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Where am I? Who am I?
[Abjection and Negotiating Identity in Carin Mannheimer's *Sista Dansen*]

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Abstract

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Where am I? Who am I?¹

Abjection and Negotiating Identity in Carin Mannheimer's *Sista Dansen* [The Last Dance]

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Julia Kristeva's lexicon of abjection, criticized by feminist philosophers for being trapped in a male/female polarity, is explored for its potential to generate analyses. What is meant by lexicon is the terminology, which is used with Kristeva's definitions rather than definitions found in a common dictionary. This terminology, grounded in the Freudian and Lacanian schools of psychoanalysis and further developed by Kristeva, includes words for the mechanisms that describe the interaction between the symbolic and the semiotic in spoken language.

Two characters from the playscript of Carin Mannheimer's *Sista dansen* (2008) [The Last Dance] are analyzed in this paper. The perspectives of two scholars are applied: a perspective described by Ruth Y. Jenkins that identifies the dominant culture in a literary work, those excluded from the culture, and how they use recognition of exclusion to create an alternative identity, and Karen Shimakawa's unifying strategy that combines feminist theories with Kristeva's theories. The two characters selected for analysis are Bogdan, a young, immigrant, male caregiver in a nursing home, and Harriet an elderly, frail, woman resident in the nursing home. The "Who am I?" in the title is an expression for a subject's ongoing search for emancipation from a condition that he or she cannot endorse, and for one that gives the subject a sense of happiness. The "Where am I?" in the title is an expression for a state of being in a social situation, for example, that of an immigrant who intuits discrimination and exclusion. It is found

that by examining linguistic articulation as containing signifiers that mark the borders to that which a speaking subject experiences as abject, the theories of Julia Kristeva are capable of revealing a multitude of issues, and consequently, bringing to the fore the richness of the social criticism in Mannheimer's playscript.

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1. Introduction

The Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva (born 1941) uses notions of the symbolic and the semiotic to explain a subject's sense of identity. These theories originate in the Freudian and Lacanian schools of psychoanalytic thought, in which Kristeva received training. The semiotic, according to Kristeva, is the pre-linguistic state of an infant, and is associated with a maternal essence. As the subject begins to speak, he or she enters into the symbolic order of grammar and syntax, for the purpose of reasoning and functioning in society, which is associated with a paternal essence. However, pre-linguistic drives remain in the subject, and constantly disrupt the symbolic order of language to express the subject's unconscious drives and urges. In *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974) (*Revolution in Poetic Language*) Kristeva explains this interaction between the symbolic and the semiotic as existing simultaneously in spoken language in an ongoing process of structuring and de-structuring (Kristeva 2002: 31). In other words, according to Kristeva, the identity of a subject, as expressed linguistically, is never static, but is an unceasing process. This unceasing process is what she designates a process of *significance* (Ibid). Since the semiotic and the symbolic exist simultaneously in an ongoing process, a speaking subject, consequently, is always in a process of signification (Kristeva 2002: 34).

Kristeva's notion of signification in language can be compared to signification in a theatrical performance. In *Essais critiques* (1964) (*Critical Essays*), Roland Barthes explains that a theatrical performance sends messages to the audience. These messages originate in the set, the costumes, the lighting, the choreography of the actors on stage, the actors' gestures and their speech, all of which occur simultaneously in what he denotes "*a density of signs*" that communicate meaning on stage (Barthes 1972: 261-262, Barthes's emphasis). Kristeva's notion of signifiers in speech, for example, rhythm, tones, obscene words, unconventional modes of speaking, then, can be imagined as messages that communicate meaning about the speaking subject.

Kristeva's theories are criticized by feminist scholars, such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz, who maintain that Kristeva's notions of the symbolic and the semiotic are limited because they are locked in a male-female polarity.² In the textbook *Julia Kristeva* (2004), Noëlle McAfee explains that these critics assume that Kristeva's philosophy bases psychological characteristics, and consequently linguistic characteristics, in biology (McAfee 2004: 77). Since Kristeva's

notion of the *chora*, as the source of the semiotic, is equated with a maternal essence associated with nature, and since the symbolic is equated with a masculine essence associated with culture, or the law and order of society, these critics reason that Kristeva's philosophy expresses a stereotyped femininity that would make her theories limited for expressing emancipation from a male-driven symbolic order. Consequently, her theories would be limited for analyzing works of art and literature (McAfee 2004: 77).

In the masters thesis on gender and ethnicity, "Julia Kristeva's Subversive Semiotic Politics. A Conceptual Analysis of Kristeva's Notions of the Semiotic *chora*, Maternity and Feminism", Evelien Geerts asks whether Kristeva's theory of the symbolic and the semiotic is limited. Geerts analyzes the ambiguities present in Kristeva's philosophy and suggests that Kristeva, instead of being dualistic and limited, actually deconstructs "the binary between nature and culture, via emphasizing the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic" (Geerts 2010-2011: 5). This approach to the semiotic and the symbolic will be adopted in this paper to analyze two characters in Carin Mannheimer's *Sista dansen* (2008).

1.1. Aim and motivation

This paper proposes to challenge the alleged limitation of Kristeva's notions of the symbolic and the semiotic, abjection and the abject, by analyzing the signifying process of two characters in the playscript of Carin Mannheimer's *Sista dansen*. The subject matter of Mannheimer's play is commonly assumed to be aging and institutional care of the elderly in a welfare society. However, the playscript includes many types of characters in a complex web that reflects the social issues of contemporary Sweden, thereby motivating an exploration of the script with an openness to these issues.

2. Background and Material

2.1. Carin Mannheimer

Carin Mannheimer, born Jacobson, on August 17, 1934 in Osby, Sweden, is a Swedish author, dramatist, screenwriter and director renowned and awarded for her social criticism.³ Mannheimer gained acclaim with the book *Rapport om kvinnor* [Report on Women] (1969). The situation of women, children and the elderly in society are recurring themes in her writing, including the three television series she wrote and directed: *Lära för livet* [Learning for Life] (1977), about a

fictional ninth-grade class, and *Svenska hjärtan* [Swedish Hearts] (1987–1998), about a group of neighbors who have benefitted from the economic upswing prior to the 1980s and the downside to their superficially idyllic existence. *Solbacken: Avd. E* [Sunny Hill: Ward E] (2003) is about elder care, a series for which Mannheimer conducted research, including an internship at a nursing home. The name “Solbacken” in Swedish means sunny slope or sunny hill in English, and invokes a sense of cheerfulness that is absent in reality. *Sista dansen* is the staged spinoff of *Solbacken: Avd. E*.

In an e-mail exchange in May, 2013, and supplemented in September, 2013, I asked Mannheimer questions about *Sista dansen*. In responding to these questions she also offered her view of the difference between writing for the stage and writing for the screen, which reveals her approach to writing in general. For the interested reader, this interview is attached as Appendix A in the original Swedish, and as Appendix B in an English translation.

2.2. Material

This paper is based on the actors’ script version 2, 2010 (in my possession), which I translated in 2009-2010 for the purpose of simultaneous interpreting for an English-speaking audience at Göteborgs stadsteater (the Gothenburg City Theatre) on January 21 and February 8, 2010. The translation, with the title *The Last Dance*, is, at the moment of writing, unpublished.

Sista dansen is a two-act play with 29 scenes set in a municipal, tax-funded nursing home in contemporary Sweden. The nursing home has seven active patients: Harriet, Ingrid, Ulla, Majken, Olle, Hilding and Axel and one silent patient, Annmari. Three family members appear in the play: Kristina, Ingrid’s daughter, Erik, Axel’s son, and Johan, Harriet’s son. The nursing home employs two caregivers with permanent, full time employment, Bogdan and Elsie, two temporary employees, Izmir and Sussie, and one director, Katrin. Other characters in the play are: a home helper, a municipal needs assessor for elder care, a physician and a pianist.

The home is a locked facility and the eight patients are no longer able to care for themselves in their own homes owing to illness, physical handicap or dementia. They are from different educational, professional and social backgrounds and must come to terms with living in close proximity to each other until death. Since the facility is locked, the patients, already frail and at the end of life, must struggle under the additional burden of surrendering what remains of their independence and identities to the routines of the home. The title literally refers to the last

dance in the final scene, and it can metaphorically be extended to the bureaucratic red tape the patients, their families, and the employees waltz around in.

Sixteen scenes take place in the day room, around the dining table where meals are served. Seven scenes take place in one of the private rooms during the morning or evening routine. The remaining scenes take place in the administration office or in a corridor where employees meet out of earshot of the patients. The scenes to be discussed in this paper are designated in the analysis section.

