In his theory of recognition, Hegel cements the other as indispensable ingredient of the formation of self-consciousness. In order to achieve selfhood, a person is in need of the recognition of another autonomous self, and subjectivity is anchored in the existence of the other. Hegel breaks with the philosophical precedent of his time by destroying the concept of an independent, self-conscious subject. Pursuing his great goal to overcome the dualism between subject and object, Hegel shatters the Cartesian ideal of autonomous identity, proclaimed in the latter's famous *cogito ergo sum*. Hegel grasps the self-doubting subject and exposes it to the presence of the other. His ultimate aim is to sublate the difference between self and other into the unity of an absolute spirit, or absolute idea, which would encompass and reconcile subject and object in a system of identity.

At the root of Hegel's construction of selfhood lies an inherent human desire to consume external objects. Even at the lowest physical level, the self is dependent on its environment. As Charles Taylor holds, "Man cannot remain a simple 'I', simply self-identical, because he needs external things, external life, to live. He is a being of desire" (152).[13] The development of the self leads from a self-reflective inner-directed awareness of self to an outward manifestation of this inner self. In order to attain self-consciousness, the self needs to find itself reflected externally; it needs to claim an object for itself and thus find itself reflected in that object. In this state of desire, the self is in perpetual need of consuming the world it lives in. Thus the inner and the outer are invariably connected—life without this exchange between inside and outside is impossible. The self is captivated by the desire to sublate the difference between being and non-being, to dissolve the boundary between inside and outside: "Das 'begehrende' Selbstbewußtsein existiert als der Widerspruch zwischen dem Bewußtsein seines Seins als Einheit und dem Bewußtsein eines Mangels, eines Nicht-Seins und *ist* zugleich darauf aus, diesen Widerspruch aufzuheben" (Marx 28).

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[13] A rejection of such desire can have fatal consequences, as my discussion of anorexia nervosa will highlight (see Chapter 4.3).

Yet the desire of the self can never be satisfied, since by the appropriation and negation of objects it simply creates the need for further negation:

> . . . self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty . . . . In this satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. . . . Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well. (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 109)

Like Sisyphus behind his rock, the self will eternally be caught in the loop of unfulfilled desire if it does not find another path toward self-realization. The self cannot master the world by consuming it, and it keeps on re-creating its desire, never reaching a state of fulfillment. "Self-consciousness," writes Soll, "expresses itself as desire *in order* to do away with the external world, but instead, by requiring such a world to overcome, it insures the continued existence of such a world and, in turn, the continuance of desire" (*Introduction* 14). What the self truly yearns for is to be reconfirmed in its own existence, not the possession of an object: "Selbstbewußtsein als menschliche Begierde sucht letztlich gar nicht den Besitz eines von ihm begehrten Gegenstandes, sondern sich selbst. Es sucht sich selbst zu gewinnen durch das Gefühl seiner Befriedigung" (Marx 30). In the absence of such satisfaction the self must turn to the other in order to find itself. If the self manages to achieve recognition through an other, its desire may find fulfillment. As Hegel contends, "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*" (*Phenomenology* 110; italics in original).

In the master-slave parable, Hegel then plays out the encounter between self and other. A parable about the confrontation between two self-consciousnesses, the master-slave dialectic concerns interpersonal relations before the interference of institutions and social rules. In a way, it is thus the natural state between people before the formation of society (cf. Solomon 427). However, this stage of conflict between master and slave is not the end of the dialectical development of consciousness as demonstrated in the *Phenomenology*, but rather an element of selfhood that will be synthesized into a higher sphere along the way to the ideal state of the absolute spirit. Each human being carries both master and slave inside,

and "the shifting pattern of psychological domination and servitude within the individual ego" as well as "the interior consequences wrought by the external confrontation of the Self and the Other" (Kelly, "Notes" 165) are more significant to this reading than purely social, historical, and political dimensions.

At the beginning of the section "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," in which he explores the master-slave relation, Hegel writes: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (*Phenomenology* 111). Self-consciousness is reliant on the existence of another self-consciousness, as it depends on the other as a source of recognition. As Marx points out,

> Die Gewißheit seiner selbst kann dies einzelne Ich nicht in einem *un*mittelbaren Bezug auf einen einzelnen anderen, ihm gegebenen Gegenstand finden. Es muß vielmehr über *andere selbstbewußte Iche* erst einen Bezug zu der Sphäre begehrter Gegenstände überhaupt herstellen. Es kann sich nur in anderen selbstbewußten Ichen und dann erst durch sie vermittelt in der Welt begehrter Gegenstände wiederfinden. Dies gelingt ihm aber nur nach einem Kampf mit den anderen Subjekten, einem Kampf um Anerkennung. (23-24)

This mediation through another self-conscious being is a necessary step in the movement toward self-consciousness. By this dependence on another self, the self's absoluteness is compromised. Only through its reflection in another consciousness can the self relate to the world of things. Ultimately, this need to be mediated by another subject leads to an essential conflict between self and other, since both strive toward a domination of their opposite in order to enforce him to recognize their identity:

> On the assumption that a constitutive subjectivity must be self-determining, that the categorial structure of any subject's experience cannot be said to be grounded on a beyond or a given, we must consider the possibility of a chaotic struggle for supremacy among opposed self-consciousnesses, a struggle not just for simply supremacy at a time, but for permanent supremacy and so recognition. (Pippin 163)

This results in a life-and-death struggle, in which "each seeks the death of the other" (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 113). Due to an instinct of self-preservation, the self attempts to force its being onto the other, regardless of life-endangering consequences. If, however, the other is killed in the process, the self can no longer be recognized. Hence, killing the opponent will not do—instead, the other needs to be transformed into a consciousness that is no longer independent but subjugated to the will of the self. Therefore, in this stage of the spirit's evolution, the only pos-

sible form of cohabitation is that of master and slave. In Hegel's words, "one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman" (*Phenomenology* 115).

Significantly, in the end the master's triumph over the slave becomes void. Since the slave only reflects the master under threat of death, he loses his independence and can no longer provide a genuine mediation of the master's self. As Charles Taylor explains, "The recognition is onesided; slave is forced to recognize master, but not vice versa. But for this very reason the upshot is of no value for the master. His vis-à-vis is not seen to be a real other self, but has been reduced to subordination to thing. Recognition by him is therefore worthless" (154). In the end, the slave turns out to be in a more privileged position than the master, because through his work he "becomes conscious of what he truly is" (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 118). This comes about, according to Hegel, because work "is desire held in check . . . ; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing" (118). Rather than consuming the object and thus reproducing desire, the slave controls the object without losing himself in it and can thus find a satisfaction that is denied to the master. In addition, he "at least has before him a being who exists for himself in the master" (C. Taylor 154). This, as Taylor also points out, becomes a crucial point in Marx's interpretation of the master-slave dialectic, in which the slave is seen to emerge triumphantly, as slavery itself prepared him for liberation.

The master-slave stage, however, is ultimately transcended in the evolution of the spirit. Robert Williams sees the state of consciousness reached in the situation between master and slave not as "a 'realization' of the *concept* of recognition"; instead, he calls it "its suppression or perversion" (*Recognition* 170). Although Williams may take his criticism of the mater-slave relation too far—if the master-slave relation were *not* a realization of recognition, it hardly would have remained an integrated part of the *Phenomenology*—it must be read as a dialectic step towards, and not as the final point of, absolute spirit. Domination and subservience are not the ideal states of self-consciousness, but they are necessary components of the path toward perfection. In their *Aufhebung* they remain present even

in the stage of the Absolute, and as the first dimension of self-consciousness, they retain their essential importance for an understanding of selfhood and identity. The encounter between two self-consciousnesses progresses from the initial state of struggle to a state of harmony upon the individuals' entry into a social order. As Hegel himself explains in his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830):

> Der Kampf des Anerkennens und die Unterwerfung unter einen Herrn ist die Erscheinung, in welcher das Zusammenleben der Menschen als ein Beginnen der Staaten hervorgegangen ist. . . . Es ist der äußerliche oder erscheinende Anfang der Staaten, nicht ihr substantielles Princip. (431)

Thus the fight for recognition represents merely a step in the development of the mind. As Hegel continues in his *Enzyklopädie*, the rudimentary form of particular self-consciousness will be transformed into a general self-consciousness through the establishment of social structures regulating individual behavior:

> Das allgemeine Selbstbewußtseyn ist das affirmative Wissen seiner selbst im andern Selbst, deren jedes als freie Einzelnheit absolute Selbständigkeit hat . . . Diß allgemeine Wiederscheinen des Selbstbewußtseyns . . . ist die Form des Bewußtseyns der Substanz jeder wesentlichen Geistigkeit, der Familie, des Vaterlandes, des Staats . . . (432-33)

As Dews states, the master-slave stage "represents the maximal disequilibrium of self-consciousness, and it is from this point that the long peregrination of consciousness towards an adequate concept of itself will begin. Clearly, such a concept can only emerge when full reciprocity becomes possible . . ." (54).

The prominent focus on Hegel's master-slave parable by later thinkers is indicative of a tendency to emphasize moments of individual power and struggle rather than a reciprocal understanding between self and other. Hegel, however, did not stop at the stage of individual autonomy, but strove to develop a system of a social unity in which there is room for alterity as well as a shared perception of the world. Williams writes,

> Without the release and allowing of the other to be as *other, in its difference*, the 'We' would be merely an abstract, parochial identity. The release and affirmation of the other is constitutive of the determinately universal identity of the 'We'. The 'We' is not a return to abstract, parochial self-identity of the original self-certain I. It is a determinate universal that reflects both the common identity and individual differences. (*Hegel's Ethics* 56)

This synthesis of difference and identity is the expression of the absolute spirit, the fulfilment of the dialectical development of consciousness. Hegel gives a preview of this synthesis in the following: "What still lies ahead for consciousness is the

experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (*Phenomenology* 110).[14] Robert Williams also argues for a development from I to We in Hegel's *Phenomenology,* which positions the self in a social community in the stage of the absolute spirit, which Williams regards "as the very accomplishment of mutual-reciprocal recognition" (*Recognition* 14). "Spirit," he writes, "has its existential genesis in interpersonal recognition. It is an I that is a We and a We that is an I. This suggests a hypothesis to be explored, namely, that just as the I is *aufgehoben* or sublated in the We, so recognition is *aufgehoben* in *Geist*" (*Recognition* 14).

The conflict between master and slave thus gets sublated through the individual's participation in a social community. Instead of struggle and chaos, the self now finds a balance in the social structure, in which all pieces fit together in a sort of cosmic harmony. This equilibrium and this new-found connection with the environment—it is no longer felt to be "other," as the self now identifies as part of a whole, thus no longer drawing the boundary line between itself and the world outside: "The whole is a stable equilibrium of all the parts, and each part is a Spirit at home in this whole, a Spirit which does not seek its satisfaction outside of itself but finds it within itself, because it is itself in this equilibrium with the whole" (*Phenomenology* 277).

Thus in Hegel, the particular finds its designation as part of a universal structure; it has no identity beyond its existence as part of a whole. This system determines the community as existential frame beyond which the self cannot achieve full identity. Hence it counteracts notions of individual autonomy and establishes a self-other balance as the basis of fulfilled identity.

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[14] In *What I Loved*, narrator Leo's reflections mirror Hegel's thoughts on the self's immersion in a social context: "What was unwritten then is inscribed into what I call myself. The longer I live the more convinced I am that when I say 'I,' I am really saying 'we'" (22-23).

2.2 Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue: I-It and I-You[15] Relations

The Austrian-born Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's (1878-1965) work is dedicated to a philosophy of dialogism, a philosophy of both interhuman relationships and the relationship between self and God.[16] Buber's approach to human existence is dialogical to the very core; instead of looking at a single individual and his or her environment, he regards a minimum of two individuals who are in relation to each other as the smallest, irreducible unit of human existence. "If you consider the individual by himself," Buber writes, "then you see of man just as much as you see of the moon; only man with man provides a full image" (*Between* 205). In order to investigate human nature, one hence needs to observe how the individual acts in the presence of another—in isolation, there is no exchange and no communication through which the individual may disclose parts of his or her inner being. Buber is not primarily interested in hidden psychological elements of the self but rather sees the communication between self and other as the significant target of investigation. He notes that psychology "is only the hidden accompaniment to the conversation itself, the phonetic event fraught with meaning, whose meaning is to be found neither in one of the two partners nor in both together; but only in the dialogue itself, in this 'between' which they live together" (*Knowledge* 75). According to Buber, all life is dialogical, and there is a perpetual flow of energy between self and other:

> Consider man with man, and you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who endures, the attacking force and the defending force, the

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[15] As Walter Kaufmann, the translator of the volume, remarks in his prologue to *I and Thou*, the English "Thou" is different from the German "Du": "German lovers say *Du* to one another, and so do friends. *Du* is spontaneous and unpretentious, remote from formality, pomp, and dignity . . . . Thou immediately brings to mind God; *Du* does not" (14). This is why he uses "You" rather than "Thou" throughout his translation of the essay (though not, however, in the title). Since I am concerned with intersubjectivity rather than the relation to God, I follow Kaufmann's translation and use "I-You" rather than "I-Thou."

[16] Since the frame of this study requires a selective analysis of Buber's philosophy, the exclusive focus will be on his reflections on the relationships between human beings. Naturally this entails a certain reductiveness, since Buber's ultimate vision of an ideal relation was that between the self and God, and "Buber's entire work is permeated by a deep-rooted commitment, intellectual as well as existential, to Hebraic teachings, Talmudic studies, Hassidic wisdom, and Judeo-Christian theology" (Boni 169); yet great shares of Buber's dialogical principle are grounded in real-life encounters between people, and I would like to investigate his dualistic interpretation of these encounters.

> nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted—and always both together, completing one another in mutual contribution, together showing forth man. (*Between* 205)

In Buber's concept of dialogism, self and other hence do not collide in a battle over subjectivity and power, but rather provide the life elixir to each other without which none of them could persist in the world. Buber regards the relation between self and other as a reciprocal interplay of personal energies, which enriches both parties of exchange.

In his major work, the philosophical essay *I and Thou*,[17] Buber distinguishes between two forms of primal relations between people: the I-It relation and the I-You relation. This dual principle is immediately expressed in the first passage of the text:

> The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.
> The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.
> The basis words are not single words but word pairs.
> One basic word is the word pair I-You.
> The other basic word is the word-pair I-It . . . (53)

A human being therefore has two ways of encountering other human beings, either with an attitude of I-You or with an attitude of I-It. While I-You is a relation that affirms co-existence and embraces intersubjective exchange, I-It is a state in which the I objectifies the other. The self has no identity outside of these two relations, since it can only exist in relation to another. As Buber expresses, "There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It" (*I and Thou* 54).

Only in the I-You state is the I present in its whole being, while in the I-It state a part of its being is absent (see *I and Thou* 54). If I encounter the world in an I-It relation, the It is an object with clearly defined borders. In the I-You relation, in contrast, boundaries are transcended: "You has no borders" (*I and Thou* 55). Buber links the contrast between I-You and I-It to a contrast between participation and experience. "Those who experience," he writes, "do not participate in the world. For the experience is 'in them' and not between them and the world" (*I and Thou* 56). In the I-You relation, on the contrary, the participation of both sub-

[17] Originally published under the title *Ich und Du* in 1923.

jects opens up an interhuman space in which genuine dialogue becomes possible. In his essay "Elements of the Interhuman," Buber elaborates:

> But by the sphere of the interhuman I mean solely actual happenings between men, whether wholly mutual or tending to grow into mutual relations. For the participation of both partners is in principle indispensable. The sphere of the interhuman is one in which a person is confronted by the other. We call its unfolding the dialogical. (*Psychology* 75)

The I-You relation is an unmediated encounter in which "Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness" (*I and Thou* 62).[18] Buber here sketches a relation that transcends all preconceived ideas of the other, an opening between self and other that is uninhibited by anticipation and that moves beyond subjective knowledge and memory into a space of wholeness. Mutual love is one example of a dialogical relation, since "love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its 'content' or object; it is between I and You" (*I and Thou* 66).

The I-You relation, furthermore, also transcends the medium of language. In *Between Man and Man*, Buber relates several moments of dialogue beyond words, one of them in the opera house: "In the darkened opera-house there can be established between two of the audience, who do not know one another, and who are listening in the same purity and with the same intensity to the music of Mozart, a relation which is scarcely perceptible and yet is one of elemental dialogue" (204). In this scene, Buber illustrates his emphasis on an inner connection that goes beyond words, in this case triggered by a shared appreciation of music. The intensity of the moment is enhanced by the fact that the elemental dialogue happens between two complete strangers. Utterly free of any element of alienation, conflict, or anxiety, it is possible for two subjects to connect in a moment of transcendent unity. In another example, Buber uses the term "unreserve" do characterize the openness of the self to the other:

> Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour. Indeed it was intended for him, and he receives it unreservedly as he receives all genuine destiny that meets him. . . . .For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally. (*Between* 4)

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[18] For an extensive interpretation of the concept of immediacy in Buber's thought, see Nathan Rotenstreich's *Immediacy and Its Limits.*

Dialogue therefore is conceived of not primarily as an exchange of words, but rather as an unrestrained opening up towards one another. As Rotenstreich notes, "Dialogue is to be understood not only as a mode of linguistic communication, but also as a broad interhuman context, which is both the basis of human mutuality and its central shaping factor" (51). The deep connection that is established in dialogical intersubjectivity transcends both linguistic and spatial distance. As Buber holds, "Not only is the shared silence of two such persons such a dialogue, but also their dialogical life continues, even when they are separated in space, as the continual potential presence of the one to the other, as an unexpressed inter-course" (*Between* 97). Dialogical life hence emerges as a basic setting of the self, an inner state that subsists in the absence of the other.

In such a dialogical encounter, which can only occur as an I-You relation, self and other move beyond the categories of subject and object, entering a space "between" which determines the moment:

> In the most powerful moments of dialogic, where in truth "deep calls unto deep," it becomes unmistakably clear that it is not the wand of the individual or of the social, but of a third which draws the circle round the happening. On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of "between." (Buber, *Between* 204)

The "between" emerges as a space in which the division between inside and outside is subverted—it is neither object nor subject but a shared space between, in which we transcend the boundary between self and other. In the "between," the limits of subjectivity are dismantled and replaced with a notion of self that goes beyond its "sphere of ownness" (Husserl; see below) into the intrinsically mixed state of dialogical existence. Maurice Friedman describes the space of the between as a remainder which reaches beyond the sphere of the individual: "When two individuals 'happen' to each other, there is an essential remainder which is common to them but, which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. That remainder is the basic reality, the 'sphere of between'" (*Buber* 98). In a sense, the dialogical relation seems to effect a kind of synergy, since the positive energy generated between self and other appears as something greater in its intentional force than the sum of its parts. The sphere of the between is essential to Hustvedt's perception of intersubjective encounters. The author turns to the "between" as a space in which

self and other meet and mix, and the sphere of the "between" gains particular significance in the relationship between artwork, artist, and observer (see Chapter 3.4).

The ideal state of I-You, however, is transitory and cannot be maintained indefinitely. It is, as Buber stresses,

> the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in the direct relationship—as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by *means*, the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest one and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary. (*I and Thou* 68)

The relationship between self and other thus fluctuates between unmediated connection and objectification. Buber hence acknowledges the inevitable tension between mutuality and objectification. Hegel's master-slave relation is therefore not entirely ruled out in Buber's vision of the interhuman. Buber and Hegel share their emphasis on the other as essential component in the process of becoming self. The self cannot grow, cannot develop self-consciousness without relating to an other. In opposition to a conception of recognition as a phenomenon whose primary emanation manifests itself in a battle of consciousnesses, however, Buber sees recognition not as an enforced but voluntary acceptance of the "elemental otherness of the other" (*Psychology* 13). In contrast to the Hegelian battle of consciousnesses that we witness in the master-slave dialectic, Buber sees mutual recognition as an inherent trait in human nature: "The basis of man's life with man is twofold, and it is one—the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow men in this way" (*Psychology* 12). In Buber's model of interhuman relations, recognizing and confirming the other's identity is a mutual need, and the more mutual confirmation is granted in a society, the more human it can be called (cf. *Psychology* 11).

In the I-It relation, however, Buber acknowledges the presence of a certain tendency toward mastery and objectification. Yet Buber regards the scope and power of this objectification—which, as we will see in Chapter 3, Jean-Paul Sartre has emphasized in his reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic—as limited. He preserves the self's agency in the presence of the other's observation: "We have in common with all existing beings that we can be made objects of observation. But it

is my privilege as man that by the hidden activity of my being I can establish an impassable barrier to objectification. Only in partnership can my being be perceived as an existing whole" (Buber, *Psychology* 74-75). Buber here posits an "impassable barrier" between self and other, a line of protection against the objectifying force of the other. Hubert Hermans and Harry Kempen describe Buber's notion of a protective barrier as a screen: "The self-boundary structure can be understood as a screen, which people carry with them at all times and can at any time interpose between themselves and the outer situation" (65); this screen, however, is "semipermeable when a certain degree of familiarity exists" (Hermans and Kempen 65). The sharing of the "hidden activity" of the self thus only happens in a dialogical opening up between partners—it is a matter of choice, not coercion. This hidden activity is of particular importance to the self-other relations in Hustvedt's novels: Some characters lack protective barriers, which turns mixing into an identity-endangering concept, others manage to preserve a protected inner core, which enables them to mix with and relate to others without a threat to their identities.

2.3 M. M. Bakhtin's Dialogical Principle

The Russian thinker and critic M. M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) is another major representative of dialogism, and he acknowledges Buber's influence on his thinking (see Friedman, "Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin" 30). Like Buber, Bakhtin regards two people as the minimal unit of human existence. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin writes: "Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (252). Bakhtin's work is a celebration of human diversity, of the "multi-speechedness" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 330) of human society, of difference, and of the endless possibilities inherent in human communication. Whether analyzing the life of dialogue, the nature of discourse and the utterance, the carnival and the grotesque image of the body, or other social and interpersonal phenomena, Bakhtin always points his critical view to the threshold between people, between words, between layers of society. He possesses a keen sensitivity for the energies produced by collapsing forces and boundary crossings, for the power

generated through interhuman communication and struggle. Life, according to Bakhtin, is co-existence, and the more voices are heard in a society, the more power and creative energy is ensured for the collective body of the people.

In Bakhtin's model of dialogism, words are penetrated by their linguistic environment, and people cannot divorce themselves from the discourses surrounding them and the people whom they wish to address. Consciousness is only possible as dialogical consciousness. In a set of notes published under the title "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book" of 1961, Bakhtin's affinities with Hegel and Buber surface, enforcing his emphasis on the dialogic nature of all human intercourse:

> Nonself-sufficiency, the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness. I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). Separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self as the main reason for the loss of one's self. Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*. (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 287)

This passage contains the essence of Bakhtin's dialogical model of self-consciousness: Like Hegel, Bakhtin insists on the presence of another consciousness to enable self-consciousness, and, like Buber, he emphasizes the importance of relating to another person. Bakhtin, however, is vehemently anti-Hegelian in his rejection of a dialectical process sublimating difference and opposition into a final stage of wholeness and unity: "The unified, dialectically evolving spirit, understood in Hegelian terms, can give rise to nothing but a philosophical monologue" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 26), where "genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 81). Any model geared toward a reduction of the "essential, irreducible multi-centeredness, or 'polyphony,' of human life" (Booth, "Introduction" xx) goes deeply against the grain of the Bakhtinian ideal of life as a symphonic dialogue in which no individual voice shall be muted or suffocated by a dominating, deafening, and monologic discourse.

Bakhtin focuses on reciprocal confirmation as the basis of self-other (or I-You) relations: "I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 287). It is essential to note,

nevertheless, that mutuality does not mean unity in the Bakhtinian model. Self and other do not melt into identity, do not form a complete unity in which alterity gets erased by the powers of sameness. As Holquist states, "In dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*. This otherness is not merely a dialectical alienation on its way to a sublation that will endow it with a unifying identity in higher consciousness. On the contrary: in dialogism consciousness is other" (*Dialogism* 18). Again, we see Bakhtin's opposition to Hegelian idealism, which he also underlines in his *Dostoevsky* book: "Ideological monologism found its clearest and theoretically most precise expression in idealistic philosophy. The monistic principle, that is, the affirmation of the unity of *existence*, is, in idealism, transformed into the unity of the *consciousness*" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 80). Bakhtin thus rejects the idea of "absolute spirit," because it would lead to a reduction of the multitude of consciousnesses to an artificial unity and sameness. This tension between interdependence and union or merging, as well as the focus on the threshold between self and other, is essential to Hustvedt's exploration of self-other relations. Like Bakhtin, for example, she exhibits a full merging with the other as a negative mode of existence (see Chapter 4 for an interpretation of Hustvedt's concept of "overmixing").

Holquist and Clark also portray dialogism as a science that embraces the idea of alterity rather than engaging in an endeavor to find a wholeness of self based on the exclusion of the other. Dialogism perceives the other as "in the deepest sense my friend, because it is only from the other that I can get myself" (Holquist and Clark 65). Holquist and Clark furthermore point to the meaning of *drugost'*—the Russian term Bakhtin uses for alterity—and highlight the fusion of "friend" (*drug*) and "other" (*drugoj*) realized in that term (65-66). Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue opposes the idea of personal autonomy, since "A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 287).

Possibly the most intrinsic and penetrating mode in which the other enters the self is through the medium of language. Bakhtin's linguistic theory is a theory of mixing. The identity of the word is penetrated by the realities of its linguistic

environment. In this penetration and dialogic interconnectedness of the word and its context, Bakhtin sees creative energy: "The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel" (*Dialogic* 275). The novel is the richest medium of art, since it creates a space in which many discourses are allowed to intersect and interact.

The word that is spoken occupies a space between the speaker and the addressee—neither has complete control over its meaning. In the between, in the space where I and you overlap, where the word travels and is neither mine nor yours, language happens. Bakhtin states, ". . . language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (*Dialogic* 293). Thus language is only possible in the presence of another, when dialogue is lived between two people. Holquist and Clark place Bakhtin's understanding of language as "both a cognitive and a social practice" (9) in the intermediate space between a perception of language as controlled by the subject and language as elusive and indeterminate: "for Personalists space is inner, for Deconstructionists space is elsewhere, and for Bakhtin space is somewhere in between. This 'in betweenness' suggests not only meaning's need always to be shared but also the degree to which multiplicity and struggle characterize Bakhtin's heteroglot view of language" (13). Hustvedt's application of this notion of "in betweenness" to the production and perception of art will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, above all in "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin develops a theory of the novel and reveals a plenitude of observations on the nature of communication in general. First of all, Bakhtin points to the social character of all discourse: "Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon" (*Dialogic* 259). With this statement Bakhtin begins his examination of the dialogic nature of language in the novel and everywhere. There is no such thing as a private language, meaning can only exist in the social sphere, in the interaction between social beings, the ex-

change between self and environment. Bakhtin harshly criticizes traditional approaches to language which ignore this social factor by characterizing language in terms of monologue, putting the speaker in relation to his own language without paying tribute to the discursive environment determining the speaker's message: "Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics [i.e., such as they have come down to us] have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular 'own' language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 269). In Bakhtin's view, all models preferring a unitary or monologic system of language cannot cope with and explain the realities of a society marked by diversity and multi-speechedness. As he puts it,

> Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given [*dan*] but is always in essence posited [*zadan*]—and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 270)

Furthermore, Bakhtin attacks traditional approaches to art and stylistics, since they merely interpret the artistic work as "a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue, one that presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 274), and neglect to analyse the dialogical relationship between work and recipients. In her writing on art and in her novels, Hustvedt conceptualizes a dialogical relationship between artwork and recipient (see Chapter 3).

2.4 Intersubjective Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In an interview of 2008, Siri Hustvedt voices her commitment to phenomenological thought, especially to a phenomenological account of intersubjectivity. She refers to her reading of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—two prominent proponents of phenomenologist philosophy—and emphasizes her interest in human experience from a first-person point of view (Interview by Carroll n. pag.). Going against the Kantian "thing in itself," Hustvedt highlights the in-

tersubjective nature of reality, the manifold intersections of the self with the culture it lives in:

> Reality does not consist in "things in themselves" seen from a suprahuman perspective, but our *shared* intersubjective universe which is not only about things out there as we perceive them – trees and fields and cities and other people, but also the stories, myths, fables, countless books and artworks and music that shape our world. (Interview by Carroll n. pag.; emphasis in original)

The universe is never experienced from a point of view that is disconnected and objective; perception instead is a shared phenomenon and, in a sense, a coproduction of self and other. The intersubjective realm is constituted by both material and non-material matter, and cultural contents like stories and artworks affect the individual as much as physical realities such as nourishment and reproduction, for example. In fact, as will be solidified in the course of this study, body and mind, the physical and the symbolic, can hardly be separated in Hustvedt's works.

In the following, I will introduce both Husserl's concept of analogical transfer and pairing as modes of intersubjectivity and Merleau-Ponty's construction of the world as a shared intersubjective space. While Husserl's phenomenology reconfirms the existence of a Cartesian cogito and attempts to makes sense of the presence of independent others from the point of view of a monadic existence, Merleau-Ponty moves the self beyond safe limits of subjectivity and throws it into the world, into a state of symbiosis between self and other. As I will demonstrate, Hustvedt maneuvers between these positions, but in many instances seems to lean toward a Merleau-Pontian conception of self-other relations.

2.4.1 Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation: Monadic Selves and Intersubjective Community

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the German mathematician, logician, and philosopher, is considered to be the principal founder of phenomenological philosophy. Phenomenology is commonly defined as the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person point of view. It focuses on the study of phenomena—things as they appear in our experience. At the center of phenomenological thought is the idea of the intentionality of experience, which con-

stitutes that all consciousness is consciousness of and directed at something. Phenomenology is furthermore concerned with embodied consciousness, and Husserl grants great significance to the individual's proprioception, to his or her corporeal orientation toward the world. Kinesthetic experience, the consciousness of one's own body, determines the way in which the individual perceives the environment; everything—including other people—is perceived in relation to the body.[19] A. D. Smith describes Husserl's prioritization of the body in perception as follows: "First, my body is the 'null centre' of my orientation towards the world. My body is how I am where I am; it constitutes my 'here'. And this location is constituted, not by my placing myself within some objective map of the world, but by virtue of its being the place *from where I perceive the world*" (*Husserl* 221; italics in original). The particularity of personal existence is anchored in the body, which is the center of subjective experience of the world.

In the Preface of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty offers some explanatory remarks about key elements of Husserlian phenomenology. He distinguishes phenomenological reduction (Husserl's method) from analytical reflection due to the former's intersubjective approach as opposed to the latter's incapacity of integrating the presence of other consciousnesses in its analytical realm (*Phenomenology* xii-xiii). While analytical reflection "insists that with the first glimmer of consciousness there appears in me theoretically the power of reaching some universal truth" (xiii), Husserl, according to Merleau-Ponty, acknowledges the problem of other people's existence and integrates it into his phenomenology: "He [the other] must and I must have an outer appearance, and there must be, besides the perspective of the For Oneself—my view of myself and the other's of himself—a perspective of For Others—my view of others and theirs of me" (xiii).[20] Husserl thus presents a phenomenology that includes other people's existence at the very basis of our perception of the self in the world. It is this element

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[19] For an introduction to Husserl's phenomenology, see, for example, David Woodruff Smith's *Husserl*, *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, the *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Husserl and the* Cartesian Meditations, or Dan Zahavi's *Husserl's Phenomenology*.

[20] The tension of the perspective of the For Oneself and the perspective of the For Others will be reexamined in Chapter 3.1, in which I will juxtapose Sartre's, Bakhtin's, and Lacan's ideas on the gaze and self-other relations.

of intersubjectivity that harmonizes with Hegel's positioning of the other at the center of self-consciousness and Hustvedt's central statement of *What I Loved*: "I am because you are."

The major work in which Husserl presents his theory of intersubjectivity is his *Cartesian Meditations*. The title alone reveals Husserl's affinity with the Cartesian cogito—an alliance that ultimately upholds the boundary between self and other.[21] In his Fifth Cartesian Meditation, Husserl sets out to expand his concept of a "transcendentally reduced ego" (89) beyond the realm of the solipsist self to the sphere of intersubjectivity. "But what about other egos," he asks, "who surely are not a mere intending and intended *in me*, merely synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*, but, according to their sense, precisely *others*" (89). The presence of others cannot simply be subsumed under the self's intentional consciousness but must be accounted for in their own intentionality, which does not coincide with that of the self. The presence of others, moreover, comprises a potential for an objective worldview that is inaccessible to the individual self. As Crossley points out, "other perspectives on the world than my own are necessary if the objectivity of the world is to be established. Objectivity, in this sense, is intersubjective" (3). Husserl's Fifth Meditation thus finds itself between a focus on individual consciousness and an acceptance of the world as being determined by intersubjective relations, since "my ego . . . can be a world-experiencing ego only by being in communion with others like himself" (Husserl 139).

The key problem appears to revolve around the question of how one's consciousness comes to appropriate an existence outside the limits of its particular intentionality, its "sphere of ownness" (Husserl 100). Although naturally this sphere of ownness is not completely isolated from the world, but rather related through "possible intentional intersections between my sphere of ownness and another's" (Smith 232), there yet remains a unique and non-exchangeable position of the self. The non-coincidence between the self and the other is anchored in the self's embodied spatiality, which entails a "dissimilarity between my own body

[21] For a more detailed critique of Husserl's philosophy of intersubjectivity as unable to move beyond a state of solipsism, see Dillon 113-118.

and any other material thing . . . For the latter is necessarily always more or less *over there*, while I am constantly *here*" (Smith 225). Although the self can modify its position in the world by traversing the distance between here and there—"I can change my position in such a manner that I convert any There into a Here" (Husserl 116)—the Here is forever the self's "mode of givenness" (Husserl 116), while "every other body . . . has the mode 'There'" (Husserl 116).[22]

Husserl attempts to transcend the gap between this Here of the self and the There of the other and to synchronize his idea of "*my concrete being as a monad*" (*Cartesian* 94; emphasis in original) with the being of the other by way of introducing a "transcendental theory of so-called 'empathy'" (*Cartesian* 92). This "so-called 'empathy,'" in Husserl's conception, takes the form of an analogical transfer based on one's own body experience and observation of the other's body.

Appresentation, Apperception, Analogical Transfer

Husserl's idea of a perception of the other as a conscious entity is based on the self's capacity to make a connection between its own embodied presence and the presence of another consciousness seated in a foreign body, a "making present to consciousness a 'there too', ... [a] *making 'co-present',* a kind of '*appresentation*'" (Husserl 109). Appresentation occurs constantly in everyday experience, as "an intending of the presence of one thing on the basis of the actual presence of another" (Mensch 29). This happens at the most common level of perception; for example, we cannot see the back of a house when looking at its front side, so we deduce the presence of the backside from the presence of the front: "When the front of a physical object is evidentially present to me in perception, its back is co-presented, co-intended" (Dillon 116; cf. also Crossley 5).

Although the self has no access to the other's inner psyche, the presence of another consciousness can be deduced by observation and analogy. "In this appresentation," Husserl states,

> therefore, the body in the mode *There*, which presents itself in *my* monadic sphere and is apperceived as another's live body (the animate organism of the animate ego)—that body

[22] This idea of an embodied spatial positioning will be taken up later in this study, since it is of crucial importance to the relation between vision and identity, as will be explored with the help of theories by Lacan, Sartre, and Bakhtin.

> indicates "the same" body in the mode *Here*, as the body experienced by the other ego in *his* monadic sphere. (117)

When I am confronted with "the body of a psyche essentially inaccessible to me originaliter" (Husserl 124), I can nevertheless discover certain parallels between my own body and that of my opposite: "Although self and Other are separated due to their distinct positioning in space – self here, Other there – and thus not identical, their 'appearance-systems' are identical" (Husserl 125). This can be achieved through an appresentation in which the self can intend the consciousness of the other by way of experiencing its own embodied consciousness. Thus, in spite of the non-coincidence of self and other, there is an identity of "appearance-systems," a common ground of interpretation of the behavior of self and other. Although we do not have a direct perception or former knowledge of another consciousness, since it never has been and never will be immediately accessible to us, we can affiliate the movements of another body with those of our own lived body and by way of analogical transfer reach an apperception of the other's consciousness. This apperception, however, upholds the boundary between self and other. As Zahavi notes, "the self-givenness of the other is inaccessible and transcendent to me, but it is exactly this inaccessibility, this limit, which I can experience" ("Beyond Empathy" 153).

The transcendental ego thus perceives another self by way of apperception—a "*certain mediacy of intentionality* . . . making present to consciousness a 'there too', which nevertheless is not itself there and can never become an 'itself-there'" (Husserl 109)—it appropriates the other's body and associates its own body with the material appearance of the alien body. Seeing the other's body, the self makes a connection with its own. Through an empathic transfer, the self transcends its sphere of ownness and accepts the existence of another body inhabited by a consciousness. This analogical transfer is what sets the body of another person apart from other material objects in my perception. As Michael Sanders explains,

> Just as I recognize my own consciousness as embodied in the flesh and blood that comprises my body, so too do I analogically – via 'apperceptive transfer' – recognize that the material body now presented before me is not merely one object alongside many, but is itself also a living organism as I am. (143)

Perceiving the body of the other, I can conclude that he has a consciousness, although I do not have direct access to it. In an analogizing or "apperceptive transfer, "I constantly transfer to the Other the senses of the psychic determinations that I have directly experienced in my own conduct" (Mensch 32). De Preester summarizes the concept of analogy as follows:

> As a subject with a psychic layer, I experience my body as a stratum of kinesthetic sensations, due to the movements I make. When I visually perceive a body which resembles my body, I perceive the other not as an object, but as an animated body, in the same way as I am a living body. The seen body of the other appears immediately as a body having a stratum of kinesthetic sensation and therefore as carrier of a psychic I. Hence a feeling of empathy and the basis of intersubjectivity arise. (46)

Although there is no immediate access to the other and therefore no direct connection between self and other, Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity nevertheless effectively underlines the self's embeddedness in a communal system which inevitably puts the individual in a context that equalizes it with fellow individuals. This shared existence in a community implies a mutuality at the basis of human existence: ". . . in the sense of *a community of men* . . . there is implicit a *mutual being for one another*, which entails an *Objectivating equalization* of my existence with that of all others" (Husserl 129). This objectification at the same time entails a certain disempowerment of the subject, since she is no longer the ruler of the universe. As Smith puts it, "I am thrown into the world by glimpsing the other. The other ejects me from 'my' world. I am now equalized with any other possible subject and hold no privileged position as regards the constitution of reality – undergoing what Husserl calls an 'objectivating equalization'" (Smith 232). Nevertheless, Husserl insists on the possibility of an intersubjective harmony. The world of the individual is not threatened but completed by the presence of another. The universe does not get disrupted by another's gaze, since it is constituted as an intersubjective reality to begin with.

In the end, Husserl's philosophy of intersubjectivity is one in which the borders of the monadic self remain uncrossed. The self's perception of the other is a mere transfer, an intentional imagination, an inner process which preserves a distinct boundary between self and other. Although the self must transcend its sphere of ownness to integrate the experiences of others into a harmonious system

(see Husserl 105), this system is established as a community of self-enclosed egos: "*Ego-community*, . . . a community of Egos existing with each other and for each other – *ultimately a community of monads* " (Husserl 107). Husserl's vision of "an *intersubjective* sphere of ownness" (107) therefore remains a sphere of disconnected individuals. "To be sure," as Husserl reconfirms, "they [other monads] are separate from my monad, so far as really inherent constituents are concerned, since no really inherent connexion leads from their subjective processes to my subjective processes or from anything included in their peculiar ownness to anything included in mine" (128-29). The inner self cannot be seized by other's consciousness, and it is only by an imaginative transfer of its own bodily experience that the other can assume the existence of a consciousness in the other.

As will be disclosed in the following chapters, Hustvedt's idea of intersubjectivity seems to go beyond Husserlian phenomenology. Especially in her emphasis on communication between people and exchange with the world, she goes beyond an intersubjectivity based on cognitive perception. Her writings emphasize boundary subversions that exhibit the monadic shell of individual existence as a porous, unstable, and illusory construct. Husserl's "sphere of ownness" finds itself under constant revision, since boundaries between self and other are fluctuating. Hustvedt's emphasis on the unconscious processes determining who we are brings her much closer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was decisively influenced by Husserl, yet took phenomenology to a far more engaged intersubjective level than his antecessor.

