

The Body Unmasked: The Uncanny and Masked Acting

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May 2001

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ABSTRACT

THE BODY UNMASKED

THE UNCANNY AND MASKED ACTING

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The body is not only a natural conglomeration of different internal organs, but it is also the site around/on/through which narratives of subjectivity are constructed and deconstructed. The Freudian *unheimlich*, translated into English as ‘the uncanny’, transgresses the rules of signification established by such narratives. This study focuses on a particular play on the site of the body, i.e. the ‘body’ suggested by masked acting. Masked acting takes place within the structure of the uncanny in transgressing the discourse of the transcendent self based on the meaningfulness, expediency and unity of the ‘body’. The case study is the masks designed by Kuzgun Acar for Mehmet Ulusoy’s 1975 *Théâtre de Liberté* production of Bertol Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Keywords: *Unheimlich*, The Uncanny, Body, Kuzgun Acar, Mask.

ÖZET

MASKELERİ ATMAK

‘TEKİNSİZ’ VE TİYATRO MASKLARI

Gülru Çakmak

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

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Haziran, 2001

Beden yalnızca değişik organların oluşturduğu doğal bir bütün değil, aynı zamanda üzerinde kişiliğin ve öznellik söylemlerinin kurgulandığı alandır. Sigmund Freud’un tanımladığı *unheimlich*, Türkçe’deki karşılığıyla ‘tekinsiz’, beden aracılığıyla ve beden üzerinden kurgulanan bu söylemlerin sürekliliğini tehdit eder. Bu çalışma, beden alanında tiyatro masklarının oynadığı oyun üzerine eğilmektedir. Bedeni anlamlı ve işlevsel bir bütün olarak gören öznellik söylemi, tiyatro masklarının ‘tekinsiz’ oyunuyla yıkılır. Bu bağlamda, Kuzgun Acar’ın 1975 yılında Mehmet Ulusoy’un yönettiği ‘Kafkas Tebeşir Dairesi’ için yaptığı masklar ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Unheimlich*, Tekinsiz, Beden, Kuzgun Acar, Mask.

To my grandmother, Dr. Zekavet Dursunkaya

and

To the unborn child

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The Body Unmasked: The Uncanny and Masked Acting

Introduction

Peter Brooks, in the first chapter of *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, maintains that “our bodies are with us, though we have always had trouble saying exactly how. We are, in various conceptions or metaphors, in our body, or having a body, or at one with our body, or alienated from it. The body is both ourselves and other, and as such the object of emotions from love to disgust” (1). Brooks adds that the body as such oscillates between the two interdependent categories of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ (1).

The body is not only a natural conglomeration of different internal organs, but it is also a discourse through which the ‘subjectivity’ is constructed. According to the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism, the identity of the subject is based upon the imagined integrity of her/his body (Weber 233). This is why this thesis will take liberty in applying the concepts of the ‘body’ and subjectivity interchangeably. This study revolves around the concept of ‘the law of the body’, referring to those discourses of subjectivity constructed around/on/through the ‘body’.

The basis of this thesis is the two term papers written on the subject of the Freudian uncanny and a reading of Kuzgun Acar’s theatre masks within the context of the uncanny. These masks were designed for the 1975 Mehmet Ulusoy production of Bertolt Brecht’s the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The problems encountered in these two papers were to set the case in which the question of the ‘body’ as a discourse of

subjectivity, and the repercussions of the uncanny and masked acting on this discourse should be elaborated in a future study.

The underlying question which shapes this thesis is the ‘body’ suggested by masked acting. The question which contains the germ is, if an actor already assumes a *persona* on the stage, already instrumentalises her/his body in ‘creating’ the *persona*, then why is there masked acting?

Why the uncanny? As will be elaborated in Chapter I, the uncanny works against, disturbs, transgresses the law of the ‘body’.

The two prominent readings of the concept of *unheimlich* are those of Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud, whose studies on the uncanny were published as articles in medical journals in 1906 and 1919 respectively. Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 article “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” is known mainly as the predecessor of Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny” written in 1919. Comprehending the full meaning of Jentsch’s study, its relevance to the Freudian text, its use of such technical terms as ‘conscious’, ‘sub-conscious’ would have to include a thorough inquiry of the medico-psychological context of the *fin-de-siècle* Europe, which is beyond the scope and the objective of this thesis. Rather, the aim is to read what is written between the lines as to the relationship of the uncanny to the ‘body’. Neither does the section dwelling on Jentsch’s text aspire to be an exhaustive reading, because even within the particular context of the discourses of the ‘body’, a thorough examination of the attitudes to the body in the 19th century would be necessary. Leaving such a detailed interrogation to a future study, I preferred to read what is written between the lines as to the relation of the body to the construction of subjectivity in Jentsch.

In Ernst Jentsch's study, we will see two accounts of the instrumentality of the body. The first one, which Jentsch defines and finds incomplete, will be referred to as the phantasised 'body', the body considered to be meaningful, expedient and unitary. Jentsch aims to augment this discourse of the 'body' by arguing that intellectual, i.e. conscious, mastery of oneself and of the environment can come about only as a result of the scientific knowledge of the human body, how it relates to itself and to its environment.

Samuel Weber's definition of consciousness would be instrumental in giving an account of Jentsch's relationship to the law of the body. Weber contends that,

consciousness is tied to the narcissistic conception of the body as an integral whole: when it goes, so does consciousness- which must always be consciousness of an object, which is to say, consciousness of *an object that is one*. (15)

Jentsch's social Darwinist stance leads him to conclude that the uncanny sensation occurs as a result of disorientation in relation to the law of the 'body'. With the term the law of the 'body', I want to emphasise those axioms and rules with regards to what the human body means, how is it a unified, integrated whole, and how it should be instrumentalised in relation to the environment and to itself. This discourse aims to delineate the line that separates the 'inside' from the 'outside', the 'self' from the 'other'.

Sigmund Freud's account of the uncanny does not have Jentsch's confidence in relation to the elimination of the uncanny through intellectual

mastery of one's environment. This account of the uncanny was to introduce the unconscious, and repression. Nevertheless, Freud's account of the uncanny fails to master the uncanny as well. The reason for this failure will be explained through the secondary literature on the uncanny, mainly through the works of Sarah Kofman and Samuel Weber. These readings will point to, what they call the narrative 'structure' of the uncanny. Kofman's and Weber's accounts of this structure will help to elucidate the transgressive movement of the uncanny in relation to the law of the 'body'. Any such definition or meaning attributed to the human body for the production and maintenance of the integrity of the subjectivity is a discourse, and as such, it is open to transgression in so far as the body is the site where "the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance" takes place according to Samuel Weber (233).

If the uncanny is one of the two piers on which this study on the construction and transgression of the 'body' as discourse stands, the other pier is theatre masks. Masked acting, within the particular example of the Acar masks, is to be accounted for within the structure of the uncanny, disturbing the continuity, unity and expediency of the 'body'.

A typical dictionary of the English language describes a mask as "something which you wear over your face in order to hide your face or make yourself look different, and which usually has holes for your eyes" (Sinclair 891). The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology traces the roots of the word "mask" as we use it today to Middle French ('masque' -covering to hide or protect the face), Medieval Latin ('masca' -mask, spectre, nightmare, of uncertain origin), and Arabic ('maskhara' -

buffoon, ‘sakhira’-to ridicule) (638). The same source points to a striking parallel between the Latin words ‘masca’ and ‘larva’ where the latter also means ghost, spectre, mask (638). In another source, ‘larva’ is defined as a ghost, spectre; a mask; a skeleton (Lewis 1037).

Through these different definitions and webs of meaning, a mask is defined in terms of its relation to hiding, covering; also it is something which causes some sense of fear, and at the same time some sense of ridicule. Hiding and looking different are suggested as two possible motives behind wearing a mask. Another point which attracts attention is that mask can mean that which is on the surface, which covers, as much as it has an undecidable distance from a skeleton, that which is covered and that which covers without being on the surface. Its meaning as a ghost exceeds these two opposites, since a ghost is neither that which covers, nor that which is covered. Mask’s etymological relation to ‘larva’ suggests another dimension to the theme of covering, hiding: a mask as habitat.

According to the Synthesis Discourse, elaborated on the lines of Mehmet Ulusoy’s argument, the mask and the human body are instrumentalized, in a synthesis, to create a *persona*. Introducing the aesthetics of the uncanny, this thesis will argue that rather than being in harmony with the discourse of the unified, meaningful and instrumental ‘body’, masked acting transgresses such a notion of the body, which is the matrix of subjectivity according to Samuel Weber.

The uncanny is an assault on this discourse of the ‘body’ as such. The uncanny transgresses the law of the ‘body’, and this transgression, in Foucault’s words, “carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face

the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognise itself for the first time)” (28).

The transcendent self, constructed within the limits set by the law of the ‘body’, is doomed to be haunted by the ‘violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance’ in the site of the body. The uncanny, in a sense, reveals the absence of transcendental signified. It is thus that the uncanny as the transgressive force ‘forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance’.

The aesthetics of the uncanny suggests that the play of the mask exceeds the play with the mask, it turns against the subject, threatening to disintegrate the phantasised ‘body’ and the phantasised notion of its meaning, instrumentality, unity, and thus, the subjectivity. Haunting will haunt this study, surfacing in several instances to discompose the law of the ‘body’. The mask’s relation to a ghost will link it to the uncanny in haunting, and transgressing the ‘body’.

What should be emphasised at this point is that this thesis does not intend to develop a universal theory aspiring to explain all masked acting traditions around the world. Rather, the ideas shaping the Synthesis Discourse, that of Mehmet Ulusoy, John Emigh and Bertolt Brecht are important so far as they are symptomatic of a particular approach to the body and subjectivity. This symptom defines Jentsch as well, and the law of the ‘body’ he wants to establish.

The reading of the Acar masks in Chapter III will try to trace the movement of the aesthetics of the uncanny in these works. A thorough examination of the thematic content of the play will be skipped, for a reading of the aesthetics of the uncanny handles these masks as artworks, as sculptures, and thus not dominated by the text of

the play. Nevertheless, since they are produced for particular actors in the play, the politics of portraiture involved within their production will be given due respect.

Chapter I

The Uncanny: Mastering the Unmasterable

1.1 Towards a Scientific Account of the Uncanny: Ernst Jentsch

In 1906, Ernst Jentsch wrote an article titled “On the Psychology of the Uncanny”¹. Succeeding an introductory paragraph in which he states the necessity “to make the terminology clear in one’s own mind” in a psychological analysis (7), he introduces the term that was to occupy his attention in his study: the German word *unheimlich*.

At this point, it might be important to point out that this concept has been translated into English as ‘uncanny’, referring us to the assumed nature of the experience of the *unheimlich*. Nevertheless, the literal translation of the term would be ‘unhomely’, as a footnote by the translator of Sigmund Freud’s article “The Uncanny” informs the reader (370).

Pointing to the highly subjective aspect of any experience of the uncanny, Jentsch asserts that rather than attempting to “define the essence of the uncanny”, he will “investigate how the affective excitement of the uncanny arises in psychological terms, how the psychical conditions must be constituted so that the ‘uncanny’ sensation emerges” (8). Wisely, he decides “to limit the posing of the problem even further, and merely to take into consideration those psychical processes which

culminate experientially in the subjective impression of the uncanny with some regularity and sufficient generality” (8).

According to Jentsch, “someone to whom something ‘uncanny’ happens is not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. ...the word suggests that a lack of orientation is bound up with the *impression* of the uncanniness of a thing or incident” (8). He maintains that the uncanny sensation emerges only when there is confusion about the self-evident nature of what was considered to be ‘old/known/familiar’ (9), for in the case of ‘new/foreign/hostile’ “the emergence of sensations of uncertainty is quite natural” (9). In the former case, “disorientation remains concealed for as long as the confusion of ‘known/ self-evident’ does not enter the consciousness of the individual” (9). He adds that psychological uncertainty is welcome under certain conditions, “in those who are more intellectually discriminating when they perceive daily phenomena, and it may well represent an important factor in the origin of the drive to knowledge and research”(9). What underlies this argument is that the questioning of the meaning is not only acceptable but necessary for scientific inquiry to set the terms of the signification in order to ‘master’ the external world. Jentsch’s account of the uncanny is about the law that sets the meaning, and its transgression. The uncanny transgresses the law, as the feeling of uncertainty turns into the uncanny sensation.

Jentsch contends that an uncanny experience will disturb “relative psychological harmony” (14), and throughout the article, he enumerates several “states of psychological uncertainty...determined in many subsidiary ways by abnormal conditions” (10). He is

¹ Translator Roy Sellars informs the reader at a footnote that “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” was published in the *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8.22-23 (1906) p. 195-98, 203-205.

convinced that “a stronger tendency to bring about such sensations of uncertainty under certain external circumstances is created in the case of an abnormal disposition” (10). In various instances where an uncanny feeling is experienced, what is at stake according to Jentsch is some kind of psychological uncertainty stemming from such preconditions as ignorance enhanced by habits (9), nervous disposition (10), lack or weakness of critical sense (13), fantasy (13), ignorance as to the existence of those mechanical processes that take place in what was hitherto considered to be a unified psyche (14).

The corporal connotation of the term ‘(dis)orientation’ is crucial at this point. Jentsch maintains his scruple in relation to the selection and application of the terminology at the very beginning of the article. Therefore the selection of the term ‘(dis)orientation’ and the relation of this term to the corporal cannot be coincidental, even in the English translation of the article. Examples given by Jentsch relate to the ‘body’, to the law that sets the meaning of the body in terms of its instrumentality in ‘mastering’ the environment. The uncanny displaces the phantasised body, “the body that under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient, and unitary, functioning according to the directions of his consciousness” (14). The uncanny is not the surprise caused by the new, but the confusion caused by the alien quality of what was hitherto accepted as ‘known’. This confusion displaces the stable knowledge of the body, the habitat/ habitual. Jentsch hopes to eliminate the dis/orienting threat posed by the uncanny through “intellectual mastery of the situation” (15). This ‘mastery’ excludes nervousity, weakness of critical sense and ignorance.

On the subject of an uncanny sensation deriving from ignorance of ‘mechanical processes in the human mind’, Jentsch gives the example of epilepsy which “is ...spoken of ...as an illness deriving not from the human world but from

foreign and enigmatic spheres, for the epileptic attack of spasm reveals the human body to the viewer-the body that under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient, and unitary, functioning according to the directions of his consciousness- as an immensely complicated and delicate mechanism”, and this revelation produces a “demonic effect on those who see it” (14). The un-homeliness of one’s ‘home’ is ‘revealed’. The homely quality of the body, in terms of being a familiar dwelling place, but also through which one defines oneself is transgressed by the un-homely. What was familiar is not familiar anymore, just as I am not whom I thought I was. “In the case of an expert”, suggests Jentsch, “the corresponding emotion will occur only rarely or perhaps be completely lacking, for to him the mechanical processes in human mind are no longer a novelty”(15). Such an expert “knows and rediscovers their trace so often elsewhere that their appearance no longer has the power to affect him” (Jentsch 15).

The uncanny transgresses the everyday notion of the ‘body’ as that which is meaningful, expedient and unitary, functioning according to the directions of the consciousness, in Jentsch’s words. The expedient body is that which is instrumental in relation to the directions of the consciousness, with which one can ‘master’ the environment. The body is unitary so far as its instrumentality is ‘meaningful’. The uncanny occurs when this meaningful instrument is transgressed by another sort of “animatedness” (Jentsch 15).

Masquerade is an instance when this ‘meaningful, expedient and unitary’ body is ‘disoriented’. Referring to the state of psychical uncertainty Jentsch maintains, “even when they know very well that they are being fooled by merely harmless illusions, many people cannot suppress an extremely uncomfortable feeling when a corresponding situation imposes itself on them” (9). His example is those people “who

do not like to attend masked balls, since the masks and disguises produce in them an exceedingly awkward impression to which they are incapable of becoming accustomed” (10). It is not the novelty of the appearance which is discomfoting, since as mentioned earlier, the emergence of sensations of uncertainty is quite natural in the case of ‘new/foreign/hostile’. Jentsch reads the uncanny as a sensation which ‘happens’ to someone when faced with the confusion of the known/ self-evident. The confusion exists in so far as the ‘environment’ is experienced, defined in terms of and through the phantasised ‘body’. Consequently, by interrupting the meaning, unity and expediency of the ‘body’, masquerade displaces the definition and experience of the ‘environment’ as well. This definition and experience based on the phantasised body is what constructs the law of the ‘body’, therefore masquerade does not enhance, but interrupts, displaces, transgresses the law. This is why it leaves a sense of psychological uncertainty in the observer.

