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The Horror of Myth. Turns in Genre and the Body in Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*

As a story of conspiracy, murder, betrayal and compulsive dancing, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Sophocles seems to have all the theatrical elements and dramaturgical authority of an immediate success. Yet the 1903 dramatic version of *Elektra* is seldom studied and seldom performed, at least in comparison to the 1909 opera adaptation with Richard Strauss. The original stage version is nevertheless a fascinating text that Hofmannsthal repeatedly felt the need to excuse and explain. He published *Authentische Vorschriften für die Inszenierung*, or detailed prescriptions for the play's staging, along with the original text, and he already began sketching an essay entitled *Vertheidigung der Elektra* before its premiere. In this essay, he remarked: »Wir müssen uns den Schauer des Mythos *neu* erschaffen«.¹ Using this quote as my point of departure, I wish to explore how Hofmannsthal's version of the Elektra myth can be understood as »schaurig«, or horrific, what sort of turns this reveals in reading the text, and what the broader implications are for current trends in the literary theory. I will begin with a brief overview of the Sophoclean pre-text to clarify its elements of horror and where they may have gotten lost before sketching Hofmannsthal's historical, aesthetic and literary context. After turning my attention to the role that bodies and corporeality play in developing a new sense of horror, my final steps will be to position those findings relative to recent scholarship categorized under the performative and body turns. My goal is twofold: to highlight how this play represents a turning point in Hofmannsthal's career and aesthetic trends at the *fin de siècle*, and also to consider how this reading of *Elektra* affects more general approaches to research methodology and literary scholarship.

Sophocles's *Electra* addresses a fragment of the five-generational curse placed on the royal House of Atreus. Stripping away the first three generations of patricide, infanticide, adultery, incest and cannibalism as dealt with in Aeschylus's and Euripides's dramas, Sophocles focuses only on the last two generations. Before the play begins, Agamemnon has secretly sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia in order to sail to the Trojan War. In revenge, his wife Clytemnestra and her new lover Aegisthus (who is also Agamemnon's cousin) kill Agamemnon upon his return and the two then seize the

¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Vertheidigung der Elektra*. In: Idem: *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Ausgabe. Bd. VII: Dramen 5*. Eds. Klaus E. Bohnenkamp and Mathias Mayer. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1997, p. 368. Emphasis in the original.

throne. Sophocles's drama tells how Electra, one of Iphigenia's surviving sisters, welcomes their brother Orestes back from exile and how Orestes kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in a final act of vengeance. Although Sophocles's version bears Electra's name, it begins and ends with Orestes. Electra is only present at the core of the play and she never plays the role of an active agent; she only ever speaks. Her first interaction is with the chorus, who functions as the women and people of Mycenae. She then has individual scenes with her other sister Chrysothemis, her mother Clytemnestra and her brother Orestes. The primary subject matter of Sophocles's dialogue consists of discussions about how to honor authority figures both alive and deceased, be they gods, rulers, or parents.

Sophocles's text is indeed concerned with horrible subject matter, for how is it possible to maintain cultural norms and avenge your father's death when it requires committing matricide? Additionally, bloody murders both precede and end the drama, but the staging and the language read today as restrained, moderate and, in the words of Hofmannsthal himself, »advocatorisch«.² Perhaps this is because of the classical convention to only report any violent acts rather than representing them on stage; perhaps it is because the antique Electra and Orestes have already decided what must be done and there is little need for psychological deliberation. Despite Hofmannsthal's critique of Sophocles's language, he insisted the classic drama still could thrill and terrify audiences familiar with classical conventions, but that it had lost its effect on the majority of modern spectators.³ I would like to suggest that in adapting and re-invigorating this ancient Greek tragedy, in re-casting the title figure into a more active role and in re-centering the drama's emphasis on the body, Hofmannsthal was experimenting with a newly emergent aesthetic language that crossed generic and medial boundaries – namely, the horror film.

The emergence of cinema in Germany-speaking Europe also coincided with a turning point in Hofmannsthal's literary career. The Skladanowsky Brothers introduced Berlin to the movies in 1895, eight years before *Elektra*, and cinema quickly spread through the rest of Germany and Austria. It was not until 1911, eight years after *Elektra*, that Hofmannsthal first became actively involved in movie production.⁴ In the years surrounding the

² Ibidem.

³ Cf. Andreas Thomasberger: *Nachwort*. In: Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Elektra. Tragödie in einem Aufzug*. Stuttgart: Reclam 2001 (RUB; 18113), pp. 71–79, here p. 76.

⁴ Assenka Oksiloff: *Archaic Modernism. Hofmannsthal's Cinematic Aesthetics*. In: *The Germanic Review* 78 (1998), pp. 70–85 suggests convincingly that the »stumme Sprache« invoked in Hofmannsthal's *Chandos Letter* both anticipates and implicitly reacts to the language and aesthetics of silent film in the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, though his direct involvement began nearly a full decade later, evidence is available that Hofmannsthal was aware of and influenced by the emergence of cinema in its early years.

turn of the century, Hofmannsthal established his legacy in literary and intellectual history with the publication of the »Lord Chandos Letter«, but also shifted his literary production from the early poetry and lyric dramas to the stage dramas, operas and prose works. In bringing his dramas to the stage, Hofmannsthal developed a mutually inspired relationship with the director Max Reinhardt. Beyond their work together as co-founders of the Salzburg Festival in 1918, Hofmannsthal selected Reinhardt to stage the first production of *Elektra*, and Reinhardt's first movie was a screen adaptation of the Hofmannsthal pantomime *Sumurûn* (1910).

With this professional partnership in place, Hofmannsthal and Reinhardt helped to redefine the aesthetic trends of the early twentieth century. Reinhardt's influence on Hofmannsthal's staging prescriptions becomes apparent in the exaggerated use of lighting effects and shadows. Lotte Eisner has demonstrated how Reinhardt established his reputation as a master of theatrical chiaroscuro and how his transposition of this technique from the stage to the screen came to characterize a central element of Expressionist cinema.⁵ It is less immediately obvious how Reinhardt's influence on aesthetic trends at this time also manifest themselves in Hofmannsthal's 1903 stage drama. Labeling *Elektra* as an Expressionist work would be anachronistic, but because of the author's staging instructions, we can see how its aesthetic stylizations are consistent with features that would define Expressionist cinema in the following decades.⁶ The play is set in the inner courtyard of a palace, whose windows are asymmetrical and of varying sizes, thus creating an irregular, unpredictable space. The windows remain unlit in order to create the impression of »unheimliche schwarze Höhlen« and evoke a feeling of »jenes Lauernde, Versteckte des Orients«.⁷ He calls for a massive, twisted fig tree to appear upstage center and be backlit by a setting sun, so that »tiefe Flecken von Roth und Schwarz erfüllen, von diesem Baum ausgeworfen, die ganze Bühne«.⁸ Classic Expressionist films, such as Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), and Lang's *M* (1931), employ elements of this design in their movie sets. The stage

⁵ Cf. Lotte Eisner: *The Haunted Screen. Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1969, p. 47.