2.4.2 Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Embodied Intersubjectivity

In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) envisions the self as inseparable from the body and the world it inhabits. He ultimately aims at deconstructing the dichotomy between subject and object through a continuous focus on the self's immersion in the world, its immediate link to others and things, and the inherent perceptual openness of the self in perception. His opposition to a Cartesian split between

mind and body is evident throughout his work. In the *Phenomenology*, he writes, "The union of the soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence" (102). And this union of mind and body ties the self in an indissoluble bond with the world, since "Bodily existence . . . . establishes our first consonance with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 192).

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy draws on a range of scientific source material, especially from psychoanalysis and psychology.[23] In the *Phenomenology*, for example, he includes case studies from patients who suffered brain damage during WWI, using phenomena such as the phantom limb to explore the philosophical undercurrents of the mind/body relation (see *Phenomenology* 88-89). Since linking science and philosophy is one of Hustvedt's central concerns, this alone may explain her interest in his writings. Yet the influence of his thinking on Hustvedt's work becomes particularly evident in a comparison of their ideas on the body, perception, and intersubjectivity. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt writes that "there is an intersubjective world of shared languages, images, reason, and other people" (195). In the following, I would like to have a closer look at Merleau-Ponty's and Hustvedt's conceptions of this intersubjective world.

At the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical enterprise lies an ontology of embodied connectedness—to exist inevitably means to be engaged in the world, and the self has no way of separating its consciousness from this lived engagement. The self has no means to master the world through disembodied thought, since it is always enmeshed in the very substance it may strive to appropriate: "The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* xviii-xix). Hence, one primary posit of the *Phenomenology* is its rejection of a self that is detached from the world and complete in itself. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is no autonomous self gov-

[23] Merleau-Ponty was appointed as lecturer in psychology and became Chair of Child Psychology and Pedagogy at the Sorbonne from 1949-52 (see Spiegelberg 25; Reynolds 6).

erning the world around it: "I *have* the world as an incomplete individual . . . my body is a movement towards the world, and the world my body's point of support" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 408). This evokes a number of instances in Hustvedt's works in which she underscores the self's embodied identity and its interrelatedness to the environment. In an essay on the painter Philip Guston, Hustvedt writes that "the world penetrates us. We eat, we smoke, and have sex. But language and images enter us too. They become us" (*Mysteries* 58). Moreover, Hustvedt stresses the connectedness of body and thing and the reversibility of inside and outside: objects "are outside me and inside me. They are of my body and not of it" (*Mysteries* 58).[24] Hustvedt and Merleau-Ponty therefore share their emphasis on the dialogue between body and world and on the inseparability of the self from its environment. Without interacting with and being penetrated by the world, the self must be incomplete.

This interrelatedness of self and world equally applies to the relation between self and other. Merleau-Ponty regards the other's body as an extension of the self, since both the body of the self and the body of the other are part of a world that places these bodies in a relation of simultaneity, as parts of a unified system. "Henceforth," Merleau-Ponty writes, "as the parts of my body together compromise a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously" (*Phenomenology* 412) To live is to be in relation with the other, and to be part of the world requires granting to the other as much space in it as to one's own body: "I enter into a pact with the other, having resolved to live in an interworld in which I accord as much place to others as to myself" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 415).

Merleau-Ponty finds the first traits of intersubjectivity incipient in early childhood. Nelson Ernesto Coelho and Luís Claudio Figueiredo find that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasizes "the pre-subjective modalities of existence, the original sphere, the plane of original indifferentiation, and trans-subjective intersubjectivity" (197). Merleau-Ponty suggests that the infant is endowed with an

[24] For a detailed account of Hustvedt's take on the self and the body, see Chapter 4.

inborn propensity of imitation that enables it without any distinct sense of self to imitate the actions of its opposite. Biting, for example, "has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 410). There is an immediate communication of intentions through the body, before the development of the cogito.[25] "Others' intentions," as Monika M. Langer comments, "and its [the infant's] own form a single pre-reflective intersubjective system in which there is no need for translation" (100). Merleau-Ponty's description of the infant's perception resembles the Lacanian register of the Real, which is marked by a borderless state of integration, without a distinction between what is inside and outside. As David Ross Fryer observes, "In the Real, the world is but a mass of impulses and the child has no understanding of the split between self and other, between inside and outside, between subject and object" (52). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the lack of a distinct sense of self within the newborn: "He has no awareness of himself or others as private subjectivities, nor does he suspect that all of us, himself included, are limited to a certain point of view of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 413).

In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt makes a similar observation about a newborn child's state of consciousness:

> It is now known that infants as young as a few hours old will actively imitate the expressions of an adult looking at them. This appears to be an inborn trait. It is not that newborn babies have a body image of their own faces moving to mimic the faces of others. They are not self-conscious. (90)

Both Merleau-Ponty and Hustvedt thus detect an inborn mode of intersubjectivity that is at work at a stage that precedes the development of self-consciousness. Self and other therefore find themselves in a primordial state of relational existence.[26] The self can only grow through the reflection of the other; it is complemented by the other and vice versa. As Merleau-Ponty expresses, "Between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and

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[25] The intersubjective immediacy inherent in our unconscious, bodily communication is at this point scientifically proven with the discovery of mirror neurons (see Chapter 6).

[26] In "Yonder," Hustvedt points to life in the womb as an instance of symbiosis between self and other that continues to shape human existence. Intersubjectivity, from this point of view, hence even predates birth (see Chapter 4.1).

that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system" (*Phenomenology* 410).

In contrast to Husserl, both Merleau-Ponty and Hustvedt share the focus on an immediate unconscious entwining of self and other that does not require an analogical transfer but is inherent in the phenomenal body experience. Dillon offers the following comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl:

> Husserl's account of pairing is placed within the context of isolated immanence, the sphere of ownness that he regards as primordial, whereas Merleau-Ponty places the transfer of corporeal schema within a context of syncretic sociability, a context defined as prior to any distinction of perspectives or differentiation between what is mine and what is other. (Dillon 118)

Merleau-Ponty regards the body of the self and the body of the other as a unified system, a union which transcends the distinction between subject and object and allows for an intersubjective harmony which comes close to an extinction of any sense of a separate self: "Henceforth, as the parts of my body together compromise a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 412).[27]

However, Merleau-Ponty does not neglect to acknowledge the element of potential disconnection entering perception with the advent of self-consciousness. At the moment of a conscious recognition of the self as a separate entity, the infant enters a state of cleavage between self and other, which results in a combat between consciousnesses. Referring to Hegel's master-slave parable, Merleau-Ponty remarks: "With the *cogito* begins that struggle between consciousnesses, each one of which, as Hegel says, seeks the death of the other" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 414). This battle can, in the worst case, end up in the annihilation of one of

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[27] Emmanuel Levinas criticized Merleau-Ponty for not taking into account the alterity of the other—from Levinas's point of view, the other's interior state remains unapproachable. To Levinas it is precisely the otherness, the alterity of the person I am encountering that needs to be preserved. Levinas's stance toward alterity thus resembles that of Bakhtin, who also speaks out for a preservation of otherness. According to Levinas, out of the difference and separation of self and other arises a sense of responsibility. The self cannot simply subsume the other into its "sphere of ownness" (Husserl), but needs to grant the other his or her own private space—a space to be respected and unharmed. Self and other consequently enter into an ethical relationship (see Sanders 146).

the consciousnesses participating in such conflict. Yet this only needs to be the case "[i]n the absence of reciprocity . . ., since the world of the one then takes in completely that of the other, so that one feels disinherited in favour of the other" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 416). Merleau-Ponty names the experience of unrequited love as an example of a self that "feels his being and substance flowing away into that freedom which confronts him" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 416). This imbalance concluding in a loss of subjectivity surfaces in certain character constellations in Hustvedt's fiction; for instance, in the non-reciprocal love of Bill for Lucille, on the one hand, but also in Bill's, Violet's, and Leo's desperate attempts to establish a relationship of mutual love and respect with Mark (see Chapter 5.1.4).

The battle of consciousnesses first envisioned by Hegel in his master-slave dialectic and later developed in Sartre's philosophy of being-for-others (see Chapter 3.1.2) is a battle determined by the power of the gaze. According to Merleau-Ponty, however, the subject—even when trapped in the gaze of another—can still go beyond a state of struggle and establish meaningful connections with another subject that result in a transcendence of the original state of adversity: "Once the other is posited, once the other's gaze fixed upon me has, by inserting me into his field, stripped me of part of my being, it will readily be understood that I can recover it only by establishing relations with him, by bringing about his clear recognition of me, and that my freedom requires the same freedom for others" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 416).[28] Clearly Merleau-Ponty thus sees the potential for objectification and disempowerment of the subject in interpersonal encounters, but to him co-existence is possible, and mutual complementation an ideal state of intersubjectivity. He stresses that objectification is not an inevitability but a matter of choice:

> In fact the other's gaze transforms me into an object, and mine him, only if both of us withdraw into the core of our thinking nature, if we both make ourselves into an inhuman gaze, if each of us feels his actions to be not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect's. . . . the objectification of each by the other's gaze is felt as unbearable only because it takes the place of possible communication. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 420)

[28] Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the gaze and vision will be explored in more detail in the context of Hustvedt's theory of art and vision.

Merleau-Ponty's observation in the above passage evokes Buber's distinction between the I-It relation and the I-You relation. We can choose to "make ourselves into an inhuman gaze," to regard the other as an object in an I-It constellation, with a gaze that lacks affection and denies subjectivity to the other, or we can opt for a communicative openness—an I-Thou relation—that leaves both self and other unharmed.

In his discussion of dialogue, Merleau-Ponty takes the symbiosis of self and other to a point of merged co-existence. Self and other occupy "a common ground," their words "are inserted into a shared operation" and they ultimately merge into "a dual being" "in consummate reciprocity" (*Phenomenology* 413). The idea of a consummate reciprocity sets Merleau-Ponty's thinking on dialogue apart from Bakhtin's dialogical idea, since to the latter the idea of consummation implies a loss of alterity. The "common ground" which the participants in a dialogue share is determined by an established system of cultural and linguistic signifiers with which the words spoken in a dialogical exchange reverberate: "Available meanings, in other words former acts of expression, establish between speaking subjects a common world, to which the words being actually uttered in their novelty refer as does the gesture to the perceptible world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 216-17). All speech acts are thus embedded in their cultural surroundings, and the exchange between two people is shaped by their shared existence in an intersubjective space of communication.

3 Seeing on the Threshold: Self-Other Relations, Vision, and Visual Art in Siri Hustvedt's Works

> The fact that we can say to each other all the time: here, I am not like you. And this always takes place in the exchange, in the system of reflection where it is the other we look at – we never see ourselves; we are always blind; we see of ourselves what comes back to us through (the difference of) the other. (Cixous, "Alterity: Being Human" 190)

The previous chapter has outlined a philosophical frame of the self in relation to the other, focusing on the constantly renegotiated threshold between sameness and difference. The other has been shown to be constitutive to the formation of self-consciousness (Hegel), a complementation of the self in a dialogical model of identity (Bakhtin, Buber), and an equal and necessary participant in an intersubjective perception of the world (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty). The other, as the combat between consciousnesses in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates, can be both affirming and threatening, both nourishing and consuming. As we have seen in the discussion of Hegel's concept of desire and recognition, the self needs to be mirrored by an other in order to reach a stage of self-conscious subjectivity. This idea of recognition and desire to be reflected in another consciousness is closely tied to the mechanisms of seeing and being seen. Looking at somebody else, the individual sees part of herself reflected through the eyes of the other. The look can be both an instrument of subjection and a mediator of affirmation. Vision is marked by an irreducible ambiguity, since it shifts with the perspective of the viewer.

In her conceptualization of vision and visual art, Siri Hustvedt accentuates this ambivalence of the other's presence. Vision is a guiding element shaping intersubjective relations: looking into another person's eyes signals presence and attention and seems to open up channels of exchange that would remain closed if we did not have access to this mutual field of looking. The dynamics of seeing others and being seen by others is significant in positing identity on the threshold between self and other. Children learn by observing

their environment,[29] and the self generally receives an image of the other by looking at his outer appearance, movements etc. As Hustvedt writes, "We are mirrors of one another" (*Shaking Woman* 91). Hustvedt, in both her novels and her nonfictional writing about art, highlights how the perception of other people, as well as the perception of artworks, reflects identity constellations governed by either intersubjective exchange or subject-object domination.

Inga, one of the main characters of *The Sorrows of an American*, is preoccupied with the way we perceive the world and other people through vision and how it shapes our lives. Inga claims that

> since Plato, Western philosophy and culture have had an ocular bias: vision is our dominant sense. We read each other through our eyes, and anatomically they are an extension of our brains. When we catch somebody's eye, we look into a mind. A person without eyes is disturbing for the simple reason that eyes are the doors to the self. (*Sorrows* 36)

Indeed, formulations of subjectivity and identity formation rooted in the Western tradition are frequently affiliated with modes of vision. In the service of an ocularcentric metaphysics, the latter has mainly been portrayed as a medium of power and epistemological authority. From early Greek thought to the peak of the modern era, the visual has been praised as the noblest of the senses, as a privileged source of objective knowledge and certainty. According to Jacques Derrida, Western ideology finds its roots in the intertwining of epistemology and vision: "*Idein, eidos, idea*: the whole history, the whole semantics of the European *idea*, in its Greek genealogy, as we know—as we see—relates seeing to knowing" (12). Vision has been instrumentalized to enforce notions of a pure Cartesian cogito, exerting control over its environment with a detached and disincarnate gaze. "Of all the senses," as Elizabeth Grosz asserts, "vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object" (*Lacan* 38).

The supremacy of vision determining "the scopic regimes of modernity"[30] is nowadays in the process of being revised, in concordance with the

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[29] As Hustvedt points out, newborn children are found to imitate facial gestures of attachment figures within the first hour of their lives (see *Shaking Woman* 90). Erik, the protagonist of *The Sorrows of an American*, quotes a passage from D. W. Winnicott's *Thinking about Children*: "'People need to be seen'" (*Sorrows* 271). For a detailed analysis of intersubjectivity and relational psychoanalysis, which takes up the idea of mirroring (especially between mother and child), see Chapter 5.

[30] See Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity."

gradual postmodern displacement of any form of grand narrative, of the accessibility of an all-encompassing model of signification. The perspectival nature of seeing has been pushed to the fore, dethroning vision and unmasking it as a source of contradiction and illusion. Center and periphery have lost their stable positions in the contested space of the visual. A range of French theorists, philosophers and writers, for example, have come to attack the idea of vision as the primary sense, effecting a "denigration of vision,"[31] or at least suggesting alternative ontologies of sight.

Moreover, the look has often been interpreted in terms of domination and appropriation, as a corrosive force attacking subjectivity. In our times of universal media presence and information technologies, identity has become increasingly subjected to exposure and surveillance—be it through security cameras, satellite pictures, toll bridges, or "cell phone reporters" publishing their pictures in so-called cyber-vigilantes[32] etc. The public is intruding more and more upon the private. Foucault finds the power play of seeing and being seen at the basic dynamics of institutionalized surveillance in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* According to Foucault, "the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation" (170). Using the example of the structure of a military camp, and, famously, the architecture of the Panopticon, Foucault illustrates the exertion of power based on a "network of gazes" (170) and a "diagram of power that acts by means of general visibility" (170). In the Panopticon, the prisoner is controlled by the

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[31] *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* is the title of Martin Jay's extensive analysis of the history of vision in Western philosophy, from Plato and Descartes to postmodern subversions of "ocularcentrism." Among the people whose work contains "explicit manifestations of hostility to visual primacy" (*Downcast* 14), Jay names Bataille, Breton, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Foucault, Althusser, Debord, Lacan, Irigaray, Barthes, Metz, Derrida, and Lyotard.

[32] As a recent example for the significance of these cyber-vigilantes, I would like to point out the Holla Back New York City website (www.hollabacknyc.com), which is a forum for the publication of photos taken by individuals on the street who witness another person harassing them or somebody else. In an interesting article published in the *Village Voice* with the title "The 21st-Century Peepshow," Kathryn Belgiorno raises the issue of what kind of implications "snapping a picture with a digital camera […] [and] posting it before a potential audience of nearly 1 billion people" (n.pag.) could have for the identity of the photographed person. Another significant aspect of the Holla Back trend is its alleged empowerment of women: being given a chance to capture the assaulting man in a picture and make it public, "a woman can seize a kind of power usually unavailable to her by snapping a photo of the macho man on the sidewalk who moved in too close" (Belgiorno n.pag.). This subverts the traditional gender distribution of the male spectator and the female object, an issue that will be further discussed below.

fact that he is constantly surveyed but cannot return the gaze that subjects him: "he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). His state of being looked at thus becomes the trap robbing him of a feeling of intact subjectivity, assuring the maintenance of automated and disindividualized power (cf. Foucault 202). Sartre's theory of subjectivity, which will be discussed below, shares Foucault's emphasis on the look as an instrument of power, arguing that intersubjective relations are perpetually bound to be conflictual.

A recent edition of *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, "Appropriating Vision(s): Visual Practices in American Women's Writing" (2009), underlines the ongoing current re-evaluation of "the role of vision in processes of inclusion and exclusion, identification and Othering, as well as . . . the interrelations between issues of vision, gender, and social power" (Spengler 6). Hustvedt's works, in their renegotiation of self-other relations in the visual field, make an innovative contribution to the contemporary debate over the dynamics of vision and subjectivity. Although vision, especially through the medium of photography, is shown to have power over characters' identities, this power can also be used to affirm the subject rather than objectifying it. Especially in her redefinition of the voyeuristic gaze as a means of crossing the boundaries between self and other, Hustvedt challenges traditional gender roles in the scopic field. In her redefinition of the gaze, Hustvedt thus reframes notions of identity and gender in the visual field.

In Hustvedt's works, visual perception is often shown to be easily manipulable and shifting, since it is not necessarily—as promoted for centuries in Western philosophy—a superior instrument to access knowledge of the world. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Inga reflects on the inaccessibility of a clear image of the world due to the inevitable distortion of perception caused by individual expectations: "'The problem is that we're all blind, all dependent on preordained representations, on what we think we'll see'" (*Sorrows* 130). Hustvedt elaborates on the malleability of perception and its formation through individual memory in her book on art, *Mysteries of the Rectangle*: ". . . perception is a hugely complicated neuronal process that relies on a dynamic, not fixed, memory that allows us to make sense of what we see" (xvii). Personal memory adjusts to the present moment and keeps on rearranging the events of

the past, and this altered memory will reflect back on our perception of the present moment. "Whether we know it or not," Hustvedt suggests, "seeing is always interpretive, and the distortions of memory may reveal far more than a subjective gaffe" (*Mysteries* xviii).

Leo, the vision-impaired narrator of *What I Loved*, who wrote a book called *A History of Seeing in Western Painting,* is also preoccupied with "the difficulty of seeing" and the "problem of the viewer's perspective" (255). He comes to the conclusion that "The spectator is the true vanishing point, the pinprick in the canvas, the zero. I'm only whole to myself in mirrors and photographs and the rare home movie, and I've often longed to escape that confinement" (*Loved* 255). "This perspectivism," however, as Zapf states, "does not imply an epistemological solipsism that sees the external world as a mere construct of the perceiving and understanding self; it rather emphasizes how the subject position involves a partial, limited and even distorted view of the world and one's self" (179). This partiality and limitation of the subject's perception of the world, on the contrary, puts the subject in relation with other subjects' perspectives and opens up new fields of negotiation between self and other.

In her work, Hustvedt seizes the tension created between self and other in the field of vision and examines various constellations of desire, distortion, and alienation, particularly in photography and painting. Hustvedt consistently examines the effects of the look on personal identity and works toward the conception of a new mode of seeing, one that ultimately overcomes the subject-object dualism inherent in traditional theories of vision. This chapter will examine the relational field between observer and observed, exploring a range of interpretations of the look in its implications for the formation of identity, from possession and alienation to mutual confirmation, from a distancing between subject and object to an exchange that dissolves the boundary between the two. For, as Jay points out, "There can . . . be few human interactions as subtle as the dialectic of the mutual gaze, ranging from the contest for domination to the lovers' complementary adoration" (*Downcast* 11).

This chapter will introduce a variety of identity theories based on the phenomenon of sight, predominantly the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and his concept of the gaze, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's elaborations on the look in *L'Être et le Néant* and Russian theorist M.

M. Bakhtin's ideas about the gaze of the other as introduced in his essay "Author and Hero." Furthermore, the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and the Belgian feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's models of vision as touch-based will play a significant role in tracing the various perceptions of vision and identity. Sartre, Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty are connected in being influenced by the Russian émigré Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel,[33] thus being conscious of and influenced by his reception of the master-slave parable, of the dialectic of lack and desire, and the struggle for recognition. Accordingly, their vision-based concepts of subjectivity tie in with the Hegelian self-other dynamics discussed above.

Merleau-Ponty's and Irigaray's constructs of vision are of particular importance to this study because they undermine ocularcentric theories by transforming the look from a unilateral instrument of power to a bilaterally constructed exchange between subjects. The two thinkers share the goal of deconstructing the idea of a Cartesian ego by unveiling the intersubjective nature of vision. Merleau-Ponty, both in his *Phenomenology of Perception* and in his late work *The Visible and the Invisible*, launches into a new interpretation of the nature of vision, focusing on the intersubjective complimentarity of the gaze. Introducing the idea of flesh, of a connective tissue erasing the gap between the seer and his object of observation, he reverses traditional notions of the power of the perceiving subject. His linking of vision and touch is expanded by Luce Irigaray, who thus further deconstructs conventional interpretations of the look.

One recurring phenomenon in Hustvedt's novels that is immediately connected to the gaze is photography. In *The Blindfold*, protagonist Iris feels bereft of her identity due to a photographic representation that seems to gain an uncanny power over other people's perception of her. In *What I Loved*, photography is shown as an instrument of power and manipulation in the classification of hysterical symptoms at the Salpêtrière, a French hospital, in the late nineteenth century. Finally, in *The Sorrows of an American*, the photographer Jeffrey Lane misuses his camera to intrude on people's privacy and exploit his objects for his own artistic satisfaction. Photography, in these

[33] It is unclear, however, whether Sartre ever attended Kojève's lectures, although his name was on the lecture list (see Dobson 11-12).

examples, is used as an instrument of objectification, and the photographer's gaze poses a threat to the people he captures with his camera. The photograph, according to Susan Sontag, "is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude. . . . it has always been possible for a photograph to misrepresent" (*Regarding* 46).

Photography, however, in its negative realization of the look, is contrasted with an altogether positive mode of vision in manifestations of voyeuristic desire and intersubjective art theory in *The Blindfold*, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, and in *What I Loved.* People "enter" paintings, switch positions, at times lose themselves in the other. Here, Hustvedt arrives at a conception of vision that counteracts male-dominated definitions of subjectivity by revealing the "mixed" nature of the gaze and thus stripping it of its powers of objectification and enclosure. Hustvedt likens the act of looking to a voyeuristic endeavor—redefining voyeuristic desire as a possible moment of positive participation. In looking at one another or at a piece of art, spatial distance and personal boundaries can be overcome, and a mixing of identities becomes possible. In moments of transgressive desire in the three novels, vision is portrayed as a medium of participation. Hustvedt shows that the look can be eroticizing and sexual, yet her approach to the look does not conform to the traditional distribution of the male as the dominant subject and the female as the subservient object.

In her conception of the visual arts, especially painting, Hustvedt highlights vision as a medium of interconnection. The last part of the chapter will emphasize the intersubjectivity and intertextuality dominating Hustvedt's approach and bring them into communication with Barthes's and Bakhtin's models stressing the discursivity of text and communication. This links Hustvedt's ideas with postmodern art theory, influenced by poststructuralist thought, which has developed new interpretations of vision and the way art interacts with the recipient, deconstructing the conventions of an objective and transcendent gaze. In her observations on art, Hustvedt arrives at creating an intersubjective construct of vision which functions as another component in her overall theory of mixed identity formation. Hustvedt, as I will exhibit, dissolves the boundaries between artwork and observer. Paintings, in Hustvedt's interpretation, are no longer separated from the rest of the world by means of

their frame, but rather become part of an interactive field between the spectator and the object. In a sense, Hustvedt hence posits the painting in a field of intertextuality similar to Bakhtin's model of dialogism, but also reminiscent of Barthes's theory of the intertextual. As Burgin states,

> *Text*, as conceived of by Barthes (with the prompting of, most notably, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva), is seen not as an 'object' but rather as 'space' between the object and the reader/viewer – a space made up of endlessly proliferating meanings which have no stable points of origin, nor of closure. In the concept of 'text' the boundaries which enclosed the 'work' are dissolved; the text opens continuously into other texts, the space of *intertextuality*. (73)

Similarly, Hustvedt draws attention to art's quality of coming to life in the space between object and observer; art happens in the moment when it is perceived, it must enter a dialogical relation with its recipient—it is the site where identities mix in the exchange of visual energies.

3.1 The Self as a Hole in Vision: Subjectivity and the Gaze of the Other

The isolated self has no access to an idea of its outside appearance. Only through a mirror or another person acting as mirror can the self attain an idea of itself in a totality that is otherwise always compromised by the parts of the self that remain unseen. One can never visually perceive oneself as a whole, one can never take in one's own image in its entirety. In *What I Loved*, Leo and his son Matt discuss the implications of perspectivism and the self as a hole in vision:

> "I mean that because we were sitting where we were sitting tonight, we saw a game that was a little different from those guys with the beer next to us. It was the same game, but I could've noticed something those guys didn't. And then I thought, if I was sitting over there, I'd see something else. And not just the game. I mean they saw me and I saw them, but I didn't see myself and they didn't see themselves. Do you get what I mean?" "I know just what you mean. I've thought about it a lot, Matt. The place where I am is missing from my view. It's like that for everybody. We don't see ourselves in the picture, do we? It's a kind of hole." (129)

Besides pinning down the self as an absence in the subject's image of the world, this passage raises the issue of the self's embodiment, its spatial positioning in the world and its perspective being contrasted by and never identical with that of other people. The self becomes limited and shaped through the look of the other. Can notions of a unified and self-contained subject be upheld in the face of this "hole" of perception, the blind spot at the center of our vision? To start exploring these issues, I will examine Lacan's analysis of the infant's confrontation with its specular double, which emphasizes the discrepancy be-

tween the totality of the mirror image and the fragmentation of the child's own perception of self.

3.1.1 Jacques Lacan: The Specular Subject

"Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique" (1949 ; *Écrits* 93-100),[34] Lacan's account of the mirror stage, is one of the most prominent psychoanalytic texts ever written. It dominated the field of film studies in the 1960s and 1970s,[35] and it has left its imprints on feminist, queer, theatre, and postcolonial conceptions of the gaze. Lacan's theory of the mirror stage investigates the inner rupture of the subject due to her dependence on the environment to present her with a visual representation of her own body in its totality. Lacan's exploration of the formation of the ego in the imaginary order shows how deeply the infant's sense of self is determined by its perception of visual self-representations; secondly, it appears to demarcate the birth moment of the threshold between self and other, between inside and outside; and, thirdly, it highlights how much the unconscious is intertwined with the other in a quasi-Hegelian dialectic of desire. In its focus on the child's wish to fill the hole of perception gaping in its own visual field, Lacan's theory stresses intersubjective identification as the motor of the imaginary register.

As mentioned above, Lacan attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel. Many critics have drawn a parallel between the Lacanian mirror-stage and the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (especially as restated by Kojève). Sean Homer, for example, indicates the influence Kojève's readings of Hegel have had on Lacan, claiming that the imaginary order is determined by Lacan's interpretation of the master-slave stage, manifesting at the same time a reciprocal dependence and an element of aggression and conflict in the moment of confrontation with the mirror (24). Elizabeth Roudinesco also alludes to the

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[34] As Payne notes, the original lecture on the mirror stage preceded this later revised lecture by thirteen years—the published, later paper was delivered at the Psychoanalytic Congress in Zurich in 1949, the earlier version in 1936; Lacan's ideas about the mirror stage were at least partly a reaction to Henri Wallon's mirror experiments with children and animals published between 1931 and 1934 (see Payne 27; Fryer 44).

[35] See, for example, Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus."

Kojèvian reading of Hegel as a source of Lacan's vision of "the desiring subject, generator of recognition and bondsman of the desire of the other" (*Lacan & Co* 138). She summarizes the Kojèvian interpretation of the master-slave parable in Lacanian terminology in the following:

> "To want to be recognized in a struggle between master and slave is above all to want to be desired; it entails risking one's life in a dual interaction for the sake of something that exists only in the imaginary. Thus reality is social insofar as it is the *totality of desires mutually desiring each other*" (*Lacan & Co.* 139-40).

Furthermore, Roudinesco highlights the reverberation of a Hegelian conception of desire as *Begierde* in Lacan as opposed to the Freudian *Wunsch*:

> *Begierde* is the desire through which the relation of consciousness to the self is expressed: the issue is to acknowledge the other or otherness insofar as consciousness finds itself in this very movement. The other is the object of desire that the consciousness desires in a negative mirror-relationship that allows it to recognise itself in it. *Wunsch*, or desire in the Freudian sense, is more simply an inclination, an aspiration, the fulfillment of an unconscious wish. ("Mirror Stage" 28)

Hegel, or Kojève's rendering of Hegel, provided Lacan with the necessary dialectics of desire to reform psychoanalysis. Kojève's lectures thus instigated a shift from the intrapsychic Freudian drive theory to the intersubjective Lacanian conception of psychoanalysis, configured around the basic premise of the self's unconscious intersection with the other. Lacan, in his rereading of Freudian theory, does not focus on individual drive theory but rather on the desire for the other. As Carolyn J. Dean points out,

> While the psychic agencies perform the same analytic work for Lacan as for Freud, Lacan sees identity as constituted through the mediation of others, through, paradoxically, a process of self-alienation, so that the psychic agencies' operations are determined by, conceal or reveal a lack, an other (as Lacan called it) at the very heart of the self. (14)

Identity formation is thus unthinkable without reference to the other. The basic Lacanian formula of desire ruling over the unconscious and determining one's sense of self places the other right at the core of self-formation. As Lacan himself writes in "Le stade du miroir": "C'est ce moment [the moment of the mirror stage] qui décisivement fait basculer tout le savoir humain dans la médiatisation par le désir de l'autre, constitue ses objets dans une équivalence abstraite par la concurrence d'autrui . . ." (*Écrits* 98).

According to Lacan, the mirror stage occurs when the child is between six and eighteen months old. When the infant sees her reflection in the mirror, she is enraptured and identifies with this newly found representation of herself; the attraction of the mirror image lies in its suggestion of an individuated total-

ity which stands in stark contrast with the child's own physical fragmentation. Lacan asserts that

> le *stade du miroir* est un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation – et qui pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, – et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental. (*Écrits* 97)

The initial stage of anticipation and pleasure is thus inevitably followed by a feeling of alienation, due to the incompatibility of the complete representation, of the total body form, reflected in the mirror with the child's own partitioned perception of self. Before the moment of realization initiated by the mirror, or the (m)other acting as mirror, the child has no awareness of boundaries between self and other; only when becoming aware of the split between the self and its unified representation in the mirror does the subject feel the gap at the core if its existence. As Grosz points out,

> its [the infant's] recognition of itself as a (potential) totality is correlative with its recognition that the world as a whole is *not* its own. This marks the primitive 'origins' of the child's separation of inside and outside, subject and object, self and other, and a number of other conceptual oppositions which henceforth structure its adult life. (*Lacan* 35)

The self strives to find a fixed identity, to overcome its own fissure: ". . . the 'I' is tirelessly intent upon freezing a subjective process that cannot be frozen, introducing stagnation into the mobile field of human desire" (Bowie 25). The child enters the imaginary register, a sphere in which it creates an ideal I, shaped by and "mediated through a totalizing image that has come from outside" (Gallop 79). This idealized image of a stable and comprehensive self ("la permanence mentale du *je*" [Lacan, *Écrits* 95]) figures as an implementation of subjective power. As Wilfried Ver Eecke emphasizes, Lacan's "dialectic of the mirror stage results in the creation of an idealized organizing matrix that the subject is not"—the reflection in the mirror is utilized to fill the hole of the self.

In an attempt to counteract the fleeting nature of its physical self, the infant clings to an illusory identification with a fixed image. Lacan articulates the sense of power associated with the visualization as follows,

> C'est que la forme totale du corps par quoi le sujet devance dans un mirage la maturation de sa puissance, ne lui est donnée que comme *Gestalt*, c'est-à-dire dans une extériorité où certes cette forme est-elle plus constituante que constituée, mais où surtout elle lui apparaît dans un relief de stature qui la fige et sous une symétrie qui l'inverse. (*Écrits* 95)

This passage discloses that ultimately the feeling of power initiated by the appearance in the mirror is accompanied by elements of alienation, due to the inverted and frozen nature of this exterior representation, which is incompatible with the child's inner self. The image of a whole body is nothing but a hallucination and a dream, a misrecognition ("dans l'hallucination et dans le rêve *l'imago du corps propre*" [Lacan, *Écrits* 95]); or, as Bowie has it, ". . . the complex geometry of body, setting and mirror works upon the individual as a ruse, a deception, an inveiglement" (Bowie 23). The image representing the self in its totality is a *méconnaissance*, identity is thus based on a misrecognition of the self as unified.

Judith Butler remarks about the interconnection between the body and identity: "Lacan establishes a morphology of the body as a psychically invested projection, an idealization or 'fiction' of the body as a totality and locus of control" (*Bodies* 73); this delusion of power and control vested in the identification with the visual representation of a physical state reveals how decisive visual perception is in its suggestion of intact subjectivity. Butler's reading of the Lacanian mirror stage draws attention to the later transition from the imaginary construct of a bodily totality to the symbolic enforcement of the self's cohesion by the application of a name: "Bodies only become whole, i.e., totalities, by the idealizing and totalizing specular image which is sustained through time by the sexually marked name. To have a name is to be positioned in the Symbolic" (*Bodies* 72). Consequently, the mirror stage initiates a process of individuation and creation of a framed subjectivity that will later be continued in the identification with a name that stipulates gender and codifies the subject in the social order.

In my analysis of subjectivity and mirroring below, I will apply Lacan's thoughts on the mirror stage to the representation of the self in photography. Photographs, in my interpretation, act as mirrors of the self. The misrepresentation of the self within photography is exemplified in both Iris's negative identification with the photograph in *The Blindfold* and the humiliation Erik feels due to the public display of his photograph in *The Sorrows of an American*; one could say that in their overdetermined association with their pictorial reflection, they are caught in the imaginary stage of misrecognition.

3.1.2 Jean-Paul Sartre's Theory of Vision and Subjectivity

Another possible explanation for the alienation experienced by the photographed subject is the objectifying gaze as envisioned by Sartre. Sartre, in his seminal work *L'Être et le Néant*, describes three forms of being: être-en-soi, être-pour-soi, and être-pour-autrui. To this study, the third stage of being is most significant, since the look of the other is what defines être-pour-autrui, being for others.

As Ann Jefferson states in her essay "Bodymatters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes," Bakhtin's and Sartre's (and Barthes's) approaches to self-other relations share their conviction that "these relations are determined by the fact that one does not see oneself as one is seen by others, and this difference in perspective turns on the body" (202). She goes on to note that "since the body is what others see but what the subject does not, the subject becomes dependent on the Other in a way that ultimately makes the body the focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications" (202). The emphasis on this power struggle based on the physical presence of the body, however, prevails in Sartre's work. He interprets the encounter with the other as a permanent conflict between objectifying and being objectified. The alternating positions that the other can take—either a subject taking control over me and alienating me from myself, or an object under the influence of my determining look—lead to a battle that clearly bears resemblance to Hegel's struggle for recognition. Thus, for Sartre, conflict is the basic state between people ("Le conflit est le sens originel de l'être-pour-autrui" [*L'Être* 431]).

Sartre and Hegel

Sartre, like Hegel, addresses the problem of the other as inevitable presence defining the self's ontological status. Human existence is permanently coined by the existence of the other; even when there is no definite realization of a self-other encounter: the presence of the other is always implied in the perception of the self. As Hartmann states, the existence for others is an ontological relation, directly determining our perception of self: "Sartre fordert, daß meine Beziehung zum Andern eine Seinsbeziehung sei. Damit ist für ihn der Hegelsche Gedanke maßgebend, daß ich nur ich selbst bin, indem ich mich

gegen den Andern absetze. Hegel verbindet damit auch ein *Mich-im-Andern-Erkennen*" (103). This recognition of self through the other, however, is something that Sartre decidedly negates. He emphasizes difference, separation and opposition as the main modes of interpersonal relations, thus denying the possibility of an intersubjective identity: "I do not see any reason to speak of intersubjectivity once subjectivities are separated. Intersubjectivity assumes a communion that almost reaches a kind of identification, in any case a unity . . . I see the separation but I do not see the union" (Sartre, qtd. in Fox 146). Intersubjectivity presupposes a subject-subject relation which is impossible in Sartrean terms because one subject is annihilated (objectified) by the presence of the other. Out of this essential and—as opposed to Hegel's vision—insurmountable separation between self and other arises the perception of the other as an enemy to the free and self-determined subject. What Sartre comes to regard as the fundamental state of conflict between self and other bears traces of Hegel's master-slave dialectic in its interplay of domination and subservience.[36]

Close to Hegel's concept of the self as mediated by the other ("Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself . . ." [*Phenomenology* 112]), Sartre defines the gaze of the other as an instrument of mediation: "le regard est d'abord un intermédiaire qui renvoie de moi à moi-même" (*L'Être* 316). Sartre, however, rejects the possibility of mutual recognition and portrays the objectifying gaze of the other as a bearer of alienation and enslavement. The "sinister dialectic of gazes" (Jay 289) thus inevitably results in a master-slave relation, a dead end. Here Sartre therefore radically departs from the Hegelian system of absolute spirit, since he regards the dualism between subject and object as inerasable. Either the other is object to me, which means that he or she cannot act as a mirror in which I find myself, or I myself become objectified by the other, which means that I lose my agency and am other-determined. Even lovers cannot transcend this dilemma. Jay explains this condition in Buber's terms of I-thou (I-You) and I-it (I-It): "Even the most seemingly 'I-thou' relationship . . . is at root an 'I-it' interaction," and hence lovers "are engaged in a mutual dialectic of possession"

[36] Jay also points to the affinity of Sartre's analysis of the gaze with the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in its emphasis on "reciprocal violence rather than mutual recognition" (287).

(*Downcast* 292). Consequently, it is impossible for the self to find recognition in the other. Hartmann notes,

> Das cogito bekommt nie Subjektivität zu fassen. In diesem Antagonismus von Subjekt und Objekt und damit der Unmöglichkeit, den Andern als Andern im Erkennen zu haben oder sich im Andern zu erkennen, liegt eine Grundüberzeugung Sartres. Sie steht in Gegensatz zu einer Grundüberzeugung Hegels, wonach der Fortschritt der Dialektik genau dieses will: die Vermittlung von Subjektivem und Objektivem. Hegel erscheint Sartre hierin als ein "erkenntnistheoretischer Optimist." [see *Être* 296] (104)

Sartre cannot support Hegel's optimism. The other is hell because he poses an existential threat to one's subjectivity. The other becomes the enemy who robs the self of self-determination and power. The gaze according to Sartre, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, automatically turns human beings into mannequins, in order to ensure its dominance over its environment. "For a philosophy that is installed in pure vision," Merleau-Ponty writes, ". . . there can be no encounter with another: for the look dominates; it can dominate only things, and if it falls upon men it transforms them into puppets which move only by springs" (*Visible* 77).