3. Previous Research

This section serves as an introduction to the textbook and articles by scholars whose analyses of performance, drama and literary works using Kristeva's notions of abjection and the abject constitute the sources from which the models of analysis applied in this paper were selected.⁴

3.1. Ruth Y. Jenkins

In the essay "Engendering Abjection's Sublime" published in the periodical *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (winter issue 2011, vol. 36, no. 4), Ruth Y. Jenkins uses Kristeva's notions of abjection and the abject to present an alternative reading of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. This youth novel is commonly criticized for its conservative, gendered values. However, by examining the novel through the lens of Kristevan notions of abjection and the abject, Jenkins identifies the domain of the dominant culture, identifies those excluded from it, then reveals how the disenfranchised characters of the novel create an alternative identity by recognizing the rejection exercised by the dominant culture (Jenkins 2011: 440). This perspective will be fruitful in examining the notion of "Who am I?" in this paper.

3.2. Adrian Kiernander

In the article "Abjected Arcadia: Images of Classical Greece and Rome in Barrie Kosky's *Oedipus*, *The Lost Echo* and *The Women of Troy*" published in the periodical *Australian Drama Studies* (April 2010, Issue 56) Adrian Kiernander writes: "These productions have all discovered features of the abject in the playscripts, especially the sense that the abject has no proper place or status" (Kiernander 2010: 112). Kiernander quotes from Kristeva in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*

(1980) (*Powers of Horror*): “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 2002: 232). He applies Kristeva’s idea of what disturbs identity to offer an analysis of Lear, Titus and Hecuba, who face forms of degradation in old age that become intertwined with their personal identities (Kiernander 2010: 112). For example, in Act Four of Barrie Kosky’s play *The Lost Echo* (2006), the age-marked bodies of the nude actors are exposed on stage. Kiernander uses this example to illustrate one form of abjection, namely the violation that elderly, frail persons may be forced to experience through “deprivation of modesty, dignity and decency” (Kiernander 2010: 112). Kiernander’s suggestion of how to view the elderly will be adopted in this paper.

3.3. Karen Shimakawa

In a review of the textbook *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (2002) by Karen Shimakawa, published in the periodical *Theatre Journal* (2005, Vol. 57, Issue 1), Esther Kim Lee writes that Shimakawa uses Kristeva’s concept of abjection but rearticulated in a unifying strategy for the purpose of examining the tensions between “Asian Americanness” and “Americanness” (Lee 2005: 154). By “unifying strategy” Lee means Shimakawa’s combination of feminist philosophy with Kristevan notions of abjection and the abject. Shimakawa examines the negotiation of Asian Americans between abject visibility as foreigners in America and invisibility as assimilated into the dominant culture. She offers multiple uses of the notion of abjection. In some instances the notion is applied as spatial in terms of the insider versus the outsider, and in some instances it is legal in terms of citizen or noncitizen.

Karen Shimakawa’s approach is informed by the theories of the feminist scholars who criticize Kristeva for being limited and dualistic. She has analogously adopted aspects of feminist philosophy, finding the feminist concept of the body fruitful for discussing racism, and has unified feminist theories with Kristeva’s notions of abjection and the abject to examine issues of assimilation, citizenship (native versus non-native), discrimination (exclusion), gender, legal status, and racism. Aware of the risks of such a direct adoption, Shimakawa writes, “I want to suggest nevertheless that something analogous (and at times collusive) might be identified in certain theatrical responses to Asian American abjection” (Shimakawa 2002: 103-104). This approach will be used to examine issues of citizenship, discrimination, gender, and social status in Mannheimer’s playscript, and will be extended to examine ageism. An additional advantage of

this approach is that it aids in answering the question “Where am I?” in the title of this paper. This question does not refer to a physical location, but to a state or condition experienced by a subject in a social situation. The boundaries to the abject in a social context can be difficult to discern because they are comprised of non-objects, and as such are perceived through intuition rather than seen with the naked eye.

4. Method, Scope, and Limitations

The analysis is based on a close reading of selected scenes from Mannheimer’s playscript. The dialog in these scenes will be examined as discourse enunciated by speaking subjects. The term discourse, here, means a conversation or dialog: a perpetual speaking movement underpinning the movement in the negotiation of the identity of speaking subjects. Kristeva’s theories from both linguistics and psychoanalysis will be employed assuming that a dynamic speaking subject is in operation in creating the signifying process that takes place through verbal communication. In line with Shimakawa in *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, however, the entire apparatus of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory will not be applied (Shimakawa 2002: 3). The Kristevan terminology will be limited to the definitions in the theory section and within the framework described by Jenkins and Shimakawa. Of the twenty characters in the play, only Bogdan and Harriet will be analyzed. The nursing home will be assumed to be a microcosm of the dominant culture, exhibiting the values of Swedish cultural hegemony.

5. Theory

The terminology used in analyses based on Kristeva’s theories is often called the “lexicon of abjection”, because the definitions of the terminology may not be the same as definitions found in a common dictionary. For this reason the terminology used in this paper is defined below. For use of this terminology in Swedish, the reader is referred to Karin Widerberg’s article “Abjektion – könets och samhällets drivkraft” in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* (1990, nr.11:4, s.65-74).

5.1. The speaking subject (or speaking being)

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva defines language as a signifying process that “allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic” (Kristeva 2002: 92-93). The signifying process is part of the subject because when the subject expresses him- or herself

verbally, both the semiotic and the symbolic are involved (Kristeva 2002: 93,). Clear examples of the semiotic in the dialog of Mannheimer's playscript are Harriet's unconventional mode of communication and Bogdan's use of an obscene word to describe his job.

5.2. The subject-in-process or the subject-on-trial (*le sujet en procès*)

The speaking subject has a characteristic that makes it unstable, a subject-in-process (McAfee 2004: 38). The subject-in-process can also be called the subject-on-trial, because the original French phrase *en procès* has a double meaning as both "in process and under legal duress" (McAfee 2004: 38). Here, Kristeva offers a model of the self that is not stable or unified, but is constantly a work in process (McAfee 2004: 41). Kristeva's idea of the subject-in-process/on trial implies that the subject and subjectivity are not posited but emerge in a process of signification between the modalities of semiotic and symbolic. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva writes:

[...] the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both (Kristeva 2002: 34, Kristeva's emphasis).

The signifying process is the unstable aspect of the speaking subject, the movement in the revolt against the abject and the fascination with it. In the analysis of the playscript here, the lines of the character in the playscript will be assumed to be an expression of the signifying process of that character in relationship to the lines of the other characters. For instance, the character Harriet employs fantasy, when revolting against the abject, which Kristeva would describe as an illustration of how drive erupts into the symbolic. This imaginary deployment rebuilds and liberates the restrictions that Harriet perceives as repressing her as a speaking subject (Kristeva 2002: 213).

The notion of imaginary deployment is related to mimicry and mimesis which are discussed below.

5.3. The abject and abjection

“One of the most fundamental processes of the subject-in-process is what Kristeva calls abjection, the state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself, and thereby creating borders of a tenuous ‘I’ “ (McAfee 2004: 45). In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva gives examples of the abject in the form of food loathing, such as the repulsive taste and consistency of spoiled milk, or the most extreme abject, the corpse, which she vividly describes as death infecting the body (Kristeva 2002: 230-231). The notion abjection, then, is a process of jettisoning that which is abject (McAfee 2004: 46).

The abject for the immigrant Bogdan in *Sista dansen* is being told by Harriet that he is excluded from the Swedish norm, and the abject for the elegant Harriet is being told that she must conform to nursing home standards in terms of clothing. These examples of the abject make these characters feel that their identity is threatened.

5.4. Revolt as an element of identity

In *Sens et non-sens de la révolte* (1996) (*The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*) Kristeva asserts plasticity in her notion of revolt and defines it as constituted of two meanings. The first meaning of the word suggests movement and the second suggests time and space (Kristeva 2002: 413). Linguistically this movement occurs when semiotic drives disrupt the symbolic. In terms of time and space, revolt indicates the end or the beginning of something. For instance, the character Bogdan walks out on his coworkers during a busy time of day, which is an example of marking the end of a condition that he cannot endorse, while this condition simultaneously takes place in a physical space. Kristeva’s plastic notion of revolt plays a role in meaning making in that an individual’s endeavor to negotiate an identity that he or she is satisfied with, entails the subject breaking out of an interpersonal or intersocial experience that he or she cannot endorse (Kristeva 2002: 27).

5.5. The Other and the other

There are two perspectives of Kristeva’s notion of “other” that invoke an ambiguity of identity: the Other and the other within, and the Other and the other in society. Tracing back to Freud and the theory of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) the Other within, in upper case, denotes the alter ego, and marks the border to that which is loathed by a subject and the subject’s notion of their

own identity (Kristeva 2002, 237). The other, in lower case, is that which is recognizable within, and with which the speaking subject can identify.

The Other in society represents that which is strange or uncanny about a member of society, for example an immigrant who speaks the language with an accent or with incorrect grammar and syntax. This is a person with whom another member of a society may feel no affiliation, and may perceive as a threat to that society's identity and order. The other, in contrast, is a person whom a member of a society recognizes and feels affiliated with.

