*Noli Me Tangere*:

The Efflorescence of the Third Skin in the Torsions of Pain

in Howard Barker’s *The Europeans*

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“To be in one’s skin is an extreme way of being exposed.”

(Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 89)

“The need to lend a voice to suffering is the condition of all truth.”

(Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 17-8)

“Thus morality is created in art, by exposure to pain and the illegitimate thought.”

(Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*1 47)

**Introduction**

This study is the first to consider the prominent role and significance of the skin in Howard Barker’s work. It demonstrates that, for Barker, the skin embodies a twofold, or double-edged, function: the symptomatic-pathological and the aesthetic-ethical. On this premise, it is my argument that the skin, as it recurs in Barker’s work, and as it is depicted in *The Europeans* in particular, constitutes, ontologically, both ‘the ego’ and the ‘ego ideal,’ or, what this paper will call, the ‘materialist transcendental element’.2 Thus, in both of its manifestations, the skin features as the condition of possibility for both the artistic act of creation and for the aesthetic-ethical process of self-cultivation and self-overcoming, and also for the creative imagination which inheres in both processes. Such an explication of the various dimensions and functions of the skin in Barker’s work poses a strong challenge to the dominant trend in the scholarship of his work, which dismisses, or is at best profoundly sceptical of the possibility of a psychoanalytical reading of Barker, particularly as regards such attendant issues as the unconscious, the role of the (m)other, the heteronomous3 nature of individual autonomy, and the personal histories of the characters.

Barker initiates his quasi-autobiographical account of the emergence of his artistic self and the evolution of his idiosyncratic style with an anecdote about the profession of the women in his family, which has a particularly evocative focus on his mother and his fraught relationship with her.4 Echoing the rhetoric and tone of the book of Genesis – as if to imply: in the beginning was the sheet – Barker entitles this opening section: “BEGINNING WITH THE WHITE SHEET”.5 In this section, Barker recounts his reminiscences thus: “The women of his family had been laundresses and his mother wanted to wash... [...]” (*Ibid*). He proceeds to depict his mother in highly lyrical terms and, more specifically, in association with three issues/images: sheets, rinsing/laundering, and singing/laughing. Barker describes her thus: “She pegged great sheets on lines and the sheets cracked in the breeze... […] She *sang songs* from the war as she carried the basket on her hip her labour was pleasure she laughed at the wind and showed her teeth...” (Ibid). Indeed, Barker’s memories of his mother appear to be intensely erotically charged, particularly when placed in conjunction with his highly suggestive indication of “her suffocating love” towards him, and with their intimate moments of hanging the sheets together with an intermittent exchange of laughter as a tacit token of seduction.6

The pages following this anecdotal reference, are interspersed with references to the recurring instances of “sheets,” “handkerchiefs,” “aprons,” and hanging cloths in Barker’s plays, coupled with the acts of rinsing, washing, and laundering in them, a fact that attests to how the sheet (be it smeared and stained or white/clean), both literally (as a folded/foldable surface) and as a trope, appears as an integral stage element in many of his plays. But, more consequentially, it transpires as an aesthetic feature of Barker’s childhood which has been embedded in him and his aesthetic ever since (see *Style* 13).

Accordingly, it is my claim that, in Barker, there exists an integral intertwinement and affective-figural continuity between the white sheet, the blank page/canvas (on which Barker writes and paints), and the skin. I argue that the triadic assemblage of sheet, paper/page/canvas and the skin is embedded in Barker (and his work) as a psychic envelope that subtends and sustains Barker as a writer, but also as a person/man, aesthetically, existentially, and ethically - bolstering the autonomy of the self and yet opening it up to the possibility of relating to the other in the mode of heteronomy. The sheer act of placing the aforementioned psycho-biographical account at the forefront of his *A Style and Its Origins* lends credence and primacy to the role the sheet/skin and sheet/skin-based relationship with the mother (and (m)other) plays in the aesthetics and ethical-existential dimensions of Barker’s work. As is evident in the foregoing excerpts, the sheet/skin is perceived as an affectively-charged, con-tactile space, associated with inter-personal intimacy, the (m)other, and seduction. Hence, it appears, and serves, as a third space between self/son and the (m)other, fulfilling both the anaclitic and erotic functions of libidinal (re-)charging and discharging.

When, impelled by the force of this initial provocation, we embark on chronicling the usage and dissemination of skin rhetoric throughout Barker’s texts, we soon discover that references to the skin are by no means infrequent. Indeed, the skin proves to occupy an emblematic position in Barker on three counts: in the modality of relationality that it embodies, in the modality of subjectivity, and transpiring as the figure of sensibility, thereby illustrating, on a larger level, the nature and function of corporeality in Barker’s oeuvre. The borderline status and chiasmatic nature of the skin (which accounts for its association with the abject and transgressive-liminal states below) is vividly reflected in the ensuing passage from *He Stumbled*, in which Baldwin enunciates his heightened sensibility and sensitivity coupled with his insight into the melancholic nature of the world: “Nothing / Is lost on me / I am / Oh, misery / Oh, melancholy / Intuitive to an inordinate degree / My skin / So thin / I feel a thought alight on me / I feel the mothlike footsteps of a curse uttered in distant places” (273).7 In an essay on a character ‘Dancer’ in *Hated Nightfall*, Barker makes a revealing use of skin as the principal mode of sensibility. Here skin is invoked to express intense sensitivity and an acute historical and existential sensibility**:** “The dancer has the thinnest skin of any character I have invented. A thin skin is a painful condition the agonized condition of a thin skin…” (*AT* 179)**.** In *Rome*,the skin features as the allomorpth of undecidability par excellence and the space of (inter-)subjective possibilities. Accordingly, a parallel between the manifoldness of the skin and the multiplicity of the self is evident. Holloo says: “I found another living underneath my skin. Also me. I found a different sheltering inside my bones. Also me” (*Rome* 262).8 The skin is once more invoked in *Blok/Eko* to express the associations indicated above: the texture of the skin as the register of personal/existential sensibility and inter-affective traces. Here Tot states: “Blok knew more of dread than any man / his skin as you breathed a harsh word / trembled like a lake in winter / I said no speeches / a few / a few” (102).9 In the following excerpt from *(Uncle) Vanya* the skin is wielded as the space for intercorporeal proximity, of con-tactile co-implication, and non-identificatory incorporation of the other. As Vanya asserts: “Tie him up if you want to, listen, listen I never wanted a single thing, one thing, more in my life than the nakedness of Helena and she also had me in her arteries, **I inhabited Helena** I was the skin under her skin I was the tenant of her brain and backbone and she undid her clothes not me she” (316).10 The other evidence that clinches the point appears at a revealing juncture in *Style* where Barker, while explaining the (auto)biographical roots of his development of a tragic vision and world, uses the skin trope to express his spiritual aspect coupled with his intolerance of the normative reality and the (neoliberal and late-capitalist) social totality. What is strikingly revealing is the way the whole theatre of catastrophe is implicitly considered as serving the function of a skin (figure), securing a viable relationship between a disturbed inside and a disturbing outside. Here the skin trope, true to its topology, is twofold: amenable to an infinitely intuitive interior (exteriority) and vulnerable hence largely foreclosed to the outside:

He thought his time sordid and suffered an emotional and physical distaste for it, preserving his ecstasies for the spiritual and sexual life he created for himself. He craved solitude. *He was thin-skinned*. Neither quality befits a man of the theatre, where bruising is routine. So he invented a method, as an alternative to flight or suicide. (*Style*, 9; emphasis added.)

The significance of the foregoing discussion and its bearing on Barker’s dramatic work are more palpably perceived when we take into account the pivotal role the skin plays in the various dimensions of the human as demonstrated by psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and philosophy. The phenomenon of skin (as expression, medium, and means of transcendence), however, is inextricable from that of pain and *jouissance*. Indeed, this dyad of skin and pain, coupled with a substantial part of the features delineated above, finds an emblematic illustration in *The Europeans*, in which highly analogous concerns are evident in Katrin and Starhemberg as well as the relationships between Starhemberg and Katrin and Starhemberg and his *second* mother.

In Barker’s *The Europeans*11 - set in the aftermath of the Siege of Vienna (1683) and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire - pain and suffering play a pivotal role in the dynamics of the self, and in the tensions and interactions between self and other.12 Although the (belated) role of love cannot be disregarded in this play, pain features as the main impetus in the aesthetics and ethics of the embodied self in its *relation* with the other. Nonetheless, this pain, as I will seek to demonstrate, is not restricted to the level of sheer physical pain, and crucially involves pain in a particular ontological, epistemological and ethical sense: suffering within the bounds of the self, suffering from being confined under one’s own skin, and suffering from the im-possibility of, or the deficiency of the medium for, relating to the other. Given the role and the significance of pain in *The Europeans* (in which a victim of the war gives birth on stage) and the manner in which the main characters treat, interpret, and wield their own and others’ pain, I take it to occasion both intense immanentization (individuation) and transcendence (super-individuation).

The thrust of the argument, thus, is my proposed notion of ‘the third skin’ or ‘the skin of proximity’.13 I thereby argue that the foregoing processes of immanentization and transcendence are realized in an emergent intercorporeally fabricated space, which is primarily concretized in the medium of the *skin*. In this regard*, skin* designates the foremost mode of subjective and inter-subjective sensibility and relationality. The need for such a notion when tackling the crucial concerns and issues of the play, derives from the prevalent yet tacit dimensions of skin in *The Europeans*. Accordingly, in the following paper, drawing on Anzieu and Freud’s respective notions of the skin ego and the bodily ego, I will argue that, in rough correspondence with skin ego-related categories, Starhemberg’s self-conception can be deemed a narcissistic (and melancholic) envelope, while Katrin’s is an hysterical envelope of suffering. Qualifying Anzieu’s proposed antithetical notions of the narcissistic envelope and the envelope of suffering, however, it is my contention that, as is evidenced in Barker’s nuanced rendition, these two envelopes are not mutually exclusive in *The Europeans*, but partake of and permeate one another. I will argue that, in the course of the play, by “undergoing and undertaking” their pains in an affirmative manner, both Katrin and Starhemberg gain insight into a more ethically authentic self14 and achieve self-overcoming, exposition (or more accurately, “ex-peausition” (see *Corpus* 32-3))15 and alter-ation in proximity to the other.