Sartre's Theory of the Look

Sartre describes the detrimental repercussions of the other's entry into the self's universe vividly in the section of *L'Être et le Néant* subtitled "Le Regard." Norman Bryson provides some insightful reflections on the meaning of the French term "regard":

> The etymology of the word *regard* points to far more than the rudimentary act of looking: the prefix, with its implication of an act that is always repeated, already indicates an impatient pressure within vision, a persevering drive which looks outward with mistrust (*reprendre sous garde*, to re-arrest) and actively seeks to confine what is always on the point of escaping or slipping out of bounds. (*Vision* 93)

These connotations match Sartre's definition of the look in their emphasis on the desire to fix the outer world in a structure mastered by a self at the center, exerting control over its environment. In "Le Regard," Sartre directs his attention to the interpersonal dynamics set into motion through the intrusion of another person into our field of vision. The other's capacity to "catch" us in his gaze is a significant factor in making us perceive the other as human, as another subject rather than object. With the appearance of the other, the self's position as center of the universe becomes contested: ". . . dans la mesure où l'objet-homme est le terme fundamental de cette relation, dans la mesure où

elle *va vers lui* elle m'échappe, je ne puis me mettre au centre" (*L'Être* 312). Thus the presence of another human being observing the same object from another perspective qualifies the existence of that same object, and through this shift it now eludes full consciousness. As Schumacher underlines, "Sein und in der Welt engagiert sein bedeutet für den Menschen . . . verkörpert sein als ein *Bezugszentrum*" (163). Schumacher here describes the relational positioning of consciousness in its worldly environment—the self needs to relate to the objects around it, it needs to establish itself as the center of these relations in order to retain a sense of its own unity.[37] This sense of unity is disrupted with the realization that ". . . I am not the only perceiver and agent in my world. The world is peopled by others, and these others are not simply objects in the world: they are centres of reorientation to the objective universe" (Laing and Lee 3).

In Sartre's example of being in the park, the lawn has been transformed by the existence of an other, and the loss of control over and absolute knowledge of that particular object entail the displacement of the subject in the universe:

> Ainsi tout à coup un objet est apparu qui m'a volé le monde. Tout est en place, tout existe toujours pour moi, mais tout est parcouru par une fuite invisible et figée vers un object nouveau. L'apparition d'autrui dans le monde correspond donc à un glissement figé de tout l'univers, à une décentration du monde qui mine par en dessous la centralisation que j'opère dans le même temps. (*L'Être* 313)

What emerges from these passages is a sense of an existential relativity resulting from the appearance of another person. The world as perceived through a single consciousness can no longer be the same if one acknowledges the presence of another consciousness qualifying the existence of objects by creating "a new gravitational field, drawing into its own orbit the objects which were orbiting me" (Atkins 89). The notion of a stable subject is undermined by the presence of the other. One is no longer the only master of the situation, since an essential reorientation of the world toward this other person has occurred. The self is alienated from a world that converges toward the presence of a new subject, a source of re-evaluation of so far uncontested space.

Not only does the presence of the other have an effect on the nature of the object's appearance, it also turns the conscious subject into a spectacle. The "hole," the self that is missing from its own picture, now becomes part of

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[37] Schumacher's interpretation of the body as an embodied center of relations bears affinity to Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of embodied subjectivity (see Chapter 2.4).

somebody else's field of vision. This creates a dependence on the other in order to fill the gap left in our own perception. According to Sartre, the gaze of the other leads to an imprisonment of the self: ". . . autrui me *regarde* et, comme tel, il détient le secret de mon être, il sait ce que je suis; ainsi, le sens profond de mon être est hors de moi, emprisonné dans une absence" (*L'Être* 430).[38] However, whether the other really has such access to the secret of the self is certainly questioned in Hustvedt's works. Although characters frequently feel usurped by the gaze of others and by misrepresentations which shift beyond their control, Hustvedt reserves the possibility to retain a degree of inner safety, an "inner sanctum" (*What I Loved* 48) to the self, even when identity gets disrupted by a hostile act of visual appropriation as performed by the photographers George and Jeffrey. The other does not get full access to the self by pinning down an outer appearance—there is always part of the self that evades the other, and this is a definite contrast between Hustvedt's and Sartre's approaches.

In Sartre's model, nonetheless, the danger of the self being objectified by the other's gaze is the basic condition of interpersonal relations: "C'est dans et par la révélation de mon être-objet pour autrui que je dois pouvoir saisir la présence de son être-sujet" (*L'Être* 314). The look of the other possesses the self, it has absolute control over how it perceives the self's outer physical appearance, an appearance that the self cannot realize. "[L]e regard d'autrui façonne mon corps dans sa nudité, le fait naître, le sculpte, le produit comme il *est*, le voit *comme* je ne le verrai jamais. Autrui détient un secret: le secret de ce que je suis" (*L'Être* 431).

Merleau-Ponty analyzes Sartre's pessimistic conceptualization of the gaze in terms of Hegel's master-slave dialectic:

> He has the impression that the alien gaze which runs over his body is stealing it from him, or else, on the other hand, that the display of his body will deliver the other person up to him, defenceless, and that in this case the other will be reduced to servitude. Shame and immodesty, then, take their place in a dialectic of the self and

[38] Memorably, the fatal attraction of this secret seated in the other is displayed in Sartre's play *Huis Clos*. In the play, Inès gains control over Estelle due to the latter's fixedness on her exterior appearance. Taking on the role of the mirror reflecting Estelle's identity, Inès incarnates the power of the gaze: "Si le miroir se mettait à mentir? Ou si je fermais les yeux, si je refusais de te regarder, que ferais-tu de toute cette beauté?" (*Huis Clos* 27). Without being looked at, Estelle's body does not exist to her. She needs Inès, but at the same time, her opposite has the power to misrepresent or to look away, thus denying a reflection of the self.

> the other which is that of master and slave: in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at *him*. (*Phenomenology* 193)

In Sartre's view, the alien gaze has the power to hold command over one's identity. Due to this domination of one's outward appearance through the look of the other, the self loses its autonomy. As Sartre remarks, "S'il y a un Autre, quel qu'il soit, où qu'il soit, quels que soient ses rapports avec moi, sans même qu'il agisse autrement sur moi que par le pur surgissement de son être, j'ai un dehors, j'ai une *nature*: ma chute originelle c'est l'existence de l'autre" (*L'Être* 321). The existence of the other manifests the embodiment of the self—through the process of objectification the inner is inescapably trapped by the outer. Thus in Sartre's interpretation of interpersonal relationships the other becomes the dominating force of our being. Rather than inaugurating a process of mutual recognition, the encounter between two self-consciousnesses inevitably leads to a sense of entrapment and alienation.

Both Sartre's theory of the look and Lacan's account of the mirror stage then entail a sense of alienation and misrecognition. As Homer notes, Lacan, like Sartre, holds the gaze of the other to be an inevitable component of existence: "To exist one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves" (Homer 26). Yet, both Lacan and Sartre acknowledge the dangers of misrepresentation, misidentification, and alienation.

Throughout *L'Être et le Néant*, Sartre hence posits the other as an objectifying force shattering the unique system of representation arranged around a single subject center. Once the existence of the other is accepted as a reality, the subject's position in the world is thrown out of balance through the clash of representational centers. Unlike Bakhtin, Sartre does not evaluate the excess of seeing maintained by one's opposite as a possibility of completing the self, but instead stresses the inevitable process of objectification originating with the other's presence. Grene criticizes Sartre for exactly this absence of any positive moments of being looked at, and directs the reader's attention toward instances of looking that do not embody a subject-object conflict: "The rare but still indubitable experience of mutual understanding, of the reciprocal look of peers;

or the look of mother and infant, where the one protects and the other is protected. In its immediate appearance there seems no internecine warfare here" (*Sartre* 154). Brosman also hints at the possibility of reciprocity when asking, "If cooperation could be established between two looks, perhaps each could help the other by affording it some perspective on itself; this would be a free exchange" (65), an option that Sartre, as she confirms, would reject as inauthentic. In the following I will present Bakhtin's answer to the question of how to deal with the clash of different perspectives and its outcome for his conception of subjectivity to show that he allows for the reciprocal exchange that Brosman and Grene miss in Sartre.

3.1.3 M. M. Bakhtin: Vision and Consummation

Bakhtin's concept of vision, which is based on the contrast between consummation and unfinalizability, comprises an optimistic interpretation of the look and the self's positionality in space. As Clark and Holquist stress, one can interpret the spatial non-coincidence of self and other in both optimistic and pessimistic terms (cf. 70). While Sartre chooses the negative, Bakhtin embraces a more positive side of the incongruence of self-other perspectives. In a passage from "Author and Hero,"[39] Bakhtin makes an observation on the perspectival structure of vision resembling Matt's thoughts in *What I Loved* on the same topic:

> When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes. It is possible, upon assuming an appropriate position, to reduce this difference of horizons to a minimum, but in order to annihilate it completely, it would be necessary to merge into one, to become one and the same person. (22-23)

[39] Although in "Author and Hero," as in most of his work, Bakhtin is primarily concerned with aesthetic theory, and above all with the relationship between the author and his work, his remarks about the nature of the novel, the author, polyphony etc. lend themselves to a transfer onto human existence in general; they bear significance beyond mere aesthetic theory, because all of human life is structured according to the parameters of dialogue. As Holquist remarks, "Bakhtin conceives existence as the kind of book we call a novel . . . , for all of us write our own text, a text that is then called our life. Bakhtin uses the literary genre of the novel as an allegory for representing existence as the condition of authoring" (*Dialogism* 30).

What conclusions does Bakhtin draw from this confrontation of non-conflatable viewpoints? Is the other, as it is for Sartre, the downfall of an intact subjectivity? First of all, Bakhtin goes on to emphasize the "irreplaceability" of the self's place in the world. The individual's embodiment implicates the uniqueness of his or her position. Only through cognition can the "concrete outsideness" ("Author and Hero" 23) characterizing the self's relationship with the other be surmounted: "For cognition, there is no absolutely inconvertible relationship of *I* and *all others*; for cognition, '*I* and the *other*,' inasmuch as they are being thought, constitute a relationship that is relative and convertible, since the cognitive *subiectum* as such does not occupy any determinate, concrete place in being" (Bakhtin, "Author and Hero" 23). Thus Bakhtin argues in favor of a mutual and relational subjectivity based on a transcendence of one's own fixation in space through the cognitive faculty that is capable of assuming the other's position. Hence the self is, on the one hand, irreplaceable and its view of the world unique, on the other, this does not effect a denial of a relational connectedness with the other.

Bakhtin, however, like Sartre, acknowledges the potential of objectification anchored in the gaze of the other. In Bakhtinian terminology, this objectification is referred to as "consummation." If fully captivated and determined by the look of the other, the self loses its freedom and its life energy:

> If I am consummated and my life is consummated, I am no longer capable of living and acting. For in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself—at least in all the essential moments constituting my life; I have to be, for myself, someone who is axiologically yet-to-be, someone who does not coincide with his already existing makeup. (Bakhtin, "Author and Hero" 13)

Bakhtin, in contradistinction to Sartre, grants the possibility of such openness and self-determination in the presence of the other. Complete consummation is not the only variety of human interactions; on the contrary, Bakhtin regards a certain degree of complementation through the other as a completion rather than an imprisonment. In their interpretation of the interaction of glances between self and other as envisioned by Bakhtin, Holquist and Clark illuminate the positive value of the other's gaze, which makes the opposition between Sartre and the Russian critic explicit:

> So that when I complete the other, or when the other completes me, she and I are actually exchanging the gift of a perceptible self. This is what Bakhtin means when

> he argues that we got our selves from others; I get a self I can see, that I can understand and use, by clothing my otherwise invisible (incomprehensible, unutilizable) self in the completing categories I appropriate from the other's image of me. (79)

Instead of posing a threat to subjectivity, the presence of the other offers comfort in making the self able to get a grasp on her outer appearance and hence the chance to fully realize her own identity. The other endorses a promise of coherence between the inner and the outer. As Bakhtin himself stresses, the other's perspective does not collide with and destroy a sense of unity of the self; instead, the other's reflection of the self is incorporated into consciousness and thus adds to the fluid movement of an identity continuously developing:

> . . . these moments or constituents of our life that we recognize and anticipate through the other are rendered completely immanent to our own consciousness, are translated, as it were, into its language: . . . they do not disrupt the unity of our own life – a life that is directed ahead of itself toward the event yet-to-come, a life that finds no rest within itself and never coincides with its given, presently existing makeup. ("Author and Hero" 16)

In addition, Bernard-Donals' statement that "[w]e might be able to complete either a 'reflection' of ourselves as seen by some other, or comprehend the other in the same way, but these reflections are not coincident with our selves as they are experienced by us" (26) shows that the other in general has no means to fully consummate us because our reflections do not coincide with our true selves. Being thus based on the principle of progress and fluidity, the self, in Bakhtin's interpretation, cannot be fixed and objectified by the other. Accordingly, one can escape complete consummation through the other's gaze, much to one's advantage, since "consummating one's life is completing one's life, and in Bakhtin's terms, anything that is completed – in later terminology, what is monologic – is dead" (Bernard-Donals 27).

As we have quoted Sartre before, the other thus penetrates us to the heart. Or, in Bakhtin's words: "A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 287). In spite of this, the subject still retains a degree of self-determination, since the final make-up of identity is attained through a return to the inner self: "After looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, we always return—in life—into ourselves again, and the final, or, as it were, recapitulative event takes place

within ourselves in the categories of our own life" (Bakhtin, "Author and Hero" 17).

3.1.4 Alienation and Photographic Misrepresentation in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* and Other Works

In *The Blindfold*, interpersonal relations are marked by mechanisms of alienation, misidentification and conflict. The novel comprises a wealth of moments in which its characters are exposed to or rebel against objectification through the other's gaze and fall prey to an identification with (mis)representations of themselves through others. None of the characters can experience enrichment or completion through another.

The Blindfold is filled with narratives of evasion and acts of performance geared toward an escape from being fixed and defined through the perception of others. Mr. Morning, Paris, and Iris all revel in disguising their "true" selves as a measure of protection against being pinned down and objectified by their environment. Pseudonyms and masks, disguises and role plays mark the characters' interactions, and subjectivity is based almost exclusively on performativity, not on genuine dialogue and exchange. What makes the novel interesting in both a Lacanian and a Sartrean framework, are the many instances in which the characters attempt to escape the totalizing identification through others; instead of feeling the initial jubilation experienced by the infant, they are trapped in a state of estrangement and terror.

The alienating force of the other's gaze is felt from the beginning of the novel, in the first encounter between Iris and Mr. Morning: "Without any apparent reserve, he looked at me, taking in my whole body with his gaze. I don't know if his scrutiny was lecherous or merely curious, but I felt assaulted and turned away from him, and then when he asked me my name I lied" (*Blindfold* 11). This passage reveals the connectedness of the gaze and subjectivity, since Iris's attempt to cover up her real identity comes as a defense against the other's visual assault on her body. Her outside being "taken in" by a stranger interferes with her sense of independence and integral subjectivity. Hence Iris tries to counteract the power exerted by Mr. Morning's look through the creation of a fake identity. Iris describes the lie as "a defensive act, a way

of protecting myself from some amorphous danger" (*Blindfold* 11). By giving a wrong name, Iris tries to protect and keep secret her real position in the symbolic order, denying Mr. Morning any further access to her identity. In this first encounter, subjectivity is thus portrayed as an endangered and unstable concept, easily intruded upon by a stranger's look, and disrupted by layers of fictions heaped upon the "true" self to protect it from being uncovered and controlled by the other.

Concealing the nature of one's inner self from the environment is an endeavor shared by all characters. Mr. Morning publishes his work under pseudonyms ("'You enjoy hiding behind masks?' 'I revel in it. It gives my life a certain color and danger'" [*Blindfold* 12]). Stephen withdraws and holds back information about himself (*Blindfold* 41). George, though more outgoing on the surface, also evades exposing anything about his true self (*Blindfold* 44). Michael (Professor Rose) hardly gives away any facts about his life, and charms Iris with quoting fictions instead: ". . . he talked up a storm, wooing me with Catullus, Boccaccio, Donne, and Sidney, with Shakespeare and Wyatt, Fielding and Joyce . . ." (*Blindfold* 187). Last but not least, Paris is the master of disguise and pretense, a character impossible to pin down and explain. Paris is the epitome of a fleeting surface. Significantly, the novel ends with Iris running in terror ("like a bat out of hell" [*Blindfold* 221]) from her last meeting with Paris, in which she is finally forced to realize that everything she thought she knew about him was nothing but a product of her imagination. What shakes Iris's constitution most is that by confiding in him and telling him about her life (looking for understanding, recognition, for somebody sharing the knowledge of her true self), she has made her identity vulnerable to his misrepresentations. He acts as a mirror in the Lacanian sense, but a manipulative and distorting one, terrifying Iris with her reflection, an effect similar to the fragmented portrait in the photograph taken by George (see below). Iris's complete misinterpretation of Paris's character and his ruthless negation of any kind of meaningful and human qualities lead her to call him a monster (*Blindfold* 218). The long list of names that Iris throws at Paris show that there are endless possible identities hidden behind the mask he wears that bears the name "Paris." He is the embodiment of fluid and incongruent identity, a floating signifier in the symbolic order, fully embracing the "circus"

(*Blindfold* 220) of life; his "true" identity is forever out of reach since he has embraced the maxim of a world stripped of coherence, a world in which self-creation is boundless. Paris, by avoiding the objectifying force of the other through the creation of fake surfaces, hence achieves a certain measure of freedom. However, it seems that, by basing his existence on a continuous series of lies and evasions, he also denies himself the possibility of any real connection with his environment, which ultimately means that he does not possess an identity either.

Other instances in the novel further illustrate that attempts at sidestepping their identity bear dangers that are beyond the characters' control. Iris regretfully looks back at her initial lie about her name: ". . . later that false name haunted me; it seemed to move me elsewhere, shifting me off course and strangely altering my whole world for a time. When I think back on it now, I imagine that lie as the beginning of the story, as a kind of door to my uneasiness" (*Blindfold* 11). Pseudonyms develop their own powers, reality comes to reverberate with the fake representations chosen by the characters. By creating these fictional links between selves and names, the chain of signification is released on the identity of the self. Each representation echoes back to its referent. As Mr. Morning points out, "'Even the most careful planning can go awry. It's impossible to know for sure who's concealed under the pseudonym I choose'" (*Blindfold* 12).

All these are examples of identities formulated within a context of constant threat and mistrust in the other. Finding themselves under constant attack through the gaze of the other, the characters resort to reshaping their identities as a measure of protection against being objectified. This, however, leads to an absence of any genuine encounters and exchanges between individuals—the masks and performances hide and ultimately endanger the characters' authentic selves.

Photography in *The Blindfold*

In *The Blindfold*, the distinction between representations and realities becomes impossible at times. The novel presents a world in which appearances are given the same level of importance as facts. "'It's a matter of appearances,'"

as Stephen remarks, "'but surfaces are underestimated. The veneer becomes the thing. I rarely distinguish the man in the movie from the spectator anymore'" (*Blindfold* 81). This dangerous exchangeability of reality and fiction, of the inner and the outer, finds its most powerful manifestation in the photograph George takes of Iris. During the photography session, George entices Iris to lose control and show herself without restrictions. The photograph that George chooses to exhibit shows Iris in a fragmented and contorted way that shocks and repels her, with unsettling effects to her relationships with other people.

Susan Sontag describes the specific power of photographs over the realities which they represent in her essay "On Photography." Pointing to the prevalence of image-worlds over reality as a symptom of modern society (349), Sontag goes on to differentiate photography from painting. She stresses that ". . . first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask" (350).

In spite of the various manipulations—retouching of photographs, photo montages etc.—now practicable in the field of photography, the medium still retains traces of its alleged conveyance of objective truth. Photography's presupposed superiority over painting as an expression of objective truth is highlighted in the following: "In the photographic camera we have the most reliable aid to the beginning of objective vision. Everyone will be compelled to see that which is optically true . . ." (Moholy-Nagy, qtd. in Burgin 8). One of the great temptations of photography hence is its suggestion of objectively mirroring a part of ourselves which otherwise we wouldn't have access to (the self as a hole in vision). Its claim to truthfulness seems to make the photographic representation the ideal medium to act as a mirror of our identity in the Lacanian sense.

As we see in the example of the photograph in *The Blindfold*, however, this claim to objectivity disregards the distortion of the original subject effected by the photographic representation. Its objectifying quality does not amount to the same as the communication of an objective truth. It appropriates a person's identity and threatens its intactness through the creation of a counter-identity beyond the control of the subject. Part of the "unfaithfulness" of the photograph to the identity of its subject is that it singles out an isolated

fragment, stopping the flux of images that usually comprises our appearance. As Elkins states, "Photographs clip out instants in time, and since we see in overlapping moments and usually base our sense of a person on a fluid sequence of moments and motions, a single photograph can often seem wrong" (28). Thus the threat that Iris feels from the photograph is partially due to the fact that this (mis)representation of herself seems to contain a certain reality about her identity—one that, however, contradicts her own self-image. As Ljungberg writes, "this photograph, fragmented and obscured, shows herself from the point of view of the Other, an absurd image that she cannot integrate with her own" (119).

The presence of the photograph seems to produce an absence of Iris's inner core; she feels that with the advent of the picture she loses presence. Elkins sees this absence as characteristic of all photographs: "I think this incompleteness is an inbuilt property of photographs . . ." (28). It is no wonder that Stephen's—the advocate of appearances—reaction to the photo is the first to make Iris realize that danger: "His unblinking gaze reminded me of some animal whose eyes appear totally inert, almost blind, and suddenly I had the feeling that for Stephen I had become invisible" (*Blindfold* 64). In Stephen's eyes, the real Iris is quickly substituted with her photographic double: "'. . . You say it's a horrible photograph. I don't know what that means. You're making a moral judgment, but this face, this woman, is beyond all that.' 'Stephen,' I said. 'It's a picture of me'" (*Blindfold* 69). Stephen's attitude toward the photograph is exemplary for the way he treats Iris in general: he has no interest in her genuine identity, no intention of crossing the borderline between them; he is rather content with assuming power over her representation by fixing her in a stable image, denying the mysterious movements of her inner being. He thus reduces Iris to a surface. Luce Irigaray links the dominating male gaze with the photographic image: "Spelled out in images and photographs, a face loses the mobility of its expressions, the perpetual unfolding and becoming of the living being. Gazing at the beloved, the lover reduces her to less than nothing if this gaze is seduced by an image . . ." (*Ethics* 192). Stephen is seduced by such an image; he is not interested in the authentic core of the people around him, he feels no ethical

responsibility toward other people's feelings. Stephen, free of empathy and genuine emotional connection to Iris, chooses the representation over the self.

Sontag highlights the idea that photographs extend a power over the subject, turning it into an object to be scrutinized and controlled through representation: "But a photograph is not only like its subject, a homage to the subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it" ("On Photography" 351). Photographs, according to Sontag, redefine reality "as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance" (351)—they freeze the fleeting moments of time into a single, graspable, and observable instant, thus relinquishing their subject eternally to the objectifying gaze of the other. In some sense, Iris's reaction to her appearance in the photograph can be said to resemble the primitive fear of the camera. As Sontag writes, in primitive cultures photography is believed to steal part of one's identity, since it is regarded as a material part of one's being (353-54).[40] Elkins also enforces this material intrusion of the photographic representation on the identity of the subject: "Every photograph is a little sting, a small hurt inflicted on its subject, but even more: every glance *hurts* in some way by freezing and condensing what's seen into something that it is not" (29). Iris feels a loss of identity because of the photograph George took of her. The representation gains control over and disrupts her identity: "'I don't know where I am anymore, and that picture is part of it.' . . . . 'You robbed me.'" (*Blindfold* 78). The photograph hence forms a nexus drawing on the looks of others to create a counter-identity overshadowing the real person. Thus it epitomizes the danger inherent in the look of the other by recording the hole in our vision that is fixed from the outside. As Sontag makes evident, "there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" ("On Photography" 14).

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[40] Sontag adds a further twist to the mix between image-world and real world with her postulation that we do not so much take the photographic representation for the real thing, but rather, struggling with a general loss of a sense of reality and unable to describe the events of our lives in terms of reality, we need to resort to the vocabulary of representations instead to add a layer of signification to our thinning grip on real life (354-55).

All this explains the horror that Iris experiences when she discovers the photograph that George has taken of her. Her first impressions upon observing the picture of herself are marked by a feeling of absence, fragmentation and disorientation: "At first I didn't even recognize myself. . . . I was cut off below my breasts, and my extended arms were severed at the elbows. . . . I had the awful impression that the parts of me that weren't in the photo were really absent . . . . what appeared of me inside the photograph was also fragmented" (62). The fragmentation of the body evokes Lacan's "image morcelée du corps" (*Écrits* 97), the body in pieces without a sense of coherence and wholeness.[41] The photograph becomes the drain hole through which the center of Iris's subjectivity becomes distorted. Her identity having been reduced to being "body-for-others" in the photographic representation, Iris can no longer retain her stable position as center of relations, as center of reference.

The reduction, framing, and fragmentation that Iris experiences corresponds with Shaun Gallagher's characterization of the schism between body schema and body image: "Precisely because the body schema operates in a holistic, unified way, whereas in the body image the body appears with certain parts emphasized or singled out, the body image is not a veridical representation of the body schema" (Gallagher 230). The photograph is not an appropriate representation because it eclipses the holistic presence of the body schema. Instead of representing her in a totality or wholeness, the photograph shows the body in fragments ("une image morcelée du corps" [Lacan, *Écrits* 97]), thus enforcing rather than counteracting Iris's feeling of disintegration.

The fixed representation of the self as caught in a photograph becomes an instrument of terror. Iris perceives the image of herself as part of her identity. Elizabeth Bronfen indicates that Iris's comportment regarding the photograph resembles that of a hysteric: ". . . she begins, much along the lines of the classic hysteric, to somatically enact the murky interface between fiction and reality which this image comes to represent for her. The photograph initially takes on the function of a fetish in her fantasy life" ("Gendering" 285). Claudia Öhlschläger also links Iris's reaction to the photograph to hysteria, by

[41] In the chapter "Visualizing the Disabled Body: The Classical Nude and the Fragmented Torso" of his *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, Lennard J. Davis uses Lacan's concept of the *corps morcelé* to disclose social constructions of the fragmented or disabled body as monstrous, contaminating, and repulsive (126-57).

pointing to Charcot's optical demonstration of his female patients at the Salpêtrière (216-17). Bronfen's and Öhlschläger's interconnections between photography and hysterical identity in a sense foreshadow Hustvedt's investigation of hysteria and photographic representation in *What I Loved* (see below). Bronfen furthermore portrays Iris as Hustvedt's "critical reconfiguration of Pandora," the world's first woman, a "fabricated woman" ("Gendering" 287) made from clay, who, due to curiosity, releases all evils and afflictions on the world. Bronfen's rendering of Iris as a hysterical Pandora provides an interesting link between identity, representation and gender, which will be mirrored in my interpretation of hysteria in *What I Loved*.

Ultimately, the photograph is the quintessential realization of objectification through the gaze of the other as introduced by Sartre. The self is enslaved by the observer, it is mastered by another self-consciousness. The image has developed into a severed and independent entity, and Iris has lost all control over the identity of her representation, an identity which inevitably reflects back on her own awareness of self. This is the ultimate stage of alienation between self and the world ("l'aliénation de moi qu'est l'*être-regardé* implique l'aliénation du monde que j'organise" [Sartre, *L'Être* 321-22]), and Iris loses all sense of connectedness to her own identity and her environment. In an attempt to break free from the prison erected by the existence of the photograph, Iris reaches the point of denying ("sidestepped"; *Blindfold* 76) her identity altogether: "'You're Iris,' he said, 'aren't you?' I looked at the dark plates over his eyes. 'No,' I said, 'I'm not'" (*Blindfold* 75).

In his *Camera Lucida,* Barthes depicts the photograph as the moment in which the self becomes conscious of the illusionary state of its own identity: ". . . the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" (12). Barthes likens the experience of being photographed to "a micro-version of death"; as an object in front of the camera, the subject experiences the discontinuity and conflict between self-image and perception of others. Barthes fastens the moment of being photographed as the instance in which subject and object overlap:

> The portrait photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be)

> photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I *intend*) represents the very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre. (*Camera Lucida* 13-14)

The nightmarish feeling of inauthenticity is grounded in the moment of transition between being subject and being object. Sartre, as shown above, holds this simultaneity itself to be impossible. In the moment of being fixed in the gaze of the photographer, the subject loses its authoring capacity, power is in the hand of the other. Barthes, however, differentiates more, pointing to the feeling of becoming an object, a feeling that places the self in an undecidable field of presence and absence, equating the sensation with death and becoming a spectre. The four layers of self intersecting in the subject of photography complicate the definition of identity: not only is identity created through the interaction of these layers, but, even harder to grasp, through the self's imitation of what it thinks these factors to be. As a finished product, however, photography ultimately turns the subject into an object: (see Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 13). As Barthes illustrates, the objectification of the self in photography is tantamount to the experience of death: "but when I discover myself in the product of this operation, what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person" (*Camera Lucida* 14). The power of the others is grounded in the fixed visibility of the self's representation. Barthes's observations widen the complex self-other dynamics involved in photography, and hint at the detrimental forces inherent in being captured by the camera.

All in all, Iris's dread of her own representation can be said to be a symptom of the subject's alienation from itself caused by the objectifying gaze of the other. Her relationship with the photographer, George, already foreshadows the danger that his perception bears for her identity. Right after the photo shoot, whatever harmony may have existed between the two is gone immediately. George tells Iris that she's transparent (*Blindfold* 56), and Iris feels under attack by his assumed knowledge about her self: "By claiming that I, unlike he, was intelligible—an open book—he had made me vulnerable" (*Blindfold* 57). George, in taking control over Iris's representation in the photograph, gains power over her identity, since it is he who captures her presence in an image of his choice.

Photography in *What I Loved*

As in *The Blindfold*, the medium of photography is shown to enhance implications of other-determination and loss of agency in *What I Loved.* Here, Hustvedt explores the identity of hysterical patients at the Salpêtrière, a hospital in France, in the late nineteenth century.[42] Drawing on the extensive catalogue of photographs taken to document the various stages of hysteria, Bill, in a series of artworks, gives expression to the agony of the patients. His art highlights the cruelty of the clinical gaze and the objectification of the female patient, which was magnified by the photographic representation. One source of inspiration for Bill's portrayals of hysteria is the French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman's work *Invention de l'hystérie*. As narrator Leo points out:

> The book had been written by a Frenchman, Georges Didi-Huberman, but what interested Bill were its photographs. They all had been taken at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, where the famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot had conducted experiments on women suffering from hysteria. (Hustvedt, *Loved* 50).

Didi-Huberman, as the subtitle of his book reveals, analyzes the *Iconography of the Salpêtrière*—a collection of photographically documented case histories—examining the "extraordinary complicity between patients and doctors, a relationship of desires, gazes, and knowledge" (Didi-Huberman xi). At the Salpêtrière, photography was used to provide evidence to the doctors' speculations about the nature of hysteria. Didi-Huberman quotes Albert Londe, the director of the photographic department of the Salpêtrière in the 1880s: "'*the photographic plate is the scientist's true retina*'" (qtd. in Didi-Huberman 32). This statement turns photography into an extension of the scientist's sphere of subjectivity—at the same time, the idea of scientific investigation is meant to imply an objective and neutral representation of the hysterics. Hustvedt questions any kind of objectivity in the photography at the Salpêtrière: "Charcot's use of photography as an 'objective' tool to record the illness was rife with sexual bias and manipulations that created a vision of hysteria as fundamentally theatrical" (*Shaking Woman* 70-71).

Applying the above stated reflections on photography and identity to the situation of the hysterical patients, the horror and agony of the hysterics

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[42] Hustvedt's reading of hysteria as a form of boundary transgression will be investigated in detail in Chapter 4.2.

appear to be caused by the theft of agency procured by the iconography at the Salpêtrière. Didi-Huberman characterizes the clinical gaze at the Salpêtrière as follows: "The clinical glance is already *contact*, simultaneously ideal and percussive. It is a stroke [*trait*] that goes directly to the body of the patient, almost palpating it" (28-29). Like Sontag, Didi-Huberman furthermore likens photography to theft: "Such is the fundamental instability of the pleasure of seeing, of *Schaulust*, between memory and threat. Its ideal is certainty, which, in the always intersubjective moment of sight, emerges only as a theft, and as anticipated" (27). The voyeuristic desire of the doctors robs the hysterical patients of their identity; the images do not show truth, but rather become a manifestation of the doctors' expectation and manipulation.

At the Salpêtrière, the doctors' gaze takes effect as intrusion and violation of the hysteric's embodied identity. Photography is installed as an enforcement of "museological authority of the sick body, the museological agency of its 'observation'" (Didi-Huberman 30). In the moment of being fixed in the gaze of the photographer, the subject loses its authoring capacity. The assumption of such authority through photographic representation is inevitably violent. The symbolical possession effected by the photograph robs the hysteric of the ability to assume control over her identity and leaves her prey to the gaze of the readers of the iconography, including us. Her identity having been reduced to being "body-for-others" in the photographic representation, the hysteric is shown to be unable to occupy a stable position as center of relations, as center of reference.

In *What I Loved*, one of Bill's hysteria boxes is based on an actual picture taken at the Salpêtrière:

> Drawing close to her, I peeked into a small room, harshly lit by a miniature ceiling lamp that shone on an old black-and-white photograph that had been pasted to the far wall. It showed a woman's head and torso from behind. The word SATAN had been written in large letters on the skin between her shoulder blades. (Hustvedt, *Loved* 71)

The inscription of the woman's body is captured in a photograph, which heightens the sense of an identity determined by outside forces, of the woman as an object to be observed and judged against her will. Bill's interpretation of hysterical identity at the Salpêtrière displays the hysterics' agony in the grip of their doctors' violent inscription and photographic documentation. Again, photography implies an intrusion into the subject's privacy, delivering a part of

the self to the world in a representation that is beyond the control of the person photographed.

Photography in *The Sorrows of an American*

Hustvedt takes up the theme of photography again in *The Sorrows of an American*, displaying almost identically detrimental effects on people's identities. In this case, the main victim of distorted representation in a photograph is the protagonist Erik. The ex-boyfriend of Erik's neighbor Miranda, Jeffrey Lane, who is also the father of Eglantine, is a photographer who ruthlessly exploits his objects. Like Stephen, he seems to value the creative image of a person more than the person herself. As Miranda discloses to Erik: "'I felt like he wanted those photographs more than he wanted to talk to me'" (*Sorrows* 78-79). Again, photography—if executed by a person who is not conscionable about his or her art—is likened to a theft of identity: "For him [Jeffrey Lane], I thought, photography is a form of thievery, a raid that acts as a stimulant. He was a man in the business of stealing appearances" (*Sorrows* 113). The photographer, in Sontag's terminology, thus gains symbolical power over his object through a predatory act. Lane appears to be more of a stalker than an artist, since he follows Miranda and their daughter Eggie and takes their pictures, which he afterwards drops in front of their door. To add to the menace of these unwarranted photographs, Lane at times alters them by cutting into them or by crossing out the eyes of the people photographed. This aberrant behavior cannot be explained with his personal history with Miranda and Eggie, since Miranda knows that it is common practice for him: "'He's followed lots of people around, taking their pictures and then manipulating the results. He'd say, 'I'm remaking the world'" (*Sorrows* 118). This suggests the kind of power that some photographers potentially have over other people's identities: Lane is free to manipulate the result of his work and therefore becomes a creator of a reality shaped by his artistic delusion.

Not only does Lane take photographs of people who are unaware of the fact, he seems to derive more pleasure from it the more helpless his victims are. Miranda tells Erik: "'Well, he likes to take pictures of people sleeping. He likes it because the subjects don't know, because they're vulnerable" (*Sorrows* 113).

The photographer here becomes an agent of objectification who consumes the other in order to control their identity. He does not pay tribute to the other's alterity, but rather intrudes on their privacy and shows no regard for their personal space—he wants to turn people into art objects the identity of which he has full control over. As in *The Blindfold*, the photographer is shown to be a megalomaniac creature enjoying his power over other people. He says to Erik, "'I've photographed you, man. You're an open book'" (*Sorrows* 157), obviously claiming access to Erik's identity via this outer representation.

Like Iris, Erik feels bewildered and disconcerted by the presence of an image that he feels misrepresents his identity. When Eric's patient confronts him with a completely altered perception of his personality due to a photograph of him that she saw at an exhibition, he feels deeply destabilized and hurt: "It's hard to describe the loss that I felt at that moment. It was as if I had been robbed of something very dear to me, and without even having seen the image or images, I felt the burn of humiliation" (*Sorrows* 257). Erik feels "lacerated with shame" (*Sorrows* 264) and humiliation at the sight of his own contorted image displayed in Lane's photo exhibition. The distortion is so extreme that he does not even recognize himself at first (*Sorrows* 263).

In these examples of photography, subjectivity is compromised by a representation that clashes with the self's own sense of identity. The totalizing image (Lacan) of the mirroring photograph causes the self to realize its own fragmentation and the discrepancy between other people's perception and self-image. The photograph in this case becomes a manifestation of the objectifying potential of the other's gaze, and the self becomes consummated by the other.

A Side Note: Positive Moments of Photography

It is important to mention, however, that Hustvedt by no means regards the medium of photography in general as cruel or negative. Hustvedt promotes a responsibility of the artist regarding the way in which he or she represents the object. Artistic misrepresentation is furthermore not restricted to the medium of photography, but can occur in other art forms as well, as becomes evident in Hustvedt's unflattering portrayal of postmodern artist Teddy Giles in *What I Loved.* As a real-life counterexample to George's ruthlessness and exploitation,

I would like to point to Donata Wenders's work, which Hustvedt praises (in an essay that is included in a collection of photography by Donata Wenders) for its preservation of the objects' dignity and for its unintrusiveness. Hustvedt writes: "Each subject, seen from far away or close up, is invested with uncommon dignity, a sense of tremendous worth in its own right, viewed without condescension or the leering voyeurism that is part of so many photographs" ("Illuminated" 12). In addition, Hustvedt writes about her own picture being taken: "When Donata took pictures of me, I felt an ease I've rarely felt, a willingness to simply be in her presence, without self-consciousness or anxiety" ("Illuminated" 12).

A good photographer thus does not simply objectify and control her subject, but "recognizes all that remains unseen" (Hustvedt, "Illuminated" 12). She mediates, she selects (cf. "Illuminated" 12), but she does not erase the other's presence. Importantly, Hustvedt also finds the photographer's presence in these photographies ("I offer you these reflections, these mysterious doubles, she seems to say. I will even show you myself and my camera" ("Illuminated" 12), which discloses the involvement of the artist in his work. The good photographer does not employ an objectifying gaze, trying to exploit her model. Significantly, Hustvedt is reminded of Renoir, Vermeer, and Degas paintings when analyzing Wenders's photographs, pointing to their "subliminal reference" ("Illuminated" 12). Although photography is highlighted in its elements of alienation and identity theft in the novels, Hustvedt hence does not condemn the medium of photography altogether.

Blindfolded

The interrelation of vision and power is further developed in one of the final scenes of *The Blindfold*, a scene centered on the use of the blindfold, thus explaining the title of the work. Iris's and Michael's affair reaches its negative climax in the moment when she loses her ability to see him. Being blindfolded, she loses control over the situation, and he assumes full power over the action. At first, Iris enjoys the feeling of anonymity: "He kissed me, and it was good not to see him. . . . Like a child, I felt that my blindness made me disappear, or at least made the boundaries of my body unstable" (*Blindfold* 203).

