

# The (Dis)possession of Lear's Two Bodies: Madness, Demystification, and Domestic Space in Peter Brook's *King Lear*

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## Abstract

Criticism of Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1971) emphasizes the film's relationship to the theories of Jan Kott and Antonin Artaud, a tendency that has led many to interpret the film as merely a bleak and narrow redaction of Shakespeare's play. This essay offers an alternative reading of the film rooted in both early modern theories of kingship and contemporary theories of embodiment in order to approach the film's nihilistic idiom from a different valence. In arguing that both playtext and filmtext explore tensions between the political and natural bodies of the king, I claim that the film dramatizes Lear's recognition that kingship is a metonymy imposed upon the enfleshed human subject, a subject which is dependent for existence upon the generative powers of femininity. Once Lear recognizes his dependence on and possession by female domestic authority, he attempts to escape the demystified, shameful flesh that constitutes his "unaccommodated" subjectivity, and ultimately achieves this escape through the cinematic techniques of fragmentation that characterize Brook's filmic language. Thus, we should value Brook's film not only because of its reevaluation of Goneril and Regan, but also because it utilizes incipient postmodern theories of art and the subject of its late 1960s milieu in order to realize crucial historical and cultural discourses already existing in Shakespeare's playtext.

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Since its release in 1971, Peter Brook's *King Lear* has been the subject of a deeply bifurcated body of criticism. As critics have long noted, the film's commitment to experimental cinema and to a firmly nihilistic interpretation of Shakespeare's playtext is indebted to Brook's exposure to a number of sources, most notably Jan Kott's essay "*King Lear* or Endgame," as well as to the theories of Bertold Brecht and Antonin Artaud. Indeed, it is the film's relationship to the theater of cruelty, its unflagging dedication to the bleakest and most hopeless elements of the play — even to the point of cutting and sometimes rewriting the playtext — that has dichotomized responses to Brook's work. Anthony Davies, for instance, devalues the film because of its reductive treatment of Shakespeare's

text, claiming that "viewed as a critical interpretation of Shakespeare's play, [Brook's film] must be judged both intellectually narrow and aesthetically impoverished . . . [w]hy, the question remains, does Brook choose to perpetrate with such dispassion his cinematic deconstruction on *King Lear*?" (Davies 1988, 151). In a later evaluation of the film, Davies writes that "In making *King Lear* 'so much a story of our time,' it is arguable that the play has been reduced to the dimension of a domestic quarrel" (Davies 1997, 251). Similarly, Laurilyn J. Harris, in putting forward a gentler evaluation, criticizes the film's reductionism, arguing that "while [Brook's] vision is valid, it is also limited . . . and captures only one dimension of a multi-dimensional play" (Harris 1986, 236). It is to such charges of "aesthetic impoverishment" and "unfaithfulness" to Shakespeare's playtext that Barbara Hodgdon responds when she rightly urges critics to evaluate the performance of a Shakespearean text as a filmtext in its own right, with its own *auteur*, that demands to be interpreted on its own terms: "This means working, not with a single authoritative text and its signed and unsigned derivatives, but with a multiplicity of texts — a playscript, a theatrical performance, a filmtext — and finding more precise modes of description and analysis for the ways they engage us" (Hodgdon 1983, 150). Although with the expansion of performance scholarship in Shakespeare studies, Hodgdon's call has produced more positive readings of Brook's film, broadly speaking the discussion of this film has stagnated, for scholars generally either laud the film as a fine example of meta-cinematic experimentation or decry it as a reductive and biased vision of Shakespeare's great play, dated by its intellectual debts to the culture of the 1960s.

For these reasons, I would like to provide an alternative reading of Brook's seminal film of *Lear*, a reading that attempts to move the discussion beyond the cinematic influences and textual rearrangements that underlie the film's bleakness. In what follows, I will argue that Brook's interpretation of *Lear* is deeply rooted in Shakespeare's playtext and that we can better understand the film's notorious treatment of the fragmented and isolated human subject by attending to specific cultural contexts of Shakespeare's early modern milieu. This approach shares some common ground with the recent work of Lukas Erne, who has reminded us of the importance of recognizing both performance history and early modern textual-literary contexts in interpreting Shakespearean drama.<sup>1</sup> By mobilizing feminist scholarship that has pointed out the playtext's concern with misogynistic language as well as more general issues of gender and embodiment, I hope to show that *Lear* is a play that interrogates the nature of political power through the trope of the fleshly body, and that far from reducing or eliding the film's faithfulness to Shakespeare's text, Brook's cinematic idiom and his commitment to dramatizing the isolated

and fragmented subject of postmodernity are supported by central elements of the playtext and the early modern constructions of political authority and gender that inflect it.

### Embodying the Political and Domestic

A key component of reevaluating Brook's *King Lear* lies in complicating the traditional domestic/political binary that has dominated studies of the playtext. On the one hand, scholars such as Bruce Young (2002) and Sharon Hamilton (2003) argue that *Lear* is predominantly about domestic relationships between fathers and children. On the other hand, political and feminist criticism by writers like Dan Brayton (2003) and Cristina Leon Alfar (2003) has challenged such "humanist" readings, emphasizing instead historicized versions of political power and kingship, as mediated by gender and economics within early modern culture. The two approaches thus tend to simplify the interweaving of political and domestic discourses that dominate the play's gendered constructions of royal authority. However, theorists of gender and embodiment such as Carol Rutter (2001) and Claudette Hoover (1985) have rightly shown the play's concern with sexuality, gender, and misogyny, while performance scholars like Pascale Aebischer (2004) and Roger Apfelbaum (2004) have underlined the importance of "embodying" playtexts in performance in order to recuperate a wider range of textual meanings potentialized by Shakespeare's and other early modern dramatists' texts. I would like to appropriate this fruitful feminist line of argument, which emphasizes the performing body as a place for the construction of dramatic meaning, to interpret Brook's film, and especially its sympathetic depiction of Goneril and Regan, to show that Brook's *Lear* accesses crucial insights into the gendered spheres of domestic and political power that pervade Shakespeare's playtext and that illuminate Brook's significant evaluation of Lear's "pelican daughters" (*King Lear*, 3.4.72).

The film achieves this vision through a treatment of *masculinized* embodiment, a dynamic largely overlooked in Brook's realization of Shakespeare's playtext. More specifically, Brook's film shows that Lear's demystification originates in the rupture of his two male identities as private father and public monarch, a sundering of subjectivity resulting from his divesting of his "body politic" and his subordinating his "body natural" to the feminized domestic space represented in Goneril and Regan. Using Ernst Kantorowicz's theory of the king's two bodies and reading this theory through early modern language of bodily possession, as outlined by Dan Brayton, I argue that Brook's film conflates Lear's "body natural" (the sphere of domestic identity) and "body politic" (the public sphere of landed kingship) and then ruptures and opposes these identities in the first half of the film. Once Lear violates the integrity of his two bodies by divesting himself of his public "body politic," he submits his natural, domestic body to feminine possession, a domestic

power structure represented in part by the potential sexual reproductivity of Goneril and Regan. This submission of masculinized political authority to feminized domestic authority results both in the dissolution of the king's "body politic" and in the parallel humiliation and demystification of Lear's domestic body natural, a process that generates the misogynistic madness that dominates the last half of the film. In discovering that kingship is a metonymy imposed upon an arbitrary, domestic male body (which is itself dependent on the generative power of the female body), Lear's madness — his fear of bodily possession and loathing of female fertility — is directed at disembodiment itself, at an escape from what Michael Neill has called the "ontological shame" that is inherent in Lear's recognition of his limited, mortal, frail flesh.<sup>2</sup> Hence, when Lear begins to see himself as "unaccommodated man," as "the thing itself" (1.4.104-105), his madness becomes an exorcising repudiation of feminine fertility — an attempt to repossess a masculine political identity free of domestic authority — that ultimately motivates Lear's final escape from his shameful, embodied subjectivity through Brook's camera lens. The disturbing closing sequence of the film, then, produces a montage that cinematically presents not only Lear's final self-negation and escape from the frail and unaccommodated domestic body, but also the film's final denial of coherent subjectivity.

