Whose pain? Childhood, trauma, imagination

Lam-Hesseling, J.

Citation for published version (APA):
It is turning out that the "missing link" in psychoanalysis is the nonverbal affect transacting relationship between the developing human infant and the primary caregiver, since this serves as the matrix of the individual's emerging unconscious. Allan Schore

The Skin of the Subject

Because Perec's rhetoric of gap aroused in me a theoretical interest in the subject-forming role of affects, he made me re-visit ideas about infancy and development. Arguing that (inter)subjectivity starts as the effect of affective communication, I will demonstrate that this nonverbal exchange is best understood as a semiotic interaction. Subjects share meaning through feeling and doing before they share meaning with the help of words; hence, what I call here "nonverbal thinking" predates, as well as continues to complicate verbal thought processes.

This chapter aims at clarifying how an affective communication that is based in semiotic practices "grounds" subjects both in their bodies and in the interpersonal, social, and cultural environment. The body implied in this twofold anchoring consists of a communicating body (an affective agent) that is also a space-oriented and sensing body (a sensorimotor agent). Affects are manifested in motivated action. Hence, an affective force field emerges in which subjects communicate in a concrete way, by means of a body language that produces meaning through affective signs. This meaning is concrete because it is substantiated in (intrapersonal) feelings, (interpersonal) enactments, and (transpersonal or shared) actions upon the world; the most concrete meaning effect, however, is a personal relationship.

1. See Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self, 1994: 537. Schore's study offers an interdisciplinary perspective from within psychiatry and neurobiology. The author links emotional development to the development of the brain, giving evidence for the principle that the right hemisphere (affective processes) develops before the left hemisphere (verbal language) in the relationally defined development towards self-regulation. He argues that affective communication and the early language that appears in the second year are both the output of the right hemisphere. A child's name - the first "emotion word" a child learns - is also processed in the earlier developed right part of the brain (488). Schore concludes that the "emergent capacity of objective self-awareness implies the operation of a bipartite system that is capable of more than one state of consciousness" (498). This conclusion is compatible with the idea of different registers of experience.
The affective dimension of (inter)subjectivity contributes to the understanding of the relational aspect of (inter)subjectivity and the constellation of personal relationships and cultural environment. Moreover, because nonverbal communication remains at work during the entire lifespan, this communication not only yields insight into developmental subjectivity; it is also relevant to the understanding of (inter)subjectivity in general. The pertinence to trauma theory lies in the explainatory value of the affective dimension for the specific aspect of discursive disability, as different from the structural one. I will draw attention to a failure of experience that pertains to the incapacity to form emotionally mature relationships. The disposition to form such relationships is causally related to a subject’s capacity to regulate affects in general and to cope with stress and danger in particular. The insight into the nested and layered nature of the incapacitation to relate — in its double sense of connecting and narrating — clarifies why traumatic pain should be qualified as a relational problem. Finally, it is the affective dimension of (inter)subjectivity that explains why the question “whose pain?” cannot receive a simple answer.

Since affective communication stresses the “doing” involved in the production of meaning, the genesis of (inter)subjectivity can be seen as a performative process that turns the communicative behavior of the caregiver into the equivalent of speech acts. The relationship between the caregiver and the baby that is structured by these speech acts is asymmetrical, as far as the caregiver knows the rules from the semiotic practices through which she speaks, whereas the child does not know them. Nevertheless, the positions of caregiver and baby are comparable to the dialogic relationship that is implied in the exchangeability of the deictic pronouns “I” and “you,” although the caregiver as yet takes the initiative and sets the tone of this specific communication — acts mostly as an “I.”

Because the caregiver addresses her baby as a “you,” she performatively anchors a potential subject in her (linguistic) act; she appeals to the communicative potential of the baby. By calling her baby a “you,” a caregiver treats her as an “I” in becoming and facilitates the interaction through which that baby can become a subject. Hence, a caregiver’s anticipatory approach is needed to create the relational space — the holding environment — in which the baby can accept her offer to become a subject. I will argue that as soon as the infant actively and intentionally participates

2. I am aware of the constraints implied in this account of “normal” relational (inter)subjectivity. It should be noted that I do not deny persons who are differently brained — people with autism, for instance — their own subjectivity. Instead, my argument hints at a possible relationship between an innate incapacity to develop affective body language and the particular communication problems inherent in autistic and comparable disabilities.
in that relationship as a subject that “knows” – in the sense of feels or enacts – as soon as it shares meaning concerning the outer world, the infant can be called an intersubject.

This idea of (inter)subjectivity does not require conscious sign use and verbalizable self-knowledge as the birthmark of a subject. It marks a transitional area between two extremes. On the one end is the genesis of subjectivity as suggested by psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, when he presents the “nursling” as the translator of the other’s “enigmatic” message that is mostly unconscious. Subjectivity, then, starts as the “translation” of the “message” of a caregiver who herself is not aware of that message (1996: 7-12). Seen from this perspective, subjectivity starts as non-conscious interaction. On the other end is the view of philosopher Marcia Cavell, who conceptualizes (inter)subjectivity in terms of consciousness and mind. Arguing that language is “the condition for the mental in general,” Cavell connects (inter)subjectivity with the acquisition of language and, moreover, with self-awareness and the ability to tell about something (1996: 38). The concept of self “has an awareness of self as a self built into it, an ‘I’ who can tell stories about its passage through the world” (120; emphasis in text). For lack of this verbal demonstration of self-awareness, preverbal infants are still only potential subjects, according to Cavell.4

These views are relevant to the semiotic view elaborated in this study because they both approach subject formation in terms of interactions depending on the production of meaning. Laplanche is explicitly semiotics-oriented. He states that the messages of the other are expressed in a “language” that must be given the “general sense of semiological system (and not the restricted sense of verbal language)”. These messages are “most often non-verbal – acts of care, mimicry, gestures; but sometimes verbal too” (1996: 11). Cavell presents her view of (inter)subjectivity as “the interpreter’s perspective,” which implies that the mind is the result of an interpersonal process of meaning production; accordingly, she defines a subject as “a creature with interpretable mental states” (40). Apart from a common language, this process of interpretation requires other “constraints of meaning”, that is the idea of “a common world, the sharing of many particular beliefs, and some very general norms of rationality” (33). The most important of the preconditions she mentions is the triangular relationship to which I will return below.

3. Laplanche uses the idea of the baby as translator to clarify the position of the analysand in the psychoanalytic situation. Laplanche argues that “the only genuine, originary hermeneutist is the human being” and that the “originary translation is (...) performed by the child, the nursling baby (...) the baby that has no unconscious” (1996: 10-11). Significantly, Laplanche’s reference to the translating baby has been made in an article in which he emphasizes that the force of psychoanalysis is its method and not its theories or “myths.” Psychoanalysis should "account for experience. (...) It is the theory of repression, of the genesis of the unconscious” (12). Laplanche foregrounds translation as an “anti-hermeneutic method” that should go beyond the synthesis implied in “symbolism” and, instead, un-fix meaning through “ana-lytic (...) associative and dissociative unbinding” (10). Laplanche’s presentation of the translating baby thus also highlights a difference
I will argue that the difference between the two views explains how the unconscious and conscious aspects of becoming a subject can be approached in terms of a developmental transition—a “translation” in Laplanche’s terminology—from affective body language to verbal language. To understand the complexity of this translation, the metaphor of skin might be helpful again. The skin indicates that a psychosomatic area is at stake, and, moreover, that the genesis of (inter)subjectivity takes place in a space between inner and outer life, between self and other.

I propose to use the skin as a metaphor for affective feeling. Such a skin indicates that the felt tones of the different affects interact with sensorimotor perception. The metaphor refers to both the idea of a holding sack—the skin holds the subject together—and the idea of a touchable and touching surface—the subject becomes an interface, open to many contacts and interactions. The skin of affects thus refers to cohesion as well as diffuseness, simultaneously protecting and making vulnerable. Approaching feelings as the skin of the subject, I provide subjectivity with a precondition comparable to the function of the physiological skin for the corporeal body. Like the physiological skin with its multiple sensitivity to touch, pressure, pain, heat, and cold, feelings make the mind sensitive to the many possible forces occurring between feeling attracted to and feeling repelled from the environment.