Jentsch argues that human beings associate the animatedness around them with their own animatedness, and any perception which seems to work against this expectation causes an uncanny sensation in the observer:

Another important factor in the origin of the uncanny is the natural tendency of man to infer, in a kind of naïve analogy with his own animatedness, that things in the external world are also animate or, perhaps more correctly, are animate in the same way. (13)

Within this context, one particular class of various states of psychological uncertainty, which “is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general

effect” (Jentsch 11) is the state of “doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate-and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one’s consciousness” (Jentsch 11). “This peculiar effect makes its appearance even more clearly” contends Jentsch, “when imitations of the human form ... appear to be united with certain bodily or mental functions” (12). In the particular context of the “imitations of human form”, he continues, the strength of the “special effect” depends on the sophistication of the mechanism; a life-size automaton tends to give “a feeling of unease” easily, whereas “a doll which closes and opens its eyes by itself, or a small automatic toy, will cause no notable sensation of this kind” (12). He adds that literature makes use of “this fact” in order “to invoke the origin of the uncanny mood in the reader” (12). An automaton, which can act like a human being, transgresses the law of the ‘body’ in so far as it disturbs the meaning of the instrumentality of the body, of what the ‘body’ is for.²

Consequently, those to whom something uncanny happens turn out to be the unschooled observer (14), or people of generally nervous disposition accompanied by abnormal sensitivity (10), primitive men (9), or alternately wild men (11), women, children, and dreamers (13), and even animals (11). In short, in some way or other the inept, incompetent subject (compared to the educated, intelligent, rational man represented throughout the article as the ‘expert’ who does not fail to master even

² In *The Sandman*, E.T.A. Hoffmann describes the eyes of Olympia, the automaton, as follows: “Nathaniel behold Olympia’s beautiful face. The eyes alone seemed to him strangely fixed and dead, yet as the image in the glass grew sharper and sharper it seemed as though beams of moonlight began to rise within them; it was as if they were at the moment acquiring a power of sight, and their glance grew even warmer and more lively” (110).

when he cannot avoid psychological uncertainty) succumbs to the dark recesses of the uncanny as s/he fails to master her/his environment, i.e. set the law of the body. The uncanny reveals the blurred division between the 'exterior' and the 'interior'. Jentsch contends that weak psychological conditions allow such an ambiguity, and that this ambiguity is intolerable. For Jentsch, the uncanny is a nuisance to be removed since,

intellectual mastery of one's environment signifies a defensive position against the assault of hostile forces, and the lack of such certainty is equivalent to lack of cover in the episodes of that never-ending war of the human and organic world for the sake of which the strongest and most impregnable bastions of science were erected.

(15)

He contends that "if ... there prevails sufficient orientation with respect to psychological processes, and enough certainty in the judgement of such processes outside the individual, then the states described-under normal psycho-physiological conditions, of course- will never be able to arise" (14). Scientific knowledge, according to this view, sets the terms as to how the human being relates to her/his body and to the environment in which the body exists. Jentsch wants to delineate the border that separates the 'interior' from the 'exterior' clearly. By setting the 'law', accounting for the 'normal psycho-physiological conditions', Jentsch argues for the transition from the phantasised body to the law of the 'body' through scientific knowledge. While pointing to the limits of the phantasised body, he draws the limits for an alternative body in terms of the law of the 'body', trying to control the modes of

experience of the human body within the lines of those ‘normal psycho-physiological conditions’. This is

H

how Jentsch aims at mastering the uncanny and this is why he fails at this mastery, for every such limit invites transgression.

1.2 Sigmund Freud and the ‘Return of the Repressed’

Sigmund Freud was to write an article on the same subject thirteen years later, in 1919. Freud’s article consists of three sections. In the introductory paragraph to the first section of “The Uncanny” Freud pronounces that he intends to dwell on some particular and a rather remote province of aesthetics; aesthetics defined as “the theory of feeling” (368). He contends that the subject of the ‘uncanny’, being a province of this kind, has been neglected in standard works of aesthetics (368).

In that study, for a scientific analysis of the uncanny, Freud suggests two methodologies: it is possible either to “find out what meaning has come to be attached to the word ‘uncanny’ in the course of its history” (369), or to “collect all those properties of persons, things, sensations, experiences and situations which arouse in us the feeling of the uncanniness, and then infer the unknown nature of the uncanny from what they all have in common” (369). He confidently adds that “both courses lead to the same result” (369), for “the ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar”(370). He then promises that in the course of his article he will display how an uncanny experience “is possible, in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening” (370).

Referring to Jentsch's article as the only one attempt he knows of in medico-psychological literature on the subject of the uncanny, Freud considers it to be a "fertile but not exhaustive paper" (369). Freud contends that "on the whole, Jentsch did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and the unfamiliar" (370), and asserts that his study will "try to proceed beyond the equation of *unheimlich* with unfamiliar" (370).

It is no coincidence that Freud's criticism of Jentsch dwells mainly on Jentsch's point of intellectual uncertainty as the main cause of an uncanny sensation (Freud 382). As previously stated, in Jentsch's view intellectual mastery of one's environment effaces uncanniness. 'Intellectual mastery of one's environment' can be read in the Freudian terminology as 'conscious mastering of the stimuli'. Nevertheless, for Freud, stimuli cannot be always mastered consciously because of the highly significant role the unconscious system plays in the psyche. In his 1915 article "The Unconscious", Freud was to maintain that "it is both untenable and presumptuous to claim that whatever goes on in the mind must be known to consciousness" (99). In the same article, Freud argues that "we must learn to emancipate ourselves from our sense of the importance of that symptom which consists in 'being conscious'" (125). He points out the conventional axiomatic identification of 'conscious' and 'mental', and maintains that this "thoroughly unpractical" identification "breaks up all mental continuity, ... is open to the reproach that without any manifest grounds it overestimates the part played by consciousness" (100).

As maintained earlier, Jentsch's objective is to eliminate the threat posed by the uncanny. "Sufficient orientation with respect to psychical processes, and enough certainty in the judgement of such processes outside the individual" (14) would prevail,

according to Jentsch, by intellectual, i.e. conscious, mastery of the situation through scientific inquiry and knowledge. By overcoming ignorance, fantasy and nervousity, Jentsch aims at eliminating the 'lack of orientation'. The Freudian scheme, on the other hand, as Kristeva suggests, was to be a step which,

removed the uncanny strangeness from the outside, where fright had anchored it, to locate it inside, not inside the familiar considered as one's own and proper, but the familiar potentially tainted with strangeness and referred (beyond its imaginative origin) to an improper past. The other is my ('own and proper') unconscious.
(183)

In Jentsch's account of the uncanny, ignorant or nervous people, because of their deficiency in comprehending psychical processes, fail to master 'the familiar considered as one's own and proper'. Freud's introduction of the unconscious and the process of repression to the definition of the uncanny was to underscore the uncanny as symptomatic of those processes beyond conscious control.

In "The Uncanny", Freud contends that the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar or old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (394). He suggests that "the *unheimlich* is that was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of repression"

(399). Scrutinising the dictionary meanings of *unheimlich* and *heimlich* leads Freud to conclude that “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*” (377).

Unheimlich is not the opposite of *heimlich*. The meaning of *heimlich* coincides with *unheimlich* at a particular point, as elucidated in this quotation Freud makes from Grimm’s dictionary: “from the idea of ‘homelike’, ‘belonging to the house’, the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of others, something concealed, secret, and this idea is expanded in many ways” (376). As the ‘homelike’ stretches into the dark recesses of ‘home’, the imagined limit that divides the familiar from the unfamiliar disappears, so that in the end *heimlich* embraces that which is secret, hidden, unfamiliar. Freud suggests that,

In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. The word *unheimlich* is only used customarily...as the contrary of the first signification, and not of the second. Sanders tells us nothing concerning a possible genetic connection between these two sets of meanings.³ On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something, which throws quite a new light on the concept of the ‘uncanny’, which we had certainly not

³ Freud’s quotation from Sanders reads as follows: “*Unheimlich* is not *often* (my emphasis) used as opposite to meaning II”, the alluded meaning being “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others” (373).

awaited. According to him everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret and yet comes to light. (375)

This relation between the ‘homely’ and ‘unhomely’ in the German language becomes comprehensible, Freud argues, as he puts forward “two considerations which...contain the gist of this short study”:

In the first place, if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every emotional affect, whatever its quality, is transformed by repression into morbid anxiety, then among such cases of anxiety there must be a class in which the anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs*. This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny, irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why the usage of speech has extended *das Heimliche* into its opposite *das Unheimliche*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar or old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. (394)

In the 1915 article “Repression”, Freud states that repression does not take place once and for all, but it is a continuous process in which what is repressed exercises “a straining in the direction of consciousness, so that the balance has to be kept by means of a steady counter-pressure” (90). This mobile quality of repression,

Freud continues, “finds expression also in the mental characteristics of the condition of sleep which alone renders dream-formation possible. With a return to waking life the repressive cathexes which have been called in are once more put forth” (90).

Elsewhere, in his “Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams”, he elaborates this process in terms of the “insubordination of repressed impulses” in yielding to the desire for sleep (140). This desire “endeavours to call in all the cathexes put forth by the ego” (141). He continues that “this can only partly succeed, for the repressed material in the system Ucs does not yield to the desire for sleep” (141).

The uncanny does not lift repression; the power of denial and the strength of repression prevail over the force of the repressed. It is a momentary ‘failure’ of repression. For, even if conscious representation of the ideational element of the repressed does not emerge, in “The Unconscious” Freud contends that “*transformation* into *affects*, and especially into *anxiety*, of the mental energy belonging to the *instincts*” proves to be a “new possible vicissitude undergone by an instinct” (92). In “The Uncanny”, Freud is to categorise the uncanny as that class of anxiety stemming “from something repressed which recurs” (394).

In “The Uncanny”, he introduces a particular example as “a beautiful confirmation of our theory of the uncanny”:

It often happens that male patients declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former heim (home) of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. ... whenever a man dreams of a place or a

country and says to himself, still in the dream, ‘this place is familiar to me, I have been here before’, we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body. In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is that was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression. (398-9)

Thus, by suggesting “the *unheimlich* is that was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression” (399), Freud himself argues that “un-” does not amount to opposition, does not signify a meaning opposite to that of the *heimlich*. On the contrary, “*unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*” (377).

Freud’s reading of Schellings’s description of the *unheimlich* in “The Uncanny” refers to some sort of ‘coming into light’, ‘revealing’ (373). Similarly, in “Negation”, written in 1925, Freud contends that “negation is a way of taking account of what is repressed”, for “the result is a kind of intellectual acceptance of what is repressed” (182). When the subject-matter of the repression cannot be given up, the process of negation, which is based on denial, “assists in undoing one of the consequences of repression-namely, the fact that the subject-matter of the image in question is unable to enter the consciousness”, yet “in all essentials the repression persists” (182). Considering *unheimlich* as negation based on denial, the suffix *un-* being the sign for negation, as ‘a particular class of morbid anxiety stemming from repressed emotional affects’ has repercussions for the *heimlich*, wherever it is on the spectrum, either on the homely side, or directed towards concealment, secrecy.

The subject-matter of the repressed element enters the consciousness as the *unheimlich*. The *heimisch* quality of the *unheimlich* is denied, and simultaneously

acknowledged: “By the help of the symbol of negation, the thinking-process frees itself from the limitations of repression and enriches itself with the subject-matter without which it could not work efficiently” contends Freud in “Negation” (182). Let us remember that the meaning of the *heimlich* itself reveals the unhomely as much as it refers to that which is homely. The following question appears at this point: Which *heimisch* is confessed through the denial involved in the *un-heimlich*? This question does not seek for an answer which would aspire to clear out the ambiguity, settle signifiers in their respective places to which they belong. This ambiguity is in the very nature of the uncanny itself.

The uncanny merges strangeness with familiarity as denial paradoxically reveals what is being denied, and ‘uncanny strangeness’ and ‘uncanny familiarity’ turn out to be the two facets of the same thing. ‘No, this is not familiar to me’, or ‘no this is not a secret’ are two facets of the denial of the *heimlich*. In “Negation”, Freud contends,

To deny something in one’s judgement is at the bottom the same thing as to say: ‘That is something that I would rather repress.’ A negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression; the ‘No’ in which it is expressed is the hallmark of repression, a certificate of origin, as it were, like ‘Made in Germany’. (182)

In “The Uncanny”, having given various examples qualified as “undeniable instances of the uncanny” (391-92), Freud ends up classifying the reasons behind an uncanny experience under two main groups, contending that “an uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some

impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (403).⁴

In the course of the article, “infantile fears”(383) and “infantile fantasies” (383) will be connected to “repressed infantile complexes” (403). ‘Repressed infantile complexes’ refer mainly to “the castration-complex and womb-phantasies” (403). Elsewhere, Freud describes the latter as “the phantasy ... of intra-uterine existence” (397). His reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman* gives Freud the opportunity to introduce the castration-complex in relation to the uncanny (384). He is convinced that this sort of repressed infantile complex is the main theme of uncanniness in *The Sandman*.

Nevertheless, Freud has to confess that the process of repression does not provide the problematic of uncanny with a definitive explanation, for the proposition that “the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition” (309) is “clearly not convertible” (309), which is to say that “not everything that is connected with repressed desires and archaic forms of thought” is uncanny (309).

Freud makes a move to find a way out of this impasse by differentiating “the uncanny that is actually experienced, and the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it” (401), only to come up with the conclusion that “the class (of the uncanny) which proceeds from repressed complexes is more irrefragable and remains as powerful in fiction as in real experience” (406). And since earlier, he contended that

⁴ Freud’s account of the surmounted animistic beliefs gets very close to Jentsch’s reading of the uncanny in terms of psychical uncertainty deriving from ignorance or lack of critical sense. Freud emphasises that “as soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to support the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny (...). And conversely, he who has

“primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based upon them” (406), and that “these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable” (403), the question of an exhaustive explanation of the origin of the uncanny is still unanswered.

Although both Freud and Jentsch confess in their articles that their scientific methodologies do not bring exhaustive accounts of those circumstances which bring about the uncanny, both of them nevertheless spell out in various sections in their articles the possibility of producing an uncanny effect, for instance in the realm of arts. Jentsch contends that “the production of the uncanny can...be attempted in true art...with exclusively artistic means and artistic intention” (12). In his article, he gives several examples of those “means of arousing uncanny effects” which “are ...often exploited by poets and storytellers” (13). Similarly, in “The Uncanny” Freud contends that “there are many more means of creating uncanny effects of fiction than there are in real life” (404).

E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story *The Sandman* provides both Jentsch and Freud with the case on which they test their respective hypotheses as to the production of an uncanny feeling. Sarah Kofman gives credit to Freud by stating that “the Freudian principle of treating fictional characters as if they were real people seems, in strategic terms, highly salutary. By establishing an essential link between the work and desire, by scotching the opposition between the imaginary and the real, Freud deconstructs the sacred character of art” (159). Nevertheless, what is confused is the uncanny experience of the protagonist of the story, Nathaniel, and the possible uncanny

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completely and finally dispelled animistic beliefs in himself, will be insensible to this type of the

experience of the reader. What leaves an uncanny impression on Nathaniel does not necessarily have to lead to an uncanny experience on the side of each and every reader of the story. Therefore, if Kofman's contention is true, then it should be stated that Freud deconstructed the sacred character of art, but he did it at the expense of submitting to the universal. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, following his reading of *The Sandman*, Freud suggests a "possible differentiation between the uncanny that is actually experienced, and the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it" (401).⁵ But eventually he is convinced that "something uncanny in *real experience*... can be traced back without exception to something familiar that has been repressed" (401).