Subsequently, relying in part on Nietzsche and Levinas’ thoughts on the relation between ethics and pain, I will argue that this aesthetic process of strained individuation culminates in an ethical moment of impassioned super-individuation. In this eventful moment, Starhemberg partially and provisionally abandons his former self (his narcissistic-melancholic skin-ego) and Katrin relinquishes her habituated self (her hysterical skin-ego). In the throes of this intense affective-spiritual proximity (or, what I will describe as, chiasmatic con-tactility), which takes the form of a haptic gaze, each in his or her own turn *gives skin (*or *flesh*) to the other, the manifestation of which is the formation of a ‘skin’ between them, which I will call ‘the third’ or ‘the proximal skin’, and which effects a notable alteration in the existential and ethical dynamics of their selfhoods. This event, however, is paradoxically followed by a profoundly ethically ambivalent moment: the moment of the exclusion of the infant.

The Alterity of the Event in *The Europeans*

*The Europeans* (1987) depicts the collision and intersection of moments in *chronological* history (history as determined and defined by the meta-narratives imposed by ideological imperatives – including transcendent meaning and teleological trends - and the moral norms of symbolic discourse) and what Giorgio Agamben terms *kairological*16 history (or what Barker himself has called anti-History).17 In Barker’s drama, such a kairological history, or the untimely moment of the event,18 represents the disruption or fragmentation of those grand- and meta-narratives by the intervention and testimony of narratives provided by individual acts of transgression, counter-narrative, anamnesis, and the relation between the self and the singular, individual other. Those dramatic events are articulated in a context of pain, love, and tragic knowledge, while all three are invariably traversed with ideology. As such, the characters who inhabit the world of *The Europeans* (in the socio-historical circumstances they find themselves in, and in their mode of relation to them) conform to Barker’s characterization of Europeans: “To be European is to hold to opposites and live, if not rejoice, in the contradictions [...] The individual and the collective are never more embattled than they are here, and reconciliation is impossible [...]. It is perpetual oscillation, and all talk of harmony is false, a self-deception” (Barker, in Brown 129-130; see also Brown 117, 86)19.

*The Europeans* exposes its pock-marked and crumpled skinscape to us at a time when Austria has just vanquished the Turks and released itself from their colonial grip. This triumph has chiefly been achieved through the intrepid display of military ingenuity by the commander, Starhemberg. There are four other main characters in the play. Katrin is a war victim who has been raped, disfigured, and impregnated by Turkish soldiers; she inexorably undertakes an array of disruptive and provocative public acts to publicize her pain and traumatic state. In fact, by resolving to construct “her life around the unforgiving” (Barker, in Brown 193), she turns herself into a “Screaming Exhibit” in the post-war “Museum of Reconciliation” (Ibid 61); and, thus, she embodies a “negativity” which challenges, and remains heterogeneous to, the Idea, the modern State, the dialectical synthesis, and teleological sublation by History (see Kristeva 1984, 107-127).20 Crucially, Barker makes Katrin’s overdetermined body and her child “a ground for struggle between State and private will” (Barker, in Brown 176) in which the former strives to diffuse the negativity of pain, contradiction, and inassimilable individual anomaly.

Alongside these protagonists Barker adds Orphuls, an unorthodox priest who is preoccupied with evental possibilities of re-fabricating one’s self and a new ethics released in the aftermath of catastrophe. He is also concerned with the manifestation of the contingency of moral truths and social conventions, culminating in his disavowal of Christ and his creed. In his quest for self-transcendence and becoming-other, which is precipitated by Starhemberg’s provocations, Orphuls embarks on a series of transgressive acts, culminating in the murder of his mother (for which he is charged and later executed). And, finally, there are Leopold, the head of the Austrian state, and his wife, the Empress, who strive for the restoration of socio-cultural, political, and moral order through conciliatory (yet systematic) measures. What distinguishes Leopold and the Empress as rather eccentric figures of authority (and can be regarded as one of Barker’s idiosyncrasies in endowing almost all his characters with varying degrees of complexity) is their explicit interest in the aesthetics of self and their apparent sharing - with occasional acuity and empathy - of the existential concerns of the protagonists.

The tragic vision of *The Europeans* - in conformity with Howard Barker’s aesthetic principles of contradiction, pragmatic speculation on the impossible (*AT* 94, 132, 162), affirmative negativity, différential openness to the other and the event, and non-subsumptive individual autonomy (see Ibid. 50, 91, 100, 157, passim) - is manifest in its repudiation of any climactic moment of Aristotelian catharsis or Hegelian reconciliation. This is epitomized in the restitution of Katrin’s child, symbolically christened “Concilia” by the State, despite the apparent irrationality of the act and the harrowing pain suffered by Katrin. As regards the structure of the play, in contrast to such plays as *The Power of the Dog* and *The Last Supper*, in which these two orders - the historical-ideological and the individual-interpersonal - run formally and thematically parallel, with rare intersections; the structure of *The Europeans*, I suggest, is akin to a möbius strip, in that, those orders/layers never cease to imbricate and implicate one another in this play. As such, the actions of the characters assume double significance and dimensions: simultaneously socio-political and existentio-ethical. Tellingly, as will be borne out more explicitly in the course of the ensuing discussion, this möbius-strip structure, on the formal and thematic levels, proves congruent with the inherently möbius-like (or chiasmic) structure of the pivotal figure of *The Europeans*: the skin.

To discuss them separately for the sake of clarity, on one layer, we observe the implacable efforts made by Emperor Leopold, in conjunction with his wife, to reconstitute socio-political discipline and cultural and moral order, including the reinstatement of institutions, not least the arts and medicine. Judging by the principles and criteria Leopold promotes in the course of the play - coupled with his ideological methods and attitudes deployed for the establishment of harmony, homogeneity, solidarity through tolerance, subsumptive cohesion and reconciliation - he can be identified as representing a liberal-humanist and nationalist European identity/authority. On the other layer, there are primarily the conqueror Starhemberg and the war victim Katrin (along with some other characters, including Orphuls) who feature prominently. Their distinguishing trait resides in their dual positions and moves in the play, saliently reflected in their alternation between the centre and the periphery, or the inside and outside, simultaneously.

In their endeavor to detach themselves from the centre of power, by refusing to settle into the discursive positions assigned by Leopold’s emergent discourse, Katrin and Starhemberg not only refuse the redemptive meanings provided by salvific narratives of collective-traditional wisdom, but try to thwart ideological schemes for the annexation of their pain, individual experience, and autonomy conducted chiefly through the meaning-endowing processes of rationalization and institutionalization, mainly based on the morality of the religious discourse of transcendent idealism, or that of collective or state humanism.

Barker reflects this tension textually - through the characters’ use of uppercase and lowercase to differentiate between the two senses of history at issue here, and to valorize one over and above the other. In the scene of Katrin’s public parturition, Leopold, holding Katrin’s new-born baby in hand, in an interpellating speech act (instituting the child as an ideological-historical symbol) declares: “What history spoiled, let History mend. I christen her— Concilia!” (103). By the same token, the ensuing assertion by Starhemberg captures the tension-laden relation between two layers at stake: “How do we escape from History? We reproduce its mayhem in our lives...” (115). This negative dialectical tension is equally cogently captured in Katrin’s riven state. Earlier she asserts her existential will over (chronological) history by saying: “HOW DID I PERISH, I WAS MADE” (95); and this personal (kairological) history reaches a climactic point when she gives birth to the baby and affirms: “I bring you hope. I bring you History” (102)*.* And yet, this is later counterpointed by her lament: “They cheated me [...] And made of my horrors reconciliation [...] History [in the ideological-chronological sense] they made of me” (104).

Nonetheless, it is the second layer I have delineated above – the subjective (the characters’ existential-ethical preoccupations) and intersubjective dimensions - which forms the fulcrum of this study. It is to this second layer that we now turn.

*The Europeans* and Its Critical Literature

Notwithstanding Barker’s self-proclaimed preoccupation with *The Europeans* and his identification of it as the first fully-fledged and paradigmatic example of his ‘Theatre of Catastrophe’ - “I have consistently identified THE EUROPEANS as the first of the Catastrophic plays, not only from its narrative inception in a crisis of order but from the insistence of the protagonist on privileging personal instinct over cultural discipline” (Barker 2009)21 – scant critical attention has hitherto been paid to the play. The only two extended engagements with *The Europeans* are by David Ian Rabey (1988) and David Barnett (2001).Both derive the critical terms and premises of their analysis mainly from the existential aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy, though they apply them to establish opposite conclusions: the former a sympathetic and affirmative reading, the latter a trenchantly critical one.

David Ian Rabey’s pioneering engagement with *The Europeans* is mainly expository and, as a result, it hardly delves into the more psychological and philosophical implications and dimensions of the play. Theoretically, he, implicitly, demonstrates the primacy of certain Nietzschean characteristics in Barker’s protagonists, including transgressive self-creation and the pursuit of authenticity, coupled with the defiance and subversion of ideological institutions, all through a relentless insistence on self-sufficiency (see Rabey 1988, 229-242).22

Taking his point of departure implicitly from Charles Lamb (see 459) and explicitly from Rabey (458), David Barnett proposes to pursue a sustained Nietzschean reading, though he reaches a conclusion opposite to Rabey’s. Barnett observes that “[t]he Nietzschean influence on the drama is obvious. Starhemberg is clearly an *Übermensch* figure” (465).23 Barnett contends that ‘self’ – not necessarily as depicted in *The Europeans*, but as articulated and characterized in Barker’s theory in general – is a solid unit, characterized by sovereignty and authenticity in an essentialist sense (461). Accordingly, he regards the emphasis Barker lays on the spontaneous action, autonomous volition and self-expression of the individual as a retrogressive movement “remarkably reminiscent of earlier historical manifestations, associated with the bourgeois individualism of the nineteenth century” (463). He hints at Barker’s neglect of the significant fact that individualism, along with such a centrality accorded to the individual and its ostensible a-historicity in Barker, can, in a self-defeating manner, turn out to be an ideological institution in itself. And thus he recognizes such a predilection as liable to being evocative of, and latently complicit with, (neo-)liberal tenets and bourgeois values. Eventually, he proceeds to posit that Barker fails to address two significant points which are, ironically, among the dramatist’s recurrent and fundamental themes: “therole of the body and the non-essentialist theories of identity” (Ibid). Indeed, Barnett’s reading is symptomatic: it reveals at best a lacuna and at worst a flaw in the currently prevalent Barker scholarship – and particularly its conception of Barkerian selfhood – since it corroborates how a crucial, yet hitherto-overlooked dimension of self/subjectivity in Barker might be misconstrued or misrepresented. Nevertheless, it is worth underscoring that when it comes to his analysis of *The Europeans*, Barnett’s observations become more nuanced and qualified. Discerning and critically accentuating the discrepancy between Barker’s published theories (as a way of recouping the drama) and the more complicated characterization present in his plays, Barnett concludes: Barker’s “dramatic practice […] exposes a more complex model of the individual and its environment” (473).