*Embodiment* is crucial to understanding the gendered discourses of political authority in the play, both in current critical theory and in Shakespeare's historical moment. In the period of 1603-1605, the years immediately following King James's accession to the English throne, the embodiment of royal authority — of the "body politic," of the people — in the physical body of the sovereign was becoming a commonplace of the Stuart government. This is the theory of embodied kingship summarized in Kantorowicz's seminal 1957 study of political theology, *The King's Two Bodies*, and although Kantorowicz's argument has been criticized in recent years for its association with twentieth-century fascism (cf. Norbrook 1996), it remains a significant framework for discussing the way Shakespeare and his contemporaries thought about kingship. Upon his accession to the throne in 1603, James I advocated the unity of Scotland and England as a quasi-mythic "Great Britain." The proposed political union was conceived as a "natural" one because of James's Scottish ancestry and the prevailing assumption that the king embodies the state he governs. Francis Bacon's 1603 tract defending this proposed union, *A Breife Discourse, Touching The Happie Union of the Kingdomes of England and Scotland*, argues for the "natural" logic of such a union of political bodies, drawing on the humanist axiom that one can understand the political world by reflecting upon the natural one (Bacon 1603, sig. A3v-A4v). Using similar language in his first speech to parliament in 1604, King James claims that he embodies the union of the houses

of Lancaster and York through his "descent lineally out of the loynes of Henry the seventh" (James 1994, 135). Such political claims are significant because of their dependence upon the semiotic identity of the king with the geographic *and* demographic body politic. Indeed, in his 1604 speech James goes on to argue that England and Scotland should become one body politic because King James himself contains both English and Scottish blood within one body natural, a physical space that embodies the ideal nation-state (137). In the discourse of the early Stuart regime, then, there is an inherent connection between the realm of the sovereign's physical, domestic body and the figurative, political body — the nation — comprised of his subjects.

The point here is not to belabor the historical veracity of the theory of the king's two bodies under James I. Rather, it is to underline the thematic connection between *King Lear*'s preoccupation with the integrity of the British kingdom and the exigent politics of James's political union during the time Shakespeare was most likely composing *Lear*. Therefore, even if Kantorowicz's theory is drawn in part on wishful paraphrases of source texts, or on an incomplete account of early modern English politics before the Civil War, as Norbrook claims (1996, 348-51), thinking of the king's person as the site of intersection between the physical body and the political body remains central to understanding Shakespeare's exploration of political and domestic spaces in the play. This "politics of somatic space," as I call it, creates in Shakespeare's cultural moment a pervasive language of kingship and its concomitant socio-political conflicts, and if the play was first performed in the presence of James, as the title page of the first quarto claims, this politics of somatic space would have resonated quite clearly in the play's anxiety over divided kingdoms, civil wars, and a disintegrating monarch.

The theory of the king's two bodies also becomes quite helpful to a hermeneutics of *gendered* power in Brook's vision of *Lear*, for just as it probably inflected contemporary politics performances of *Lear* in its early modern debut, the theory also allows us to interrogate the rupture of *Lear*'s gendered subjectivity and the concomitant portrayals of gendered power spheres that catalyze the play's demystification of kingship through somatically figured madness. To use the theory in such a way, however, we must complicate it with a realization that the embodiment of political power is by its nature performed, and as such is also gendered — a dynamic quite pertinent to the political and sexual imaginary of post-Elizabethan England. As Bruce Smith intimates in his study of masculinity in Shakespeare, the theory of the king's two bodies assumes in the seventeenth century a particularly masculine valence, for it is a male trope that imbues the king's person with a transcendent being that defies the mere fleshly embodiment of the human subject (Smith 2000, 27).<sup>3</sup> Also, Smith's study shows that masculinity or "manhood" is an identity that by definition must

be achieved rather than received or given in early modern culture (2).<sup>4</sup> This performed nature of maleness is crucial for understanding Shakespeare's portrayal of Lear because it suggests that both "kingship" and "maleness" can be constructed, performed identities, whose founding unit is the body itself (10). In *King Lear*, it is precisely this negotiated, fictive nature of male embodiment and kingship that Shakespeare strips bare through Lear's mad ravings against domestic, feminine rule. Therefore, considered with all its implications of embodiment, Kantorowiczian political theology informs my reading of Brook's film in at least two ways. First, it allows a dynamic interplay of gendered power discourses by showing the fragmentation of power into feminized domestic space and masculinized political space, and suggests a rich discourse of male/female body politics underlying both Shakespeare's playtext and Brook's filmtext. Second, understood in conjunction with Smith's insights, it can complicate Lear's (and our) assumptions about the nature of early modern kingship by revealing royalty's performative, gendered essence.

### Dividing, Divesting, and Dispossessioning "the Thing Itself"

Before exploring the development of gendered political structures in the first half of the film, I would like to glance at a climactic moment in the progress of Lear's demystification as king, the moment in the film in which gendered networks of meaning are manifested most explicitly: the meeting of Lear and Poor Tom in the storm. In the storm scene, Brook uses a series of shots from Lear's POV both to emphasize the relationship between Lear and Poor Tom (men who are "possessed") and to highlight the association between gendered power networks and Lear's self-identity within those networks. When Paul Scofield's gritty (and, as Alexander Leggatt [2004] points out, decidedly "masculine")<sup>5</sup> Lear enters the hovel, Tom identifies himself as "A serving-man . . . [who] served the lust of my mistress' heart and did the act of darkness with her," one who "out-paramoured the Turk" in sexual appetite.<sup>6</sup> His warning against female sexuality accentuates the film's emphasis on the body, for as Tom speaks, the camera repeatedly cuts from an unfocused close-up of his head to a medium-distance shot of Tom's naked upper-body, and back again (figure 1). The series of rapid cuts not only builds the sexual energy of the speech, but also juxtaposes a visually dominant male body with Tom's verbal declamation of feminine sexuality. The effect is to contrast the vulnerable male body visualized in the shot with the spoken suggestion of female sexual power: it is a moment where female sexuality impinges on the dispossessed, "unaccommodated" male body that Tom represents.