Interestingly, Hustvedt here equates the loss of vision with a loss of clear limits of one's own body—limits that are blurred and questioned throughout her writing. The absence of vision leads to a loss of identity; the self seems to "disappear," and the self's boundaries become loose. Öhlschläger reproaches Hustvedt of confirming the traditional gender distribution of the female as the object of vision, victimized by her male counterparts:

> Die Autorin läßt – und darin besteht das eigentlich Provokante und Ärgerliche – Iris die Geschichte ihrer weiblichen Identitätssuche als eine der Abhängigkeitsbeziehungen zu anderen Menschen, genauer gesagt zu Männern, erzählen, und dies in einem Genus der Souveränität, der ungebrochen in die Reproduktion vorhandener Geschlechter-Stereotypen mündet. Ohne kritische Reflexion über die Tragweite diskursiv erzeugter Vorstellungen geschlechtsspezifischen Verhaltens stilisiert Hustvedt ihre (Anti-)Heldin zum (freiwilligen) Opfer männlicher Herrschaftsausübung. Indem sie sie mit Attributen der Hilflosigkeit, der Naivität und Infantilität ausstattet, schreibt sich Hustvedt in ihrem Roman in jenen literarischen Machtdiskurs ein, der die Frau als 'schwaches' Geschlecht generiert. (Öhlschläger 207)

This assessment of Hustvedt's novel appears unjustified, since it withholds the various instances of male weakness occurring in *The Blindfold* that significantly defuse the reproach of stylizing the female as the weak gender. Although Iris may take the part of passive object of the gaze in being photographed and blindfolded, at least in the blindfold scene it becomes apparent how quickly supposedly male power may dissolve into vulnerability and helplessness. As Hustvedt remarks in her essay "A Plea for Eros," she does not agree with gender classifications of the male as subject and the female as object, but rather sees these roles as reversible and exchangeable: "Of course women are sexual objects: so are men" (*Plea* 47). Thus the quality of "*looked-at-ness*," turning the "body into a spectacle of desire" (Denzin 43), conventionally limited to the female, in Hustvedt becomes transferable to the male. This is actually realized in *The Sorrows of an American*, since the male protagonist Erik becomes the disempowered object, while Miranda, who is also a target of the photographic assault, is less affected by it.

Hustvedt also undermines the traditional gender assignment of the man as observer and woman as object in her essay "The Pleasures of Bewilderment": "A lot has been written about the male gaze in painting. Much of it is true. In many paintings with an erotic theme, the spectator is generally acknowledged from inside the painting itself to be a man. What has been discussed less is that women hop very easily into a man's shoes when looking at such a painting"

(*Mysteries* 8). Thus the traditional male subject-female object distinction is subverted, since voyeurism, as will discussed in more detail below, is universal and not limited to the male spectator. Already Öhlschläger's title for her interpretation of Hustvedt's *The Blindfold*, "Die Rehabilitation des männlichen Blicks" seems misleading, since Hustvedt does not aim at a rehabilitation of the male gaze but rather identifies the detrimental implications of such a mastering and objectifying look.

In addition to the increased destabilization of identity caused by the blindness, Iris feels thrilled by the sense of performing an act, by the transition of reality into a staged performance. "The pleasure was in the staging," she feels, "the idea of ourselves as the repetition of others. I knew this without saying it, felt my femininity as the game of all women, a mysterious identification in which I lost myself. He was caught too, and I wondered what he saw, whom he saw" (*Blindfold* 204). What this performative quality of the encounter brings about, however, is the failure of a genuine exchange between two selves; instead, being caught in an identification with something beyond the self, Iris and Michael become alienated from each other. The process of alienation, however, has started earlier in their relationship, and, significantly, is always connected to modes of seeing and the thin boundary line between reality and performance. Iris describes her relationship with Michael in terms of jealousy, guilt, alienation, and blame (*Blindfold* 197)—all feelings that Sartre lists as the basic modes of the interpersonal encounter—and sees both herself and Michael as role players in a game directed alternately by him or her, with the other as spectator or actor respectively: "I was a player and not a player. I was in and out. . . . He was one and then another" (*Blindfold* 197); "I felt like a character in a farce" (*Blindfold* 198); "I became a spectator in my own act" (*Blindfold* 198).

This staged character of reality reaches its culmination point in the blindfold scene. And again, as pointed to above, the danger of this mix of fiction and reality takes over, and the dread of losing control over one's own identity remains. In a moment of sheer panic, Iris, being captured in Michael's outburst of cruel passion, realizes that he can no longer differentiate between the real situation and the fictions they created together: "He doesn't know, I thought. He's still inside it. He can't know" (*Blindfold* 204). What Iris has

referred to as a "third presence," "the thing between us," in the end is shown to be nothing but an illusion that does not lead to a true togetherness or a knowledge or recognition of the other's inner self. Tellingly, after this outbreak of violence, Michael and Iris sit on the bed, staring at the mirror, and Iris realizes the incompatibility of her identity with Michael's image of her. Whatever answer Michael has been seeing in her, she now realizes, is nothing but a spectre of herself, a phantom created by his desire (see *Blindfold* 206). What is left in the end is only Iris's pity for her lover, and his inability to accept it. Their relationship serves as a further example of what Sartre understood as the "impossibility of a we"; in *The Blindfold*, characters fail to establish reciprocal relationships in which both parts retain their subjectivity. Unable to access the inner core of the other, due to dynamics of performativity and the inseparability of fact and fiction which captivates them in the battle between actor and spectator, they are never in a position that would allow them to reach out and grasp the true nature of the other.

3.2 Moving toward the Other: Intersubjective Modes of Vision

The conception of the alienating look in *The Blindfold* (and in the examples of photography in *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American*) is contrasted with alternative models of vision in Hustvedt's novels *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* and *What I Loved*. In the latter two novels, Hustvedt introduces a construct of vision in which subject-object distinctions are transgressed: in a voyeuristic setting in *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* and *What I Loved*, and in the field of visual arts in *What I Loved.* In this chapter, Merleau-Ponty's concept of vision will introduce a reciprocal trait to the nature of seeing and thus facilitate an understanding of the potential mixing of identities initiated by the look. Merleau-Ponty's theory will be complemented with Lacan's and Irigaray's approaches to vision. While in Bakhtin's and Sartre's models of the gaze the spatial distance between self and other is maintained, Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray, and also Lacan erase this gap through a new approach to vision, emphasizing reversibility and intersubjectivity. The space between people is no longer interpreted as an emptiness forming an

abyss between the looking self and its object. Vision emerges as a medium of connection and mutuality rather than separation.

Merleau-Ponty

As has been discussed above, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy endorses the connectedness of self and world. Like Husserl, Bakthin, and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the embodied positioning of perception, which determines our view of the world in relation to our particular perspective. However, he does not focus on the self as the center where the world is tied into a unified representation; rather, he conceives of vision as developing in an energy field between the object and the perceiving self. The object reaches out to the self, and a part of the self moves beyond the "sphere of ownness" (Husserl) to fuse with the external phenomenon. "Everything depends," he states, "on the fact that our glances are not 'acts of consciousness,' each of which claims an invariable priority, but openings of our flesh which are immediately filled by the universal flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* 16). The act of viewing thus becomes an opening in which the self mixes with the world. Merleau-Ponty situates perception beyond the limits of a sealed subjectivity and connects subject and object in an intermediate perceptual field. The visual sphere, according to Merleau-Ponty, is intersubjective and shared: "My vision overlaps another one; or rather they function together and fall as a matter of principle upon the same Visible World" (*Signs* 16).

Like Matt in *What I Loved*, Merleau-Ponty reflects on the fact that the self is a hole in vision: "There can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts thrown up in the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, that gap which we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence for someone" (*Phenomenology* 241). This gap, however, has a very different potential for Merleau-Ponty than for Sartre. Merleau-Ponty reviews Sartre's theory of the look critically; in Merleau-Ponty's view, one should not perceive the other as an object, but rather as behavior: "But if another's body is not an object for me, nor mine an object for him, if both are manifestations of behaviour, the positing of the other does not reduce me to the status of an object in his field, nor does my perception of the other reduce him

to the status of an object in mine" (*Phenomenology* 411). This links up with Husserl's differentiation between *Körper* (the body as object) and *Leib* (the body as lived being; cf. page 8-9 of this study). In a similar vein, Hustvedt cites Shaun Gallagher's distinction between body schema and body image. "The former [body schema] is 'a system of sensory motor capacities,'" she quotes, "a mostly unconscious system. . . . . My body image, on the other hand, is conscious—the beliefs and thoughts I have about my physical being. I'm fat or thin or ugly or beautiful; it is I as an object, a perception of my body from the *outside*" (*Shaking Woman* 50).

Merleau-Ponty sees the self as always already beyond safe limits of subjectivity (cf. Chapter 2.4.2), since "both [self and other] are, not *cogitationes* shut up in their own immanence, but beings which are outrun by their world, and which consequently may well be outrun by each other" (*Phenomenology* 411). Since the self is inseparable from the world, since its embodiment inevitably presupposes an immersion and an entanglement in the fabric of the world, the other's gaze cannot pose the threat described by Sartre; a self which has no objective power over the world to begin with cannot lose it to somebody else. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is based on notions of fusion and indistinctness—perception is a shared phenomenon without definite boundaries. This prevents the objectifying force of the gaze: "In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception" (*Phenomenology* 411). Merleau-Ponty thus outlines a concept of an intersubjectively constituted world in which self and other can never be quite completely separated, since their perspectives overlap and since they collaborate and complete each other in their perception of this world.

In Merleau-Ponty's view, the gaze does not establish distance between self and object, but instead affects an immersion in which subject-object distinctions are annihilated. He writes, "to look at an object is to plunge oneself into it" (*Phenomenology* 78) and "to look at an object is to inhabit it" (*Phenomenology* 79). Merleau-Ponty maintains that the gaze is characterized by its quality of reciprocity. Nevertheless, he also promotes a view of the other

as intruding into the self's field of vision, similar to Sartre's: "The other can enter into the universe of the seer only by assault, as a pain and a catastrophe" (*Visible* 78). Against Sartre, however, Merleau-Ponty asserts that there is something more between self and other than the insurmountable division caused by the clash of two opposing gazes: "It is necessary that there be transition from the other to me and from me to the other . . ." (*Visible* 80). Merleau-Ponty thus revises Sartre's view of vision as a totality by juxtaposing it with a co-existence of multiple perspectives which denies the presence of a pure gaze: ". . . he is not a pure gaze upon pure being anymore than I am, because his views and my own are in advance inserted into a system of partial perspectives, referred to one same world in which we coexist and where our views intersect" (*Visible* 82). Merleau-Ponty hence insists on an intersection of perspectives, a fusion of self and other into a synthesized existence:

> It is necessary . . . that we do not have two images side by side of someone and of ourselves, but one sole image in which we are both involved, which is responsible for the fact that my consciousness of myself and my myth of the other are not two contradictories, but rather each the reverse of the other. (*Visible* 82-83)

Instead of juxtaposing the position of self with that of the other, Merleau-Ponty here suggests to create a unified image of the two in which they do not contradict but rather complement each other. He further confirms the intertwining of self and other in the interplay between seeing and being seen in the following: "As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision . . . be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot" (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 134).

Merleau-Ponty strives to substitute the void between subject and object with matter; there is no such thing as "empty space," but rather living matter bridging the gap between self and other:

> It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity ; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. . . . The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh. (*Visible* 135)

Hence Merleau-Ponty manifests an exchange, a crossing of the limit between self and the world which subverts the notion of an identity separable from and autonomous of its environment. The self is simultaneously subject and object

due to its visibility and embodiment, thus its status is constantly reversible. Seeing subject and seen object are connected by the medium of *flesh*, a texture that Vasseleu defines as "the interwovenness of language and materiality in perception" (23), the "prototypical structure of all subject-object relations" (26).

Merleau-Ponty interprets the act of seeing as a variant of tactile palpation, thus substituting notions of distance and objectification inherent in traditional Western approaches to vision with a tactile connection between observer and observed ("We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible . . ." [*Visible* 134]). "The thickness of the flesh guarantees relations," Oliver notes, "while the skin ensures that we can distinguish our experience from the other's. Yet since the flesh and skin are not objects but synergetic, we are never cut off from the other. The skin is a boundary, but a permeable boundary"[43] (*Beyond Recognition* 199). Merleau-Ponty promotes a philosophy of sight that allows for a "transcendence of the isolated subject and a sympathetic entry into the subjectivity of others" (Jay, *Downcast* 312), thus opposing the Sartrean denial of reciprocal intersubjectivity.

Lacan

As an addition to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the gaze as a phenomenon of reciprocity, I would like to point to Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in which the latter repeatedly refers to his contemporary while pursuing his reflections on vision. Merleau-Ponty's and Lacan's models share their accentuation of an inherent passivity in the gaze, being primarily a phenomenon of being looked at rather than looking: "What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path he [Merleau-Ponty] indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental* 72). This is an unavoidable ontological status that is independent of the appearance, or intrusion, of another subject (as in Sartre); the self is always in the grasp of the gaze, it is transformed into a "*speculum mundi*" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental* 75).

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[43] Skin in its function as a permeable boundary will be interrogated more closely in Chapter 4, which deals with hysteria, boundaries, and inscriptions on the skin (dermagraphism).

Lacan's thoughts on the gaze are complex in their subversion of the appropriating qualities of vision. In opposition to Sartre, who equates the look with subjective agency and domination over the things perceived, Lacan uncovers the gaze's primordial function of circumscribing the self rather than radiating from it. Instead of constituting a power emanating from the subject, the gaze is formed in a territory which is neither the field of the subject nor that of the object; it is a territory beyond and between the two. As Shepherdson states,

> In short, the gaze is not a property of the subject, but it is not a property of things either, a feature of the visible itself. It has no specular image, but is rather something invisible, something that cannot be seen but that nevertheless comes from the *world* of things, something that, in Lacan's language, comes *from the Other,* preceding my vision and calling it forth, "such that it imposes my vision upon me" [*VI* 173/131], continuing itself in the very act of my vision, reducing my most active sensory exploration to a fundamental *passivity,* and indeed to the very point at which we may speak of the *annihilation of the subject* [see *SXI* 78, 83/82, 88]. The gaze is something to which I am *subjected.* (79)

This creates a resonance between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty in that they both stress the passivity rather than the agency of the look, the energy emanating from the objects affecting a weakening of the self's subject position, or even the complete annihilation of subjectivity. It does not take the presence of another person to revoke the power of the self's gaze; as Merleau-Ponty stresses when identifying the relationship between the painter and his objects, the objects themselves determine the way that the artist perceives them: ". . . the vision he [the seer] exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity. . ." (*Visible* 139). This evokes a sense of reciprocity, since "the object stares back" (Elkins), denying the artist's control over his own gaze.

Similarly, Lacan underscores the reversibility of the gaze in his presupposition that the self is transformed into a picture: "in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental* 106). Lacan points to the effect of being *photo-graphed* (see Lacan, *Four Fundamental* 106), drawing attention to the word's combination of light and writing. Lacan's depiction of this passivity of the gaze, however, does not share Sartre's sense of imprisonment through vision. In Lacan's view, the subject is already divided the moment it enters the imaginary register (see

above), thus the idea of being looked at does not bear any dangers to an intact subjectivity: one cannot lose what already no longer exists.

Irigaray

Luce Irigaray explains erotic pleasure in terms of an innovative perception of sight, criticizing both ocularcentrism and phallocentrism, or, to use a term employed by Martin Jay, "phallogocularcentrism" (*Downcast* 493); in her outline, vision is, rather than judging and objectifying, tactile, thus creating a sensual bond between observer and observed, enforcing a "sensual pleasure of birth into a world where the look itself remains tactile – open to the light" (Irigaray, *Ethics* 185). She promotes a state of vision beyond the limits of the subject, a state in which "touch binds and unbinds two others in a flesh that is still and always untouched by mastery" (*Ethics* 186). Erotic vision, in "the night's most secret place," is the opposite of distance and alienation: "The light that shines there is different from the one that makes distinctions and separates too neatly" (*Ethics* 189). Intimacy thus both establishes and overcomes borderlines. It affirms the other's identity. In order to do so, the other needs to cross over into the other's sphere of subjectivity, but he or she does so without dissolving personal borders altogether.

Sensual pleasure, according to Irigaray, leads back to a state of "the evanescence of subject and object" (*Ethics* 185). Irigaray creates a link between touch and vision that erases the spatial distance and thus the borderlines between self and other. She writes, "Touch perceives itself but transcends the gaze" (*Ethics* 192). As Vasseleu states, "Irigaray argues that without the sense of touch seeing would not be possible. The indeterminacy of the body in touch is the basis of an erotically constituted threshold of immersion in the visual" (12). Vasseleu, in her study of vision and touch in the works of Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty defines light as a fabrication that "implicates touch in vision" (12) with the effect of shifting vision from objective knowledge to an immediate and "sensible indeterminacy as both feeling subject and object being affected" (12). The look as a tactile sense may help to explain the common sensation of *feeling* the look of somebody else on one's back, like Lily: ". . . Lily felt Martin staring at her, felt his eyes on her

neck or back, and when she turned around she was always there to meet her glance, and Lily wondered if scientists had discovered how it is that you can actually feel someone's eyes on your body" (Hustvedt, *Lily* 156-57).

Taking up Irigaray's ideas about vision and touch, Oliver portrays the space between people as brimming with unseen energies. She rejects the Western tradition of seeing in its enforcement of monadic systems of enclosed entities inhabiting an empty space, and designs a counter vision of filled space:

> Space, however, is not an empty void. It is full of air, light, and the circulation of various forms of electrical, thermal, mechanical, and chemical energies that sustain us and connect us to each other and the world. If space is not empty, and if vision connects us rather than separates us, if vision is indeed a proximal sense like touch, then visual recognition is neither the assimilation of all difference into sameness nor the alienation, exclusion, or abjection of all difference. (Oliver, *Witnessing* 12)

She refutes both Lacan's and Sartre's conceptions of vision since they emphasize notions of distance, separation and mastery over the world (see Oliver, "Look of Love" 57), criticizing them for ignoring "the *between*" (65) in vision. While *The Blindfold* primarily emphasizes the alienating aspects of vision, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* moves toward this *between*, emphasizing moments of boundary crossing and reversibility.

3.2.1 Voyeuristic Tendencies in Siri Hustvedt's Writing: The Pleasure of the Look

"She had been watching him for three weeks. Every morning since the beginning of May, she had gone to the window to look at him. It was always early, just before dawn, and as far as she knew he had never seen her" (Hustvedt, *Lily* 1). Thus starts out the mysterious story of Lily Dahl, a tale of initiation, a narration on the threshold between fiction and reality. As in *The Blindfold*, the dynamics of looking and being looked at, the play between exposure and hiding, between the identity-endangering powers of the other's look and its simultaneous invigorating effects, play a significant role in the characters' identity formation in *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*. From the beginning, Lily is a voyeur, spying on her neighbor, deriving obvious pleasure from his beauty which she gets to enjoy in almost full exposure, "[s]tripped down in the heat to only his shorts" (*Lily* 1) and his physical activity while painting, "using his whole body" (*Lily* 1). The sudden feeling of shame which Lily feels in a moment of near discovery recalls Sartre's observations on the

nature of the look and on shame: "She had taken a terrible risk leaning out that way. Before that moment, she had scolded herself a little for spying on him, but the thought that she had been discovered filled her with sudden, acute shame" (*Lily* 2).[44]

The act of spying on somebody else, however, is not one of mere appropriation and domination.[45] Both looking and being looked at are portrayed as pleasurable experiences, bearing a feeling of recognition rather than threat. Lily, for example, enjoys turning herself into an object of observation: "She felt both of them looking at her, and knowing they were looking made her happy" (*Lily* 116). Being looked at has a strongly eroticizing effect. As Denzin points out, "The voyeur's look has its own aesthetic. This aesthetic always turns on the fact that the look produces a double subjectivity; an awareness of self both for the person who looks and for the person who is looked upon" (46). Interestingly, erotic pleasure can also be derived from the objectification and self-alienation effected by the look of the other; when stripping for Ed at the window, Lily sees herself as someone else:

> She could feel the stiff material slide down her buttocks, and that sensation, along with the fact that she knew he was looking at her, prompted an image of herself as someone else—a party girl crashing a strip show, a girl who never said die and who could bump and grind with the best of them. (*Lily* 38)

Similar to the instances of role-playing in *The Blindfold*, Lily experiences the joys of side-stepping her identity through the look of another. Even in the moment of actual sexual intercourse with Edward Shapiro, Lily's thoughts return to the moment of stripping for him: "They were both sweating on top of the white sheet, and Lily imagined herself in the window as though she were looking at herself with his eyes" (*Lily* 79). This, of course, is connected to a mixing of identities, since it is the taking over of the other's perspective, the switching of roles, that causes the erotic tension. Denzin sees this particular emphasis on the assumption of several perspectives at once as typical for the

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[44] The connection of shame, guilt, and the look is also made explicit in Mabel's observations on confession: The look of the other enhances the feeling of shame, which is why it makes it easier to confess to a priest without seeing him, or to talk to a psychiatrist without looking him in the eye (cf. *Lily* 110).

[45] In her essay on modes of vision in Sartre, Brosman comments on voyeurism: "The most extreme form of this [observation as possession and aggression] is voyeurism, which expresses the project of using the other's body, including his words and gestures, to get a perspective on him, without his knowledge, or, through his mediation, on oneself whom one imagines in his place" (66).

female voyeur: "The gaze of the female voyeur is multi-perspectival, or multi-sensual. It goes beyond pure vision and specularity to privilege the other senses, including touch, hearing and taste" (141). The presence of a voyeuristic spectator leads to a loosening up of the boundary between subject and object.

Analyzing a voyeuristic key scene in Mario Vargas Llosa's *El elogio de la madrasta*, Öhlschläger points to the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity initiated by the imagined presence of a third person watching a sexual encounter:

> Die imaginäre Anwesenheit des 'Dritten' zeigt sich hier in ihrer ganzen Ambivalenz. Einerseits scheint sie zu einer sexuellen Enthemmung, ja, zu einer narzißtischen Grenzüberschreitung des Ich zu führen, indem sich dieses, wie in einem Spiegel, *im* Voyeur spiegelt, andererseits entlarvt der Blick des Eindringlings *aus* dem Spiegel . . . [den] illusionistischen Versuch, sich als souveränes Subjekt zu konstitutieren. (192)

This analysis of the voyeuristic setting resonates with the Lacanian panorama of the mirror stage: the voyeur acts as the mirror in which the self feels reflected in its totality, which can be disinhibiting and stimulating in its suggestion of power; yet, at the same time, the dependence on the voyeur leads to a loss of self-determination. The voyeur trespasses and macerates the boundaries of the self, endangering its sovereignty. Hence, in the voyeuristic moment, perception of self becomes fused with the other's position. There is a moment in which the positions of self and other overlap in the mind of the person being watched, a transgression of the boundary between two separate identities.

Ed's image of Lily's body, his detailed memory of her single body parts, once more reflect the ambiguous nature of the look, comprising both the possibility of alienation and invigoration. Lily feels that "her body no longer belonged to her" (*Lily* 111); hence the other holds a degree of power over the identity of the observed, and with it comes a degree of responsibility. Yet, in opposition to Sartre, the abandoning of control over one's identity is experienced as excitement and pleasure ("the sound of his voice in the darkened room filled her with such intense pleasure and excitement that she didn't want it to stop" [*Lily* 111]).

However, there is evidence for the danger inherent in the look of the other in *Lily Dahl*, too, in Martin's eerie observation connecting Lily to a girl dead for sixteen years, assuming a knowledge of her identity deeper than her

own: "'. . . usually it's other people who see it, not the person'" (*Lily* 129). This exhibits the frightening aspects of one's identity being caught in the other's gaze, recalling the above cited passage from *L'Être et le Néant*: "Autrui détient un secret: le secret de ce que je suis" (Sartre 431).

Another example of a voyeuristic shift of perspective is Hustvedt's interpretation of Giorgione's painting *The Tempest*, both part of *The Blindfold* and subject of the essay "The Pleasures of Bewilderment." In *The Blindfold*, as Iris describes the painting, she submits a wealth of details but has forgotten the presence of a man in the foreground of the painting, looking at a woman with child:

> "I thought I remembered it exactly," I said. "You did," Paris said. "I blanked out a whole person." "Because you entered the painting so completely." . . . . "You became the man," Paris said. "You stepped into his shoes and promptly deleted him from the painting. He's a spectator, too, almost a double of the person viewing the picture." (*Blindfold* 152)

Paris's explanation of Iris's erasure of the man in the painting elucidates how easily the frame of the artwork can be crossed in the observer's imagination, thus integrating her into the piece. Consciousness overcomes the distinction between self and other through a voyeuristic participation in the world inside the frame. Describing the same experience in "Pleasures of Bewilderment," Hustvedt claims that she felt drawn into the painting by the woman's gaze, taking over the man's position, "trapped in this triangular seduction of looking" (*Mysteries* 5). "*The Tempest*," Hustvedt writes," "is about voyeurism itself, and it isn't static, but reveals a game of glances in an imaginary place. Bewildered, the spectator, who is always 'I,' is drawn into the mysterious otherness of the nude woman" (*Mysteries* 7). Hustvedt hence endows the object itself with the power of the gaze, creating a mutual dialectic of vision opening up passage way between the viewer and the viewed. Unlike the Sartrean version of the gaze, Hustvedt's approach therefore conceives of vision in painting as a medium of transgression between self and other, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Moreover, Hustvedt again emphasizes her reconfiguration of gender roles in voyeurism: "And if it is true, and I think it is, that we all partake of both the male and the female in our heads, then the sexual mobility we have when we look at a painting or read a book is more liberating than constraining" (*Mysteries* 8). Hustvedt frees the gaze of its

objectifying power and turns it into a gender- and identity-transcending arbitrator between self and other.

What I Loved shares this fascination with the presence of a voyeuristic third person as an example of a mixing of identities. When Violet tries to enlighten Leo about her theory of mixing, she tells him a story about her past. In the event she refers to, she meets a young man called Jules, who becomes her lover and recommends a piano teacher to give her lessons. There is a rising erotic tension between the piano teacher and Violet, but only because of the imaginary presence of Jules as observer, looking at her "'acting out one of Jules's fantasies'" (*Loved* 91). Violet emphasizes the importance of the third person and defines the source of the scene's eroticism as the mixing of the identities of her lover and the piano teacher (cf. *Loved* 89-91). Later in the book, Leo takes up the same fantasy, finding its attraction once again in the presence of a third person: "It had to be Violet and it had to be that story, not of two people but of three" (*Loved* 168). Thus the voyeuristic look leads to a softening of the definite borderlines between separate subjects. The loss of a stable perception of one's subjectivity and the assumption of the other's position, however, does not bring about a complete decomposition of identity, but rather to an amplified and eroticized perception of self as mixed with the other.

3.2.2 Painting as a Medium of Dialogue in Hustvedt's Intersubjective Vision of Art

While the presentation of a voyeuristic desire in vision is already a step away from mere objectification in Hustvedt's works (since it is based on reversibility and a blurring of traditional gender roles), the idea of an intersubjective exchange in vision becomes most prominent in the author's reflections on art. Hustvedt, both in her novels and in her essays on painting, strives to provide gateways enabling the viewer to become part of the artwork, and thus deconstructs traditional relations between observer and object. Art, according to Hustvedt, is always interpersonal, and in her approach she directs the reader to the space between viewer and viewed, to the threshold on which art is conceived.

Hustvedt's blurring of the boundaries between artwork and observer discloses an affinity with a trend in Western painting in contemporary culture; in a society "composed of disparate fragmentary experiences and images that constantly bombard the individual in music, video, television, advertising and other forms of electronic media" (Childers and Hentzi 235), a culture of growing doubt concerning the possibilities of representations of substantial and identical subjectivities, new forms of art have developed. Florian Rötzer expresses the new desire for active participation in the artwork in the following: "Wir wollen keine Fenster mehr, durch die wir hindurchschauen, wir wollen Türen, durch die wir in Welten eintreten können. Wir wollen Wirklichkeit, also nicht nur auf uns wirkende Bilder, sondern auch solche, auf die wir einwirken können" (qtd. in Klotz 190).

In his essay "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'?" Craig Owens pinpoints the postmodern shift of attention from the artist to its recipient, underlining the social interaction involved in the conception of art:

> Rather, postmodernism approaches the empty space left by the author's disappearance from a different perspective, one which brings to light a number of questions that modernism, with its exclusive focus on the work of art and its "creator," either ignored or repressed: Where do exchanges between readers and viewers take place? Who is free to define, manipulate and, ultimately, to benefit from the codes and conventions of cultural production? These questions shift attention away from the work and its producer and into its *frame* – the first, by focusing on the *location* in which the work of art is encountered; the second, by insisting on the *social* nature of artistic production and reception. (126)

Owens's article transfers the movement from author to reader—so famously proclaimed by Roland Barthes in his "The Death of the Author"—to the visual arts. Barthes writes: "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (148). Besides initiating a paradigmatic shift of attention in literary criticism (from author to reader), Barthes's groundbreaking article also drew attention to the contested space of cultural discourses determining the perception of art, "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash" ("Death" 146). Owens draws attention to the social production of art—the meaning of paintings, as of texts, are produced in Barthes's "multi-dimensional

space" of production and reception. Martina Weinhart sees a paradigmatic shift in the visual arts toward a new sensitivity to this contextualization of the art work due to the adaptation of principles established by Barthes (cf. Weinhart 37-43). She notes,

> Die Figur des Menschen, die in der Moderne als Basis und Fundament eine zentrale Position eingenommen hat, wird im *postmodernen* Denken zur Marginalie erklärt – aus dem Zentrum an den Rand gerückt. Mit ihr wird das alles-begründende Subjekt der Herrschaft über seine Sprache beraubt, Autorschaft zur Chimäre. Der Betrachter wird ebenso wichtig wie der Künstler selbst. Wahrheit und Bedeutung werden im Plural dekliniert und entstehen in einem Feld zwischen beiden. (Weinhart 67)

The interactive field between artist and observer in which meaning is dialogically produced and reproduced is, as will be shown below, also central to Hustvedt's conception of art.

In his emphasis on the multiple layers of discursivity, Barthes is very close to Bakhtin's model of language. Barthes and Bakhtin share their accentuation of the multidimensionality of textual space, the discursive structuring of all communication that intersperses the individual's message with the echoes of innumerable others. Through this they both uncover the illusion of fixed meanings, autonomous identities, and epistemological distance. According to Bakhtin, as introduced in Chapter 2, language can only come into being between self and other, as it is a social, not a private, phenomenon. From the moment the self is first immersed in a language, it is part of a social process, resonating with an entire choir of voices. As Booth writes, "We come into consciousness speaking a language already permeated with many voices—a social, not private language" ("Introduction" xxi). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bakhtin in the same vein rejects approaches to art and stylistics that interpret the artistic work as "a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue, one that presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 274).

Hustvedt's art theory can be linked to Bakhtin's model of language as introduced in his essay "Discourse in the Novel." Following Bryson, I argue that the visual communication in art is similar in structure to that of linguistic exchange:

> The structure of painting is not so dissimilar to that of language: it, too, unfolds in duration, indeed twice over – once in painting practice, and once again in the activity of viewing; and it, too, possesses a repertoire of iconographic forms which the viewer needs to know if he is to assign the individual painting to its appropriate semantic neighborhood. (*Vision* 120)

The same can be said for the interplay between artist and spectator: both are inseparably entangled with their cultural background, and the artistic sign carries the traces of an infinite chain of signification. The space between viewer and viewed is an intersection of multiple discourses. Art is a creation that comes to life on the threshold between the artist (the speaker's, in a sense) and the recipient's (or addressee's) context.

Art, like language, happens in a dialogical exchange between viewer and observer; like language, art is a medium of exchange, not an autonomous creation of the artist. Although Bakthin focuses on the novel as the richest medium of art, painting can also be open to a variety of discourses and interpretations, especially when it raises doubt about so far uncontested realities, as will be highlighted below in the examination of Bill's work in *What I Loved*. As Bakhtin himself stresses, dialogical relations are not reduced to the written or spoken word: ". . . dialogic relationships in the broad sense are also possible among different intelligent phenomena, provided that these phenomena are expressed in some semiotic material. Dialogic relationships are possible, for example, among images belonging to different art forms" (*Dostoevsky* 184-85).

Language, in Bakhtin's model of dialogism, is governed by two opposing forces: one—represented and enforced by traditional linguistics—that tries to attribute linguistic systems with the ultimate possibility of manifesting and representing a unified structure of reality independent of particular contexts, and one—promoted by Bakhtin as the driving force of discourse—that leads toward a continuing diversification of meaning due to the infinite variations of speech contexts. "Alongside the centripetal forces," Bakhtin writes, "the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (*Dialogic* 272). And these processes "intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well" (*Dialogic* 272).

Thus the utterance, the idea, any act of communication or thought, is always bound to and determined by its environment. It is important to note that the space between the sign and its referent is not clear and vacuous, but interpenetrated by an abundance of layers of signification. Bakhtin argues that

> between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape. (*Dialogic* 276)

Hence the interactive encounter between the word and its environment is what constitutes the nature of communication. The word is pulsating with the energies surrounding it, constantly processing and changing according to its linguistic environment. Objects of discourse are "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 276). Bakhtin goes on to describe any given object of discourse as "entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (*Dialogic* 276).

Bakhtin's design of the linguistic landscape sketches a space filled with interacting energies: "The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group . . ." (*Dialogic* 276). Thus the word, or sign, is determined by a dynamic interplay of presence and absence, it can never be reduced to a full moment of unmoved, present being. The word marked by tension, agitation, and intersection effects a deconstruction of a stable, logocentric perception of language.

Bakhtin never tires of praising the multicenteredness of human reality and the openness of human existence. A speech event thus requires a degree of openness toward one's opposite; a co-participation of self and other sharing a common space between, both reaching beyond the limits of their individual horizons. In order to perceive the other's message, we have to be willing to accept his different and unique situatedness in time and space. The drive toward openness and sharing is also active within the properties of painting and vision. All acts of seeing are embedded in one's cultural environment; there is

no vision that is unfiltered by a specific system of representations. As J. T. Mitchell puts it:

> Aber wenn das Sehen selbst ein Produkt der Erfahrung und der Akkulturation ist—einschließlich der Erfahrung des Bildermachens--, dann ist das, womit wir die bildlichen Darstellungen vergleichen, in keiner Weise eine nackte Wirklichkeit, sondern eine Welt, die bereits in unsere Repräsentationssysteme gekleidet ist. (49)

Hustvedt's Art Theory

In her introduction to *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting*, Hustvedt explicitly defines art as a medium based on the interpersonal communication between artist and observer. Since the artwork indicates the presence of the artist in its manifestation of the latter's trace, it serves as an instrument ensuring an intersubjective link between the creator and the recipient of the work:

> Visual art exists only to be seen. It is the silent encounter between the viewer, "I," and the object, "it." That "it," however, is the material trace of another human consciousness. The artist, who is missing from the scene, has nevertheless left us a work, an act of pure will, which has no practical purpose. The painting carries within it a residue of an "I" or a "you." In art, the meeting between viewer and thing implies intersubjectivity. (Hustvedt, *Mysteries* xix)

Art, furthermore, is inseparable from its cultural context, forming a point of intersection between the public and the private, a transgression from the outer to the inner by opening up a space between, in which discourses entangle and promote new meanings, balancing one's inner language with that of the artist and the cultural environment. Hence art is always immersed in and in dialogue with its environment. As Hustvedt argues in an interview with Andie Miller,

> Art, it seems to me, is probably the place where private life meets the culture in some way. With art we have the strange experience of looking at another person's inner life and unconscious through the vocabulary of the culture. Whether it's a written work of art, or a painting, art always borrows from history. It is never created in total isolation, never a vacuum. You use an artistic vocabulary that you've inherited, from art history. (Hustvedt qtd. in Miller 4)

Art, as Bryson underlines, is an interactional field in which "sign and social formation are continuous and occupy the same 'inside' of semiotic process" (*Vision* 51); the artist's object is hence a sign partaking in the semiotic structure of its cultural background, indivisible from the chain of signification that precedes and follows it.

Besides, the observer's gaze is not a neutral instrument, but invariably determined by the symbolic order of language and by personal experience: "We perceive the 'out there' through language and the whole symbolic level of

the human experience it brings with it—long-established cultural hierarchies and pictorial codes that shape expectation, recognition, and memory of what is seen" (Hustvedt, *Mysteries* xvii). This implies a degree of shared social experience as a prerequisite for deciphering a visual message. As Bryson stresses, "For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together, it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world" ("Gaze" 91). There is hardly such a thing as the 'innocent,' uncorrupted, unmanipulated look. As Bill observes in *What I Loved*, "'That's the problem with seeing things. Nothing is clear. Feelings, ideas shape what's in front of you. Cézanne wanted the naked world, but the world is never naked. In my work, I want to create doubt.' He stopped and smiled at me. 'Because that's what we're sure of'" (12).

We never simply see the world through our own eyes; instead, our gaze is shaped by the lens of our personal histories, which are always inevitably embedded in our cultural and linguistic environment. What becomes evident in all this is that art lives at the moment of being perceived, and that this moment is constituted by an interplay of the visual energy emerging from the piece itself, the subjective interpretation effected by the observer's gaze and the mixture of cultural discourses contouring the meeting between art and recipient. Hustvedt points to the dangers of an overweight of dominant cultural discourse inhibiting a personal intake of a work of art. When famous art objects become overmixed with culturally established expectations their genuine radiance expires. As Hustvedt writes, "the idea of genius, of the masterpiece, of the greatest and the best usually interferes with seeing the thing before us. In the worst case, the poor beleaguered painting drowns in its own fame" (*Mysteries* xxi).

So how does the interaction between the viewer and the painting take place, and what are its ramifications for the identities of both viewer and also the subject of the painting? In how far is the painting less of a disruption of identity than photography? Painting allows for a mutuality of the gaze and the simultaneity of seeing and being seen, as has been underlined by Merleau-Ponty in his essay "Eye and Mind." Although, reminiscent of Sartre's positing of the self at the center the universe, Merleau-Ponty describes the self as "hold[ing] things in a circle around itself," he stresses that the embodied self

"simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking" ("Eye" 124). Describing the way he looks at a painting, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that his gaze cannot be equated with the objectifying look at an ordinary thing: "For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to it, or with it" ("Eye" 126). Significantly, his gaze wanders *within* the painting rather than appropriating it from the outside, just like Hustvedt, who subconsciously entered the painting instead of keeping an inner distance from it. Where photography has delivered its object to the fixing gaze of the observer, the painting draws people in and subverts the subject-object distinction. Hustvedt writes, "His [the man in the painting] presence destabilizes my position as someone securely outside the canvas" (*Mysteries* 8). Hustvedt's fascination with overthrowing the limits of the frame also shows in her interest in Goya's paintings, in which she finds "a quality of mutability that he [Goya] was able to create in static images, and a narrowing of the distance between the viewer and the picture, which makes the spectator complicit in the scene" (*Mysteries* 62). She also notes that through the awakening of the "animal self" stimulated by the portrayal of "corporeal transformations," "I find it hard to keep myself at a safe distance" (*Mysteries* 79).

Crossing the Boundaries: Painting and the Body

Western tradition in painting—echoing the repression of the body in Western philosophy—has striven to exclude the painter's embodiment from the field of his object, since his presence was felt to interfere with the purity of the painting's energy. Bryson points to this disincarnation of the painting in his *Vision and Painting*: "[T]he body itself is that which our painting always erases" (120). Jay also stresses the exclusion of desire, embodiment and emotional entanglement in the Cartesian perspectivalist tradition: "the bodies of the painter and viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye" ("Scopic" 8). Postmodern discourses have been struggling to reintegrate physicality into conceptions of art, facing new challenges in coming

to terms with redefined outlines of the body, in a reaction to the increasingly thinning boundaries between (wo)man and machine due to the emergence of phenomena such as cyborgs.[46] Conceptions of the body in art get complicated through these "posthuman" models of the body. As Weinhart states, the reconfiguration of the human body brings about the emergence of new fields of art: "Figuren von Selbstkonstruktion, beliebig austauschbaren Identitäten, multiplen Wirklichkeiten und Wahrnehmungen bestimmen den Diskurs" (27). Although Hustvedt may not thematize the posthuman body in art, her approach nevertheless shares the emphasis on multiple perspectives and a transgression of bodily limits.