Nonetheless, as will become evident in the following discussion, I take issue with several of the foregoing critics, as well as Barnett’s claims on various counts, not least his assertion that Barker conceives of the individual subjectivity as a sovereign, essentialist, ahistorical, and disembodied unit, or put otherwise, as a hypostatized identity (463). If we scrutinize the language, interactions and characteristic conduct of the characters, we discern that almost all of Barker’s plays abound in instances that clearly problematize and run counter to Barnett’s claims.I contend that the self in Barker’s plays is characterized by heteronomous becoming, intercorporeal relationality, multiplicity, and self-difference; in short, it is *a self as (a heteronomously autonomous) relationality* and *a self in relation to singular alterity* (as expounded in Levinas’ ethics of the other) and a self-in-process/crisis.24 Equally importantly, it is the former idiosyncrasy (the relational nature of the self, yet solely so in relation to a singular individual other in a catastrophic condition) which is flagrantly absent in the critical studies carried out by the critics in the “Seduction strand” (including Lamb, Rabey and other fellow critics that adhere to and draw on this trend) or those (such as Karoline Gritzner) whose work takes as its focal point the individual in, or in pursuit of, “sublime” states, and partly inflected with Adornian notions. In the former strand in particular, even when the inter-subjective aspect of the characters is recognized, it occurs as such solely in terms of seduction (of one by the other or both simultaneously) and its dynamics. Thus, this study intends to restore this dimension and establish its essential role.

The other equally crucial issue concerns the (qualified) psychoanalytically-inflected approach to Barker’s work. The dominant trend of criticism in Barker scholarship (including varying figures such as Lamb, Rabey, Gritzner, and more recent (Post)modernist-oriented critics such as Elisabeth Angel-Perez ) is highly sceptical towards all claims to truth (even in a non-metaphysical, evental sense) with respect to Barker’s work and characters, and hence, it either explicitly or implicitly dismisses the viability or pertinence of psychoanalytical approaches to Barker on the same ground. The postulation of anti-psychological nature of Barker’s characters and plays and advocating their being un-susceptible to psychoanalytical readings, and, hence, the unviability with respect to both of them in the so-called postmodernist-oriented trends, however, have led to some pernicious consequences. The most conspicuous consequence, perhaps, has been the sheer neglect of the persistent presence and significance of the fraught role of the mother in Barker. The recurrent figure of the mother, strikingly, has received almost no critical attention. And this reveals one of the blind spots, or pitfalls, of the “Seductionist”, as it were, or postmodernist-oriented approaches to his plays.).

Indeed, the figure of the mother is so prevalent and assumes such a pivotal position in the majority of the plays (including *Hard Heart*, *The Europeans*, *The Ecstatic Bible*, *Gertrude-the Cry*, *Knowledge and a Girl*, *Brilliance of a Servant*, *Fence* *in Its Thousandth Year*, *The Gaoler’s Ache for the Nearly Dead*, *Dead Hands*, *Animals in Paradise*, *Wonder and Worship in the Dying Ward*, and the latest yet unpublished plays25, to mention only a few) to such an extent that, in Barker, I contend, one should speak of the (m)O*ther Principle* to the disappearance, diminution, or exclusion of the father and the Name of the Father. Whether perceived negatively (as an impediment to self-realization, or fabrication, or as an object of hatred and aversion to surpass or transcend) or positively (as an object of fixation, fascination and love), the mother transpires as a figure in whom characters make immense and intense psychosomatic investments and plays a prominent role in the aesthetics of the self and ethics of relationality with the other. If we divested such drastic dramatic alterations and events of their overt psychosomatic associations, there would remain notable lacunae in our understanding of the genealogy of the body, the dynamics of desire, the aesthetics of the self-cultivation, and the ethics of becoming-other in Barker.

The Event of Alterity

A. Traumatized Egos in Anguished Skins:

As indicated above, it is my contention that skin functions as the pivotal figure in *The Europeans*, in which it is the primary modality of sensibility, relationality and subjectivity. Recognised as such, it provides an illuminating perspective on the relation between pain, knowledge, speculative ethics (or speculation on morality), and the unconscious in the play. Thus the skin performs three distinct functions in *The Europeans*: etiological, symptomatological, and therapeutic. Accordingly, in this section, initially I will introduce the premises of Anzieu’s theory of the skin ego in broad strokes, as it constitutes the theoretical core of my argument and will underpin discussion throughout the article. I will then undertake a close reading of the play while probing the relevance of his theory to its concerns.

Freud posits the understanding of the individual’s experience of the somatic self as indispensable to the understanding of psychic structure. Accordingly, proposing body as the ground of mental functioning constitutes the crux of Freud’s conception of the development of the ego and the psychic apparatus in general. Thus “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego [...] it is not merely a surface entity but it is itself the projection of a surface” (Freud, “The Ego and the Id” 1923, 26).26 In other words, the nascent form of self-representation is primarily a body representation, derived from proprioception and the experiences of pain and pleasure (see Freud 1923: 26). Following Freud, Anzieu’s theory is premised on the central importance of the body to psychical life. Substantially elaborating on Freud’s insights, he primarily conceptualizes his own approach in terms of skin: “Psychic space and physical space constitute each other in reciprocal metaphors […] skin-ego is one of these metaphors” (Anzieu 1990, 58 in Segal 44; see also *Skin Ego* 28)27.

Building on and extending Freud’s notion of the ‘bodily ego,’ while also developing the ideas of Esther Bick, Wilfred Bion, and Donald Winnicott, Anzieu postulates that the ego is primarily structured as a ‘skin ego’ or *psychic envelope*. In his definition of the term, skin ego is a mental image of the self, derived from its experience of the surface of the body, which the ego of the child relies on and wields during the early phases of its psycho-somatic development “to represent itself as an ego containing psychical contents” (*Skin Ego*, 40). At its inchoate stage, the ‘skin ego’ is represented as an imaginary outer membrane or case that embraces the whole of the psychical apparatus akin to the way skin enfolds the body. Anzieu advances the idea of the “common skin” as that which is imaginatively shared by, and enveloping of, both mother and child. This *common skin* establishes an “adhesive identification” (Ibid, 63-4) between mother and child. The next stage of psycho-somatic development consists in the abolition and partial interiorization of this common skin, which, though strenuous, paves the way for the internalisation of, and identification with, a part of the mother that sustains the baby's physical and psychical development (Ibid, 41-45, 63-5, 147). Depending on the way this psychic process is undergone, Anzieu differentiates two potential outcomes of such a process as two modes of skin ego: the skin ego as a ‘narcissistic envelope’, which fulfils a vital protective function and supplies the child with a sense of security; and the skin ego as an ‘envelope of suffering’, in which the protective function has been attenuated or stunted due to its being inscribed with a traumatic incidence (29, 44, 200-210).

Now, the foregoing theoretical discussions will allow us to engage with Barker’s *Europeans*, to deal with the problem that has vexed critical analysis of the play, and to probe their pertinence to it. In order that these discussions be applicable to the analysis, however, they are to be deployed with certain qualifications. Hence, the present analysis is not simply a straightforward case of ‘applying’ Anzieu and Levinas to Barker, since, as I will demonstrate, there are certain divergences between Anzieu’s assumptions and Barker’s practice, particularly in relation to their respective conception of parenthood and its very necessity, to attitudes towards pain and its implications, and to socio-political dimensions.

In the play, Katrin has been raped and disfigured during the war by the Turks. This event has inflicted an indelible gash on her psycho-somatic schema, not to mention her body. This fragmentation is sorely vivid on a personal level, which includes two planes: the surface of her body (her abraded skin and the abject sight of her lacerated breasts, a loss to which she refers as “irreparable and anatomi­cal” (67)); and that of her mind, in the form of her traumatized sense of self or identity. Yet it is also discernible on a social and inter-personal level: in the wake of this violation, her sense of self and ego-boundaries have become so tenuous and frail that she feels too exposed to stand the proximity of others and their communicative stimuli. Hence, she insists on their just gazing at her and refraining from any tactile contact with her.

However, as Prosser puts it: “Subjectivity is not just about having a physical skin; it is about feeling one owns it; it is a matter of psychic investment of [the] self in [the] skin” (73).28 By the same token, the trauma in Katrin has primarily been inscribed on the skin and registered in her sense of tactility. This conscious, yet forced, investment at the level of skin is cogently evident in her statement:“I am frightened of everyone, especially you, and I would not be otherwise, I am so alive with fear, *I am skinless*, *I am flayed* and the nerves tremble on the slightest passage of a man like leaves on birches flutter at the poorest breeze” (95; italics mine). Anzieu’s observation can help to unfold the implications of Katrin’s remark. Recognizing the skin(ego) as the space of “inter-sensorial inscription” (*Skin Ego* 81, 104, 201), Anzieu proceeds to argue: “The seriousness of the damage to the skin … is in direct relation to the extent, both quantitative and qualitative, of the flaws in the Skin Ego” (Ibid. 35). Due to the loss of the sense of being securely enveloped, Katrin parries the approach of any other person, including Starhemberg and her sister. In fact, here, the cluster of words in Katrin’s remark (the prohibition from touching, fear, the skin, and the nerves) is highly evocative of, and corresponds to, the constellation Anzieu forms when expounding the “intersensorial” function of skin-ego and its pathologies, by referring to the way both the “skin” and the “central nervous system” simultaneously develop from “the ectoderm,” and the way in which defects in this function leads to the loss of a “common sense/space” and “the anxiety of the body being fragmented, or more precisely of it being dismantled” (104). However, we can more clearly realize the ambivalent implications of Katrin’s state – her being flayed – if we place it in the light of Steve Connor’s observation on flaying: “Flaying is always … accompanied by the possibility of a re-assumption: either the assumption of another skin, or the resumption of one’s own skin (through healing)” (31).29

The other relevant evidence of the registration of the trauma in the skin/tactility emerges when, on Starhemberg’s persistently following her, she cautions him against approaching too closely and ‘touching’ her: “You know you have a terrible face, *don’t touch me* I would shudder if you *touched* me and some cry would issue from the very bottom of my gut like afterbirth sings in the grate or a green long screams” (95; italics mine). It is this recoiling from the least bodily contact on Katrin’s part, and her adequation of being touched to being hurt or afflicted, which is highly symptomatic. The grave psycho-somatic functional losses (of protection, containing, maintenance, inscription, intersensoriality/consensuality, and individuality) and the assumption of a toxic/traumatic skin-envelope (pain) for survival, evident in Katrin, closely reflect, and can be accounted for, in light of some of the functions Anzieu has articulated for the skin ego (as well as the intimately linked concept of the psychic envelope). Anzieu identifies one negative and eight positive function for the skin ego, which respectively include: that of maintaining the mind; of containing or enveloping the whole of the psychic apparatus and libidinal/instinctual contents; a function of excitation screen; of individuation; of intersensoriality or con-sensuality, which leads to the construction of ‘common sense’; a function of support for sexual excitation; a function of libidinal recharge; and finally, a function of inscribing tactile-sensorial traces.30 The final, negative function, which emanates from the traumatic disturbances in, and thus the inversion of, the normal ones, is the toxic function of self-destruction which was rejected later by Anzieu as a malfunction rather than a function. (*Skin Ego* 122, 125, 127, 128, passim).