Lear's response to the sight of Poor Tom contributes to the scene's anxiety about the vulnerability of the male body (as evidenced in Lear's "Off, off, you lendings" [3.4.106]; see

figure 2). As Lear discovers that Poor Tom is "unaccommodated man," he gives his speech as the camera slowly tracks down Tom's nearly-naked, wet body from Lear's POV. When Lear says, "Thou art the thing itself" (3.4.104-105), the downward pan slows over Tom's loincloth (figure 3), revealing in Lear's mind a connection between Tom's male "essentialness" and Lear's forfeited political body. The fact that Lear has already identified himself with Tom ("Didst thou give all to thy daughters?" [3.4.48]) only supports the inherent link in this scene between male sexual and political power. The scene's emphasis on the vulnerability of the male body to the temptation of female sexual power also suggests how Lear perceives the basic conflict with his daughters: Lear's focus on Tom's genitals becomes an index of his need to assert his former masculinized identity against the forces of female domesticity that have vied for sovereignty, through Goneril and Regan, over the film's narrative up to this point. Thus, the meeting of Tom and Lear in the storm serves as a point of collision in the film between notions of feminine and masculine power, while Tom's body emblemizes the discourses of Kantorowiczian political theory that the film accesses in the playtext. The encounter also demonstrates that constructs of royal political power are emphatically somatic and male in Brook's visual language: the image of the naked male body, "the thing itself," haunts this central sequence as a trope of Lear's movement toward demystification and alienated subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

The storm scene, therefore, teaches us that a major organizing principle of the film's visual language lies in the vulnerability of the divested male human body. Moreover, this male, somatic vulnerability inflects the film's identification of maleness with public, exterior spaces and femaleness with interior settings marked by the domestic hearth. Such a division between male and female spheres is not Brook's innovation. Rather, the film appropriates modes of gendered theatrical space that Hanna Scolnicov has asserted are integral to the western theatrical tradition, a convention in which female identity is expressed through interior spaces (especially the hearth), while male identity is signed in exterior spaces such as the street or the forum (Scolnicov 1994, 11-15). Similarly, this logic of gendered space throughout Brook's film makes manifest coded political spheres derived from the playtext and the cultural traditions informing it. Brook's invocation of gendered space thereby reveals and manipulates what is available in Shakespeare's dramaturgy. Indeed, in Brook's description of his film's symbolic economy, his words gesture toward a spatial concept commensurate with Scolnicov's historical insights, suggesting that the major elemental division in Lear's society in the film is between interior and exterior settings:

We decided to start with the idea that the basic element of life in the society in which Lear lived was the contrast between heat and cold. One real element that emerges from the plot

is the notion of nature as something hostile, dangerous, against which man is to battle . . . what counts from a psychological point of view is the contrast between the safe, enclosed places and the wild, unprotected places. Which leads you to two denominators of security: fire and fur. (Brook 1987, 204)

This dichotomy between "hostile" and "secure" spaces manifests itself in a cinematic language in which domestic spaces are symbolized by interior scenes, blazing hearths, and thick furs, while the elemental forces of "wildness" are communicated through stark exterior shots showing the barren, frigid countryside of Jutland where the film was shot (see figures 4 and 5). Brook's words contrast with Anthony Davies's claim that the barren landscape of Jutland does nothing but punctuate "the world view which Brook strives to impose" (Davies 1997, 250); they also challenge R. B. Parker's analysis that Brook uses *mise-en-scène* expressionistically rather than symbolically (Parker 1991, 81, 83). Understood in light of Scolnicov's work, the interior/exterior polarities in Brook's *mise-en-scène* are intertwined with symbolically gendered political spaces, for as the storm scene indicates in its emphasis on essential masculinity vis-à-vis the adumbrated genitalia, gender coding is signed in the exterior/interior visual idiom Brook adapts from a playtext that "depends crucially on the contrast between indoors and out" (Holland 1994, 61). "Unaccommodated man" is made vulnerable by the forces of nature unmitigated by roofs that should protect "houseless poverty" (3.4.104, 26) and domesticated spaces are routinely symbolized in the film by fireplaces (as in the sequence in Goneril's castle, discussed below) and dining halls. In short, Brook's interior/exterior visual logic aligns with congruent semiotic pairings of domestic/political spaces, of female/male power spheres invoked by carefully composed background images in the film's key scenes.

The opening of Brook's *King Lear* employs this public/domestic, gendered coding to describe a masculine model of Lear's political body that the storm scene works to deconstruct. The sequence also develops the conceptual union of body politic and body natural in the king in order first to rupture the unity of Lear's public/domestic subjectivity, and then to gender the consequent political and domestic spaces sundered by the rupture. As the opening credits roll, the camera tracks slowly over a sea of male faces, men who are awaiting, in a space exterior to Lear's throne room, the publication of Lear's decision. The pan evokes the type of somatic politics being worked out in the text: Lear's "public" kingdom — the body politic represented by the male subjects in an exteriorized space — is unequivocally male (we learn that these are Lear's hundred knights). After showing the mass of men who represent the masculinized, public state, the tracking shot cuts to a static, interior visual of Lear's throne room. This symmetrically composed frame increases the stakes of a gendered reading of the film's conception of somatic politics, for we do not know at first that



the large, coarse, phallic stone (Hodgdon 1983, 146) in the center of the composition is actually Lear's throne, a fact that, once recognized, highlights the embodiment of male political power made visually explicit (figure 6). Thus, the phallic image, in its placement immediately after the sea of the male body politic outside the throne room, emerges as an establishing symbol of the alignment of political power with male embodiment in the film. It is a crucial index showing the relationships among maleness, political order, and public (exterior) space in Brook's cinematic idiom. Although at this moment both political and domestic powers are unified in Lear's throne room (the phallic throne is located within an interior space), their immanent rupture into two competing gendered spheres is already intimated by the closing throne room door that separates exterior and interior spaces.

The division of the kingdom in this scene dramatically foregrounds the synecdoche that links the king's body politic with his male body natural. When Lear partitions the map, we are presented with an emblem that unites the map of the state with Lear's own body. The map, as John Gillies and Dan Brayton have shown, is a symbolically dense prop in Shakespeare's theater, for its deployment underlines the political significances of early modern cartography (Gillies 2001, 109-21; Brayton 2003, 400-403). Additionally, Brayton has convincingly argued that Lear's division of the physical map is an attempt to "oversee his symbolic death in order to fossilize himself within the political order that will succeed him" (2003, 401). Although this "fossilization" fails miserably, the rich semiotic possibilities of the map latent in any performance of this scene remain. Moreover, the political discourses encoded in the map are in this scene interwoven with the sexualized symbolization of the throne and the orb of state (figure 7), both of which Kenneth S. Rothwell has read as symbols of sexual reproductivity (1997, 139). Indeed, in Brook's vision, the political world the map represents is inextricably bound up with the realm of the (sexually-produced) body natural of Lear himself. As Lear proclaims, "Of all these bounds, even from this line to this, we make thee lady" (1.1.63, 66), Gloucester pulls back the thick fur that covers the floor-map; when Lear rises from the dark recess of his throne a moment later, he dons a prominent bear skin, a symbolic vestment of his embodied royal authority (figures 8 and 9). This series of shots iconically links the political map — a sign of the male body politic outside — to Lear's body. The king's parceling of the kingdom thus ironically becomes a visual divesting of Lear's royal authority even as the action embeds Lear's body in the political map, for as Lear tries to identify himself with the cartographic sign of his kingdom, he is also metaphorically shedding from his body the thick fur that signifies his political power — this is the only scene in which Lear wears the robe of state. The visual language of the throne room sequence — its network of political and sexual symbolism encoded in the map, throne, and orb — graphically portrays the king's political

"abdication" as a physical divesting: Lear initiates a demystification of gendered authority that culminates in his recognition of Tom's nearly-naked "thing itself" in the storm.