5.6. A unifying strategy

5.6.1. Abjection unified with feminist theory

While Ruth Y. Jenkins's method of literary analysis is straightforward, Karen Shimakawa's method is complex, weaving together many theoreticians. In *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, Shimakawa adopts a strategy that unifies Kristeva's apparatus of abjection with the theoreticians Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray. She uses Kristeva's notion of abjection as both a state of being, i.e. a state of being that is loathsome, and a process through which the assessment is made, in her endeavor to facilitate social criticism in performance studies (Shimakawa 2002: 3). For example, Shimakawa extends Judith Butler's application of abjection in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) to examine how white, heterosexual males come to play a central role in social discourse, while others in relation to them are disenfranchised, i.e. are not considered as subjects in the cultural hegemony and must find a way to circumscribe the domain that excludes them (Shimakawa 2002: 4). The aspect of this approach that interests Shimakawa is Butler's assumption of links between psychic, social, visual/perspective, and bodily experiences of identity (Ibid). Shimakawa does not adopt the entire corpus of psychoanalysis and filters Kristeva's apparatus through Butler's notion of the performance of psychic, social, and bodily experiences of identity to expand a method originally for examining sexism in society to include racism.

5.7. Mimesis and mimicry

5.7.1. Grosz and mimesis

In her method Shimakawa also includes mimesis as defined by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) for the purpose of exploring social criticism in the performance context:

Mimesis is particularly significant in outlining the ways in which the relations between an organism and its environment are blurred and confused - the way in which its environment is not distinct from the organism but is an active internal component of its “identity” (Grosz 1994: 46).

The above definition would most commonly be applied to a creature that can change colors to match its surroundings, like a chameleon. The appeal of mimesis for Shimakawa, however, is in how mediation between self and other, inside and outside, sameness and difference, relates to the performance of Asian American characters on stage. This notion of physical mimesis is extended to linguistic mimicry below as part of Shimakawa’s unifying strategy.

5.7.2. Irigaray and mimicry

In *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (1977) (*This Sex Which Is Not One*), Luce Irigaray proposes a conception of mimicry as a feminist strategy to “convert a form of subordination into an affirmation” (Irigaray 1985: 76). This can be explained as the disenfranchised members of a society seeking a way to circumscribe the domain that excludes them by mimicking its power. Whereas the original intention was to deconstruct misogyny, Shimakawa extends it in an endeavor to examine racism (Shimakawa 2002: 103).

5.7.3. Butler and mimicry

Shimakawa also turns to Judith Butler’s interpretation of Irigaray’s notion of mimicry in Butler’s textbook *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) as a model for emancipation and empowerment. In Butler’s interpretation, it is possible for the disenfranchised subject to coopt the power of the law by citing it and producing it differently (Judith Butler 1993: 15). Shimakawa unifies Butler’s notion of mimicry with Kristeva’s notions of abjection and the abject to devise a model for responding to disenfranchisement. Accepting that disenfranchisement is produced by a repressive force, it is possible to displace, or disrupt, this force through mimicry. This action also assumes that the disenfranchised subject deliberately assumes the role of the abject (cf Jenkins who sees potential for emancipation by acknowledging

the socially abject). Mimicry is also a way for a disenfranchised subject to become visible. The notion of mimicry, articulated linguistically, will be essential in analyzing the character Harriet in Mannheimer's playscript.

6. Analysis of Harriet and Bogdan

The analysis is based on a playscript, and therefore it is natural to follow the narrative arc in examining the two characters Harriet and Bogdan, rather than allowing the chronological order of numbered scenes to govern the structure of the analysis. The analysis may appear to hop from one scene to the other, but this is only superficial. Scene numbers are provided along with an explanation of which aspects of the analysis link the scenes.

Harriet has climbed her way up the social ladder through marriage. She married the first time for love, gave birth to a son, Johan, was subsequently abandoned by his father, and suffered financially as a single mother. After that she married twice for money, which was a period of life when she acquired jewelry and elegant clothing, and became acquainted with the luxuries and comforts of life that money can buy. The jewelry and elegant garments, including a pair of gold stiletto heels, are meaningful to Harriet. The staff in the nursing home try to convince her to wear the jogging pants and slippers supplied by the home, but Harriet protests, even though her heels cause her ankles and legs to swell, and her elegant garments are impractical in the setting of the home.

Harriet also describes her only child, Johan, as a busy and successful husband and father who lives on the Mediterranean coast with his wife Marie-Louise and their children. Harriet describes him as constantly on the go, traveling to all corners of the globe on business. In reality, however, he occupies a loathsome zone for a middle-aged, white male in terms of Swedish cultural hegemony, i.e. he is unemployed, unmarried, without children and an alcoholic.

The playscript does not reveal anything about Bogdan's country of origin or background. We know that he is an immigrant through Harriet's comments to him in Scene 10, through his response to her comments and through his reference to Swedish males as "svennesvenskar". The name "Bogdan" has Slavic origins, not Swedish, and the actor Tito Pencheff, who played the role of Bogdan at the Gothenburg City Theatre in 2010, has physical attributes that commonly signify "immigrant" on the Swedish stage.

6.1. Harriet indicates uninhabitable zones

Act 1 Scene 6 takes place in the day room. Olle is sitting in his wheelchair, Axel is in an armchair, Ulla is in the sofa writing, Majken is watching TV, and Hilding is pacing back and forth. They are discussing aging. Harriet enters and sits in the sofa beside Ulla and puts on a pair of stiletto heels, swings her foot coquettishly and Axel whistles appreciatively.

Ulla: Ursäkta mig men vad ska det där föreställa?

Harriet: Förlåt?

Ulla: Jag bara undrar om det där är lämplig klädsel för en åttioåring.

Harriet: Jag har inga åldersfördomar.

Å Axel, jag horde nog vad du sade. Att det är bra här.

Jag tycker det är underbart. Det är som att bo på hotel. Roomservice dygnet runt...ja, nästan...all mat serverad vid bordet...ingen städning...inga bekymmer. Till och med en barpianist”toodeloo”. Jag har just ringt till min son i Hongkong och berättat och han var så glad för min skull.

Hilding: Hongkong. Det blev dyrt.

Harriet: Min son betalar.

Nej, det enda som drar ner det här stället det är väl i så fall några av de andra gästerna.

Allting ska ju vara så jämställt och nivellerat nu för tiden.

Och så är det dåligt att här inte finns en pool.

Men igår fick jag pedikyr. Kom upp en liten människa på rummet. Det är ju rena lyxen.

Olle: Men allt extra kostar pengar. Det är bara blöjorna som är gratis.

Harriet: Det där behöver vi väl inte tala om!

Nej service har alltid kostat. Men min son betalar.

Är det några roliga döda idag?

English translation

Ulla: Excuse me but what's this?

Harriet: Sorry?

Ulla: I just wonder if that's suitable attire for an eighty-year-old.

Harriet: I don't have any age hangups.

Oh, Axel, I heard what you were saying. That it's good here.

I think it's wonderful. It's like staying at a hotel. Room service 24 hours a day...almost...all meals served at the table...no cleaning...no worries. Even a bar pianist "toodeloo". I just talked to my son in Hong Kong and told him. He's so happy for my sake.

Hilding: Hong Kong. That was expensive.

Harriet: My son pays for it.

The only negative thing about this place is some of the other guests.

Everything is supposed to be so equalized and standardized these days.

I think it's a shame there isn't a pool.

But yesterday I had a pedicure. A little person came up to my room.

It's sheer luxury.

Olle: But all the extras cost money. Only the diapers are free.

Harriet: We don't need to talk about that!

Service has always had a price. But my son pays.

Any fun dearly departed today?

Harriet mentions her son for the first time in Scene 3 when imagining death at home alone. In Scene 6 at the second mention of her son, Harriet establishes a pattern of mentioning her son in reaction to a state that the reader and audience will come to understand that she finds loathsome. Visually and verbally she constitutes multiple borders to the abject in the scene above. One vital border for her is aging, which entails a future she equates with loss of social status and with imminent death. She also articulates a fluidity of identity when she says that she does not have age hangups, marking that she acknowledges the frontier to the past, or her youth, and acknowledges that she currently inhabits what, borrowing from Butler, Shimakawa denotes an uninhabitable zone (Shimakawa 2002: 103).

In Scene 6 Harriet says: "Det där behöver vi väl inte tala om!" (We don't need to talk about that!) when Olle mentions diapers. And Harriet says: "Usch, prata inte om den!" (Ugh,

don't talk about that!) later in the scene when Ulla mentions the future. The future, for elderly persons, is on the border to the extreme abject, i.e. the corpse, and diapers are necessary as the human body stops functioning correctly with age. These are two forms of the abject that impel Harriet to linguistically indicate that she is in an uninhabitable zone on the personal level.

At the same time Harriet establishes a border to the abject on the social level by implying that she is familiar with service and luxuries. She upholds this social boundary through her description of a pedicure therapist whom Harriet ascribes the qualities of being of small stature and without gender, i.e. a child. Experience tells the reader and the theater audience that a child would not have administered this therapy in a Swedish nursing home, but that Harriet is articulating that the therapist occupies a zone that is loathsome to her, i.e. low social status.