I will return to these elements of Anzieu’s theory shortly, but for the moment, if we inspect the snatches of the account Katrin gives of the details of her despoliation, we may discern to what degree her language is saturated with tactile terms. Referring to the soldiers who assaulted her, she states: “They *soaked*, they *drenched*, they *swilled* me with their kisses, and *bruised* my lips and bit my *mouth* and thrust these thousand tongues into my throat” (68). The recurrence of words laden with tactile associations in this excerpt demonstrates the primacy accorded to this sense and her conscious investment in it. The immediate sense that is evoked on listening to her account is that of the skin as a sieve or a porous interface. Her subsequent rendition of the situation illustrates her perception of her violators, above all, as an amorphous mass whose indefinite and impersonal touch is first and foremost felt tactilely rather than seen visually: “from now on I talk of them as plural, as many-headed, as many-legged and a mass of mouths” (67); and a few moments later, on referring to her condensed imagery of them as “this many mouthed thing” – whose absorptive touch has been perceived as a liquid touch which dis-identifies the object of its reception – her speech falters and she nearly faints: “She shudders as if taken by a fit, emitting an appalling cry and sending the water flying” (68). Katrin also accentuates the point at issue by identifying her mouth, not only as “holy” and “sacred,” but as “the very shape and seat of intimacy” (Ibid); a hint from which can be inferred the indissociable relation and imbrications between orality and tactility in her speech and conduct, which is pervasive throughout the play. Then, in an aggrieved tone, she proceeds to recount the manner her mouth was “smothered with *wet* and *fluid*” kisses.

No less revealing is her expression of the events in terms of flowing, overflowing and submersion which substantiates the extent to which her skin ego has languished, both as a surface and an interface. The liquid, in which she has been immersed, has been corrosive and has placed her in a liquid state which has searingly touched her away. Later, she emphasizes that the only parts of her which were not ‘touched’ by the Turk soldiers were her eyes: “None would look me in the eye, and I have such lovely eyes. Are my eyes so dangerous? No Turk did either … My eyes remain unravished … like unentered rooms” (79). Her depiction of her eyes as rooms, however, significantly illustrates how she apprehends her eyes, or her sense of sight, in terms of motility and tactility, rather than visuality. Such an apprehension is crucial as it illuminates the fraught and unorthodox nature of sight (that is, haptic and caressing) in the play, and contributes to our understanding of the penultimate scene in which the moment of *con-tactile aesthetics-ethics* (of simultaneous self-fabrication and self-transcendence) materializes when Katrin and Starhemberg sit facing each other without any visible tactile contact, their communication apparently confined to an exchange of gazes.

The other principal trait that confirms the pathological facets of Katrin’s character is her evident hysterical (and histrionic) behaviours throughout the play. In Katrin, the psycho-somatic trauma has been projected both inwardly (embodiment) and outwardly (phobia). Hence, one can witness the indications of both kinds of hysteria distinguished by Freud (anxiety hysteria and conversion hysteria (Freud and Breuer 196-216))31 explicitly in her recurrent self-dramatization (her unremitting pursuit of publicity through various public spectacles). Indeed, Katrin’s is a spectacular body, and the compelling evidence for this proposition is her inexorable intention to have a public parturition, in conjunction with her consent to, and actual pursuit of, being exposed to, recorded and archived by medical-clinical discourse, though with the intention of disrupting the hegemony and homogeneity of the collective social realm, and of asserting the uniqueness of her individual pain. Katrin displays many characteristic symptoms of hysteria in her actions and behaviour throughout the play, including permanent motor agitation, zonal confusion, erogenous diffusion, over-cathexis of the body (particularly oral and tactile zones), hyper-excitability, and hyper-sensitivity (see Micale 1995, Bronfen 1998, Mentzos 2000).32 Equally important is the heightened permeability of the border between body and language (or the semiotic and the symbolic) coupled with the cumulative proclivity towards conversion and re-inscription of the psychic/symbolic onto the somatic/semiotic, which, as we will observe in our examination of Katrin, do not neatly correspond to her state.

In accord with, and reflective of, her hysteric condition, Katrin has assimilated this traumatic rupture and clings to it, paradoxically, for the subsistence and sustenance of her self to the extent of incorporating it even as a part of herself, that is, as an ‘envelope of suffering’ or a hysterical envelope. Perhaps, the most explicit expression of her traumatic fixation on her violation manifests itself in her acknowledging that: “I wish to hold on to my agony, it is all I have” (70). Joyce McDougall, underlining the importance of physical symptoms in the psychosomatic patient, argues that the suffering body performs the function of the transitional object. Anzieu, relatedly, in his treatment of an analogous case observes: “the phantasy of the flayed skin must be kept permanently alive in the perverse masochist for him to re-acquire Skin Ego” (110). In fact, McDougall’s psychopathological recognition of the individual who experiences “the body suffering [as] a body that is alive” as a neurotic person can effectively be extended, and applied, to Katrin.33 Such a strain, as evidenced by her resorting to the force of pain/suffering to sustain herself, and to hold her traumatized psychosomatic apparatus together, becomes poignantly visible when she professes: “To fear is to be alive. Of course, I shan’t live to be old, the body cannot take the strain” (95).

In keeping with the above discussion of the hysterical ego (as an envelope of suffering), perhaps the most salient token is that, here, we witness the incorporated trauma in the form of a substantial and literally *foreign body*: the child. In his analytical reflections on the somatic manifestation and re-enactment of traumatic experiences of crisis in survival and the profound psychic conflicts they bear, Freud establishes a link between hysteria and the core experience of an attack, and dedicates his clinical studies to probing the way such a hysterical layer gets embedded in the body of the individual, like a latent and affectively laden layer: “We must presume … that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of trauma – acts like a *foreign body* which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work …” (Freud and Breuer 56; italics mine). Though they explain here that the traumatic experience is conducive to regression and the assumption of one’s own bodily drives and impulses as alien, in Katrin, however, this intruded skin-ego evinces itself in a twofold manner: both an obtrusive loss on the surface of her body (her skin and her breasts) and an intrusion in the interior of her body (the child). The testimony to the fact that she recognizes the child as an interiorized traumatic layer is to be found in the manner by which she tends to identify it already with its foreign fathers, perceiving the infant as an aggressive violator or oppressor within her. Beckoning to the baby while holding her belly, she says: “It moves, my master ... Do feel him ... he is every bit as violent as his fathers ... He is perfectly loathsome the way he shoves. He longs to be out and about and intent on damage! **He rampages!**” (92; emphasis original).

One of the characteristics identified by almost all major psychoanalysts of the field is that, “Hysterics mainly suffer from reminiscences” (Freud and Breuer 11). This propensity characterizes Katrin’s fixation (to the point of masochism), which, coupled with her repetition compulsion bordering on obsessional neurosis, aggravates Katrin’s traumatic state. Her (hallucinatory) reminiscences, constant re-counting, and the inevitable re-enactments of both the traumatic event (which has befallen her) and the analogous, yet displaced, account of *the virgin Asian girl* scene, all attest to her aggravated state. This streak surfaces when, in order to prove her dementia, she professes to being haunted by a scene of a gruesome orgy of atrocity, in which some Christian troopers swoop down on an apparently virtuous Muslim girl in prayer and impale her to the ground. And, then, Katrin blindly proceeds to ask: “what satisfaction could I have from dreaming only my Turks die? Now, am I mad?” (69). Here she is obliviously ensnared in re-enacting her trauma (see Cathy Caruth 11).34

Perverse and persistent (ab)use of, and resort to, language are among Katrin’s other revealing idiosyncrasies which, I suggest, can be attributed to a quasi-hysteric condition, among other things (see Scarry 60-61).35 Oral excitation and over-cathection on the oral zone are among the prevalent indications of hysteria. A. Anzieu considers oral fixation as “one of the essential mechanisms of hysteria” consisting in the zonal confusion and erogenous diffusion of a mode of oral excitation to other parts of the body, “especially the skin surface and the sensory orifices” (68-9). Accordingly, Katrin’s self-conception reveals a profound interweaving of corporeality and language. She wields language as a compensatory aegis, a protective-projective screen, or more strictly *a surrogate skin*: “I try to hide behind the language, oh, the language I do twist like bars of brass to shelter in” (68). Subsequently, she proceeds to refer to the way the experiences of traumatic pain and violence occasion both linguistic deprivation and ontological dereliction, thus, pointing to the link between language and the body which is inextricable from her sense of transgressive individuality: “The poor have neither words nor drawers” (67), insisting on continuing “In my own words [...] Words of my own”; in other words, to have a skin/body of one’s own is tantamount to having a language of one’s own and the reverse. This corporeal language and/or linguistic corporeality are deemed as the space of intimacy and individuality, both of which have been violated in her. Elsewhere, referring to her implacable oral/verbal aggression, she reinforces this subtle relationship between language and body: “I’m so cruel, aren’t I? It comes of having a vocabulary and no breasts” (70). And, then, she goes on to lament that: “I have no breasts! I have no breasts!” (69).

Nevertheless, there are a number of not insignificant traits that distinguish her from simply a traumatically afflicted personality, and enhance her acute socio-political and historical consciousness.36 In fact, her actively disturbing the socio-political hegemony of homogeneity and unity through displaying herself as an eccentric spectacle on numerous occasions substantiates this point. These instances include Katrin’s relentless efforts to publicize and make a spectacular event of her pain and her abused body (her voluntary attendance at the science academy is a case in point (see 76-9)); her aversion to home and domestication (as repressive institutions), her vehement rejection of pity and sympathy (as assimilative-defensive emotions), her implacable insistence on her existential autonomy and her own language; and eventually, her incisive ideological consciousness and discursive defiance in general, and the exploitation of her condition/status to such an effect, in particular. Katrin’s uncompromising treatment of Susannah, who features more as a maternal, patronizing and domineering personality rather than sisterly, asking Katrin peremptorily to “Come home, now” (69-70) is another example. This excerpt from the scene of her public parturition elucidates her socio-politically-oriented (as much as traumatic) intentions. In the throes of labor pains, she exclaims: “Not as many as I’d hoped. Don’t they like a spectacle? Not the numbers I’d predicted, but – (A spasm of pain doubles her. The Midwife goes to assist her. Katrin pushes her away.) / Nobody help me birth the child [...] (She stares into the audience.) [...] I bring you hope. / I bring you History” (102).