⁶ An exact definition of Expressionism is and should remain a fluid concept. For the sake of brevity, I understand Expressionism as an artistic movement that addresses the alienation and traumas linked with modern urbanization and World War I, while also reviving Romantic and Gothic aesthetics from the early to mid-nineteenth century. The literature on what and when Expressionism was is too extensive to list here, but the above-cited monograph by Eisner and Siegfried Kracauer's *Von Caligari zu Hitler. Eine psychologische Geschichte des deutschen Films* remain two classics as starting points for this discussion.

⁷ Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Authentische Vorschriften für die Inszenierung*. In: Idem: *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Ausgabe. Bd. VII: Dramen 5*. Eds. Klaus E. Bohnenkamp and Mathias Mayer. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1997, pp. 379–381, here p. 380.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

lighting for *Elektra* is to be cast primarily in red tones, reminiscent of the monochromatic tinting in early silent films, but used in this case to create the illusion of a stage drenched in blood. A number of flickering torches provide mobile lighting across the stage to supplement the fading sun, and the selected spots of light on stage emphasize the light's variability. All of this creates in a 1903 stage drama what Eisner attributes to later Expressionist cinema as »the iridescent ambiguities [...] and ephemeral hues of nature«.⁹

Though *Elektra* exhibits qualities of Expressionist cinema, it is still a far cry to instantly associate this with the genre of horror film. With regards to medial limitations, cinema and literature can explore a broader range of terror and fright more easily than the stage. Movies such as Murnau's *Nosferatu* or Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* films can manufacture horror through various editing techniques and special effects. Literature can realize horror with relative ease through vivid descriptions and the readers' imagination. But it is more difficult to enact the graphic nature and brutalities associated with the horror genre on a live stage.¹⁰ Throughout the history of theater, the German stage frequently engaged with difficult psychological issues, but the standard repertoire is often classified under moral dramas, Naturalism or Realism rather than a genre of staged psychological horror. How then is it possible to interpret the Expressionist, cinematic qualities of Hofmannsthal's stage drama as an anticipation of the horror film?

Before proceeding further, I must first establish what the term »horror« refers to in my reading. In surveying recent scholarship on horror films, I have found four perspectives helpful in considering the theory behind this generic label. In the introduction to his anthology on horror film, Steffen Hantke rejects the tautology of horror as a narrative in which the events or characters are »simply and self-evidently horrific«.¹¹ While the literal horror still plays an important role, Cynthia Freeland suggests horror also mani-

⁹ Eisner: *The Haunted Screen*, p. 10.

¹⁰ One exception to this would be the Grand Guignol in Paris, which opened in 1897 and grew to brief popularity in London in the 1920s. The plays performed at the Grand Guignol were famous of their depictions of direct corporeal violence against its actors on stage. The theater phenomenon never gained a significant foothold in Germany or Austria, and its influence on cinema seems largely untouched by the secondary literature. Adam Lowenstein briefly discusses the legacy of the Grand Guignol for the cinema, but ties it to the 1960 (!) French film *Eyes Without a Face*. Adam Lowenstein: *Shocking Representation. Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film*. New York: Columbia UP 2005, pp. 46–48. For a more thorough history of this French and British horror theater tradition, Richard Hand and Michael Wilson have written two excellent monographs: *Grand-Guignol. The French Theater of Horror* (2002) and *London's Grand Guignol and the Theater of Horror* (2007).

¹¹ Steffen Hantke: *Horror Film and the Apparatus of Cinema*. In: Idem (Ed.): *Horror Film. Creating and Marketing Fear*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi 2004, pp. vii–xiii, here p. ix.

fest itself through the overturning of a natural order.¹² This natural order need not coincide with the values and standards of the spectators' world and it does not need to involve a literal or metaphorical monster; it questions the repercussions of an inversion of norms. Besides these first two aspects, i.e. self-evident horror and the overturning of a natural order, a third aspect of horror is related to the notion of trauma. This reveals itself in one of two ways: either the events of the film depict a personal or collective trauma that must be worked through, or a historical trauma has produced the conditions for the film's horror. Most scholarship along these lines focuses on displaced representations of the Holocaust, World War II, the Vietnam War or post-traumatic stress disorder, to highlight only a small range of possibilities.¹³ Finally, Linda Williams identifies horror along with melodrama and pornography as three main »body genres« because of the body's centrality in the production process and the spectators' frequently corporeal response.¹⁴

In relating these three perspectives on the genre of horror back to *Elektra*, it is difficult to pinpoint a single historical trauma that the play addresses. That Hofmannsthal, as a fairly nationalist Austrian, would be writing this play for the Berlin stage speaks against a uniquely national concern behind the play. Instead, it seems more plausible to think of *Elektra* as a work that unifies the first two theories on horror: overturning dominant norms with respect to the family, and the personal trauma that ensues. As a play centering on patricide in a royal family, it is tempting to view the murders as a destabilization of the rulers' legitimization, and thereby as an implicit inclusion of the public sphere. The structure of Hofmannsthal's adaptation however indicates that other concerns have shifted to the foreground in his version. Sophocles's pre-text featured a chorus that functioned as the people of Mycenae and thereby included the voice of the populous, but Hofmannsthal refashioned this group into a handful of household servants. In doing so, he effectively stripped *Elektra* of its overt connection to the public realm and restricted it to a domestic tragedy. Hofmannsthal also transformed the title character's reaction to the trauma of losing her father. She is no longer the reflective, mournful, apologetic thinker of the Sophoclean version, who links the more active characters into a coherent narrative, but

¹² Cf. Cynthia A. Freeland: *Introduction*. In: Idem: *The Naked and the Undead. Evil and the Appeal of Horror*. Boulder: Westview Press 2000, pp. 1–21, here p. 8.