This method of debasing a person as non-adult and thereby relegating them to a zone that cannot be endorsed for adults by the dominant culture is also expressed by Majken in Scene 17 when she refers to Bogdan. In this scene breakfast has been delayed because Axel had an accident during the night and Bogdan has escorted him to the doctor. When Elsie serves breakfast alone, Majken asks: "Var är pojken?" (Where's the boy?), thereby verbalizing the attitude of the dominant culture towards a non-native, adult male. The designation of Bogdan as a child, a boy, signifies that in Majken's opinion, he is disenfranchised from the dominant culture, and as a non-normative member of society is denied access to its privileges. One such privilege is that of the male gender in the play and in Swedish culture. This exclusion from the dominant culture that is foisted on Bogdan, will later in the play be part of the repressive force that triggers the revolt that is part of his negotiation of an identity he can endorse.

Harriet states in Scene 6 that she does not have any age hangups, but by wearing stiletto heels she performs a revolt against the expectations the dominant culture has on an elderly woman. In this manner she endeavors to constitute a border to physical strength and youthfulness, and a time period during which she enjoyed economic security and high social status. This process of constitution, however, is not complete, because Harriet, as a speaking subject, is not cut off from what threatens her identity, on the contrary, by insisting on wearing stiletto heels in the nursing home she acknowledges that she feels in danger of losing her identity (Shimakawa 2002: 9-10). In other words, she acknowledges that she currently exists in a loathsome state of being, or abjection. Harriet's acknowledgment of abjection at the border to old age and to low social status is also repeatedly signified in the dialog with the other characters.

Each mention of her son in a fictive setting is an expression of her drive to start afresh from a space that she cannot endorse in her negotiation of identity (Shimakawa 2002: 10).

Harriet mentions her son for the first time in Scene 3 and throughout the play articulates that he fluctuates between geographical locations that have high status in Swedish cultural hegemony: New York in Scene 3, Hong Kong in Scene 6, the Mediterranean in Scene 11, Singapore in Scene 21, London and Singapore in Scene 22, Tokyo in Scene 24 and New York again in Scene 29. Harriet's untruthful representation of her son's life can be interpreted as a metaphor for her own oscillating search for an identity she can endorse. By articulating a globe-trotting, financially secure son, Harriet denies the abject of a son who is a failure in terms of Swedish cultural hegemony, and instead, through an imaginative mimicry of the dominant culture, she deauthorizes the culture's power by creating a charade of success (Shimakawa 2002: 102-103). This is an example of the rebelliousness that informs her signifying process.

Another perspective from which to view Harriet's stories about her son is that she does not deny the abject of her son's social position, which reflects her social origins, but finds imaginative potential in the low social status of a single mother with a son who is a "loser". In other words, Harriet recognizes rejection by the dominant culture and seizes this opportunity to recreate an identity (Jenkins 2011: 431). Viewed from this perspective, it is imaginative potential that impels Harriet to articulate a son with a fictive background, thus creating an alternative identity for herself in revolt against the repressive force of the society around her. Harriet also uses an unconventional mode of communicating about her son, one which has comic effect in the script. Her mode of communication, in sharp contrast to the conventional conversation of the other characters in the symbolic of the nursing home, marks her state of Otherness. This particular mode of communication is a linguistic expression of semiotic energy, i.e. Harriet indicates a revolt although she does not speak in rhyme or verse. By disturbing the conventional conversation of the other characters, Harriet causes a disruption, thus making herself visible with an identity that she can endorse.

It can be assumed that Harriet finds a sense of emancipation through this signifying gesture. For instance in Scene 11 when Olle is planning his funeral service and expressing regret for all he has missed in life, Harriet disrupts the conversation:

Olle: Jag förstår inte vart tiden tagit vägen...hur kunde jag slarva så?

Axel: Vad säger du, Olle?

Har du slösat bort ditt liv?

Olle: Just nu känns det som om jag inte har hunnit med nånting.

Harriet: Vilket underbart väder. De sitter nog ute och äter en sån här underbar dag. Min son och hans familj. På sin terrass. Med utsikt mot Medelhavet.

English translation

Olle: I don't know where the time has gone...how could I have been so careless?

Axel: What're you saying?

Have you wasted your life?

Olle: Right now it feels like I haven't had time for anything.

Harriet: What lovely weather. They're probably sitting outside and eating on such a gorgeous day. My son and his family I mean. On their terrace. Overlooking the Mediterranean.

Harriet repeats her charade of a successful son when confronted with what she assesses as the loathsome, uninhabitable zone of old age again in Scenes 6 and 11, and on her birthday in Scene 21. She also repeats this story in Scene 29 when confronted with Olle's discussion of his obituary, and the illness and helplessness of Ingrid.

Scene 24, however, has an extra twist. Harriet says farewell to her son in front of the other characters. In her farewell, Harriet links her son to a geographic location that has value in the dominant culture through association with an international business center, namely Tokyo. In doing this, she acknowledges the repressive force that threatens her identity and seizes the emancipatory potential of mimicking the values of the dominant culture, although not alone:

Harriet: Tack själv min älskling. Och hälsa Marie-Louise och barnen.

Johan: Marie-Louise och barnen. Ja.

Harriet: Och ta det försiktigt i Tokyo.

Johan: Ja, ja, Tokyo.

English translation

Harriet: Thank you my darling. And give my regards to Marie-Louise and the children.

Johan: Marie-Louise and the children. Right.

Harriet: And be careful in Tokyo.

Johan: Yes, yes, Tokyo.

In this scene Johan is complicit in Harriet's charade and reveals something of her personality. Not only does he play along with her charade, but he articulates that this method is one that Harriet has employed in the past when he says "Mamma, vet du en sak? Dina sagor var alltid bäst" (Mom, do you know what? Your stories were always the best). In other words, this method of imaginary deployment has been an element of Harriet's signifying process even in the past. Perhaps it is her survival tactic.

Harriet is a good visual illustration of the dynamic and simultaneous relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic with her unconventional attire. Stiletto heels on the feet of an elderly woman are not attire culturally endorsed in the symbolic pretense of order of the nursing home, but by wearing the heels Harriet adopts an alternative identity. She adopts this identity in two steps, first by recognizing the rejection she experiences in the setting of the home, and then by disrupting the home's pretense of order by insisting on wearing the shoes.

According to Kristeva, signs arise from the mental place where revolt occurs (Kristeva 2002: 237). Viewed from this perspective, Harriet, in revolt against the values of the nursing home, creates signs that she is not satisfied with her current condition. Besides articulating protest against diapers and the future, and insisting on wearing stiletto heels, she also creates signs in her implementation of mimesis.

6.2. Bogdan as the Other

Scene 7 is a key scene for analyzing Bogdan and Harriet later in Scene 10. In Scene 7 the characters are sitting around the dining table. Elsie, a middle-aged, female caregiver, enters with her arms full of clean sheets, while Bogdan, a male immigrant, and Izmir, a female immigrant, enter from the other side of the stage. Elsie gives them instructions. (Stage directions from the script are indicated in italics.)

Elsie: Jaja. Det är bara att byta lakan och sätta på torra blöjor.

Tittar på klockan, ger Bogdan matlistan.

Nu får ni ta upp matbeställningar till nästa vecka. Och torka gärna upp under bordet efter dem.

Elsie skyndar ut. Bogdan och Izmir går mot bordet.

Bogdan: Vänder sig till Izmir.

Det kan du göra. Hur länge tanker du stanna då?

Izmir: Länge hoppas jag.

Bogdan: Oj då!

English translation

Elsie: Well well. Just change the sheets and put on dry diapers.

Looks at the clock, gives Bogdan the food order list.

You two can take the meal orders for next week. And mop the floor under the table when they're done.

Elsie hurries out. Bogdan and Izmir walk towards the table.

Bogdan: Turns to face Izmir. You can do that. How long are you going to stay here?

Izmir: A long time I hope.

Bogdan: Really!

Izmir has a minor role in the play and is not analyzed here, however, Bogdan's lines can be analyzed in light of her comment. Bogdan articulates that he does not endorse the position he is forced to perform by the dominant culture, unqualified labor commonly delegated to female workers, as additionally expressed in Scene 10 below. The exchange between these two characters, both non-natives, but of different genders, leads the reader or the audience to intuit that Bogdan acknowledges what he has been denied as an occupier of the abject position as the social Other. While Izmir denies abjection, Bogdan, in repulsing the loathsomeness of his job, which he will articulate in Scene 10, and in repulsing what he experiences as a violation of his gender, is impelled, through revolt, to seize the potential of gender privilege offered by Swedish culture, and expressed in Scene 21. In terms of the narrative arc Scene 7 foreshadows Scene 21

in which he leaves Elsie and Sussie shorthanded, and Scene 23 in which he tells Elsie that he wants to become a doctor.⁵

Scene 10 provides rich grounds for analyzing the interaction between Bogdan and Harriet, in which Mannheimer captures a multitude of social issues including aging, gender, native versus non-native status, and social status. First, Bogdan's identity is challenged in the dialog with Harriet. This scene takes place in Harriet's room. It is early morning, she is sitting on her bed and Bogdan enters her room to help her dress. He presents a pair of jogging pants for her to wear instead of her elegant garments.