The foremost testimony is her denigration of home as a redemptive or restorative haven, as the origin or end of an enforced reconciliation. Katrin foregrounds the institutional nature and role of home (and domesticity) by decrying it as a means of divesting the singularity of the individual in its sympathetic, sublational collectivity and enclosure: “home is the instru­ment of reconciliation, the means through which all crime is rinsed in streams of sympathy and outrage doused … the place where the preposterous becomes the tolerable and hell itself is stacked on shelves…” (70). Such a stance thoroughly conforms to Barker’s trinity of political suppression of the individual as “pity, reconciliation and forgetfulness” (*AT* 59), but can be construed as gesture of resistance and existential autonomy given his repudiation of “familiarity, domesticity and recognition” (*DOAT* 7) as among his aesthetic principles.

Notwithstanding the valuable insights Anzieu’s approach yields with respect to the play, there are problems with Anzieu’s notion of the psychic envelope in relation to Barker’s characters, in general, and characters in *The Europeans* in particular, that should not be overlooked. In this regard, there are two prominent points worth indicating; first, Anzieu’s tendency to narrowly link the patients’ defective or strained relationships to their somatic self or to other persons to what he perceives as negligent caregiving in “early infancy”. Second, in Anzieu, pathological or traumatic psycho-somatic states are examined in abstraction from overdetermined and complex social and political contexts and determinants (including issues such as race, discourse, and power relations). As such, his theory fails to account for the aforementioned subversive and transgressive endeavours undertaken by Katrin and Starhemberg.

**B. Starhemberg’s Other-Consciousness and the Melancholic-Narcissistic Envelope**

Starhemberg’s implacable hazarding of his self, apparently, in pursuit of novel possibilities for self-fabrication can be ascribed to diverse causes. His embarking on peripatetic moves and the adoption of a self-excoriating “statelessness”, aside from demonstrating his existential authenticity and fluidity (see Levinas *Proper Names* 44)37, can also be construed as an impelled attempt to elude the stranglehold of the impersonal other (including the State, History, and even the collective) in order not to be determined by their discursive imperatives and restrictive subject positions. However, on the other hand, the latent and more overriding reason for his conduct, I propose, resides in Starhemberg’s sense of self-suffocation issuing from his being caught between the ever-expanding and ever-contracting bounds of the self. That is to say, it results from his being riven between having a loose and volatile inner psychic envelope and an encrusted, impervious, and inflexible outer psychic envelope. In such a state, he is driven not solely by the impetus for existential authenticity and becoming-other, but, primarily, by an impulse to survive an inveterate traumatic state. As such, one of the reasons underlying another problematic – that Starhemberg’s active process of self-fabrication up until the later parts of the play chiefly appears as a solitary task from which a “true” other seems to be excluded – comes to the fore.

This struggle evinces itself most palpably in his act of roaming in the recesses of Vienna. Though Starhemberg wanders throughout the city slums at nights venturing into every nook and cranny, seeking to confront other persons and situations, the mode of nomadic life he leads is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, he selects other persons to whom he goes and the situation in which he encounters them; and on the other, even in these pre-conceived conditions there persists a faint possibility that he might face the unpredictable. This excerpt from the play, which shows him accosting a beggar in a taunting and derisory manner, illustrates his characteristic propensity: “How my lip swells from your compli­ments – (Second Beggar goes to attackStarhemberg, butStarhemberg is the swifter and takes theSecond Beggar in a terrible embrace.) Oh, dance you terrible hater, dance, sick-with-life, **not dancing!** (Hejerks him again*.)* Oh, your movements, are these the **veiled messages of love?**”(86) As such, a crucial conclusion which can be drawn from the foregoing points is that ‘self’, for Starhemberg, is indeed *relative* to a considerable extent (that is, volatile and variable), but it hardly appears to be *relational*.

Accordingly, it should be acknowledged that there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between him and whomever he encounters. He always retains the initiative to approach and accost an-other to himself; and hence in the play, we can specify few genuinely adventitiously encountered others. Starhemberg’s being beset with this enclosing autonomy ineluctably incurs solipsism and a melancholic narcissism which express themselves in his suffering from despair, fear of death (in isomorphism, of solipsism, of self-enclosure, of deficiency or absence of a true relation or a non-predetermined intimacy with an other), and deep discontent (with both self and others). This observation is verified by indications made by Leopold, the Empress, the Midwife and by Starhemberg himself concerning his conduct and temperament. Both the midwife and the Empress discern a deep-seated turbulence and disturbance in Starhemberg, surging up from time to time in his emotional reactions and actions. Midwife perceptively remarks: “You have some pain, mister…”, and goes on to affirm, “I think you will find death difficult” (104). Leopold asks him: “do you hate us? You do ... so that’s your burden ... you are thin with hate ... Starhemberg, my maker, you are ill” (75). His poignant lament on the irremediable seal of loneliness of the dying, and his solemn demand of Katrin to help him in this regard bear witness to his pre-occupations and concerns:“Help me, or I think we'll die alone...” (96); to which she scathingly responds: “Why not? Why not die alone? How would you die? To the sound of violins, with your children clinging to your feet as if your soul could be pulled back through the ceiling? **I help you** how” (Ibid).

Furthermore, viewed from another perspective, which will be taken up below in light of Levinas’ arguments, the existence of this void haunting him from within can be ascribed to his lack of faith in an entity or dimension that might be irrevocably transcendent to him (see *OB* xlii, 12), or, for that matter, distrust of an absolute exposure to the other. His intensely equivocal expression (since it can equally tenably be regarded to emanate from an ethical insight) of his cynicism towards any true intimacy attests to the point at stake: “NO MOMENT OF UNITY IS EVER TRUE” (83). As such, I shall contend that Starhemberg suffers from what Levinas refers to as “the basic state of the self”. Levinas describes the condition thus: “In its own skin. Not at rest under a form, but tight in its skin, encumbered and as it were stuffed with itself, suffocating under itself, insufficiently open, forced to detach itself from itself, to breathe more deeply, all the way, forced to dispossess itself to the point of losing itself” (*OB* 110). In this regard, Levinas employs the idea of ‘the One without Being’ to show how the “One”, namely in this instance ‘me without the other’, is indeed suffering, thrown back onto itself, not able to take distance from itself in either time or space. Sensibility or vulnerability, then, mean exactly this kind of oneness without Being (see *OB* 53).

Another evidence, which poses the issue conspicuously in terms of *skin* and comes to accentuate the ethico-existential crisis Starhemberg is beset with as one that is traceable through the *skin*, is his apparent obsession with the (naked) body of a woman who is seemingly his mother (named The Second Mother in the play). She emphasizes: “He is not my son. I never suffered him, nor any other infant;” and, not infrequently, he pays visits to her quite compulsively and despite his will. He reveals his intense preoccupation with her thus: “I come as rarely as I can. Often I wish to come, and refuse myself” (89). And when the Empress, in her attempts to find Starhemberg, arrives at the mother’s house, and is confronted with the repulsively shabby and shadowy conditions of the place, she asks him, “Why are you here…?”, he responds: “I don't know” (90). Later, the Empress foregrounds this irresistible fascination she exerts on him by stating, “Madam, you have more magnetism for this man than all five hundred rooms of the Kaiserhof. I think your son is a remarkable swine” (90).

This preoccupation with seeing the “(m)other” might initially strike us as a masculine scopophilic solicitude, with the sight of the mother’s body as the primal scene for the constitution of the specular and sovereign subjectivity/self. This interpretation is not unfounded, as several times throughout the play Starhemberg exhibits such an inclination towards others. Towards the middle of the play, on offering some food to Susanna and flaunting his knowledge of her sexual secrecy, he asks her to strip bare in front of him, saying: “I have seen you fucked - go down and let me *look at* you - your hair - your crevices …” (77). When she intimates that she prefers their having *inter-course* rather than just baring herself in front of him, and that in a more affectionate place or manner, he adamantly shrinks from the least mutual im-plication and enfolding, and in an apathetic tone insists: “I only ask *to gaze*, there’s no complication –” (78). Elsewhere, on their first face-to-face encounter , when Karin confronts him with: “Why would you not look at me?” Starhemberg revealingly responds: “I only look when I am certain I shall see,” to which Katrin in apremonitory tone, replies: “You will see” (79) – though the object of this look, or “seeing,” might also be rightly deemed as her “existential authenticity”. What is apparent in all the aforementioned instances is the lack of the least tangible in-between, or concrete contact, a lack which primarily evinces itself in the negative relational space that persists between Starhemberg and the other.

Although Starhemberg’s specular drive is a prominent proclivity of his, his obsession with contact with his “(m)other”38, I will contend, transpires to be primarily a tactile one (rather than being a visual mastery) and propelled by a different impetus: a longing for development and prolongation of the self and/through the palpation of the (m)other so as to appropriate or interiorize a sustainable tranche of her body. Consequently, such a con-tactile reflexivity would effect the formation of a more sustainable skin-ego in him. And this incorporation, as we will see, is indeed vital to his sense of self (involving the functions of individuation, protection, containment, maintenance, and sexualization) and his relationship with the other (involving the functions of libidinal re-cathexis, inscription, common sense, consensuality, and self-transcendence).

This primal carnal intertwinement, we glean, has never properly taken place between Starhemberg and the (m)other figure.Second Mother’s vivid and eloquent depiction of the critical scene of encounter captures its abiding presentness: “He came up *behind* me, on a hill … And he – so wanted *to touch* me – such suffering – it *marked* me – *like a disfigurement* – I could not turn but felt his awful *stare* – I felt my entire body flush with blood – the kidneys gush – the whole length of my bowel – hot rush of blood ...” (91; italics mine). The primary point that strikes us in this vignette is the intersensorial, or intercorporeal, proximity which has been unreciprocated, or laid in abeyance, between them; a lack which, in its own turn, has inflicted such an indelible corporeal gash on both of them that the traumatic moment does not cease haunting both of them. Starhemberg’s forlorn intimation delivers the point: “Once I saw you naked. But only once” (88), as if implying he had not had, or internalized, enough of his (m)other or of the maternal body.