¹³ The above-cited books by Freeland and Lowenstein thematize trauma as an element of their analyses, the latter more directly than the former. Two other volumes that push in this direction are Linnie Blake: *The Wounds of Nations. Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity*. Manchester, New York: Manchester UP 2008 and Stephen Prince (Ed.): *The Horror Film*. New Brunswick, London: Rutgers 2004.

¹⁴ Cf. Linda Williams: *When the Woman Looks*. In: Barry Keith Grant (Ed.): *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press 1996, pp. 15–35.

rather she is a strong-willed daughter, who inflicts trauma on others while working through the horrors of her own experience.¹⁵ She viciously defends her deceased father, graphically imagines three murders, attacks the servants and her mother, insults her mother's lover before leading him to his death and effectively seduces her sister.

Elektra's actions, as well as those by her sister Chrysothemis and her mother Clytemnestra, evoke aspects of all three body genres: melodrama, pornography and horror. Nearly every character's entrance is marked by stage directions for another character to react in surprise or terror with their eyes and hands. These exaggerated reactions are reminiscent of performance techniques from melodramatic theater and cinema, but because the play continually pulls towards revenge through matricide, the stylized acting does not fall into the humorous or ridiculous. In terms of the pornographic or sexualized body, Elektra mocks her sister initially for her desire to bear children and to share her bed with a lover. Yet when Elektra requires her sister's help in Aegisthus's and Clytemnestra's murders, she glorifies Chrysothemis's body in a gesture of nearly incestuous seduction and reproductive glory.

Wie stark du bist! dich haben
 die jungfräulichen Nächte stark gemacht.
 Wie schlank und biegsam deine Hüften sind!
 Du windest dich durch jeden Spalt, du hebst dich
 durch's Fenster! Laß mich deine Arme fühlen:
 wie kühl und stark sie sind! Wie du mich abwehrst,
 fühl' ich, was das für Arme sind. Du könntest
 mich, oder einen Mann mit deinen Armen
 an deine kühlen festen Brüste pressen,
 daß man ersticken müßte! [...]
 [...]
 Du bist wie eine Frucht am Tag der Reife.
 Von jetzt an will ich deine Schwester sein,
 so wie ich niemals deine Schwester war!
 Ich will mit dir in deiner Kammer sitzen
 und warten auf den Bräutigam, für ihn
 will ich dich salben, und ins duftige Bad
 sollst du mir tauchen wie der junge Schwan
 und deinen Kopf an meiner Brust verbergen,
 bevor er dich, die durch die Schleier glüht
 wie eine Fackel, in das Hochzeitsbett
 mit starken Armen zieht.
 [...]
 und wenn auf einmal auf dem nackten Schoß
 dir ein Lebendiges liegt, erschreckend fast,
 so heb' ich dir's empor, so hoch! damit

¹⁵ Regarding the character traits of the Sophoclean Electra, see her scene with the women of Mycenae in lines 162–326 in Sophocles: *Electra*. In: Idem: *Electra and Other Plays*. Transl. by Edward Fairchild Watling. Middlesex et al.: Penguin Books 1984, pp. 68–117, here pp. 73–78.

sein Lächeln hoch von oben in die tiefsten
 geheimsten Klüfte deiner Seele fällt
 und dort das letzte, eisig Gräßliche
 vor dieser Sonne schmilzt und du's in hellen
 Tränen ausweinen kannst.¹⁶

Elektra not only praises and admires the strength of her sister's arms and hips, but desires to bathe and anoint her in preparation for her wedding night. Rather than cursing Chrysothemis to suffer at the hands of her children, as she did in their opening dialogue, Elektra hopes the fruit of her sister's ripe condition will melt away the last residues to icy terror. In order to realize her fantasy of matricide, Elektra glorifies her sister's body in highly sexualized language that violates accepted cultural norms for two sisters' relationship.

Chrysothemis rejects Elektra's encouraging advances and violent schemes with the counter-suggestion to flee the family home. She does not wish more blood to flow; she wishes to escape and start a new life free from the memory of her sister's death on the sacrificial altar and her father's death at her mother's hand. Elektra by contrast is driven to continue overturning traditional familial relations. She seduce her sister into assisting with their mother's murder because of the trauma she experienced when her mother violated traditional relationships to husband (murder) and son (banishment). Although many of the same scenarios are present in Sophocles's and Hofmannsthal's versions of the drama – new life, sacrifice, and murder – Sophocles's language focuses more heavily on emotional conditions and moral values, such as honor, courage, shame and mourning, whereas the body plays a central role as the primary site of these debates in Hofmannsthal's adaptation.

Though Hantke insists that horror is more than the obviously terrible and violent, these qualities still remain an important component of the horror in Hofmannsthal's re-working of the ancient tragedy. Elektra's opening monologue demonstrates her strained mental condition through her imagined resurrection of Agamemnon and the re-creation of his bloody demise.¹⁷ In her

¹⁶ Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*. In: Idem: *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Ausgabe. Bd. VII: Dramen 5*. Eds. Klaus E. Bohnenkamp and Mathias Mayer. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1997, pp. 61–109, here pp. 92–94. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷ The majority of scholarship on Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* positions itself relative to a psychoanalytical interpretation and the author's relationship to Freud. The central connection between this trend and my reading is the question of whether Elektra has repressed the memory of her father's murder, forgotten the event and created a new memory, or whether she is unable to forget anything. For the purposes of my argument here, I am content to emphasize that her visions, whether invented or genuine, repressed or irrepressible, focus on the immediacy of the bodily experience. For more reading on this debate, consult the following articles and books, listed in chronological order: Heinz Politzer: *Hugo von Hofmannsthal's ›Elektra‹. Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Psychopathologie*. In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 47 (1973), pp.

first lines in the drama, Elektra bemoans her solitary condition and calls out to her father, who is confined in the blood-red earth. The gruesome nature of her vision becomes most clear through the repetition of the word »Blut« nine times in the monologue. Blood however signifies more than death and violence; it comes to stand for life through one's offspring. By the end of the monologue, Agamemnon's blood transforms from the literal fluid that flowed from his body into the continued life of his son and daughters.

Allein! Weh, ganz allein. [...]
 [...]