Hustvedt emphasizes the physicality of the act of painting and thus also effects a linking of vision and touch, conjuring up Irigaray's and Merleau-Ponty's reflections on vision. As Violet writes in her letter to Bill: "'I wanted you to turn around and walk over to me and rub my skin the way you rubbed the painting. I wanted you to press hard on me with your thumb the way you pressed on the picture . . .'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 3). In this, the "de-eroticizing of the visual order" (Jay, "Scopic" 8) is lifted, and the distinctions between painting, painter and the object of observation are erased. The anti-Cartesian emphasis on the physical presence of the painter is another feature Hustvedt shares with Merleau-Ponty. As Grene states, "every painter, however 'abstract' his style, is working, with arm and hand, to shape physical material, colors and lines. The painter at work stands, for Merleau-Ponty, for the bodily rootedness of all creative activity" (Grene, "Aesthetic" 224). The stress on the productive process also adds a dimension of movement to the painting that has traditionally been ignored. "Western painting," Bryson contends, "denies syntagmatic movement: it addresses visuality in an impossible and mythical guise, of stasis" (120). It is this stasis in particular against which Hustvedt's excursions into the art world define themselves. Art, as it is portrayed in *What I Loved*, is flux, and needs to convey the changeability of the object of art through both the painter's and the viewer's perception. "Seeing is flux," Bill states, and continues,

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[46] See Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149-81.

> that for him stories were like blood running through a body—paths of a life. . . . As an artist, Bill was hunting the unseen in the seen. The paradox was that he had chosen this invisible movement in figurative painting, which is nothing if not a frozen apparition—a surface. (Hustvedt, *Loved* 13)

Yet, the frames of this "frozen apparition" are melted in Bill's artwork, by integrating details that point beyond the piece itself, making the viewer aware of the "unseen." This can be read in combination with Merleau-Ponty's statement on the dynamics of absence and presence in painting: "Vision alone teaches us that beings that are different, 'exterior,' foreign to one another, are yet absolutely *together*, are 'simultaneity'" ("Eye" 146). What all this results in is a dissolution of the self-other dichotomy in art. In *What I Loved*, this is attained through an arbitrary mixing up of elements within and without the painting.

The first series of paintings that Leo describes serves as an illustrative example of the mutual relationship between the work of art, the artist, and the observer, but also of the mysterious interplay between the seen and the unseen. The painting that first arouses Leo's interest in a SoHo gallery is a portrait of a woman lying on the floor. It acquires its multi-dimensionality through elements incorporated in the work, through its relation with the other works in the series, and through its title. Firstly, one can see the foot and ankle of an unknown person leaving the picture. This automatically breaks up the frame's confinement of the painting, guiding the observer beyond the canvas. Secondly, there is a shadow, which Leo at first mistakes for his own. Through this, the observer is drawn into the picture, feeling his own presence through the identification with a shadow. Thirdly, the painting is part of a series which all show the same woman in fluctuating shapes—gaining and losing weight. Through this emphasis on the changing physicality of the woman, the painting is released from its fixedness in time, since it highlights the notions of progression and change, once again pointing beyond the "now" of the "frozen apparition." The same aspect is stressed in the subsequent series of paintings, all portraits of Bill's deceased father. Where Violet grew and shrank, Bill's father is shown to age, accumulating wrinkles and moles from one portrait to another (*Loved* 45). All this distinguishes the nature of Bill's paintings from the alienating elements disclosed in photography above: In its focus on flux

and change, it does not fix its subject's identity in a fragmented misrepresentation and thus does not objectify in the Sartrean sense.

Moreover, Bill's art is concerned with the vulnerability of people's bodies and endeavors to highlight details of violations of the body's surface, details that make the viewer keenly aware of the physicality and mortality of the represented person: "a chipped tooth, a Band-Aid on a finger, a vein, a cut, a rash, a mole" (*Loved* 13).

The ultimate breakdown of the barrier between the artist and his object originates with the title of the painting, "*Self-Portrait.*" The painting shows a young woman lying in an empty room, yet the painter's name is William Wechsler. The incongruity of gender and identity confuses the narrator, too: "Did that title suggest a feminine part of himself or a trio of selves? Maybe the oblique narrative of two women and a viewer referred directly to the artist, or maybe the title didn't refer to the content of the picture at all, but to its form" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 4). When Leo meets Bill for the first time, the artist explains the strange title as follows: "'They're all self-portraits,' he said. 'While I was working with Violet, I realized that I was mapping out a territory in myself I hadn't seen before, or maybe a territory between her and me'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 15). To this Leo replies: "'You borrowed her to show yourself'" (*Loved* 15). As Derrida holds, the definition of "self-portrait" ought to be liberated from any strict reference to a concrete image of the self: "If what is called a self-portrait depends on the fact that it is called 'self-portrait,' an act of naming should allow or entitle me to call just about anything a self-portrait, not only any drawing ('portrait' or not) but anything that happens to me, anything by which I can be affected or let myself be affected" (*Memoirs* 65). Thus identity is moved across the threshold between two individuals in the act of painting. In an ultimate moment of exchange, the artistic creation is conceived as a co-production in which two separate identities are melted into one. Leo links the creation of art to an idea of impregnation, a symbiosis of the artist, the viewer, and the object: "One of the fantasies between the viewer/painter and the female object had to be impregnation. After all, conception is plurality—the two in the one—the male and the female." (*Loved* 26). The artist's identity can no longer be separated from his subject, just as the subject's identity is both present and absent in its being overtaken, yet not extinguished, by the painter's control. In

opposition to the photographs in *The Blindfold* and *The Sorrows of an American*, this does not lead to a loss of subjectivity in Violet, but rather opens up a new and shared space between, an instance of intersubjective fulfillment.

This mixing of identities, however, is not always presented as being so positive. In *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, Mabel feels threatened by her appearance on canvas, having lost control over her representation, similar to Iris in her photograph:

> 'The portrait's bothering me, Lily.' Mabel rubbed her cheek gently, as if it were another person's skin. 'I don't know what to do. You should see it now. We worked today. It's, it's, oh, I don't know, when I look at it, I feel upset. I'm well aware that no one's going to care one way or the other about the identity of the old lady in Edward Shapiro's painting, and yet I feel that I'm being pulled into a crisis a part of me willed and another part resists.' (*Enchantment* 208-9)

Painting, therefore, if executed ruthlessly, carries the same dangers as photographic representation. Shapiro assumes control over the biographical narratives the people he paints entrust him with and overshadows them with his own interpretation. The effect is alienation and a loss of self-control. Mabel feels that parts of her inner self have been "pulled into a crisis" due to the fact that they are now open on the canvas, prey to misrecognition and corruption.

But to return to the *Self-Portrait* series: The mix of subjectivities is not limited to the relation between the artist and his subject, but concomitantly extends to the observer, too, as is revealed by the detail of the shadow on the canvas. It can be either the painter's or the viewer's shadow, which makes their position exchangeable and leads to an overlapping of identities: "'And the shadows?' I asked him. 'They're mine, too.' 'Too bad,' I said. 'I thought they were mine.' Bill looked at me. 'They can be yours, too.'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 15). This moment of interlacing identities is further highlighted in the essay Leo composes for the show:

> By including a viewer's shadow in each canvas, Bill called attention to the space between the viewer and the painting where the real action of all painting takes place—a picture becomes itself in the moment of being seen. But the space the viewer occupies also belongs to the painter. The viewer stands in the painter's position and looks at a self-portrait, but what he sees or she sees is not an image of the man who has signed the painting in the right-hand corner but somebody else: a woman. (Hustvedt, *Loved* 25)

All of Bill's work is geared towards a deconstruction of conventional boundary lines, an indication of the undecidability of interpersonal structures and the

relativity of all identity, thus denying the presence of a transcendent subjectivity putting an end to the infinite flux of meaning:

> "You think you know, Bill seemed to be saying in every work, but you don't know. I subvert your truisms, your smug understanding and blind you with this metamorphosis. When does one thing cease and another begin? Your borders are inventions, jokes, absurdities. The same woman grows and shrinks, and at each extreme she defies recognition. A doll lies on her back with the sign of an outdated diagnosis over her mouth. Two boys become each other. . . ." (*Loved* 298)

Significantly, Bill's work evolves more and more toward a fusion of painting with other media—first he creates boxes in the hysteria pieces, then he goes on to use three-dimensional structures for the *Hansel and Gretel* series. It is important to note that the topics of his art work are also a manifestation of intersubjectivity: Like the self-portraits, the hysteria and fairy tale art pieces are closely connected to his partner Violet, who does her research on hysteria and eating disorders (*Hansel and Gretel* focuses on eating and food). Thus Leo observes correctly that Augustine, the protagonist of both Violet's hysteria research and of one of Bill's artistic creations, is another instance of self-portraiture, of a "fictional child he and Violet had made together" (*Loved* 76), conceived in the space between the two.

In his last project before his death, Bill moves on to a film camera as his new medium, which—due to the camera's ability to convey fleeting moments and change—seems logical. Capturing the mystery of "human particularity and sameness" (*Loved* 336), he films a seemingly endless number of children, gradually growing older as he proceeds, "their faces mingled" (*Loved* 336), giving an impressive insight into human development and creating an intersubjective unit out of the individual children. As Leo notes: "What I had seen was unedited and crude, but when strung together the fragments had formed a syntax that might be read for possible meaning. It was as if Bill intended the many lives he documented to merge into a single entity, to show the one in the many or the many in the one. Everyone begins and ends" (*Loved* 336-37).

In her conception of art, Hustvedt accordingly develops a coordinate system in which the vectors of self and other converge and form a symbiotic field of interaction. Her work is thus a significant contribution to the revision of epistemological structures in art, focusing on models of intersubjective and discursive participation, or, as Weinhart puts it, "fortschreitende Wahrnehmung

des Wissens als ausgedehnte Wanderung durch die Felder von intertextuellen Subjektivitäten" (180). By moving the spectator into the field of the painting through a transgression of the frame, Hustvedt stresses the interplay between the work and the recipient, and dissolves notions of a bodiless and ideal gaze. Subjectivity is conceived of as an interpenetrated entity, irreducible to a single consciousness. The system of gazes entangles viewer and viewed in a mutual substitution of positions. Wherever Hustvedt analyzes the act of looking at art, she portrays vision as the opposite of a distancing and totalizing instrument; rather, it is personal and immediate, it eliminates the spatial gap between observer and art work, it is a medium of connection. Vision is always contextualized in the presence of the other: "Vision unfolds to the side of, in tangent to, the field of the other" (Bryson, "Gaze" 94).

4 Identity and the Boundaries of the Body: Hysteria and Anorexia Nervosa in Siri Hustvedt's Writing

When reminiscing about her daughter Sophie's childhood in "Yonder," an essay about memory, language, and her Norwegian heritage, Siri Hustvedt reflects on the lack of boundaries that shaped the child's perception of the world as a baby: "She didn't know where she began or ended" (*Yonder* 37). While the infant seems to be living in an undifferentiated space of the real, the presence of margins is essential for the formation of individual identity. Elsewhere, Hustvedt refers to the transition from a borderless existence to the formation of an identity marked by a separation between self and other:

> . . . we as human beings are born without an awareness of our corporeal boundaries. Infants are fragmented beings who come together as whole selves only over time, and the borders and categories established in language are crucial to the creation of a separate and complete idea of the self. (*A Plea for Eros* 164)

This is how Hustvedt conceptualizes the emergence of subjectivity through a development of boundary recognition. The formative role of language in the establishment of boundaries is tied to self's inherent existence as a social being. Only when the self enters the realm of the social, when it goes beyond the private, self-absorbed stage of the Lacanian real does it begin to realize its own borders. In Lacanian terms, this is initiated through the mirror stage. Though the dynamics of the mirror stage have already been discussed in the third chapter, I would like to briefly reconsider them at this point. When the infant detects her reflection in the mirror, she identifies with this newly found representation of herself; the attraction of the mirror image lies in its suggestion of an individuated totality, which, however, appears to be incommensurable with the child's own physical fragmentation. Due to the incompatibility of the partitioned self with the unified representation, the initial phase of identification is followed by a sense of alienation. The mirror stage, as exhibited above, appears to demarcate the establishment of the threshold between subject and object, between inside and outside. The sharp contrast between the infant's inner fragmentation and the wholeness suggested by the visual representation in the mirror cause the child to realize a split between self and other.

The mirror stage manifests a transition from an indiscriminate existence to a sense of self as separate from others. Language, symbolic representation, becomes the principal tool to create a sense of cohesion. Subjectivity is thus based on exclusion—in order to be self, we have to keep out what is other. Boundaries are constitutional to the creation of the self. Yet, the margins of the self are permeable and unstable, and bound to be transgressed.

In Hustvedt's fictional worlds—in accordance with her stance that identity is intersubjective, that identities are constantly mixed—categories, boundaries, and distinctions between subjects are shown to be fragile and pervious. In the previous chapters, the self's embodiment has already been shown to play a crucial role in determining self-other relations; this part of the study will complement the former two by foregrounding the (inter)corporeal basis of identity. I intend to show that Hustvedt, through her examination of boundaries and the body, overcomes the dualism of body and mind and consistently illuminates that the body cannot be excluded from a conception of identity. She emphasizes the vulnerability of all contours of the self and illustrates that the self is always intermingled with the other due to its physical connectedness to the world.

In *What I Loved*, Hustvedt introduces two disorders indicative of a defective relation between self and other: hysteria and anorexia nervosa. While the hysteric is shown to be a person who continuously reinvents herself to adjust to her audience, the idea of a fluctuating, metamorphosing identity arouses a sense of essential anxiety in a person who suffers from anorexia nervosa. As protagonist Violet points out: "'Nowadays girls *make* boundaries . . . . The hysterics wanted to explode them. Anorexics build them up'" (*Loved* 81). Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, interprets both hysteria and anorexia nervosa as a rejection of relational co-existence with other people, a shutting down of communication between self and other:

> Loss of speech, then, stands for the refusal of co-existence, just as, in other subjects, a fit of hysterics is the means of escaping from the situation. The patient breaks with relational life within the family circle. More generally, she tends to break with life itself: her inability to swallow food arises from the fact that swallowing symbolizes the movement of existence which carries events and assimilates them. (186)

The refusal of co-existence is thus linked to an ultimate refusal of existence altogether. The anorexic rejects taking in and assimilating elements of existence—she erects a boundary between herself and the world. Both Hustvedt's and Merleau-Ponty's interpretations identify the disorders as a disconnection between self and other.

In a socio-historical context, both disorders can be perceived as reflections of the cultural energies bearing on the individual: While the role of women in Western societies in the nineteenth century was marked by restrictions and firm regulations regarding their societal status, the late twentieth century brought more personal freedoms, yet at the same time a sense of growing insecurity and fragmentation. With regard to the nineteenth century, Regina Schaps notes a radical dissociation of gender roles due to the advent of modern industrial society, which brought about deep changes in life and family structures. Women, according to Schaps, were moved into a stronger dependence on their patriarchal husbands (see 121). Prime Victorian female virtues such as domesticity and purity assigned a clearly restricted sphere to middle and upper class women, turning them into angels in the house, nurturers of the family and adornments of society. Hysteria may be read as a response to the restraints that came with this ideal of women.

In contrast to the patriarchal system predominant in the nineteenth century, the second half of the twentieth century was shaped by a shift towards postmodern play and epistemological instability. In the case of people suffering from anorexia, this destabilization and indeterminacy propels the subject to a desperate counter-reaction: The movement toward purity and control over one's own physical limits is intended to intercept the forces pulling the subject into ever so many directions at once. The Norwegian psychiatrist Finn Skårderud, in the collection *Eating Disorders and Cultures in Transition*, underlines the increasing decomposition of stable identity structures and the growing openness of the body:

> Rapid social changes threaten the identity and obliterate the boundaries. The human being becomes more open, for better or worse. He or she is more open to change and to new possibilities, but also severed from contexts and routines and therefore more vulnerable. "Identity" is about distinguishing between the inside and the outside, certainty and uncertainty. If the boundaries disappear, the hold on reality will also disappear. (38)

Skårderud sees the increased significatory potential of the body as a result of the dissolution of boundaries and the increasingly unstable position of the subject:

> Where boundaries do not exist, the body in the culture turns into a boundary definer, that is a tool of communication between one's self and others—in other words "identity." When confronted with increasing vagueness and fragmentation, there is an increased need for explicit and over-explicit signs. The body's concrete discourse is such that profound messages about ethics and psychology are transmitted via its surface. (38)

The body's significatory power seems to have moved into the center of attention, as the maintenance of intact identity boundaries, which mark the self as a separate and independent entity in command of a clear distinction between exteriority and interiority, has become increasingly complicated.

Hustvedt construes anorexic identity as an endeavor to counteract the transgressions taking place on the floating boundaries between self and other, while she characterizes the hysterical self as coined by an almost complete lack of such boundaries. The hysteric is thus on one, the anorexic on the other extreme of interpersonal relations: for the hysteric, everything is outward-directed and other-determined—she has no desire to distinguish between self and other at all. The anorexic, on the other hand, rejects all forms of relational mixing in favor of a pure and uncontaminated self.

Hustvedt refers to both anorexia and hysteria as "'broad cultural phenomen[a]—a permissible way out'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 54). I would like to argue that in *What I Loved* the two disorders figure as pathological modes of renegotiating the balance between inside and outside through an attempt at fashioning a self that defies intruding social structures. Hysteria, like anorexia, is a phenomenon on the threshold between cultural unease and personal trauma; the hysteric, like the anorexic, can be read as a signifier representing the malady of her cultural context; the changing cultural formations have brought about the demise of hysterical symptoms and the rise of anorexia—which invites the interpretation of both diseases as being culturally constructed.

Hysteria and anorexia are gendered syndromes, generally constructed as symptoms of femininity turned pathological. Although there are examples of male

hysteria and male anorexia,[47] both disorders have been characterized as typically female. What might make the female more susceptible to these disorders is clearly linked to the social production of the female body and to the female tendency to move beyond the boundaries of her own identity, which conflicts with ideals of self-determination and independence.

The construction of both disorders is tied to constructions of the feminine body. Traditionally, women's bodies have been perceived as being more open than men's (see, for example, Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*) and female ego boundaries as more permeable than male ego boundaries (see, for example, Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*). Doctors' representations of hysterics in late nineteenth-century France, as Janet Beizer points out, characterized their patients as "incontinent slave to her secretions, unable to control her dripping, flowing, spurting, oozing bodily fluids" (41), which served to underline the notion of the female body as "intrinsically pathological" (Hurley 120). Anorexics attempt to defend themselves against the openness ascribed to the female body by shutting down the circulation that the process of consuming and discharging food involves.

As Nancy Chodorow has argued, women have traditionally been expected to assume the function of mothering, not just biologically but also socially, being "more involved in interpersonal, affective relationships than men" (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 7). The distinctly female quality of connecting with and nurturing the other has been explored in relational psychoanalytic interpretations of the early bond between mother and daughter (see Chapter 5). In essence, they all single out the mother's experience of bearing and nurturing a child as something that invariably leads to a different, relational subject position of the mother: "There are few experiences to rival motherhood for revealing this primary, pre-rational, responsibility which pulls consciousness out of its egotism and forces it to experience its being-alongside the other, its being inhabited by the other" (Agacinski 51). This experience of undifferentiation, of having inside oneself a presence which is

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[47] Hilde Bruch, for example, dedicates an entire chapter ("Anorexia Nervosa in the Male") of her study *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within*, to occurrences of male anorexia; she does admit, however, that such cases are extremely rare (cf. 285).

at the same time self and other, shapes female identity (see 4.1). Women bond and merge where men separate. And anorexics, fighting against any female traits in their bodies, also fight this sense of merging with and dissolving into the other. In Hustvedt's latest novel, *The Sorrows of an American*, protagonist Erik, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, has his own terminology for the special relationship between mothers and daughters, ". . . an unarticulated corporeal closeness that I call an overlap" (18); this overlap is again founded on the female disposition to relate to others and to create an identity that transcends autonomy.

In his essay "Moral Contagion and the Will: The Crisis of Masculinity in *fin-de-siècle* France," Christopher E. Forth refers to Charcot's hypnosis experiments as a demonstration of the female patients' susceptibility to moral contagion, maintaining "a sharp division between 'normal' and 'pathological' (read: feminine) personality types" (64). The increased levels of susceptibility in women can on the one hand be traced to women's naturally heightened disposition towards forming a more relationally oriented identity; on the other hand, they can be interpreted as shaped by social expectations and concepts of what a woman ought to behave like. As Margrit Shildrick remarks,

> Losing control of oneself is to a large degree synonymous with losing control of, or having no control over, one's body. In scientific and medical discourse in particular, it is quintessentially a feminine rather than masculine trait, predictable and tolerated in women, but sufficient to disqualify us from the mental self-governance necessary to (rational) moral agency. Normative constructions of medical syndromes such as hysteria and its modern-day counterparts, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, are strongly gender-linked, and suggest someone who is in need of control by others. (26-27).

Even though there are male anorexics and male hysterics,[48] the medical constructions of the syndromes have traditionally characterized them as typically female. The patriarchal model of female subjectivity described by Shildrick, stressing the need of guidance due to the lack of agency inherent in woman's natural make-up, is also highlighted in Hustvedt's portrayal of the way that doctors treat their female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital. The doctor-patient relationship emerges as an extreme example of a self mastered by the other, and the patient is turned into a

[48] One of Charcot's achievements was to diagnose hysteria in male patients—the sources deviate as to how high the number of his male patients was; e.g., Baer claims "nearly 25 percent of his patients" (44) as male, while Showalter refers to ninety male patients being treated by Charcot (*Hystories* 33).

marionette moving according to the doctor's will, an object of study and a blank slate to be inscribed by the guiding hand of the master physician. The hysteric's body is used to emphasize women's liminal and unruly physicality and to juxtapose it with the male rationality of the doctor, who is portrayed as a disembodied observer.

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément stress that "[s]ocieties do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are, if one may say so, between symbolic systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility" (7). Both the body of the hysteric and the body of the anorexic find themselves in the current of such "dangerous symbolic mobility," in the midst of a far-reaching debate over feminine identity and social norms. "If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge," Judith Butler holds, "then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment" (132). While Butler applies this to criticize constructions of "homosexual pollution" (132), the concept also appears to match the sexually open and unregulated body displayed by the hysterics and their opposite, the tightly regulated and closed body of the anorexic.

4.1 Boundaries of the Body

One reason why women have always held a special position with regard to the boundaries of the self is based on their ability to become two in one during pregnancy. This quintessential experience of intercorporeality also plays a role in Hustvedt's works, in which pregnancy is presented as a moment in which the borderline between self and other is trespassed. In "Yonder," she points to the particular feminine experience of being two in one during pregnancy that marks woman's identity as defying secure identity borders: "When I was pregnant with Sophie, I felt it was the only time I had been physically plural—two in one" (*Yonder* 11). Mother and child are indistinguishably connected, which results in an insoluble enigma of interconnected subjectivities. Iris Marion Young describes the ambiguity of the space inside the womb as follows: "Pregnancy challenges the in-

tegration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body" (49). Jane-Maree Maher, in her essay "The Promiscuous Placenta: Crossing Over," writes about pregnancy as "a gradual transformation in a still-unified corporeal space" (201). "In this way," she adds, "the pregnant body participates in the particular western requirements of subjective identity where it is the edges that delimit the subject" (Maher 201). The "porous conception of subjectivity" (Maher 203) immanent in pregnancy defies the Western idealization of autonomy which is based on a denial of the interconnectedness and boundary transgression that lies at the very origin of every human being's existence. The mother's body, as Mary Russo states, "figures simultaneously demarcation and dissolution of identity" (328). Pregnant embodiment places the female self in a state that can no longer be easily classified as either subject or object. As Robyn Longhurst states, "The pregnant body is neither subject nor object but rather exemplifies the impossible, ambiguous and untenable identity of each" (6).

Hustvedt extends the idea of original symbiosis beyond the realm of the female by pointing to the universal human experience of life in the womb: "By its very nature, original space, maternal space, is nonsense; human experience there is undifferentiated and so can't be put into words. It lives on in our bodies, however, when we curl up to sleep, when we eat, when some of us bathe or swim. And surely it leaves its traces in our physical desire for another" (*Yonder* 11). French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski also portrays the transgression of boundaries as a universal ingredient of human existence: "The boundaries of my physical existence have already been crossed by the other" (50). This boundary crossing which lies at the very beginning of all human existence results in the questioning of safe assumptions about a separate and autonomous identity—an insecurity at odds with a Cartesian consciousness grounded on a clear distinction between inside and outside. Although identity relies on a distinction between self and other, every person experienced the unspeakable, undifferentiated space of the mother's womb. The unconscious presence of such an experience lingers on after birth, "that first, brutal separation" (*Yonder* 11), "the ordinary miracle, a violent and bloody process in

which the borders between one person and another become indistinguishable. The inside becomes the outside as a being is thrust across the borders of the mother's body" (Hustvedt, *Mysteries* 87). Or, as Julia Kristeva describes the moment of birth: "the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual" (*Powers of Horror* 155). The self thus finds its origin in a moment of transition between inside and outside, in a moment in which the two are mingled in a dissolution of the very binaries it will later define itself through. Thus identity is always on the threshold between a yearning for autonomy and a desire for a merging with the other resonating with the comfort of the "original space, maternal space" (*Yonder* 11). Hustvedt regards human existence as shaped by an original state of symbiosis and a desire to recover the unity disrupted at birth—tugging subjectivity away from autonomy and isolation to a space in which identity is fused with the other.

Hustvedt's fascination with and the deconstruction of thresholds and boundaries play an important role both in her contemplations on art and in her theory of overmixing in hysterics and anorexics. When considering questions of the body and identity, Hustvedt never tires of pointing to physical boundaries and the transgression thereof. For example, her observations on Fransisco de Goya y Lucientes' series of etchings *Los Caprichos* in the essay "Narratives in the Body: Goya's *Los Caprichos*" revolve around margins of the self and the significance of embodiment. Central to her reading of Goya's nightmarish and evocative images is their undermining of safe boundaries: "It is exactly this cut," she argues, "this threshold or boundary between one thing and another that has blurred in the world of *Los Caprichos*, making its transformations seem natural because, despite their supernatural appearance, they are deeply connected to lived experience" (*Mysteries* 79-80). Hustvedt then calls attention to the body's open physical borders, claiming that "what we see in these bodies reverberates with our own vulnerable anatomies, in particular those parts of the body where there is no line of suture, where we are literally open to what is outside us" (*Mysteries* 80).

Fragmented, destabilized, and intersected, the self is shown as embedded in a complex system of discursivity and ongoing negotiations between private and public matters throughout Hustvedt's novels. The danger and vulnerability inherent in boundaries are also central to *The Sorrows of an American.* Subjectivity, Hustvedt demonstrates, needs borders. The novel's protagonist Eric reflects on a dialogue with a patient: "'Some days, it's like I don't have any skin. I'm all raw and bleeding.' This comment had helped me. I had talked to her about following a metaphor. No skin, no barrier, no protection. The borders are important" (*Sorrows* 155).[49] Erik's conversation with his patient reveals to him the need for a protective borderline between self and the world. This notion is fortified by Erik's contemplation of an instance of pathological border crossing in a schizophrenic patient:

> The forms of things—the outlines. We can't live without them. 'Don't touch my nose, you shit!' one of the inpatients had screamed at me after I had briefly scratched my own during the interview. I was a young psychiatric resident then, and his words passed through me with a jolt. After that, I learned how precarious it all is—where we begin and end, our bodies, our words, inside and outside. (*Sorrows* 184)

The characters' fragility is oftentimes deepened by the loss of a loved one. Both of her most recent novels, *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American*, center on mourning, loss, and trauma. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt creates a work at the intersection between personal and collective trauma, weaving the drama of 9/11 into a plot that revolves around the theme of absent fathers and the creation of meaningful relationships. Magda, protagonist Erik Davidsen's psychiatrist colleague, remarks concerning grief and identity:

> "We all go to pieces now and then even without a patient to help us along. Your grief makes you more fragile. You know I've always thought of wholeness and integration as necessary myths. We're fragmented beings who cement ourselves together, but there are always cracks. Living with the cracks is part of being, well, reasonably healthy." (*Sorrows* 139)

As I would like to show in the following, Hustvedt employs the disorders hysteria and anorexia nervosa in *What I Loved* in order to show what happens when people no longer manage "living with the cracks." Conceiving of herself a "wounded self" ("I can't remember a time when I didn't carry around inside me a sensation of being wounded" [*Eros* 195-96]), she draws attention to the cracks and

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[49] The symbolic value of the skin will be discussed in the interpretation of dermagraphism and hysterical identity below.

fissures that are part of everyone's life, deconstructing the myth of an insuperable and autonomous self. Rather than embracing notions of rupture and fragmentation, however, Hustvedt's works appear to be a wake-up call, a sensitizing to the instability of subjecthood and the need to protect the self through a creation of wholeness.

4.2 The Self as a Reflection of the Other's Desire: Hysteria

Hysteria, though in a sense the "signature disease" of nineteenth-century women, dates back to Hippocrates's *On the Disease of Women*, in which he describes it as a disease of the wandering uterus (see, e.g., Didi-Huberman, *Invention* 68; Veith, *History* 10; Schaps 19). Thus hysteria, as the Greek origin of the name implies, has traditionally been defined as a female disease. In the Middle Ages, hysteria was regarded as a sign of possession and as an indicator of a soul inhabited by evil spirits. Later, in the mid-eighteenth century, the hysteric was said to fall ill "owing to an abundance of feeling, an excessive sympathy with her environment, an uncurbed empathy for all that would move her body and soul" (Bronfen, *Knotted* 114). Hysteria was by then regarded as a neurological disease, yet still one that mostly afflicted women rather than men. Jean-Martin Charcot, probably the best-known of all doctors treating hysterical patients, attempted to cure hysteria through hypnosis, defined it as a neurological disease and categorized specific stages of an hysterical attack, and also found it not to be an exclusively female disease (see also Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman* 22). In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Sigmund Freud and his colleague Josef Breuer investigated the psychic traumas they found to be the origin of hysteria and developed the talking cure as a means to cope with the traumatic experiences of the past[50]. The connection between trauma and hysteria was important in the diagnosis of shell-shocked patients after World War I, which widened the scope of hysteria to a large scale of male patients. Nowadays, hysteria, as far as it still exists, is above all characterized by its quality of imitation. The mutability of hysterical symptoms has basically led to an extinction of the term in contemporary medical profession.

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[50] See also Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman* 16-18.

Hustvedt refers to the history of hysteria, the difficulty of diagnosis, and the imitating qualities of symptoms (*Shaking Woman* 10-13) and finds the mind/body dualism at the core of the problematic interpretation of hysteria (*Shaking Woman* 14), since the disorder has never been quite clearly placed at either side of the duality: is it a disorder caused by, for example, severe emotional shock or does it spring from an organic cause? Hustvedt then mentions schizophrenia as an equally ambiguous disorder since it is a hereditary phenomenon, yet in identical twins there is only a fifty percent chance that, if one of them is a schizophrenic, the other will be one as well (*Shaking Woman* 15).

This condition is also reflected in Hustvedt's fictional account of the disease. Violet says, "'There are still psychoanalysts who talk about 'hysterical personality,' but most psychiatrists don't even consider hysteria a mental illness anymore'" (*What I Loved* 54). To Leo's question whether hysteria was a medical creation, Violet replies:

> "The medical establishment was certainly part of it, but the fact that so many women had hysterical attacks, not just women who were hospitalized for them, goes beyond doctors. Swooning, thrashing, and foaming at the mouth were a lot more common in the nineteenth century. It hardly happens anymore. Don't you find that strange? I mean, the only explanation is that hysteria really was a broad cultural phenomenon—a permissible way out." (*Loved* 54)

The widespread occurrence of symptoms like swooning and thrashing in nineteenth-century women—which went far beyond the sphere of hospitals and lunatic asylums—speaks for the contagious nature of hysterical symptoms. Notably, this makes the disorder an interesting phenomenon with regard to the intersubjective forces at work between the women whose bodies pick up and imitate signals of the people surrounding them. In the following, the energies of imitation at work in hysteria will be investigated to illuminate the intersubjective powers that come to play in the transmission of such energies.

Giving an account of a childhood experience, Violet relates a crucial moment of identity mixing she experiences while witnessing an epileptic attack of her sister Alice:

> "Alice fell over and started kicking and choking. I grabbed her and started to shake her. At first, I thought she was fooling, and then I saw her eyes roll up into her head and I knew she wasn't. I started screaming for my mother, and then I was gagging on my own spit. I was kicking and rolling around in the hay. . . . It took my mother a couple of minutes to figure out which one of us was in trouble." (*What I Loved* 55)

In a moment of panic, Violet absorbs her sister Alice's symptoms and involuntarily copies them. This imitation of symptoms likens Violet's behavior to a hysterical attack. Significantly, Violet will later on point out that the hysterics in the French Hospital La Salpêtrière copied the behavior patterns of the epileptic patients who were accommodated next to them: "'You know how Charcot began to understand hysteria? The hysterics just happened to be housed right next door to the epileptics at the hospital. After a little while, the hysterics started having seizures. They became what they were near'"[51] (*What I Loved* 55-56). As Hustvedt later explains in *The Shaking Woman*, "Conversion disorders [the contemporary term for "hysteria] often mimic neurological symptoms: paralyses, seizures; difficulty walking, swallowing, or speaking; blindness; and deafness" (12). In *What I Loved*, the symptoms of hysteria are listed as "violent seizures, paralyzed limbs, stigmata, obsessive scratching, lewd postures, and hallucinations" (*What I Loved* 50-51).

"Hysteria," as Elaine Showalter points out, "is a mimetic disorder; it mimics culturally permissible expressions of distress" (15). Due to its changing appearance—symptoms are manifold and have shifted from hysterical paralyses, blindness, deafness, or fainting to circulatory problems, diffuse pain syndromes and states of exhaustion (cf. Mentzos 20)– hysteria is called the 'great imitator' of other diseases (cf. Mentzos 15). This marks hysteria as a phenomenon which is invariably tied to its cultural surroundings. The patient's symptoms adjust to changing social pressures and expectations. Hysterical phenomena are unconscious scenic performances (Mentzos 21), intuitive orchestrations of the self as a product of its discursivity—the hysteric is thus a pathological realization of a self without boundaries. The permeability of self-other boundaries—"die Diffusität der Grenzen zwischen Selbstwelt und äußerer Welt" (Mentzos 46)—makes it more or less impossible to find the "true" identity of a hysteric, as she appears to have no ac-

[51] Violet's observation is not Hustvedt's invention. As Goetz observes, in his commentary on Charcot's Tuesday lecture on hysteroepilepsy: "'Living in this way amongst epileptics, seeing them fall and taking care of them during their seizures after they had fallen, the young hysterics became susceptible to powerful impressions, and because of their tendencies to mimic, which is so characteristic of their neurosis, they duplicated in their hysterical fits every phase of a genuine epileptic seizure'" (112).

cess to a stable core of self: "In ihrer Fähigkeit zur Ekstase und zur totalen Hinwendung an ihre Umgebung gab die Hysterikerin den Mittelpunkt der eigenen Existenz auf" (Schaps 64). In reference to Lucien Israël, Elizabeth Bronfen suggests

> that the language of hysteria be considered a mode of communication, an attempt to establish a relation with the Other, to broadcast the message of a recognition of lack—"I am not complete"—yet accomplishing this, in contrast to all other forms of neurosis, by transforming anxieties and desires into somatic manifestations. (*Knotted* xii)

Israël regards hysteria as a mode of relating which establishes an unconscious complicity between the hysteric and her surroundings. He concludes that hysterical symptoms are not merely signs of a defunct organ or system—instead, they contain an undeciphered message, (see Israël 22-23), an expression of the unconscious (see Israël 36).

While Bronfen underlines that the hysteric's adjustment of her symptoms to an audience makes her "readily appear[] to be an arch simulator, deceiver, and seductress" (Bronfen xi), Hustvedt emphasizes that the hysteric's "acting" is not a conscious performance: "At the same time, hysterics are not malingerers. They can't help what's happening to them and aren't faking their illnesses" (*Shaking Woman* 13). In the same vein, Merleau-Ponty also defends hysterics against the label of "deceiver":

> It is generally known how, by the notion of pithiatism[52], the theory of hysteria has been carried beyond the dilemma of paralysis (or of anesthesia) and simulation. If the hysterical patient is a deceiver, it is first and foremost himself that he deceives, so that it is impossible to separate what he *really* feels or thinks and what he overtly expresses: pithiatism is a disease of the *Cogito*, consciousness which has become ambivalent and not a deliberate refusal to declare what one knows. (*Phenomenology* 187)

Mentzos stresses that the hysteric does not strive to get something from her audience; rather, she needs the partner (other) as a confirmative audience, constituting a necessary figure in a symbolically revived scene and as a help and feedback to a process of getting worked up into a specific emotional state (97).

This subconscious imitation of the people one is surrounded by is neither limited to hysterical patients nor to extreme situations as the one described by Violet. Rather, in *What I Loved*, it is an everyday phenomenon for identities to in-

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[52] A translator's note defines this term as "the class of hysterical symptoms which can be made to disappear or be reproduced by means of suggestion" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 187)

vade each other, as becomes evident, for example, in Leo's accidental adoption of a new writing style: "And because Erica read to me from her book almost every afternoon, I found that the attenuated sentences of Henry James . . . sometimes infected my prose, and I had to revise my paragraphs to rid them of a writer's influence that had drifted onto my page through Erica's voice" (106). Hysterical imitation can thus simply be seen as an extreme manifestation of a disposition to take over elements of the other which can also be found in "normal" people.

In fact, even the topic of hysteria travels from character to character: Violet's dissertation inspires Bill to create a series of artworks on hysteria. In this series, Bill gives expression to the idea that the hysterics found their identities encroached upon by the various "therapies" administered at the Salpêtrière. In one of his artworks, a box ten feet high and seven feet wide, he shows a small doll with blond curls, screaming in agony:

> Her eyes were screwed shut and her mouth was stretched wide in a silent scream as she clamped her arms around a pole that divided the little room in half. In her fit she had contorted her body to one side so that her dress had twisted up around her waist, and when I scrutinized her little face more closely, I saw that a long bloody scratch ran down one of her cheeks. On the walls that surrounded her, Bill had painted ten shadowy male figures in black and white. Each man was holding a book and had turned his gray eyes toward the howling girl. (*Loved* 72)

The portrayal of the howling creature prey to the gaze of scientific observers fixing their gray eyes on her from all sides gives an intense expression to the disentitled position of the hysteric patient. The books hint at the doctors' epistemological power—they watch and judge, they record and chart, and thus assign meaning to hysterical identity. In a traditional allocation of the female as the objectified target of the male gaze, this artistic representation makes the observer complicit in a scene of voyeurism[53]—since the people looking at the artwork share their position with those of the shadows on the wall. Like the men in the box, they are mere shadows, their identities hidden and protected. Bill's rendering of the hysteric in the midst of the male shadows does not allow for hysterical body language as a sign of empowerment: the doll's scream is silent, her body is contorted, exposed, and hurt. However, although the hysteric's body seems powerless and victimized,

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[53] Without the connotation of desire and affirmation that Hustvedt describes in her discussion of Giorgione's *The Tempest* (see Chapter 3).

it does convey its message of pain—though ignored by the clinical gaze, it may be perceived by the more empathic gaze of people looking at Bill's art.