Given the arbitrary, irrational, and equally cerebral nature of erotic inclination in Barker’s world (rather than being solely bound to the physical appearance or appeal of the characters), nevertheless, Barker in his scene descriptions takes pains to strip the Second Mother of the least sexual allure she might hold in order to augment the *caressing*, *con-tactile* nature of the relation between the two. The opening scene description reads: “A darkened room. An arid and dusty old woman in a chair.” Furthermore, what enhances the tactile rather than visual facets of the scene is the lighting and its quality; in fact, the unobtrusive presence of light, and its haptic nature, paradoxically sheds light on the nature of the relation between them and enhances the aspired caressing-proximal condition of the house. The Empress’ confounded expression in her confrontation with the conditions of this “darkened room” elucidates the point: “And why this hatred of la clarté, das licht, are you afraid to witness your own decay?” (90)

Now, it would be revealing to explore the dynamics of the scene in terms of the psychopathology of the skin-ego. Intimately intermeshed with his hypothesis of attachment or clinging drive (*Skin Ego* 12) and “the phantasy of the common skin”, Anzieu elaborates the notion of “dual process of interiorization” (63) which is indispensable to the formation and proper function of skin-ego, and entails the internalization of two spatial facets ofskin. First, the skin-space,or intercorporeal interface, between the mothering figure39 (or what I have called the (m)other) and the child; and second, the mothering or caressing environment itself, both of which are lacking in Starhemberg’s relation with his (m)other. According to Anzieu,the fulfilment of this “double anaclisis” (112)39 leads to a firm and salubrious establishment of the skin-ego, which “responds to the need for a narcissistic envelope and creates, for the psychic apparatus, the assurance of a constant, certain, basic well-being” (61). In consequence of such a double inclusion (coupled withreciprocal stimulation and communication with the (m)other), the child “acquires a power of endogenous mastery that develops from a sense of confidence into a euphoric feeling of unlimited omnipotence” (80).

Now, my claim is that it is this unfulfilled con-tactile relation that is sorely visible, and underlies Starhemberg’s proclivities, in the aforesaid scene and throughout the play. This vitiated, loose envelope has occasioned an existential lacuna40 in Starhemberg, and can be held accountable for the deep sense of ontological dearth that gnaws him, and which has resulted in his ceaseless vagrancy and volatility of identity. Starhemberg conveys this intercorporeal vacuity, arising from the (m)other’s failure in *aesthetic reciprocity* (see Meltzer 1998)41, in terms of lack of vitality, slack skin (particularly her breasts) and infirm state, calling her “the antithesis of sculpture” and “the antithesis of abundance” (89) which evokes his later comparison between Katrin and Susanna (77). In brief, Starhemberg, in his visits to his (m)other, strenuously strives for something that is lacking there, yet he cannot restrain himself from seeking, and this corroborates the intensity of his fixation with, and urgency of, his psychosomatic need.

In the light of the preceding argument, I suggest that the act of “asking” in Starhemberg’s remark to his (m)other (“You have nothing to say but I have much toask” (88)) should be construed as haptically and orally intended, rather than primarily cognitively. More strictly, by this unremitting *asking*, he aspires to a(n) (intercorporeal) re-cognition, rather than (abstract) cognition. This carnal asking can be translated into (the Merleau-Pontian) terms of intercorporeal relation as “interrogation” (1969, 127-8)42: a voluptuous pursuit, and perception, of the interwovenness of the folds of flesh (of self and the other) and carnal intuition of the invisible (which is both inside and outside self and the other), thereby the attainment of an other-aware selfhood. Accordingly, Starhemberg’s gaze, in the aforementioned scene, solicits envelopment, and this affective interrogation is so intense that the (Second) Mother perceives it as a sensible disfigurement on her body/skin. This is a touch which was supposed to transfigure rather than disfigure, though.

The cogent testimony to the foregoing argument, which is also the key to the underlying reason for his visits, is disclosed when he professes to the (m)other: “I would have been your *child*. How I lay and wished I was *your child*. If I had been *your child* none of this would be necessary” (88). Equally revealingly, when Empress breaks the news of his mother's death to Starhemberg,he responds: “Dead? *But I hadn’t finished with her yet* [...] I shall have to *see her naked*, shan’t **I?** I shall have to wash her and she was not clean...” (105; italics mine). Relatedly, Empress calls the Second Mother, the “Mother of Deliverance”, which is irreducibly ambivalent and even ironic. It can be deemed to simultaneously designate the Second Mother as the phantasized (yet failed) deliverer of Starhemberg and also imply her as the mother of the deliverer or emancipator of Europe and European people, to wit, Starhemberg. Such a transfiguration of the self, as a restorative or redressing occurrence, is fulfilled through his encounter with Katrin, and not the mother; a considerable fact that once more attests to the fact that Barker’s play defies, and repudiates, the primacy and originariness of the familial or the domestic.

Notwithstanding the above discussion, however, Starhemberg’s conduct, akin to the idiosyncratic manners of Katrin, which distinguish her from a merely pathological example of a traumatized individual, is far from being solely confined to, or determined by, his traumatic fixation and pathologized skin-ego. In keeping with this point, my suggestion about the consideration of Starhemberg’s relentless concern with an event-based and inter-affective aesthetics of the self (with concomitants such as self-fabrication, self-transcendence, and self-overcoming) as indissociable from the terms of an ethics of singular relationship with the other is further corroborated by two points. On the one hand, Starhemberg’s concern with “love” and his conception of love reveal this concern; on the other, his perceptive remarks to the Turk (Ottoman general) containing his understanding of the issue of freedom, coupled with those of pain and love, in relation to the self and other (see *Ibid*.)

What further reveals Starhemberg’s attitude towards human selfhood43 and the subtleties of inter-personal relationships is his acute consciousness and understanding of love. In fact, this “act of self-overcoming is explicitly raised by Orphuls in his laudatory comment about Starhemberg: “The good have little pur­chase on the memory. Who would follow the innocent? No, you follow him *who triumphs over himself*, who boils within and in whose eyes all struggle rages. Him you follow to the water’s edge, and no other ... (He kisses STARHEMBERG’s hand.)” (104; emphasis mine). Significantly, Starhemberg is one who, far more frequently than all the other characters, refers to love (both as an affectivity and a concept/word), thereby revealing his gnawing preoccupation with it (as a paradigmatic evidence to his other-consciousness in the play). When the Empress suggestively asks him: “Cold mouth. Have you a mistress?” Starhemberg responds: “I love a woman,” to which Empress aptly retorts: “But your mouth is cold!” (75). Love to Starhemberg, as I will try to show, exceeds the bounds of a sheer amorous relation and is intimately associated with freedom, pain, imagination, and creativity, and all this primarily in the mode of proximity rather than identification, synthetic unity, or union.

C. The Efflorescence of the Third Skin

In the analysis of the later part of the play, I would like to advance the argument that in the process of *excendance,44* or super-individuation, (both Katrin and Starhemberg being in a state of extreme suffering/pain), the inter-human dimension that emerges between the self and the other is an essentially ‘inter-corporeal’ space, which is significant, not only because, by means of it, both parties transcend their own sensible and ethical limits, but, more importantly, because it is the outcome of the efflorescence of ‘a third skin’, which emerges out of and between both of them. This *third skin*, I propose, is the corporeal co-articulation of the self and the other. Crucially, this moment of proximity entails not a dialectical synthesis, but rather *a disjunctive synthesis* in which the singularity of both Katrin and Starhemberg is maintained. In other words, Katrin and Starhemberg, through their suffering, conjoined with suffering one another’s suffering, outgrow themselves; Starhemberg partially and provisionally reaches out of his habituated self (as a narcissistic-hysteric envelope) and Katrin forgoes her traumatized self (as an autistic-hysteric envelope or her envelope of suffering). As such, they create and enter *a shared skin*, a third envelope in which the self unfolds itself and enfolds what is other-than-the-self. This third skin, or envelope, is an envelope of proximity in the folds of which they are intertwined and through which an in-between and an evental moment of self-birth to other-than-the-self take place.

What is revealing in both scenes of co-birth and carnal intimacy between Katrin and Starhemberg is that Barker delineates this moment, in which they are momentarily denuded of their present envelopes and transcend their former skin egos, as both sitting against each other naked; in other words, this figural moment of aesthetic-ethical denudation and trans-substantiation has been transposed into a literal sense or scene of nakedness. There we read: “A room in Vienna, shuttered. The bell ceases. Into the obscurity, Starhemberg walks slowly. He removes his clothing, item by item. He goes to a chair, and sits. KATRIN is discovered, already naked, in a chair distantly opposite his own. They gaze, unfalteringly.” (109-110).

The moment is starkly marked by affectivity and somaesthetic sensibility: with consuming pain and intense ‘mutual exposure’ between the two in which they are intertwined. What should be noted is that, the term *exposure* and its correlate, *exposition*, are opaque, highly charged and multi-directional here. Exposition, here, does not mean an extraction or unveiling of intimacy; it does not signify the act of disclosure of an essence or self-exhibition. Otherwise then, *exposition of the self* would be crudely interpreted in terms of translation of a core self into a carnal medium (and as such, a spectacular act of striptease would be the apotheosis of self-revelation), and not merely an existentio-ethical exposure of the self to what is heteronomous and informed by the trace (of the other)45 and differánce. I suggest that here, ‘exposition’, true to its aesthetic and ethical implications, and above all, in light of the pivotal role of *skin* in the play, is an ‘ex-peausition’. It is an intermediary, interstitial and inter-facial act; and as such, its position is profoundly akin to that of skin; hence the moments of experience of pain are invariably coeval with exposure of skin, extension of skin, and exchange of skin.

Now Levinas can help us to explain the nature of skin (as sensibility and affectivity), and the dynamics of this act of “giving and exchanging skin” (as an act of self-transcendence, intercorporeal proximity between inter-ipseities, and self-cultivation). To recall discussions from the foregoing parts, if we distil Freud and Anzieu’s theory of the skin ego, we can state that we are both psychically and physically ‘beings-in-skin’. This conception of the individual leads us to, and constitutes a link with, Levinas’s depiction of an ethical subjectivity as a *being-in-a-skin*, or as he elsewhere articulates: “I am entrails in a skin” (*Totality and Infinity* 77)46. Correspondingly, Levinas determines the “self” as intrinsically interwoven with skin (corporeality), pain, and alterity; a characterization which is entirely congruent with Barker’s depiction of self in *The Europeans*. Levinas defines the very “living human corporeality” in terms of “a possibility of pain, a sensibility which of itself is the susceptibility to being hurt”. Worthy of attention is the manner Levinas’s definition of the self is akin to “the self” as it is depicted in *The Europeans*. The self, in Levinas’ delineation, is “a self despite itself, in incarnation, where it is the very possibility of suffering, suffering and trauma” (*OB* 50). He characterizes the self as “obsessed by the other with the passivity of a trauma, but one that prevents its own representation, a deafening trauma, cutting the thread of consciousness which should have welcomed it” (111); and proceeds to couch it specifically in terms of *skin*: “a self uncovered, exposed and suffering in its skin. In its skin it is stuck in its skin, not having its skin to itself, a vulnerability” (51). Though, in this trauma, he maintains: “the Good re-absorbs, or redeems, the violence of non-freedom” (123).