This political divestment in the throne room scene also demonstrates how both political and domestic power are expressed in part through early modern discourses of territorial possession and dispossession; that is, Lear's royal power lies in his ability to own and dispose of the land and the people who live on it (Brayton 2003, 403-404). Similarly, as Brook's discussion of interior/exterior settings and Scolnicov's claims about theatrical space both suggest, power in the domestic sphere can also be understood as somatic possession — the ability to "own" and protect a natural, physical body from the exterior world. Lear expresses this sense of royal-power-as-possession when he banishes Cordelia and Kent. But the King of France also reinforces a politics of possession when he identifies Cordelia with land, thereby equating his political and sexual power with ownership. France declares, "Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away. Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon. Thy dowerless daughter, King, is queen of France" (1.1.255, 258-59), using language that is, especially when considered within this scene's context of bequeathed kingdoms and landed marriages, suggestive of property rights ("I *seize* upon"), revealing the relationship between male political power and its desire to possess the female body. More significantly, Lear employs a gendered discourse of possession when he uses his political authority to banish Cordelia. Lear calls upon Hecate, a figure that Jeanne Addison Roberts associates with a preternatural cult of female religious rule (Roberts 1992, 125), in order to "exorcise" his land of his youngest daughter. The cursing of Cordelia suggests that Lear calls upon a deity associated with female power in order to remove the "body" of his daughter from the "body politic" of his kingdom. Possession — here meaning both political and familial/domestic possession — thus emerges as a function of a female-gendered sphere of power summarized in Lear's invocation of the goddess. Similarly, even as Lear dispossesses his kingdom of Cordelia, he reduces and submits himself indirectly to the domestic space of his body natural when he claims that he will stay with each daughter with his hundred knights, that he will "make abode with [each] by due turn" (1.1.135-36). The language of possession resonates with vital significance throughout this important scene: possession is constructed first as male political power over geographic space and the female body (Brayton's claim), but is then subtly translated into the female figure of Hecate. Lear begins the scene in complete possession of a male kingdom, but concludes the scene effectually divested of this male power and in the "possession" of his daughters' "abodes," spaces deriving their domestic power from feminized discourses of divine dispossession. This conflict between domestic and political power structures organizes Brook's more sympathetic treatment of Goneril and Regan and leads to Lear's mad railings against female domestic power. The irony is that Lear himself catalyzes the dichotomy

by linguistically confusing domestic and political power, while simultaneously and symbolically divesting himself of his masculine body politic.

### Domesticity and Lear's Loathing of the "Kind Nursery"

If the throne room scene represents a sundering of Lear's body natural and body politic, as well as a gendering of domestic and political power spheres through the language of (dis)possession, then 1.4 represents a conflict between Lear's masculine, public identity as king (which he has "cast off"), and Goneril's domestic space, the household that visually tropes her power over the interior, somatic realm. Brook's textual rearrangement is provocative in this sequence, which opens with a frame of text telling us that Lear is at "Goneril's [not Albany's] Castle," preparing us to read the following setting as Goneril's domestic domain rather than merely a male political center. We see Goneril and Albany dining face-to-face in front of a fire (figure 10) as Goneril voices her concern about Lear's unruly knights ("Tis politic, and safe, to let him keep at point a hundred knights?" [1.4.316-17] becomes an emphatic question). The shot composition establishes the domestic nature of Goneril's qualms by associating her visually with the hearth, the symbol of feminine dominion in the classical and western theatrical tradition (Scolnicov 1994, 14). Goneril's attitude toward her father's destructiveness is developed gradually and organically in the first few minutes of the sequence, for rather than giving her three longer speeches in which she complains to Oswald about Lear's retinue (as in the playtext's 1.3), Brook allows her resentment to accumulate in two- and three-line comments, interspersed with shots of the knights' rowdiness. As Goneril tells Oswald to "Say I am sick. I will not speak with him" (1.3.9), the camera cuts to Lear's small army of hunting knights on the frozen countryside. The shot cuts back to the interior of the castle, and Goneril assures the servants (in front of a fire in the dining hall), "If you come slack of your former services, you shall do well; the fault I'll answer" (1.3.10-11). After cutting to Lear's train entering the courtyard, the camera cuts back to Goneril, who says to Oswald, "Put on what weary negligence you please . . . If he should detest it, let him to my sister's" (1.3.14-15). The effect of this deftly edited montage is to produce a thoughtful Goneril who is not treacherously devising a plan to thwart her father, as a critic such as Bruce Young would have it (2002, 59-60).<sup>8</sup> Rather, Irene Worth's Goneril is measured and justified in her growing outrage, a woman concerned with the integrity and order of her (now sovereign) household (figure 11). The alternating shots of exterior and interior space accentuate the film's growing conflict between male political power (the identity Lear still wishes to retain through his knights) and female domestic power: Goneril asserts her authority through domestic servants in scenes shot before large dining-hall fires, all of

which suggests her ordered attempt to defend her political and domestic rule from the destructive, masculinized, barren world outside.

This gendering of domestic space underpins Irene Worth's Goneril, whose domestic sovereignty and circumspect rule are manifest in the dining hall scene. By the time she chastises Lear for his behavior, Worth's Goneril has developed a free-standing subject-position vis-à-vis familial domesticity. She delivers her reproaches to Lear gently, sitting next to him in-frame, conveying concern for her father's well-being within her domestic space (figure 12). Goneril asks more than commands Lear, "A little to disquantity your train, and the remainders to be such men as may besort your age, which know themselves, and you" (1.4.240-43). Instead of being a power-hungry woman bent solely on overthrowing Lear, Goneril appears concerned for her father, perhaps suspicious that his knights are in a position to abuse or humiliate the king, who is already mentally disintegrating (earlier in the scene, Scofield yammers in a voice cracking with senility, "Where's my fool?" (1.4.42). The fact that most of this conversation takes place in front of the fire emphasizes Goneril's responsibility for the domestic sphere, for the fire links this exchange to the intimate conversation with Albany and thus to the mythic hearth that opened the sequence. Lear's figure is also visually subordinated to the domestic set of the dining hall even when Goneril is not on camera affirming her authority over Lear's body natural. When Jack MacGowran's Fool says, "Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech" (1.4.113), he is opposite Lear, the fire in the background the only light in the scene. When the Fool chides Lear in his next speech, "I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches" (1.4.163-65), MacGowran is in close-up, speaking over a loaf of bread on the table, a composition that foregrounds the domestic space of the dining hall and Lear's somatic place within it (figures 13 and 14). The overall effect of the sequence — the Fool's chiding in front of the fire and Goneril's gentle, emotionally dynamic speeches — is two-fold. First, it shows Goneril's potential for a fuller subject-position within the playtext, a position ascribable to her role as domestic ruler that shifts her motives away from the purely political; and second, it underlines Lear's physical dependence upon both the fires of the interior dining hall and Goneril's feminine, domestic rule — she is both daughter and "mother" ruling over interior spaces, over the "kind nursery" upon which Lear's body natural depends and against which he will begin to rage.