Bogdan: Hej Harriet. Har det hänt nåt?

Harriet: Finns det ingen flicka idag?

Bogdan: Nej, det är bara jag på morgonpasset. Och så Sasha men han ska städa.

Harriet: Inga svenskar heller tydligen.

Bogdan: Harriet...nu gör du mig lessen.

Harriet: Ja, ja jag får väl vänja mig.

Bogdan: Det finns inga vanliga svennesvenskar som vill jobba här.

Harriet: Varför det?

Bogdan: Därför att det är ett skittjobb.

Harriet: Elsie vill ju.

Bogdan: Elsie är tjej.

Harriet: Jag begriper ingenting.

Vad är det där

Bogdan håller upp ett par stora joggingbyxor.

Bogdan: Ett par sköna byxor.

English translation

Bogdan: Hi Harriet. Is something wrong?

Harriet: Isn't there any girl today?

Bogdan: No, just me on the morning shift. And Sasha but he has to clean.

Harriet: No Swedes either, I gather.

Bogdan: Harriet...now you've hurt my feelings.

Harriet: Oh well, guess I'll have to get used to it.

Bogdan: Ordinary Swedish guys don't want to work here.

Harriet: Why not?

Bogdan: Because it's a shitty job.

Harriet: Elsie wants to.

Bogdan: Elsie's a girl.

Harriet: I don't understand anything.

What's that?

Bogdan holds up a large pair of jogging pants.

Bogdan: A comfortable pair of pants.

Assuming that Harriet is a representative of the dominant Swedish culture and protests that an immigrant male dresses her, this scene can be interpreted as a revolt against the abject social Other who, as a member of the dominant culture, Harriet must expel or repress to maintain her power status. Harriet insults Bogdan's non-native citizenship by indicating that if a male is going to help her dress, then she would prefer a Swedish male. In the event that Harriet's goal is to maintain her position of power, then insulting Bogdan is a gesture of revolt against the pretense of order in the nursing home, which violates her fundamental values. These values are aptly described by Kiernander as "deprivation of modesty, dignity and decency" (Kiernander 2010: 112). The reader and the audience realize that Bogdan understands that his job is not gender appropriate in Swedish culture when he uses the slang expression "svennesvenskar" to denote Swedish men.

Harriet protests the request to abandon her elegant garments because her clothing and jewels are objects that are intertwined with her identity on two levels, as acculturation of social status and as visual signs of youth that are important to her psychologically. Being denied her own clothing by an external power, Harriet experiences a disruption of order, system and sense of identity as described by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, and this disruption of Harriet's private sense of order and identity puts her in a zone of abjection (Kristeva 2002: 232). Harriet's request for her personal garments indicates that she feels abjection at the border to the ageism of the nursing home. The home's ageism literally threatens to strip Harriet of her identity. She resists the coerced assimilation to old age, or rather the assumption of normative old age at the nursing

home, similar to Shimakawa's notion of coerced assimilation in terms of race (Shimakawa 2002: 15). The social status that has formed the fabric of Harriet's identity, which was tenuous from the beginning, is jettisoned in this scene and Harriet is foisted, by revolt at the border to the abject, into the negotiation of a new identity. It can be speculated that such an experience, for an elderly, frail person, would result in a state of confusion. In the event that this character is suffering from dementia, such treatment could possibly worsen her condition.

In the same scene, the role of the social Other is imposed on Bogdan by Harriet, who views him as an undesired male in a female job category. She insults his gender and his citizenship status, as well. Bogdan retaliates by articulating for Harriet that caring for the elderly at the nursing home "är ett skittjobb" (is a shitty job). Through his selection of adjectives to describe his job, Bogdan linguistically indicates a movement of rejection, which he experiences psychologically, and which is a demonstration of how semiotic drives attain linguistic signification. In *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969) *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Kristeva writes that obscene words have a desemanticization function that is akin to the effect achieved in language when syntax is fragmented by rhythm, such as in poetry (Kristeva 2002: 110). She explains that the subject uses the obscene word to mobilize their signifying resources, and that the obscene word is commonly used to denote an object. In this scene Bogdan, by expressing his identity through the use of this obscene word, indicates both rejection and appropriation of the job of elder care. By calling his job "shitty", Bogdan appropriates the role of the social Other with the purpose of challenging the values of the dominant culture: The subtext of what he is saying is that he knows there are better jobs on the labor market. In terms of revolt, Bogdan's word choice marks that he rejects the role imposed on him by the dominant culture, and that he is not going to resign himself to exclusion from the privileges of Swedish cultural hegemony, which is what will happen if he remains on this job. Instead, he appears to understand the mechanisms of Swedish society, and identifies potential for emancipation as a person of the male gender. This is expressed when he tells Harriet that ordinary Swedish guys do not want to work as caregivers at the nursing home. Bogdan's comments to Harriet, including the word "shitty", are additional signifiers to the reader and the audience that he does not intend to remain in this job category. In terms of narrative arc the dialog in this scene foreshadows Scenes 21 and 23, in which Bogdan voices an alternative

identity while circumscribing Swedish social norms and violating his female coworkers, when he asserts both the privilege of gender and the privilege of young age.

In the same scenes, however, viewed from perspective of the Kristevan immigrant, Bogdan can be described as expressing this revolt, driven by the extreme individualism required for the immigrant, in order to survive in a new culture, as described by Kristeva in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1989) *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva 2002: 294). It can be speculated that this Kristevan extreme individualism helps Bogdan to help himself when he finds himself in a state of weakness, or subordination, that he cannot endorse (see Note 1.).

6.3. Harriet and psychic bonding

Scene 11 takes place in the day room after breakfast. Izmir is mopping the floor, Ulla is sitting in the sofa, Majken enters, Ingrid is still seated at the dining table and Axel sits down next to her. Hilding is walking around restlessly and Olle is writing and thinking. Harriet is attired in her elegant garments and is wearing her high heels, although she has slippers with her. She protests the talk among the characters who are mocking Hilding's demented obsession with botany:

Hilding: Blåklocka.

Majken: Hönsfjärt.

Hilding: Vad?

Majken: Hönsfjärt.

Harriet: Jag tror jag går in till mig. Här var det inte trevligt längre.

Harriet tar av sig sina högklackade skor och sätter fötterna i stora laddor.

Axel reser sig och bjuder henne armen.

Axel: Får jag lov att eskortera er min sköna?

Harriet tvekar men tar honom sen under armen.

Harriet: Är det tillåtet?

Axel: Vilket?

Harriet: Att vi går arm i arm?

Axel: Det tror jag. Men knulla är väl inte att tänka på?

Harriet: Förlåt, vad sade du?

Axel: Nej det var inget. Jag tänkte lite högt.

Harriet: Ja, man gör ju det ibland. I vår alder.

English translation

Hilding: Bluebell.

Majken: Chicken fart.

Hilding: What?

Majken: Chicken fart.

Harriet: I'm going to go to my room. It's not pleasant here anymore.

Harriet removes her high heels and puts her feet in a pair of large slippers supplied by the nursing home. Axel rises and offers her his arm.

Axel: May I escort you my beauty?

Harriet hesitates first then accepts his arm.

Harriet: Is this allowed?

Axel: What?

Harriet: That we walk arm in arm.

Axel: I believe so. But fucking's out of the question.

Harriet: Sorry, what did you say?

Axel: Nothing. I was thinking out loud.

Harriet: Yes, we do that at times. At our age.

In this scene Harriet appears to reconcile her identity with the condition of old age, signified here both visibly and linguistically, a notion that she previously revolted against as loathsome. The position of the age stereotype that she now occupies can be described as a psychic bond between her speaking subject and the other within (Kristeva 2002: 204). Harriet revisits such intervals of psychic bonding, e.g. in Scene 19:

Harriet: Jag är lite förtjust i plataner.

Och så palmerna förstås...det milda rasslandet i palmbladen utanför fönstret...där låg vi i varandras armar och så skulle vi ligga till tidens ände...det var i Nice...eller var det Saint Tropez...

Ulla: Vad pratar du om, Harriet? Mår du bra?

Harriet: Nej.

Det var längesen jag mådde bra.

Vad är det med det nu plötsligt?

Vi är väl här för att vi inte mår så bra. Är vi inte?

English translation

Harriet: I rather like plantains.

And palms too...the gentle rustle in the palm fronds outside our window...as we laid there wrapped in each other's arms until the end of time...it was in Nice...or perhaps it was Saint Tropez...

Ulla: What are you talking about Harriet. Are you okay?

Harriet: No.

I haven't been okay for a long time.

Why does it suddenly matter?