 Wo bist du, Vater? hast du nicht die Kraft,
 dein Angesicht herauf zu mir zu schleppen?
 Es ist die Stunde, unsre Stunde ist's!
 Die Stunde, wo sie dich geschlachtet haben,
 dein Weib und der mit ihr in einem Bette,
 in deinem königlichen Bette schläft.
 Sie schlugen dich im Bade tot, dein Blut
 rann über deine Augen, und das Bad
 dampfte von deinem Blut, dann nahm er dich,
 der Feige, bei den Schultern, zerrte dich
 hinaus aus dem Gemach, den Kopf voraus,
 die Beine schleifend hinterher: dein Auge,
 das starre, offne, sah herein ins Haus.
 So kommst du wieder, setzest Fuß vor Fuß
 und stehst auf einmal da, die beiden Augen
 weit offen, und ein königlicher Reif
 von Purpur ist um deine Stirn, der speist sich
 aus deines Hauptes offner Wunde. [...]
 [...]

 Vater! dein Tag wird kommen! Von den Sternen
 stürzt alle Zeit herab, so wird das Blut
 aus hundert Kehlen stürzen auf dein Grab!
 So wie aus umgeworfenen Krügen wird's
 aus den gebundnen Mördern fließen, rings
 wie Marmorkrüge werden nackte Leiber
 von allen ihren Helfern sein, von Männern
 und Frauen, und in einem Schwall, in einem
 geschwollnen Bach wird ihres Lebens Leben
 aus ihnen stürzen – [...]
 [...]

 [...] darum muß ihr Blut
 hinab, um dir zu Dienst zu sein, und wir,
 dein Blut, dein Sohn Orest und deine Töchter,
 wir drei, wenn alles dies vollbracht und Purpur-

95–119; Bernd Urban: *Hofmannsthal, Freud und die Psychoanalyse. Quellenkundliche Untersuchungen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Lang 1978; Michael Worbs: *Nervenkunst. Literature und Psychoanalyse im Wien der Jahrhundertwende*. Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1983, pp. 259–95; Lorna Martens: *The Theme of Repressed Memory in Hofmannsthal's Elektra*. In: *The German Quarterly* 60 (1987), pp. 38–51; Nancy C. Michael: *Elektra and Her Sisters. Three Female Characters in Schnitzler, Freud and Hofmannsthal*. New York: Lang 2001 (Austrian Culture; 11) and Jill Scott: *Elektra after Freud. Myth and Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP 2005.

gezelte aufgerichtet sind, vom Dunst
 des Blutes, den die Sonne an sich zieht,
 dann tanzen wir, dein Blut, rings um dein Grab:
 und über Leichen hin werd' ich das Knie
 hochheben Schritt für Schritt, und die mich werden
 so tanzen sehen, ja, die meinen Schatten
 von weitem nur so werden tanzen sehn,
 die werden sagen: einem großen König
 wird hier ein großes Prunkfest angestellt
 von seinem Fleisch und Blut, und glücklich ist,
 wer Kinder hat, die um sein hohes Grab
 so königliche Siegestänze tanzen!¹⁸

In Elektra's vision, her father's spilled blood can only rest once his embodied blood («wir, dein Blut») drains his murders of their blood. In both the past murder and its future revenge, Elektra imagines bloodshed and the destruction of the body as a form of indulgence – feasting on Agamemnon's open head wound and a celebratory dance in the swollen river of blood from the naked bodies of the perpetrators. These visions seem more in sync with the splatter films of the mid- to late-twentieth century than with a lyric poet's adaptation of classical Greek tragedy.¹⁹ Yet this extreme corporeality and the ambivalent stance on the destruction and preservation of the human body define a central theme throughout Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*.

The drama's emphasis on the body reveals more than just an inclination towards violence, gore and destruction; it also raises important questions about the relationship between the body and the characters' human qualities. The stage directions and characters' interactions with one another frequently refer to bodies in order to draw attention to their animalistic qualities. On three occasions, Elektra's behavior is compared to that of a creature: she recoils, paces and digs like an animal.²⁰ In each instance, she has reached an extreme state of desperation that cannot be communicated through spoken language. But in resorting to body language, Elektra loses the ability to conduct herself as a human, let alone a princess.

Her marginalized status through sub-human behavior is both reflected in and made possible by Hofmannsthal's costume prescriptions. Her costume is described as »ein verächtliches, elendes Gewand, das zu kurz für sie ist. Ihre Beine sind nackt, ebenso ihre Arme.«²¹ Besides leaving her as the most

¹⁸ Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, pp. 66–68.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that John McCarty: *Splatter Movies. Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen*. New York: St. Martin's Press 1984 traces the aesthetic roots of the splatter film's gratuitous gore back to the Grand Guignol theaters of France and England.

²⁰ »Elektra springt zurück wie ein Tier in seinen Schlupfwinkel« (Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, p. 63); »Sie fängt an der Wand des Hauses, seitwärts der Türschwelle, eifrig zu graben an, lautlos, wie ein Tier« (ibidem, p. 96); »Sie läuft auf einem Strich vor der Tür hin und her, mit gesenktem Kopf, wie das gefangene Tier im Käfig« (ibidem, p. 106).

²¹ Hofmannsthal: *Vorschriften*, p. 381.

exposed character on stage, the minimalist costume emphasizes her body as that of a lithe, athletic dancer. Elektra's nimble movements stand in stark contrast to the impaired, distorted movements of Clytemnestra. The stage directions call attention to Clytemnestra's crutches and her need for attendants to help her stand upright.²² Her heavily robed but twisted figure is further weighed down by her train and her jewels, which impede her movements across the stage and alternately create an impression of the queen as a marionette or a gilded idol. Meanwhile, her daughter's exposed arms and legs illustrate the destitute condition she is kept in but also allow her to spring freely in and out of doorways, to jump back in terror or forward in attack, or to cower in corners.²³ Every motion the queen makes is guided either by the assistance of crutches and/or a servant, and she tended to by an additional servant responsible solely for her train. Conspicuously, this servant is also compared to an animal, this time more specifically »einer aufgerichteten Schlange gleichend«. The contrast between the queen's rejection of her own daughter as a neglected animal and her attraction to a reptilian attendant highlights the need for greater attention to the characters' bodies.