The climactic destruction of the dining hall and the curse on Goneril's womb dramatize Lear's outrage at his loss of political identity, as well as his attempts to dislodge himself from the film's logic of domestic possession of the male body. After Goneril admonishes Lear to "disquantity" his train, Lear screams, "Darkness and devils" (1.4.243), striking the fireplace mantel with his riding crop. Crying out that Goneril is a "degenerate bastard" (l. 245) — the camera cutting to

show Worth's pained face — Lear pauses with a napkin in his hand, a reminder of his physical dependence on his daughter. Lear then violently overturns a table, setting off a destructive riot that nearly destroys the hall. More than simply justifying Goneril's anxieties, the destruction also represents Lear's attempt to extricate himself from the domain of the feminine "mother" by reasserting masculine violence through his knights. The attack on the dining hall symbolically positions male political violence against domestic control, which subsides when in the background the exterior doors open to provide an exit for Lear and his knights. Hence, following the logic of Brook's gendered exterior/interior idiom, male violence catalyzes a temporary rupture of domestic space and stages what may be termed a brief "exorcism" that allows male subjectivity an escape back into the barren exterior world beyond the pale of Goneril's domesticating fires (figure 15).

If the barren outside world signifies the male political domain that Lear wishes to reconstitute through violence, then his curse of Goneril is a liminal moment in which female fertility and sexuality become essential symbols of domesticity, and therefore the central fear informing Lear's madness in the storm scene with Poor Tom. When Lear curses Goneril's womb at the end of this sequence, Scofield's face, profiled in close-up, marks a visual boundary between the warm domestic space behind the camera's POV (from which Lear is escaping) and the barren masculine world outside, beyond Scofield's face (figure 16). This composition inscribes Lear's body within the margins of the domestic world and magnifies his yearning to escape his daughter's authority. When Lear begs the goddess of nature, "into [Goneril's] womb convey sterility, dry up in her the organs of increase" (1.4.270-71), the camera cuts to Worth's anguished face at the word "sterility," in a close-up that highlights the importance of fertility for a woman who indeed will never have children (figure 17). The montage of the curse speech thereby aligns Goneril with generation, a crucial source of feminine power that bridges the domestic and political spheres. In addition, the curse reveals Lear's fear of mastery by this domestic world, so that the only way he may regain political autonomy and "exorcise" himself from domestic space is to reclaim the power to procreate from his daughter. The aggressiveness with which Lear asserts his will against his daughter (who is also his "mother," his de facto "kind nursery") is further underlined when he invades the frame to accost and dominate Goneril so "that she may feel how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" (1.4.279-81; figure 18). Hence, while Lear wishes to embed his body in the map of the body politic, as represented by the exterior world in the background of the shot (he will "abjure all roofs" (2.2.397), Goneril's body is a site for the procreative, female "body natural" — for the enveloping domestic sphere against which Lear retaliates. The curse reinvigorates the film's bifurcation between exterior/interior, political/domestic spaces, and argues that the essence of female domestic and political power is the ability to enflesh human subjects. The effect of Lear's

denial of female reproductivity is evident in Goneril's face as Lear strolls into the barren male political world: her eyes brim with tears, and her warning to Regan through Oswald becomes not an insidious plot against fatherhood, but empathy for her sister's womb, her "particular fear" that Oswald will carry to Gloucester's castle.

The conflict between domestic and political spaces within which Lear is attempting to regain his political identity reaches its climax when Goneril and Regan rapidly pare down Lear's train of knights. Like Goneril, Susan Engel's Regan speaks gently to Lear, seemingly concerned for his well-being. Her line, "Sir, you are old: Nature in you stands on the very verge of her confine" (2.2.235-37), is delivered as she sits next to Lear, the two figures facing each other intimately within frame. Regan's tone is not cruel; she merely reminds her father that he should submit to domestic rule, the "nursery" that will care for his decaying body natural. But when Goneril and Regan admonish Lear to dissolve his train, the conflict between their domestic rule and Lear's grasp of his political identity is foregrounded. When Goneril asks, "Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance from those that she calls servants or from mine?" and Regan adds, "If then they chanced to slack ye, we could control them" (2.2.432-35), the two women stand next to each other in front of the castle door, again marking their identification with interior space (figure 19). As the women divest Lear of his train, the gendered conflict becomes stark: Lear's knights represent to him the last vestiges of his masculine identity as king, the last link to his already-divested body politic. He "needs" them in order to maintain a kingly subject-position. Lear is quite clear that without his knights, "man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.2.456), a comment that points out the relationship between kingship and its ornamental expression through the possession of *men*. Just as Regan clothes herself in "gorgeous" apparel (the camera cuts at the word "gorgeous" from Lear's weaving upper body to Regan's fur-clad torso) and thereby expresses her feminine "body," so too does Lear express his masculine identity through knightly "vestment." For Lear, to eliminate the train is to relegate him fully to a completely domestic subject-position. This is exactly what Goneril's and Regan's paring attempts to achieve.

Lear's choices are clear at this point in the domestic/political, interior/exterior conflict: he either must submit himself to a "naked" subjectivity and become a natural body possessed by the domestic world, or he must seek an escape from subjectivity altogether, since his political identity has been subsumed by Regan's and Goneril's domestic rule. Lear, of course, chooses the latter and rushes into the wild storm, abjuring not only all roofs, but also his own invaded, shameful body. The storm scene's defamiliarizing effects emphasize the fragmentation of Lear's subjectivity: harsh, electronic thunder, black frames, rapidly shifting montages of Lear and the Fool, reverse shots of Lear arguing with himself in the speeches of 3.1, all represent the film's dismantling of

Lear's subject-position. But in terms of Lear's "pelican daughters," his "reason not the need" speech marks the climax of their dominance, for the second half of the film reabsorbs Goneril and Regan's potential for self-sustaining subjectivity into the political world of Britain and the invasion by France's army. Although for reasons discussed below, I disagree with Carol Rutter's suggestion that the second half of the film fails to engage a feminist agenda (cf. Rutter 1997, 198), I think a more productive method of interpreting the film lies within early modern language of possession. The first half provides more deeply considered characterizations of Goneril and Regan because the first half is concerned with the effect of domestic space on Lear's body natural once his body politic has been relinquished, dissolved — divested. Thus, domesticity and the daughters' spheres of influence govern the film up to Lear's "reason not the need" speech. However, once Lear's subjectivity and his drive to escape from domestic possession become central, the film's emphasis shifts back to the politics of the playtext's French invasion. Political space overtakes the domestic at this point and repossesses the narrative's trajectory, a point highlighted by the decreasing focus on interior settings through the end of the film.

At this juncture, therefore, we must clarify and qualify Brook's more sympathetic treatment of Goneril and Regan. Although Brook's directorial vision opens a space for Engel's and Worth's portrayals of more sympathetic women, Brook's cinematic idiom inscribes these female characters within a domestic space that is traditionally associated with oppressed or silenced femininity (Scolnicov 1994, 6-7). This directorial employment of stereotypically gendered spaces makes it difficult to view Brook's treatment of feminine subjectivity as unqualifiedly "feminist," and it partially supports Kathleen McLuskie's claims that even attempts at feminist readings of Shakespeare fail to create a completely radical, feminist point of view (McLuskie 1985, 106). However, my overall goal is not to recuperate Brook as a feminist, but rather to explore the significance of Goneril's and Regan's expanded subjectivities in relation to the film's gendered power spheres and its visual language. Brook's ingenuity lies in his ability to turn the domestic world into an active, politically interested articulation of femininity that is far removed from the subservient silence so conventionally associated with the feminized hearth and home. Thus, even though Brook's artistic vision is generally circumscribed by conventional stereotypes of gendered space, his treatment of Goneril and Regan within the gendered spaces of *King Lear* also demonstrates his ability to re-inflect and empower femininity while simultaneously critiquing misogyny — even to the maddening of royal Lear.