Freud's article might be helpful in showing the way towards 'what not to do' in trying to draft a working conceptualisation of the uncanny. So, 'to collect all those properties of persons, things, sensations, experiences and situations which arouse in us the feeling of the uncanniness, and then infer the unknown nature of the uncanny from what they all have in common' may not be the correct path to take.

This point exemplifies the main problematic in thinking about the uncanny: if uncanny is a subjective affect and if even "the same perception on the part of the same individual does not necessarily develop into the 'uncanny' every time, or at least not

uncanny. For the whole matter is one of 'testing reality' " (402).

⁵ At this point, it may be asserted that Gothic literature exemplifies 'the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it', in so far as it "*enables* us to consider our options, in a wider space than is usual: we may *contemplate what it would be like* to be a devil or an angel, what it would be like if the domestic space were simultaneously freighted with the extremes of passion, what it would be like to have at one's service a double for whose actions we are not responsible and who, we know, might at any moment proclaim him or herself ruler of the house which we had imagined our own" (Punter 17-18) (italics added).

every time in the same way” (Jentsch 8), then the validity of such endeavours as Freud’s and Jentsch’s in trying to isolate and categorise, and in a way, master, those circumstances leading to the uncanny remains one of the most problematic parts of these two accounts of the uncanny.

Freud’s impasses in the conceptualisation of the uncanny is inseparable from the structure of “The Uncanny”, as he goes back and forth between hypotheses, followed by examples promising to test those hypotheses, yet rather than testing, producing new hypotheses.

Samuel Weber makes a crucial point in relation to the erratic structure of “The Uncanny”:

At the conclusion of this essay, Freud has in a sense been led back to his starting point, by a strange temptation, without really intending it, except that this time it is not merely the uncanny which is off-beat, off-side and far out, *abseits*; for Freud himself has been led astray. The reasons for this pertain surely no less to the nature of the uncanny, to its position *abseits*, than to any peculiarities of Freud, or weaknesses in his argument. (213)

Another front in the conceptualisation of the uncanny opens up with this argument. As mentioned above, Freud’s professed methodology was to focus on fictive and non-fictive themes of the uncanny to ‘infer’ its unknown nature. With Weber’s suggestion, the uncanny exceeds the limits of a ‘theme’, and becomes a structure. Freud’s comment on the uncanniness of psychoanalysis in “The Uncanny”, as he contends that he “should not be surprised to hear that psycho-analysis, which is

concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people” (397) actually hints at the latency of this idea in his theory, as well.

According to Samuel Weber, “the role of the narrator and the narrative structure, totally neglected by Freud, must be interrogated, since this provides the context for that movement of repetition and splitting which is constitutive for the uncanny” (225). Similarly Sarah Kofman contends that “it is really the form of the narrative and not the theme in itself which plays the decisive role in the production of effects” (137). Both of these ideas suggest that what is at stake in the uncanny is not (only) the ‘what’, the thematic content of the text, but (also) the ‘how’, the narrative structure of the text.

The (only) and (also) are inserted in brackets in order to emphasise that the theme and the structure are not given as opposing categories. The transgressive relationship of the structure to the theme is vital to the uncanny. The intricacies involved in the etymologies of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* themselves account for this blurring of the structure to the content. As elaborated above, the range of meanings attributed to the *heimlich* cause the complications in the *un-heimlich* as well, where a denial and simultaneously a return of the repressed is expressed in the suffix ‘un-’. The very impossibility of answering such questions as ‘What is it that is being denied and thus is recurring? The secret homeliness? The homely secret?’ is inherent to structure the uncanny.

Julia Kristeva's contention that the uncanny points the way towards the "working of the unconscious, which is itself dependent on repression" (186) might be a path worth following in determining the structure of the uncanny.

1.3 The Structure of the Uncanny

Freud in his 1915 article "The Unconscious" maintains,

Psychoanalysis has taught us that the essence of repression lies, not in abrogating or annihilating the ideational presentation of an instinct, but in withholding it from becoming conscious. We then say of the idea that it is in a state of 'unconsciousness', of being not apprehended by the conscious mind, and we can produce convincing proofs to show that unconsciously it can also produce effects, even of a kind that finally penetrate to consciousness. (98)

In an earlier work, "A Note on The Unconscious in Psychoanalysis" of 1912, Freud was to contend that "an unconscious conception is one of which we are not aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on account of other proofs or signs" (23).

What Derrida can read between the lines of Freud's writing as to the nature of the unconscious is that "the unconscious is a realm not of truths, but rather of traces, differences and transcriptions" (qtd. in Howells 99). Evaluating Derrida's reading of Freud, Norris points out that "Freud can only think the unconscious in differential

terms, as the name of whatever escapes, eludes or discomposes the logic of self-present waking thought” (207).

Freud talks of the ‘unconscious memory-trace’ within the context of repression in his 1915 article “The Unconscious”, defining the trace as “the unconscious memory of ... actual experience” (108). In “Freud and the Scene of Writing”, Jacques Derrida reads the Freudian concept of trace as “something which has never been perceived, whose meaning has never been lived in the present, i.e. has never been lived consciously” (214). Derrida emphasises that trace as memory cannot be “reappropriated at any time as simple presence” (201). The differential nature of trace is related to the nature of the archive which “itself does not record an original experience which can be returned to” (qtd. in Howells 116). Christina Howells remarks the following on Derrida’s account of the ‘trace’:

In simple terms, the trace expresses the absence of full, present meaning: in so far as meaning is differential, a matter of constant referral onwards from term to term, each of which has meaning only from its necessary difference from other signifiers, it is constituted by a network of traces.... The sign implies that it is a sign of something which precedes it; the trace, on the contrary, in Derrida’s account, is not a secondary mark of a prior origin, it means rather that there was no origin before the trace. (50-51)

Similarly, Samuel Weber contends that “the temporality of the unconscious, and in particular of its originating scene, its *Urzsene*, is never linear or punctual, but always subsequent” (16). Such an account of the unconscious memory trace where the

meaning of an 'experience', a 'present' is constituted only subsequently, through deferral, "a present which does not constitute but is originally reconstituted from

'signs' of memory" (Derrida, 1978: 206) has repercussions for the understanding of the 'return of the repressed' involved in the *un-heimlich*.

Referring to Freud, Derrida suggests that "we are wrong...to speak of translation or transcription in describing the transition of unconscious thoughts through the preconscious toward consciousness" (1978: 211). He underscores that the "metaphorical concept of translation ...or transcription ... is dangerous ... because it presupposes a text which would already be there, immobile: the serene presence of a statue, of a written stone or archive whose signified content might be harmlessly transported into the milieu of a different language, that of the preconscious or the conscious" (1978: 211). If the transition of unconscious memory traces to consciousness is originary and irreducible in its secondariness as Derrida maintains (1978: 211), then how is the 'return of repressed' possible, and what is it that which returns to haunt?

The 'return' itself is haunting, for it transgresses the rules of signification established by the law of the 'body'. David Punter suggests that "in order for the haunting to occur at all there must always have been something prior, yet that 'prior' is always one which will elude clear sight, will always move beyond the bright world of the law" (14). 'The bright world of the law', where signification is ideally fixed, is doomed to be haunted by the non-originary of the memory-trace. What returns to haunt is not some sort of Jack-in-the-box, or a monster under the bed. It is no-thing.

As “a nothingness, a nonexistent which is there without being there as being present” (Derrida, 1987: 378), the uncanny strangeness cannot be represented. The uncanny evades appropriation and representation. It haunts.

The next two sections will present and dwell on two accounts of the transgression of the law by the uncanny. According to Sarah Kofman, it is the originarity of the death instincts which transgresses the law of the ‘body’. Samuel Weber accounts for this transgression in terms of the castration complex.

1.3.1 Sarah Kofman and the death instincts

In *Freud and Fiction*, Kofman evaluates Freud’s reading, and gives her own account of, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman*. Her main point is that the experience of uncanniness associated with Olympia, the automaton with which Nathaniel falls in love, in evoking animistic beliefs, and the figure of the Sandman referring to the castration anxiety are actually not of different kinds and that it is not possible to separate the two themes (132). She concludes that beyond the suppressed infantile complexes and animistic beliefs, the “supreme form of *Unheimlichkeit*” is the death instincts, “for which the figures of the devil serve as metaphors” (158). She suggests that Freud, who resisted seeing this ‘beyond’, “could not bear the importance of his discovery concerning the death instincts” (161), and that “*The Uncanny* with its successive invalidations, its tortuous procedure, is a last effort to conceal ‘the return of the repressed’ which emerges in the theory” (161). Kofman contends that the uncanniness of the death instincts derives from “a universal case of repression, a case

that is the most resistant of all: the repression of the presence of death within, and at the origin of, life itself” (158).⁶

Let us refer back to Freud himself one more time at this point. Freud contends in “The Uncanny” that the uncanny is directly related to the “principle of a *repetition-compulsion* in the unconscious mind, based upon instinctual activity and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts” (391). In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud formulates the instinctual nature of repetition-compulsion as follows:

But how is the predicate of being ‘instinctual’ related to the compulsion to repeat? At this point we cannot escape a suspicion that we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general which has not hitherto been clearly recognised or at least not explicitly stressed. *It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state* of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; ...it is...the expression of inertia inherent in organic life. (43)

As mentioned above, Freud contends that whatever is uncanny reminds us of this principle of repetition-compulsion. Derrida is convinced that the compulsion to repeat itself is devoid of ‘meaning’, it is linked to the death drive (Howells 120).

David Punter contends that the body, and death, provide “the point beyond

⁶ This account of the Freudian uncanny by Sarah Kofman resembles Derrida’s reading of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where “Freud’s explicit intention is to explore the Pleasure Principle, but in Derrida’s view he is unwilling to accept what he uncovers; every time a negative element seems to dominate or underlie the Pleasure Principle, Freud attempts to explain it away. His text is marked by self-doubt and anxiety as he finds himself going from one dead-end to the next in a series of blind-alleys which serve to mask the unthinkable” (Howells 109).

explanation on which law and addiction converge in their parallel strategies of disavowal” (9). Death, as the point ‘beyond’, transgresses the law of the ‘body’.

Kofman is convinced that “with the theory of death instincts, the work can no longer be the secondary illustration of an originary model full of sense, because such a hypothesis scotches any identity and plenitude of meaning and turns the text into an originary double” (160). Kofman’s concept of ‘originary double’ echoes Derrida’s “deconstruction of the classical conception of repetition as a secondary rehearsal of something original that precedes it” (Howells 110). Finally, Kofman is to claim that the uncanniness of death instincts, with “the notion of the death instincts understood as a principle of general economy”, points towards the “problematics of a simulacrum without an originary model” (160). According to Kofman, it is not the thematic content of the text *per se*, but writing itself that is uncanny in Hoffmann’s story. What this reading implies is that the existence of death at the ‘origin of life’ effaces any originary meaning and the possibility of signification itself. This loss has serious repercussions for the law of the ‘body’, for “the law is the imposition of certainty, the rhetorical summation of absence, or the loss, of doubt” (Punter 2).

A ‘diabolical’ literature is no longer a literature of illusion or deception: it mimics the double as illusion by giving rise to ‘effects’ of sense and themes, in a mood of simulacrum and derision; introducing within the text a structure of duplicity which does not allow itself to be reappropriated into, or mastered by a, problematics of truth or falsehood. (Kofman 160)

1.3.2 Samuel Weber and castration

Samuel Weber in *The Legend of Freud* suggests that “the distinctive character of the uncanny requires a structural determination that exceeds the realms of purely subjective affect” (233). Where a memory trace does not promise any presence, but only a web of signification in which the signified is always deferred, the uncanny return of the repressed turns out to be ‘the crisis of perception’ in Weber’s terms, for “what should have remained concealed and what has nonetheless, in a certain manner, emerged, engenders the uncanny because its very appearance eludes perception, its being is not to be had, because it side-steps and side-tracks...by repeating, doubling, splitting and reflecting” (Weber 233). The undecidability related to the uncanny infecting “representations, motifs, themes and situations which ... always mean something other than what they are” (Weber 234) calls up for denial “to conserve the integrity of perception: perceiver and perceived, the wholeness of the body” (Weber 234). In other words, this perception threatens the very assumptions of presence and consciousness stemming from the “narcissistic expectation of a self that wants to see itself as intact, whole and autonomous” (Weber 6). This uncanny transgression is a direct assault on the subject and on its identity based on this phantasised body.

Weber asserts that the denial of the unexpected perception, which threatens this narcissistic ‘expectation’ is not a straightforward rejection, but rather it takes place in terms of a ‘contextualisation’ of this unexpected perception.

Weber maintains that “castration in Freud’s writing is above all the title of a *story* that children of both sexes tell themselves, but from a single point of view—that of the male child— in order to render the perception of sexual difference compatible with the ‘expectation’ of male identity” (5). The denial in the form of story telling is performed by the ‘I’ who “thereby strives to secure its position as mere ‘observer’, situated at an ostensibly safe remove from the disturbing possibilities it seeks merely to describe or retell” (Weber 6). Nevertheless castration anxiety ‘haunts’ “the story the subject would like to tell itself in order to confirm its self-identity as an ‘I’” (Weber 16). Weber contends that the story told *by* the ‘I’ is told *for* the ‘I’, and “the telling of the story itself becomes part of the ‘action’, a performance inscribed in a scene that is not separated from what it describes” (6).

The ‘return of the repressed’ requires the continuous articulation of this narrative, performance, theatricality, which is indispensable for the integrity of the ‘body’, and for the maintenance of the law of the ‘body’. On the other hand, it is the process of this very articulation which disperses the subjectivity, transgressing the inside-outside border drawn by the self. The abandoning of the ‘I’ to such a dispersion is “what marks the space ... of the unconscious as an ‘other scene’ that is irreducibly theatrical” (7). Weber contends that “in place of the Aristotelian call for “synoptic” viewing”, what we find, ... in ... Freud, is the inscribing not just of the *spectator*, but also of irreducibly multiple and split *perspectives*, in the scene and its scenario” (Weber 31).

This irreducibility of multiplicity, which is disavowed by the law of the ‘body’, is revealed by the uncanny. The theatrical space of the law of the ‘body’ as a discourse of subjectivity is interrupted by its very theatricality, by “theatricality as a *coup*, a

blow...that gives the beat, marks the time, but also interrupts the expectation of a continuous, progressive, linear-teleological course of events” (Weber 7).

Interrupting the expectation of the events, the *coup de théâtre* dismantles the “narcissistic conception of the body as a matrix for the ego: self-contained, unified, integrated” (Weber 15). This loss of the integrity of the body, or rather, the revelation of that loss, the revelation of the site of the body, leads to the loss of consciousness according to Weber, the consciousness,

which must always be consciousness of an object, which is to say, consciousness of *an object that is one*. When the object is revealed as being more or less than one, as split or doubled, like the space itself of the scene we are rereading, what results is a ‘sudden spasm’.

(15)

Just as Kofman’s ‘diabolical’ literature introduces “within the text a structure of duplicity which does not allow itself to be reappropriated into, or mastered by a, problematic of truth or falsehood”(160), so does Weber’s *coup de théâtre* interrupt the narratives of disavowal involved within the law of the ‘body’. The *coup* reveals the site of the body, against which all such narratives are constructed. The *coup de théâtre* is the break of the law of the ‘body’, and as such, it can only take place within the site of the body where “the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance” (Weber 233) takes place.

Consequently, what the castration complex reveals turns out to be a certain form of recurrence in the “laws of articulation in which repetition consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance” (233). Weber defines this process as “reference without ultimate or fundamental referent” (233), and he unearths the movement of the castration complex as that which works against a transcendental signified, against an ultimate origin. Weber contends that “according to the law of castration no thing is ever the same but only the repetition of another, itself a repetition” (Weber 224). Castration is a fiction the dependency of which on laws of articulation allow it to be “glimpsed obliquely, sideways ... *en travers*: never *en face*” (Weber 233).