The comparison of characters with animals only occurs a handful of times in the text. Elektra's first appearance on stage was already cited above, in which she jumps back like an animal into its hideout. The servants continue the animal imagery when they say her gaze is »Giftig | wie eine wilde Katze« and with her voice »pfauchte sie wie eine Katze«. ²⁴ In both instances, the servants' speech directs attention to the Elektra's behavior and her use of her body as something animalistic. This gesture returns at approximately the middle of the play, when word arrives that Orestes is dead. Chrysothemis and Elektra embrace as one to mourn the loss of their brother – »aneinandergedrückt [...], wie ein Leib, den das Schluchzen der Chrysothemis schüttelt«. ²⁵ Upon seeing them, the cook rebukes the sisters, saying

[...] Die Hunde heulen
beim Vollmond, und ihr heult, weil jetzt für euch
auf immer Neumond ist. Die Hunde jagt man,
wenn sie die Hausruh' stören. Gebt ihr acht,

²² »[Klytämnestra] stützt sich auf eine Vertraute, die dunkelviolett gekleidet ist, und auf einen elfenbeinernen, mit Edelsteinen geschmückten Stab. Eine gelbe Gestalt, mit zurückgekämmtem schwarzem Haar, einer Ägypterin ähnlich, mit glattem Gesicht einer aufgerichteten Schlange gleichend, trägt ihr die Schleppe. Die Königin ist über und über bedeckt mit Edelsteinen und Talismanen. Ihre Arme sind voll Reifen, ihre Finger starren von Ringen« (Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, p. 74).

²³ Cf. stage directions on pp. 63, 68, 85–87, 89, 108.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

sonst geht's euch ebenso.²⁶

Here, Elektra no longer exhibits the wildness of a cat in her aggressive behavior towards the servants; instead, she and her sister have sunk to the level of desperate, howling dogs that will be driven away if they cannot control themselves. Again, their transformation into animals is marked by a loss of language. Chrysothemis can only weep and Elektra remains silent. When language fails and the body takes center stage as a means of expression, then it is consistently in animal form. The text's denigration of human form to animalistic behavior represents another aspect of the horror in *Elektra* through the overturning of a natural order. If Elektra's opening monologue exemplifies the literal horror of the text and the emotional trauma it inspires in the title character, then the servants' evaluation of the two princesses seen here demonstrates Freeland's idea of an inversion of norms. The princesses are no longer treated as masters by their servants, nor as daughters by their mother, but rather as household animals that can be discarded at whim.

Hofmannsthal illustrates the power dynamics in these transformations through the characters' observations of each others' bodies and the power of their gazes. Chrysothemis attributes to Clytemnestra's gaze the power to kill – »sie schickt | den Tod aus jedem Blick« – and strangely, Clytemnestra wishes Elektra's gaze were powerful enough to kill her – »Wenn sie mich mit den Blicken töten könnte!«²⁷ When tested, Elektra's gaze proves to be the stronger of the two. In their confrontation, Elektra tells Clytemnestra

[...] du kannst den Blick
nicht von mir wenden, immer krampft es dich,
daß du von meinem schweigenden Gesicht
ein Wort ablesen willst, du rollst die Augen,
willst irgend etwas denken [...].²⁸

Once they lock eyes, Elektra maintains the upper hand. Her gaze makes her mother's body cramp, robs her ability to read Elektra's face, and paralyzes her ability to think. In this scene, Elektra has risen to her most powerful, having pulled her cowering mother across the stage. She now towers over her. Yet Elektra's gaze does not enjoy a lasting omnipotence. When Orestes returns later in the play, he speaks with Elektra, thinking her a servant, and praises his memory of Elektra's beauty and grace. Elektra replies: »Ich werd' ihr's wiedersagen, wenn ich sie (*mit erstickter Stimme*) sehe.«²⁹ The thought of turning Orestes's gaze back onto her own body causes Elektra to choke on the word »sehe«. Though her gaze can command terror and obedi-

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 73 and 75.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 86.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 99.

ence from her mother, its strength conflicts with her brother's pleasant memory; she cannot bear her brother's gaze, nor the idea of seeing what she has become through his gaze. Orestes describes the gaze and appearance of the Elektra he knew as sad but gentle, whereas the current woman he sees before him is full of blood and hate. Elektra defends her condition, stating that neither priestesses nor queens can thrive on the scraps of clothing and food given to her. The power of Orestes's gaze reveals the horrible impact on the title character's corporeal appearance through physical deprivation, a horror based on an inversion of treatment befitting family and royalty.

The power of the gaze inverts not only familiar roles between characters on stage within the court and the family, but also inverts traditional relationships between the audience and the characters. The stage directions describe in detail how Aegisthus fights for his life, but his bloody murder is not the violence that gained reviewers' attention. Instead, they concentrate on Elektra's death. In the play's final scene, the title character's body literally takes center stage as she dances herself to death in a Bacchanalian frenzy:

Sie hat den Kopf zurückgeworfen wie eine Mänade. Sie wirft die Kniee, sie reckt die Arme aus, es ist ein namenloser Tanz, in welchem sie nach vorwärts schreitet. [...] Sie tut noch einige Schritte des angespanntesten Triumphes und stürzt zusammen.³⁰

The true violence of the play is not Orestes's double murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but rather the title character's terpsichorean demise. And it is an act of violence committed against the audience. Theater critic Hermann Bahr summarizes the audience's reception of this final scene in his collection of reviews from the early twentieth century. He asserts that *Elektra* is especially Greek precisely because of the title character's ghastliness:

Ein Wesen, ganz ausgesaugt und ausgehöhlt von Leid; alle Schleier zerrissen, die sonst Sitte, freundliche Gewöhnung, Scham um uns zieht. Ein nackter Mensch, auf das Letzte zurückgebracht. [...] Nicht mehr irgend ein Wesen, das haßt, sondern der Haß selbst. Schreie, wie aus ferner Urzeit her, Tritte des wilden Tieres, Blicke des ewigen Chaos. Gräßlich, sagen die Leute, zusammenschauernd. Gräßlich. Aber eben darin griechischer, als es jemals die Kunst der strengsten Linie, der klugen Mäßigung, der zarten Stille sein kann.³¹

Bahr was not alone in recording the audience's shudder at Gertrud Eysoldt's performance; other reviewers such as Alfred Klaar and Julius Babs referred to Elektra as a frightening, flickering flame of revenge, an outrageous per-

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 110.