The idea of a skin of the subject sheds another light on Freud’s observation in The Ego and the Id that the ego is “first and foremost, a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but it is itself the projection of a surface” (SE XIX: 27). If the surface stands for felt interaction, Freud’s bodily ego turns into a skin-ego. Like in Anzieu’s argument, who presents the skin-ego as an unconscious symbolic fantasy characterized by the skin’s multiple function of envelope, support, protection, borderline, interface, and surface of contact, the metaphor of skin emphasizes that the embodied aspect of (inter)subjectivity has a relational aspect. This skin-ego clarifies the complex interaction between the relational and the self-reflective aspects implied in (inter)subjectivity.

In this chapter, I will argue that (inter)subjectivity starts as a concrete interaction by which the relational subject is provided with the mental complexity that enables her to further develop into a subject that can tell and reflect about self and other. Put differently, a subject initially enacts her
“I-ness” as an “I-in-relation” through communications with concrete others in which the outer world is involved as well. Subsequently, she verbally confirms herself as an “I” who still is an “I-in-relation,” but who can also complicate her intrapsychic and relational interaction with increasingly complex life stories and (self)reflections. A subject’s genesis appears to be marked by (the integration of) the two functions that have already been signaled in the earlier chapters: feeling from within and telling about.

To demonstrate that this human development requires an explanation in terms of human sign action, some preliminary work has to be done. Firstly, I will look at the function of affects and emotions, and, more specifically, their differentiation and regulation during development. For this developmental aspect I make use of the study of a child psychologist, Alan Sroufe. His viewpoint substantially contributes to the understanding of the development from feeling (as meaning) to knowing (of meaning) and suggests a relation between the genesis of (inter)subjectivity and the capacity to form an emotional relationship. Secondly, the viewpoint of a psychoanalyst, Ivri Kumin, enables me to elucidate the issue of affective contagion, that is, the unconscious matching and exchange of affect states, which is a possibly ongoing aspect of human communication. Moreover, by drawing attention to this nonverbal affect communication, Kumin also helps to specify the borderline between concrete interaction and internalization. Thirdly, the work of a psychoanalyst and semiotician, John Muller, explains development as a layered learning process, which can be approached as a sequence of different forms of semiotic communication.

Together these views help describe a developmental phase that results in the formation of an intersubject who makes use of emotion schemas. I will explain the latter as non-conscious Peircean “habits.” This intersubject not only heralds an area of transition to the necessary integration of different levels of experience; it also enables me to situate the potential space and to clarify specific discursive problems as different from structural ones. In addition, my argument foregrounds a body language that can be qualified as the concrete predecessor and the ongoing partner of performative speech acts. Finally, the relational aspect of (inter)subjectivity highlights the pivotal role of the first attachment and of emotional relationships in general.

reinforce” (128). Therefore, Cavell proposes to see the interaction between mother and baby in terms of projection: “[the projection of] a self (not necessarily her self) onto [the baby], treating him as a human creature in the making” (128; emphasis in text). Finally, the statement that “we learn something about the force of words before we learn what they mean,” hints at the affective charge implied in speaking voices (131; emphasis added).
Cavell's last "constraint of meaning" makes clear that the precondition for a semiotic view of (inter)subjectivity exists in the possibility of sharing meaning. She argues that the production of meaning requires a triangular relationship between at least two subjects or minds and an object independent from their existence "to which (...) they can give a name that will allow them both to speak of it in its absence" (37). Importantly, the triangulation implies simultaneity: "subjectivity arises along with intersubjectivity and is not the prior state" (40). This simultaneity underscores that the moment two subjects share each other's relationship to an object, both subjects are aware of their separate existence and of the fact that they have similar things in mind. (Inter)subjectivity, then, can only come about in a space of semiotic interactions and practices. This makes experience into an interpersonal and transpersonal concept. I will argue that the awareness of such experience does not and need not depend on verbal language alone.

**Feeling as Knowing**

The point of suspension to hook the question how affective interaction can lead to intersubjectivity is Sroufe's integrative study: *Emotional Development: The Organization of Emotional Life in the Early Years* (1996). As professor in child psychology, Sroufe presents a developmental approach to the study of emotions, an inquiry that is based on experimental work as well as theoretical elaboration. Moreover, he combines two different fields in his investigation: the development of the distinct emotions, pertaining to normative questions, and the regulation of emotions, pertaining to individual differences. "Meaning" appears to play a decisive role in his argument, because it pinpoints the emergence of a subject of emotion who can "evaluate" an event. As Sroufe formulates it, "central to the definition of emotion in this book is the subjective relationship between infant and event" (28).

Emotions are developmental constructs that depend on a process of maturation, through which undifferentiated positive and negative affects turn into specific, subjectively felt emotions. This process is structured by caregivers and moves "from caregiver-orchestrated regulation to dyadic regulation to self-regulation" (236). Sroufe uses emotion as an umbrella term, in which physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects are included; "affect" is restricted to "the feeling component and the facial and postural expressive components of emotion" (15-16). He emphasizes that emotional development cannot be abstracted from social and cognitive development. Sroufe's working definition of emotions is based on what other investigators of emotion have
in common. All view emotions "as complex transactions with the environment; most theorists recognize a role for a cognitive process (...) and all point to associated physiological changes" (12). Correspondingly, he tentatively defines emotion as: "a subjective reaction to a salient event, characterized by physiological, experiential, and overt behavioral change" (15; emphasis in text).

Moreover, all mature emotions unfold from precursor emotions that, in turn, start as mere physical reactions: "major affect systems may be traced from the newborn period, (...) emotions proper are not viewed as emerging until later" (60; emphasis added). The capacity to make use of different emotions goes together with the capacity to evaluate events and to act adequately upon them. The term "evaluate," stresses the cognitive aspect of the production of meaning involved. A "subjective reaction," then, implies a subject who can evaluate – conveys meaning to – "a salient event."

I would like to point out that the cognitive aspect of this "salience" is intertwined with value, suggesting a subject that takes her well-being to heart when she evaluates.5

Using an "organizational perspective," Sroufe presents development as a sequence of qualitatively different levels of mental organization. Each step in the process indicates an increase in complexity, defined by the nature of the relationship between affective, cognitive, and social aspects of the process. The development of the brain also interacts with the development of emotion and cognition. However, development is not a predetermined process, because the prior behavior enables new behavior without specifying it; "new behavior is at a level of complexity and organization not inherent in the preconditions" (39).

The growth from baby to child implies a process "wherein what emerges derives in a logical, though complex way from what was present before as a precursor, (...) embodying an important core essence of that which is to come" (235). Sroufe distinguishes seven normative stages in the two first years of life, culminating in the emergence of the autonomous self and the "self-concept," while the development towards self-regulation appears still later. At the end of the second year the subject operates more or less autonomously. This is the period of caregiver-guided self-regulation. The subject can actively cope, has a positive self-evaluation, and is capable of self-conscious emotions like shame (70). That "the more mature emotions do not displace precursor

5. See, for example, the cognitive approach of emotions as represented by the work of Nico Frijda (1986, 1992).
emotions” is especially relevant for my argument (64). This implies that at any age a diffuse, unspecified feeling is able to develop into a specific emotional evaluation.

Sroufe’s account demonstrates that, although the emergence of self is marked by language acquisition, it is only one, albeit significant, phase in a complex continuous or discontinuous process; moreover, the self-concept is not presented as the watershed between potential subjectivity and subjectivity proper. Because Sroufe approaches subjectivity in terms of a subjective condition, he introduces a subject who makes use of evaluative feelings and adequate reactions to events. Thus the practice of life becomes involved in subject constitution, as much as the other way around.

The capacity to evaluate “is clearly apparent in the second half year, though it has earlier roots and evolves considerably with the later development of symbolic capacity” (132; emphasis added). The emergence of the production of subjective meaning is ascribed to the third and fourth phase of development, to “active participation” (six to nine months) and “attachment” (nine to twelve months) (70). This indicates that language need not be the precondition for the production of meaning through emotions. Because this evaluation is mediated by interactions with caregivers, there may be a nonverbal semiosis that predates verbal communication. If there indeed a preverbal communication at stake, it is plausible to present the capacity to evaluate as a criterion for – semiotic – subjectivity.

Sroufe explains that infants can evaluate events when their behavior is determined by what sense they make out of those events, a reaction that is radically different from automatic reflexes. Such an infant “interprets the caregiver’s accessibility and behavior” (170). This does not suggest, however, that preverbal infants have thoughts in the proper sense of that term. For example, if a caregiver suddenly disappears, an infant feels a fear that is associated with this perceived event and thus makes this event unsafe: “the infant feels anxiety and that [feeling] mediates interpretations of events and the overall situation” (139; emphasis in text). The infant’s interpretation does not imply that she “thinks ‘this is safe’ or ‘this is dangerous;’ rather, (...) she feels safe or apprehensive” (139; emphasis in text). I see this bodily-based agent as a “subject of feeling” who is capable of producing a felt knowing. This subject functions without the support of an imaginary ego or a verbally indicated “I.”