We're not here because we're okay. Are we?

Another interval of psychic bonding between speaking subject and the Other within occurs again in Scene 27 when Harriet is alone with Ulla. In the dialog with Ulla, Harriet reveals the truth about her son, who she admits, is not financially successful, is not married with children and was not sober when he visited. Harriet also confides in Ulla about her background as a chorus girl without economic security, who has married her way up the social ladder. In this scene Harriet is also able to comfort Ulla when she confides in Harriet about her daughter who committed suicide, and Harriet is able to converse lucidly with Ulla about death and notions of the afterlife.

In these three scenes (11, 19 and 27) Harriet, driven by a desire for meaning, has appropriated the abject of old age, which she equates with death, and has incorporated it into her fragile identity. By appropriating rather than denying old age she appears to have found an answer to "Where am I?". When Harriet recognizes the abjection of her current state she taps into its generative qualities, and, consequently, finds emancipation in a new identity (Jenkins 2011: 438). Harriet's identity, however, is fragile and this new sense of significance does not last. In Scene 29, when Ingrid has been taken away for medical attention and Majken complains about being poisoned, Harriet, revolting at the border to death, repeats the charade of a

successful son, although this time with a complicit Ulla. The dialog between Harriet and Ulla in this scene is significant in that Ulla, earlier aligned with the culturally endorsed values of the dominant symbolic nursing home (Scene 6), joins Harriet in acknowledging the repressive force that threatens their identities. Together Harriet and Ulla seize the emancipatory potential of mimicking the values of that culture in an attempt to disrupt the symbolic pretense of order and system of the nursing home.

6.4. Bogdan asserts privilege of gender and age

Scene 21 takes place during mealtime in the day room. Elsie is sitting alone with the patients at the dining table. With one hand she is feeding Annmari and with the other she is helping Axel get meat on his fork. Sussie, another female caregiver, rolls Olle to the table in his wheelchair. Everyone else is seated at their places. Bogdan enters at this busy time of day and announces that he is leaving for the day; as of now he only works part time.

While Bogdan is a social Other in Sweden, being male offers him access to the male gender privilege of Swedish culture. He revolts against the identity of the social Other, and asserts the privilege of gender available to him in Swedish culture. In this sense, his action can be seen as the performance of the "stray" immigrant, discussed below. Although he may be an immigrant straying in Swedish culture, he has acculturated gender expectations. Being both an immigrant and male, however, means that inclusion into the dominant culture is ambivalent, i.e. it is the inclusion of a non-normative subject into that culture. This may explain his aberrant behavior towards Elsie and Sussie in which he circumscribes Swedish norms, and is rude and inconsiderate by not informing them that he has cut back to a part time schedule. Kristeva's metaphor of the "stray" can be used to explain Bogdan's inconsiderate behavior in this scene. Imagine Bogdan, the immigrant, wandering on a journey during a pitch-black night that stretches on without end (Kristeva 2002: 235). Such imagery suggests the feelings of fear, insecurity, and doubt with which an immigrant lives. As a non-normative subject, Bogdan has a sense of the danger of being neither the subject nor the object of Swedish culture, and thus, is surrounded by abjection. Kristeva describes this form of abjection as ambiguous because it lacks stationary borders (Ibid).

In Scene 23 Bogdan and Elsie are sitting in a corner. While Bogdan is eating a piece of Harriet's birthday cake he tells Elsie that he plans to study medicine. Bogdan's intention to study

medicine as an immigrant student is not only an example of his endeavor to be included in the dominant culture, but is also an illustration of how he, the immigrant, disrupts the symbolic hegemony in a search for identity in that, as the abject or culturally rejected, he nevertheless seeks to be included in the dominant symbolic (Jenkins 2011: 434).

Viewed from the perspective offered by the metaphor of the stray, the scenes in which Bogdan uses an obscene word to denote his current job, behaves inconsiderately towards his female coworkers thus circumscribing the Swedish norm, and then informs Elsie that he intends to study medicine illustrate Bogdan's search for significance in Swedish culture: the "Where am I?" element of negotiating identity. He indicates that he chooses to leave and through this action signifies his opinion of the job of elder care, and thus, establishes a border to his identity, which is a rejection of the identity as an unqualified, low-paid caregiver at a nursing home. That job category defines him in terms of lack of social status as an immigrant, and one way he can assert the privilege of gender on such a low-level job is by leaving it. As the social Other, Bogdan is unable to identify with his surroundings, as insinuated in the dialog with Izmir (Scene 11). His recognition of the identity imposed on him by the dominant culture, i.e. as the socially abject, empowers him to recognize what he wants instead (Kristeva 2002: 232). Bogdan incorporates this want into his identity as a challenge to be met. Nothing is going to keep him on this job: his identity is signified in his revolt against the abasement he experiences in his employment.

However, Bogdan's actions can be understood in light of the fluidity of his ambiguous condition. Adopting Shimakawa's approach, Bogdan can be seen as the embodiment of, or performing, the social Other in Sweden. The universe of the social Other lacks stationary borders and is ambiguous, for instance, while jogging pants and slippers, objects, are abject for Harriet, Bogdan faces a plethora of abject non-objects, i.e. citizenship, discrimination and exclusion. Viewed from this perspective, Bogdan is driven by the ambiguity of non-stationary borders to continuously endeavor to test and establish boundaries in his search for solid ground from which he can start afresh in negotiating an identity he can endorse (Shimakawa 2002: 10).

7. Summary

Karen Shimakawa and Ruth Y. Jenkins provide perspectives from which to identify a multitude of abject conditions and repressive forces that impel a revolt in a speaking subject against conditions that he or she finds loathsome. Jenkins's perspective has allowed for an analysis of

Harriet as both a representative of the dominant culture, in her insult to Bogdan's citizenship, and as non-normative or a rebel in her revolt against the dominant culture's ageism, as demonstrated by the nursing home's disapproval of her attire. This approach additionally paves the way for two perspectives on Harriet's unconventional mode of communication. From one perspective, Harriet's communication in certain scenes is an example of how semiotic energy can have a disrupting function on the symbolic, thus marking Harriet as a depository of difference. From the other perspective, Harriet has recognized rejection by the dominant culture (as a poor single mother with a loser son), and seizes the opportunity to deploy mimicry, thus creating the charade of a successful son, and thereby an alternative identity for herself.

Seen from the perspectives above, Harriet can be understood as a subject who is impelled to start afresh in negotiating her identity when confronted with old age and imminent death, and with low social status. The metaphor of the stray, used to describe Bogdan as an immigrant earlier in the paper, can also be extended to Harriet, but in relation to time: as an elderly woman who does not endorse old age, Harriet becomes a stray in time. She indicates abjection at the border to the past on the social level, where in the distant past she was a poor single mother who has accrued social status through marriage, and she articulates rebellion at the mention of illness, frailty or death, which are an inevitable part of her near future. Harriet oscillates constantly between these boundaries but experiences intervals of a psychic bond between her speaking subject and that which she cannot endorse. There is one scene in which she asserts her position of power in Swedish cultural hegemony, and that is in revolt against the violation of her sense of modesty, dignity and decency when Bogdan enters her room in the morning to dress her.

Bogdan can be said to be impelled by revolt against the abject as well as asserting the privileges of gender and young age, driven by the extreme individualism required for him to save himself, as described by Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva 2002: 294). Similar to Harriet, this makes him also a depository of difference, i.e. non-normative, and the reader and the audience are left to wonder if Bogdan will succeed in offering a revision of the dominant culture's expectation on the immigrant by redefining himself as a medical doctor, and thereby assimilating with the dominant culture through the privileges of gender and age that it offers.

A key element of the identities examined in this paper is ambiguity. Ambiguity can be exemplified in the human being's fear of death which is overcome by imagining life after death, or the religious promise of immortality, all the while the human subject knows that death is

inevitable (Kristeva 2002: 284). Another perspective on ambiguity is imagining the border to the abject as a non-object, as a perceived notion or gut-level feeling on the part of the subject. This perspective aids in exposing abjection that may arise in social situations. This definition of ambiguity is clearly illustrated in Scene 10 when Bogdan denotes his job as "shitty" demonstrating three things, namely that he has appropriated the abject, has passed judgment on it, and revolts against it. The ambiguity here is that Bogdan is not revolting against a physical employment contract that states that he has been given this job because he is an immigrant man, instead he intuits discrimination and exclusion from the privilege of male gender in Swedish society.

8. Conclusion

Kristeva's lexicon of abjection was explored for generative potential in analyzing two characters in the playscript of Carin Mannheimer's *Sista dansen*. Feminist scholars have maintained that Kristeva's theories are locked in a male/female polarity, and consequently, are limited for literary analysis. However, the perspective suggested by Ruth Y. Jenkins identifies how a repressed character can create an alternative identity in revolt against a dominant culture, and was employed in this paper, along with the strategy offered by Karen Shimakawa. This strategy unifies feminist theories with Kristeva's theories, and enabled the exploration of issues of ageism, assimilation, citizenship, discrimination, gender, and social status in this paper.