Such an account of castration is in accord with Derrida’s reading of the castration complex in terms of ‘dissemination’, which, Howells explains, “helps explain castration in so far as it affirms endless substitution” (100). Howells suggests that “understanding dissemination, and acknowledging the negative fear that loss of a transcendental signifier (or signified) may unleash, may help us understand the castration complex” (101).

Uncanny is that moment of break of identification for this narcissistic self, and it poses “a mortal danger to the subject, to the ‘integrity’ of its body and thus to its very identity, which -if we accept the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism- is based upon this body-image as its model” (Weber 233). It transgresses the ‘body’ by revealing the multiplicity and split inherent in the body.

1.3.3 The site of the body

David Punter's contention that the body, and death, provide "the point beyond explanation on which law and addiction converge in their parallel strategies of disavowal" (9) might shed a new light on the 'law of castration' and its relation to the law of the 'body'. The 'body' turns out to be the site where "the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance" takes place (Weber 233). This is why the law of the 'body' is a strategy of disavowal, for it denies this violence, the loss of the transcendental signified. As mentioned above, the law has to be based on a transcendental signified to sustain signification, and thus, sustain its authority in maintaining the integrity of the 'body'. This is why "the movement of repetition and splitting ... is constitutive for the uncanny and for the crisis of perception and of corporal unity that are inseparable from it" (Weber 225).

Both Weber's account of infantile castration complex and Kofman's reading of the death instincts suggest that the uncanny experience is a cycle which involves the comprehension of and fascination by the arbitrariness of signification of the site of the body and by the absence of an origin, i.e. the absence of the law of the 'body'. The law has to be based on a transcendental signified to sustain signification in so far as the "law alone serves to validate memory, continuity" (Punter 16).

The following section presents a general introduction to masked acting to give an account of masked acting in so far as it relates to the disturbance of the 'body' as a narcissistic discourse and thus fits within the structure of the uncanny. Tracing the narrative structure of the uncanny in a text will form the next step of this study. The chosen text is a group of theatre masks by Kuzgun Acar designed for the production of Bertolt Brecht's the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The structural account of the uncanny will help to border the mode(s) of experience in relation to these masks.

Chapter II

Masked Acting and The Synthesis Discourse

A functional definition of a mask would draw its examples from several sources. Bill Baird, in *The Art of the Puppet* defines a mask's original function in terms of hiding through disguise. He contends that "the mask was originally a disguise, perhaps a skin or a pair of antlers worn to conceal the approach of a hunter moving in the manner of his prey. The success of the masquerade gave it an aura of magic; the mask itself took on a quality of divinity" (30).

This aura surrounding a mask would be functional in stretching a mask's meaning from something which hides to an ontological form of alterity: an 'other', a ghost, a spectre, something which invades. A mask would thus be a false continuity of the body. The 'divine quality' of the mask refers to its magical power of coming to life by itself, bringing life upon itself.

John Emigh's introduction to *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre* exemplifies the mainstream attitude towards masked acting within the Western theatrical context where a mask is considered to be an "inherent and disembodied other" (introduction xviii) confronting the actor who is "nakedly and pathetically himself/herself vis-à-vis the mask" (introduction xviii). Emigh contends that "the actor plays with the mask as if it were his or her own face, allowing the suggested life of the mask to play upon and to reshape the actor's

imaginative sense of self”(introduction xviii). He perceives a similar relationship between the actor and the text: “initially set apart, the text must be appropriated, owned” (introduction xviii). Emigh underscores that “in working up a role, the unmediated self of the actor, the mask (*persona*) that is to be acted and the text that is to be spoken with the flow of action form a triad” (introduction xix). It might be of interest to note in here that Latin word *persona* originally referred both to the mask and to the part to be acted (Lewis 1356).

Throughout his book, Emigh draws examples from various masked acting traditions around the world to support his hypothesis that masked acting involves the process which contrives to find “a meeting ground for self and other” (introduction xviii).

In New Guinean performances for instance, Emigh contends that a mask acts as a “conduit for a ‘visiting’ spiritual entity, coming from the past into the contemporary world of the spectators” (14). In this sense, a mask functions as a temporary body, as a skeleton for the ‘visiting’ spiritual entity, as a vessel which contains the power of the spirit, a mediator between the living and the dead.

Nevertheless, this ‘other’ that is ‘represented’ by a mask does not necessarily have to be a spectral entity, an otherworldly being. According to Emigh, another important aspect of masked acting is that it represents human characters in its own peculiar way:

Not all masks portray otherworldly beings. Masks may also serve to essentialise the character traits of human agents in history, legend, and contemporary society. Most of the masks used on the Greek classical or Hellenistic stages, for example, portrayed not *the* other, but *another*- a forsaken wife, a once-proud ruler from the legendary past, a recently conquered enemy from Persia, a slave bearing terrible news, or even a comic caricature of Socrates or Cleon. Gods, too, were represented on the Greek stage, but when they were they took on a decidedly human aspect. Similarly, the face-like masks of Japanese *noh* theatre were created to depict human agents with stories that bind them to the past, or gods and demons in essentially human form. The half-masks of the *commedia dell'arte* of Renaissance Italy had a more prosaic field of reference; they were based upon the human faces one could see in the contemporary faces of Venice. The actor's own face was reshaped for comic effect, and in that reshaping into a comic type, eccentricities and excesses of character were revealed through a mischievous remodelling of brows, cheeks, and noses and the addition of flowing mustachios or angry carbuncles... *Topeng* is a popular form of theatre in Bali that also uses masks-both full masks and half-masks- in order to represent the human face; *topeng pajegan* is an old and particularly demanding version of that form in which one man portrays all the characters-male and female, noble and ignoble, tragic and comic, past and present, human, demonic and divine. In *topeng*, as in Greek

tragedy and Japanese noh, even the ... godly characters appear in essentially human form, and the topeng pajegan performer's many

masks-his many personae-reveal a wide range of attitudes toward human life". (Emigh 105)

What appears in such an account of masked acting is that the actor faces the mask's existence and meaning as something alien, as an 'other'. Emigh interprets a mask as either representing 'the other' or 'another'. Whatever the prefix, for Emigh this 'otherness' is always in relation to the actor's assumed integrity of self and body, to the "narcissistic expectation of a self that wants to see itself as intact, whole, and autonomous" (Weber 6).

David Griffiths, in his *Acting Through Mask*, which is seemingly set in an entirely different context, has the same presupposition that the mask is an 'other' in its objectivity.⁷ For him, "the only way to animate the mask is to discover the essence of its spirit and to activate that spirit through the unique body language which belongs to it" (39). In the section on mask design, Griffiths suggests that actors should be involved with the design and production of their masks from the very beginning as he is convinced that this involvement is "crucial to the future progress of the complementary body language of the character" (38). The actor has to learn to wear and animate the mask, "to learn to release its spirit in all its 'novelty'" (39).

⁷Griffiths aims to draw the "outline of an alternative programme of actor-training" with the "introduction of a mask-based training philosophy" (2). Pointing to the lack of emphasis on physical technical skills in the "oral tradition in theatre", Griffiths believes that physical training of the actor's body to reply to "the highly complex, artistic demands of theatre performance" can be attained through training with masks (3). He is convinced that "years of training to work in mask lays the foundations for performing *without* mask" (4).

Griffiths' argument concerning masks influencing the acting style is supported by what the *Berliner Ensemble* experienced during the production of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the 1950's. During the dress rehearsal of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht and the *Berliner Ensemble* observed that masked acting required "a different style of interpretation, different from how we have worked so far" (Tenschert 111). As the actors had not put on the masks during the rehearsals until the *Kostümprobe*, they were not aware that they would have to change "many of the so far employed gestures and positions" (ibid.).

Ulusoy's argument about the relationship between the actor and the mask is on par with Brecht and Griffiths, for he too contends that "the form of the mask deforms the movement, gestures of the actor and vice-versa" (Bablet, 1985: 226). This 'deformation' of the movement and the gestures confronts the actor and the mask, and in Ulusoy's view this "contradiction" leads to "the synthesis between the body of the actor and the mask"(Bablet, 1985: 226). He is convinced that "when the actor carries the mask, the mask has to become a part of his/ her body, there has to be a synthesis established with the body, otherwise that union does not mean anything..."(Bablet, 1985: 226).⁸

This discourse of 'synthesis', in which the hidden potential, i.e. the 'spirit', of the mask and the actor are believed to come together to shape the character, can be extended to puppetry as well. "Puppets are described as being 'almost human' in the hands of a highly skilled puppeteer. They can also do many things which are beyond the capabilities of humans" (Griffiths 45).

⁸ "Quand le comédien porte le masque, il faut que le masque devienne partie de son corps, il faut qu'une synthèse s'établisse avec le corps, sinon cette union ne veut rien dire(...) La forme du masque déformait le geste du comédien et vice-versa. C'est en cela que réside la vie du masque. C'est cette synthèse qu'il faut toujours trouver, cette contradiction qui aboutit à la synthèse entre le corps de l'acteur et le masque."

Baird contends that there is a “progression from masks to puppet masks to marionettes” (34). He describes this process as follows:

Masks, particularly hinged and jointed ones like the shaman’s, are just an evolutionary step or two away from the puppet. When a single masked dancer began to appear as a performer before the rest of his group, it was the beginning of theatrical performance and a stepping-off place for the mask to become a puppet. Gradually, in the course of the centuries, the hinged and jointed mask moved upward, off the head, and was held in the hands in front of the body. Later it moved farther away and was made to live by the manipulation of strings. (30)

Nevertheless, the puppet does not necessarily have to be a separate objective reality external to the actor’s body. For instance, French puppeteer Yves Joly bewitched his spectators by allowing “his hands to assume the attitudes of the most sophisticated drama” (Baird 189). “Working with pantomime and music, his company of hands created ballet, satire and melodrama. Occasionally a glove has been used to represent costume, or a small hat or other prop to symbolise authority, caste, or status” (Baird 191). Thus, the ‘otherness’ considered to be symbolised by masks and puppets does not have to be external to an actor’s body, since even one’s hands can produce the sense of alterity exterior to the imagined self of the actor, and thus to the ‘body’. Joly’s hands transgress the instrumentality of the ‘body’, the instrumentality which serves to reify the integrity of the ‘body’ and of the self.

What the Synthesis Discourse suggests is that the mask interrupts the ‘body’ of the actor to re-present another ‘body’, that of the *persona*. What is undermined in this discourse is a second movement, that of the *Coup de théâtre*, where the theatricality of the ‘body’ is revealed. As will be elaborated in the following chapter, masked acting, rather than finding a meeting ground for the self and the other as Emigh contends, i.e. re-presenting an-other ‘body’, re-producing the law of the ‘body’, reveals the ‘body’ as a site where “the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance” takes place (Weber 233). Consequently, the Synthesis Discourse turns out to be another discourse of the ‘body’, trying to abide by the law of the ‘body’ in its disavowal of the loss of the signified, in so far it aspires to re-present the body of the *persona*, the *persona* as a body.

The ‘intermittent mode’ of use Ulusoy assigns to the masks plays exactly with this disavowal. Ulusoy’s ‘intermittent mode’ makes this sham open, while providing another one: mask as weapon, as helmet, as shield, i.e. mask as an instrument. The instrumentality of the re-presented body, suggested as mask-as-the-face, is transgressed by the instrumentality of the mask-as-weapon. Moreover, the mask-as-the-face itself transgresses the unity, meaning and instrumentality of the ‘face’ as a part of the ‘body’, in so far as it re-presents. This transgressive oscillation between the mask and the ‘body’, and in particular the ‘face’, will be elaborated in the following chapter.

Chapter III

Transgressing the Law of the 'Body'

3.1 The *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and the Acar masks

In 1975, Mehmet Ulusoy commissioned Kuzgun Acar for the design and production of masks to be used in a production of Bertolt Brecht's play the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* which was to be directed by Ulusoy himself and staged by his *Théâtre de Liberté* in Paris. 14 actors would play 49 parts in total, thus some actors would play multiple parts with the masks. It took Acar three months to be ready with the masks, during which he observed each and every actor for whom he would design and produce masks during rehearsals, on the stage. In an interview with Denis Bablet, Ulusoy, remarking that a mask is not an *ex-nihilo* creation, describes how Kuzgun would observe an actor for sometimes even up to 4-5 hours during rehearsals (Bablet, 1985: 229). Ulusoy remembers Acar's scrupulous style of work, and the times when he would literally throw away an unsatisfactory mask on which he had worked for a considerable amount of time (private interview).

Acar was to die less than a year after the first staging of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Today, the bulk of the masks he produced for the 1975 production of *Caucasian Chalk Circle* are in Mehmet Ulusoy's possession.

The Acar masks can be roughly classified as follows: half-masks (*Figures 1-8*), handled masks (*faces-a-main*) (*Figures 9-16*), and helmet-masks (*Figures 17-23*).

Half-masks are intended to be used by characters of the middle class, such as servants and lawyers. They are made out of copper (Bablet, 1985: 228). Some of these cover the face very much in the line of classical half masks (*Figure 1, Figure 2*).

Some other of these half-masks cover the head without necessarily covering the part of the face between the mouth and the forehead, as done by conventional half-masks.

Instead, they cover only the forehead (*Figures 3, 4, 8*), and ears (*Figure 6*). Others,

like the mask of one of the lawyers in the play as shown in *Figure 5*, have multiple

modes of utilisation described by Ulusoy as follows:

I do not consider the mask ... as a prosthesis with which the actor gets on to the scene and keeps it on from the very beginning until the very end. It comes, it goes, you put it on, you take it off. Sometimes the lawyer puts his mask on his face, sometimes on his head like a helmet. When he starts talking he puts it on his face and it becomes a weapon which extends its function; but when he stops, it is done with its purpose, and thus he puts the mask back on his head. The same goes for the passage from the mask to the helmet for soldiers; this is the passage from the everydayness of the uniform to the atrocity of the war. (Bablet, 1985: 229)⁹

⁹ “Je ne considère pas le masque à l’intérieur d’un spectacle comme quelque chose de définitif, comme une prothèse avec laquelle le comédien entrerait en scène au début de la représentation pour ne pas quitter avant la fin. Il va, il vient, tu le prends, tu le remets. Il se déplace sur la tête. À certains moments l’avocat porte son masque devant son visage, à d’autres sur la tête comme un casque. Quand il commence son discours il le met sur son visage et le masque devient une arme qui prolonge sa fonction, mais quand il sort, il quitte sa fonction et alors il renverse son masque sur sa tête. De même pour le soldat le passage du casque au masque, c’est le passage du quotidien de l’uniforme à l’atrocité de la guerre.”

According to Denis Bablet, through this ‘intermittent practice’ in masked acting, Ulusoy inscribes the conception and the fabrication of the masks within the general conception of the play (Bablet, 1984: 282).¹⁰

In Ulusoy’s words, handled masks (*faces-a-main*) are used by the *grandes personnages* of the play, i.e. the aristocrats (Bablet, 1985: 228). He mentions that these masks are made up of objects of everyday life, either reworked (such as spoons, and fork as shown in *Figure 13*, *Figure 14*) or more or less left intact as they are found (Bablet, 1985: 228). Ulusoy qualifies these masks as “mobile masks which can be manipulated towards or away from the face” (Bablet, 1985: 228).

The last group of masks are made up of military helmets, and they are used by the soldiers in the play. These masks also prove to be ‘mobile’ masks, for their mode of usage is multiple: sometimes they are used as masks covering the face, sometimes as helmets on the head, and sometimes in an intermediary position (Bablet, 1985: 228). This mode is described by Ulusoy as “the passage from the mask to the helmet for soldiers”, which is “the passage from the everydayness of the uniform to the atrocity of the war” (Bablet, 1985: 229).

3.2 False innocence of the death mask

A critical reading of the Acar masks within a structural relationship to the aesthetics of the uncanny may be focused on the modes of intentionality that accompany these masks. One of the scruples, which shape this process of diagnosis, is

¹⁰ “... il fait l’emploi du masque une pratique intermittente, il inscrit leur conception et leur fabrication dans la conception générale du spectacle” (Bablet, 1984: 282).

the problematisation of the issue of theatricality, where the non-equation of ‘theatricality’ and ‘theatrical context’ should be emphasised. This will help bordering, framing the modes of experience of and with the masks.