Another of Bill's artworks exhibits four Barbie dolls lying on the ground, each blindfolded and with their mouths taped; three of the mouth tapes have words printed on them: HYSTERIA, ANOREXIA NERVOSA, EXQUISITE MUTILATION, while the last one is blank (*Loved* 73). The hysterics are muted by the discourse of medical classification. The question of who speaks through the hysterical body has been a central concern in a number of interpretations of hysteria. The hysterics' various symptoms have been interpreted as a specific body language, and much has been written about hysterical semiotics and the hysterics' use of a repertory of signs to communicate. Manfred Schneider, for example, in his essay "Hysterie als Gesamtkunstwerk: Aufstieg und Verfall einer Semiotik der Weiblichkeit" (Hysteria as a Synthesis of the Arts: Rise and Fall of a Semiotics of the Female), writes about the medical lecture of women's bodies and the register of female suffering as a poetry album (882). He also calls hysteria the register of deceiving female forms of expression, a rhetoric of female desire, and refers to the rule of metaphor and the pathological symbolism of sex (883). In a similar vein, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White read the hysterics' behavior as an endeavor to speak through the body; they conceptualize hysterical symptoms as an "attempt to produce their own pastiche and parody in an effort to embody semiotically their distress" (174). Susan Bordo argues that the symptomatology of hysteria—along with disorders such as agoraphobia and anorexia nervosa—"reveals itself as textuality" (93) and that the "bodies of disordered women in this way offer themselves as an aggressively graphic text for the interpreter—a text that insists, actually demands, that it be read as a cultural statement, a statement about gender" (94). The Surrealist thinkers André Breton and Louis Aragon have even called hysteria the "most poetic discovery of the 19th century" and a "supreme mode of expression" (qtd. in Filipovic 194). Yet the question remains whether the message conveyed by the hysteric's body was received or ignored. Elaine Showalter points to the fact that French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva have defined hysteria "as a female signifying system outside of language" (86) and have created an

écriture féminine inspired by a wish to find a voice for the silenced language of the female body. Janet Beizer stresses the semiotic struggle between hysterical incoherence and a medical appropriation of the hysteric's body language:

> The silences and incoherences of hysteria were perceived as an invitation to narrate: it is precisely because the hysteric cannot tell her story that this story, in the form of a blank to be filled in, is so readily accessible as narrative matter. But also, it is because the hysteric's story is not *only* hers—it is a more inclusive cultural story that, repressed, can be spoken only in the Other's name—that the hysteric is so readily appropriated as narrative screen. (9)

What this passage, like the other texts considered here, brings to the foreground is the tension between the significatory power of the body and the discursive repression of its voice through the medical institution. The transformations enacted by the body through a variety of symptoms figure as signifying practices in a network of socio-political power relations—the body is always infused with cultural meaning. In a Foucauldian vein, the body is commonly viewed as a parchment on which discourses and social pressures are inscribed, a textual construction that is beyond the control of the individual. This idea is prominent in the application of dermagraphism—the practice of tracing the hysteric's supposedly more impressionable skin with a blunt instrument to make letters and paintings visible on her body—repeatedly exercised at the Salpêtrière. In *What I Loved*, Bill expresses the violence immanent in such an inscription of the body in his artwork.

The cruelty of the clinical gaze and the objectification of the female patient highlighted in Bill's artwork are most clearly enunciated in his representations of dermagraphism. In one of the hysteria boxes, he shows a naked woman straddled by a dressed man: "She was lying on the floor as the young man straddled her back. Gripping a large pen in his left hand, he appeared to be writing vigorously on one of her buttocks" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 72). When Leo and his wife Erica visit Bill's studio to have a look at some of the hysteria exhibits, Erica and Violet have a conversation about dermagraphism in which Violet draws a parallel between the body of the hysterics and works of art: "'They turned living women into things,' she said. 'Charcot called the hypnotized women 'artificial hysterics.' That was his term. Dermagraphism makes the idea more potent. Doctors like Barthélémy signed

women's bodies just as if they were works of art'" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 74).[54] Vicky Kirby, in her study *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, also makes a connection between hysterics and art: "Fixed before the camera of clinical voyeurism, the symptom was effectively aestheticized by Charcot in a *tableau vivant* of sculptural compliance. There could be no doubt that the hysteric was part of the artist's *oeuvre*" (58). This interlinking of illness and art situates the hysterics in a sphere "that blurs the difference between pose and possession" (Kirby 58) and demonstrates the heteronomy at the heart of the doctor-patient relationship.

In another of his hysteria pieces, Bill displays a photograph of a woman with the word "SATAN" inscribed on her back.[55] The traced and imprinted skin of the patient is defenselessly exposed to the observer's gaze—the identity of the hysteric is reduced to its impressionable and manipulable outer surface. The woman's body's inscription with the word SATAN evokes the idea of a self possessed by an evil power, denied of self-control and agency. Leo's further description of the installation illuminates the transformation of the hysteric into an art object affected by dermagraphism:

> In front of the photo was the image of another woman kneeling on the ground. She had been painted on heavy canvas and then cut out. For her exposed back and arms, Bill had used pearly, idealized flesh tones reminiscent of Titian. The nightgown she had pulled down over her shoulders was the palest of blues. The third figure in the room was a man, a small wax sculpture. He stood over the cut-out woman with a pointer, like the ones used in geography classes, and seemed to be tracing something onto her skin—a crude landscape of a tree, a house, and a cloud. (Hustvedt, *Loved* 71)

The installation focuses on the topography of the female body mapped out by the clinical observer. Art and medicine are conflated in the body of the woman—the man uses the pointer to create an image on the skin, thus reducing his patient to an empty canvas for his own creation. Drawing attention to this peculiar practice at the Salpêtrière, Hustvedt lays particular emphasis on the various similarities between the objectification of women practiced in both the medical field and art.

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[54] Charcot called the Salpêtrière a "museum of living pathology" (quoted, for example, in Bronfen 174).

[55] The photograph is based on a real picture taken for the *Iconography of the Salpêtrière.* See my discussion of photography in *What I Loved* in Chapter 3.1.4.

Transforming the body of the woman into a supposedly blank slate[56] used for inscription, writing on the body plays a central role in metamorphosing the female patients into art objects. The doctors assume creative control over their patients by treating them like a canvas to be inscribed with a meaning dictated by the hand of the master physician. More than just a physical cover of the body, the skin is the symbolical field between the self and the world (cf. Benthien 7), the "surface . . . where the self meets what is other than self" (Leder 11). It is a site of contact, a site of exchange: "*In between* the outside and the inside, the contact surface—whether it be membrane, film, or skin—is alike the place of exchanges, of adjustments, of sensory signals, and the place of conflicts or wounds" (Starobinski 342). As Benthien argues in her literary history of the skin, the skin has been developed into a central metaphor of separation, especially in the twentieth century (7). According to Benthien, in the eighteenth century the skin was still seen as a porous layer with manifold openings (51)—this notion of permeability has been increasingly suppressed. The inscription of the skin, the penetration and marking of this symbolical field with a writing instrument, suggests authorial control of the doctor and the impressionability of the patient.

The symbolical power assigned to the skin as dividing line between inside and outside can again be tied to the discursive powers at play in the body in general. As Butler points out in her reading of Foucault's notion of the body and culture in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History": "In a sense, for Foucault, as for Nietzsche, cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values" (130). This transvaluation is exercised very directly on the body of the hysteric—the presence of the body and any kind of message communicated by the body are muted by the enforced transformation of the medium into a blank page. Although both Foucault and Butler use the term "inscriptions" in a metaphorical sense, the literal, physical realization of impregnating a

[56] For an elaborate account of literary representations of woman as a blank slate to be inscribed, a passive creation of the male artist, see Gubar's "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity."

person's body with a text authored by the doctor stands out as a forceful encroachment on that person's identity.

Hustvedt furthermore extends the scope of this male fantasy of objectification and subjection to a prominent myth of male creation: the Pygmalion myth. Leo observes,

> Medicine had granted permission to a fantasy that men have never abandoned, a muddled version of what Pygmalion wanted—something between a real woman and a beautiful thing. . . . I thought of Ovid's Pygmalion kissing, embracing, and dressing the girl he had carved out of ivory. When his wish comes true, he touches her new warm skin and his fingers leave an imprint. (*Loved* 74)

In a reverted version of this myth, the doctors at the Salpêtrière turn their Galateas from living beings into statues. Rather than creating life, they create art. Although the imprint the physician leaves on the hysteric's body is a sign of the skin's vulnerability, the lasting impression of dermagraphism is one denying the living interior of the patient, reducing her to the surface. Peter Brooks regards the myth of Pygmalion as the story that best exemplifies what Brooks calls "the interplay of eros and artistic creation":

> What presides at the inscription and imprinting of bodies is, in the broadest sense, a set of desires: a desire that the body not be lost to meaning—that it be brought into the realm of the semiotic and the significant—and, underneath this, a desire for the body itself, and erotic longing to have or to be the body. (22)

While the desire in the case of the doctors seems to be a desire of mastering the patient's body, it is not free from erotic undertones. The erotic desire connected to the sensation of leaving an imprint on another person's body evokes another scene right at the beginning of *What I Loved.* The stimulating connection between leaving a mark on the skin and leaving a mark on the canvas already emerges on the first page of the novel, when Violet describes her feelings as she was painted by Bill: "'I wanted you to turn around and walk over to me and rub my skin the way you rubbed the painting. I wanted you to press hard on me with your thumb the way you pressed on the picture . . .'" (*Loved* 3). The erotic tension present in this scene is complimented by Leo's reaction to seeing a bruise in the very same painting that Violet is referring to: Leo gets aroused and has sex with his wife Erica. "Later," Leo writes, "Erica said that she thought my response had something to do with a desire to leave a mark on another person's body. 'Skin is soft' she

said. 'We're easily cut and bruised'" (*Loved* 6). These hints at the erotic potential in marking another body but also at the skin as a site of violence and injury foreshadow the practice of dermagraphism at the Salpêtrière. Furthermore, Violet's posing as a model for Bill's art constitutes a counter model to the hysterics' conversion into art objects. Rather than emphasizing elements of objectification and domination, Bill's art work becomes a true co-production; mapping out "a territory between her [Violet] and me [Bill]" (*Loved* 15), the work of art melts the identity of the artist and his model, as emphasized by the title of the painting: *Self-Portrait* (*Loved* 4).

4.3 Closing the Self Down: The Anorexic Struggle against the Open Body

Anorexia nervosa, like hysteria, can be read as a message transmitted via the body. Hustvedt's characterization of anorexia as a defensive act against being "overmixed" with one's social and physical environment (the two overlap and can hardly be kept separate), adds new facet to the author's overall theory of mixed identity. To further elucidate the symbolic relevance of the body, I will draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body and Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. Bakhtin's ideas on carnival and the grotesque serve as an interesting counterpoint to contemporary interpretations of the body. The celebration of boundary transgressions as a manifestation of power and revolt marks a striking contrast to the anxiety experienced by anorexics. Bakhtin's emphasis on the body as a medium of signification is relevant to an understanding of the body as a site of negotiating cultural practices and identity. I read Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection as another possible way to explain the sense of being overmixed, which results in a feeling of horror and disgust experienced by anorexics. The discursive construction of the body—as it has been emphasized in great parts of the literature on anorexia nervosa—will be considered regarding its repercussions in anorexic identity. Moreover, I will examine anorexia nervosa as a gendered syndrome and draw conclusions for the interrelation of gender and intersubjectivity.

Anorexia, as portrayed in *What I Loved*, is a defensive act against the self being permeated by other people's desires. Violet, who is in the process of writing a study of eating disorders, explains her theory of anorexia as follows:

> "It started because I was looking for a way to talk about the threat anorexics feel from the outside. Those girls have overmixed, if you see what I mean. They find it hard to separate the needs and desires of other people from their own. After a while, they rebel by shutting down. They want to close up all their openings so nothing and nobody can get in. But mixing is the way of the world. The world passes through us—food, books, pictures, other people." (Hustvedt, *Loved* 88-9)

In drawing together the corporeal and social registers constituting these openings of the self, Hustvedt shows the individual to require a variety of exchanges with the social and physical spheres that surround her in order to maintain her existence. Identity is comprised out of this multitude of exterior influences intersecting in the self—the inner self is shaped by the outside, and the existence of an impenetrable inner core is called into question. Identity cannot be seen as distinct from the body, and the body and the world always mix. By reducing their food intake to the absolute minimum, anorexics seek to keep the intrusive forces from outside at bay.

On the one hand, people with anorexia adopt an almost Cartesian point of view, presupposing an inner self that needs to be protected from physical forces. As Caskey holds, "The anorexic grows up viewing her body as a reflected image of the desires of others. It is not *herself*; it is something exterior and foreign, and at the same time more relevant to others than to herself" (179). This distinction between the inner self and the body is characteristic of anorexic identity. One can interpret the anorexics' quest as a symptom of a society which still denigrates the body in favor of a disembodied, ideal, and pure self. Leslie Heywood characterizes anorexia as "an experience of the body and the mind as radically split, with the mind struggling to control the body" (17), which turns anorexics into "paradigmatic Cartesian subjects" (18). Therefore anorexia can be seen as the strife toward "the ecstasy of disembodiment" (Ellmann 2).

However, there are rare moments of insight during which the anorexic doubts this ecstasy. Consider this comment posted by a girl with anorexia on the "World's Largest Pro-Anorexia Site"[57]:

> I've always, for some reason, thought that my body wasn't me or was separate from me. My thoughts are me, because I can control them. And when I move my arm that's me too, but when I'm sick, I'm not my body because I can't just stop being sick. When you blush, it's not because of your mind. It's how your body reacts to certain situations. When you smile, you're happy. Your body is happy. You are happy. (posted April 30, 2008)

Hence, on the other hand, anorexics are keenly aware of the connectedness of body and mind and the instability that arises from this condition. Once the Cartesian split between the body and the mind is challenged, a process of mingling and a complication of boundaries are instigated. If the existence of an inner self starts to get entangled with the physical presence of the body, the idea of autonomous identity is bound to disintegrate, since the body's margins are open. Heywood contrasts her own portrayal of anorexics as Cartesian subjects by proposing to regard them as representatives of postmodern subjectivity, "the literalization of the fragmented postmodern subject who has no autonomous self but is the product of a range of heterogeneous discourse, since her inability to establish boundaries between herself and the rest of the world is arguably postmodern" (18).

Hustvedt's intuitive accentuation of margins also emerges in another essay on art, "Ghosts at the Table." As in the Goya piece, she concentrates on the boundaries between objects and persons, on the moment when clear distinctions between inside and outside become obliterated. Describing Abstract Expressionist painter Philip Guston's *Painter Forms* (1972), Hustvedt interprets his use of objects as "not limiting forms but liberating ones" (*Mysteries* 58). Assuming the

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[57] On so-called Pro Ana sites, young girls who suffer from anorexia nervosa establish web communities in which they exchange personal comments. These comments are predominantly shaped by guilt about eating and express the fears and depressions emanating from the girls' distorted body images. As the name Pro Ana (pro anorexia) already implies, the goal here is to encourage oneself and the other girls to lose more weight rather than get healthy—there are motivation contracts, "thinspirations" (images of super thin models, oftentimes manipulated to make them look even thinner), calorie charts etc., all geared toward a kind of self-help in starvation. The quotation above is not characteristic of these sites, since it reveals a degree of critical questioning that is rather uncommon in such communities. Frightening as they are in their glorification of anorexia nervosa, Pro Ana sites are nevertheless meaningful in establishing a communal network that works against the isolation that a person with anorexia typically has to deal with (cf. Dias).

painter's position, Hustvedt contends that objects "are outside me and inside me. They are of my body and not of it" (*Mysteries* 58). The creation of art as well as the relationship to the outer world of objects is thus shown to be a relation that transcends the self's inner limits. "Guston's still lifes," Hustvedt writes, "speak to the fact that the world penetrates us. We eat, we smoke, and have sex. But language and images enter us too. They become us. And in art, they are spewed forth again, transfigured and renewed" (*Mysteries* 58). In these passages, the author establishes a connection between the physical sensation of mixing with the world and artistic creation; the body becomes a site of recycling and transfiguring both physical and ideational material. It is in this exchange between inside and outside that the body's interactions assume discursive signification and the body becomes a cultural medium.

In the same essay, Hustvedt also describes a still life by Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* (1602). Cotán, Hustvedt observes, lived as a lay brother of the Carthusian order, whose members lead hermitic lives. Hustvedt regards the sharply traced distinctions between the single elements of the still life as its defining characteristic (*Mysteries* 46) and links this clear separation of nutritional objects to the painter's religious background:

> In Cotán, the very idea of food is suppressed in the name of a larger order of things, an order that relies on highly refined separations—among them a clean cut between the body and the outside world. The fasting and sexual abstinence practiced by the Carthusians as acts of purification may be seen as attempts to seal off the body from the material world. (*Mysteries* 46)

She then proceeds to compare this religious strife towards physical and spiritual purity to the struggle of today's anorexics: "This is not an impulse limited to religious orders; modern anorexics are driven by a similar desire for purity and cleanliness" (Hustvedt, *Mysteries* 48). There are a number of studies that point to the religious background of self-starvation, connecting Christian asceticism with anorexia (cf., for example, Bell, *Holy Anorexia*; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*; Banks, "'Culture' in Culture-Bound Syndromes"). As Hustvedt asserts, "modern" anorexics, though no longer driven by religious zeal, share the desire for purity with the "miraculous maids," their thirteenth- and fourteenth-century predecessors. In both cases, the body is instrumentalized to sig-

nify a higher level of spirituality and perfection. If anorexics today share this desire for an immaculate self, unsoiled by any form of nutrition, however, they—for the most part—do not share the religious motif for fasting.

In the Goya essay, Hustvedt further illuminates the symbolic function of the body by quoting from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*: "All margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect orifices of the body to symbolize specially vulnerable points" (qtd. in Hustvedt, *Mysteries* 80). This quotation is significant to this study in two ways: First of all, it exposes the vulnerability inherent in margins, a susceptibility to threats from the outside that fundamentally shapes not only the anorexic but possibly also female self-awareness in general. Secondly, it reads the body in its symbolic function. Mary Douglas was a structuralist anthropologist who, in *Purity and Danger*, examined the significance of taboos in primitive societies, the establishment of symbolic structures to maintain purity, to avoid ambiguity, and keep clear classifications of an ordered universe. This highly symbolic interpretation of the body's margins gains particular significance in an analysis of anorexic identity. In order to illuminate Hustvedt's concept of anorexics as "overmixed" selves, it is important to see them as members of a discursive community that constantly reads the body according to certain ideals of purity and autonomy.

Bakhtin's Grotesque Image of the Body

The grotesque body is overflowing, boundless, and untamed. It is marked by transition and renewal, exchange and evolution. Bakhtin vividly describes these grotesque features in *Rabelais and His World:*

> . . . a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. . . . Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 317)

Anorexics display a particular sensitivity toward specifically those characteristics of the body that are overemphasized in grotesque realism. While anorexics strive to regulate their orifices and are terrified of the transgressions which take place through them, Bakhtin describes the celebratory trespassing of the body's boundaries in carnival culture. The subversion of traditionally unquestioned delineations of meaning based on clear boundary lines between binary oppositions is a central aspect of the carnival and the grotesque. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin reads the work of the French Renaissance writer with the aim to uncover the various levels of border crossings characteristic of the carnivalistic tradition. In the universe of the carnivalesque, everything is turned upside down: hierarchies are overcome, and the distance between spectator and actor is dissolved in the act of laughter. As Peytard writes, "Mais le carnaval est un spectacle où les limites qui, ordinairement, séparent interprètes et spectateurs sont effacées, annihilées par l'exaltation de la vie. Domaine où le rire éclate sans retenue ni censure" (67). In the realm of the carnival, old interpretations of social structures are thrown into question, and new images of individual interrelationships are drawn, counteracting "the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life" (Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky* 123).

Michael Gardiner highlights the relation between Bakhtin's study of social dynamics in *Rabelais* with his examination of dialogical structures in linguistics: "*Rabelais and His World* is unique in a number of respects, not least because it treats the human body itself as a semiotic medium, as an 'open' signifier which is inscribed and 'made meaningful' through the operation of contesting signifying practices" (*Dialogics* 48). Our bodies are signifiers and determine the way we are in the world through their interactions with other material signifiers. Just as the word always reaches out beyond its apparent semantic limit and connects with other elements of signification, so does the "grotesque body always supersede . . . its apparent boundaries" (Gardiner, *Dialogics* 49). "The carnival imagery of *Rabelais* is," as Emerson states, "related to the almost coterminous essay 'The Word [Discourse] in the Novel' as matter is related to spirit. It is that word 'made flesh'" (*The First Hundred* 169). In *Rabelais*, we find the intertextual nature of language (the word seen in active communication with its linguistic environment)

transferred to the social and biological realm. "Just as the carnival enacts the intertextuality of ideologies," Holquist and Clark state, "official and unofficial, so the grotesque body foregrounds the intertextuality of nature. The grotesque is intertextually perceived at the level of biology" (304).

Bakhtin's awareness of the relativity of all meaning, be it an interpretation of the individual's position in society or the word and its relation to the linguistic system, has led several of his critics to point out the Russian thinker's closeness to new scientific and biological theories of his time, such as relativity and quantum theory (e.g., Holquist, *Dialogism* 6, 17; Bernard-Donals 22). It is Bakhtin's mediation between the biological and the aesthetic which makes him particularly interesting to this study, since this is an endeavor shared by Hustvedt. To establish a link between the philosophical, the biological, and the social is one of the major projects realized in Hustvedt's writings. It is only through the creation of new links between formerly separated fields of knowledge that original visions of identity can come to life. In Bakhtin's case, one of the links he makes is that between the material and the immaterial, between biological reactions and the formation of identity. Holquist and Clark theorize the essential tie between Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and the most basic principle of biological life itself, determining the core of all life as a "capacity to react to, or interact with, the environment" (66). Quite obviously, thus, all life is based on interaction and exchange—without this, life becomes dead matter. As Holquist and Clark furthermore remark, the human body itself is a complex organism of cooperating cells, "all interacting with each other in a constantly interrelating community of 'languages,' a heteroglossia of electrochemical impulses and hormonal 'dialects' and enzymatic 'patois'" (66-67). To people with anorexia, all these layers of interaction with the environment pose a threat to a unified and coherent sense of self. Instead of relativity, exchange, and interrelation they reach for protection and isolation.

So far, Bakhtin's approach to the grotesque body has contributed to this study by offering another focus on the symbolic function of the body. Conceiving of the body as a figure in a textual field foreshadows Foucault's concept of discursivity and power. In addition, the concept of the grotesque body complements

Hustvedt's emphasis on the fragility of borders, on the constant subversion of limits that takes place on the surface of the body. Mihailovic's reading of Bakhtin helps to underscore the latter's fascination with borders:

> carnival ignores the hard-and-fast distinctions of spatial boundaries . . . . This idea and the varied terminology of restrictive borders or dividing lines opposed to it are reiterated time and again by Bakhtin: derivatives of the words *granitsa* (border, boundary), *rubezh* (border, verge, dividing line), *predel* (limit, or often other variants formed from the stem *del* such as *delenie* [division] and the Chalcedonian *razdel'no* [undivided]), and occasionally the terms *mezha* (boundary, boundary-strip) and *mezhdu* (between) reverberate throughout the book . . . (153)

As shown above, Hustvedt shares this interest in permeable borders, in the places where self and other, inside and outside become indistinguishable. According to Bakhtin, eating is the most significant interaction between self and the world, as realized by the grotesque body:

> The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. . . . (*Rabelais* 281)

It is the interpretation of the transgressive act of eating which most strongly stands in contrast to the anorexics' understanding of eating as a moment of contamination and powerlessness. Bakhtin holds that:

> Man's awakening consciousness could not but concentrate on this moment, could not help borrowing from it a number of substantial images determining its interrelation with the world. Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage." (*Rabelais* 281)

Thus Bakhtin and Hustvedt both outline the openness of the body and its interaction with the world; yet, while Bakhtin portrays eating as the triumphant moment of overcoming the world, Hustvedt points to the pathologization of the same act in contemporary culture. Violet indicates the ambiguity towards food in contemporary culture, which turns eating into a highly contested cultural practice:

> "Food. . . is our pleasure and our penance, our good and evil. Fanatical running, the rise of the health club and the health-food store, Rolfing, massage, vitamin therapy, colonics, diet centers, bodybuilding, plastic surgery, a moral horror of smoking and sugar, and a terror of pollutants all testify to an idea of the body as extremely vulnerable—one with failing thresholds, one that is under constant threat." (*Loved* 162)

The way Violet describes the cultural struggle against the body's vulnerability shows how opposed contemporary society is to anything resembling the Bakhtin-

ian carnival sense of the world. Transgression, becoming, interaction, and the erasure of physical limits—all themes that Bakhtin reads as positive instances of overcoming hierarchical and monologic structures—are generally interpreted as a danger, since they remind us of the inseparability of mind and body and the dependence of the self on its environment. This reveals the degree in which cultural significations of eating have changed over the centuries. Bakhtin's portrayal of eating as the celebratory triumph of man over the world finds it opposite in the attitude that anorexics have toward eating: instead of conquering the world by integrating it into the body, the body becomes alienated by the fact that the outside invades the inside; the self senses its powerlessness over biological forces and finds itself in a pathological struggle for separation; the physical entanglement of the self in the world is felt to inhibit a free expression of self. Everything is geared toward sealing off the self from the world. The only character in *What I Loved* that can be read as a representative of Bakhtin's positive view of eating as a triumph is Violet herself. Significantly, she is one of the strongest and most sympathetic characters of the novel. She is the exact opposite of the isolated, closed down anorexic. She loves food, she gains and loses weight, and always feels comfortable with her body. She displays a deep connectedness of the mind and the body: "Violet didn't distinguish between the cerebral and the physical. Her thoughts seemed to run through her whole being, as if thinking were a sensual experience" (*What I Loved* 51). Violet thus offers a positive counter-model to the rejection of the physical in anorexia nervosa. While in modern Western society "body management becomes central to the maintenance of self-integrity, and eating becomes an occasion when the body, something that is 'not me,' 'takes over' and triumphs in the discursively produced conflict between mind/self and body" (Malson 125), Violet stands for the triumph of eating, devouring the world without being devoured herself.

The body and its flexible and permeable boundaries play a major role in many of Hustvedt's works. The vicissitude of Violet's growing and shrinking body in Bill's paintings, Bill's representations of his father's aging body, Leo's detachment from his own body image, and Teenie's emaciated appearance are only some

instances in which the body is accentuated in *What I Loved*. When writing about eroticism in her essay "A Plea for Eros," Hustvedt points out that it "thrives both on borders and on distance" (*Yonder* 77) and posits that "sexual pleasure demands thresholds" (*Yonder* 77). The idea of trespassing into the other's territory is part of the erotic adventure. Iris's adaptation of a male alter ego is closely connected to a change in the shape of her body from a healthy female figure to skin and bones. Her withdrawal from this alternative identity gets sealed by a re-transformation of the body: "Food was my salvation, and I imagined that I was getting fatter, that the roundness of my body was returning at an impossible rate. With every mouthful, I was burying Klaus, piling more and more dirt on top of him to keep him down" (*Blindfold* 176). Bodies appear as fluctuating signifiers of identity, negotiating, sometimes conflicting with, but always tied to a person's subjectivity. Bodies are not fixed, bodies move and change shape.

Food and its impact on the body are furthermore expressing people's states of minds: In *What I Loved*, Erica loses weight after Matt's death (139); Violet, out of despair, cannot eat anymore at the end (271); Violet conveys her affection and compassion by feeding Leo and Erica (139); Erica helps out Lazlo Finkelman by feeding him (100); later in the novel, Leo feeds Violet; Mark tries "to chew his way through the loss of his father" (263). After Bill's death, food preparation becomes a symbol of stability and sustenance: "Preparing food was an important ritual that defined the day for all three of us" (263) Lucille, an unsympathetic character, shows complete indifference towards food. Food is a medium of exchange, and feeding another an act of love and care.

Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection

Another concept that elucidates the symbolic forces at play in our perception of the body is Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. According to this theory, the breakdown of the safe boundary between self and other, inside and outside causes horror and disgust. Abjection, the expulsion of the unclean, is interpreted as a protective measure of the self's precarious boundaries: "Loathing an item of

food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me" (Kristeva 2). The abject needs to be repressed in order for the subject to preserve its distinction between exteriority and interiority. This repression, however, is constructed and thus not natural. As Grosz observes, "Abjection is the body's acknowledgement that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social projections—effects of desire, not nature" ("Signification" 90). The rejection of food can be interpreted as working against the symbolic dissolution of a stable subjectivity, initiated by the perception of physical processes as representing one's inner identity. By managing to keep the body as free from external materials as possible, the anorexic hopes to preserve her inner purity—both of the body and the mind. The exclusion of the contaminating element food endows her with a sense of stability. "Food loathing," Kristeva writes, "is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). However, the sense of stability reached through abjection is under constant threat from the lingering presence of the abject. The abject, as Grosz underlines, "can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution" ("Signification" 87). This may help to understand the anorexic's panicky obsession with controlling herself and her constant feeling of guilt with regard to eating even the smallest amount of food. Kristeva's delineation of the abject as something that defies order and classification evokes Mary Douglas's interpretation of dirt as being dangerous for the same reason. "It is thus not lack of cleanliness that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). As we have seen, this in-betweenness has traditionally been assigned to the feminine and has been interpreted to put into question female agency and autonomy. All these transgressions and boundary crossings are instances of overmixing that the anorexic represses through her renunciation of food.

Pointing to cultural rites in India and Polynesia, Kristeva spotlights a sensitivity to the impurity of food which one may compare to that felt by a great share of anorexic patients: "Thus the Brahmin who surrounds his meal and his

food with very strict regulations is less pure after eating than before. Food in this instance designates the other (the natural) that is opposed to the social condition of man and penetrates the self's clean and proper body" (Kristeva, *Powers* 75). This distinction between the social and the natural, with its prioritizing of spiritual purity, bears an affinity with the anorexic's struggle to keep their bodies pure and uncontaminated.

Megan Warin, engaging both Douglas's concept of pollution and Kristeva's abjection, draws attention to the degree of contamination that is experienced by anorexic patients due to the crossing of physical boundaries—food is equated with a contagion invading the inside. For a great number of anorexics, Warin argues, "the very act of eating—of food passing into the interior of the body—was described as 'out of bounds,' contaminating and polluting" (81). Special sensitivity is placed on the lips and the skin—the orifice of the mouth forming a gate, the skin a membrane, between inside and outside: "when you eat you actually try to make as little contact with your mouth as possible" (qtd. in Warin 1). This fear of contamination knows no boundaries in some people with anorexia—calories could be absorbed when touching any oily or greasy substance, even shampoo or moisturizing cream (see Warin 87), or through simple breathing, the air being perceived as a carrier of contagious calories (Warin 84-85).[58] "By drawing inward—closing and protecting—participants were evoking disgust and revulsion, an emotive 'casting out' of abject horror" (Warin 83). Thus once again, we see that the closing down of the self is a coping mechanism directed against the body's openness and vulnerability, its contamination with what are perceived to be polluting elements from without.

What Hustvedt describes as a natural process of integration and exchange becomes to the anorexic a threat to her identity. "In the real world," Hustvedt writes, "food becomes part of the body. It enters us, is used, and the excess is expelled as waste. Consumption and digestion blur the boundary between the eater and the eaten" (*Mysteries* 46). The anorexic feels that in the blurring of eater and eaten, the self is annihilated by the outside. In a sense, anorexics attempt to protect

[58] This notion goes all the way back to miraculous starvation practices in the Middle Ages: Fasting girls were said to survive by feeding on particles of the air (cf. Hof 72).

their "inner sanctum" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 48), conceiving of "the self as monarch, residing within the palace of the body, guiding its renovation so that its unique status will be made manifest" (Heyes 6). To keep this monarch protected and pure, bodily needs are repressed.

Being Overmixed with Social Forces: Foucault and Feminist Discourses

Where does the anorexics' sense of being oversaturated with the environment originate, and in how far is it a symptom of contemporary cultural discourses at work in the individual? Nikolas Rose, in an essay published in 2001, defines our age as "biopolitical," marked by the increasing interference of political authorities with the sphere of the individual (cf. Rose 1). The body serves as a signifier of subjectivity, and a healthy body is connected with a strong subject. This leads to an increasing awareness of the body's shapes and metamorphoses:

> From official discourses of health promotion through narratives of the experience of disease and suffering in the mass media, to popular discourses on dieting and exercise, we see an increasing stress on personal reconstruction through acting on the body in the name of a fitness that is simultaneously corporeal and psychological. Exercise, diet, vitamins, tattoos, body piercing, drugs, cosmetic surgery, gender reassignment, organ transplantation - . . . the corporeal existence and vitality of the self have become the privileged site of experiments with subjectivity. (Rose 18)

What this passage, like all of the texts considered here, brings to the foreground, is the immense significatory power of the body. Its shape and the way we control it, the transformations we enact upon it, all figure as signifying practices in a network of socio-political power relations—the body is infused with cultural meaning.

In order to illuminate the social dynamics at work in a syndrome like anorexia nervosa, many analytical thinkers—among them anthropologists, medical professionals, or feminists[59]—draw on Foucault's concept of the body as a site of discursive struggle. In these conceptions, the body is commonly viewed as a parchment on which discourses and social pressures are inscribed; the body is portrayed as a textual construction. Lester, for example, points out that much of feminist critique on anorexia—using Foucauldian terminology—claims that "cultural discourses are written on the docile body, merge together and work their

[59] See, for example, Lester, Warin, Bordo, and Malson.

mysterious alchemy with no direct and predictable linkage to the internal processes of the woman" (481). She also discloses feminists' tendencies to neglect the biological body in favor of the symbolic function of the body: the "the debilitating illness of anorexia nervosa is read as a text—a symbolic struggle played out in the 'language' of the body" (Lester 481). This critique of such a mythologizing of a disease evokes the spirit of Susan Sontag's powerful critique of the use of illness as metaphor. Lester makes a distinction between the "Body" and the "body," using the former to refer to the theoretical concept and the latter to "the actual, real, masses of flesh, bones and blood we walk around in" (482).

Foucault develops his concept of "docile bodies" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, arguing that the classical age discovered the body as a target of power and subjection, to be controlled and manipulated: "out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable . . ." (135). This subjection of the body—in Foucault's example applied to the soldier's body - is exercised in contemporary machineries of the fitness regime; the body is regarded as an organism that needs to be controlled and perfected.

Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* is another feminist reading of anorexia as a reaction to the subjection of the female body to a male-dominated discourse. To this study, the Foucauldian construction of the body as an intersection of discourses and a site of political agency is important in its emphasis on the power being exerted on the body. His concept of "docile bodies" helps us understand the mechanisms of power and surveillance at play in the individual's body perception. What this subverts, yet again, is the idea of an autonomous subjectivity, since the individual cannot free herself from the discursive pressures "weighing" on her body. The body is to be made amenable to the exigencies of its social surroundings. The body's "forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement'" (Bordo 2363).

The Foucauldian concept of the docile body and the stress on the discursive element in the disorder invites a reference to Hustvedt's use of dermagraphism in

What I Loved, as discussed above. Elizabeth Grosz lists a number of possible writing instruments, "pen, stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing, diet, exercise" (*Volatile Bodies* 117), including dieting as a form of writing on the body. What Hustvedt describes as a form of ultimate patriarchal control of the doctor over the patient can consequently be transferred to the compulsory composition of the perfect body that the anorexic construes to create. Anorexia is a pathological consequence of the body being enmeshed in networks of social discourse, caught in the pressure field of public economies beyond control. The attempt to emancipate it from the textual control of its environment ultimately can only succeed via an elimination of the body, since embodiment, as shown above, always implies intertextuality.

Anorexia Nervosa and the Gender Question

Anorexics, however, wish to counteract specifically this feminine quality of openness; instead of a source of connection and affection, the presence of the other poses a threat to selfhood and wholeness. The complication of identity outlines as a result of the feminine self's openness during pregnancy is expressed in the following statement made by an anorexic patient:

> "Bottle—child—disgust, if I think of it—injections—the idea that there is something flowing into me, into my mouth or into my vagina, is maddening—integer, integra, integrum occurs to me—untouchable—he does not have to bear a child—a man is what he is—he need not receive and he need not give" (from an anorexic treatment session, qtd. in Bell 16)

Female penetrability appears as the trigger of disgust and disintegration, and is clearly juxtaposed to the ideal of an untouchable male self.

That anorexics have a pathological desire to establish borders in order to keep the inside uncontaminated by the outside can also be explained by their extreme feeling of a lack of control over their environment. "This sense of a total inability to control the environment," as Lawrence remarks, "is compensated for by a desperate attempt to control the self in the environment. Anorexics appear to need to separate themselves from the environment. They need to define their own limits and set boundaries for themselves" (94). She then continues, and this is essential, by pointing to the gender-specific difficulty to maintain these boundaries, due to the other-directedness that is inscribed in her identity by social expecta-

tions: “Woman is the carer, the facilitator, receptive and waiting to allow herself to become ‘something’ in someone else’s life. Being very thin seems to say to the world ‘I have sharp contours, I am not soft, I do not merge with you. I have nothing to give you’” (Lawrence 94).

While stressing the female inclination towards relating to and mixing with others, Hustvedt, nonetheless, also regards a need for clear distinctions as a typically feminine trait: “I organize and I clean, because I love to see the lines of every object around me clearly delineated, because in my domestic life I fight blur, ambiguity, cyclones, and decay (if not disease). It is a classically feminine position . . .” (*A Plea for Eros* 79). It seems as if, in order to counterbalance the essential openness attributed to constructions of the feminine body, women in general, not just anorexics, are bound to strive toward a clear distinction of boundaries. In “Being a Man,” Hustvedt reemphasizes the female demand for intact margins, in this case reflected in Iris’s (the protagonist of *The Blindfold*) erasure of any female signs of her body and taking on of a male personality: “Iris’s cross-dressing is defensive, an escape from the openness, fragility, and boundlessness she connects with her femininity” (*A Plea for Eros* 102). Significantly, Iris also loses a considerable amount of weight during her transformation, which links her with the anorexics’ attempt to create protective barriers by erasing the feminine traits of their bodies and by counteracting their openness through a refusal of food intake.

Hilde Bruch also describes anorexia as a countermeasure to extreme expectations of accommodation in the female. Like Hustvedt, Bruch sees anorexia as an attempt to seal the self off from its surroundings, as evoked in the title of her book *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*. The anorexic flees into compulsive food refusal in order to ward off the social forces, especially generated by her parents, intruding on her identity. Bruch speaks of a “confusion of pronouns” (*The Golden Cage* 35) taking place between the anorexic and her parents; she observes that oftentimes family members will assume the other’s position and speak in her place, which leads to a dangerous deconstruction of a stable distinction between self and other.

In Bordo's interpretation, anorexia is an outcome of a dilemma that women in today's society are forced to face: in order to succeed, they need to adhere to constructions of the body that display an idealized masculinity. She writes, "In the pursuit of slenderness and the denial of appetite the traditional construction of femininity intersects with the new requirement for women to embody the 'masculine' values of the public arena" (Bordo 2368). This aligns the anorexic refusal of voluptuous feminine body shapes with Iris's cross-dressing in *The Blindfold.* Both the anorexics' and Iris's weight loss and the concomitant shift from feminine to masculine are means of protection against a vulnerability that is characterized as female. Bordo describes the transformation and its effect of impenetrability and invulnerability as follows:

> As her body begins to lose its traditional feminine curves, its breast and hips and rounded stomach, begins to feel and look more like a spare, lanky male body, she begins to feel untouchable, out of reach of hurt, "invulnerable, clean and hard as the bones etched into my silhouette," as one student described it in her journal. (2372)

Similarly, Iris becomes more daring and hardened the longer she keeps up her game of cross-dressing and denial of her femininity. Ultimately, both the anorexic struggle and Iris's experiment become life-threatening. Bordo admits to the failure of such a sidestepping of one's feminine identity, since the independence and invulnerability gained from it turn out to be an illusion: "To *feel* autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body-practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities" (Bordo 2373). In *The Blindfold*, Iris is rescued from her nightmarish masculine counter-identity, and in the end food becomes a measure of her salvation, since she seems to regain herself by gaining weight and distancing herself from her masculine shape.

Conclusion

In *The Sorrows of an American*, protagonist Erik reflects on the need for protection that every self senses: "It happens that we all need to hold ourselves together, to shore up the walls of our houses, to patch and paint, to erect a silent fortress where no one leaves and no one enters" (250). In the anorexic, this silent fortress has become a space of incarceration. The walls she continues to shore up

against the contaminating outside forces that threaten to infiltrate her have become insuperable. What remains is an isolated and starving self, no longer overmixed, but stripped of the basic connections that a human being needs to survive, both physically and spiritually. While repeatedly focusing on instances of overlap and mixing, Hustvedt displays anorexia as a refusal against such moments of blending between the self and the world. Anorexic identity is a rejection of what Violet holds to be the foundation of identity: "I am because you are" (*Loved* 91). In a desperate attempt to defend herself against exterior forces, the anorexic closes down the gates leading into her body. Whether one interprets the refusal to take in food as a casting out of the abject, an endeavor to keep the self pure and immaculate, or a rebellion against the discursive control over her body, it always involves a renunciation of intersubjectivity, a longing for autonomy and exclusion. Consequently, anorexic identity poses a counter-example to Hustvedt's ideal of a reciprocal exchange between self and other. As Hustvedt keeps on demonstrating in her writing, some doors need to be kept open in order to survive. Or, as Merleau-Ponty has it, ". . . precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there" (*Phenomenology* 191).