³¹ Hermann Bahr: *Elektra*. In: Idem: *Glossen zum Wiener Theater (1903–1906)*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1907, pp. 269–277, here p. 276.

version of femininity, and a monstrous amoral beast.³² The general tenor of reviews from the first three years of the drama's production reflects the surprise and disgust with which audiences reacted. To the extent that authorial intent deserves consideration, the reviews shows how Hofmannsthal and his leading actress achieved his goal of re-creating the horror of the myth by inverting the normal roles of princesses and daughters and exploiting the corporeality of both actor and audience.

This performance sustained such vitality in theater history that Erika Fischer-Lichte featured Eysoldt's role as a defining moment in her theory of performativity. In *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Fischer-Lichte describes the Hofmannsthal-Reinhardt co-productions of *Elektra* (1903), *Ödipus* (1910), and *Orestie* (1911) as among the earliest works of German-language theater that pushed the corporeality of the actors' bodies into the foreground. She traces this back to the audience's rejection of »Eysoldts Bewegungen [...], die nicht einer Bebilderung des Textes dienten, sondern unüberschaubar auf den Körper der Schauspielerin zurückwiesen.«³³ Unfamiliar with this use of the body on stage, the audience rejected Eysoldt's »Auflösung der Grenzen des Ich der Schauspielerin – nicht der Figur.«³⁴ As such, Eysoldt violated the comfortable separation between the 'real world' of the audience and the ›fictional world‹ of the stage, as known from traditional mimetic theater. By exposing her own body rather than the body of her character, she threatened to ›infect‹ the audience with impulses towards »von Leidenschaft getriebene Handlungen« rather than »eine heilsame Katharsis.«³⁵ Furthermore, it defied the dominant convention since eighteenth century of the actor as a semiotic body, i.e. a body that functions as a sign, an allegory or a stand-in. Instead, Eysoldt's performance restored the actor's body to its phenomenal state as a body in and of itself. As a result, *Elektra*'s death threatened to violate a presumably clear distinction between the death of a stage character and the victim of a public sacrificial rite. Fischer-Lichte thus identifies *Elektra* as a central work in the shift from the semiotic body to the phenomenal body and in the destruction of staged illusion. The theater had become a space that forced the immediacy and extreme physicality of Eysoldt's bodily performance upon the audience in all the horror captured in its initial reviews. This drama, this role and this production thus issued in a new instance of performativity on the stage that altered how audiences, theater critics and theoreticians thought about the body and performance.

³² Cited in Sally McMullen: *From the Armchair to the Stage*. In: *The Modern Language Review* 80 (1985), pp. 637–651, here pp. 644 and 649.

³³ Erika Fischer-Lichte: *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2004 (stw; 2373), pp. 50f.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 162. The language of *contagiös* and *Ansteckung* comes from Fischer-Lichte's argument as well.

While questions about the body quickly lead to considerations of performativity in general, it should be clear that performativity is a much broader concept than I can address here. Besides the body, it requires the consideration of categories such as language, location, temporality, materiality, and notions of agency and power. As such, my analysis of *Elektra* here makes no claim to an exhaustive study of its performative elements. My examination of bodies in Hofmannsthal's drama does invite reflection on how this fits into notions of performativity, and how performativity fits into the methodology of literary studies as a whole. Performativity gained currency as a full-fledged turn in literary studies (rather than a concept borrowed from other disciplines) at the latest through Erika Fischer-Lichte's aforementioned book. Her notion of performativity pays tribute to its theoretical forerunners, largely Austin's performative speech acts and Butler's performative acts in gender construction. Fischer-Lichte integrates these principles together with earlier aesthetic theories to engage with and re-frame questions of artistic representation and the transformation of a static work of art into dynamic, lived experience.

Scholarship focused specifically on the body is plagued by terminological and conceptual vagueness. It is alternately referred to as the body turn, the corporeal turn or the somatic turn, and is situated across a range of disciplines from sociology to sports sciences, and from political science to theater and dance. Richard Shusterman, for example, proposes the notion of somaesthetics, not as a method of artistic analysis, but a philosophical reflection about the interaction of the body, mind and spirit to improve self-consciousness and modes of interpersonal relations.³⁶ In 2005, Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco released an anthology simply entitled, *The Body: A Reader*, in which they collected and organized texts about bodies by prominent scholars over the last thirty years. They suggest that the way to advance knowledge about the representation of the body is not to assert a single overarching theory, nor to assert that bodies only exist in the plural. Rather, their project is »to log the ways in which the body is a problem; and a problem in the positive sense – not just an ›obstacle‹ but as a vehicle for thought and action.«³⁷ While this strategy continues to a useful approach in literary studies, it seems to negate the notion of a body turn. The anthology does not propose new ways of thinking about bodies; it points to ways the body has already been thought about. Similarly, Georg Braungart's *Leibhafter Sinn* considers how the body can serve as an alternative means to stabilize meaning when language proves to be unreliable, but his study largely addresses the body as the means to a semiotic end rather than re-defining

³⁶ Cf. Richard Shusterman: *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2008.

³⁷ Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco. *The Body: A Reader*. London: Routledge 2005, p. 3.

how literary studies thinks about the body.³⁸ When Stacy Alaimo talks about the corporeal turn, she does so in phrases such as »the textualization of the body and the embodiment of the text«,³⁹ but neither expands on what this means, nor points to further theories in the bibliography. And in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's essay on the corporeal turn in Jewish Studies, she indicates some of the potential problems implicit in attempting to read the Jewish body. She also references a conversation with Eric Santner, in which he asked her: »But concerning the ›corporeal turn‹: My sense is that it has already begun to fade. Is that your sense too?«⁴⁰ Thus, while Gideon Stiening was correct in stating (or repeating), »Soviel Körper war nie«,⁴¹ it seems difficult to label this an institutionalized turn for literary and cultural studies.

Yet, Ursula Hennigfeld provides a helpful overview of the somatic turn as the theoretical underpinning for her monograph on Petrarchan sonnets, *Der ruinierte Körper*.⁴² She traces an awareness of the body as a distinct element, separate from and in conflict with the mind and spirit, back to the Old Testament's rejection of physical labor because it distracts from intellectual study. Though she includes late twentieth century gender theory, she focuses primarily on what she identifies as the first theoretical formulation of a somatic turn in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. She quotes:

Der Körper wird als Unterlegenes, Versklavtes noch einmal verhöhnt und gestoßen und zugleich als das Verbotene, Verdinglichte, Entfremdete begehrt. Erst Kultur kennt den Körper als Ding, das man besitzen kann, erst in ihr hat er sich vom Geist, dem Inbegriff der Macht [...], als der Gegenstand, das tote Ding, ›corpus‹ unterschieden.⁴³

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the body is trapped in a dialectical tension. The body is not the physical manifestation of subjectivity; it is an object simultaneously discarded as inferior and enslaved, but also coveted

³⁸ Cf. Georg Braungart: *Leibhafter Sinn. Der andere Diskurs der Moderne*. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1995 (Studien zur deutschen Literatur; 130).