One way of asserting the mode of usage of the Acar masks appears within the theatrical context, masks as inanimate human likenesses in accord with Brechtian realism. Brecht contends that even with the most grotesque mask it is possible to stage a realist representation, for “in the theatre reality can be represented in a factual or in a fantastic form. The actors can do without (or with the minimum of) makeup, appearing ‘natural’, and the whole thing can be a fake; they can wear grotesque masks and represent the truth” (qtd. in Willett, 1964: 110). Nevertheless, even within the particular context of the Acar masks, the inanimate human likeness is transgressed by Ulusoy’s assignment of an “intermittent” mode where the mask is not only the grotesque likeness of a face but also a weapon (like the spoon-fork in *Figure 14*), a shield (*Figure 5*), a helmet (*Figures 17-23*).

The Acar masks as artworks do not ‘realise their potential’ only on the stage by ‘realising the potential of the actor’. Their sculptural quality is this excess value. *Figure 24* shows some of the Acar masks on the wall of Mehmet Ulusoy’s flat in Istanbul, where the slightly larger-than-lifesize helmet-masks project out like trophies. A photograph taken by Ugur Günyüz at an Acar exhibition at Galeri MD in 1988 documents a very specific instance: one of the Acar masks is exhibited alongside Acar’s own death mask.¹¹ Is this a *mise-en-scène* where the exhibitors want to convey the feeling that Acar is watching us? Is it an attempt at association which articulates itself on the lines of ‘the artist and his work’? Repetition-compulsion?

¹¹ This photograph was published in the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* alongside Ferit Edgü’s article on Kuzgun Acar. Please check the References section at the end for information.

The death mask involves the structure of the uncanny in its re-presentation of the phantasised body, in so far as this re-presentation amounts to a denial. For it is more than a last glimpse of the mortal corpse of the deceased; it aims at immortalisation. It conveys the feeling that the deceased is caught at that very moment when the death has just arrived, the moment just before decay, decomposition and disintegration set in the body. The brief description in *Undying Faces* of how a death mask is taken might desacralize the illusion of the phantasised perfect image of death. Not only that the moulding of the mask is not instantaneous but actually it is a process comprising several stages. Similarly, the mask maker is not a passive mould-caster but an active intervening power, retouching the contours of the face, actually creating the mask. The repercussion is that the death mask does not catch the expression of the face of the deceased as s/he dies away, it does not present the present, the moment of the first encounter with death, but it re-presents that imagined moment. At this point, it is possible to suggest that the ‘politics of mask-making’ and the ‘politics of portraiture’ are very much entangled in the production of death-masks. The death mask turns out to be the uncanny transgression of the instrumentality of the human body, in particular the face, as memorial, monumental. Kenneth Gross, in *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, argues that “the wish to become a monument, to find a resting place between life and death, is itself as unsettled as it is unsettling” (20). The instrumentality of the body, the meaning of the ‘face’ is transgressed by the mask/monument’s very originary secondariness, by the continuous deferral of meaning the nodal point of which is ‘death’, following Kofman’s argument. The death mask transgresses the intended monumentality by its very monumentality, if we accept Rosalind Krauss’s notion that a monument is a “commemorative representation” (279). The uncanny de-stabilises the values of

representation, by pointing to the un-marked, in so far as the suffix 'un-' is a token of repression and denial.

The aggressiveness against the commemorative in the juncture of the politics of mask-making and the politics of portraiture can be extended to the Acar masks.

Acar himself was delighted with the idea that his masks turned into moving sculptures on the stage (Ural 73). Kenneth Gross argues that "the fantasy of the moving statue can coincide with the domain of this wish to be a statue" (19). Gross mentions Michel Serres at one point, suggesting that Serres, in his *Statues*,

insists that what the statue stands for, what it both conceals and fixes in place, is the dying, entropic, and violable human body. ... it conceals what is revealed by the fact of a corpse, our decaying materiality, our being's entanglement with alien, apparently inhuman processes or substances, our bondage to a lifelessness we inhabit or once inhabited. (21)

The Acar masks work against this conventional conception of sculptures, not only because they are not polished to shine but left to decay and rust, but also they point to a past contaminated with the war, in so far as the materials Acar employed in the production of these masks are various sorts of metal remaining from the Second World War. Furthermore, on several levels, they play with the vulnerability of the human body and with the vulnerability of the law of the 'body'. The fantasy of

moving sculpture, in a way, reveals what the sculpture conceals. “The living statue may remind us that there is never any fixed space between” (Gross 135).

3.3 The human, the machine and the animal

In the epilogue to *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automaton, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama*, Harold B. Segel contends that puppets, marionettes, automatons and related forms of human likenesses provided modernism and the avant-garde with a wide field in which to experiment. He mentions that with the emergence of Futurism and Expressionism, the pre-occupation with inanimate human likenesses were carried to their extremes (322).

From the exploration of the various ramifications of the human-as-puppet metaphor to the celebration of the puppet or marionette as model of animated perfection, the avant-garde grafted the culture of the machine age onto the inanimate figure and then animated it with all its anxieties, exhilarations, and disillusionments. Once art had worked its way through the reduction of human to machine or, ... from human being to robot and robot back to human being, the modernist and avant-garde obsession with puppetry had run much of its course. (Segel 322)

In the above paragraph Segel talks about the period between 1890-1935, and it seems like a long way to 1975. Nevertheless, the theme of human-machine haunts the Acar masks as well, albeit with different repercussions. For one thing, the borderline between the human and the machine, likewise the human and the animal, and even the animal and the machine, is transgressed in these works, as will be discussed shortly. There is no 'reduction' of the human to the machine, neither a transition from the human to the robot back to the human, but a complicated web of transgression of the human, in particular the instrumentality of the 'body', through the machine and the animal. It is not only the intermingling of the 'machine' and the 'human', because what is machine and what is human is already very much entangled within the notion of 'instrumentality'.

The material of these works laid the ground for a perception favouring the 'machine'. The masks are made up of different types of metals collected by Acar at the flea market in Paris: forks, spoons, helmets.... The helmets have been identified as those left behind the Second World War, as is all the other metal used in the making of other masks, apart from the giant turtle shells which were to be the shields of the soldiers in the play (Ural 89). History repeats itself in a repetitive-compulsive manner. Punter suggests that for the obsessive, the world is already ruined (12). Rust, decay, dismemberment...

Three of such helmet-masks (*Figures 18, 19, 23*) look like metal sheets covering some sort of an engine, ribbed horizontally to provide small openings for the motor to have contact with air. It is possible to trace the same idea in two of the half-masks, shown in *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*.

Another helmet-mask, as seen in *Figure 22* might have resembled a stylised human face, with the roundness of the head and the projecting eyelids, if it was not for the small hoe attached horizontally to where a nose would be expected to project. The Y-shape of the body of the hoe repeats the circular contours of the forehead, eyebrows and eyelids. This roundness is suddenly terminated with the angular shape of the head of the hoe. On the other hand, this angular shape of the hoe repeats the pointed, star-shaped rim of the helmet. Is the hoe attached to the head, or the head to the hoe? Is it a stylised, almost animalistic nose, or is it a lever with which the machine would be started? The transition from the angular to the circular back to the angular is an oscillation creating a confusion of the human, the animal and the machine.

This circular-angular dichotomy should not be taken as a binary opposition where the circular is attributed anthropomorphic qualities, whereas the angular with its sharp edges is associated with the mechanical. The circular itself can have mechanical qualities, like the work in *Figure 7*, where the round centre with extending small arms looks like some sort of a propeller.

Figure 16 invokes a confusion similar to that of *Figure 22*. In this particular work 'instrumentality' shifts according to the viewpoint. The 'nose' becomes the handle. The handle displaces the 'head', while at the same time 'pointing' to that which is behind the mask: the emptiness.

It should be mentioned that the helmet-masks were accompanied by giant-turtle shells worn by some of the actors. Acar mentions that it was an act of the moment for him to see those empty gigantic turtle shells on the Algerian beach and connect them to Brecht and to the play (Ural 86). These turtle shells further add to the confusion of the human-machine-animal.

Another instance of transgression is the repetition of the decaying human form and its merging into the weapon, like in *Figure 5*, where a small-scale, distorted, metal skeleton greets us, arms wide open. This is not an inviting greeting, though. The tension between the horizontal line provided by two forks, and the vertical line provided by two other forks is broken by the roundness of the spoon projecting up (not unlike an antenna) at a slight angle. Once put on the head, it is not difficult to imagine that the forks attached vertically would look like long, threatening fangs. The hygienic, angular look associated with the mechanical in the case of *Figure 22* does not exist in this piece. Yet, it is not a metal representation of the organic, for the dangerous metallic weapon and the miserable decay of the organic are intertwined in here.

The use of spoons and forks in the design of works such as *Figure 5*, *Figure 13*, *Figure 14*, and *Figure 15* is accounted for by art critic Seçkin Selvi as indicating the inherent social/ist critique, ‘inviting’ the bourgeoisie to ‘eat’, i.e. to exploit (private interview).¹²

The spoon-fork mask in *Figure 14* is made out of a spoon, the middle of which is carved out, and fork teeth welded on top of this carved-out spoon. According to Mehmet Ulusoy’s description, this piece was designed for one of the female characters, the mother who deserted her child in the play, and it is a mask that can turn into a dangerous dagger-like weapon at times (private interview). Yet the long and sharp fork teeth supposed to represent the long eye-lashes of the female character keep the level of tension high on another front: they pose a direct threat to the eye expected to be located within the empty core of the carved-out spoon. According to Punter,

the maternal body is an emblem for all vulnerability, for the animal as much as for the human, and thus in the animal layers of the psyche. It is in our dealings with this fantasised maternal body that the formations of sadism and masochism appear, in projected and introjected torture of the mother. (14-15).

The threat is twofold. On one hand, the threat refers to a phantasised ‘past’ when the sharp teeth ran through the eye which is already dismembered, hence the empty eye-socket (‘it was there, but it is not there anymore’). On the other hand, the threat refers to a phantasised ‘future’ when the sharp teeth might turn against the eye (‘it is there and the teeth are sharp enough to dive into it and rip through it’). Thus, the fork projecting out of the empty eye-socket plays with the theme of castration anxiety as much as it plays with the temporality, merging what happened into what might happen. Furthermore, due to the phantasised character of this ‘threat’, the fork also plays with what has never happened and what will never happen. Even when we do not read it as a ‘mask’, and hence ignore the spoon’s direct relation to the eye, the tension continues: themes of ‘devouring’, ‘eating’, ‘destroying’ circulate around the handled spoon-fork. The vicious circle of discontinuity is maintained by the thinness and sharpness of the tooth of the fork without a body, the roundness of the spoon without a core, the thinness and longness of the body of the spoon that ends up again with a round handle. The handle waits for the hand to grab it, but it is already itself a hand, grabbing the spoon-fork, the one that is always already dismembered but also

¹² ‘Yiyin efendiler!’

sharp and ready for dismembering. The eye is not there to serve, to be used because it is already eliminated by the sharp fork, which refers back to this lost eye.

Yet, the handle awaits some sort of instrumentality which transgresses the notion of the 'body' as an instrument, for it turns against itself, and it phantasises 'instrumentalities', referring to, quoting Jentsch, some 'other sort of animatedness'. Kenneth Gross suggests that "the statue is not likely to speak or keep silent as human beings do; the statue's figures of life may indeed work strongly to trouble our conventional ideas of how human beings speak or keep silent. Its life may emerge as half-life, or an inhuman life. There are no guarantees in the work of animation" (199).

In *Figure 11*, the oscillation between the past and the present tense, the 'have been' and 'will do' recurs. This particular piece is as much torn as it is ready to tear. Inverted metal 'petals' invoke the anxiety of anticipation.

Figure 13 conveys a similar tension, yet this time the contours of the face can be clearly seen. The thematic content of this particular mask feigns the female masquerade, for Denis Bablet informs us that this mask was designed for an *efféminé* male character (Bablet, 1984: 282). The 'eye-lashes' are not unlike long, slim fingers which have just managed to rip out their way on to the metal surface. Thus, a similar play with the anxiety of anticipation which has always been there without being there is at stake. The long, slim handle supports/ is attached to the round top. The small spoon attached on it crawls down to meet the handle, to continue from where it 'left'. Yet the small spoon's handle is slightly tilted on one side, disrupting the expectation of smooth continuity of the straight line which would pass right through the 'face'. This tilted handle projects upwards like an antenna, reminding us of other examples of spoon-antennas, like in *Figure 8*, *Figure 5*, and *Figure 4*. On one hand, this work

looks like a highly stylized ‘human likeness’. On the other hand, paradoxically, this reference to the human body is accompanied by the exclusion of the human body. It is not a habit/at, the ‘body’ cannot dwell in it, with it, through it. Thus, not within the context of gendered representation, but also within the broader context of masked acting as masquerade, does this work feign itself, mockingly giving reference to a masquerade which, in turn, refers back to itself.

The round contours of the works in *Figure 20* and *21* merge in the sculptural quality of the ‘faces’. Projecting eyelids and what look like moustache made out of pieces of metal give a rigid quality to the works. Yet this quality is destabilised by caricature-like antenna-eyebrows, which make these works look like some sort of animals. Persistent scrutiny may make these masks look less like human and more like sculpted animals, frozen in time, with antennas out of use. And yet the contours of the face call back the human.

‘Castration anxiety’ within the structure of the uncanny does not necessarily refer to an actual organic dismemberment. Samuel Weber’s account of ‘castration’ not as an actual event but as a structure was elaborated in the first chapter of this thesis. What this structure involves is those “laws of articulation in which repetition consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance” (Weber 233). What is displaced in the Acar masks is the reference to the unitary, meaningful, expedient body. *Figure 18* can be located within this structure. Contrary to antenna-spoons in some other works, the two spoons attached to either sides of the helmet are disabled in this particular example in so far as upward-projecting antennae are concerned. Rather, they look like ears, albeit devoid of any

function related to hearing. They are blocked, dumb. The entire piece is impenetrable, uninviting, restricting access. The relation of this helmet-mask to the machine has already been discussed above. The mechanical is restricting as well in so far as instrumentalisation is concerned; the ideal mechanical obedience is lacking. This wall-like quality of the forbidding makes an uncanny allusion to the process of repression and to the division made by the narcissistic self between the ‘interior’ and the ‘exterior’. It is more of a burlesque, rather than an allusion to such a division between the interior and the exterior. The masquerade itself plays with this ‘parody’ even more.

Another instance where impenetrability transgresses instrumentality is *Figure 12*, which looks more like a death mask rather than a theatre mask. The ‘openings’ on the surface restrict any ‘inwards’ access, and the closed round contour of the entire piece complements this restrictedness. If this is a face, then perception is impossible, expression unpractical. The expectation of a unitary, expedient, meaningful ‘body’ is transgressed in the unidentical repetition of circular forms.

Figure 10 is a handled-mask. The eye sockets and the nose are there, the round shape of the head as well, and it looks as if the mask is a mocking repetition of the actor’s head that would stand behind it. The repetition of incomplete circles, the empty eye-socket (or the frame of the eyeglass) linked to the nose linked to the other eye leads us to the quasi-circle of the face. This meandering, serpentine procession of the circles is far from being an identical repetition of the same circular form, just like the mask is far from being a repetitive portrayal of the actor or the *persona*.

Kenneth Gross suggests that “the sign of life that lends animation to a statue in many cases takes the explicit form of a wound; it can look like a thing that violates,

mars or stains the statue” (86). Within the particular context of the Acar masks, defined by Acar himself as ‘moving sculptures’, the ‘organic’ haunts the metal in several ways.