Because the development of emotions is set in motion by primary caregivers, interpersonal regulation appears to be the precondition for the subjective organization of experience. An infant’s ability to evaluate events is defined by the quality of the affective interactions with caregivers. This quality becomes manifest in the “attachment period” between nine and twelve months, in which
the mediating role of caregivers results in an enduring relationship. Such a relationship implies
the ability to differentiate between familiar and non-familiar persons. Because attachment not
only refers to the first emotional relationship between caregiver and infant, but also to an inherent
facilitating or disabling potential that affects the autonomy and self-regulation to come, it
constitutes a landmark in infant development.

Extending the ideas of the first attachment theorist Bowlby, Sroufe argues that “the set
goal of the attachment system” should be viewed as “felt security” and that affects are the means
that bring about the “adaptive behavior” that leads to this security (177). “Secure attachment” thus
presupposes a developmental process in which “confidence in the caregiver becomes confidence
in the self with the caregiver and, ultimately, confidence in the self” (186). Eventually, it helps an
infant to realize that the world is safe, others are caring, and she is worthy. Because the quality of
the care defines the quality or the nature of the attachment, differences in care quality have a
profound impact on an infant’s capacity for affect regulation and the exploration of the world.

While adequate functioning of primary caregivers leads to secure attachment, inadequate
functioning can lead to two pathogenic forms of attachment that can severely hamper the further
development of (inter)subjectivity. Sroufe calls them: “anxious/resistant attachment” and
“anxious/avoidant attachment” (183). The role of anxiety – an indication of the involvement of the
fear-system – is the reason why these failures of attachment have explanatory value for what I call
a specific traumatic disability. As I will argue later, failures of attachment are the prototype of
emotional isolation. Hence they form the core of children’s vulnerability to trauma.

Although Sroufe describes a process of sensitive, cooperative care in terms of Daniel
Stern’s idea of attunement, that is, as playful actions “that amplify, support or modulate the
infant’s response,” his study does not give specific indications for a rule-governed, semiotic
process of communication (163). Nevertheless, he stresses the socio-emotional aspect of
development, observing that “face-to-face interaction” is vital “because it allows the infant to
make the transition from a physical basis for security and comforting to a psychological basis.”
The caregiver’s “holding” of the infant’s “eyes and voice” promotes the “transition to an internalized

6. I will come back to Stern’s ideas in Chapters 6 and 7.
7. The idea of schemata of relationships as emotional constructs is related to the
tility that philosopher Mark Johnson launched in his study about “the bodily basis
of meaning, imagination, and reason” (1987). Johnson introduces the notion of
“image schemata” for the earliest (pre-consciously formed) version of a mental
representational system, which is based on bodily experience. These schemata of
experiential knowledge structure the later emerging (verbal) thought processes. The
earliest mental schemata grow into increasingly complex images or structures with
the help of what Johnson calls “metaphorical extension.” In this way Johnson
provides abstract thinking with a concrete, bodily base, although he does not take
the mediating function of affective interaction into account. In contrast,
neuroscientist Antonio Damasio presents a feeling core self that emphatically
attachment" (168; emphasis added). This internalization makes it possible to expect care also when it is not physically there. Finally, Sroufe argues that the internalization of affective interaction bears not so much on a “set of behaviors” or “a trait of the infant” as on schemata of relationships, which are “emotional constructs” (172 and 178). Because the capacity to produce and reproduce autobiographical recollections does not develop before a child is about four years old, these schemata of relationships predate the working of the autobiographical or episodic memory system.7

Sroufe’s view of emotional development can be connected to the performative subject formation I articulated in the previous section. A caregiver appears to be doing more than addressing a baby as a “you”; by means of her nonverbal as well as verbal speech acts she also interprets the affective behavior of the infant. Moreover, the caregiver’s acts of interpretation help the infant take over the initiative and become involved in a reciprocal communication. These interactions result in a subject that can differentiate between emotions, evaluate events, and maintain a mutual relationship with a caregiver. Although the two subjects involved do not have the same thoughts in mind, they share an interaction that supersedes the dual relationship. Hence, there is a preverbal agent who can be understood as a subjectively feeling “I,” an “I-in-relation-to-a-primary-other,” and an “I” that is aware of a world outside this interpersonal relationship. In terms of a nonverbal body language it can be said that the subject has learned something about a vocabulary of feelings and the possibility to combine feelings with certain actions, a proto-form of syntactic ordering.

Two subjects that nonverbally constitute an emotional relationship in a world are the predecessors of the verbally communicating subjects Cavell indicated as two creatures with interpretable minds that share a world. Being in a world by means of an emotional relationship highlights an important aspect made manifest by this early triangulation: primary relationships set the tone for other personal relationships and interactions with the world. Therefore, I approach attachment as the fundament that “holds” or “grounds” the coming interpretative processes of the infant, providing them with a basic “tonal” quality: a tonality. As I will argue, this tonality is relevant to trauma theory, because it can make the difference between a subject that can enjoy life – “life is depends on emotions and, moreover, this core self is the beginning of conscious life (1999). He thus presents a specific register of experience – feeling – in between mere being and cognitive knowing. This feeling consciousness makes use of a nonverbal (not only visual) mental imagery, which remains available for the later narratively organizing autobiographical self. He argues that feeling as feeling precedes knowing that we feel. However, in Damasio’s act of embodying consciousness only the intrapsychic development of consciousness and self has a place, leaving out the question of the cultural contribution via the mediating caregivers. Hence, neither study accounts for the idea of (inter)subjectivity, as I have now proposed it.
worth living” — and a subject that merely survives — “the environment is hostile or dangerous.” Attachment, then, influences an infant’s action readiness and coping ability by coloring her perspective on the world and herself.

To understand the empowering quality of the performative formation of subjectivity the term “force field” will be helpful. This is the field in which preverbal interaction starts as a motivated process set in motion by a caregiver. The idea of force field not only foregrounds the fact that evaluation and motivation go together, but it also indicates that the infant’s ability to make sense is motivated by interpersonal actions. A subject, then, is primarily “felt out” by concrete interactions with other people. The inevitable involvement of other people in the genesis of subjectivity also sheds some light on the affective investment in human relationships in general. The first emotional relationships seem to suggest that making sense and the forming of meaningful relationships go hand in hand. Finally, because these primary relationships are not dyadic but triangular, a space with a semiotic potential emerges, in which the cultural environment is made meaningful through the “tone” of dominating relationships.

Nevertheless, Sroufe’s study does not explain how a baby interprets the caregiver. How does an infant feel that it shares feelings with the mother, without being able to consciously know or think that it has the same feelings in mind? How does an infant feel that she is like others? These how questions require a semiotic answer. Before turning to Peircean semiotics, I will first look to the study of psychoanalyst Kumin, in which “intermodal exchange” is offered as explanation for the transmission of affective feelings. This might also explain how the production of meaning through feeling can take place. Because Kumin presents intermodal exchange as a mode of communication that starts in infancy and continues to function outside language during the entire lifespan, his study makes the issue of an affective body language more explicit. As I will argue in the course of this chapter, his argument first and foremost hints at a level of experience that functions outside normal consciousness.

Affects as Interface

Kumin’s *Pre-object Relatedness: Early Attachment and the Psychoanalytic Situation* (1996) is another example of an integrative study. He combines psychoanalytical theories of development and attachment with clinical information about the nonverbal (counter)transference concerning
pre-oedipal pathology. He thereby also makes use of empirical findings from infant observation. His interest in preverbal infancy enables him to make seemingly disparate psychoanalytic theories of classical psychoanalysis (Freud), British object-relations theory (Klein, Winnicott, Bion, Ogden), and self-psychology (Kohut) productively interact.

My choice of Kumin's work is motivated by his interest in the communication of pre-oedipal disturbances in the psychoanalytic situation. He tries to understand the mental organization implied in interactions that "to some extent predate memory, symbolic representation and verbal description, predate self-reflection, and predate the conscious awareness of the contribution of the original caretaker" (2). Because of this interest in the way early affects are interpersonally exchanged and, subsequently, intrapsychically processed or internalized, Kumin focuses on "the infant's mental and emotional repertoire for recognizing and responding to its own affects as signals" (32).