5 When the Other Goes Missing: Loss and Grief in Siri Hustvedt's Writing

The relational interdependence that exists between self and other in partnerships, friendships, and families is felt most acutely in Hustvedt's writing when she describes the deep ruptures caused by a character's disappearance or death. In *What I Loved,* Leo, after his best friend Bill's death, utters the simple, truthful phrase: "'He meant the world to me.' It was a stupid, banal phrase, but when I uttered it, the words seemed invigorated by a truth I had been keeping to myself for some time" (268). Losing a close friend, like losing a child, a parent, or a partner, can destroy the world of the self, a world that is shared and intersubjective. The degree to which the self is dependent on the other becomes most evident in the event of a significant other's vanishing, either through abandonment or death. As Marilyn McCabe observes on the topic of loss and grief, "The oscillating moments of grief can best be understood in terms of a dialogical . . . , intersubjective . . . , and multileveled . . . self emerging out of our earliest negotiations with and the paradoxical interplay between self and other, absence and presence, material and symbolic reality" (131). This chapter approaches both these "earliest negotiations" between self and other and the "oscillating moments of grief" that grip the characters in Hustvedt's works.

Especially Hustvedt's last two novels contain moments of shattering loss that unhinge the characters' lives and destroy intact models of self. In *What I Loved*, characters suffer from deprivation both due to their unrequited love for or separation from attachment figures and due to the sudden death of a loved person. Bill grew up with an absent father and married Lucille, an exceedingly inaccessible woman. Mark's childhood is shaped by his mother Lucille's emotional detachment as well as his parents' separation and the consequent lack of stability and safety. Leo and Erica suffer the unbearable loss of their only child Matt. Bill's death leaves his lover Violet and his best friend Leo in a state of mourning and sorrow. *The Sorrows of an American* is a narrative whose origin lies in Hustvedt's loss of her own father, and the entire novel can be considered a reflection of and an

attempt to cope with such loss. Dealing with the loss of one's father, the central theme of the novel, is the narrator Erik's quest; it is moreover mirrored by Eglantine's struggle to fill the hole that her father's departure left in her childhood and by Sonia's trauma of losing her father Max.

The following analysis of loss and interpersonal relations in Hustvedt's works will present further evidence for an idea of identity as relational and inseparable from the existence of other people. I will first introduce relational concepts of psychoanalysis[60] to establish an understanding of how formative early relations are to human existence. Herein I will rely most importantly on the work of British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1896-1971) on mother-child relations and on the attachment theory of the British psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990). American psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's (1946-) concept of intersubjective psychoanalysis will serve as an introduction and a connecting link between philosophy and psychoanalysis. The work of these psychoanalysts, of whom Hustvedt herself cites the former two as influences in the acknowledgments of her novel *What I Loved*,[61] will help elucidate behaviors of attachment and the damaging effects of the unattainability of the desired subject, as primarily displayed in the character Mark in *What I Loved*.[62]

Secondly, I will have a look at the consequences of being bereft of a loved person through death. In *What I Loved*, the loss of their child Matt has detrimental effects on Erica and Leo's identities and ultimately makes it impossible for them to

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[60] Hustvedt's affinity to psychoanalysis surfaces in the many references to Freud, Lacan, Bowlby and Winnicott throughout her work. Above all, her choice of a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst as narrator of her novel *The Sorrows of an American* shows the author's interest in and knowledge of psychoanalysis.

[61] Winnicott's *Deprivation and Delinquency* makes an appearance in the novel itself, as Violet reads it trying to make sense of Mark's incomprehensible behavior (*Loved* 237).

[62] The damage done to children by insufficient parental care and separation also reveals itself in a number of Erik's patients in *The Sorrows of an American* who have immense trouble in establishing healthy relationships because of their broken childhoods: Mr. R., one of Erik's patients, had very old parents, who both worked all the time and never paid much attention to him—Mr. R. thus never learned to establish good relationships with other people and to rely on other people (*Sorrows* 81-82). Mrs. L.'s parents divorced when she was two, after which none of her parents took good care of her. After a period of lost jobs, failed relationships, and failed therapies, she ends up at Erik's practice (*Sorrows* 86-87).

relate to each other the same way as before the event of their son's death. The sudden absence of their son causes their world to break down and removes the foundation of their relationship. Moreover, Violet's grieving of her husband Bill deepens the sense of interdependency and connectedness that leaves the self broken in the absence of the loved other. In *The Sorrows of an American*, characters' lives are likewise shaped by the severe losses they have to endure. Erik's life is marked by a loneliness that at times becomes overpowering after his father's death. His sister Inga and his niece Sonia are still in the process of coming to terms with the loss of husband and father Max Blaustein. In both novels, the characters depend on each other, nurturing and supporting each other to survive theses losses. Only Erica and Leo are unable to maintain their relationship, since it is too entangled with their lost son.

Both Leo's and Erik's narratives can be read as an attempt to put life back together and make sense of the bewildering events of loss they both had to go through. Narrativization can be elemental in helping to reestablish meaningful structures in a life that seems to have been disrupted beyond repair by the loss of a "relational" or intersubjective "anchor" (see Klugman 174). Leo, however, "invoke[s] ghosts that cannot satisfy" (*Loved* 364) him. Remorsefully looking back at the irrevocably lost, Leo observes: "Writing is a way to trace my hunger, and hunger is nothing if not a void" (*Loved* 365). *The Sorrows of an American*, by contrast, is accompanied by a sense of rebirth and redemption. The narrative itself becomes a way of reconnecting with the world, opening a dialogue between the narrator (and the author) and the reader that may establish a sharability of pain and grief that lifts the bereaved person out of their often isolated station in life.

5.1 Relational Psychoanalysis: Attachment and Loss

Reviewing the developments within the field of psychoanalysis, Stephen A. Mitchell suggested twenty years ago that a paradigmatic shift toward a relational model of psychoanalysis had taken place, "which considers relations with others, not drives, as the basic stuff of mental life" (2). This model, moving away

from monadic Freudian drive theory to a focus on dyadic relations between self and other, has been embraced in a variety of psychoanalytic theories, among them object-relations theories (e.g., Ronald Fairbairn, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott), interpersonal psychoanalysis (Harry Stack Sullivan), or self psychology (Heinz Kohut), and is still influential today. Mitchell defines the construction of the subject according to the relational model

> not as a conglomeration of physically based urges, but as being shaped by and inevitably embedded within a matrix of relationships with other people, struggling both to maintain our ties to others and to differentiate ourselves from them. In this vision the basic unit of study is not the individual as a separate identity whose desires clash with an external reality, but an interactional field within which the individual arises and struggles to make contact and articulate himself. *Desire* is experienced always *in the context of relatedness*, and it is that context which defines its meaning. (3)

In the same vein as philosophers like Buber, Bakhtin, or Merleau-Ponty, Mitchell stresses the primacy of relation over separate identity. Again, the complicated balance between merging with others and maintaining a differentiated sense of self is highlighted, and the self's identity is seen as inextricably interwoven with other people's identities.

5.1.1 Jessica Benjamin's Theory of Intersubjective Psychoanalysis

The shift from the self as an independent entity of research to the focus on interrelatedness and self-other interactions coincided with an emphasis on mother-child relationships. Jessica Benjamin points to "emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind" (*Bonds* 16) as major components of mother-child interactions.[63] Benjamin connects the shift toward a relational model of psychoanalysis with what she calls the "intersubjective view,"[64] which "maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self

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[63] The almost exclusive focus on the mother in psychoanalytical attachment studies may have become more or less outdated nowadays, since there are an increasing number of fathers taking care of their newborn children. However, because of the mother-child symbiosis during pregnancy and also the possibility of breastfeeding, the mother does seem to have an especially intimate connection to the newborn.

[64] She derives her approach to intersubjectivity from Jürgen Habermas's social theory as developed in his "A Theory of Communicative Competence."

meets is also a self, a subject in his own right" (*Bonds* 19-20).[65] In reference to Hegel's theory of recognition, Benjamin emphasizes moments of mutual recognition: "The idea of mutual recognition is crucial to the intersubjective view; it implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct" (*Bonds* 23). Benjamin sees feminist criticism as the driving force in emphasizing the mother as an independent subject and a mutuality of child-mother relations as a way of making readers "aware of the disastrous results for women of being reduced to the mere extension of a two-month-old" (*Bonds* 23).[66]

In her *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*, Benjamin analyzes the implications of changing the terminology used in psychoanalytical interpretation from "object" to "subject"—instead of thinking of other persons as objects to relate to and internalize, she calls for a relational psychoanalysis that acknowledges and recognizes the other's subjectivity (see, for example, *Like Subjects* 28-30). Benjamin criticizes traditional psychoanalytical concepts such as internalization due to their annihilation of the other subject. "Internalization implies that the other is consumed, incorporated, digested by the subject self," she writes. "The joy of discovering the other, the agency of the self, and the outsideness of the other—these are at best only fuzzily apprehended by internalization theory" (*Bonds* 43).[67] In a state of mutual recognition, Benjamin argues, "sameness and difference exist simultaneously" (*Bonds* 47). Benjamin underlines that what might be conceived of as an imperfection—the impossibility of becoming absolutely one with another—is necessary to remind us "that in every experience of similarity and subjective sharing, there must be enough difference to create a feeling of reality" (*Bonds* 47). Only if the other remains an external and

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[65] Benjamin, however, does not see the intersubjective view as the exclusive approach to be taken to psychoanalysis. While Mitchell clearly speaks against intrapsychic drive theory, Benjamin advocates a complementary system of intersubjective and intrapsychic theory (*Bonds* 20-21).

[66] Benjamin refers to Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, Nancy Chodorow's "Gender Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," and Evelyn Fox Keller's *Reflections on Gender and Science* (see *Bonds* 252).

[67] This again evokes the philosophies of Buber and Bakhtin, who both emphasize the importance of alterity, of acknowledging the "elemental otherness of the other" (Buber, *Psychology* 13).

separate subject can genuine emotions come to exist between the self and the other.

The independence of the other subject is one of the first things that the child needs to come to terms with. This independence is primarily displayed in the dichotomy of absence and presence of the mother. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt refers to Freud's story of his grandson's *fort/da* game as an example of this interplay between the mother's disappearance and return. The game consists of throwing a wooden reel on a piece of string away, exclaiming "fort," and pulling it back close, with the exclamation "da." As Hustvedt writes, "Freud interpreted the game as a way for the child to master absence and presence, his mother's comings and goings" (*Shaking* 58). She then points out that "We use symbols, and those symbols give us power over what is no longer there or is yet to come" (*Shaking* 58). As will be shown below, both Bowlby's and Winnicott's analyses of the child's development highlight the significance of the mother's absence and presence for the identity of the child.

As one central aspect of child-mother interaction, Benjamin describes various moments of intersubjective attunement through facial and gestural communication (*Bonds* 27). A successful, reciprocal exchange of such communicative gestures is formative to the child's capacity to negotiate the boundaries between inside and outside. Benjamin states:

> While the failure of early mutuality seems to promote a premature formation of the defensive boundary between inside and outside, the positive experience of attunement allows the individual to maintain a more permeable boundary and enter more readily into states in which there is a momentary suspension of felt boundaries between inside and outside. (*Bonds* 28-29)

Once again, identity is shown to depend on a successful navigation of the boundaries between self and other. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt also emphasizes the early capacity of children to interact with other people and to imitate them: "It is now known that infants as young as a few hours old will actively imitate the expressions of an adult looking at them. This appears to be an inborn trait" (90). The child is thus shown to relate to the other—usually the mother figure—from the very beginning of his existence. The emergence of relational psychoanalysis is significant in its focus on the interrelatedness between self and other, between

mother and child in particular. Bowlby and Winnicott stand out due to their groundbreaking work examining the child's inherent need for relation and attachment and the fatal consequences of such relations being withheld.

5.1.2 D. W. Winnicott: Holding, Mirroring, and the False Self

D. W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic work evolves around the relationship between mother and child. In his analytical approach, he illustrates the child's dependence on a "good-enough mother," who provides the child with a "holding environment" in which it can develop normally and healthily. As Winnicott explains, "The good-enough mother meets the omnipotence of the infant and to some extent makes sense of it" (*Maturational* 145). "Holding," in Winnicott's sense, does not merely refer to the physical act of holding the child, but rather designates a "total environmental provision" by the caretakers (*Maturational* 43). Such a nurturing environment enables the child to develop from "an unintegrated state to a structured integration" (*Maturational* 44); it empowers the child to develop a continuous sense of being, a self whose inside is distinguished from the outside by a "limiting membrane" (*Maturational* 45) between "me" and "not-me." If the child does not have a "good-enough" mother (for example, if the mother is depressed), or if the child is separated from the mother figure, this healthy process gets disrupted.

One of the mother's essential functions is to serve as a mirror for the child's own emotions.[68] "In individual emotional development the *precursor of the mirror is the mother's face*," Winnicott writes (*Playing* 111; also quoted by Hustvedt in *Shaking Woman* 91).[69] In order to enable the child to develop a "True

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[68] The importance of this mirroring is reinforced by the discovery of mirror neurons, which will be investigated in detail in the conclusion. Marco Iacoboni observes that early interactions and continuous relations are necessary in order for the child to be able to develop mirror neurons. If the child is isolated or otherwise deprived of these interactions, he will not develop mirror recognition ability, and hence will be less capable of entering reciprocal relations with others later (see Iacoboni 133-41). Iacoboni also connects maternal empathy with mirror neurons and refers to attachment theory: "In classic attachment theory, maternal sensitivity is even defined as the mother's disposition to answer in a contingent way to her child's needs. Mirroring allows her to achieve a powerful affective attunement" (126-27).

[69] Winnicott himself points to Lacan's "Le Stade du Miroir" as an influence. Similar to Lacan's idea of the mirror stage as the transition from the real (during which Winnicott assigns a feeling

Self," the mother must succeed "in meeting the infant's spontaneous gesture" (*Maturational* 145), in reflecting the child's efforts at expressing herself. Mother-child interrelations naturally rely on mirroring of facial expressions and emotions. In order for the child to explore the self in the mirror provided by the mother, the mother must ensure reliable responses (see also Socor 231). As Winnicott expresses: "What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*" (*Playing* 112). This, however, is only the case if the mother is sufficiently attuned to the child's gestures to provide adequate emotional responses.[70]

If the mother fails to mirror the baby's expression, the baby's creative potential decreases (*Playing* 112) and there is no "significant exchange with the world, a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things" (*Playing* 113). The child does not learn how to balance his or her own desire with that of other people, because the mother does not provide any confirmation of the child's self-expression. This lack of mirroring may result in the child's development of a "false self"—a self that "represents the denial of its real self which has been split off or dissociated into the unconscious" (Minsky 56). Winnicott relates that the not good-enough mother fails to meet the child's gestures, and that in complying with the mother's needs, the infant makes the first step toward a false self (*Maturational* 145). If "the mother

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of omnipotence to the infant) to the imaginary, Winnicott sees the mother as the mirror through which the child learns to distinguish between me and not-me. As Socor points out, Winnicott's theory of the mother's mirroring bears affinity to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in their common emphasis that "the self is the result not of direct, but of mediated, that is, reflected experience" (233). Winnicott, however, obviously focuses on the mother taking on the role of the mirror, while Lacan refers to the child's experience of seeing its reflection in an actual mirror (see Socor 233).

70 Janet Sayers links the significance of the mother's facial response—giving "subjective experience objective form"—to Tolstoy's idea of art as a way to express feelings and infect other people with them (125). Sayers furthermore makes a connection to mirror neurons: "Perhaps this is hard-wired in mirror neurons in the brain" (125), although she raises doubt regarding the effect of mirror neurons in babies due to the "very immature development of their frontal cortex at birth" (125). Sayers emphasizes that "Whatever the neuronal basis of this, we learn what we feel through the overlap and meeting of our experience with that of others" (125)—and, as both Bowlby and Winnicott have shown, the lack of such meeting and exchange may have fatal consequences to the formation of the self.

cannot adapt well enough, the infant gets seduced into a compliance, and a compliant False Self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them" (*Maturational* 146). Oftentimes, the child is so lost in compliance with her mother's need that he is incapable of developing an integrated sense of self. If the mother figure lacks reliability, the process of becoming self and acknowledging the mother's selfhood is disturbed, resulting in an absence of both responsibility and guilt (*Deprivation* 110). Winnicott posits a defective mother-child relationship at the origin of a lack of moral behavior in the child that will result in delinquent behavior later in life. Due to the lack of moral sense, these infants oftentimes "organize a compliant or false sense of self which betrays the true self in so far as it seems to succeed in terms of what the onlookers believe to have value" (*Deprivation* 112).

According to Socor, there is an inherent paradox in Winnicott's assessment of the self, a tension between the need to relate and the capacity to be alone: "It is the interpersonal which gives rise to the ultimately inaccessible personal, and it is the mother which occasions the birth of that which, if genuinely established, no other can truly know" (Socor 227). Winnicott regarded the "Capacity to Be Alone" as a "highly sophisticated phenomenon" ("Capacity" 416), something that the child learned after relating to the mother, and something that paradoxically can only be learned in the presence of the mother ("Capacity" 417).[71] Rather than to the actual experience of aloneness, Winnicott thus refers to a sense of separate subjectivity, the development of that inner core which no one has access to. The child's dependence, the reconfirming facilitation of such dependence through recognition and nurturing is the origin of the child's ability to become independent. Only if the child is given a chance to develop an awareness of the self as separate from its environment can it accept and recognize the mother as equally independ-

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[71] In a reverse theory, Daniel Stern has argued that subjective experiences of union are only possible once the infant has developed a sense of a core self: "Union experiences are thus viewed as the successful result of actively organizing the experience of self-being-with-another, rather than as the product of a passive failure of the ability to differentiate self from other" (*Interpersonal* 10). Stern thus regards the process of developing a sense of a distinct self as prior and prerequisite to a symbiotic fusion with other people.

ent. In his talk on "The absence of a sense of guilt [sic]," published in *Deprivation and Delinquency*, Winnicott furthermore elaborates that in concordance with the development of a sense of an integrated, whole self, the child forms ideas of personal responsibility and consequently a sense of guilt (*Deprivation* 109). Winnicott comes to the conclusion that the child—if growing up in a holding environment—is capable of acknowledging the mother's subjectivity; this becomes evident, for example, in the child's ability to show concern for the mother. The child, Winnicott observes, "feels the mother, or mother-figure, to be a whole person" (*Deprivation* 101).

Winnicott was also concerned with the effect of a separation from the mother at an early age. In his work *Deprivation and Delinquency,* Winnicott, like Bowlby, demonstrates the negative effects that evacuation during wartime has on young children's social behavior. The book starts with a co-written letter by Winnicott, Bowlby, and Emanuel Miller to the *British Medical Journal*, warning of the consequences of such evacuations. Being separated from their mothers for a longer period of time, the authors claim, is "one important factor in the causation of persistent delinquency" (Winnicott, *Deprivation* 13). Similar to Bowlby's work, the publication contains a number of case studies describing the psychological problems arising in children who were separated from their mothers in World War II.

In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott furthermore illustrates the effect of early separation from the mother figure by relating the example of a young patient, a boy with an obsession of tying things together, joining chairs and tables (17). The boy had been separated from his mother several times, first because of the birth of his sister, then because of his mother's surgery, then because of her stay in a mental hospital (*Playing* 16). Winnicott interprets the boy's fixation on string as a way of communicating his fear of separation and his attempt to reattach himself to his mother: "String can be looked upon as an extension of all other techniques of communication. String joins . . ." (*Playing* 19). In another case study, Winnicott describes the two-and-a-half-year old Edmund playing with a piece of string, trying to plug it into his mother's thigh. Winnicott sees the string "as a symbol of

union with his mother . . . . [,] simultaneously a symbol of separateness and of union through communication" (*Playing* 43).[72]

The elements of Winnicott's psychoanalytical approach introduced here show rather clearly the interdependence between self and other at an early stage in the child's development. Without a stable, caring, mirroring, holding other, the self is incapable of forming a sense of intact subjecthood that would facilitate the interpersonal exchange at the heart of relational identity.

5.1.3 John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby revolutionized the field of psychoanalysis with the development of his attachment theory. His major achievement was to prove that children are inherently attached to other people—they do not have to learn social behavior, but rather are born with a need to relate to other people. The child's emotional states are primarily shaped and reinforced by the reactions of the attachment figure—in most cases the mother: "Whether a child or adult is in a state of security, anxiety, or distress is determined in large part by the accessibility and responsiveness of his principal attachment figure" (Bowlby, *Separation* 23). Anxiety can not only be generated by the attachment figure's absence but also by his or her emotional unavailability; attachment figures may well be physically present but emotionally absent: ". . . although present in body, a mother may be unresponsive to her child's desire for mothering" (*Separation* 23).

If relations to key attachment figures in early childhood are disrupted, the child's emotional development is drastically inhibited. Attachment to other people is hence a basic prerequisite of a healthy human existence. Observing children who had to suffer through a separation from their mothers during World War II,

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[72] In *The Sorrows of an American*, Eggy ties up all the furniture in Erik's room in an attempt to hold things together. "By the time she had used all the string, she had made a vast web that connected every piece of furniture in the room, and I was part of it, since Eggy had bound my two feet and hands to the table as part of her creation" (*Sorrows* 270). Eggy expresses great satisfaction with her achievement: "'This way nothing's away from anything else. It's all tied'" (*Sorrows* 270). As Erik later on explains to Miranda: "'Eggy's trying to repair what's been broken by tying everything together'" (*Sorrows* 275). Since Eggy was separated from her father after her parents' breakup, the string may symbolize her attempt at reconnecting with her father, especially since Erik serves as a kind of substitute father figure to her.

Bowlby realized that the traumatic experience of separation could lead to severely deviant behavior in later life. As Bowlby expresses in the Preface to the first volume of his *Attachment and Loss* trilogy:

> Thus we reached the conclusion that loss of mother-figure, either by itself or in combination with other variables yet to be clearly identified, is capable of generating responses and processes that are of the greatest interest to psychopathology. . . . Amongst these responses and processes . . . [is] a blockage in the capacity to make deep relationships, such as is present in affectionless and psychopathic personalities" (xxix-xxx)

In *Attachment,* the first of the three volumes in which he develops his attachment theory, Bowlby suggests that infants are emotionally attached to their mothers and that a separation from the mother leads to anxiety and deviant behavior. Bowlby draws on a wide range of evidence, from observations of children's behavior to scientific research of animal behavior, to illustrate the deep bond between mother and child. He demonstrates that the mother figure provides a sense of safety that the child clings to and is dependent on: "So long as a child is in the unchallenged presence of a principal attachment-figure, or within easy reach, he feels secure. A threat of loss creates anxiety, and actual loss sorrow; both, moreover, are likely to arouse anger" (Bowlby, *Attachment* 209).

In the second volume of this study, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*, Bowlby consults a number of case studies of young children at a nursery or foster home in wartime. Bowlby observes that children who are separated from their mothers go through stages of protest, despair, and detachment (cf. *Separation* 26). He interprets these phases as follows: "Thus the phase of *protest* is found to raise the problem of separation anxiety; *despair* that of grief and mourning; *detachment* that of defence" and declares that all three phases belong to a single process (*Separation* 27). In the chapter "Anger, Anxiety, and Attachment," Bowlby relates that children who were separated from their parents in a residential nursery showed four times as much violent play when they were given dolls as children who were never separated from their attachment figures. Most often, the dolls attacked in the game are identified as mother or father dolls (see *Separation* 245). The trauma of separation leaves feelings of frustration and aggression in the child, which are then oftentimes aimed at substitute outlets. As Bowlby states, there is a "tendency for

anger and hostility directed towards a loved person to be repressed and/or redirected elsewhere" (*Separation* 256).

In the last volume, *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, Bowlby compares the psychological consequences of loss in young children with adults' responses to loss. In adults Bowlby exclusively investigates loss caused by death. He explores a range of constellations of loss, from "Loss of Spouse" to "Loss of Child" to "Mourning in Other Cultures" etc. "Loss of a loved person," as Bowlby states, "is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer" (*Loss* 7). Loss can refer to both loss of the mother as a child (through separation, not necessarily death) and loss of a loved person through death. He writes, "Loss of a loved person gives rise not only to an intense desire for reunion but to anger at his departure and, later, usually to some degree of detachment" (*Loss* 31). In reference to George Engel's brief essay "Is Grief a Disease?" Bowlby states that "Loss of a loved person . . . is as traumatic psychologically as being severely wounded or burned physiologically" (*Loss* 42). As will be shown below, Hustvedt gives affecting expression to the intense ramifications of such traumatic loss through her characters in *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American.*

Toward the end of *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, Bowlby relates several stories of very young children who spent a period of time at a residential nursery. Based on the case studies he relates, Bowlby concludes that young children at the age of sixteen months already have such deep connections to their mother that they go through extensive phases of mourning in the absence of their attachment figure and that they can clearly distinguish between their real mother and the foster-mother (see *Loss* 437). In the epilogue, Bowlby concludes:

> Intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person's life revolves, not only when he is an infant or a toddler or a schoolchild but throughout his adolescence and his years of maturity as well, and on into old age. From these intimate attachments a person draws his strength and enjoyment of life and, through what he contributes, he gives strength and enjoyment to others. (*Loss* 442)

Overall, Bowlby's research accumulated a wealth of case studies and scientific observations to support the shift toward a relational psychoanalysis later monitored by Stephen Mitchell. Both Winnicott and Bowlby have shown the inherent neces-

sity of human connection and have fostered new perspectives on the repercussions of defective self-other relations at an early age.

5.1.4 Hustvedt's Application of Relational Psychoanalysis

"Leaving Your Mother"

In the essay "Leaving Your Mother," Hustvedt returns to a childhood experience during which she and her sister Liv visited their Uncle David and his daughter Harriet. This being the first longer period of time away from home for both of them, Siri Hustvedt and her sister Liv soon start missing their parents, especially their mother, and the familiarity of life at home. "Because our mothers are our first loves," Hustvedt reflects, "because it is through them that we find ourselves as separate beings in a new world, they have, for better or worse, immense power" (*Eros* 108). When the mother figure is gone, the child is prone to feel lost and helpless. Hustvedt links this event with her later separation from her daughter Sophie, who at the age of four became angry with her mother for leaving her, but took out her frustration on her grandmother, who had been taking care of her during the mother's absence (*Eros* 109-10). As Hustvedt explains, if the children "are feeling vulnerable about their greatest love, they may take out their anger elsewhere—on a safer object" (*Eros* 110). This substitution of the object of frustration is echoed in Mark's anger at Violet (see below), and both resonate with Bowlby's idea that anger toward a loved person is oftentimes redirected at another person.

In the same essay, Hustvedt refers to two case studies quoted in Bowlby's *Attachment and Loss*, in both of which teenage boys kill their mothers in order to prevent them from ever leaving them again (*Eros* 111). Hustvedt thus draws on her personal experience of anxiety caused by a separation from her mother and connects it with both Bowlby's and Winnicott's writings about the mother-child relation. She relates a story from Winnicott's *Thinking about Children* in which the psychoanalyst talks about a little girl who was traumatized by an early hospitalization during which she was separated from her mother for three months. Hustvedt concludes: "Traumatic separations from parents have long been connected to delinquency, and if physical separation is reinforced by a parent's emotional distance

or rejection, the damage to the child may be irreversible" (*Eros* 112). The essay, written in 1999, thus foreshadows her character Mark's fate: he appears to be the living outcome of such separation and rejection—a person damaged beyond repair. Ideally, according to Hustvedt—mirroring Winnicott's idea of a holding environment enabling the child to become an integrated and independent being—the parents provide "a strong, reassuring parental presence," which the child absorbs and carries with her even when separated from the parents (*Eros* 109).

Separation and Desertion in *What I Loved*

Mark, Bill and Lucille's son in *What I Loved*, serves as an alerting example of how damaging the lack of stable interpersonal connections in childhood can be to the child's development. In Mark, Hustvedt constructs a model character in whom both Bowlby's attachment theory and Winnicott's postulations about child-mother relations are realized in a worst-case scenario. Mark's childhood is marked by a lack of parental protection and confirmation, as both parents desert him in the course of pursuing their own lives. As the novel proceeds, Mark's character crystallizes more and more as a vessel of lies and deception, without any genuine care for the people who are close to him.

Hubert Zapf analyzes Mark as a postmodern version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, created by the excessive polarity between affection and rejection that Mark was exposed to as a child:

> The figure of the beloved son mutates in Mark into an eerie travesty, a psychic black hole that consumes and perverts the emotions directed towards him. The extreme ambiguity of his experience of parental figures—the ambivalence between love and rejection, and between his real and surrogate mothers and fathers,—is transformed into his split existence as a postmodern, juvenile version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (185)

Yet even the boy's sweetness and charm—the Dr. Jekyll side—turns out to be nothing but a shallow façade with no inner content to back up the attractive surface. The absence "of adolescent heaviness," his "body . . . as light as his spirit, his step weightless, his gestures graceful" (*Loved* 170), initially pleasing characteristics, in retrospect become signifiers of the boy's shallowness and lack of content. After endless attempts at redeeming Mark, always hoping that his best friend's son will finally find his way and show some genuine feeling, Leo in the end is forced

to realize that behind all the lies, all the personae that Mark assumes, there is no true self. Leo exclaims: "'Everything between us . . . has been a sham'" (*Loved* 323). In the following, I will analyze Mark's personal history through the lens of relational psychoanalysis, highlighting early moments of separation and the lack of a holding environment as potential sources of his false self.

Lucille, the Un-Mirroring Mother

Mark's mother Lucille is a prime example of Bowlby's and Winnicott's descriptions of an emotionally unresponsive mother. Lucille communicates no particular affection for her own child and displays indifference and greediness instead of motherly love and care. Next to Bill's father Sy, Lucille is probably the most unattainable character in *What I Loved*. In every appearance she makes, her behavior displays an abnormal lack of interest in the development of events and an extreme detachment from the people she is surrounded by. Leo observes the utter lack of relatedness in both Bill's father and wife: "Their personalities had little in common except what they both lacked—a quality of ordinary connectedness to other human beings. Lucille didn't elude only Bill, she eluded everyone who knew her" (Hustvedt, *Loved* 41).

The absence of genuine attachment that characterizes both Lucille and Sy causes a great amount of hurt to their family. Bill never quite seems to get over his father's lack of affection, and Lucille's emotional absence lingers over the lives of Bill, Violet, and Mark. Bill, as Leo points out, never succeeds in closing the distance between him and his wife: "Bill pursued her for a long time, a creature in his mind whom he could never locate" (*Loved* 365). Lucille is presented as a kind of omnipresent absence—present in the desire and lack she leaves in the people she eludes. "The idea of Lucille was strong, but I don't know what that idea was except maybe evasion itself, which is best expressed by nothing" (*Loved* 365).

Lucille's inapproachability is contrasted by Violet's lively connectedness to other people, which also shows itself in terms of physical proximity, as there are many moments of intimate closeness between Violet and other characters, but never between Lucille and anybody else. The only time there is physical exchange—when Leo and Lucille engage in a rash adventure of sexual intercourse—

is marked by a degree of coldness and violence that turns the sexual encounter into an act of aggression rather than an act of love. Leo finds "cold steadiness" in Lucille's eyes, which arouses in him "an intense desire to smash the brittle surface of her impassive face" (*Loved* 96)—instead, they make love. The act is guided by a "hint of violence" from Lucille, who "didn't want gentleness" (*Loved* 96). There is no trace of tenderness and no emotional opening between self and other, and Leo and Lucille do not seem to experience a moment of connection beyond the merely physical.

In terms of Violet's theory of mixing, Lucille seems to represent the antitype of a mixed identity, completely sealed off from other people. Every character who comes into contact with her is left embracing a sense of unfulfilled desire, since the hoped for emotional reaction inevitably fails to manifest. She appears to be untouchable and unmovable, and her emotional withdrawnness is a constant presence weighing down the lives of those close to her. Violet expresses her frustration with Lucille most explicitly, commenting on the latter's inapproachability: "'I hate Lucille, too, even though she can't help the way she is—all boarded up and shut down like a condemned house'" (*Loved* 353). Violet blames Lucille for destroying both her husband Bill's and her son Mark's lives: "'Don't you know that she's only half alive! Part of her is dead!' . . . . 'Don't you know that she was slowly killing Bill? And Mark, my boy. He was my boy, too. I loved them. I loved them. She didn't. She can't'" (*Loved* 349).

More than anybody, Mark is shown to suffer from his mother's lack of shared emotions. As Leo reflects at the end of his narrative, Mark may always have been looking for his mother (*Loved* 365). Lucille's incapability to open up and enter a genuine emotional exchange with the people around her have catastrophic consequences for Mark's development. Since Lucille at no point mirrors her son's expressions, Mark never experiences a child-mother relation of mutual attachment. When Lucille even complains about the cost of feeding Mark, Bill, enraged about the cold-heartedness of his ex-wife, comments on Lucille's lack of support and care for their son: "'Even when I didn't have two nickels to rub together, I didn't resent feeding my kid'" (*Loved* 174). Lucille's reluctance about

providing even basic nutrition for her own son—she labels food items in the refrigerator that she does not want Mark to eat—is highly symbolical, especially when contextualized with the cultural significance assigned to food in the novel in general. As I have argued in Chapter 4.3, characters frequently convey emotional support in moments of feeding, and the closed bodies of the anorexics interlace with Lucille's disconnectedness to her son. Leo's suggests that "Mark was always starved for something. . . . Insatiable, he gorged on crackers and doughnuts, on stolen things and money, on pharmaceuticals and the chase itself" (*Loved* 365); Mark's hunger seems to reflect the desire to fill the hole left by his mother's lack of affection. Or, in Hegelian terms, Lucille's unwillingness to reflect her son's self-consciousness with affirming recognition has inhibited his spirit's evolution—Mark is stuck in an infinite circle of unfulfilled desire (see Chapter 2.1).

Divorce

Mark's situation is worsened by his parents' divorce, which further destabilizes his connection to the people he needs. Violet tells Leo about the complicated relationship between Mark and Lucille, and about how much Mark suffered when his mother deserted him. After sending Mark back to Violet and Bill, Lucille comes to visit at Christmas. After his mother's departure to her new life in Texas, Mark's frustration turns into a full-blown emotional outburst. Violet remembers, "'. . . after she came to visit at Christmas and left again, he really went nuts. He pushed me, hit me, screamed at me'" (*Loved* 352). Like the children whom Bowlby describes, Mark turns Violet into a substitute target for the anger and aggression provoked by his mother's departure. This redirecting of frustration is in fact later turned into a ritual between Violet and Mark: In a game that they play repeatedly, Violet becomes Mark's devoted servant, showering him with hugs and kisses, yet Mark rejects her and fires her. As Violet keeps on begging him to take her back, Mark acquiesces, only to fire her all over again. In this quasi-Hegelian game of domination and recognition, roles are reversed and Mark gets to play his mother, while Violet takes on the part of Mark (*Loved* 92).

As Bill accompanies Mark back to Texas to resume life with his mother, however, the boy suddenly becomes docile, until he bites a little girl in school.

Violet recalls remorsefully that "'he must have felt that we were throwing him away'" (*Loved* 353). Even as Mark is once again sent back to New York, his comportment remains utterly flawless. Violet remembers: "'It was like somebody had cast a spell on him and turned him into a docile, agreeable replica of himself. But that was the thing I learned to love—that automaton'" (*Loved* 352). Mark has become an embodiment of Winnicott's false self—through the lack of a holding environment he has shifted from a strategy of protest to one of compliance.

Although his father Bill loves him, he cannot provide the stable presence and reassurance that may have enabled Mark to develop an integer sense of self. Bill thinks back to the moment in which he broke his promise to his son and left him to stay with Lucille: "'And then I betrayed him. I told him the usual rot—that I loved him but couldn't live with his mother anymore. The day the fifth letter [from Violet] came and I walked out the door, he started to scream 'Dad!' . . . . I'll never forget his voice. He sounded like he was being killed'" (*Loved* 244). To Leo's attempt at consoling Bill by claiming that children can cry terribly over basically anything, Bill responds: "'It wasn't that kind of crying. It was different. It was horrible. I can still hear it in my ears. No, I chose myself over him'" (*Loved* 244). The intensity of Mark's crying gives expression to the enormous pain that he feels at the separation from his father, a separation that after the repeated pain of being separated from his mother must have felt even more frightful and disastrous.

Mark, the Deviant Self

As demonstrated above, both Bowlby and Winnicott regarded early disruptions in the child's bond to the mother figure as the origin of deviant, psychopathic behavior. In adolescence, Mark displays a severe degree of such behavior in his disposition to lie to anybody in any given situation, to steal money, to break promises repeatedly, and in his inclination toward addiction. His behavior is marked by a lack of deep emotional attachment to other people, and by a complete disregard for other people's feelings.

Mark starts his career as a thief very early. Chronologically (although this is only discovered later in the novel) one of his first offenses is stealing his best

friend Matt's swiss army knife, a particularly vicious theft because of the amount of anguish it causes Matt, who is desperate about losing his favorite possession, a gift from his father (*Loved* 127). Moreover, when Leo spends the weekend with Mark, as Bill and Violet are gone to Los Angeles, a box of doughnuts disappears. Leo asks if Mark has eaten them, and Mark denies it. Leo later finds out that Mark started a fire with one of the neighbor kids, burning the doughnut box. What amazes Leo is the smoothness with which Mark denies responsibility for the disappeared doughnut box: "Mark had lied to me. He had quoted Violet so smoothly. He had smiled so easily" (*Loved* 161). Bill later tells Leo that Mark has been lying since he was a little boy (*Loved* 188). Mark also lies about his job (which he pretends to continue although he quits after a week), about his whereabouts, about his girlfriend. In addition, he steals almost seven thousand dollars from Leo and refuses to admit to it until cornered with no way out.

Mark never seems capable of grasping any moral flaw in the act of lying itself. He simply reacts to the situation and the people around him and models his persona according to his audience's expectations: "Mark's body and voice changed depending on whom he was speaking to at the moment" (*Loved* 205). Mark also appears to be incapable of regarding anything other than the immediate situation in which he wants to avoid conflict:

> After his lies were exposed, Mark looked like a slightly compressed version of his former self. He gave off an attitude of generalized sorrow—head down, shoulders slumped, and wide hurt eyes—but when asked directly why he had manufactured the deception, he could only answer in a dull voice that he thought his father would be disappointed. (*Loved* 219)

Yet this display of remorse, far from an emergence of authentic emotion, occurs as just another adjustment to the expectations of the people surrounding him. When Leo confronts Mark in order to uncover Mark's motif behind all the lies he generates, Mark replies: "'I want people to like me, I guess. I can't help it. Sometimes I get confused, like when I've met two different people in two different places and then I meet them at the same party or something, and I don't know how to act'" (*Loved* 322). The utter absence of an integrated self and the concordant absence of personal responsibility and a sense of guilt (see Winnicott) leave Mark vacillating between personae that are determined by others; he is permanently ad-

justing his performance of self to the audience he encounters, as there is no guiding inner element that holds him together.

Violet links Mark's behavior to the phenomenon of hysteria, the topic of her dissertation.[73] She contemplates the similarity of Mark's behavior and symptoms typically assigned to hysterical patients:

> "Trickery, deception, lying, and susceptibility to hypnosis were supposedly symptoms of hysteria. That's like Mark, isn't it?" . . . . "Charcot wanted the women to perform, and they did. We want Mark to seem to care for other people, and when he's with us, that's how he appears. He gives us the performance he thinks we want." (*Loved* 275)

Violet's wish to make sense of Mark's behavior leads her to connect it to a disorder she has researched meticulously. Although the hysterics at the Salpêtrière were confined and abused to perform the desire of their physicians, whereas Mark has almost unlimited freedom to do what he wants, they share the unconscious gearing of behavior toward a changing audience, the modeling of their reactions according to the desire of others. Both Mark and the hysterics can be regarded as examples of overmixed identity, as Mark emerges as a formidable impersonation of an overmixed self.