Figure 1 and *Figure 2* are in the form conventional half-masks, covering that part of the face between the forehead and the mouth. Yet the irregular swollen areas above and around the openings for eyes in *Figure 1* and in *Figure 2* pose a contrast to the relatively smooth surface of the metal. It is as if the organic forces its way onto the surface, yet cannot find an opening through which it can erupt. The idea of the death mask haunts these two pieces, in so far as the death mask aims to ‘catch’ and freeze the organic before it succumbs to decay. These two pieces, especially *Figure 1*, seem to suggest metal castings of dead faces. Yet, they reverse of the ideology of the death mask, for they have ‘caught’ decay, wounds and blood drops.

Phantasing an ‘eruption’ of the organic becomes possible in *Figure 17*, which differs from all the other pieces of this collection in a peculiar way. The yellow plastic foam invoking the organic as if the piece is spitting, or even, vomiting. The smooth round rim of the helmet is a contrast to the unsmoothness of the texture and the lines of the surface.

Epilogue

Mask acting takes place on the site of the body. Feigning to be yet another narrative of the ‘body’ on par with the law of the ‘body’, Acar’s masks disturb and transgress those meanings attributed to the ‘body’, in so far as the body is treated as ‘the matrix of subjectivity’ in Weber’s words. The phantasised expediency, unity and meaning of the ‘body’ is disturbed by the *coup* of theatricality.

Several instances of this *coup*, this interruption of the theatrical disavowal, are traced in the Acar masks. The transgression of the phantasised expediency of the ‘body’ is one of those instances. The threat to the integrity of the body suspended between the ‘has been’ and ‘will be’ of violation is another instance. Disturbed perspectives, and the re-presentation of those processes of decay peculiar to the organic within the metal is another uncanny transgression.

Uncanny transgression of the law of the ‘body’ does not set the site of the body as another limit, in so far as transgression “forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes” (Foucault 28). The site of the body, with the loss of signification inherent to it, suggests the imminent disappearance of the transcendent self aspired to the law of the ‘body’. Can this be a liberation for the female body?

Rather than promising a conclusion, the argument initiated in this thesis aspires to ask new questions in relation to the discourses of subjectivity constructed on/through/around the body.

As suggested in the introductory section, an issue of further inquiry is related to the attitudes to the body in the 19th century, and its repercussions on

Jentsch's conceptualisation of the uncanny. According to Peter Brooks, "the body in the nineteenth century ... is predominantly a body scrutinised. ... At a time when the positivist sciences were vastly extending their mastery over nature, there was necessarily a greatly increased attempt to master the body in systematic discourses principally founded on its visual inspection" (221). Brooks adds that "the century's most triumphant piece of deduction from observation, and its most persuasive systematisation of how human bodies came to be what they are, were no doubt realised in Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection, including sexual selection. Various social Darwinisms then charted all sorts of theories for future management of the body" (221).

We can sense Jentsch's Darwinist approach in his concluding paragraph to the article, which has a commanding tone:

Intellectual mastery of one's environment signifies a defensive position against the assault of hostile forces, and the lack of such certainty is equivalent to lack of cover in the episodes of that never-ending war of the human and organic world for the sake of which the strongest and most impregnable bastions of science were erected.

(15)

Jentsch emphasises that the psychological uncertainty involved in the uncanny is not due to the novelty of that which is perceived, but rather it is caused by the impression of alien quality of what was hitherto accepted as the familiar. This impression is a disorientation according to Jentsch, and disorientation leaves one defenseless. What can eliminate this disorientation in relation to the uncanny is

scientific knowledge and intellectual mastery of one's own psyche and environment. The 'body' turns out to be an important factor in this mastery, for only by setting the terms of the relationship of the body to itself and to its environment can the uncanny be eliminated. The 'body' in this sense refers to what Samuel Weber describes as "the narcissistic conception of the body as a matrix for the ego: self-contained, unified, integrated" (15). Jentsch defines this as the everyday notion of 'the body', that which is meaningful, expedient and unitary, functioning according to the directions of the consciousness. The uncanny is wherever this meaning, expediency and unitariness of the 'body' is disoriented. By understanding the 'mechanical processes in the human mind' and by enlarging the definitions of the meaning, expediency and unitariness of the human body Jentsch wants to complete the picture. The body is still expected to be 'meaningful', 'expedient' and 'unitary' within this new definition, for this is the only way to eliminate the uncanny: to make sense of, instrumentalize and control the body to master itself and the environment. This limit imposed on the 'body' by the law is to be continuously transgressed by the uncanny.

Brooks continues,

The psychiatric profession emerges in the nineteenth century as a discipline of those bodies that are improperly governed by their minds. During much of the century, psychiatry, in the manner of other branches of medical sciences, is intent on establishing the organic bases of its object of study. It seeks to find lesions on the brain to account for hysteria and other classified disorders. But the meaning of mental illness, and the way it reveals and dramatises itself on the body, presents perplexities not so easily resolved. The

search for their solution is in part responsible for new understandings of what and how the body signifies, leading by the end of the century to the revolution worked by Freud and to the establishment, in psychoanalysis, of one relatively coherent discourse of the body: a discourse founded in study of a certain pathological body-that of the hysteric-but then generalised to all bodies and the psychic conditions they signify. (221-222)

As exemplary of those ‘new understandings of what and how the body signifies’, Freud introduces the unconscious and the process of repression into the definition of the uncanny by suggesting that the uncanny is a repressed idea which pushes its way into the consciousness. Repetition-compulsion involved in the uncanny is suggested to be inherent to instincts trying to restore an earlier state of things. A future study may dwell on this ‘new understanding’ in relation to the body, and evaluate in detail where it stands in relation to the law of the ‘body’.

Another direction can evaluate the law of the ‘body’ through the perspective of gender studies, interrogating where the gendered bodies are located within the limits drawn by the law of the ‘body’ in Jentsch and Freud, and how the uncanny transgresses these gendered bodies. The narrative of castration which aspires to bolster the law of the ‘body’ backfires according to Weber’s account. Application of gender theories may dwell on how this ‘backfire’ affects the law of the ‘body’ in terms of gendered representations and the construction of subjectivity.

In the earlier stages of this thesis, the issue of Bertolt Brecht’s technique of estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and its relation to the uncanny was put forward. This connection was justified on the grounds that Brecht’s *Verfremdung* also aspires

to produce an uncanny sensation on the spectators, for political ends. This assumption lays the ground for a future study, for, Brecht wants the spectator to experience the uncanny, not watch a performance about the uncanny. Brecht and the *Berliner Ensemble* used masks for the realization of the estrangement effect. A reading of Brecht's views on estrangement and the application of masks may be instrumental in understanding Brecht's conception of the self and subjectivity, and its relation to the body.

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Figures 1-13, 15-23 Fersa Acar

Figure 14, Figure 24 Gülru Çakmak

APPENDIX

Figures



Figure 1

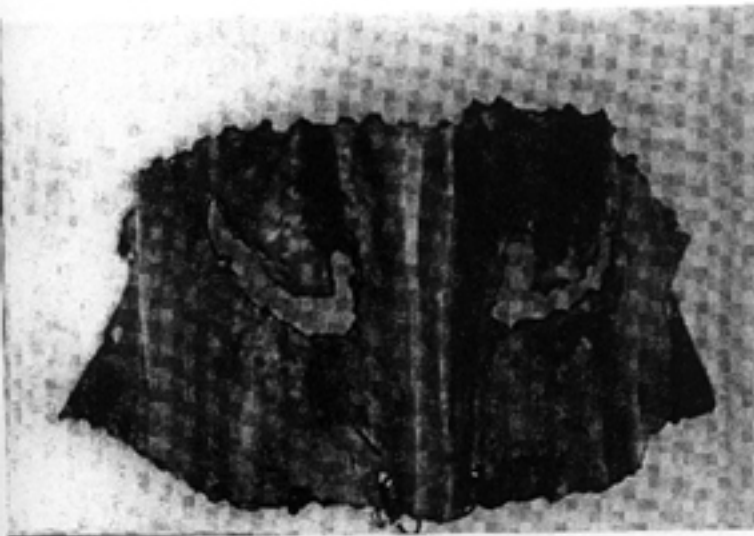


Figure 2



Figure 3

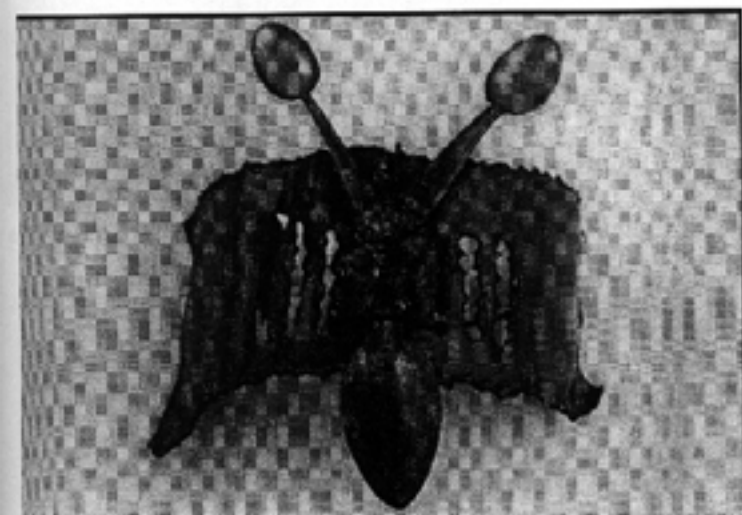


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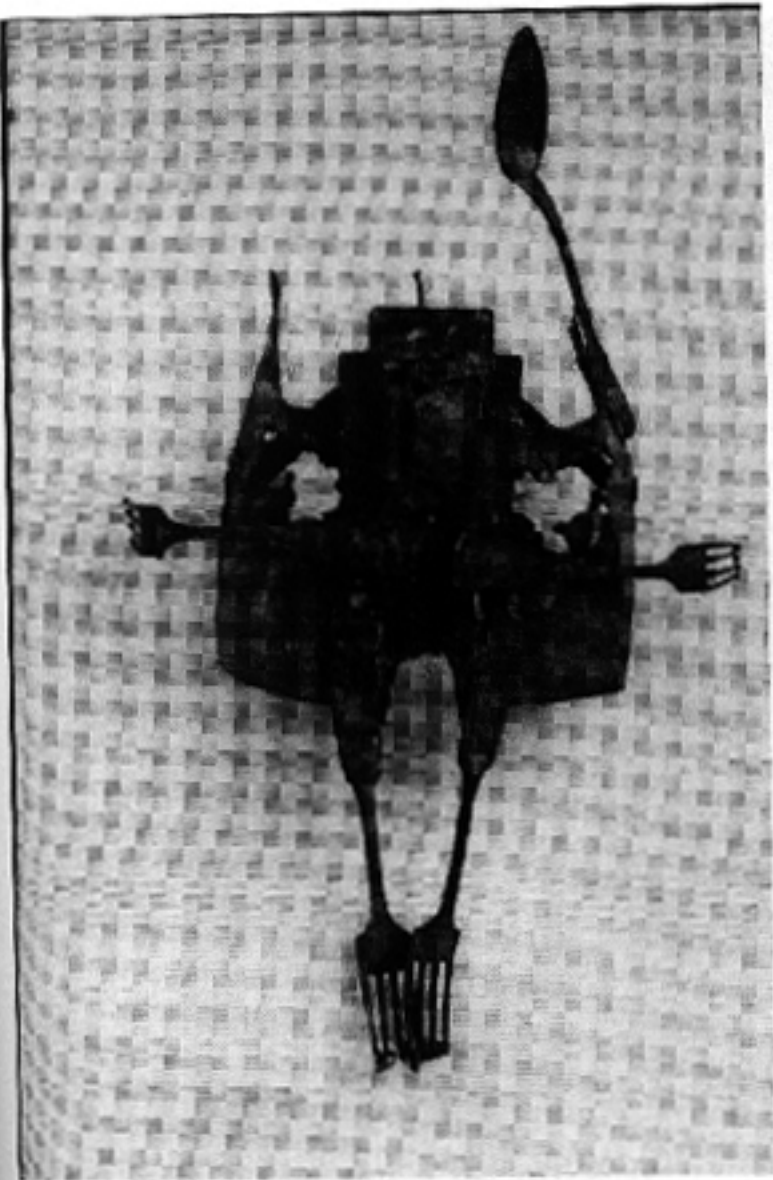