### Possession and Exorcism of the Shameful Subject

What are we to make, then, of Lear's madness, as understood both through the gendered framework of political and domestic power I have adumbrated and through the language of possession as a mode of thinking about the domestic, natural body? In what remains, I would like to show that Lear's madness is inflected by early modern understandings of bodily possession, and that Brook's film exploits the connections between feminine fertility and somatic possession in order to stage a repudiation of a coherent subject-position either for Lear or for the audience. In other words, Lear's madness can be understood as a desire to exorcise from his own body the influences of feminine domesticity, a desire that perceives procreation as a base proliferation of domestic subjects — the shameful, fleshly bodies Michael Neill (2006) has described — without inherently political meaning. Once Lear's illusion of kingship is demystified in the storm, he realizes that his body natural is the only "real" body available to him. In this demystified position, Lear's madness manifests itself as a drive to escape subjective embodiment, a dynamic evidenced by Brook's closing sequence.

The early modern period saw the beginning of what Carol Thomas Neely has described as the formation of the modern secular subject:

In the early modern period and especially in the decades before and after the beginning of the seventeenth century, several cultural debates in process (over the prerogatives of medicine, the validity of witchcraft accusations, the control of possession and exorcism) have the effect of requiring and welcoming the separation of human madness from the similar-appearing conditions caused by sin and guilt, demonic and divine possession, bewitchment, or fraud. By making such distinctions, these debates gradually map out the normal, "natural," and self-contained secular human subject — one that of course exists within a divinely ordered and devil-threatened cosmos but is not entirely shaped by supernatural forces. (Neely 2004, 47)

This emerging distinction, so regularly asserted by scholars of early modernity, was often politically inflected in the post-Reformation era's bitterly sectarian atmosphere. In England especially, the Protestant state encouraged the treatment of possession as a medical and physical affliction curable by secular intervention rather than by Roman Catholic ritual exorcisms that the state perceived as subversive, "papist" manipulations of a gullible public.<sup>9</sup> The proliferation of pathologies for supernatural possession contributed to an increasing overlap in religious, scientific, and psychological discourses, and drama served a unique role in this discursive secularization through a heightened awareness on stage of alternative explanations for "distraction," "possession," and "madness" (Neely 2004, 46-47, 49).<sup>10</sup> Within this milieu, therefore, Shakespeare's stage has



available to it a rich multitude of natural and supernatural discourses with which to inflect and express Lear's madness. In the case of *King Lear*, gendered medical language provides a framework for understanding the dissolution of Lear's body natural. The physician Edmund Jorden published a treatise emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between "possession" and "disease," a work likely to have been in Shakespeare's hands sometime between its publication in 1603 and the first performance of *Lear* in 1605, since its terminology surfaces in Lear's fear of the *hysterica passio*. Jorden's tract, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, is implicitly positioned against Catholic ritualism:

I thought good to make knowne the doctrine of this disease, so farre forth, as may be in a vulgar tongue conveniently disclosed, to the end that the unlearned and rash conceits of divers [sic], might be thereby brought to better understanding and moderation; who are apt to make everything a supernaturall work which they do not understand, proportioning the bounds of nature unto their own capacities. (1603, sig. A2v-A3r)

However, Jorden does not completely discount possession as a viable explanation for physical affliction, claiming,

I doe not deny but that God doth in these dayes worke extraordinarily, for the deliverance of his children . . . and that among other, there may be both possessions by the Divell, and obsessions and witchcraft, & and dispossession also through the Prayers and supplications of his servants. (1603, sig. A3r)

Significantly, Jorden distinguishes between supernatural and natural causes of disease. But what I want to suggest in presenting these passages is that although the early modern period witnessed the emergence of medicine as an alternative explanation for supernatural possession, the discourses of possession, madness, and physical disease were not easily extricated from one another in Shakespeare's culture. In fact, since Jorden's tract was published just before the composition of *King Lear*, and since Lear himself claims to suffer from *hysterica passio* — the wandering womb of Jorden's "suffocation of the mother" — it is very likely that Shakespeare exploits the indeterminacies among discourses of possession, madness, and sexuality available in Jorden's text.<sup>11</sup> The play thus appropriates language from these discourses to interrogate the domestic "possession" that Brook's filmtext accesses, as well as to dramatize a misogynistic madness that serves as a male "exorcism" of feminine possession.

Within these interweaving discourses, Lear's madness emerges in Brook's film as a perceived "possession" by "motherly" — i.e., domestic and female — authority over the body natural. When

Lear finds the disguised Kent stocked in Gloucester's courtyard, for example, it is an affront to the power once symbolized by the king's body politic, a sign that Lear's political identity is forfeit to a new order represented in Lear's sons-in-law, but more immediately mediated by his daughters. What is fascinating about Lear's reaction here is that this attack against his body politic manifests itself as a violation of his body natural through the language of feminine possession: "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! *Hysterica passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, thy element's below" (2.2.246-48).<sup>12</sup> Later in the scene, Lear apostrophizes his heart, ordering it "down" again. And when Lear is at the height of his anger against his daughters' domestic authority, he cries out, "No, I'll not weep. I have full cause of weeping, but this heart shall break into a hundred thousand flaws or e'er I'll weep" (2.2.472-75). Taken alone, these passages merely indicate a once-fierce king's fear of appearing effete in public, but read within a somatic politics, the lines are pregnant with meaning. Lear interprets his dependence on domestic space (e.g., Goneril's dining hall) as a possession of his body natural by feminine forces. More horrifyingly for Lear, his body natural is literally ruled by a domestic "womb," the essential symbol of fertility and female dominion. If previously Lear could exorcise himself of Goneril's literal domestic hearth and dining hall by reentering the barren political exterior world, here such an option is no longer available, for here not only is Lear "distracted" by his dependence upon the domestic body, but the very sign of that feminized order now possesses his own body. Madness for Lear thus slips linguistically into bodily possession, an invasion of his subject-position by the female's organs of increase.

In short, making Goneril and Regan figures of domestic power with autonomous subject positions opposing male political authority reveals the rich valences of Lear's *hysterica passio*, dynamics embodied and exploited in Brook's ambitious production. Once we organize a reading of the film- and playtexts around the principles of bifurcated and conflicting "bodies" of gendered power — bodies represented in the domestic interiors and political exteriors offered in Brook's cinematic idiom and elaborated in Scolnicov's insights into feminine theatrical space — Lear's madness dominates Brook's camera lens: off-centered close-ups, erratic pans and jump-cuts, and the disembodied effects of the storm scene all emanate from the "possession" of Lear's body natural and indeed mimic Lear's destabilized subjectivity (cf. Hodgdon 1983, 146). Therefore, since Lear's madness is linked to his domination by feminine domesticity, Lear's misogyny assumes a more poignant "rationale" in Brook's interpretation, for it allows us to read the possibilities coded in Poor Tom's body, which offers Lear a final possibility for exorcising his body natural from the invasive wandering womb.

Tom's body in the storm scene represents to Lear a possible method, mediated by Christian iconography, to assert once again male political authority. But this potentiality is only suggested, then withdrawn from our vision. Tom becomes instead an index of Lear's demystified, humiliated body natural and suggests the impossibility of Lear's regaining a masculinized body politic once the domestic sphere has asserted itself in the narrative. As described earlier, Tom's body in the storm scene is clad only in a thin loincloth. But Tom is also crowned with a thick wreath of shrubbery, and his face is shrouded in a prominent black beard. As the camera pans down Tom's humiliated body, cutting between his emaciated torso and crowned head, Tom becomes a crucified and humiliated Christ figure (Parker 1991, 81), an emblem of abject mortality and suffering and the trope par excellence of male enfleshment or incarnation (figures 20 and 21). Emblematically, therefore, Tom offers a traditional remedy for Lear's "possessed" body natural: the physical, religious ritual of exorcism, mediated by the sacramental body of the God-man. Lear seems to acknowledge this possibility of "re-embodiment" when he beholds Tom's suggested genitals beneath the loincloth and says, "Thou art the thing itself." At this juncture, Lear apprehends the metonymic power of his own kingship, the arbitrary designation of his body politic that seemed inherently identical to his person in the opening scene. Tom's genitals signal the network of the film's gendered meanings associated with the phallic throne. But whereas the images of Tom invoke the presence of a humiliated Christ figure standing in opposition to Lear's possessed body natural, Lear immediately realizes that there can be no "exorcism" of feminine, domestic power. Rather, Lear recognizes that he, too, is merely "the thing itself": he is *only* a body natural, a shameful animated corpse that lacks any natural identity with a body politic. Lear enters the hovel and sees Poor Tom's body as a positive reassertion of somatic politics, a reestablishing of incarnated, male political space. Instead, Lear reads his own subject-position out of Tom, and sees that the domestic space of the frail body is the only real subjectivity available for him. He is himself "unaccommodated man," born because copulation thrived not, as in late medieval political theology and early modern absolutism, because he was ordained the king of a mystical body politic and destined by God to rule.<sup>13</sup>

Once Lear recognizes his own domestic nature — his own body natural — as the sole meaningful unit of his subjectivity, the only option available for him is an escape from subjectivity itself, for it is only this way that he may be "exorcised" of this "wandering womb," this knowledge of his own feminized corporeality (i.e., derived from the domestic space). The king expresses this option through his bitter irony and misogyny in the "mad scene," which Brook sets against the liminal space of the seashore not merely as a gesture toward Beckettian dramaturgy, but in order to foreground both Lear's demystified body natural and the old men's desires to escape a fleshly

subjectivity, a mortality derived from embodiment within the domestic space of the womb.<sup>14</sup> Lear pitifully mumbles that he is "every inch a king" (4.6.106), diminishing the dignity these lines might carry, and the shot shrinks Lear's previously imposing torso: a solitary figure in an unbroken white background, Scofield crosses his arms not to defy, but to hide (figure 22). As Lear continues this speech, we realize that his ravings about sex and adultery are ironic commentaries not only on Gloucester's sexual sins, but on the utter dependence of men (specifically men) on the womb that gives them flesh. Lear claims, "Let copulation thrive" (4.6.112), and we sense he refers not only to the bastard Edmund, but also to the futility of regulating procreation, which as Lear learned in the encounter with Poor Tom, is a mere proliferation of unaccommodated, fleshly bodies, not the making of royal subjectivities. Since even a "dog's obeyed in office" (4.5.154-55), Lear asserts the primacy of corporeality over metonymical political meaning: the only reality underpinning subjectivity is enfleshed and feminized, not political and masculine. When Gloucester and Lear, the last of the "legitimate" male rulers (as far as they know), embrace each other and weep, they are the only subjects that exist in this world, and the black and white seashore emerges as the last border of meaning separating the weeping male subjects from the void beyond, into which both men seek to escape from "possession" by the domestic/sexual spaces now dominated by Goneril and Regan (figure 23).

The film's final scene — Lear's death — cinematically describes the evacuation of subjectivity for which Lear yearns in the last half of the narrative. Lear's fragmented dissolution also serves as a visual summary of his larger journey, for it refracts the sundering of Lear's artificially conceived dual identities in 1.1 into the defamiliarizing visual language for which the film is known. We see Lear, screaming "Howl, howl, howl," walk across the barren landscape with Cordelia's body. They are not central figures, nor are they shot close-up. Rather, their bodies are both virtually absorbed by the vast, cold background — two fragile, ill-defined figures dwarfed by the immensity of the growing white void. Once Lear places Cordelia's body on the ground and kneels over her, the sequence dissolves into a fractured series of shots whose only coherent meaning lies in their meaninglessness: Lear kneels over Cordelia ("Oh, you are men of stones"), then Cordelia is gone, out of frame, and Lear is looking directly at us ("Cordelia? I might have saved her"). Lear addresses Kent, who is in frame with him ("You're welcome hither"); then turns to look at us, with Cordelia standing behind him simultaneously alive and ghostly ("And my poor fool hanged"). The shot cuts again to Lear looking at the camera ("Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, never, never"), then cuts to Lear from behind, kneeling over nothing ("never, never, never" [5.1.255-307]; see, for example, figures 24 and 25). The effect of this

disjointed and fantastic sequence is profound in its miming of the meaninglessness of consciousness and subjectivity that Brook intends to communicate to his early 1970s audience, a fragmentation that pervades Lear's shattered mind. Ironically, this is the "exorcism" of Lear's feminized, domestic body, but the ritual is communicated through *Cordelia's* evacuated subjectivity: she is both present and absent, both in frame and out of frame, both alive and dead. She becomes an evacuated subject divested of cinematic meaning, and Brook uses montage here to separate not only Lear from his daughter, but also the audience from both subjects, so that we, too, may partake visually in the exorcism of subjectivity that the death scene dramatizes.

Lear himself wishes to emulate the example of his daughter's anatomized and voided subject-position, and the film's last image epitomizes the argument of the film's second half. When he says, "Do you see this?" (5.3.309), the camera focuses on Lear's buttoned tunic, his last remnant of bodily vestment (figure 26). The emphasis here is on the king's body natural, and even though Brook excises Lear's "Pray you undo this button," the suggestion of a clothed body soon to be shuffled off in death is evident in the coarse fabric that fills the frame, a garment that almost parodically recalls the fur of state that Lear symbolically cast off in 1.1. As he commands, "Look on her: look, her lips, look there, look there!" (5.3.309-10), the camera pans up to Lear's face, which gazes into the lens, the dying man pointing at us as if we were Cordelia's body. Making eye contact with Scofield at this moment is tantalizing, for it shows us that as Lear commands us to look "at her," all we can behold is him: we are told to see his vested body and bearded face as an analogue to Cordelia's voided presence, to look at him as the undefined female subject whose death models his exorcism from shameful, embodied life (figure 27). The disjunction between hearing the command "look on her" and looking at Lear from Cordelia's (voided) POV also aligns father and daughter in a striking way, for just as we looked at Cordelia through Lear's POV when he banished her in 1.1, so too do we look at Lear from the valence of the disembodied Cordelia during his own dissolution. While the initial banishment was a divestment and fragmentation of Lear's masculinized body politic, Lear's death scene is a disintegration of his now feminized body natural — of his fleshly subjectivity, which was the demystified, necessary product of a powerful, domestic fertility that "possesses" all subject-positions and undermines the fictional holds of political identity. Lear is thus exorcised of his wandering womb of female domesticity, of his humiliated body, via Brook's closing sequence: the king's head cranes backward, and he drifts slowly down out of frame, which then dissolves into pure white nothingness (figure 28). As the film's relationship to the postmodern theories of Artaud and Kott implies, the price for the exorcism in this cinematic idiom is nothing less than the possibility of cohesive subjectivity itself, for as Cordelia's first words in the film intimate, "the

thing itself" is in reality "nothing" at all: it is an unclothed body natural, an ashamed corpse, playing a man, playing a domestic subject — playing a king.