Viewed from the perspectives described by these two scholars, it was possible to discern the mechanisms driving the analyzed characters in their unceasing search for "Who am I?", an expression for a speaking subject's search for emancipation from a condition that he or she cannot endorse, and for one that gives the subject a sense of happiness. Analysis was enabled when these mechanisms were identified.

The question of "Where am I?" was explored as a state of being, rather than in relation to a physical location. In a state of being, a character is confronted with non-stationary borders to an abject situation that he or she cannot endorse, borders intuited at gut level. For Bogdan this involved his non-native citizenship status, and for Harriet this involved her relationship to time, which by its very nature is non-stationary.

The approaches offered by Shimakawa and Jenkins opened for multiple perspectives from which to examine signifiers articulated linguistically by the characters in the playscript. In

this manner, the theories of Julia Kristeva were found to be efficient tools for uncovering issues of ageism, citizenship, discrimination, gender, and social status, and, consequently, capable of revealing the richness of the social criticism in Mannheim's playscript.

9. Appendix A: Email-intervju med Carin Mannheimer

Mannheimers pjäs *Sista dansen* såg jag på Göteborgs Stadsteatern först under en repetition i 2009 och sedan som föreställningar i januari och februari 2010, i samband med att jag simultantolkade pjäsen till engelska. Följande intervju inleddes efter att jag såg en föreställning av Mannheimers pjäs *I sista minuten* på Göteborgs Stadsteatern 2013. Frågorna uppstod då jag blev nyfiken på skillnader mellan pjäserna. Första delen av intervjun gjordes via email i maj 2013. Därefter tittade jag på teveserierna *Lära för livet* och *Solbacken: Avd.E* som Mannheimer skrev och regisserade, och fick nya frågor. Serierna finns tillgängliga i SVTs *Öppet arkiv*. Följdfrågorna ställdes via email i september 2013.

Fronko: I *Sista dansen* förekommer typiskt svenska fenomen, som maträtter och referenser till svenska tv-program och svensk musik. *I sista minuten* är mindre "svensk" i det avseendet, t ex de äter sushi och Nicoise istället för fläskfilé och kantareller. Hade samhället förändrats mellan pjäserna? Eller tillhör rollfigurerna i pjäserna olika samhällsklasser?

Mannheimer: Karaktärerna i *Sista dansen* var äldre. De är dessutom på ett äldreboende för vård till livets slut och kommer från olika klasser och bakgrunder. En av kvinnorna är professor, en annan har arbetat i bageri, en av männen är gammal lantbrukare, en är regissör, och en är en gammal "charmör". De är sammanförda av vårdbehovet. I *I sista minuten* är de tre kvinnorna nära vänner sedan 30 år minst. En är journalist, en är lärare och en är poet och översättare. De bor i en storstad, de följer med i nutiden och de är några år yngre än nittioåringarna i *Sista dansen*.

Fronko: Replikerna i *I sista minuten* är roliga, publiken skrattar högt och applåderar samtidigt, fast ibland fastnar skrattet i halsen. Händer det att du skriver repliker som du tycker är träffande och roliga men som någon annan säger "Nej Carin, nu går du för långt!?" Stryker du replikerna då?

Mannheimer: Jag bara skriver det som kommer i mitt huvud. Det handlar om att säga det jag vill säga (predika, upplysa om, karakterisera, osv). Jag skriver också i en rytm, ett flöde som vare sig jag vill det eller ej kan leda till en sk "punchline". Jag skulle bara ändra en replik om jag fann den osann, klumpig, illa formulerad, tjatig, onödig. Aldrig annars. Att skratten fastnar i halsen är avsiktlig. Jag är en svart humorist.

Fronko: Jag såg *Sista dansen* 2010. Det finns många rollfigurer i pjäsen, men jag kommer ihåg allihop. Var och en har en tydlig personlighet. Var hittar du dessa personligheter? Finns det en psykolog inom dig?

Mannheimer: Det finns en författare inom mig. Och en iakttagare. Om man är lyhörd, intresserad och tyst så hittar man karaktärer överallt. En del är embryon som man sen fullbordar efter fantasi och behov. Andra kommer klara och färdiga från början. Det handlar om att vara just lyhörd. Och nyfiken på människor. Och sen ha tillräckligt mycket livserfarenhet för att skildra dem, ge dem språk och kropp.

Fronko: Finns det några fördelar med att skriva för scen jämfört med att skriva för teve eller film? Eller tvärtom?

Mannheimer: Att skriva för scen innebär att man kan lämna ett visst mått av realism. På scen kan man stilisera, förhöja språket, ge sig större frihet. Publikerna är beredda att ta till sig det mesta. Tevetittaren vill ha omedelbar begriplighet och logik. Tiden som går behöver inte heller vara logisk i en scenpjäs. Men en av fördelarna med film och teve är ju att man kan ”klippa”, redigera. Samman fördel är att scenpjäsen inte går att klippa i; den spelas live framför våra ögon i salongen.

Fronko: Regisserar du oftast dina egna manus? Hur känns det att lämna ett manus till en annan regissör?

Mannheimer: Jag regisserar oftast uruppförandet av mina pjäser, helt enkelt därför att jag upplever att det är först då som jag ”skrivit färdigt”. Att lämna till en annan regissör känns både spännande, glädjande och nervöst. Jag lägger mig aldrig i någon annans regiarbete och jag avhåller mig från kritik.

Följdfrågor

Fronko: I ett klipp i SVTs *Öppet arkiv* frågar en journalist om du överdrev situationen i skolan i serien *Lära för livet*. Väckte *Lära för livet* samhällsdebatt i Sverige?

Mannheimer: Den väckte en jättedebatt. Som varade i månader. Och i hela Skandinavien eftersom serien gick i alla de nordiska länderna. Jag fick stå till svars och jag fick mottaga hyllningar och samtycke. Det tog tid och kraft. Och så fick jag *Stora journalistpriset* för den. Det finns fortfarande en organisation i Norge som heter “*Lära för livet*”. Den bildades efter serien och har som uppgift att diskutera skolfrågor.

Fronko: Är *Sista dansen* en bearbetning av *Solbacken: Avd. E*? Gerd Hegnell spelar en karaktär som heter Harriet i båda produktionerna. Och vad inspirerade idén om att skriva om åldringsvården?

Mannheimer: Du har alldeles rätt i att *Sista Dansen* är en scenisk utlöpare av *Solbacken*.

Efter *Lära för livet* planerade jag en ny serie med namnet *Lära för döden*. Jag ville undersöka och skildra åldringsvården på samma sätt som jag gjort med skolan, helt enkelt en institution i välfärdssamhället. Fungerade det? Var den bra? Men ingen mer än jag var intresserad. SVT ville inte göra några som helst program där ordet "döden" ingick. Det var alltför deprimerande. Så jag lade ner projektet och skrev nån annan teveserie. Men i början av 2000-talet kom den dåvarande dramachefen i Göteborg och frågade om det inte var dags för *Lära för döden* nu. Och det var det ju. Så jag rekade, läste allt jag kom över, jobbade i vården och skrev och regisserade en teveserie som gick 2003, och som fick heta *Solbacken* för säkerhets skull. Den väckte mycket stor uppståndelse, jag hade en jättepublik.

Men jag började tröttna på TV. Gjorde två pliktskyldiga serier på Viveca Lärns Saltböcker för att hålla instrumentet i gång och komma utomhus i friska luften. Men sen ville jag till teatern! Föreslog en pjäs ungefär som *Solbacken*. Skrev och regisserade det som fick heta *Sista dansen*, likt och olik på samma gång. Det var sanslöst roligt och det blev en sanslös succé. Den gick 150 gånger för fullsatta hus och handlade om ett gäng trötta och sjuka gamlingar på ett äldreboende! Premiär december 2008.

Sen skrev jag *I sista minuten*. Också om ålderdom, svaghet och existentiell oro men som komedi. I *I sista minuten* är de tre kvinnorna nära vänner sedan 30 år minst. En är journalist, en är lärare och en är poet och översättare. De bor i en storstad, de följer med i nutiden och de är några år yngre än nittioåringarna i *Sista dansen*.

Och nu sitter jag med sista delen i denna trilogi om att närma sig det tillstånd där man behöver all hjälp man kan få: kroppslig i form av hemhjälp, gåhjälp, se- och hörhjälp och trygghet och värme och närhet inför det obönhörliga slutet som heter döden. Ett bistånd som det moderna samhället är snålt med att tillhandahålla i sin iver att framhäva styrka och skönhet och snabbhet...