Figure 5



Figure 6

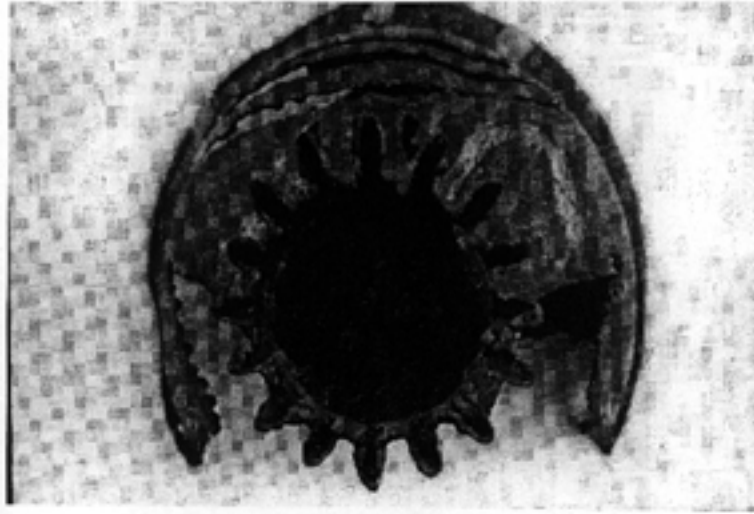


Figure 7



Figure 8

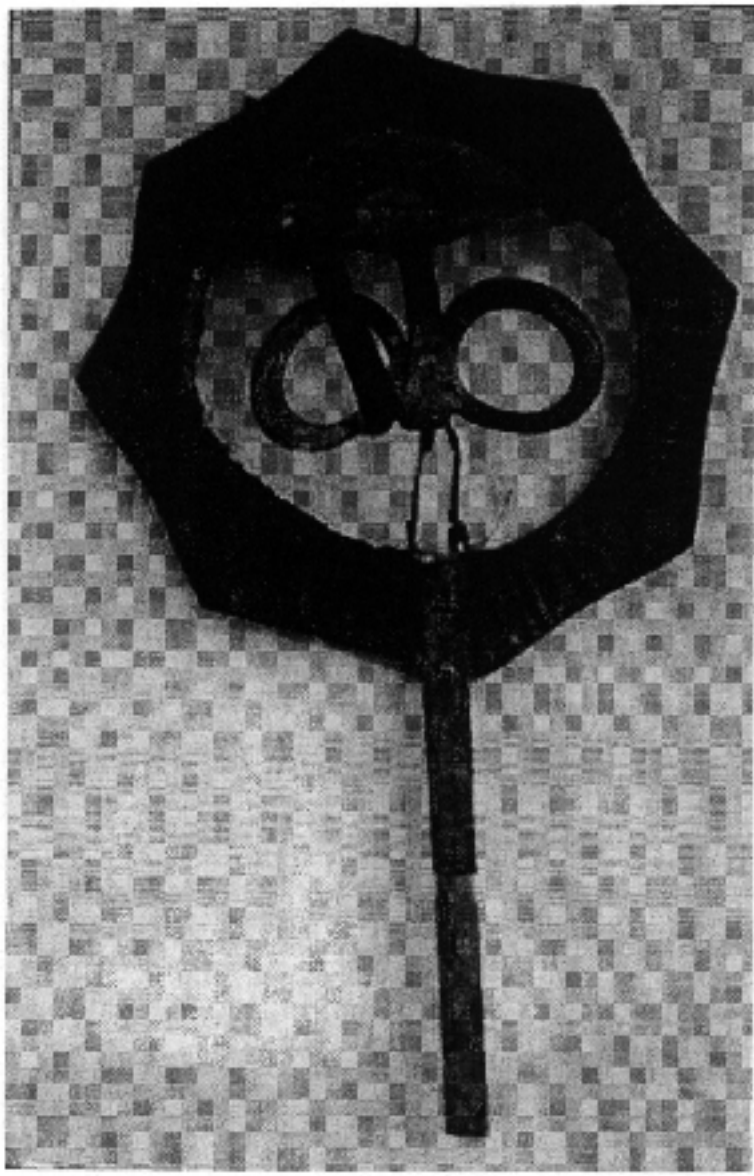


Figure 9



Figure 10

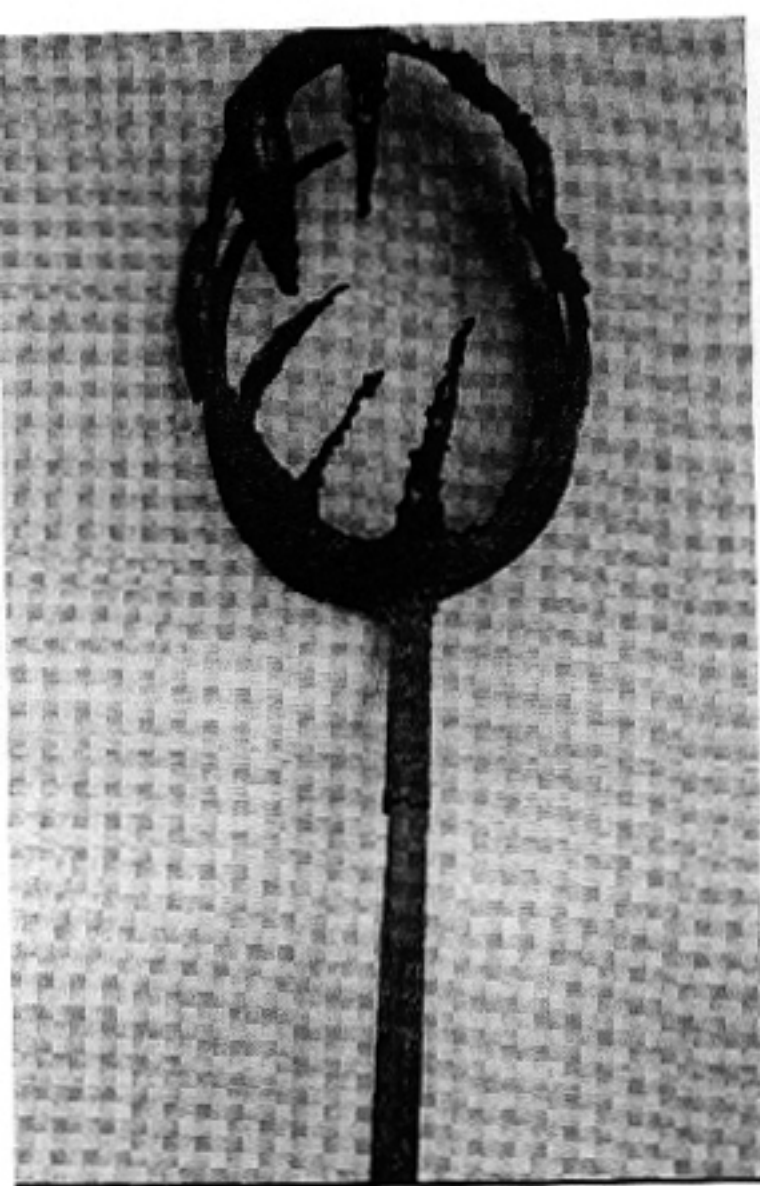


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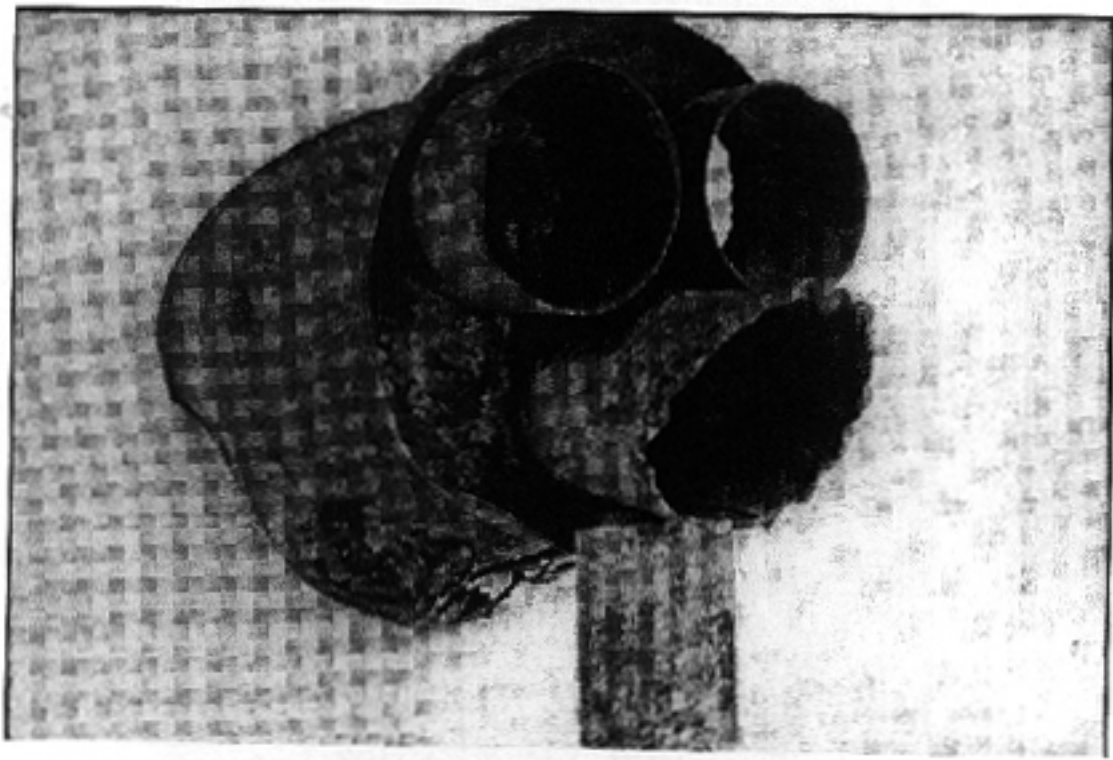


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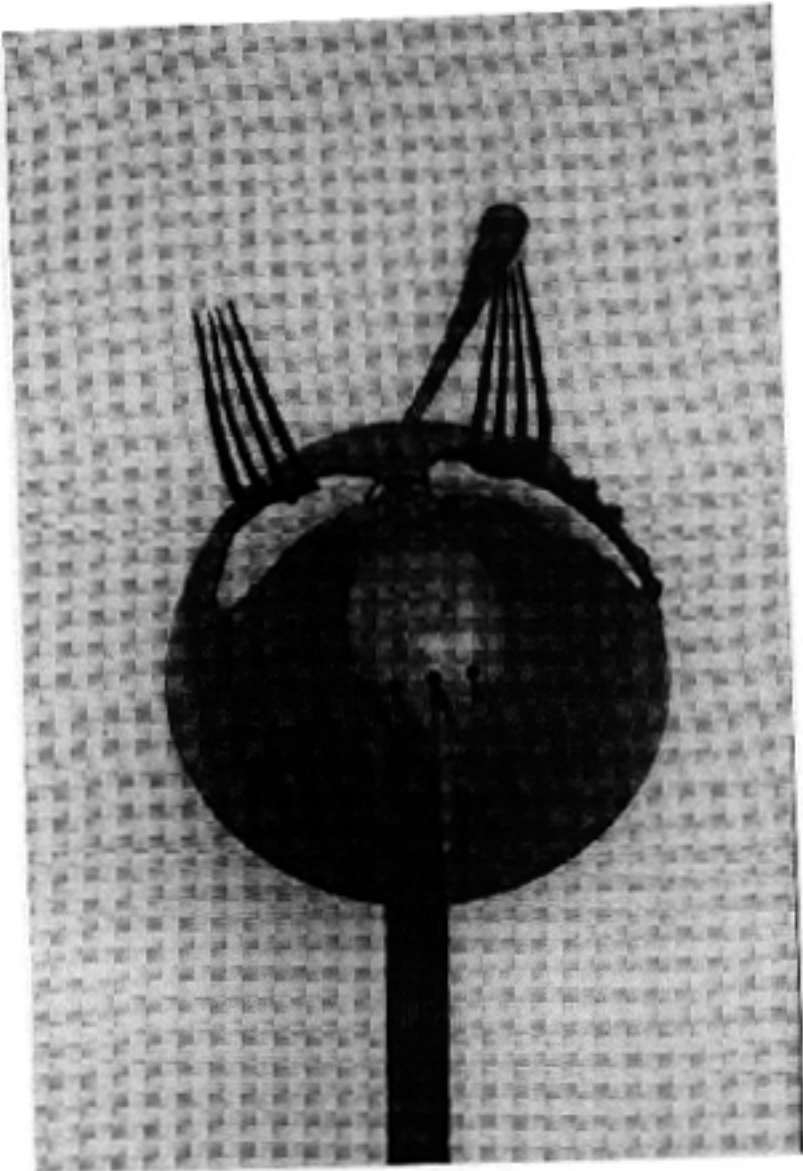


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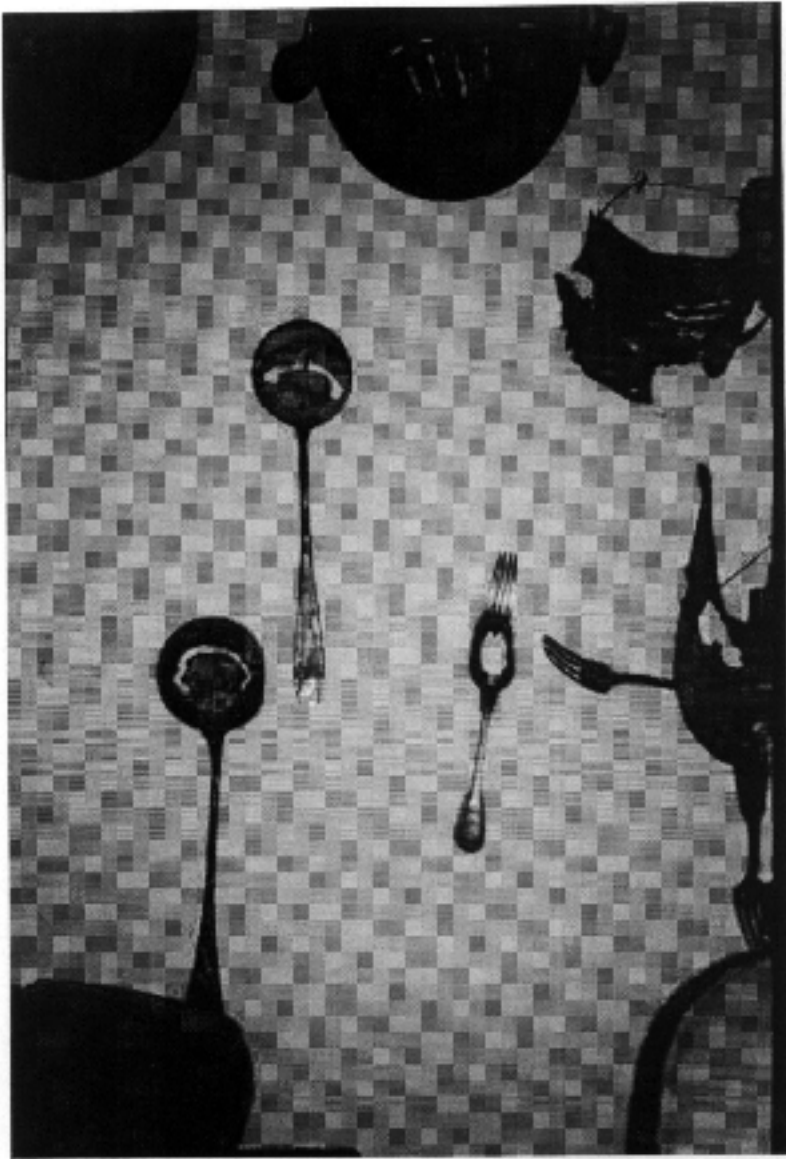


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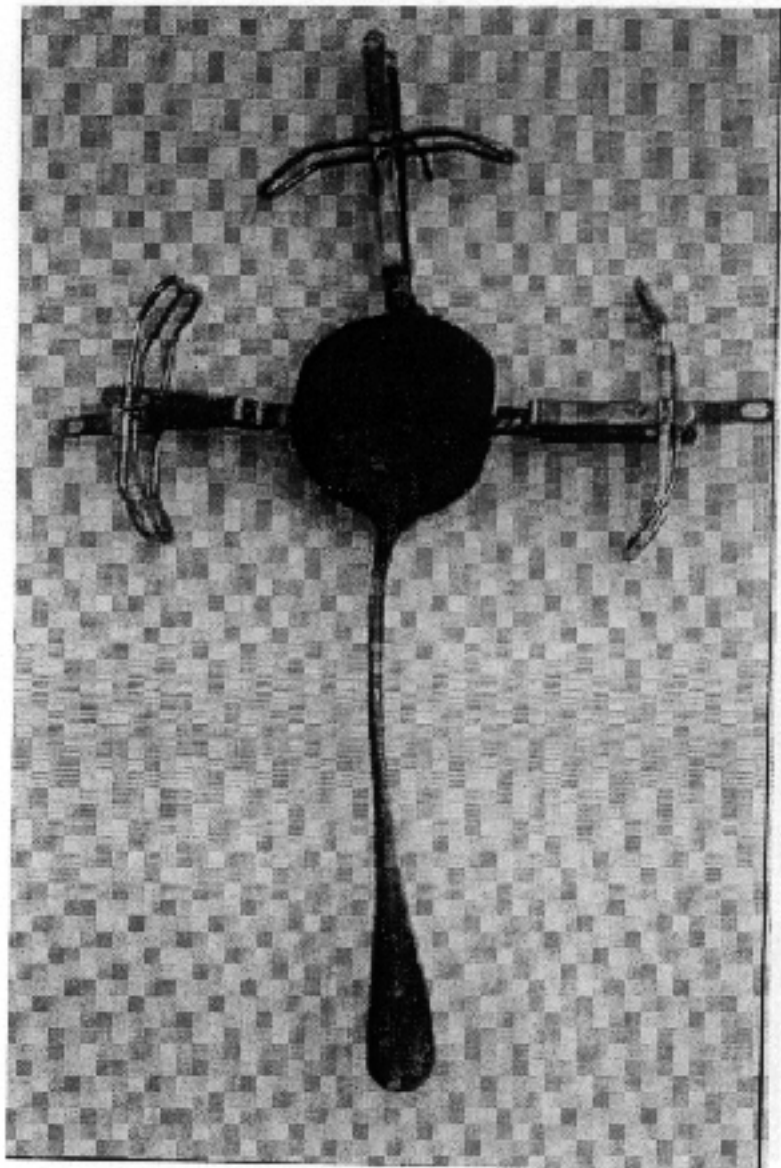