Even more suggestively, and germane to *The Europeans*, Levinas refers to the act of “giving skin” and defines the subject as an individual “that is hungry and eats, entrails in a skin, and thus capable of giving the bread out of his mouth, or *giving his skin*” (*TI* 77). In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas, taking his point of departure from his analysis of “the caress” in *Time and the Other*, combined with an affirmative adaptation from Merleau-Ponty’s last writings (see Perpich 116-9)47, and proceeds to posit “skin” as a paradigmatic site which illustrates the ambiguity of the “face”. Significantly Levinas, at different junctures, juxtaposes the face with skin and tends to deploy them interchangeably to the point of identification. Referring to skin in terms of the *face*, he argues: “Signifyingness is the immediacy of a skin and a face, a skin which is always a modification of a face, a face that is weighted down with a skin” (*OB* 85). As such, skin transpires as “the divergence between the visible and invisible” (Ibid 89). Further, as is firmly established in *Totality and Infinity*, the *face* is considered to be the paradigmatic emblem and locus of the ethical encounter/event as well as the manifestation of infinitude and transcendence; however, as we well know from Levinas’ elaboration, *face* is inherently *haptic* rather than optic; the face “is a demand, not a question. The face is a hand in search of recompense, an open hand” (*The Provocation of Levinas* 169).48

This skin should not be construed as ‘the physical skin’, or as confined to the representational and objectified body which is subjected to scrutiny in the natural sciences (see Boothroyd 132). It designates a non-conceptualizable sensibility, non-thematizable actuality, “a modality of subjectivity” (*OB* 26). What renders skin in Levinas’ account highly relevant and of substantial contribution to my analysis of Katrin and her relationship with Starhemberg is that skin features as a ‘not-yet-decided’ (hence it is fluid and malleable, with intense aesthetic potentiality) and a passive and vulnerable entity (thus enhancing its ethical nature and rendering it highly amenable to being used as the material of ethics). As Boothroyd, elucidating Levinas’s statement that “[a]s passivity, in the paining of the pain felt, [skin as] sensibility is a vulnerability” (*OB* 55) – argues: “exposure to the other [through skin] is at one and the same time surface of all possible contact and the exposedness to injury, wounding and violence – and physical pain itself” (156).49

Thus, in the climactic scene, stark nakedness reveals the excess of sensibility, inter-corporeal exposure, and vulnerability; and the act of denudation, on both Katrin’s and Starhemberg’s part, features as an act of self-giving through which each self turns itself into a possibility of utmost solicitation, inter-affective responsivity, and inter-relational becoming. As such, the *haptic gaze* proves to be the totality of the body (or exposed skin) through which the totality of sensible-spiritual capacities are offered for reciprocal enfoldment, intercorporeal proximity in the haptic gaze. To more strictly elaborate on the *haptic gaze* involved in the scene, which offers the possibility of confluence without fusion, the haptic/tactile aspect of incarnate gaze is foregrounded by Merleau-Ponty who argues for the possibility of palpating others with the look “because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh”.50 This point is also confirmed by Roland Barthes when he observes: “by gaze I touch, I seize, I am seized” (*Responsibility of Forms* 238).51 This is the way, in that moment of “unfaltering gaze” between them, Starhemberg “gives skin” to Katrin, and she to him, thereby overcoming their traumatized skin-egos. This extreme mode of communication as “proximity”, I shall suggest, explains the sheer absence of language or utter speechlessness by both characters, since according to Levinas this “relationship of proximity ... is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication” (*Collected* 119).52

Strikingly apposite in this regard is that Jean-Luc Nancy too, in his philosophical reflections on the body, construes ‘expeausition’ as skin-show (33). This act, in accord with the fundamental ambiguity of skin/flesh and con-tactile aesthetics involved in the play, is an act of both exposition/exposure and concealment/withdrawal. Such a move requires that one treat oneself as a constantly *entre-deux* (in-between two or inter-mediary) phenomenon (see *Visible* 147-8; 194-5); in other words, it defies metaphysics of presence and self-identity, and requires self-distanciation or self-parting. Nancy’s cogent discussion can be illuminating in this regard: “Exposition … means that expression itself is an intimacy and a withdrawal. The a-part-selfis not translated or incarnated into exposition, it is what it is there: this vertiginous withdrawal *of* the self *from* the self that is needed to open the infinity of that withdrawal *all the way up to* self” (33-4). Furthermore, he accordingly defines body as a mobile sensible in a perpetual state of self-transcendence, as this “departure of self to self. The body is self indeparture, insofar as it parts - displaces itself right here from the here” (Ibid). As such, the *skin* transpires as an essentially intermediary, incomplete and dehiscent space which is characterized by the opening of sense, the passage of sensibility, and unfolding of carnality.

And it is owing to this, I maintain, that Katrin exposes herself and calls this act of exposition an act of love (as self-exposure and self-transcendence, in a Levinasian sense). She says: “I show myself to you. I show myself, and it is an act of love. Stay in your place! … You were not moving, no ... (Pause) I am in such a torment it would be an act of pity to approach me, pure pity, but you will not, will you?” (109). Hence, in keeping with Katrin’s severely infringed skin, the intimate communication between them takes place in the subtlest and least literally haptic mode of contact: (the carnal light of) the gaze. Their con/tactile moment of love takes place in the textures of light: “Yes, may I call you my love, whether or not you love me I must call you my love, **don't get up!**” (Ibid).

In accord with the foregoing, seemingly conflictual, features of the scene, the agony and ardour of the moment have been couched in an oxymoronic language: the language of love in lacerating terms: “I am in the most beautiful Hell.Praise me a little, mutter me a bit, describe, describe for Christ in Heaven’s sake, I could gnaw your knees to blood, and you mine, I know you could”. Pain, here, figures as an involuted fold: both outward and inward, both as gathering and dissipating, both including and excluding, inscribed with self and the other. This pain of co-birth is at once rending and redeeming, at once dis-assembling and re-assembling. The aforesaid idiosyncrasies render this peculiar mode of pain as intensely akin to the features of folds of the flesh (delineated by Merleau-Ponty in terms of reflexivity and divergence (see *Visible* 130-156)) integral to the moment of intercorporeal proximity (an *entre-deux* moment of simultaneous dehiscence and *connaissance*) between self and the other. Furthermore, what should be noted is that this radical exposure and ostensible passivity towards the other (manifest in Katrin’s and Starhemberg’s sitting still facing each other) should not be taken at face value, to wit, as passive rather than active. Contrarily, given the evident ramifications of this exposure and passivity in the play, I suggest, we should conceive of this passivity in a Levinasian sense: passivity as the manifestation of utmost passion and potentiality. In this regard, “radical passivity” (see Wall 1).52

The releasing and regenerative effect of the encounter immediately exhibits itself in Katrin’s assertion that: “I'm better now, much better ...” Then she proceeds to express her bewilderment at the amatory potentialities of the look, which expectedly arises from the traditional and historical association of sense of sight with scopic/specular economy, specularization, fetishism and ocularcentrism, which in their own turn, are inveterately bound up with phallocentrism, male visual mastery and visual rape (see Jay 493-5, 526-540).53 She professes: “It's odd, but though I have done all that sug­gesteditself to me, I never looked at any man but you, I think. Looked, I mean. I never knew to look was love” (109).

What renders both persons so amenable to the creation of this aesthetic-ethical moment is that neither of them is an idealist and neither aspires to identification, synthetic unity, reconciliation, and thus the dissolution of the self or subsumption of the other. We already witnessed how vehemently she rebuffed any pretentious gesture of pity, empathy or sympathy and also repudiated collectivity, historicization and institutionalization at the cost of dis-individuation in her scathing remarks on her sister and home as an instrument of reconciliation. With regard to Starhemberg’s deep distrust of such an appropriative and exploitative approach, there are two illuminating passages; one is uttered by Katrin and substantiates his aversion towards such a sublational synthesis: “I know because you are not kind, thank God, you spare us kindness, and your body is quite grey, itis so far from perfect, you spare us perfection also!” The other articulation of disbelief in the ideal unity of self and the other is made by Starhemberg himself: “No moment of unity is ever true” (83).

Thus, notwithstanding the apparent absence of any visible act of “touching” between them, they “caress,” rather than touch,54 one another through their con/tactile *gazes* and this is the manifestation of the utmost love; the fulfillment of their harrowing, yet implacable, “Struggles to Love”, as reflected in the subtitle of the play. Barker himself alludes to the occurrence of this event as one of the rarest moments in his drama: “The word love is not uncommon in my work, but I only edged towards a meaning for it in *The Europeans*”. Significantly, he proceeds to affirm that this love in *The Europeans* “is in many ways not mediated through the body, as desire is” (Barker in Brown 60-1). These observations strongly corroborate the proposed analysis of the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the two characters expounded in terms of caress and the third skin above. Accordingly, Barker also describes Starhemberg’s love for Katrin as “a love for her completion, her pursuit, which he perceives and perhaps judges more finely than she does herself” (Ibid).

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**Notes**

1 *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. Henceforth referred to as *AT*.

2 I am using the term “materialist transcendental element” in the sense articulated by Deleuze in relation to his “transcendental empiricist” account of the genesis of sense. By abovementioned term I mean the instance that circulates within the space of the transcendental field of sense and performs an act of disjunctive synthesis (a process that effects the transition from the physical surface to the formation of the metaphysical or cerebral surface of sense (where surface and sense are used nearly interchangeably and synonymously); thus designating the space/material that is differentiated. During this process, the good object is split into the maternal body and the phallus. For a detailed explanation of this process see his elaboration of the ego ideal in his account of the dynamic genesis in *The Logic of Sense*, see the Series on static and dynamic genesis; see also 72-3. *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester, ed. C. V. Boundas, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

3 In the sense variously elaborated by Bataille and Levinas, rather than Kant.

4 The latter, in its own turn, lends credence to my argument concerning the central/primal role of the mother, and corroborates my postulation of a prevalent (m)other Principle in Barker’s plays, while simultaneously revealing the biographical, or personal, roots and traces of this feature in Barker.

5 Howard Barker and Eduardo Houth, *A Style and Its Origin,* (London: Oberon, 2007):p.13. Henceforth referred to as *Style*.

6 The implications and significance of this fusion of laughter, overdetermined fabric/cloth (the handkerchief, the sheet, etc.,), and inter-personal relation can be further illuminated by reference to passages in *Death the One, and the Art of Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005. Henceforth referred to as *DOAT*)where these three are linked together through the issue of seduction (see 8). Elsewhere in the same book, there appears a similar constellation of elements evoking an interplay of component which opens up the possibility of an eventful encounter with the other or new configuration of circumstances that might lead to the emergence of new dynamics and modes of perception and self-relation (see *DOAT* 8).