In line with "object relations theory," the psychoanalytical approach that gives the internalized, symbolic representations of the relationship with the "primary object" or caregiver pride of place, the experience that predates these relationships is addressed as "pre-object relatedness." Like Sroufe, Kumin asserts that this pre-object relatedness is the self-structuring precursor of mature (inter)subjectivity and correlates the failures of early relationships with later pathology. He also suggests that earlier modes of mental organization are not automatically fully integrated into later experience: "While pre-object relations likely begin even prior to birth, they persist into adulthood as the psychosomatic background of self-experience" (10). In order to explain the "contagious" aspect of the communication of affective states, Kumin presents the idea of "intermodal exchange."

Part of the argument consists of establishing a common ground between three theoretical approaches of affect regulation, of which Freud's idea of "signal anxiety" in the face of danger functions as model. This common ground offers a lead for the semiotic subject formation I aim to describe. Comparing Freud's signal anxiety with the concepts of "projective and introjective identification" formulated in object-relation theory, as well as with the "empathic attunement" addressed in self-psychology, Kumin comes to the conclusion that the different regulative processes

---

8. See also Chapter 3 (note 21), in which I mention Smith who indicates that Freud's article about signal anxiety is a turning point in his thinking about the role of affect and trauma.
can all be brought back to the same four moments. Despite the different approaches of the models – some emphasize the intrapsychic, others the relational aspects of the formation of the ego – all distinguish: 1. the perception of potential danger; 2. the communication of an anxiety signal (an affective expression or gesture); 3. the reception of this anxiety signal (by caregiver or by the ego self); 4. the mediation of the anxiety signal (soothing by caregiver or defense of ego; both are aimed at the reduction of the anxiety resulting from the danger).

Arguing that interactive processes lead to internalization, Kumin makes plausible that the different psychoanalytical approaches do not exclude each other, because "individual psychology develops in part from an internalization of pre-object experience of a two-person matrix" (47). Because the four steps describe a process of pre-relatedness, they refer to the time the infant still depends on the caregiver, which, parenthetically, need not mean that the infant is merged with the caregiver. In this early situation danger is a problem of distress, to be solved through the mediation of the caregiver. Kumin's example thus underscores the caregiver's function as the provider of the feeling of safety; as in Sroufe's argument, caregivers are persons capable of handling dangers.

In preparation for the discussion that will demonstrate the integrative power of Peircean semiotics, I will translate the four moments of the regulative process into a sign action or semiosis. As I will further clarify in the next section, this sign action implies a triple relationship between a "representamen" (a perceptible initial sign), an "interpretant" (the sign effected in somebody by the initial sign), and the "object" or "referent" of a sign (the meaning of a sign, according to some rules or "grounds"). In the process that is described the perception of something threatening is a representamen when it is perceived. This perceived sign leads to another sign or interpretant, i.e. it makes the infant react with a signal of anxiety – the infant thus communicates anxiety. This anxiety leads to still another interpretant in two ways: as expressed signal it is received as a sign by the caregiver and as feeling it is received as another sign for the infant self. Because the caregiver as well as the infant responds to this interpretant – in this example with soothing and defense, respectively – both mediate between the perceived sign and a referent or object.

By turning Kumin's staged interaction into a semiotic process, I draw attention to the
necessary coordination of an affective signal (expression) with a subjective feeling, that is, with what Oatley calls the "phenomenological tone" of emotions. However, this process does not explain how a sharing of feelings by means of "contagion" might work, because it does not specify "the way humans transmit and receive emotions without speech" (51; emphasis added). The semiotic interaction does not answer the question how a baby learns to make a connection between another's feelings and her own affective state. Kumin explains this concrete transmission of affects by extrapolating the notion of "intermodal matching," an idea developed by Meltzoff et al.

Observations of very young babies have, to begin with, led researchers to note a baby's capacity to imitate. "Alert normal neonates under one month old (...) can reliably imitate the facial gestures of adults" (53). A baby who sees another's face can imitate that visual input. Apparently, babies can translate "actions seen" into "actions done." The investigators explain this ability by assuming an innate "representational system that allows [infants] to unite in one common framework their own body transformations and those of others" (55). Meltzoff et al. call this phenomenon "intermodal matching." A baby, then, has an innate capacity to match or mirror the facial features of another person.

Other experiments have demonstrated that very young babies can also combine the information of different senses, because they visually identified an object that they had only explored with their mouths and they "match[ed] the information picked up by the eye and the ear" (56). Furthermore, infants do not only imitate the caregiver's facial expressions, they also match her voice and physiological gestalt. According to Meltzoff the imitation and sharing of bodily features enable young infants to differentiate and communicate with persons as opposed to things. Because this matching creates "a common framework" in which the bodily experience of a baby and another person are "united," it opens the possibility of sharing affects. I interpret this as a capacity to communicate. It might be possible, then, that seeing a caregiver's laughing face, which is mirrored by the baby's face, also generates a feeling of pleasure that resembles the caregiver's feeling state, provided that there is a feedback between facial expression and having a feeling. The hypotheses through which Kumin introduces the notion of intermodal exchange imply such a communication.

---

10. "Matching" refers to both the principle of similarity (imitation) and the principle of contiguity (across different sensory modalities). Apparently, two important principles of the production of meaning can be brought back to an innate capacity to learn and differentiate. These principles not only underlie the difference between the Peircean icon and index, which, as I will argue, help explain the vocabulary of feelings and the syntax of interaction implied in nonverbal body language; they also...
Infants’ ability to match themselves to their caregiver across sensory modalities leads Kumin to the conclusion that “matching between the sensory, perceptual, and motor spheres may also operate between the infant’s perceptual and affective spheres” (58). It is noteworthy that the term “intermodal exchange” comes up in connection with the third hypothesis, which states that “the capacity for intermodal matching does not end in infancy with the development of symbolic mental representations but persists normally throughout life as a characteristic of primary process thought” (60; emphasis added). In line with this hypothesis, Kumin specifies intermodal exchange as the ability to match and exchange affective states intermodally, a communication that is enabled by “an isomorphism of affect elicited and affect felt.” This isomorphism, an iconic learning of “another person’s mood from a facial expression, a posture, a tone of voice or a gesture” might indeed explain the non-conscious, contagious aspect of the affective exchange (61). In the next section I will examine the ways in which infant research and developmental semiotics support Kumin’s hypotheses.

According to Kumin’s argument the performative production of (inter)subjectivity includes a concrete sharing of affective states or moods. This process highlights three important aspects. First, there seems to be a communication through body language; second, the term “mood” indicates that more enduring affective patterns are implied in the pre-object relatedness at stake. Third, interpersonal contact raises the issue of presence. Because the experience dealt with here cannot be transferred in the form of a constative, portable meaning, its essence is that, as Kumin formulates it: “You have to be there to ‘get it.’” (87; emphasis in text). The descriptions of case stories demonstrate that intermodal exchange “can literally be sensed as a gut feeling” (83). Importantly, because these gut feelings are “evoked in another intermodally via interactional enactment rather than conveyed symbolically in verbal speech,” an interaction is at stake that cannot be approached in terms of repression. Hence, a register of experience emerges that functions outside verbal language. The possible existence of such a register indicates that the discursive silence implied in traumatization, also encompasses a concretely “felt” incapacity to relate to other people. Moreover,
such incapacity points to the possibility of preverbal traumatization. As Kumin observes: “[a] past catastrophe [can be] simultaneously unpressed and yet unthinkable” (103).

Affective exchange and the inherent possibility of a more or less autonomously operating affective register of experience substantially complicate subject-formation. Despite its explanatory value, intermodal exchange leaves the question hanging about the influence of the cultural environment on the subject-forming interaction between infant and caregivers. I have emphasized from the beginning that there is an asymmetrical relationship at stake, because the caregiver acts as an adult who has been subjected to the discursive rules of the symbolic order. Does Kumin’s preverbal dyadic interaction defy that discursive mediation? In the next section I will introduce a developmental semiotics that argues that the genesis of (inter)subjectivity is embedded in cultural frameworks: it is mediated by what Muller calls “the semiotic code” (1996: 21).

From Coerced Mirroring to Recognition

In this section I will dwell on Muller’s Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad: Developmental Semiotics in Freud, Peirce and Lacan (1996) and “Hierarchical Models in Semiotics and Psychoanalysis” in Peirce, Semiotics and Psychoanalysis (2000). Muller combines psychoanalytical theory and semiotics with findings from infant observations and psychiatric practice. He clarifies the specificity of developmental semiotics by situating it in the wider field of the semiotics as articulated by Sebeok, who distinguishes between three areas: anthroposemiotics, which deals with species-specific human sign systems, zoosemiotics, which pertains to animal communication in the broadest sense, and endosemiotics, which concerns the cybernetic systems within the body. This distinction makes it possible to understand the complexity and hierarchy implied in human development with respect to both the relational and the mental component. As Muller formulates it:

In considering infant-mother interaction, we might avoid reductionism by conceiving the process as one in which the mother’s anthroposemiotic system quickly transforms the infant’s zoosemiotic system into an anthroposemiotic one, with decisive consequences for the endosemiotic system of the developing brain. We can understand developmental semiotics as an attempt to give an account of this transition, this move from neonatal reflexes to an intersubjective position of semiotic empowerment. (1996: 30)
Muller uses Peircean semiotics to argue that the mother-infant dyad consists of sign actions that are structured by "the semiotic code." By means of this notion of semiotic code Muller puts the nonverbal dyad in the frame of Thirdness, presenting Thirdness as the Peircean equivalent of the Lacanian symbolic order. Because Thirdness places the production of meaning in the framework of cultural habits and laws, it foregrounds the role of conventionality and, hence, cultural specificity in the semiotic events we live by. Explaining the semiotic code as the semiotic practices that frame every interaction, Muller indicates that this code is comparable to the notion of discursivity as used in the present study. The term "semiotic code" makes explicit that not merely language but all kinds of signifying systems are implied in discourses. This code functions as "the third term of the dyad" and "the holding environment for both mother and infant" (1996: 21).

Muller approaches the genesis of (inter)subjectivity as the result of different levels of communication, that is, as an integrative sequence of iconic, indexical and symbolic interaction. He describes this process as a movement from coerced mirroring (coercing sameness) to recognition (positing difference); it is a development that goes from "enacted iconicity (coerced mirroring) to indexicality (pointing) to symbolization (conventional gestures and words)" (55). Enacted iconicity is an affective response that works automatically, through physical synchronization; it is "contagious, captivating, and produces a replica in the other." This automatic synchronization of affective states soon becomes an indexical conversation in which the baby gradually gains more semiotic autonomy; she thus learns that she is involved in an interaction with another participant. Recognition, the other end of the continuum, requires acknowledging "the other as other, not as an extension or repetition of oneself" (24). This view of subjectivity is articulated in Muller's final semiotic claim: "The process of mutual semiotic recognition leads to the emergence of subjectivity in the infant, eventually effected in the use of "I" and "you" (21).

Although affectivity plays an important initiating role in Muller's developmental semiotics, he does not specifically discuss the regulation of affects and the differentiation of emotions. In his account of development through infant observations, emotional development is subordinated to the genesis of (inter)subjectivity in general. Muller presents infants as semiotically competent beings,

12. Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness are the three categories of relation with which Peirce builds his "architectonic theory." I will pay more attention to these categories below.
using Colwyn Trevarthen’s infant semiotics as general frame of reference (1989). Hence, preverbal
does not mean pre-semiotic. This implies an “innate intersubjectivity,” suggesting that there is
some distinction between self and not-self present at birth (Muller 1996: 47-48). From early on
there is a selective preference for the mother’s voice, her face, and her odor. Because babies show
turn-taking behavior or a proto-conversational pattern of the interaction with the mother from six
weeks on, Trevarthen also ascribes to them inborn “conversational and empathic properties”

The shift from coerced mirroring to an indexical dialogue in which the baby willfully
provokes reactions gradually extends into a socially defined playing with the intentions of others,
“engaging desire with desire” (52). After six months, a remarkable development in “checking
behavior” is displayed by the infant, who uses the primary caregiver as an emotional frame of
reference. The baby who “directs attention to the eyes, face and voice, or hands of the partner
(or to various combinations of these)” shows “a growing awareness of how to coordinate with the
other person’s mind.” Moreover, this attempt at coordination with another’s orientation is “coupled
to a need for specific information on expressed details of their feelings, interests, and intentions”
(Trevarthen 1989: 724, quoted in Muller 53; emphasis added). Muller explains the importance of
this behavior in terms of identification and desire, clarifying that these babies are “intent (...) on
being found desirable” (53). This emphasis on desire obscures the evaluative function of different
kinds of affects, the connection with the readiness for action, and the function of a specific body
language in that interpersonal process. Nevertheless, Trevarthen sees this coordination with
another’s mind as the groundwork for symbolic communication.

The age of nine (to twelve) months is presented as a turning point, because it is the
beginning of an (inter)subjectivity that implies an ability to “attend and comply with the mother’s
instructions,” to perform “illocutionary acts,” and to have “awareness of shared reality.” These
infants, then, with the help of protolinguistic vocalization and gestures, are capable of a nonverbal
referential communication about what lies beyond the dyad; through a deictic activity that already
starts around the age of three months, infants can communicate about an object that is present
(53-54). I take it that from about nine months on infants function in a triangular relationship,
enacting the differentiation between “I” and “you,” and the outer world.

Except for his reference to desire, Muller does not take attachment and the possibly vital
function of the first emotional relationships into consideration. He makes a jump of a year and
mentions that at the end of the second year “the experience of self-cohesion (...) now appears
dependent on the meeting of standards, on the embrace of an ideal, [and] on being found pleasing" (54). Moreover, making another jump of a year, he does not stress the acquisition of language as such, but the ability of the three-year-old child to “speak to others about non-present events” (55). The ability to tell about something that is absent is for Trevarthen (and Muller) the indication of a child’s entry into the symbolic order. At this moment a child is able to consciously “sign” herself. Only when a child can thus communicate can she think consciously and remember symbolically.¹³

In Muller’s developmental semiotics, in which different kinds of sign actions follow each other, affects and emotions are explained in terms of interpretants, that is, as those aspects of a sign that take effect in somebody. And because the interpretant engages the developmental subject in the sign action, the interpretant plays a decisive role in Muller’s argument. Peirce’s description of the three aspects of a sign explains how the subject can be seen as the meaning effect of semiosis:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representation.¹⁴

The subject is the “somebody” who is addressed by the representamen, or, the effect of the sign that is perceived is substantiated in the mind of an interpreting subject. Because the representamen takes the form of “an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign,” it is manifested in some way, in the form of a feeling, for instance. Through this feeling, the addressed subject is constituted as a subject of feeling, or, a feeling subject. What the feeling “means” for the subject, that is, what the object or referent of the perceived sign is for the subject, depends on the “ground” or rule that combines the representamen with the object. Muller emphasizes that this meaning can be enacted

¹³. This view seems to be in agreement with Cavell’s idea of (inter)subjectivity. Peirce’s Collected Papers, 2.228, quoted in Bal & Bryson 1991: 188. This lucid and empowering article opens up semiotics for the analysis of visual texts.

¹⁴. Peirce’s Collected papers, 2.228, quoted in Bal & Bryson 1991: 188. This lucid and empowering article opens up semiotics for the analysis of visual texts.
— running away in reaction to fear — or can become manifest in verbalizable thought — for example, “such circumstances are dangerous.” Meaning can only become intersubjectively sharable, however, when two subjects make use of the same culturally defined rules. Those rules form the “semiotic code” or the semiotic practices indicated by Muller as the basis that grounds every semiotic human interaction.

Because the interpretant makes the subject into the nodal point of outer world and inner life, the subject-constituting function of the interpretant is implied in the way it makes mental processes visible. Muller states that the interpretant is “roughly equivalent to the sign’s meaning as different from its referent” (1996: 33). This clarifies the role of the interpretant as indication of the intrapsychic component of subjectivity. The complexity of intrapsychic processes can be conceived as an endless chain of interpretants, in which all mental steps can be reduced to different interpretants. At the moment a representamen is connected to an object, when it produces meaning for the subject, the chain of interpretants has reached its (provisional) final interpretant and comes to a halt.

To make the different aspects of the mental processes that accompany sign actions analyzable, Peirce has made a categorization of interpretants. Muller’s major contribution to my inquiry is that he approaches Peirce’s differentiation between the emotional, the energetic, and the logical interpretant as a sequence with explanatory value for developmental subjectivity. He argues that the sequence implied in Peirce’s categorization can be seen as a hierarchy that punctuates a subject’s development towards (inter)subjectivity. Muller’s argumentation helps me to explain how the affective dimension of (inter)subjectivity can function on different levels of mental organization — it indicates different forms of consciousness — and how the mediation between emotional imagination and verbal thought can take place.

To make his point Muller draws attention to Peirce’s “architectonic theory,” the philosophical foundation of his semiotics. Peirce structures experience by means of three categories of relation: First(ness), Second(ness) and Third(ness). He defines them as modes of being:

15. He quotes another definition of a sign made by Peirce to underscore this observation: “A sign stands for something to the idea it produces or modifies... That for which it stands is called its object; that which it conveys, its meaning; and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant” (1996: 33; quoted in Eco 1976: 69; emphasis in text).
First is the conception of being or existing independent of anything else. Second is the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else. Third is the conception of mediation, whereby a first and second are brought into relation. (1891: 296; quoted in Muller 2000: 50)

Firstness refers to quality as such, to an unreflected feeling, an undifferentiated state, to mere potentiality and immediate experience; it is separated from Secondness and Thirdness. “Secondness is for Peirce the dynamic category of force and impact, in particular the kind of impact that takes place in a dyadic relation” (2000: 51). Secondness involves the relation between a first and a second. It acknowledges the existential influence of external reality. Thirdness is the category of mediation and signs. It refers to “habit and law, required for thinking, self-reflection and any experience for continuity and community.” Thirdness is there when “seconds are assessed and understood” (2000: 51).

It is not the categories as sequence but their relation to each other that yields insight into the genesis of subjectivity. There is an unbound potentiality (Firstness) that can only become meaningful by means of relation (Secondness) and interpretation (Thirdness). Secondness refers to the moment of impact that sets semiosis in motion: human subjects come to life through Secondness. This Secondness, which is manifested in the relationship with caregivers, enables a baby’s unbound potentiality to become meaningful by bringing it into relation with Thirdness. The mediating skills of those caregivers thus substantially contribute to the way becoming subjects can make use of the potentiality of Firstness. As I will argue below, the space of Secondness, that is, the relational space where a potentiality can be made productive by means of Thirdness, is the potential space. Secondness helps to realize that relational subjectivity starts in a force field where mere impact can turn into motivated action that becomes manifested in a subject. Moreover, the action and the subject at stake are measured in terms of being successful and feeling well.

In Muller’s argument the architectonic theory of Peirce is mainly brought in to illuminate the hierarchy implied in the sequence of the interpretants. This hierarchy is related to the way the

16. Muller’s developmental semiotics (1996) is directed at the integration of Peirce’s categories of relation and the three registers of experience formulated by Lacan: the Real (Firstness); the Imaginary order (Secondness); and the Symbolic order (Thirdness). I do not go into that challenging aspect of his study. I only mention here that Muller’s focal point is the treatment of psychosis, a state of unbounded being that is explained in terms of Lacan’s Real and Peirce’s Firstness.

17. Semiotic theologian Ellen van Wolde demonstrates that these categories should be read in reverse order to understand Peirce’s development as a philosopher of logic. She argues that Peirce eventually integrates a nominalist and realist view of reality into a relationally defined “semiotic realism.” In the beginning reality is for the nominalist Peirce only what is “knowable” through signs and their resulting conceptual thought. Later on, he also acknowledges the influence of the “clash”
different “grounds” operate. These grounds determine which qualities of signs dominate the relationship to their objects. Because the meaning produced by these relationships is mediated by interpretants, the differentiation of grounds also bears upon the differentiation of interpretants. Peirce’s specification of signs as firsts, seconds, and thirds, then, points out three basic ways in which signs can be related to their object: similarity, contiguity, and conventionality. As Muller describes it:

In the category of Firstness, signs relate to their objects by way of resemblance through qualitative similarity; such signs (...) are known as icons. In the realm of Secondness, signs relate to their objects existentially, by way of contiguity or causal impact; such a sign (...) is known as index. (...) In the field of Thirdness, signs have a relationship to their object solely through a convention; such signs are known by Peirce as symbols, and their relationship to their objects is determined not through resemblance nor through causality but through a type of agreement or conventionality that becomes habitual. The use of symbols depends on the operation of a semiotic code. (2000: 51-52; emphasis added)

Apparently, only when a sign functions at the level of a symbol, when it is mediated through conventionality, does it function in the field of Thirdness. However, as the last sentence of the fragment underlines, Muller sees Thirdness as the general level of sign use that is structured by the working of a “semiotic code.” Thirdness “lifts the sign onto a signifyng plane,” on which it can function as a sign. This entails that “neither an icon nor an index may be registered as a sign unless a semiotic code is operating that interprets it” (52; emphasis in text). In other words, the operation of the semiotic code turns every sign into a symbol, or rather, makes every sign use “symbolic” in the Lacanian sense. But, the fragment also suggests that the icon and the index might have a function outside Thirdness, and add a specific quality to conventionality. Muller clarifies this seeming contradiction by foregrounding iconicity and indexicality as explanations for the unconscious working of affective contagion and interaction in development.18

18. Muller uses the term "unconscious" in a sense that appears to exceed, if not broaden, the meaning of the Freudian unconscious.
Iconicity and indexicality are aspects of an innate capacity for sign action that makes use of the rules of similarity and contiguity. These rules enable a baby to unconsciously interpret affective signals as icons and indexes. Initially, the baby does not "know" that she makes use of an icon when she mirrors the caregiver's smile, a sign that constitutes an emotional interpretant in the baby, which is manifested as a still undifferentiated positive feeling. Nevertheless, the baby's imitation makes her (as well as the caregiver) into an enactor of the meaning of an icon. Similarly, a baby does not "know" that she makes use of an index when she reacts to the presence of a caregiver with a spontaneous smile of her own; this time the baby's reaction of pleasure is an energetic interpretant, which is manifested in an enactment of response behavior. This enactment implies an awareness of an indexical relationship with the caregiver. Apparently, the baby has learned something from the turn-taking affective conversation that accompanies every development.

That babies learn in this way has already been indicated by Peirce himself, who states that "children manifest powers of thought much earlier" than their use of personal pronouns: "Indeed, it is almost impossible to assign a period at which children do not already exhibit decided intellectual activity in directions in which thought is indispensable for their well-being" (1992: 18-19; quoted in Muller 1996: 35). The elaboration of this intellectual capacity through signs that help to indexically point out meaning, eventually leads to mutual recognition of the other as other and the ability to sign oneself by means of verbal symbols.

Because in this interaction the caregiver inevitably brings in her own cultural baggage when she interprets her baby as a subject, this dyadic interaction not only functions at the level of Secondness but also on the level of Thirdness. The asymmetrical nature of this structuring relationship raises the question about the infant's entrance into the symbolic order. On the one hand, this entrance starts as soon as the baby is addressed as a becoming subject. Muller endorses this aspect while quoting a text in which Lacan observes that the symbolic register is present "as early as possible, even prior to the fixation of the self in the image of the subject, prior to the structuring image of the ego."19 On the other hand, the conscious use of symbols is decisive for being a subject, a moment that implies that a child can not only "sign" herself as an "I" but experienced as brute reality, as the encounter of two masses, the collision of two balls (1954-55: 257, quoted in Muller 1996: 71). The reference to "brute reality" and the "encounter of two masses" resonates with a Peircean idea of Secondness as the moment of impact that sets the sign action that leads towards subjectivity (Thirdness) in motion.

19. I give here the entire quotation: "Anyone who's observed a child has seen that the same blow, the same knock, the same slap, isn't received in the same fashion, depending on whether it is punitive or accidental. The symbolic relation is constituted as early as possible, even prior to the fixation of the self in the image of the subject, prior to the structuring image of the ego, introducing the dimension of the subject into the world, a dimension capable of creating a reality other than that.
also consciously reflect or tell about herself. Muller describes this moment as defined by “the subjectivity of self, ownership of desire and action in history (...) opened up in what semioticians call the deixis of here-now/there-then articulation” (1996: 25).

Muller’s account highlights a development that, through its different ways of communication, indicates three different ways of sharing meaning. The first way implies an unconscious, iconically induced sharing of feeling states. This dialogic interaction leads to a shared interest in the world enabled by indexical signs (pointing behavior), thus inducing the second level of meaning production. When this behavior gains a (self-)reflective component through the sharing of stories by means of verbal symbols, the third level has been reached. Because the shared interest in the world, which is manifested in the triangular situation that starts at about nine months, also depends on conventional rules or semiotic code, nonverbal symbolic pointers predate and facilitate the use of symbolic words. Hence my suggestion that the infant who can nonverbally share her interest in the world with others should be seen as a symbol user. Nevertheless, this enacted use of symbolic signs appears to function without a consciously thinking mind. Consequently, it is not so much the entry into the symbolic, as the growth towards conscious thought that is the decisive factor in the discussion about subject constitution.

In line with this, I contend that the development towards conscious symbol use cannot be pinned down in one moment or in the acquisition of language as such, because it implies a period of transition, i.e. the period I indicate as infancy. Infancy thus is marked by the transition from one communicative system – affective body language – towards a more complex sign system – verbal language, i.e. a transition in which merely performative utterances are amplified and complicated by constative content. Because the two signifying systems are different in nature, development is not a gradual growth but a discontinuous process, in which a translation – putting feelings and enactments into words – is at stake. Moreover, because the two systems will never become fully integrated, they can separately remain at work during the entire lifespan. The assumption of two different communication systems explains why the relevance of the affective dimension of (inter)subjectivity exceeds the developmental period.

Emotion Habits

The clarification of the subject matter of this chapter is best served by making Sroufe’s account of emotional development interact with Muller’s semiotic explanation and Kumin’s emphasis on
the concrete exchange of affects. This move leads to the suggestion that affects are vital forces that constitute subjectivity by means of 1. an unconsciously and concretely working affective communication, 2. the forming of emotion habits, and 3. an emotional relationship that structures the motivation to live and functions as a primary frame of reference. This structuring should not be understood in terms of causal determination, but as a process that enables or disables without spelling out the consequences.

1. Regarding affective communication, the innate possibility to develop affects and emotions endorses the existence of a register of experience that is related to a part of the brain that, developmentally seen, predates those brain functions that make the learning of verbal language possible.\(^{20}\) Because this early brain system is set in motion through interaction, the exchange of affective signals can turn into a communication. The innate rule of similarity explains how the baby can build a lexicon (paradigm) of signals through matching the repertoire of the adult caregiver. The rule of contiguity implied in the capacity of rhythmic turn-taking explains how the baby learns through sequence and combination of actions (syntax). The meaning that is enacted by the use of the affective icon and the index is a relationship that enables the baby to use affects as guidelines for potentially successful action.

The development of “checking back behavior” (Muller) or “emotional referencing” (Trevarthen) in the course of the first year demonstrates that the intertwinements of personal relationship and guiding structures becomes increasingly tight. Hence, the growing ability to affectively communicate—there is a growing attention to the caregiver’s eyes, face, voice, and hands—indicates, to repeat Trevarthen’s words, the “awareness of how to coordinate with the other person’s mind.” Because the use of body language goes hand in hand with the capacity to relate to another person, a caregiver’s role changes from empowering mirror to judge. Moreover, as further development makes clear, this judgement supersedes the mutual “I like you” relationship; it pertains to self-appreciation and world-appreciation as well. And finally, it is through the function of judge that cultural conventions are brought into the developmental process. The judging caregiver cannot but act as a subject that has already been judged.

---

\(^{20}\) According to Schore contemporary bioenergetic theory demonstrates that “energetics and information processing are tightly coupled.” He presents evidence that “the energy concept is absolutely heuristic,” while arguing that “the progressive appearance of more efficient energy systems lies at the heart of development” (1994: 536-537). These ideas about reciprocal relationships between energy-conserving and energy-expend ing components seem compatible with the approach to emotion as pertaining to action readiness and feeling well. It enhances the idea that relational subjectivity is situated in an affective force field.

\(^{21}\) See the chapter “Semiotics and Experience” (1984: 158-186). The chapter “Sexual Structures and Habit Changes” (1994: 298-312), in which the constitution of sexuality is the specific issue, can be seen as an elaboration of the earlier chapter.
2. Regarding the formation of emotion habits, how affective body language leads to these habits is made comprehensible with the help of Sroufe’s presentation of emotional development. These affects grow from physiological prototype, via precursor emotions towards basic emotions. From the perspective of sign action, these developmental steps can be linked to the subject by means of the interpretants. The baby makes the following three steps. Firstly, she is an agent with an unspecified feeling, which is the effect of an emotional interpretant. As feeling agent the baby makes the physiological prototype of an affect manifest. Secondly, the baby becomes an agent who is capable of reacting more adequately to a situation, an accomplishment that is effected by both a feeling interpretant and an energetic one. As acting and reacting agent the baby substantiates a precursor emotion. Thirdly, an infant becomes a subject who can combine a feeling interpretant with an energetic interpretant and some kind of thought interpretant, conveying subjective meaning to a situation in which the world outside is involved. As evaluative subject the infant substantiates the motivated behavior implied in the use of a basic emotion.

In a Peircean line of thought this basic emotion could be the effect of what he calls a logical interpretant, which can be manifested in either a habit or a mental conception or in both – a habit change. This logical interpretant belongs to the level of Thirdness and symbolic functioning, because it is grounded in the conventional, discursive semiotic code. Teresa de Lauretis, who uses Peirce’s theory of interpretants to articulate the interface of the psychic and the social, has convincingly argued that the logical interpretant explains the function of cultural practice in subject constitution. However, De Lauretis did more than ground subjectivity in semiotic practices; she simultaneously gave body to the subjects involved, when she wrote: “that subject (...) is the place in which, the body in whom, the signficate effect of the sign takes hold and is real-ized” (1984: 182-183; emphasis added).21

The issue of embodiment is further elaborated in another study, in which De Lauretis presents sexuality “as one particular instance of a more general process that links subjectivity to social signification and material reality” (1994: 299). I contend that the constitution of what Sroufe’s calls emotions and emotion constructs can be approached as another instance of that more general subject-constituting process. This contention suggests the working of a logical interpretant that becomes manifest in unconscious emotion habits and mental representations thereof. The possibility of such mental constructs is indicated by De Lauretis’ remark that she sees “no reason why it would be wrong to infer that those early experiences [of satisfaction] could have resulted in signs whose final interpretants were unconscious habits” (302).
De Lauretis argues that the effects of emotional and energetic interpretants can lead to a degree of mental organization. Describing the emotional interpretant as leading to an unspecified feeling and the energetic interpretant as involving an effort, De Lauretis goes on, quoting Peirce: “The third type of effect that may be produced by a sign is a ‘habit-change’: a modification of a person’s tendencies towards action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions.” Peirce calls this final significate effect of the sign the logical interpretant, because, as De Lauretis argues, this interpretant “makes sense out of the emotion and muscular/mental effort that preceded it by providing a conceptual representation of that effort” (301). The concept of habit can thus be used in a very broad sense, and, as the doubled status of the energetic interpretant already indicates, the logic involved has a psychosomatic quality.

In a later publication De Lauretis underscores the psychosomatic quality of the habit by stating that Peirce’s notion “is not a purely mental, rational, or intellectual result of the semiotic process. (...) One could say that habit or habit-change is the final interpretant or representative of a somatic-mental process. (...) I see a homology between the subject of semiosis and Freud’s bodily ego” (2000: 169). If this bodily ego is conceived in terms of the subject with the affective skin that I proposed, it becomes understandable that the practice implied in the notion of habit, the learning through a repetitive process, leads to the achievement of emotional skills that, in turn, structure further practice and learning. Hence, emotions are manifested in a subject who performs habits or skills that are the logical conclusion of affective feelings and enactments.

The assumption of such habits makes clear that “living from within the body” refers to an experience that functions within a semiotic awareness and a framework that is ruled by conventional codes, although it cannot automatically be turned into conceptual knowing. Nevertheless, this affective level of consciousness requires a translation towards verbal consciousness. Seen from this perspective, De Lauretis’ comparison of the mental status of the lived habit with Freud’s idea of psychic reality, which she calls “a domain where the mental is always implicated with the somatic,” gains explanatory value (2000: 169). Because she presents psychic reality as an experience with a double nature, it might refer to different layers of

consciousness; and because these layers are implicated with each other, not only repression but also a difficulty with translation might be involved.23

The concept of logical interpretant, then, clarifies that the relational (inter)subject who participates in the first triangulation is both the result of a process and the first decisive step towards functioning separately, which is another decisive step. The evaluative and motivated subject of about nine months thus motivates the coming into being of the subject with the interpretable mind Cavell has presented as norm. Only the latter subject can turn motivation and evaluation into conscious desires and beliefs.24 Hence an early intersubject emerges who prepares the transition to verbal communication by means of affective communication and nonverbal, symbolic pointers that bring in the world as the third participant. This activity is structured by an as yet non-conscious, albeit conventionally mediated, mental imagery of emotion habits. The nine-month-old infant is an “I-in-relation-to-a-you” who, by means of a shared interest in the world, simultaneously feels and enacts that this mutual relationship also implies an “I” who is “like you.”

3. Regarding the function of the primary emotional relationships, the attachment period that follows the step of the first triangulation makes explicit that the relationship involved is as important as the mastering of affective signaling and indexical symbol use. Or rather, the relationship and the communication are mutually constitutive. At the time an infant learns to make a distinction between the familiar caregiver and a stranger, the “I-in-relation” can become an “I” that can form a relationship with a specific person. The difference between familiar persons and unfamiliar ones – the latter are distressing – enables the forming of an emotional relationship of which the affective charge can be characterized in terms of “I like you” and “you like me.” This relationship provides the intersubject with a specific emotional focalizor, who takes the interests of the subject in the further acculturation to heart.

Because the relationship of the attachment period mediates the view of the world and the self, and not the other way around, this primary emotional relationship is the decisive factor of the first triangulation. The relationship becomes the nodal point, in which the idea of the safety of the environment, the trustworthiness of other people and the confidence of the self come together.

---

23. I do not go into the discussion of how this affective unconscious can be related to a Freudian approach to the unconscious as resulting from repression. I only suggest here that the two need not be incompatible; an affective unconscious need not exclude the (later, retroactive) working of censorship and fantasy. The articulation of the affective dimension does not merely complicate subjectivity by “doubling” experience; it also points out the mediating function of emotion schemas. It is this mediation that complicates the working of the Freudian primary and secondary thought processes. For a further elaboration of emotion schemas see Chapters 6 and 7.

24. Cavell defines desires as “what one wants to be the case” and beliefs as “what one thinks is the case” (1996: 240, note 25).
Hence, the motivation to live and enjoy life, which implies the ability to cope with inner stress and outer danger, depends on the success of this relationship. This entanglement of interests foregrounds the main feature of the relational intersubjectivity with which the entry into the symbolic starts. Attachment highlights both the strength and the vulnerability of the developmental situation: concrete relationships can empower as well as destroy subjectivity. In the next section, I will dwell on the latter aspect.

**Piercing the Skin**

The relevance of the articulation of the affective dimension to trauma theory lies above all in the first decisive developmental step, the constitution of the intersubject. Through that step the interconnection of being a subject, feeling well, and establishing and maintaining emotionally mature relationships comes to the fore. As cases in which the attachment fails suggest, the interrelation of these elements is potentially fatal for a subject in development. Because for children a traumatogenic environment, specific disablement, and vulnerability to trauma go together, enduring emotional abuse and chronic traumatization are one and the same process. Nevertheless, it should be realized that the discursive problem of emotional isolation concerns both children and adults.

The failure of the affective constitution and emotional confirmation of (inter)subjectivity adds the specific aspect to the structural problems of representation implied in traumatization. Therefore, a specific disability does not bear upon the shortcomings of the intersubjectively shared repertoire of representations, but on a lack of adequate emotion habits, communicative, affective and emotional skills and a concretely present, caring, hence enabling environment. The specific discursive problems comprise an interpersonal and an intrapsychic aspect for both children and adults. These two aspects are implied in the idea of trauma as "piercing of the skin." A gap in the affective shield concerns affective self-regulation as well as empowering relationships. This leads

---

25. Like Sroufe, Kumin describes two categories with respect to the failure of attachment and the shortcomings of affect regulation implied therein: "ambivalent attachment" and "avoidant attachment." He also observes that babies and infants show two kinds of reactive patterns to stressful situations: "Hyper states of consciousness and wakefulness" and "hypo states of consciousness, including lethargy and somnolence" (1996:146). The fact that the latter patterns of behavior correspond with categories of symptoms of PTSD enhances the idea that the understanding of affect regulation contributes to the understanding of trauma.
me to the proposal to "thicken" the discursive shortcomings as formulated by Van Alphen with the emotional practice of life. As I have already cited, Van Alphen distinguished four basic representational problems, concerning the differential positions and terms offered by the symbolic order:

two of which concern the survivor's position as subject and two of which concern the narrative frames used to tell about the Holocaust. (...) 1. ambiguous actantial position; one is neither subject nor object of the events, or one is both at the same time; 2. total negation of any actantial position or subjectivity; 3. lack of a plot or narrative frame by means of which the events can be given meaningful coherence; 4. the plots or narrative frames that are available (or are inflicted) are unacceptable because they do not do justice to one's role in the events. (1997: 45; emphasis in text)

To clarify this thickening, I read Van Alphen's sequence of problems through the two different aspects implied in the capacity to relate. Correspondingly, the first two problems, which "concern the survivor's position as subject," pertain to the incapacity to engage in a relationship. The specific aspect of this problem indicates a subject who cannot make productive use of affective communication and regulation. The last two problems, which "concern the narrative frames used to tell about the Holocaust," pertain to the incapacity to tell about. The specific aspect of this problem indicates a disembodied subject, whose telling about is dissociated from a telling from within.

The developmental approach of (inter)subjectivity has demonstrated that the twofold meaning of the capacity to relate implies a hierarchy that gives the first two problems the status of precondition. This entails that the "ambiguous actantial position" and the "total negation of any actantial position or subjectivity" have developmental aspects with possible explanatory value for childhood trauma. It also becomes clear that every traumatization involves an embodied subject, whose experience includes a dimension that is fueled by affective interaction. In conclusion, it can be said that emotional availability is the precondition for every "telling about" that incorporates a "telling from within." And because this availability can only be manifested in living persons, the affective dimension emphasizes that the "here and now" aspect of personal relationships is as necessary for narrating as the availability of means of representation.

Significantly, this view of development also demonstrates that the two aspects of the capacity to relate need not go together: there is some latitude between them. It is precisely that
latitude, the space opened up by emotional availability as precondition for a telling about, that indicates the situation and the function of what I will explain as the potential space. It is the space where the willingness to become involved in a personal relationship creates the possibility to produce new meaning. Here, I propose to approach the traumatic pain implied in the disruption or the absence of that potential space in terms of the double meaning of the capacity to relate. Hence, a doubled discursive silence surfaces: a silence that bears upon a (caregiver-induced) relational competence and a silence that bears upon a (culture-induced) representational competence. In interfering with the performative (affective) and constative aspects of communication, these two aspects of silencing parallel the difference between interpersonal and transpersonal communication.

I claim that a doubled silence is first manifested in concrete, but unverbalizable feelings. Accordingly, the undifferentiated, unnamable feelings of distress triggered by the reading of Perec’s autohistory were my initial response to this doubled incapacity to relate. Hence, I also claim that the interpretation of a text – every semiotic object – can be compared, albeit not identified, with a developmental process. The process starts with unspecified feelings that need to be acted upon, i.e. to produce energetic and logical interpretants, in order to become meaningful; moreover, this first interpretive step is effected by the general affective load or the mood of the text. The second step brings these feelings in connection to, or associates them with mental images, triggered by textual figurations; it facilitates the empathic imagination of “how it feels like to be like.” The last step leads to the logic conclusions that are made possible by connecting feelings and images with verbal thought; these thought processes are structured by the overall, temporal and spatial organization of a text – whether of narrative, argumentative, or other nature.

Retrospectively, I interpret my feelings of distress raised by the reading of W as the effect of the overall rhetoric of gaps, including the absence of affects. These feelings gain meaning by associating them with the images of powerless and isolated children invoked by the imaginative power of the “W” tale. Because this empathic imagination adds an affective load to the complex web of Perec’s doubled telling, the reading has become an embodied practice. The three previous chapters perform these interpretative steps in reverse order, because I first functioned as a puzzling reader, then as an imaginative and empathic one, and, finally, as a reader with “mere” feelings. These feelings made me realize that the annihilation implied in traumatization involves a disembodied subject, a living dead.
The layered constellation of the reading attitudes thus underscores the notion that affective reading requires a subject who can translate her affective sensitivity into both embodied imagination and verbal thought and who is aware of her own emotion habits that resonate through every reading process. Moreover, the nested constellation of reading positions stimulates the understanding that traumatic pain is a relational concept, pertaining to both emotional isolation and social exclusion. The question of “whose pain?” is an appeal to the relational capacity of readers. This does not mean that the question should remain undecidable by definition. It suggests that an empowering relationship is needed; only such a relationship can create the space where new narratives can be made together. The next chapter will demonstrate how the primary narrator of a text, a filmmaker in this case, enacts such a relationship and creates such a space.