10. Appendix B: Email interview with Carin Mannheimer

I saw Mannheimer's pjäs *Sista dansen* at the Gothenburg City Theatre first during a rehearsal in 2009 and then as performances in January and February, 2010, in connection with simultaneously interpreting the play into English. This interview was initiated after I had seen a performance of Mannheimer's play *I sista minuten* at the Gothenburg City Theatre in 2013. These questions arose from my curiosity about the differences between the plays. The first part of the interview was conducted by email in May, 2013. After that I watched the television series *Lära för livet* and *Solbacken: Avd.E*, which Mannheimer wrote and directed, and new questions arose. These series are available in SVTs *Öppet arkiv* (Open archive). The follow-up questions were sent by email in September, 2013.

Fronko: *Sista dansen* has some typically Swedish phenomena, such as food and references to Swedish television programs and Swedish music. *I sista minuten* is less "Swedish" in that sense, for instance, they eat sushi and Nicoise salad instead of tenderloin and chantarelle mushrooms. Had society changed that much between the plays? Or do the characters in the play belong to different social classes?

Mannheimer: The characters in *Sista dansen* were older. They are also in a nursing home where they are to receive care until the end of their lives, and they come from different classes and backgrounds. One of the women is a professor, another one has worked in a bakery, one of the men is a former farmer, one is a stage director, and one is an old "charmer". Their need for care has brought them together. The three women in *I sista minuten* have been close friends for at least 30 years. One of them is a journalist, one is a teacher, and one is a poet and translator. They live in a big city, they keep pace with the times, and they are a few years younger than the ninety-year-olds in *Sista dansen*.

Fronko: The lines in *I sista dansen* are funny, the audience laughs out loud and applauds at the same time, although simultaneously they realize the seriousness of the subject matter. Do you ever write lines that you think are spot-on and humorous, but then someone else says "No Carin, now you've gone too far!"? Do you delete the lines in that case?

Mannheimer: I just write what comes to mind. It's about saying whatever it is that I want to say (preach, inform about, characterize, and so on). I also write in a rhythm, a flow, that can lead to a "punchline" whether I want it to or not. I would only change a line if I felt that it was untruthful,

awkward, poorly formulated, nagging, unnecessary. Never otherwise. It is my intention to combine humor with serious subject matter. I'm a black humorist.

Fronko: I saw *Sista dansen* in 2010. Despite there being many characters in the play, I can still remember all of them years later. Each of them had a distinct personality. Where do you find these personalities? Is there a psychologist inside you?

Mannheimer: There is an author inside me. And an observer. If you are sensitive, interested and quiet, you can find characters everywhere. Some are embryos that you complete according to your imagination and needs, others come ready and complete from the beginning. It's about being sensitive. And curious about people. And then about having enough life experience to be able to portray them, give them language and body.

Fronko: Are there any advantages to writing for the stage compared to writing for television or film? Or is it the opposite?

Mannheimer: Writing for the stage means that you can relinquish a certain measure of realism. On the stage you can stylize, heighten the language, take greater freedoms. The audience is prepared to accept almost anything. The television viewer wants to have immediate comprehension and logic. Neither does passing time need to be logical in a stage play. But one of the advantages of film and television is that you can "cut," edit. The same advantage is that the stage play cannot be cut; it is played live in front of our eyes in the theater.

Fronko: Do you direct your own scripts most often? What is it like to hand a script over to another director?

Mannheimer: I most often direct the first performance of my plays, simply because that is when I feel that I am 'done writing' the play. Turning a script over to another director is both exciting, gratifying and nerve racking. I never interfere with another director's work, and I refrain from criticism.

Follow-up questions

Fronko: In a clip in Swedish television's *Öppet arkiv*, a journalist asks you if you had exaggerated the school situation in *Lära för livet*. Did the series arouse controversy in Sweden?

Mannheimer: It stirred an enormous debate. That lasted for months. And throughout Scandinavia, since the series was aired in all the Nordic countries. I was both held accountable, and received accolades and approbation. It took a lot of time and energy. And then I was

awarded *Stora journalistpriset* (the Swedish Grand Journalism Prize) for the series. There is still an organization in Norway called “*Lära för livet*”. It was founded after the series, and has as its mission to discuss school issues.

Fronko: Is *Sista dansen* a further development of the television series *Solbacken:Avd.E*? For instance, Gerd Hegnell plays a character named Harriet in both productions. And what triggered the idea of writing about elder care?

Mannheimer: You’re right, *Sista dansen* is the staged offshoot of *Solbacken*. After *Lära för livet* I planned a new series with the name *Lära för döden* (Learning for Death). I wanted to examine and portray elder care in the same way that I had examined school, as an institution in a welfare society. And I wanted to ask the questions: Did it work? Was it good? But no one except me was interested. Swedish television didn’t want anything to do with a series with the word ‘death’ in it. It was too depressing. So I shelved that project and wrote another television series. However, in the early part of this century the person who was then head of the drama division in Gothenburg asked if it wasn’t time for *Lära för döden*. And of course it was. So I did research, read everything I could get my hands on, worked in elder care and wrote and directed a television series that was aired in 2003, and called *Solbacken* as a precautionary measure. (Translator’s note: *Solbacken* means sunny hill or sunny slope.) It aroused an enormous uproar, I had a giant audience.

But I had grown tired of television. I dutifully directed two series based on Viveca Lärn’s *Saltö* books to stay sharp and to work outside in fresh air. But after that I longed to return to the theater! I suggested a play similar to *Solbacken*. Wrote and directed what was given the title *Sista dansen*, which was similar and dissimilar at the same time. It was outrageously fun and an outrageous success. It ran 150 performances, full house every time, and was about a group of tired and ailing old folks at an old folks’ home. Opened in December, 2008.

Then I wrote *I sista minuten* (At the Last Minute). Also about aging, existential anxiety, and growing weak, but as a comedy. *I sista minuten* centers on three women who have been close friends for at least 30 years. One of them is a journalist, one is a teacher and one is a poet and translator. They live in a big city, they keep pace with the times, and they are a few years younger than the ninety-year-olds in *Sista dansen*.

And now I’m working on the last part of the trilogy about approaching that state where you need all the assistance you can get: physically in the form of home help, aids for walking,

seeing and hearing, and in the form of security and warmth and intimacy in the face of the inexorable end called death. Modern society is tight-fisted in providing this assistance in its eagerness to promote strength and beauty and speed...

11. Notes

1. The title comes from *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980) *Powers of Horror*, in which Kristeva describes the person who lives in exile and searches for an identity:

Instead of sounding himself as to his “being,” he does so concerning his place: “Where am I?” instead of “Who am I?” For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous*, not *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a nonobject, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved. (Kristeva 2002: 235, Kristeva’s emphasis).

2. Judith Butler explains her criticism of Kristeva in the textbook *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler argues that Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic (associated with the pre-linguistic dependency of the infant on its mother, and consequently a maternal essence), is sanctioned by the symbolic, which in actuality is patriarchal culture. From Butler’s perspective, this means that the semiotic and the symbolic create a heterogeneous male/female dichotomy. Such heterogeneity does not offer the potential for emancipation from patriarchal order, according to Butler, because the reaction of the semiotic is always triggered by the symbolic law and order. In linguistic terms, Butler points out, disrupting syntax entails understanding syntactical requirements in the first place. In terms of literary criticism, then, Butler means that Kristeva’s theories do not offer the potential for a discourse of “emancipation” for the purpose of analysis (Butler 1990: 85-86).

3. The following is a list of the awards conferred on Mannheimer as of January, 2014.

1973: The ABF Literary Award, *ABFs litteraturpris*.

1977: The Swedish Grand Journalism Prize, *Stora journalistpriset*, for the television series *Lära för livet*.

2010: The literary award *Piratenpriset*.

2011: An honorary doctorate conferred by Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, for outstanding achievement.

2013: The foundation Långmanska kulturfonden's annual culture award.

4. Two other scholars have applied Kristeva's theoretical framework in art and literary criticism, but are not used in this paper. Christy Rennie, in the research paper "Abject Negotiations: The Mutability of Identification in Selected Artworks by Berni Searle" (2009), published online by the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg, discusses the process of self-identification as expressed in the artworks of South African multimedia artist Berni Searle. Rennie offers a model for examining identity in which Kristeva's notion of the Other and the identity of the subject are conjoined in visual art. This perspective sheds light on Kristeva's obscure notions with clear visual examples.

The article "Abjection/objectivism" by Allan Lloyd-Smith, published in *European Journal of American Culture* (December 2005, Vol. 24, No. 3), provides an account of uses of abjection in contemporary art and literature. Lloyd-Smith asserts that the situation of the human being in the world today is one of increasing 'abjection' (Lloyd-Smith 2005: 191), which would be a fruitful point of departure to analyze Carin Mannheimer's total production, since Mannheimer is renowned as a social critic in Scandinavia.

5. If the scope of this paper were larger, it would be interesting to watch the archived performance of this play to see if the sign system of the performance context would enhance the read interpretation of the script, or if it would provoke an alternative or broader interpretation of the characters' negotiation of identity. For instance, one rehearsal and four live performances were observed while translating the play, and a

visible sign occurred as early as Scene 21 signifying Bogdan as a medical doctor, although his goal is not expressed in the playscript until Scene 23.

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