7 *He Stumbled* in *Collected Plays Four* (London: Calder Publications, 1998).

8 *Rome* in *Collected Plays Two*,(London: Calder Publications, 1993).

9 *BLOK/EKO*, (London: Oberon Books, 2011).

10 *(Uncle) Vanya* in *Collected Plays Two*,(London: Calder Publications, 1993).

11 *The Europeans* in *Collected Plays Three*. (London: Calder and Calder, 1996).

12 I am deploying the term “the other” in the sense articulated in Levinasian ethics (to wit, the singular human individual in a face-to-face relation with the self) throughout the article, unless otherwise stated. More lucidly, the ethical relation to the other is non-foundational, non-cognitive, and non-ontological; thus the other is not reducible to the totality of the self, knowledge, or to an element in the self’s world, but rather is infinitely other and metaphysically transcendent to the self.

13 My conception of proximity derives from the philosophical insights purveyed primarily by Levinas, but also those elaborated by Deleuze, Blanchot, and Bataille. Below I schematically sketch out the chief features of proximity as used in the course of this paper, which are principally distilled from Levinas’ work. First, proximity involves a non-synthetic and non-dialectical relation between the other and the self, which is irreducible to intentional (noetic-noematic) or subject-object dichotomies. Proximity is neither a subjective nor an objective relation or communion, but is rather a *contaminating communication of anarchic sensibility*, involving the transitivity of the affects and the adoption of an abject or accusative position prior to assuming a subjective position, or positing (or comprehending) the Other in a representational present (see *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998, pp. 7, 9-10, 16, 100. Henceforth referred to as *OB*. Second, rather than designating a sense of *adequation*, proximity is informed with an *obsessive* urgency and repetition of a rapport with alterity (see *OB* xxv, xxxiv, 91, 197). Third, proximity is an intercorporeal co-implication and interlacement which is irreducible to *manifestation*. Fourth, in proximity, subjective identity and autonomous agency of the self are rendered infinitely passive in its exposition. Fifth, in proximity a heteronomous, compelling excess persists in negation. This negation, nevertheless, should not be interpreted as the counterforce to, or opposite of, affirmation; nor as being susceptible to the Hegelian labour of the negative (*OB* 141-9, 197-8). Sixth, in terms of temporality, proximity occurs in a diachronic mode, rather than a synchronic one. Hence, precluding the possibility of synchrony (time of consciousness, intentionality, and identity), present and representation - which are the conditions for, and conducive to symmetry and identity, adequation and knowledge (in the form of thematization and conceptualization) (*OB* 100, 127). Finally, proximity is an approach of an exteriority which itself holds no sway over self, but against which self has no power either (see also Joseph Libertson. *Proximity: Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982): p.208.

14 More strictly, a self that recognizes the vital significance of the other for its being and becoming.

5 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A. Rand, Fordham University Press, New York, 2008.

6 The distinction between *chronology* as the time of pseudo-history and *kairology* as the time of authentic history as two opposite modes of temporality or approaches to history, wielded here, is made by Giorgio Agamben in his *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron. (London: Verso, 1993): pp. 104-5.

17 For the first instances of the appearance of this dichotomy, see the subtitle to Barker’s *The Power of the Dog: Moments in History and Anti-History* in *Collected Plays Three* (London: Calder and Calder, 1996). Later the antithetical categorization is reiterated by Dancer in *Hated Nightfall* in *Collected Plays Five* (London:Calder Publications, 2001): p.33. Also see Rabey’s comments in Karoline Gritzner and D. I. Rabey (Eds.) *Essays on Catastrophe*: *New Essays on Howard Barker*. (London: Oberon Books, 2006): p*.*18.

18 I am deploying “event” primarily in the sense articulated by Deleuze, but also with a view to Badiou’s use and definition of the term. In Deleuze, to put it rather briefly, events are primarily events of sense, or that of productions of sense (“We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself. The event belongs essentially to language; it has an essential relationship to language. But language is what is said of things” (*Logic of Sense* p.22; see also pp.3, 72).

19 In fact, analogous non-synthetic (negative) dialectics and tension-laden dynamics continue to inform and are vividly detectable in some of Barker’s other plays, such as *Victory*, *The Power of the Dog*, *The Castle*, *The Bite of the Night*, *The Gaoler’s Ache*, *Fence in its Thousandth Year*, and *Ecstatic Bible*, among others. Brown, Mark (ed.). *Howard Barker Interviews 1980-2010*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2011).

20 See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*,trans. by Margaret Waller with an Introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, pp.107-127).

21 The excerpt is from “The Sunless Garden of the Unconsoled” given as a paper at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, July 10, 2009. This copy in conjunction with a series of other essays and lectures, delivered preceding and subsequent to it, were kindly provided by Howard Barker to the author. This paper has recently been included in a collection of articles on Barker’s theatre. See *Howard Barker and the Art of* Theatre (2014). Eds. D. I. Rabey and S. Goldingay Manchester University Press, 207-11.

22 See David Ian Rabey, *Howard Barker: Politics and Desire*. London: Macmilan, 1989): pp.229-242.

23 See David Barnett, “Howard Barker: Polemic Theory and Dramatic Practice. Nietzsche, Metatheatre, and the Play *The Europeans*.” *Modern Drama* 44.4 (2001): pp.458-475.

24 For an extended explication of these two term in relation to Barker’s drama see Alireza Fakhrkonandeh’s “The Acousmatic Voice as the Chiasmatic Flesh: An Analysis of Howard Barker’s *Gertrude-The Cry*”, in *Symploke*, issue 22:1-2, December 2014: pp. 193-255.

25 These three plays - *Distance* (2013), *Concentration* (2013), and *Dying in the Street* (2013) - were kindly supplied by Howard Barker to the author.

26 Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id” (1923) in *Standard Edition* 19: 1–66. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953–74) trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis.

27 Didier Anzieu *L’Epiderme nomade et la peau psychique*. (Paris: Les Editions du College de psychanaylse groupale et familiale,1990): p.58 in Naomi Segal *Consensuality: Didier Anzieu, Gender and the sense of Touch* Amsterdam: Rodopi 2009): p. 44; see also Didier Anzieu *The Skin Ego*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989): p.28.

28 Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

29 Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).

30 Though later he removes “toxic function of self-destruction” as solely a negative and pathological dysfunction.

31 That is to say, tactile plus oral.

31 Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*. Trans. Nicola Luckhurst, London: Penguin Books, 2004, pp.196-216).

32 See Stavros Mentzos, 2000 [1991]. “Einleitung”. In *Studien über Hysterie*. Eds. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. (Frankurt a.M.: Fischer): pp.7–20; Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995); And Elisabeth Bronfen. *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

33 McDougall, Joyce. *Theatres of the Body.* London: Free Association Books, 1989.

34 See Cathy Caruth 11). Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience*. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press,1996): p.11.

35 See Elaine Scarry, *Body in Pain*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987): pp.60-61.

36 The crucial point concerning Katrin’s hysteria is that her manifestation, and deployment, of hysteria can be characterized as both “strategic” and “symptomatic”. As such, it can be observed that she wields hysteria for self-reconstruction, self-expression (of her pain and desire either cathartically or compulsively), and self-reflection on the one hand; and as a vector for disruptive mimicry, offending pacifist sensibilities, and instilling anamnesis on the other.

37see Emanuel Levinas, *Proper Names,* trans. by M. B. Smith. (London: The Athlone Press, 1996): p. 44.

38 See Jacques Lacan *Ecrits.* Trans. Bruce Fink. London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): pp.462-3; see also *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis 1969–1970*, Jacques- Alain Miller (ed.), trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008): pp. 85-91, 118, 129; see also *The Ethics of* *Psychoanalysis* *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Book VII 1959-1960. The Seminar Jacques Lacan. Ed. Jacques Alain Miller. Trans. Dennis Porter. New York: Norton, 1983): pp. 2, 283, 321.

39 Anzieu, perceptively, does not restrict the nurturing figure relation and role to a familial context/grid (mother) or gendered figure (female) the actual gendered mother, and instead refers to “a mothering figure” who can even be a male person irrespective of the biological gender of the individual.

40 For further information, see Elisabeth Grosz (12-4) and Freud (1914, 87-8). Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1989).

4 Such a condition, in a psychoanalytical context, as analysed by Anzieu, is tied with obsessive neurosis or repetition compulsion and might result in cases of hysteria and severe psychosis. See Donald Meltzer, Adhesive Identification (1975) in *Contemporary Psycho-Analysis 11*: pp. 289-310.

42 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis; (Northwestern University Press, 1969). Hitherto referred to as *The Visible*. See also “Interrogation and Intuition” in *The Visible*.

43 In terms of Nietzschean existentialist aesthetics of the self, the dynamics and indispensable components of such a process of self-cultivation - far from excluding or exploiting the other or entailing a sovereign autonomy of the self - include “pathos of distance,” - which invariably presume a self-distanciation and self-difference inherent within the self along with the necessity of relationality to the other (see Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. J. Hollingdale. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973): p.257; see also *Genealogy of Morals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 1:2); and “self-overcoming,” - which primarily applies to self rather than others (see *Beyond* 212; *Genealogy* III :27; *Thus Spoke* *Zarathustra* Trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006): pp.88-90; see also Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, (London: Routledge 1997): pp.63-71.

44 To put it rather bluntly, the term designates super-individuation, or transcending a state of self-immersion and of being self-riveted. For an extended explication of the term see Levinas’ *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003): pp. 54-6.

45 I am deploying the notion of the trace in the sense variously attributed to it by Levinas and Derrida. The trace is associated with an ethics of the other (featuring as a pre-originary urge to an exposure to the other) affective trace and non-ontological memory. The trace describes what disrupts the totality of ontology, self’s knowledge of the other, and sovereign subjectivity; and denotes what defies and metaphysics of presence and a logocentric conception of autonomous self, temporality, and corporeality.

46 *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*,trans. by A. Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990). Henceforth referred to as *TI*.

47Dianne Perpich, *The Ethics of Emanuel Levinas.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

48 Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (Eds). *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking The Other*, (London: Routledge, 1989): p.169.

49 Boothroyd 156. Boothroyd, David “Beyond Suffering I Have No Alibi” in *Nietzsche and Levinas: After the Death of a Certain God*, Stauffer, Jill and Bergo, Bettina (eds.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

50 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Basic Writings*. Ed. Thomas Baldwin. London: Routledge, 2004): p.249.

51 Emanuel Levinas, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Arts, and Representation*,trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985): p. 238

52 *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1987). Trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

53 See Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity*. (New York: State University of New York, 1999): p. 1

54 See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, California: University of California Press. 1993): pp.493-5, 526-540.

55 See Levinas *TI* 258; see also *Time and the Other* *Time and the Other,* trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987): p. 89.