### Conclusion

Emphasizing the interplay of gendered discourses of political and domestic power in Peter Brook's *King Lear* necessarily runs the risk of stereotyping Brook's interpretation of Goneril and Regan. Indeed, feminist critics have critiqued Brook's directorial vision in the film as debilitatingly circumscribed by traditionalist, patriarchal notions of male power to the exclusion of feminine subjectivity. Carol Rutter claims that Brook's treatment of Goneril and Regan in the film does not adequately explore the dimensions of feminine sexuality that Lear's daughters can represent, that Brook is limited by "male-oriented directing" and as a result cannot permit a sympathetic vision of Lear's eldest daughters (Rutter 1997, 196, 198).<sup>15</sup> This critique is not new in reviews and scholarship of Brook's oeuvre, but as an interrogation of gendered power structures represented in Lear and his daughters can illustrate, such an unqualified assessment of Brook produces an inadequate account of his film. It overlooks the networks of culturally embedded, conflicting discourses that work to demystify political power and to reveal it as a fictive identity imposed on an inherently domestic — and thereby feminized — fleshly body. In short, Peter Brook's artistic vision can be read through concepts of embodiment that are important to feminist Shakespearean critics, and the emphasis in his film on the complications of masculine embodiment only demonstrates Brook's anticipation of later production theories that privilege the female body, even if Brook's vision is broadly circumscribed by traditionalist conceptions of theatrical space. And if indeed Goneril and Regan are reabsorbed into the political, masculine world in the second half of the film, it is a "limit" imposed by Shakespeare's plot as well as Brook's creative horizon, a limit that Brook's rejection of the mystified subject of political authority at least partially transgresses.

More significantly, though, an interpretation utilizing Kantorowiczian political theology, as well as early modern discourses of political and somatic possession, can illuminate the ways in which Brook appropriates both a subtly feminist reassessment of Goneril and Regan as well as postmodern theories of the subject in order to dramatize crucial historical discourses within Shakespeare's playtext. Rather than merely reflecting the troubling "despair and anger of the 1960s" (Mullin 1983, 195) through the alienation, cruelty, and nihilism of Kott, Artaud, and Beckett, Brook's interpretation of *King Lear* offers us a historically and textually informed vision of how such cinematic techniques can bring into focus the gendered conflicts between the political and domestic spheres motivating Lear's misogynistic madness. Indeed, early modern political theory can allow us to appreciate the artistic connections between Brook's treatment of fragmented,

alienated subjectivity, and his more nuanced — if sometimes inconsistent — treatment of Lear's pelican daughters. Finally, understanding Lear's madness as somatic possession by feminine, domestic power structures and reading that possession as a deconstruction of masculinized, performed political power manifested as evacuated subjectivity, permits us to interrogate the connections between gendered political and domestic "bodies," while at the same time showing how early modern constructs of masculinity, femininity, and authority produce a wider range of "faithful" production choices for *King Lear* than critics who privilege a narrower definition of "faithfulness" to Shakespearean playtexts allow. This seems a more productive paradigm for scholars of Shakespeare and the afterlives of his plays: for by illuminating this 1971 appropriation of the playtext's concerns with embodiment, possession, and political authority, we see that Brook does not deconstruct or redact *Lear*, but instead embodies one more shadow of *Lear*'s possibilities.<sup>16</sup>

### Notes

1. See Lukas Erne's *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (2003) for the foundations of this kind of analysis. Erne claims that while performance studies of Shakespeare have been needed correctives of New Critical tendencies to reduce Renaissance plays to poems, they have tended to neglect the reality that Shakespeare's plays were also literary texts produced in a specific historical moment. Awareness of this twofold nature of Shakespeare's plays — as both performance text and literary text — is hence vital to a fuller understanding of Shakespearean drama.
2. My analysis of the playtext, as realized in Brook's film, shares some similarities with the "ontological shame" of *King Lear* that Michael Neill has put forward in a recent lecture, "'The Little Dogs and All'" (2006). Indeed, although my interpretation arrives at necessarily different conclusions than Neill does, and although his discussion of "ontological shame" does not address the gendered possibilities and connotations implied in my argument, Neill's deeply compelling historicist reading of the play illuminates an important emphasis on embodiment and royal shame that is vital to interpreting Brook's film.
3. Smith (2000) invokes Kantorowicz's theory as one of several modes by which masculine identity is represented in Shakespeare, though he does not elaborate the full significance of gendered somatic politics that this political theology supports.
4. See Smith's concluding chapter, "Coalescences," for a concise discussion of the constructed nature of masculinity and its significance in specific Shakespearean performances.

5. Leggatt points out that Scofield's characterization marked a vital turning point in a twentieth-century movement away from Lear as "reverend old king" to Lear as a strong, unsympathetic tyrant (Leggatt 2004, 105-17).
6. *King Lear*, 3.4.83-86, 89-90. Because Brook's textual editing reorganizes scenes and includes altered and completely new lines, I will cite the approximate playtext lines parenthetically, without line breaks, from the Arden 3 edition, ed. R. A. Foakes (1997).
7. Many thanks to Jonathan Watson for his assistance in producing the still frames for this essay. All frames are from *King Lear*, dir. Peter Brook (1971).
8. Young (2002), using insights derived from Emmanuel Levinas, argues that the play is composed of characters who act "for themselves" (i.e., Goneril and Regan) and characters who act "for others."
9. For discussions of demonic possession in early modern England, see Stephen Greenblatt's seminal essay, "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" (1987) and Van Dijkhuizen's elaboration of Greenblatt's argument, "Mystical Bodies" (1999).
10. Neely's introduction (2004) also provides an outstanding summary of the cultural meaning of madness and distraction in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and shows how gender constructs influence cultural understanding of madness vis-à-vis the stage.
11. Jorden's treatise has been a popular historical text for exploring the intersection of demonology and early modern physiology. For another account of this treatise's potential influence on Shakespeare, see Joanna Levin's "Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria" (2002).
12. Although Scofield actually reverses the words of the Latin term, I preserve the word order of the playtext here for clarity.
13. For a discussion of the role pagan deities play in *Lear's* universe, see William R. Elton's *King Lear and the Gods* (1966). For a different take on the role absolutism plays in *King Lear*, see Richard Halpern's "Historica Passio: King Lear's Fall into Feudalism," in his *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (1991), 215-69.
14. For a recent analysis of how Brook's film treats subjectivity through Edgar and Gloucester in the "Dover cliff" scene, see Simon J. Ryle's "Filming Non-Space" (2007).
15. Rutter reads Charles Marowitz's account of Brook's original 1962 stage rehearsals of the unruly knights (Marowitz 1988, 14-15) as an example of such "in-gendered" directing, and argues that Goneril's sexuality is not sufficiently explored in the second half of the 1971 film.
16. My gratitude to Peter Holland for his thoughtful suggestions during the evolution of this essay.



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