Figure 15



Figure 16

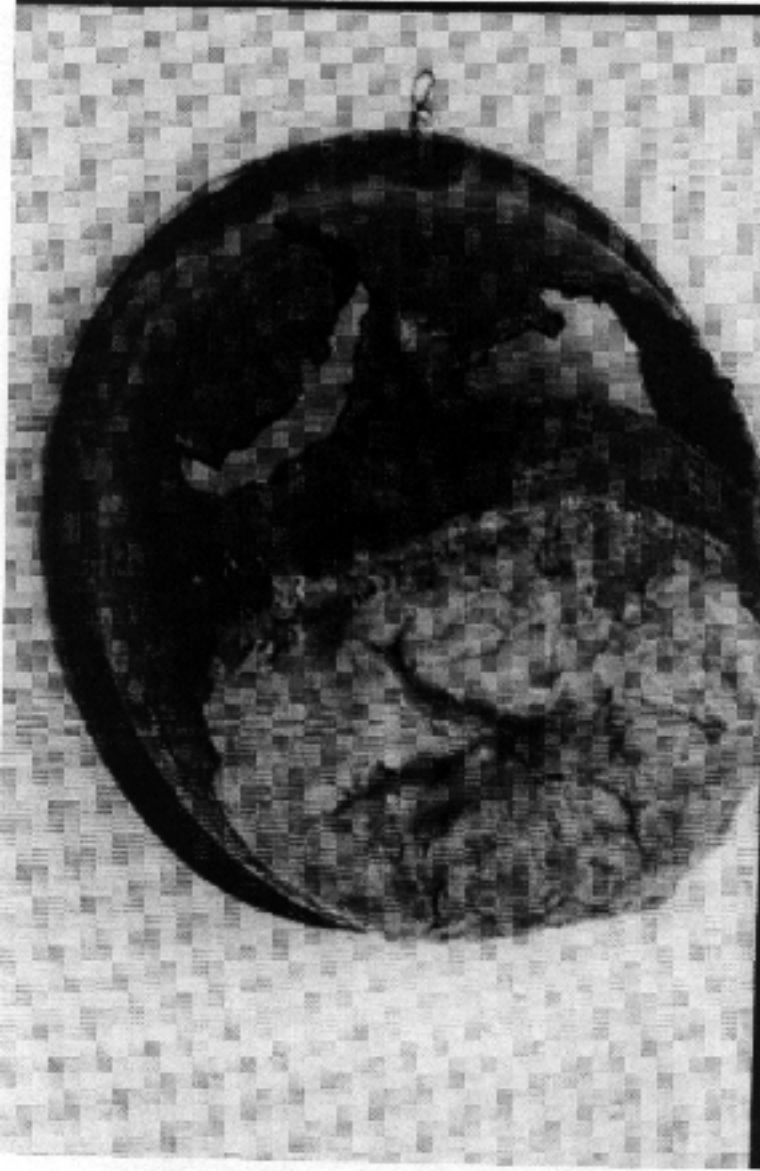


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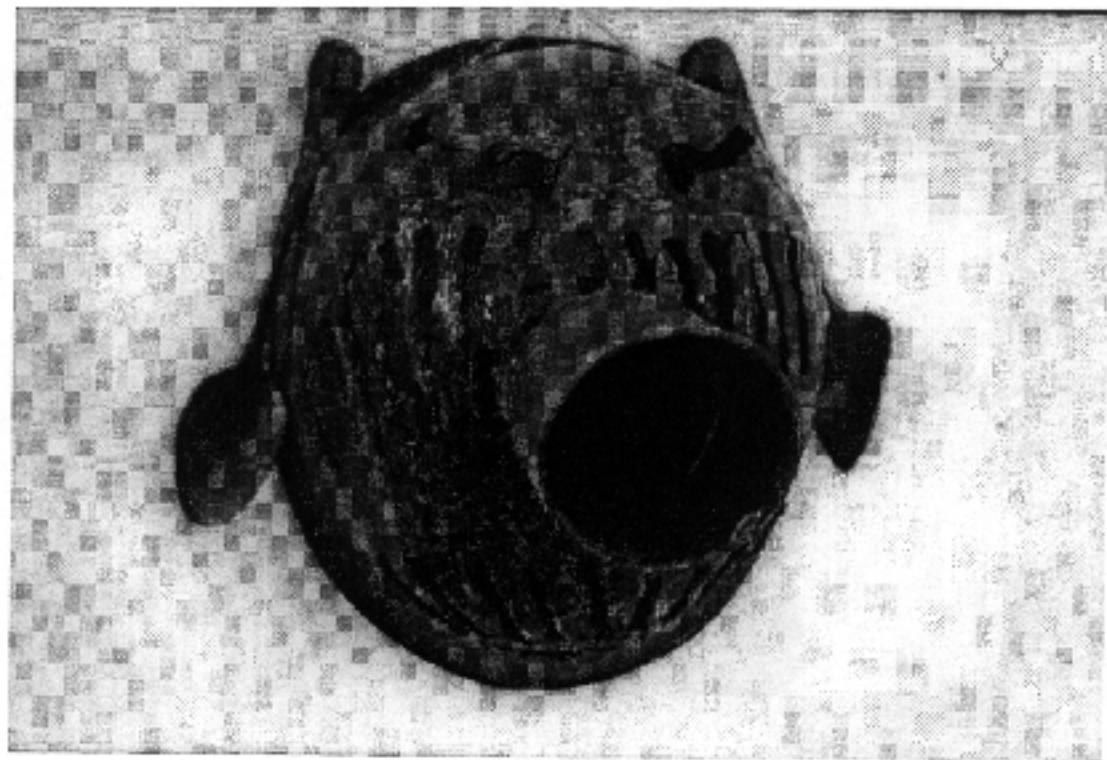


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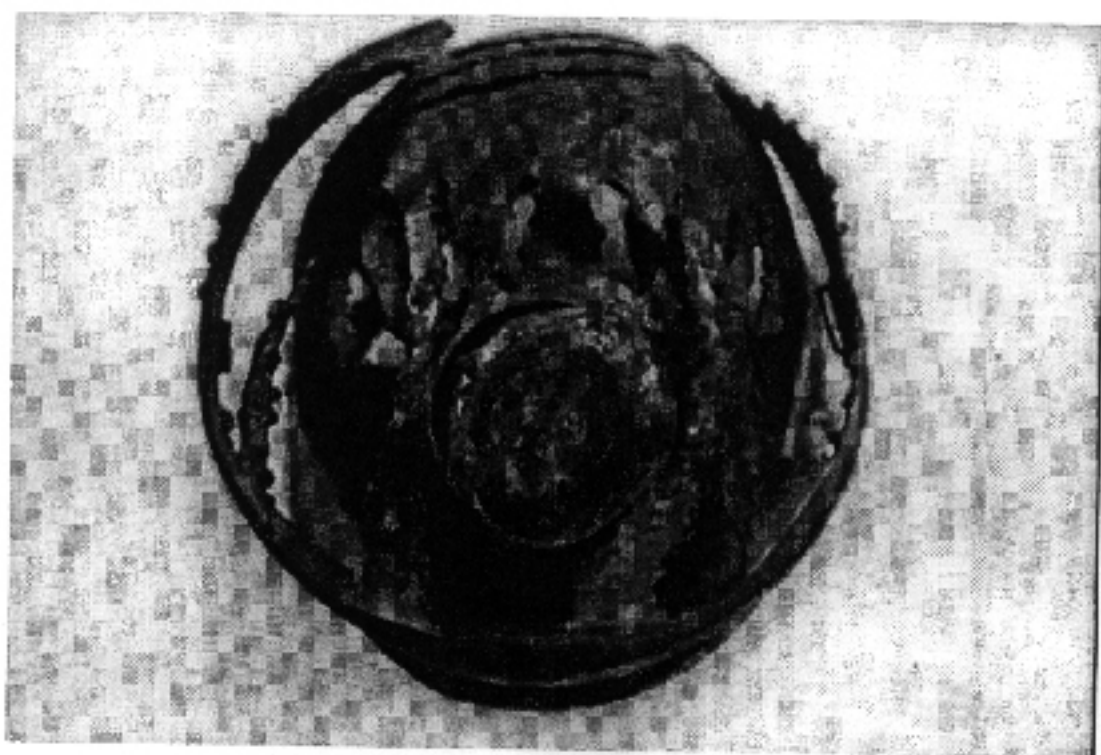


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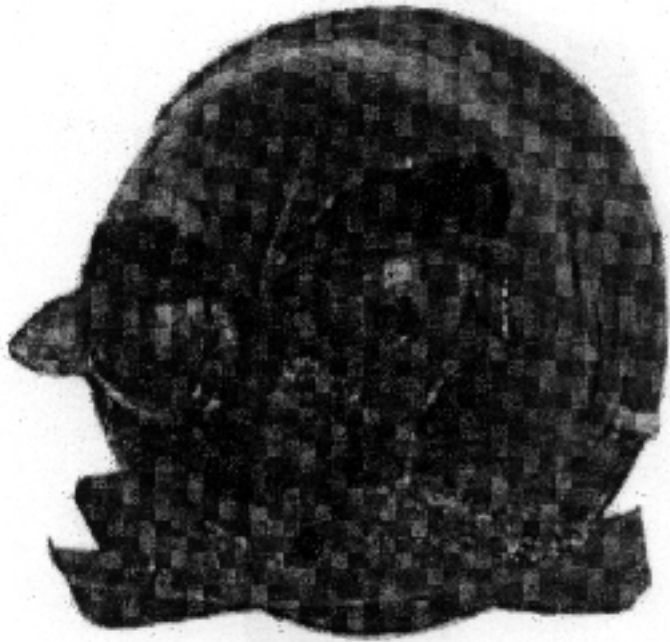


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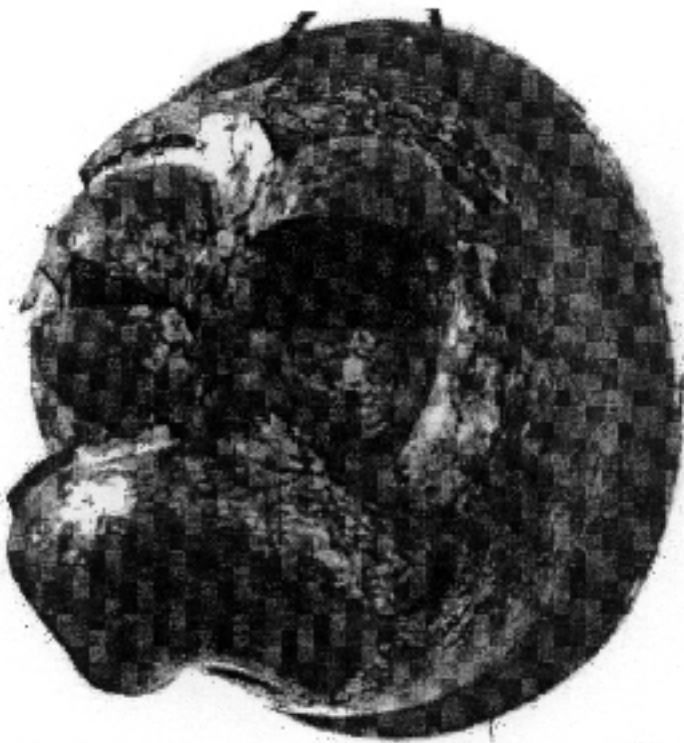


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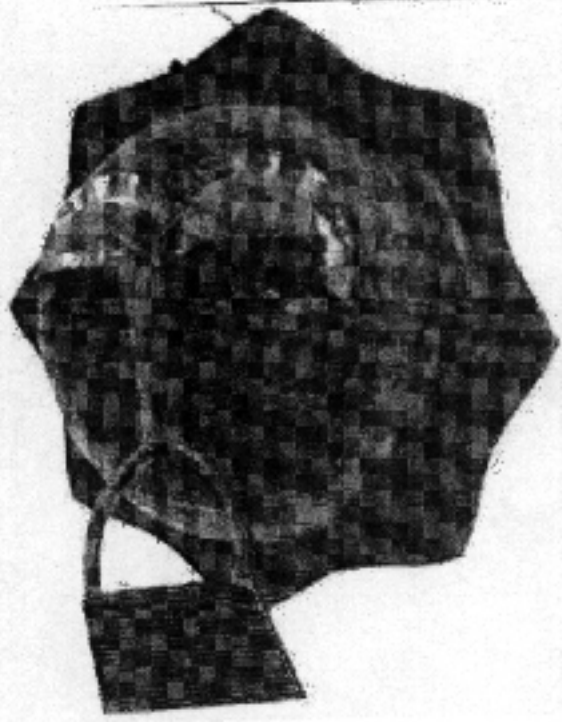


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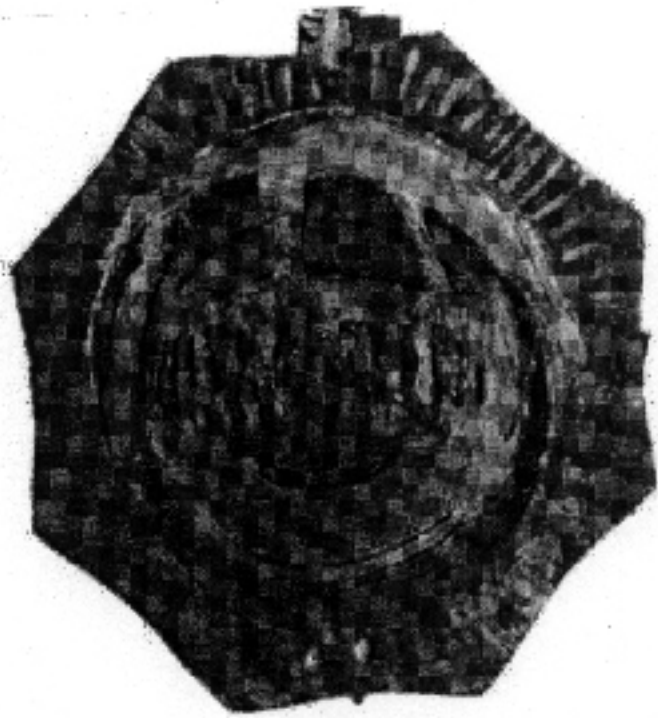


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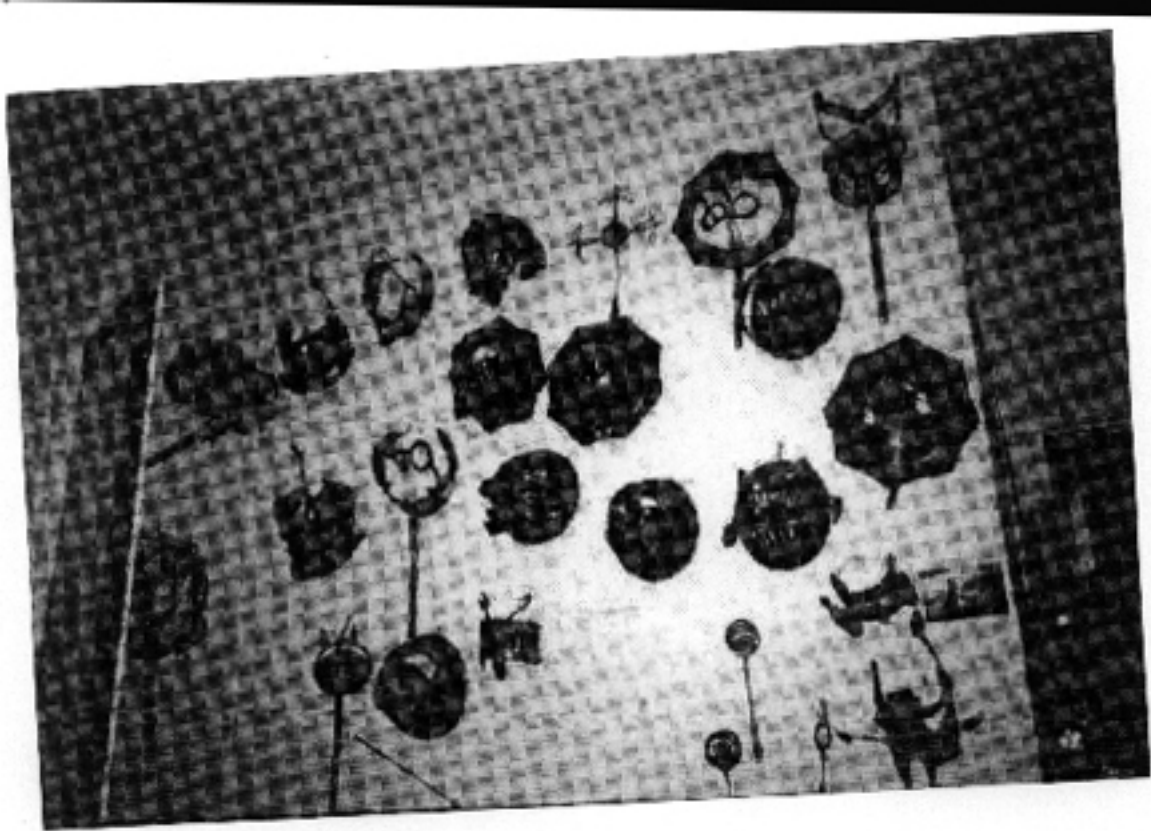


Figure 24