³⁹ Stacy Alaimo: *Comrades of the Surge. Meridle LeSueur, Cultural Studies and the Corporeal Turn*. In: *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 12 (2005), pp. 55–74, here p. 59.

⁴⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: *The Corporeal Turn*. In: *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005), pp. 447–461, here p. 448.

⁴¹ Gideon Stiening: *Body-lotion. Körpergeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft*. In: *Scientia Poetica* 5 (2001), pp. 183–215, here p. 183.

⁴² Cf. Ursula Hennigfeld: *Der ruinierte Körper. Petrarkistische Sonette in transkultureller Perspektive*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2008 (Epistemata Literaturwissenschaft; 630), pp. 17–24.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

as a physical taboo.⁴⁴ They identify culture and cultural productions as the origin of this conflict and place the mind and spirit (*Geist*) in a more powerful position over the body. Through cultural institutions, *Geist* is similarly pulled into an antithetical tension. *Geist* creates an idealized object of desire, but in striving to attain that desire, *Geist* descends from the lofty realm of ideals to the vulgar realm of the body. Thus, for Horkheimer and Adorno, culture grants *Geist* its privileged position above the body, and splits the body into an object of repulsion and an object of temptation.

Hennigfeld also picks up an element of body theory present in both Braungart and Fischer-Lichte. All three scholars point to Plessner's, Scheler's, and Husserl's remark that the German language has two words for the ›body‹ because each word represents a different relationship between individuals and their bodies. Their proposition that one *has* a ›Körper‹ but *is* a ›Leib‹ is rooted in the words' etymologies. ›Körper‹ goes back to the Latin ›corpus‹ and the English ›corpse‹ (in German, ›Leichnam‹), whereas ›Leib‹ stems from the Middle High German ›lîp‹ as a homograph for body, life and love. Like in Horkheimer/Adorno, the Körper refers to an object to be possessed. It is an object of ownership, an exterior shell that can be instrumentalized, exploited and discarded (as corpse) when broken. The body as Leib, by contrast, points inward towards a metaphysical notion of existence. As something a person ›is‹, rather than an object that a person ›has‹, the Leib is intricately linked with a person's being in the world (Leben) and their relationships with others (Liebe). With these tools – Horkheimer/Adorno's duality of repulsion and attraction to the body, and the distinction between ›Körper‹ and ›Leib‹ on the phenomenological and etymological levels –, the body/corporeal/somatic turn begins to emerge as something more solid than an intensive motif analysis and the terminological vagueness frequently demonstrated in much of the secondary literature.

Turning back to Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*, the question becomes how to relate this idea of a theoretical turn to the observations made above about horror and bodies in the drama. The seduction scene between Elektra and Chrysothemis demonstrates the dual motion of Elektra's instrumentalized attraction towards her sister and the audience's repulsion by violating the strong cultural norm of the incest taboo. Furthermore, Clytemnestra's fear of Elektra's gaze and Elektra's fear of Orestes's gaze show how characters dread losing control of their bodies and themselves when subjected to the desiring gaze of the other. In the former case, Elektra's gaze desires her mother's death; in the latter, a brother's gaze searches for the image of his younger, gentler sister. To put it in the language of Horkheimer and Adorno, the forbidden body of one character becomes another character's object

⁴⁴ Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: *Elemente des Antisemitismus*. In: Idem: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer 1989, pp. 177–217, here p. 209.

of desire (sexualized, murdered, or nostalgic) simultaneous to its enslavement in a position of inferiority. Through the repeated violation of social norms on the stage, culture loses its previously privileged position. Accordingly, *Geist* can no longer serve as the dominant organizing principle, the »Inbegriff der Macht« over the body and between the characters. Therefore, Elektra's bodily nature, as demonstrated in her lithe movements and her transformation into an animal, shapes her into the drama's most commanding figure. Her dominant position, however, is contingent not on her maintaining a clear sense of mind, but on control over her body.

With the fulfillment of Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus's murder, the traumatic memory preserved by Elektra does not need to be maintained. The resolution of the trauma through revenge dissolves Elektra's control over her body. In line with the above-cited psychoanalytic readings, Elektra's final dance illustrates the manifestation and cure of Elektra's hysteria through a combination of Dionysian release and Freudian fulfillment. Earlier in the play, she asserts her humanity through her memory – »Vergessen? Was! bin ich ein Tier? vergessen? | [...] ich bin kein Vieh, *ich kann nicht vergessen!*«⁴⁵ –, but once the crime has been avenged, her memory is no longer necessary and she loses control of her body, her humanity and her life in a grotesque, indulgent dance. Elektra's self-annihilating ecstasy is not only an expression of joy that she cannot contain, but on a classical level, it purges the drama (and the audience by extension) of a harmful memory, the harmful title character and the ancient blood curse on the House of Atreus.

This reading ties up the loose ends of Hofmannsthal's adaptation almost too nicely, packages it into familiar, convenient categories, and skips over what I find to be the most frustrating and challenging portion of the text, particularly when considering bodies. Given the above consideration of a terminological split between *Körper* and *Leib*, it is worth noting that the word *Körper* never occurs in the entire text. The term *Leib* recurs several times throughout, and the word *Leichnam* appears in only a few instances. One crucial instance of this comes very near the end of the play, shortly before the double murder. Orestes and Elektra reveal themselves to one another and Elektra explains to him the changes she has gone through in his absence. She states:

Ich bin nur mehr der Leichnam deiner Schwester,
mein armes Kind. Ich weiß, es schaudert dich
vor mir. Und war doch eines Königs Tochter!
Ich glaube, ich war schön: wenn ich die Lampe
ausblies vor meinem Spiegel, fühlte ich
mit keuschem Schauer, wie mein nackter Leib
vor Unberührtheit durch die schwüle Nacht
wie etwas Göttliches hinleuchtete.

⁴⁵ Hofmannsthal: *Elektra*, pp. 71f. Emphasis in the original.

Ich fühlte, wie der dünne Strahl des Monds
 in seiner weißen Nacktheit badete
 so wie in einem Weiher, und mein Haar
 war solches Haar, vor dem die Männer zittern,
 dies Haar, versträht, beschmutzt, erniedrigt, dieses!
 Verstehst du's, Bruder! diese süßen Schauer
 hab' ich dem Vater opfern müssen. Meinst du,
 wenn ich an meinem Leib mich freute, drangen
 nicht seine Seufzer, drang sein Stöhnen nicht
 bis an mein Bette? Eifersüchtig sind
 die Toten: und er schickte mir den Haß,
 den hohläugigen Haß als Bräutigam.
 Da mußte ich den Gräßlichen, der atmet
 wie eine Viper, über mich in mein
 schlafloses Bette lassen, der mich zwang,
 alles zu wissen, wie es zwischen Mann
 und Weib zugeht. Die Nächte, weh, die Nächte,
 in denen ich's begriff! Da war mein Leib
 eiskalt und doch verkohlt, im Innersten
 verbrannt. Und als ich endlich alles wußte,
 da war ich weise, und die Mörder hielten –
 – die Mutter mein' ich, und den, der bei ihr ist, –
 nicht einen meiner Blicke aus!⁴⁶

This passage marks the shift in Elektra's perception of her body from a *Leib* to a *Leichnam*. As noted above, *Leichnam* as *corpse* is linked semantically and etymologically to *Körper*, thus this change in Elektra reflects a shift from an idea of life to death, from the inner spark to the hollow shell. In terms of a phenomenological perspective, Elektra's statements reflect this shift as well. She could once admire the chaste beauty of her body and the divine light that seem to emanate from within. But after her father's death, his ghostly visitations both froze and burned her inner core, leaving her full of knowledge but empty of life. Her body becomes the site of revenge deferred; the crimes committed against her father's body are passed along through an allegorical rape by the hollow-eyed bridegroom of hate. In turning from a body into a corpse, Elektra gained a death stare that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus cannot endure. Elektra thus becomes the ›corpsoreal‹ extension of Agamemnon and continues to personify the impending revenge beyond the bodily scope of the murdered father. When read in this way, Elektra's body is neither the *Körper* she possesses, nor the *Leib* she is, as suggested by the distinction above, but rather her body becomes a medium of communication between the absent father and the present murderers (brother, mother, and lover). Elektra's death at the end consequently shifts away from a depiction of Bacchanalian hysteria to the execution of revenge. The horrific bridegroom's rape eliminates the ›real‹ Elektra and leaves behind a

⁴⁶ Ibidem, pp. 101f.

tool to remind and threaten the usurpers. Elektra's communicative function extends to Orestes as well, as she provides him with information from his absence and with the final motivation to complete the act of revenge. This also illuminates one of the enduring questions about the drama: why Elektra does not give Orestes the ax that murdered Agamemnon. The ax is not the tool of murder and revenge; Elektra is. As such, Elektra resembles a Körper to the extent that she is an object to be possessed and exploited, but she is no longer in possession of herself. After Orestes's double murder, Elektra is left as an instrument without user and without purpose; she has lost her applicability, breaks down and must subsequently be discarded.

The consequences of this reading strongly evoke Agamben's notion of bare life and the camp, as developed in *Homo sacer*. Elektra's life has been stripped of all human value and she has been reduced to a minimum existence at the margins of her social community, a liminal space in which the state of exception strengthens the rule. Her exclusion from the dominant power structures of the palace re-inscribes the Law and its boundaries all the more powerfully, both as she defies it and as Clytemnestra, Aegisthus and the servants deny her its guarantees. Furthermore, she represents the intersection of two notions of the Law as the preservation-through-violation of the sovereign order under Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but also from the previous order under Agamemnon. Elektra's violation at the hands of her father's spirit maintains the memory of his sovereignty, but her misbehavior and maltreatment at the court instate the power of the new norms. Despite her breach of the Law, she cannot be put to death as a sacrifice but she is held at a distance in a state of exception. As Agamben phrases it, she is »analogous to the ethnological notion of taboo: august and damned, worthy of veneration and provoking horror.«⁴⁷ Agamben further defines this societal state, which applies to the House of Atreus, as a condition in which religious law is indistinguishable from penal law. Orestes was sent by the gods to avenge his father's murder, and Elektra must preserve the divine law violated by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus until Orestes can arrive. A penal law that can punish Elektra's domestic transgression in accordance with the usurpers' new order does not exist, but because they are recognized by her family and servants as transgressions, she is both marked as a criminal but protected from punishment by the same legal order.

The conclusion to Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Greek tragedy and its initial reception in 1903 demonstrates the implications of a context in which life outside of the camp à la Agamben cannot be differentiated from life within in. The supposed distinction between life in the camp and life outside of the camp is highly reminiscent of Baudrillard's notion of simulation. If

⁴⁷ Giorgio Agamben: *Homo sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP 1998, p. 73.

fantasy exists within the scope of Disneyland, than reality must apply everywhere outside of Disneyland; if prisons represent a state of incarceration, then the space outside of prison must represent freedom.⁴⁸ If the stage remains a space for Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* to explore a scenario, in which culture no longer reigns supreme and the body replaces the power of *Geist*, then the audience presumably exists in a space still protected by the structures of culture and *Geist*. But when Eysoldt's performance under Hofmannsthal's and Reinhardt's direction broke with traditional theater conventions, as demonstrated by Fischer-Lichte, then the danger and violence of *Elektra* as a character grows into the danger and violence of *Elektra* as a drama. The audience can no longer be assured that their existence is distinct from the state of exception on the stage. Their horror at the sight of Eysoldt's *Elektra* signals a moment in which theater overturned the cultural order and invalidated the dominance of the mind at the expense of a corporeal reaction. Without the governing order of cultural institutions and social conventions, Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectical tension of the body as an object of desire and an object of repulsion can no longer be said to apply and challenges the Körper-Leib distinction. Though the body turn as a theoretical model has been erratic and ambiguous, Hofmannsthal's turn from the page to the stage highlights the need for greater attention to how we approach representations of the body, both mediated and immediate, in literature, on the stage, on the screen and beyond.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jean Baudrillard: *Simulacra and Simulations*. In: *Ibidem: Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford UP 1998, pp. 166–184.

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