Worse than the hysterics, Mark's entire being shifts and changes, so much that Leo does not even recognize the tone of Mark's voice as he overhears him speaking to Teddy Giles in the Opryland Hotel. Leo reflects: "For years I had seen in Mark the shifting colors of a chameleon, had known that he changed according to the circumstances in which he found himself. . ." (*Loved* 318). Leo comes to the final conclusion that Mark "was really somebody else" (*Loved* 318)—somebody whom Leo does not know, because all he ever got from Mark was a fake surface. Leo's diction expresses his deep mistrust regarding Mark's behavior: he thinks of Mark's mimics as a "repertoire of facial expressions," of his entire demeanor as a performance, of Mark's expression of sorrow as a "mask of regret" (*Loved* 319). Leo no longer sees a possibility of an authentic emotion in his friend's son, for whom he has become close to a surrogate father after Bill's death. He tells Mark: "'It must be hard . . . to juggle so many faces, so many lies" (*Loved* 319). Even Mark's gender is bent according to the environment. Mark dresses up as a girl be-

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[73] For a detailed analysis of hysteria and identity boundaries, see Chapter 4.2.

cause supposedly that is what Teddy Giles wants him to do. He claims, "'I'm not gay—only with him'" (*Loved* 320). Again, this exhibits the other-directedness of all of Mark's behavior. Giles's power over Mark reveals itself as complete domination, turning Mark into a puppet of Giles's schemes: "Weak and vacillating, Mark had been infected by the stronger personality of Giles, who had an almost hypnotic power over him" (*Loved* 329). This hypnotic power recalls the physicians' hypnotic control over the hysterical patients at the Salpêtrière.

These examples elucidate that Mark's traumatic childhood—lacking a holding environment and safe bonds to his parents—has impeded his development into a person with a sense of self and other, of the responsibility that comes with selfhood, and a healthy balance between autonomy and mixing. His utter lack of guilt about his misdoings and betrayals makes it impossible for the people who are close to him (Bill, Violet, Leo) to re-establish a connection that might redeem him.

5.2 Loss and Grief in *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American*

In her *New York Times* article of September 28, 2009, entitled "After a Death, the Pain That Doesn't Go Away," Fran Schumer reports that about 15 % of the people who lose a loved one cannot cope with the grief and become unable to live life as they did before; this extreme form of grief is generally referred to as complicated or prolonged grief disorder.[74] As Colin Murray Parkes pointed out over thirty years ago, "a newly bereaved person is often treated by society in much the same way as a sick person" (5). The pain caused by the loss of a loved one shows how closely our lives are tied to other people.

"The pain of grief," as Parkes underlines, "is just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment" (5-6). It seems therefore an obvious conclusion that people with stronger bonds to other people will also suffer more deeply from the loss of another person. This becomes problematic, however, when pathological grief becomes identified with de-

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[74] The potential inclusion of this disorder in the DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, published by the American Psychiatric Association) in 2012 would be a further step in a reorientation of the medical evaluation of grief.

pendent personalities and when a detachment from the deceased is idealized as a way of regaining autonomy (see Howarth 24). This ideal seems to work against a notion of identity being relational to the core, an idea of the self as inseparable from the other. Howarth underlines the relational aspect of identity: "Individuals are not comprised of bounded selves but connect with the selves of others . . . This means that when someone dies, the bereaved have lost not only a significant other but also the part of themselves that was intricately bound up with the deceased" (24). According to Schumer, grief disorder's "chief symptom is a yearning for the loved one so intense that it strips a person of other desires" ("After a Death" n. pag.). Schumer quotes Dr. M. Katherine Shear, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, who regards this form of grief as so severe as to catapult the bereaved person out of a stage of human existence: "'It takes a person away from humanity'" (qtd. in "After a Death" n. pag.).

It is a well-understood fact that life is irredeemably altered after the loss of a close person. As Polkinghorne writes, "When one who has become part of our life dies, we experience the pain and suffering of having part of ourselves torn away. And when this other has been especially intertwined in one's journey, like a family member, lover, or intimate friend, the tearing penetrates deep into the self" (xi). Nevertheless, as Bowlby suggests, "there is a tendency to suppose that a normal and healthy person can and should get over a bereavement not only fairly rapidly but also completely" (*Loss* 8). In the difficulty of measuring grief, of finding a distinction between "normal" bereavement and a pathological amount or period of grief, once again the balance between autonomy and interdependence is renegotiated. The idea of an autonomous core of identity, which will eventually enable the self to get over the loss of a loved person, is juxtaposed with a relational dependence, which would entail that the loss of an other who as part of the self must lead to an alteration of identity that can neither be rapidly nor ever completely found closure to. As Parkes writes, the other provided "essential 'supplies'" to the self. "In a sense they are the psychological equivalents of food and drink. People are necessary to people . . ." (9)—and without these supplies, the self is left with an oftentimes insatiable desire for what has been forever lost.

Hustvedt's investigation of grief in *What I Loved* and *The Sorrows of an American* is an exploration of this insatiable desire, the gaping hole left by the death of a loved one. Both novels elucidate the immense pain caused by such a loss, and both follow the characters in their attempts at coping. In *What I Loved*, the rupture in Erica and Leo's relationship after their son Matt's death illustrates the irreparable hole that the disappearance of a loved person can leave in the lives of the surviving family members and friends. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt thematizes the unavoidability of an ongoing conversation with the deceased, but at the same time underlines the importance of holding on to old interpersonal bonds and creating new ones. *The Sorrows of an American*, with its grand finale of reincarnation, leaves the reader with a sense of hope and restoration. *The Sorrows of an American* serves as an example of how existing and evolving social bonds as well as the sharing of grief through narrative can help the bereaved to work through their sorrow.

5.2.1 *What I Loved*: When Death Parts Self and Other

The death of Erica and Leo's son Matt, which comes as a shock to the reader as well as to the characters in the narrative, marks a shattering break in the lives of his parents. Looking back at the time after Matt drowned during a summer camp canoe trip, Leo observes that "the world didn't seem to be the world anymore, and when I think back on that week, on the funeral and the cemetery and the people who came, there is a shallowness to all of it, as though my vision had changed and everything I saw had been robbed of its thickness" (*Loved* 137). Through the loss of his child, Leo's perception of the world is disrupted, and life takes on a quality of the unreal, of a shallow substitution for the texture that life before the loss was made of. Both Leo and Erica seem to lose a feeling of authenticity; instead of being immersed in the texture of life, they merely seem to watch themselves perform the roles they assumed as part of their identities before the death of their son. Leo notes that "the sameness and familiarity of our duties felt more like a reenactment than a continuation of our old lives. I recalled perfectly the Leo Hertzberg who had taught in the art history department before Matthew's

death and I found that I could impersonate him smoothly" (*Loved* 143). Faced with the absence of their son, both parents are unable to pick up the pieces that are left of their lives. Leo reflects:

> We didn't know how to give him up, how to be. We couldn't find the rhythms of ordinary life. The simple business of waking, retrieving the paper from outside the door, and sitting down to eat breakfast became a cruel pantomime of the everyday enacted in the gaping absence of our son. (*Loved* 139)

Their son's sudden absence has stopped the ordinary train of life dead in its track—even the simplest actions have become void manifestations of Matt's absence, and life has become a vacuum.

The shock and grief of losing his son sits so deep that genuine emotions are impossible to Leo. Instead, he at first refuses to accept the truth of the fact and has auditory hallucinations of his son moving in his room or calling him ("My whole being refused Matt's death, and was always expecting him to walk through the door" [*Loved* 137]). Only slowly is he forced to realize the irrevocable truth of his son's death, "in moments that bored holes into the curious stage set that had replaced the world around" (*Loved* 137) him. However, for a long time Leo is incapable of letting the emotional repercussions of his grief enter his heart; instead, he closes down all gates to the self and withers inside: "I was dry as an old bone" (*Loved* 137).

Erica, by contrast, tries to find relief for her agonizing grief by intense emotional outbursts; she wails and cries in her pain, and alternately looks for Leo's proximity and pushes him away violently. Leo, in turn, is incapable of showing an adequate emotional reaction to his wife's pain. He cannot help begrudging her ability to find an outlet to the pain that is lodged too deep inside him: ". . . I envied Erica her flailing and shouting. I couldn't find it in me, and I let her do it instead" (*Loved* 137). Erica's crying feels like an excruciating physical assault to him: "Her cries seemed to gouge my lungs, and I stopped breathing each time they came" and "I let her noises tear and scrape through me" (*Loved* 137). By way of defense, Leo erects walls around himself that do not allow for an emotional connection to the people around him: "I was like a man encased in a heavy suit of armor, and inside that corporeal fortress I lived with a single-minded wish: *I will not be comforted*" (*Loved* 144).

Leo even resents his friend Bill's touch, since he has sealed all emotions to protect himself; the touch endangers the boundaries, since opening up to the touch of his friend would break the seal to his own feelings. Nevertheless, the presence of his closest friend, who comes to see and speak to him every day, does not go unnoticed, although the barrier that Leo has erected absorbs the greater part of emotional resonance: "I heard everything he said, but his words sounded muffled, as if he were speaking through a handkerchief" (*Loved* 141). The tender bond that still exists between the two friends ends up saving Leo from a complete loss of his identity: "Without Bill, I think I would have dried up completely and blown away" (*Loved* 141). Thus, even though Leo is unable to respond to Bill's gestures of comfort, they do not get deflected completely by the shield of his grief. In spite of everything, Bill's friendship keeps a part of Leo alive, nurtures it, and saves it from drying out and disappearing. Similarly, Violet's constant presence and her nurturing efforts help sustain Leo and Erica. Every day, Violet visits the two and brings them food that she prepared for them; after a while, she picks up feeding Erica, who continuously loses weight. Leo knows how substantial Violet's presence was to their lives at the time: "We depended on her" (*Loved* 139). It is therefore clear that even while neither Erica nor Leo are capable of opening up to and relating to their friends, Bill's and Violet's presence provides them with a supporting system without which they may have been completely lost.

Leo and Erica, however, who used to share a fulfilled relationship of mutual affection, become completely alienated from each other. In a moment of crisis, Erica accuses Leo of not crying, and he feels that she repulses him (*Loved* 142); in his despair and rage, Leo then pushes his fist through a wall in Matt's room. Erica burst out reproachfully: "What have you done to Matt's wall?"—almost as if the son himself had been hurt. The intensity of their loss takes away their ability to relate to each other and empathize with each other's grief; on the contrary, seeing their own desolation and rigidness reflected in each other causes feelings of resentment: "In her tight determined face, I saw myself, but I didn't like the reflection, and more I looked at it, the uglier I found it" (*Loved* 143). Leo cannot provide appropriate emotional responses to his wife's shifting moods; instead, he simply

performs, without genuine feelings—"my responses to Erica were robotic" (*Loved* 143). Open dialogue and intersubjective exchange have become impossible after Matt's death, as "the gestures and words that passed between us seemed to evaporate immediately and leave nothing behind them" (*Loved* 143-44). Even though Erica becomes kinder after a while, "her new solicitude had an impersonal quality" (*Loved* 144).

In the end, Erica decides to leave, and she never really returns. Although Erica and Leo see each other again on several occasions, they are never able to retie the bond between them that was torn by the death of their son. Leo thinks that his refusal to go to therapy with Erica might have become "the sign of my withdrawal from her without hope of return" (*Loved* 144). Once the decision to separate is made, the tension between Erica and Leo eases. Leo writes:

> The knowledge that we would soon be separated made us both more indulgent, relieving us of a burden I still can't name. I didn't want her to go away, and yet the fact that she was going away loosened a bolt in the machinery of our marriage. It had become a machine by then, a churning repetitious engine of mourning. (*Loved* 146)

Their son's death has taken over their relationship and has become an unnamable burden between them. The absence of their son seems to have become the center of their shared existence; thus the core of this shared existence has been turned into the one thing they cannot share: the pain of mourning their son. The sudden distance wedged between Erica and Leo blocks their communication and turns their relationship into a machinery. Knowing that the loss of their son will be complemented by the loss of the other actually makes it easier for them to interact. In fact, it finally makes it possible for Leo to open up toward his own grief, which occurs while he teaches a graduate seminar. The glass in Chardin's painting *Glass of Water and a Coffee Pot* becomes a symbol of Matt's absence for Leo, and he finally breaks down and cries over the loss of his son. With this moment, Leo's protective boundaries are deconstructed. His period of "self-enforced rigor mortis" (*Loved* 148), during which he turned himself into "a memorial—an inert gravestone" for his son (*Loved* 149), turns into a period of hypersensitivity.

When Leo and Erica do see each other again during a visit she pays in New York, the pain of losing Matt becomes more acute again for both of them. It is as if being in each other's presence conjures up the ghost of their son:

> I tried to untangle that feeling of injury but couldn't do it—not fully. I knew, however, that Matt was suddenly everywhere. The loft reverberated with his voice. The furniture seemed to hold the imprint of his body. Even the light from the window conjured Matthew. It won't work, I thought to myself. It's not going to work. As soon as Erica stepped through the door, she started crying. (*Loved* 164-65)

Even though they do no longer fight and even get closer again physically, they cannot overcome the sadness that is lodged between them, and it almost comes as a relief for them to separate again. In what seems like a final statement on the state of their relationship, Erica remarks: "'We're broken, Leo. It's not our fault. When Matt died it was like our story stopped. There was so much of you in him . . .'" (*Loved* 166). Erica and Leo's identities have become so enmeshed with Matt's that they cannot disentangle themselves from the memory of their son. It has become impossible to go back and start anew, since they will never find each other like they did before Matt's death. As Leo observes, "We wanted other people. Not new people. Old ones. We wanted ourselves before Matthew died, and nothing we did for the rest of our days would ever bring those people back" (*Loved* 166).

However, although they will never be able to return to the place they shared before the catastrophe, their lives are nevertheless inseparable. After a phone call to Erica years later, Leo realizes that they "would never be free of each other. . . . I didn't want to let go of Erica, and yet I rebelled against our stubborn connection. We had been pulled apart by absence, but that same absence had shackled us together for life" (*Loved* 303). And it is true: Leo and Erica remain linked until Leo's narrative closes, on August 30, 2000; Erica remains a "half presence" (*Loved* 356) in Leo's life, and they do spend two weeks together in Vermont each year. However, there is no prospect of deepening this connection, since, as Leo points out, "Fourteen days out of 365 seems to be enough for us" (356).

Bill

Bill's death serves as another example of the deep impact a character leaves behind after his death. Violet is naturally the character most affected by Bill's demise, but also Leo feels deeply influenced by the loss of his friend. The

sudden absence of his good friend causes a distortion in Leo's perception of life: "During the year that followed Bill's death, I continually found myself at a loss—either I didn't know what I was seeing or I didn't know how to read what I saw" (*Loved* 254). Again, life is altered so severely by the death of a loved one that the former structure of things no longer seems to fit the remaining characters' identities. Leo no longer knows how to interpret the events of his life, how to contextualize the things he perceives. Leo's reference to seeing is telling here, as he makes a similar statement after losing his son: ". . . without Matt, my vision of things would never be the same" (*Loved* 153). Matt and Bill, with whom Leo used to discuss the nature of vision, are both gone and leave Leo's world blurred and unclear. Leo depended on their existence, their reflections, to make sense of his life, to put things into a perspective from which he could see clearly. Both losses have irredeemably altered Leo's perception of the world. Yet, even in his absence, Bill still has a lasting influence on the lives of the people he was close to. As Leo remarks: "I couldn't help but feel that Bill was still playing a crucial role in the story that was unfolding before me, that he had created a fierce geometry among us, and that it lived on" (*Loved* 294).

Violet had the closest relation to Bill. As she describes it in a letter addressed to Bill: "'We've written and drawn ourselves into each other. Hard. You know how hard. When I sleep alone, I can hear you breathing with me . . .'" (*Loved* 58). Violet and Bill have grown together and intertwined their identities so deeply that Violet is left yearning to immerse herself in the traces of his existence after his death—Violet reacts by trying to merge with the shadow of Bill's presence. When Leo comes to Bill's studio one day, he mistakes Violet for the ghost of Bill: "I thought I saw Bill step into the blurry light that came from outside. . . . Bill's withered ghost was standing in front of the pane smoking a cigarette. . . . I walked toward him, and at the sound of my steps, the deformed shrunken Bill turned around and he was Violet" (*Loved* 260). Bereft of the love of her life, Violet seeks to immerse herself in the last traces of his presence. She tells Leo, "'I wanted his clothes on me, touching my body, and I wanted to smoke his Camels'" (*Loved* 261) and "'I just want to stay here and be with him'" (*Loved* 262). Violet

continues smoking a cigarette a day, because it makes her feel close to her deceased husband. She also, although she never took on his name, enjoys being called Mrs. Wechsler now: "'I've always been Violet Blom, but now his name is something I want to hear over and over again, and I like answering to it. I want to cover myself in what's left of him, even if it's only his name'" (*Loved* 331).

Violet and Leo support each other after Bill is gone; again, identity is only possible because of a supportive link between self and other: "'You've held me together'" (*Loved* 312), Violet reassures Leo, and he responds, "'It goes both ways'" (*Loved* 312). In opposition to the alienation he felt toward his wife Erica, Leo experiences deep empathy with Violet's grief: "I listened to her cry loudly, and the noise caused a contraction in my chest, as if it were my own grief that I was hearing, or as if hers and mine were one and the same" (*Loved* 350).

5.2.2 *The Sorrows of an American*: Talking to Ghosts

The Sorrows of an American is a novel that resonates with the presence of the dead. Through its inclusion of Hustvedt's father's original journal entries (which in the novel become Erik's father's entries), the novel embodies a mixture of real and fictional voices from the past and the present. Intertwining personal loss and collective trauma (9/11), *The Sorrows of an American* confronts the ghosts of the past and strives to reestablish a sense of completeness in the aftermath of death. The plot of *The Sorrows of an American* sets off with protagonist Erik sorting through his deceased father's remains, together with his mother, his sister Inga, and his niece Sonia. They find a letter to their father in which an unknown woman by the name of Lisa begs their father to stay true to his pledge to secrecy, which starts them off on an adventure to discover the letter's meaning, and concomitantly to explore a hidden part of their father's identity.

Death in *The Sorrows of an American* leaves its traces shaped in the form of an individual "architecture of need, structures built to fend off the ugly truths of chaos, death, and decay" (18). Inga, whose husband Max died of stomach cancer, finds an outlet to her grief by occasional attacks of wailing and by relating details of her husband's illness to Erik. Her daughter Sonia, on the contrary, never cries

and never talks about losing her father, but is plagued by nightmares and becomes possessively orderly (*Sorrows* 3, 19). She is caught in a state of trauma, caused both by her father's death and by her witnessing of 9/11. Sonia is relieved from her anguish toward the end of her novel. First, during a breakdown she suffers on the anniversary of 9/11, she finally faces the traumatic events of the past, including her father's death. This seems to change her life and release her from the inner pressure she has been enduring: she loosens up, is no longer compulsively orderly, and falls in love. Nevertheless, her father remains an important figure in her life, and when she talks about her newly discovered half brother—the result of an affair her father had with an actress—she tells Erik: "'It's strange, you know, my father is dead, and still, I don't want to share him'" (*Sorrows* 279). The dead in *The Sorrows of an American* have an enduring presence in their loved ones' lives. Erik's mother, after losing her husband, tells Erik that she is unable to read or concentrate and keeps on checking his side of the bed at night, only to remember that he is gone forever (*Sorrows* 57). Erik finds himself in a state of suspension and at times overwhelming loneliness and sadness (e.g., *Sorrows* 57). Death, however, can also evoke a strengthening shift in the relation between the surviving family members. After Inga's husband's death, Erik becomes "Uncle Erik, the all-purpose fix-it man, science paper advisor, speedy pot washer, and general consultant to Inga and Sonia on matters grave and small" (*Sorrows* 19). As in *What I Loved*, characters are saved from a complete loss of identity in their grief by their relational bonds to other characters.

The grief over the loss of his father also colors Erik's emotional reactions to other people. After his father's death, Erik feels increased sensitivity toward assaults from his patient, Mrs. L., which his colleague and friend Magda regards as a consequence of Erik mourning: "'Your grief makes you more fragile'" (*Sorrows* 139). When Miranda, his tenant, rejects Erik's pursuit of her, he realizes that "my response to Miranda's declaration couldn't be extricated from my father's death, a death I felt I hadn't sufficiently mourned. My scrutiny of his memoir and my daily jottings about the man were clearly forms of grief, but there was something missing in me, too, and that absence had turned into agitation" (*Sorrows* 122). Indeed,

the entire novel can be perceived as an attempt to bring to light a part of a lost identity, "'a missing piece'" (*Sorrows* 237)—both within the narrative's fictional sphere and beyond it, since the narrative includes authentic parts of Hustvedt's deceased father's journal. The novel therefore functions as an exploration of identity as well as an attempt to come to terms with the loss of a loved father—both within and beyond the text.

When Erik and his family return to Minnesota to bury his father's ashes, Marit, Erik's mother, tells Erik that she can feel her deceased husband's and her mother's presence (*Sorrows* 186)—only in Minnesota, not in New York. The memory of people is oftentimes bound to the places they lived in. Inga says that she hears her dead husband's voice, and that their father told her that he could hear his dead father's voice. As Erik articulates at the very beginning of the novel, "we all have ghosts inside us, and it's better when they speak than when they don't" (*Sorrows* 1). The survivors in *The Sorrows of an American* have ongoing connections to the people they lost—they feel their presence, listen to their voices, and enter dialogues, since the identities of loved others are formative to the self and cannot simply be erased from memory.

Erik reads his father's journal and, since no woman named Lisa is to be found anywhere in the entries, he comes to the conclusion that "Every memoir is full of holes. It's obvious that there are stories that can't be told without pain to others or to oneself, that autobiography is fraught with questions of perspective, self-knowledge, repression, and outright delusion" (*Sorrows* 8). Erik's quest is to fill some of the holes, to create an idea of his father that has eluded him during his lifetime and through this to redeem a part of his father's identity otherwise forever lost. He later realizes: "I was looking for a path that would take me inside a man" (*Sorrows* 256). In reading his father's journal, Erik immerses himself in the traces left by his father's living presence. Narrative becomes a means of connection beyond death. A sudden death leaves the self's world disrupted and incoherent.

Narrative gains twofold importance in Erik's coping with his father's absence: in addition to reading the journal, he starts writing personal fragments of his days in a notebook. He reflects, "I know that my father's absence had prompted

this need to document myself, but as my pen moved over the pages, I cam understood something else: I wanted to answer the words he had written with my own. I was talking to a dead man" (*Sorrows* 22-23). Creating a narrative, as Byron Good explains, can also help to recreate coherence after the rupture of a sudden death: "[N]arrative, the imaginative linking of experiences and events into a meaningful story or plot, is one of the primary reciprocal processes of both personal and social efforts to counter this dissolution and to reconstitute the world" (118). In a similar vein, Erik reflects: "Telling always binds one thing to another. We want a coherent world, not one in bits and pieces" (*Sorrows* 276). In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt relates an experiment she likes to perform during her writing work with psychiatric patients; she asks people to write down the words "I remember" and to complement the phrase with personal memories. Hustvedt notes a difference between the act of speaking these words and writing them. She then tells the story of the boy Neil, who had a brain tumor and in the aftermath lost his ability to read. Neil was still able to remember details of his everyday life by writing about them, but he could no longer evoke them through speech (see *Shaking* 62-65). This may be another underlying motif for Erik's notes: memories of the deceased may be recovered that would not resurface without the act of writing.

Erik's ongoing conversation with his father echoes Hustvedt's notion of the novel itself being a collaboration and conversation with her own father. Hustvedt writes in *The Shaking Woman*, "The words of the text I had written fell somewhere between us—not his, not quite mine—somewhere in the middle" (126). Erik's need to write mirrors the author's need to create narrative as a way to cope with her own father's death. Hustvedt remarks, "The more I think of *The Sorrows of an American* now, the more I feel that it is a work of grieving, an attempt to keep something of my father alive and address the riddle of his loss. Eric became a fictive vehicle for my sadness" (Message to the author). In his book on nature writing and autobiography, *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow*, Mark Allister remarks about the autobiographical grief narratives he explores: "Unique to this books is the way each writer stands explicitly both outside and inside the text: outside in writing exposition about a subject; inside in making that exposition part of the grieving

process, part of the writer's re-creation of self" (2). This seems equally applicable to Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American*—even though it is a fictional text, she openly declares her father's death to be the inspiration for the novel, and the integration of her father's original journal entries into the narrative turn the novel into a hybrid form.

The Sorrows of an American ends with a compelling string of associations about birth and death; in a powerful incantation, Erik draws together single fragments of narrative, memories and events from the past, fusing them together into a moment of feverish moment of the present. Motifs of birth and life alternate with those of death, moments of connection with those of loneliness. All the fragments Erik puts into context belong to his family's history, or narratives that are connected to his patients or other people close to him. Above all, Erik's thoughts wander back to his father, to his sadness and brokenness, which Erik connects to his patients' depression. In this last passage, everything is connected, and Erik knows that it is a singular and transient experience: "I stand and watch the snow. It cannot last, I say, this feeling cannot last, but it doesn't matter. It is here now" (*Sorrows* 304).

6 Intersubjective Identity, Mirror Neurons, and the Arts: Toward a Collaboration of Science and Literature

In the course of this study, I have outlined the various constellations of self-other relations in Siri Hustvedt's works—shifting between moments of intersubjective, relational, reciprocal, and constructive exchange and moments of alienation, overmixing, exploitation, and transgression. This study has highlighted the philosophical underpinnings of Hustvedt's approach to identity and followed the author's path in joining them with medical, aesthetic, and psychoanalytic discourses to provide new outlooks on the interconnections between self and other. Hustvedt, as this study has emphasized, regards the mixing between self and other as an inherent trait of identity. The author shows relational co-existence and moments of mirroring and exchange to be decisive to the formation of a healthy identity, but also spotlights the dangers of crossing the boundary between self and other. Her characters find their identities intermingled and inseparable from others. The characters' interrelatedness emerges with particular force in moments of mixing in art, in instances displaying the openness of the body, and in the characters' interdependence in family relations, friendships, and romantic relationships. In her writing, Hustvedt conveys a sense of embodied subjectivity that is based on a reflection through others, since, as George Butte remarks, "Subjects are both: a body, an experience of that body and its gestures, an intentionality grounded in that body—*and* a mirroring of other bodies, gestures, experiences, and discourses" (5).

During her career as a writer to date, Hustvedt has continued to delve deeper into the complicated relationship between self and other by widening her knowledge of medical and neurobiological fields and incorporating them into her approach to identity. In *The Sorrows of an American*, a reference to the phenomenon of mirror neurons reflects a turn toward neurobiology that is indicative of both Hustvedt's development as a writer and a recent interest in neuroscience in the humanities. The character Burton tells protagonist Erik about his monthly meetings with a group of neuroscientists and other members of the Institute of Neuro-

psychology: "'Met a fellow there, David Pincus, doing brain research on empathy. Terribly, terribly interesting. Mirror neurons, you know'" (Hustvedt, *Sorrows* 143). The discovery of mirror neurons in the 1990s has had significant impact on debates over intersubjective identity formation and will likely continue to gain importance in the future; the existence of mirror neurons shows that the mirroring of self-consciousnesses displayed in Hustvedt's novels—for example, between artist and model, doctor and patient, mother and child—indeed finds its origin in the human brain. Hustvedt explains mirror neurons in her "Notes on Seeing":

> Several years ago a friend sent me a paper on mirror neurons. They were found in the brains of macaque monkeys. When one monkey makes a gesture, grabs a banana, neurons in his premotor cortex are activated. When another monkey watches the gesture, but doesn't make it, the same neurons are activated in his brain. Human beings have them, too. We reflect each other. (n.pag.)

The discovery of mirror neurons thus demonstrated that human beings mirror each other's actions in their brains. In tests with macaque monkeys, as Hustvedt points out, researchers noted that the monkeys activated the same neurons in their brains when watching a specific action as when they personally performed that same action.[75] The same mirror neuron system was then also exhibited in the human brain. Mirror neurons therefore validate Merleau-Ponty's statement that "It is through my body that I understand other people'" (*Phenomenology* 216).

In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt connects the phenomenon of mirror neurons with Hegelian dialectics:

> At the very least, mirror neurons appear to be part of the dialectical back-and-forth inherent in human relations, a biological root for the reflexivity of the "I" and "you," an idea that can be traced at least back to Hegel and resonates strongly with his understanding that our self-consciousness is rooted in relations between the self and other . . . (93)

The need for the other to reflect the self is now anchored in a neuronal process that proves an immediate impact of the other's actions on the self. Elsewhere, Hustvedt furthermore emphasizes the link between mirror neurons and attachment studies: ". . . it [the phenomenon of mirror neurons] links up to a lot of evidence about attachment studies and relations between mothers and infants, the gaze etc. And philosophically . . . it seems to reinforce the idea of dialogue, and I think you can

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[75] See, for example, Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia ix and Rizzolatti and Arbib.

probably expand that notion of dialogue into something bigger than just language" (Personal Interview 27 Feb. 2006). Mirror neurons thus strengthen the notion of dialogue and mirroring that this reading of Hustvedt's works has revealed.

In his paper "The Two Sides of Mimesis: Girard's Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation and Social Identification,"[76] Vittorio Gallese, a member of the team of researchers who discovered mirror neurons, connects René Girard's concept of mimetic desire with mirror neurons and also draws on ideas from the works of Alexandre Kojève. Gallese regards Kojève as an anticipator of mimetic desire and reads the latter's *Introduction to a Reading of Hegel* as an initiation to the notion that human desire "can only exist as such within the plurality of other desires, that is, within a society of desiring human beings" (Gallese, "Two Sides" 24). We have thus come back full circle to Hegel's philosophy of mediated desire and recognition, since Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* focuses on the necessary mirroring between self-consciousnesses and the ensuing battle for recognition.

Moreover, a number of researchers and philosophers have attempted to contextualize mirror neurons in a phenomenological framework. As mirror neurons provide evidence of embodied cognition, they lend themselves to phenomenological accounts of human existence. Mirror neurons show that "mental processes are shaped by our bodies and by the types of perceptual and motor experiences that are the product of their movement through and interaction with the world" (Iacoboni 92). Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia quote Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* to illustrate the significance of mirror neurons:

> The sense of the gesture is not given, but understood, that is, recaptured by an act on the spectator's part. The whole difficulty is to conceive this act clearly without confusing it with a cognitive operation. The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and the intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited mine and mine his. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 215; qtd. in Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 130)

Merleau-Ponty's outline of an immediate connection between self and other, of an unmediated reciprocal understanding of each other's gestures, a direct translation

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[76] Hustvedt refers to Gallese's article in footnote 99 of *The Shaking Woman* (206).

from body to body that does not require cognitive analysis, is hence reinforced with biological proof. Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia underline this notion of immediacy in pointing to a "*shared space of action*, within which each act and chain of acts, whether ours or 'theirs', are immediately registered and understood without the need of any explicit or deliberate 'cognitive operation'" (131). Gallese writes about the same passage by Merleau-Ponty: "Self and other relate to each other, as they both represent opposite extensions of the same correlative and reversible system *self/other*. The observer and the observed are part of a dynamic system governed by *reversibility rules*" ("Roots" 176).

Elsewhere, Gallese attempts to integrate the significance of mirror neurons in a wider definition of relational identity. In his article "The Roots of Empathy: The Shared Manifold Hypothesis and the Neural Basis of Intersubjectivity," Gallese sets out with the central hypothesis "that our capacity to understand others as intentional agents, far from being *exclusively* dependent upon mentalistic/linguistic abilities, . . . [is] deeply grounded in the *relational* nature of our interactions with the world" (171; emphasis in original). He defines the shared manifold as "a multidimensional, 'we-centric' shared space" (Gallese, "Roots of Empathy" 172). Gallese highlights the immediate exchange between self and other that does not require a process of cognition: "to perceive an action is equivalent to internally simulate it. This *implicit, automatic*, and *unconscious* process of embodied simulation enables the observer to use his/her own resources to penetrate the world of the other without the need of explicitly *theorizing* about it" ("Roots of Empathy" 174).

This unconscious process of simulation then opens up the discussion of the relation between mirror neurons and empathy. Gallese gives a brief overview of concepts of empathy, starting in the eighteenth century with the idea of "sympathy" coined by Scottish moral philosophers (Gallese, "Roots" 175). He refers to the German origin of the term, "Einfühlung," as invented by Robert Vischer in 1873, and famously developed by the German philosopher Theodore Lipps, who used the term to describe the relationship between artwork and observer. Lipps postulated an empathic transgression of the distance between the viewer and the

object viewed. The observer, as he senses a voyeuristic pleasure in his reception of the artwork, moves into the work itself, becomes part of it, moves around in it. Gallese writes that Lipps "extended the concept of Einfühlung to the domain of intersubjectivity which he characterized in terms of *inner* imitation of the perceived moments of others" (Gallese, "Roots" 175).

This connection between empathy, art, and mirror neurons matches Hustvedt's project of highlighting moments of intersubjective exchange in her writing. In particular, Hustvedt's reflections on art as a constellation of triangular desire between the viewer, the artist, and the object communicates with the ideas of unconscious inner imitation and empathic participation that Gallese puts forth in his attempt to bring together science and philosophy. But the connections do not stop here, since Gallese proceeds to refer to Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation. According to Gallese's reading of Husserl, "The other is apprehended by means of a primitive holistic process of 'pairing' ('Paarung'): the self-other identity at the level of the body enables an intersubjective transfer of meaning to occur. From the very onset of life, subjectivity *is intersubjectivity*" ("Roots" 175). Like Hustvedt, Gallese points to Husserl's prioritization of the body as "the primary instrument of our capacity to share experiences with others" ("Roots" 176) and to the philosopher's distinction between "Leib" and "Körper": "What makes the behavior of other agents implicitly intelligible is the fact that their body is experienced not as material object ('Körper'), but as something alive ('Leib'), something analogous to our own experienced acting body" ("Roots" 176). With the discovery of mirror neurons, the distancing and objectifying approach of looking at another's body as "Körper," as an object which can be possessed by one's gaze (see Sartre), seems invalid in a direct encounter between self and other. For as long as a mirroring activity takes place, an objectification of the other becomes impossible.

What the mirroring process of matching other people's movements and emotions with our own implies is basically an erasure of the emotional gap between self and other. The other enters the self in an unconscious imitation of the other's actions within the self. Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia underline the inseparability of self and other in their statement that "This shows how strong and deeply

rooted is the bond to others, or in other words, how bizarre it would be to conceive of an *I* without an *us*" (xii-xiii). Though slightly varied in connotation due to the pronoun "us" instead of "you," this brings us back to the premise of this study, as expressed in the central statement of *What I Loved*: "I am because you are" (91).

Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia illustrate the enormous scope of actions that are determined by mirror neuron activity:

> From elementary acts such as grasping to the more sophisticated that require particular skills such as playing a sonata on a pianoforte or executing complicated dance steps, the mirror neurons allow our brain to match the movements we observe to the movements we ourselves can perform, and so to appreciate their meaning. (*Mirrors* xxii)

As Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia furthermore emphasize, this matching is not restricted merely to movements, but is also exercised with regard to emotional states: "Emotions, like actions, are immediately shared; the perception of pain or grief, or of disgust experienced by others, activates the same areas of the cerebral cortex that are involved when we experience these emotions ourselves" (xii). The shared sensation of disgust, for example, has already been scientifically tested in a functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) study that showed that the same neural structure was activated while experiencing and witnessing disgust (see Ferrari and Gallese 84).

Exactly how far the range of mirror neuron activity goes is yet unclear. Marco Iacoboni describes an experiment in which test subjects are shown to activate specific areas of their brain in charge of hand or mouth movements when reading sentences involving these movements, for example "grasp the banana" or "bite the peach" (94). Iacoboni concludes that the "experiment suggests that when we read a novel, our mirror neurons simulate the actions described in the novel" (94; see also Keen viii). The reader, if one follows this theory, becomes immersed in the actions of the characters in an immediate empathic participation.

The discovery of mirror neurons has instigated new discussions about the relationship between science and literature that will continue to reshape and innovate both fields. As Louis Cozolino underlines in his study on *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, "our interdependence is a constant reality of our existence," and "we are just waking up to the complexity of our own brains, to say nothing of how brains are linked together" (3). The establishment of a professorship in "Neu-

rogermanistik" (Neuro German Studies) in Göttingen, the emerging field of cognitive poetics, as well as publications investigating the significance of mirror neurons for literary studies illustrate the attempts at transferring scientific knowledge to the literary field.[77]

Siri Hustvedt's work successfully interconnects science and literature; rather than applying a scientific method to her writing, she approaches science from a writer's point of view. Instead of investigating neuroscientific findings for their objective value, she situates these findings within a greater horizon of human experience and social contexts. Hustvedt's work stands as a reminder that one cannot treat "the mind as a disembodied relationless computational machine, as an objective thing inside the head" (Fogel 4). Hustvedt criticizes the reductionism of the scientific method, since "the scientific fetish for brain functions sometimes treats these processes as if they took place in an isolated, bodiless organ" (*Shaking* 89). This tendency to neglect the embodiment of the brain, as Bennett and Hacker have argued, leads to a replacement of the old mind-body dualism with a brain-body dualism (see Bennett and Hacker 111). Hustvedt's writing is a constant reminder that body and mind are inseparable, and that subjectivity always emerges in a social context. Throughout her work, Hustvedt discredits the immateriality of the Cartesian subject and successfully undermines the distinction between body and mind as well as body and brain. Hustvedt's method of connecting scientific inquiry with both a philosophical frame and personal experience, looking at identity not "through a single window" but "from every angle" (Hustvedt, *Shaking Woman* 73), opens up new horizons for the exploration of intersubjectivity, beyond "preordained frames that allow little air in and out" (*Shaking Woman* 79).

Siri Hustvedt's persistent subversion of the Cartesian self harmonizes with the insistence of the mirror neuron scientists on the "co-constituted" (Iacoboni 133) nature of human existence—a stance that is still frequently suppressed in a culture that favors individualism and clear boundaries. Iacoboni laments Western culture's prepossession with individuality and a separation of self and other. He

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[77] See, for example, the ongoing controversy published in the *Journal of Literary Theory* (see Lauer, Koepsel and Spoerhase, Kelleter, and Salgaro).

writes, “We are entrenched in an idea that any suggestion of an interdependence of self and other may not just sound counterintuitive to us, but difficult, if not impossible, to accept” (155). Hustvedt’s works stand as a reminder of this unwanted interdependence, which Iacoboni thinks to link self and other as two sides of a coin (155).

Siri Hustvedt’s writing maps constellations of intersubjective identity formation that are built on philosophical insight, physical phenomena, a narrator’s keen sensitivity of the discursive production of the self, and a promotion of the dialogical interrelatedness between self and other. As this study has highlighted, Hustvedt’s interdisciplinary approach to relational identity makes her ideas particularly useful for exploring identity concepts at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Her linking of philosophy, art, medicine, psychoanalysis, and the burgeoning integration of neurobiological findings illustrate the manifold intertwinings between self and other. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt writes: “I am the one who hears. It is I who feels and thinks and sees and speaks. This is where I begin and where I end. I identify myself in the mirror. I see you. You are looking at me” (52-53). This study, elucidating the inseparability of self and other in Hustvedt’s works, has penetrated the underlying subversion of the I who feels and thinks and sees and speaks. Where the self begins and ends has been shown to be a frequently blurry and unstable territory in Hustvedt works, which will continue to take the reader into this territory where self and other meet.

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Christine Marks

8. 10. 1977
geb. in Essen

1984 – 1988
Grundschule, Essen

1988 – 1995
Goethe-Gymnasium, Essen

1995
Elk River High School, Minnesota

1995 – 1997
Maria-Wächtler-Gymnasium, Essen

1997
Allgemeine Hochschulreife

1997 – 2004
Magisterstudium Amerikanistik mit den Nebenfächern Anglistik und Rechtswissenschaft an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz

2004
Magistra Artium (M.A.)

2008 – 2009
Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin in der Amerikanistik, Department of English and Linguistics, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz

seit 2010
Lehrbeauftragte im English Department, LaGuardia Community College, New York

9. 9. 2010
Promotion zur Dr. phil. an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz