

ONE

Blood Sacrifice in Ancient Greece and Aztec America

THEATRE WAS BORN from ritual in ancient Greece, or so the old story goes, fixing that mirror in a particular choral frame.¹ But theatre—as the embodiment of the Other while others watch—was also part of ritual before it became a distinct art form.² Ritual sacrifice shows this theatrical side in the presentation of an oblatory agent, whether animal or human, to incarnate the desire of the Other, as impersonator of the god and/or as the god's food, for the sake of audience communion. In Richard Boothby's Lacanian view, sacrifice "recapitulates on the level of ritual practices the original sacrifice of every human being—that of separating from the mother by renouncing the security, comfort, and satisfaction of her body" ("Altar-Egos" 59). But I would argue that such ego separation, sacrificing maternal symbiosis (in the Lacanian "mirror stage"), is precisely the theatrical impulse within ritual: the separating of a distinct Thespian "actor" from choral performers and spectators, which defines the historical emergence of theatre as distinct from Dionysian ritual.

Theatre seems to be born out of ritual, yet continues to bear the potential return to a communal womb—because theatrical phylogeny extends the recapitulation of psychological ontogeny in ritual sacrifice. Like the infant separating from its mother's body in order to become an individual ego, yet carrying that primordial experience and Oedipal temptation within the mind throughout childhood and into adulthood, theatre reimagines its historical birth in each performance: acting out the return to ritual or the distancing of character and audience. (The theories of Antonin Artaud and Bertold Brecht exemplify these contradictory directions in modern theatre, pushing beyond the normative morals of communal rites and ego freedoms to an ethics of further sacrifice either way.) A

look at the theatre within ritual, not just the ritual within theatre, illuminates the persistent temptation of sacrificial desire and the potential for its cathartic clarification, in theatre's progressive separation from, yet cyclical return to its (m)Other. The rites of blood sacrifice behind Western theatre's beginnings in Greece, and beside its colonial edges in Mexico, can reveal something of the Real today: the sacrificial *chora* (space of becoming) in stage and screen illusions of a "mass audience" and the hero's transcendent individualism.

THEATRE WITHIN RITUAL

In ancient Greece the move from ritual sacrifice to more theatrical forms of performance involved a shift in the focus of collective aggression.³ Instead of an animal as sole "scapegoat," sacrificed to please the divine audience,⁴ to interpret life plots (with a priest reading its open entrails), and to stimulate primal emotions in earthly spectators (with a bloody display and communal meal), the human body became the focus of sacrifice in theatre.⁵ However, the festival of Dionysus, as primary setting for the development of theatre, continued to involve rites of animal sacrifice. In fact, the sacrificial altar was located approximately forty yards behind the *skene* (stage house) doors of the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, on the hillside of the Acropolis (Wiles, *Tragedy* 57). "Here on the altar many bulls would have been slaughtered and their innards roasted whilst the dithyrambs were danced. The performance [onstage and in the orchestra] is physically located between the god [the statue of Dionysus in the theatre auditorium] and the sacrifice in his honour . . ." (58). By staging violence through the human drama onstage, as well as the animal bloodshed behind it, the Greeks also returned to the cannibal origins of animal sacrifice in the myths and cults of Dionysus: figuratively tearing apart and eating the character represented by the actor onstage.⁶ While human sacrifice within the theatre took place as a fiction, behind the doors of the *skene* or in some other offstage space, a Dionysian chorus evoked the primal emotions of *sparagmos*⁷ through their song and dance, between the audience and the hidden drama, stimulating the play of violence in spectators' imaginations. Thus, like a movie sound track today, the choral music mediated the eventual display of violated bodies through an *ekkuklema* (wagon bearing a corpse) or bloody mask (as with Oedipus' blinded eyes).⁸

Prior to and during the invention of theatre as a distinct art form, Greek animal sacrifice involved many theatrical elements. Typically, the human participants wore symbolic costumes and ornamentation. Travel to the place of violence was staged as a choral procession with flute accompaniment⁹ (as in the theatre orchestra). The sacrificial animal participated in the costumed, choral procession, "likewise decorated and transformed—bound with fillets, its horns covered with gold" (Burkert, *Homo Necans* 3). In fact, the perfor-

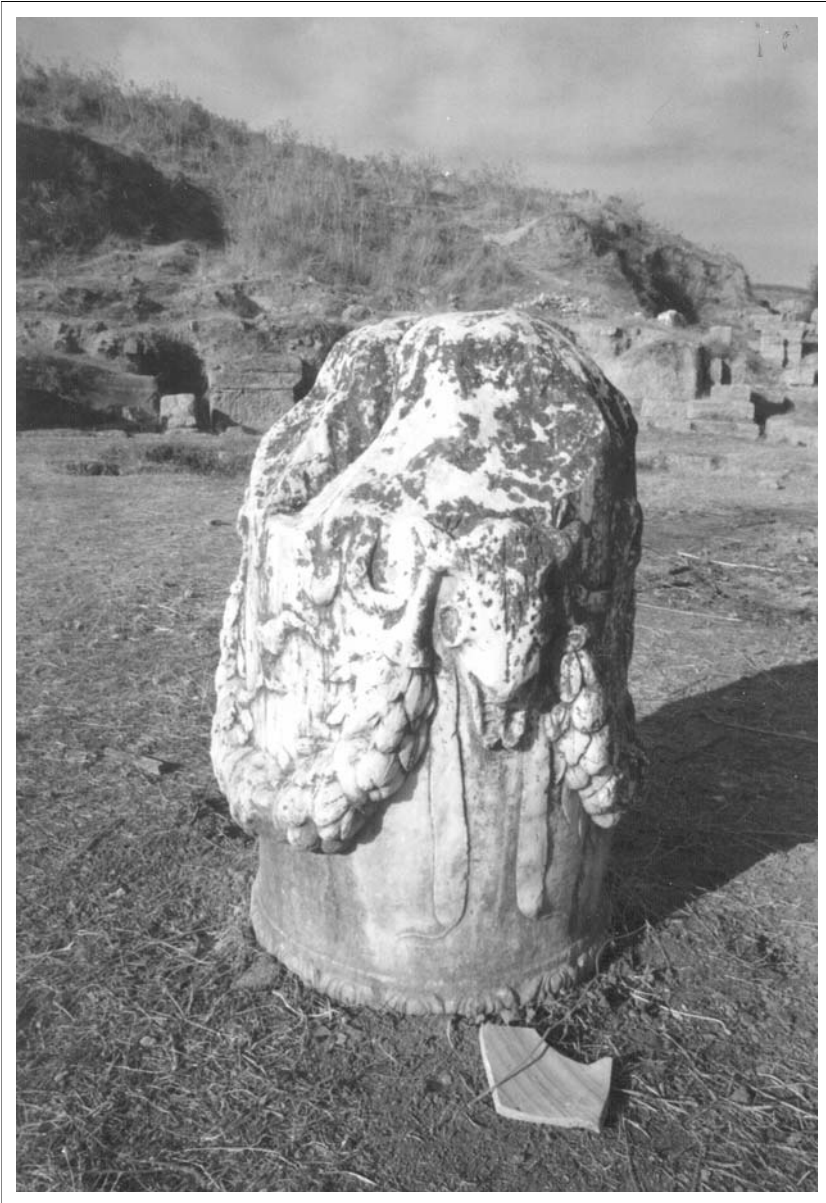


FIGURE 1.1. An ancient sacrificial altar, probably showing the garlanded bull offered at the festival of Dionysus. This altar is currently placed in the ruins of the Greek theatre at Corinth, but did not originally reside there. The photo, courtesy of Clifford Ashby, also appears in his book *Classical Greek Theatre* (University of Iowa Press, 1999).

mance of the animal en route to the sacrifice bore special significance. Apparent willingness or compliance to be sacrificed evidenced the participation of a divine director as well, “of a higher will that commands assent” (4).

At the destined site, the major set piece was, of course, the sacrificial altar. But the sacred space of performance included the spectator-participants, through special gestures and props: “the sacrificial basket and water jug . . . [were] carried around the assembly, thus marking off the sacred realm from the profane” (Burkert, *Homo Necans* 4). The spectators’ direct involvement as collaborative actors in the rite (more than in Greek theatre) was also expressed by a ritual washing of hands. The lead actor, the sacrificial animal, was sprinkled with water, too. Its response of a bowed head signified its agreement to take on the primary role in the life and death drama about to be played out. The heroic animal, its human chorus, and the sacred setting were more aggressively joined through the next communal gesture: “unground barley grains” were taken from the basket and thrown at the scapegoat, at the altar, and at the earth. Another prelude to the violent climax came then as the choral leader cut a lock of hair from the animal’s forehead and threw it into the sacrificial fire (5).

Each of these scenes increased the binding of human and animal in the fate that awaited the latter. At the ultimate moment of surrogate martyrdom, the women in the sacrificial chorus underscored the plot’s climax (and the stage edge *chora*) with “a piercing scream” (Burkert, *Homo Necans* 5). The final acts then involved certain vital props produced from the dying body, further dramatizing the mortal/immortal cycle: the blood was caught in a bowl and sprinkled on the altar stone; the heart, “sometimes still beating,” was placed upon the altar as well; lobes of the liver were used for prophecy; and the rest of the flesh was turned into a communal meal, after roasting on the sacrificial fire (6). The bones were put on the altar, along with certain pieces of flesh, to be consumed by fire and the gods. The skull, however, was “preserved in the sacred place as permanent evidence of the act of consecration.” The skin was sold to purchase another victim or other votive offerings (of wine and cakes) for the next performance (7).

These details of a typical sacrifice of a goat, ox, or bull illustrate a specific sense of theatricality, of playing with individual and social identity, life and death, violence and consumption—in Greek rituals of Homeric times and at festivals later on, including the City Dionysia, where European theatre emerged as an art form. Recently, William Morgan and Per Brask have argued that theatre evolves out of ritual practices in various societies like a superior biological species, “temporarily coexist[ing] with the ancestral species from which it has evolved” (190).¹⁰ They even find a Machiavellian aim behind such a plot: theatre supplanted ritual in ancient Greece and Aztec Mexico (their prime examples): “as a preferred non-physically coercive means of exercising social control, through thought control” (194). This new device of

theatre, in their view, emerged “from a need perceived by authorities in state societies, to address potentially socially disruptive issues in such a manner as to render their subjects passive” (190–191).

However, there are many dimensions to the theatricality of sacrifice in ritual and in art. Theatre did not begin as a new, superior species, evolving beyond former ritual performances (a theory that suggests the hubris of European imperialism as well as social Darwinism). While theatre often functions as a safety valve for mimetic violence, it is not merely a form of societal control, rendering the scapegoat, chorus, and spectators as passive victims.¹¹ Instead, theatre extends the perverse elements already present in ritual orthodoxy, entertaining a dynamic struggle of diverse desires and questions, about politics and metaphysics, through varying degrees of active submission and violent rebellion.¹² The development of theatre in ancient Greece thus signifies a more individualistic sense of identity, against the communal womb, culminating (two millennia later) in modern egoism and postmodern split-subjectivity, with new rites of submission and rebellion involving the film and TV screens.

Multiple characteristics of theatre within ritual can be revealed by comparing Greek and Aztec practices as to: (1) the offering of a sacrificial animal or human as lead actor, as divine food incarnating the mortal and immortal character of the god; (2) the staging of violent desires and fears through certain settings, costumes, props, and actions; and (3) the collective focus of political and sacred energy in the fetishized victim, at the stage edge between this world and others. In both ancient Greece and pre-conquest Mexico, unlike modern Euro-American society, the other worlds of the supernatural and the afterlife, of gods and ghosts, were not far offstage from the ordinary and the mortal. In fact, sacred and secular performance practices were often intermixed. But this also helps to show the significance of a theatrical view in many kinds of rituals, sacred and secular, from ancient to modern, from stage to screen violence today. While it may be easier to condemn Aztec human sacrifice as inhumane and completely different from fictional violence, it is far more insightful to perceive certain parallels to our own time, through the Greek mirrors of theatre and ritual.

TRANSCENDENTAL SAVAGERY

The conquering Spanish were shocked to learn that the civilization of the Aztecs, with its monumental architecture, complex artwork, and imperial organization, practiced regular human sacrifices on a mass scale along with ritual cannibalism. The Dominican priest Diego Durán wrote an extensive study of Aztec festivals. He wanted to warn fellow missionaries that pagan practices and beliefs, as works of the Devil, were continuing covertly in their own time, a half-century after the Spanish Conquest.¹³ Durán, though born

in Spain, grew up in the New World and learned Nahuatl (the Aztec language) at an early age. He did not witness the Aztec rituals he describes, but interviewed Amerindians who had been firsthand spectators. Durán's study was not published in his lifetime,¹⁴ but it offers a valuable view for us today (along with the similar work of Bernardino de Sahagún)¹⁵ to see through the European abhorrence of human sacrifice and cannibalism, into the repression, yet expression of such desires in Euro-American theatre as well as Aztec rites.¹⁶

Cannibalism was also a horror to the ancient Greeks. They considered it to be the practice of mythic monsters and primitive gods—or of barbarians and savages far outside Greek civilization. “For although Greek society rejected cannibalism utterly, yet, by virtue of what it did have to say about it, it compelled dissident individuals and groups to express their rejection of society in terms of this very form of illicit consumption” (Detienne, “Between” 217).¹⁷ Dismemberment (*sparagmos*), eating raw flesh (*omophagia*), and cannibalism were central themes in the myth of Dionysus, in Dionysian cult practices, and in related political rebellions against the Greek state at the time of theatre's emergence.¹⁸ Dionysian cannibalism was, in current theoretical terms, the abject *chora* (Kristeva), the carnivalesque (Bakhtin), the extimate Other (Lacan)—perversely outside, yet central to the institution of theatre as social control: “the Dionysiac movement, while maintaining ‘transcendence through savagery’ as an ideal, remained an essential part of the religion of the *polis*. It was always opposed, but always *inside*” (Detienne, “Between” 225).

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Aztecs had transformed the practice of human sacrifice, dismemberment, and cannibalism into ceremonial expressions of their civilization, displaying that inside element of transcendence through regular theatrical rites.¹⁹ Although the Aztecs performed various types of poetic drama, farce, and acrobatic entertainment,²⁰ their ritual use of the bodies, hearts, and skins of war captives and slaves—as sacrificial actors, props, and costumes incarnating various gods—shows even more about the Other within the theatre of the Old World and the New.²¹ During monthly festivals throughout the Aztec calendar,²² the tragic drama of human sacrifice was displayed, in ritual performances centered in temple courtyards,²³ but also moving throughout the city (like medieval European theatre). Though not bound within a single festival or stage space, the theatre of Aztec ritual was nevertheless highly structured: in casting, rehearsals, preludes, props, costumes, settings, performance spaces, symbolic gestures, and the positioning of certain members of the audience as a chorus.

For example, the slave actor who was disguised as the god Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror)²⁴ received careful training and stage direction for a full year prior to the ultimate sacrifice. He was costumed, according to Durán,²⁵ “in the complete attire and insignia of the deity,” given that divine character's name,

and worshipped by the highest levels of society for months (126). “The man to be sacrificed dwelt in the most sacred chamber of the temple; there he ate and drank; there the lords and the principal men came to revere and serve him.” This actor as god walked throughout the city, creating a sacred parade—comparable to that attending the Greek sacrificial animal, but over an extended period of time. Aztec lords and dignitaries accompanied the god-actor (*teotl ixiptla*)²⁶ like a Greek theatre chorus, surrounding its sacrificial hero, with the entire city as orchestra and stage, although in pre-conquest Mexico it was the divine character himself who played a flute, drawing spectators of all classes, genders, and ages. “Women with children in their arms came out, placing the little ones before him, greeting him like a deity, and this was done by most of the people” (126–127).

The god-actor was caged at night, says Durán, “to prevent his escape” (127). On the fatal day, at the climax of the ritual drama, with spectators gathered in the temple courtyard, four priests grasped the hands and feet of the god-actor, holding him across the sacrificial stone, while a fifth priest “opened his chest and extracted his heart, raising it with his hand as high as he could, offering its steam to the sun” (106–107). The extracted heart (perhaps still beating)²⁷ was then thrown into the face of “the idol”²⁸ and the rest of the body was rolled down the temple steps. Thus, a slave, from the lowest class in Aztec society, was raised to the highest level, worshipped as a god by priests and nobles, and ultimately transformed into immortal food, performing his final role literally “from the heart.”

In his contemporaneous study, the Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagún gives further details on the casting and performance of the divine actor. Certain captive warriors (probably taken during ritual battles with neighboring city-states)²⁹ were selected and trained as “slaves” to eventually impersonate the god Tezcatlipoca (64).³⁰ Sahagún reports many specific casting priorities, as remembered by his indigenous witnesses. Intelligence and physical ability were important for the dance and flute training, but most important of all was beauty.³¹ To play a god the actor had to be “slender like a reed; long and thin like a stout cane; well-built; not of overfed body, and neither very small nor exceedingly tall.” Sahagún continues more poetically: “[He was] like something smoothed, like a tomato, or like a pebble, as if hewn of wood.” The ideal actor’s teeth “were like seashells, well arrayed in order” (65). But Sahagún also gives a long list of disqualifying defects: specific imperfections of hair, skin, head, forehead, eyelids, eyes, cheeks, nose, lips, tongue, manner of speech, teeth, neck, chin, ears, back, hands, stomach, navel, buttocks, and thighs (64–65). Like today’s mass-media stars, the Aztec *ixiptla* had to keep the right shape while playing the god, or else take a crash diet: “if they noted that his body became even a little fat, they made him drink brine, so that he became thin; the salt water thinned him, so that he became lean; he became hard; his flesh became firm” (66).



FIGURE 1.2. The Aztec heart sacrifice, as illustrated in Sahagún's sixteenth-century *Florentine Codex*. Courtesy of the University of Utah Press.

How did the Aztecs compel their star actors to play the ultimate sacrificial role³²—like the ancient Greek animal nodding its assent to be slaughtered? There were certain rewards for the Aztec actor, as he gave his yearlong performance of a lifetime. He lost his human character (before losing his life), but gained an immortal identity—through costuming, performance gestures, and the desires of his audience.³³ The emperor Moctezuma, according to Sahagún, adorned the *ixiptla* “in great pomp with all costly articles, which he caused to be placed upon him; for verily he took him to be his beloved god” (66). Black makeup “anointed” him. The “soft down of eagles” was put in his hair, “which fell to his loins.” And he was given a crown of “sweet-smelling flowers” that flowed down over his shoulders. He wore gold pendants and bracelets, turquoise “ear plugs,” a snail shell “lip plug,” and a breast ornament of white seashells (67). The golden bells placed on his legs jingled as he walked in sandals made of “ocelot skin ears.”

However, after fasting and walking around publicly in this divine costume for some time, the actor performed a transitional gesture, a prelude to his own dismemberment, scattering the costume pieces “in various places” (Sahagún 67). Then, twenty days prior to his final performance, he was given four women to enjoy as his wives,³⁴ the hair cut of a warrior captain, and a new “heron feather ornament.” On his last day as god and human being, the actor playing Tezcatlipoca, with his wives “consoling him,” traveled by canoe to a certain beach and temple (68). There “he ascended by himself” the temple steps, “of his free will, to the place where he was to die,” shattering on the first step his flute and other tragic props—showing the drama of life’s beauty and death’s victory.

After his death, the actor’s body parts functioned as further ritual props, expressing the tragicomic paradox of death in life and life in death. His heart, the “precious eagle-cactus fruit,”³⁵ and his blood, “most precious water,” were vital resources to Aztec society. They nourished the sun on its dangerous journey through the land of the dead (in the bowels of the earth), enabling its otherwise uncertain resurrection each morning.³⁶ The actor’s severed head also gained further symbolic life. Pierced at the temples, it was strung with others on the Aztec skull rack,³⁷ so that, as Sahagún puts it, “he ended in the adornment in which he died” (68).

This viewpoint of a sixteenth-century Franciscan ethnologist, collating the memories of Amerindian spectators,³⁸ reveals an uncanny connection to the postmodern sense of character (and gender) as social construction. One is more and more aware, in the hypertheatre of postmodern life, that identity develops through the desire of the Other. “You are what others see in you,” rather than “I think, therefore I am.” In Aztec society, the son of a nobleman could lose his high status if he failed to perform on the battlefield (Clendinnen, “Cost” 50);³⁹ people of various classes could slip into slavery if their debts became too great (Durán 281). Yet, a slave or a captive warrior

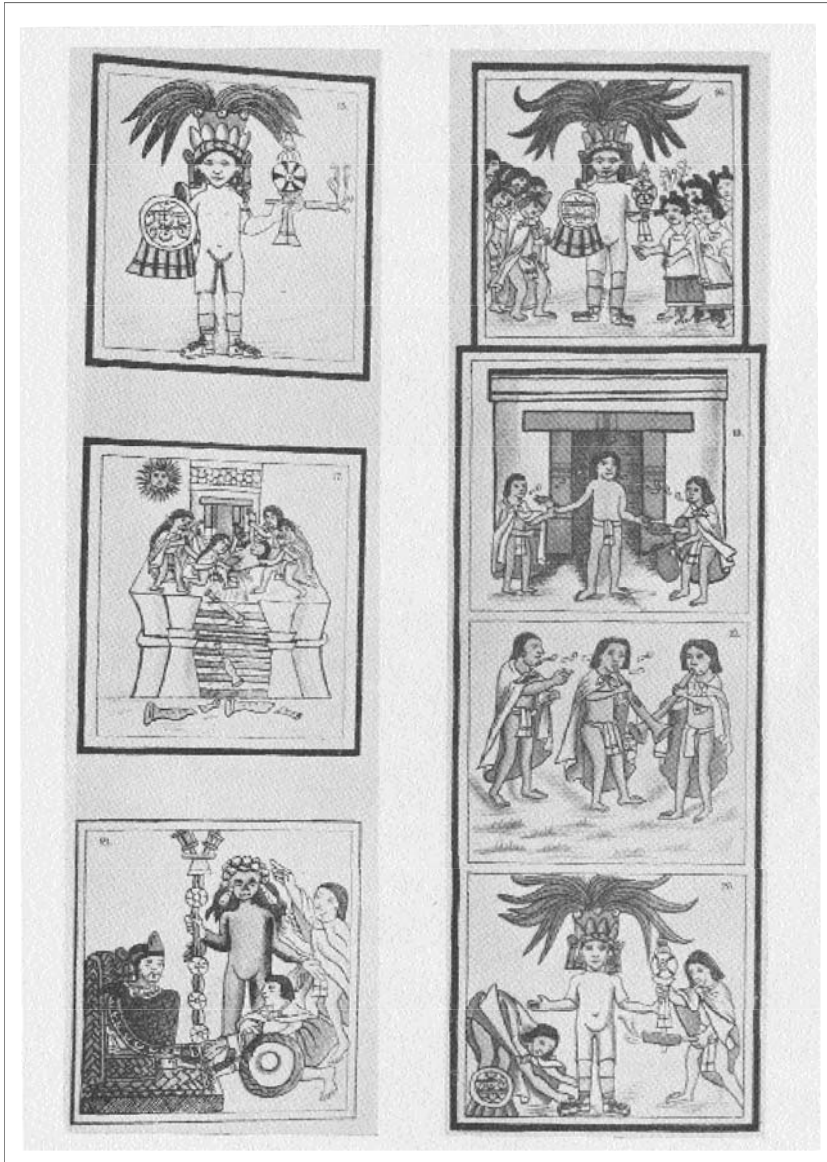


FIGURE 1.3. Illustrations of the Aztec festival of Toxcatl from Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*. On the left (from top to bottom): the god-actor portraying Tezcatlipoca, the heart sacrifice at the temple after the god-actor has broken his flute on its steps, and the god-actor appearing before the emperor. On the right: the people as audience around the god-actor, the god-actor in training as singer and flute player, and the god-actor being worshipped. Courtesy of the University of Utah Press.

could transcend all social classes, his body parts becoming immortal relics, by acting a certain role for the sacred entertainment of others watching.

Ancient Greek theatre sublimated its cannibal impulses in the fictional sacrifice of a tragic hero, dismembered plotwise through fatal pressure applied to a flaw in character. This metaphorical bloodshed of the hero's mask, in its tragic fall through the emotions of choral communion, was thus related to the political as well as religious shedding of actual human blood. The Aztecs more directly sacrificed warriors taken in battle, after costuming and rehearsing⁴⁰ them as god-actors. But the Greeks used their own warriors in training, young adult males (beardless *ephebes*), who performed their marching orders as the choral actors of tragic drama. These "billy goat singers" (*tragoidoi*), whether portraying male or female characters, young or old, according to different scripts, exemplified the political containment of Dionysian ambiguity in their rectangular, rank and file dancing in the orchestra circle.⁴¹ And yet, they also show the ritual release of sacrificial energy and potential human bloodshed—especially when compared with the warriors in Aztec rites. Both cultures, despite many differences in performance tastes, focused their theatrical rituals on the interplay of mortal identity and social aggression, on the human body in violent, transformative display.

ALTAR-EGOS AND BODY PARTS

Despite the popular belief today in Euro-American individualism and social mobility, our personal characters and life plots are fated to a great degree by circumstances of birth,⁴² formative events, and the desires of others that we absorb—through immediate contact and through the mass media. A special few of us, with the right looks and talents, are cast as celebrities. They are given godlike status for a time, yet are inevitably sacrificed as their mortal lives depart too much from their immortal images onscreen. This shows us, in extremis, our own fatal masks, although the screens of film and TV also help us to forget our fates and masks.

Striking parallels can be found between today's media stars, reflecting ego ideals in the mass audience, and the sacrificial actors of ancient Greece or pre-conquest Mexico, incarnating the fate of spectators' mortal bodies and immortal desires. Not only the Greek actors playing out the original Oedipal triangle or other family tragedies, but also the young warriors in training who acted as their chorus—both performed a rite of sacrifice expressing personal dramas and social duties through the sufferings of mythic characters. Aztec warriors also became actors, performing as gods, after being captured and before being sacrificed. While today's onscreen egos appear to declare an

I borrow the pun in the title of this section from the title of Richard Boothby's essay, where he gives a very useful application of Lacan toward a general theory of sacrifice.

independence from this stage history of ritual submission, communal sacrifice, and tragic fate, a look at that heritage behind the screen shows parallel structures in the mirror stage theatrics of prior civilizations.

In both ancient Greece and prequest Mexico, ritual theatre functioned like a collective mirror stage, replaying the “drama” that Lacan describes of the infant before the mirror and (m)Other’s eyes (*Écrits* 4). Like the child’s ideal image in the mirror, contradicting its experience of a “fragmented body” and of “dehiscence at the heart of the organism” (2),⁴³ mythic imagos of Greek and Aztec performers appeared to transcend the fictional *sparagmos* onstage or actual dismemberment at the altar by fully acting out the Other’s desire. The living actor’s masked and costumed form—plus, in the Aztec case, the dead performer’s heart, skull, and skin—became immortal images and symbolic props reflecting, surviving, and sustaining the Real violence within the viewers and their societies.⁴⁴ Paradoxically, the actor framed and cut in the mirror of Greek or Aztec ritual theatre became both a whole and broken icon, imaging the transcendent, godlike ego and its *corps morcelé*.

The Real fragmentation behind the mirrors of ritual performance took place not only at the edges of stage and altar, but also in the “mass audience.” The yearly festival to the Greek god Dionysus (through which the art of theatre emerged) and the monthly festivals to various Aztec gods (all of which involved human sacrifice) were major civic events in ancient Athens and prequest Tenochtitlan, attended by most, if not all the citizenry. Like today’s daily ritual of TV news crime scenes, or weekly dramas displaying graphic violence, these performances expressed the destructive fears and desires of the social body—the carnivalesque passions of a collective *chora*—while also confirming the images and symbols, faces and props, of the Other’s moral authority.

There are certainly great differences between the Greek or Aztec mass audience and today’s, not only in relation to technology, but also regarding the Euro-American ideal of ego independence, mirrored onscreen. Greek and Aztec characters (or ritual actors) showed their audiences a conditional sense of identity responding to a predetermined plot. As Sophocles’ *Oedipus, the King* demonstrates, a Greek hero could not escape the rule of fate that was embedded in his character by his parents’ desires, even if he and they were forewarned through oracles. In the more oracular and apocalyptic culture of the Aztecs, the past always repeated in the future and all males of the nobility were destined for war. Thus, their well maintained verbal history (with no written language) was itself an oracle and the ideal fate for each newborn son of the ruling class was to die in battle or as a captured warrior sacrificed by another city-state.⁴⁵ The Aztecs even developed a ritual form of warfare, the “flower wars,” in which the purpose was to capture enemy bodies, alive and unscathed, for future sacrifice.

At the birth of a male, the Aztec midwife greeted this little “captive” with war cries. Then the mother, who was considered a “warrior” in her battle to give birth, would hear the midwife say to the infant:

thy home is not here . . . here is only the place of thy nest, thy cradle, thy cradle blanket, the resting place of thy head . . . Thou belongest out there . . . Thou hast been sent into warfare. War is thy desert, thy task. Thou shalt give drink, nourishment, food to the sun, the lord of the earth.
(Quoted in Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 175)

The Aztec ego, male and female, was strictly shaped by social and cosmic law: the child was merely on loan to his mother until the social drama of the sun’s desire climaxed in each warrior’s death on the battlefield—or dismemberment at the sacrificial altar. “Perhaps thou wilt receive the gift, perhaps thou wilt merit death by the obsidian knife.”

This fatalism might seem very foreign to today’s mass-media spectator, who is given the illusion of being directly addressed in his or her own home by the luminous figures on the TV screen—and of having a godlike (remote) control over their presence, while choosing from many other egos on numerous channels to mirror the viewer’s power and freedom. But the TV (and computer) screen has become the primary baby-sitter and myth-conveying midwife to millions of children in America and around the world, saying to each child: your identity “belongest out there” in the media marketplace. A century ago Freud found the key to the modern ego in the ancient Greek drama of Oedipus. Similarly, we might glimpse an uncanny, extimate truth⁴⁶ about our postmodern subjectivity in the alien mirrors of Mesoamerican sacrificial identity.

FROM SOLAR TO PROSCENIUM MIRRORS

Even when an Aztec warrior was victorious—bringing home a live prisoner to be sacrificed at the temple—the captor’s family mourned his future death. After the prisoner was sacrificed at the temple altar, his flesh was sent to the captor’s home, cooked in a maize stew, and ritually eaten by the captor’s family. Then they pasted feathers on the captor, “because he had not died there in war, but was yet to die, and would pay his debt. Hence his blood relations greeted him with tears and encouraged him” (Sahagún 48).⁴⁷ The still living, victorious warrior was identified with the dismembered and consumed captive, who had been likewise pasted with feathers before the sacrifice. The victor himself did not eat the captive’s flesh, expressing instead his identification with the enemy warrior as sacrificial food: “Shall I, then, eat my own flesh?” (52).

He did, however, wear the flayed skin of the captive (thus impersonating the specific god the victim had played) as did other victorious warriors at the festival of Tlacaxipeualiztli.⁴⁸ “Each one of the captors came forth from his

house, and appeared in and went wearing the [captive's] skin. . . . So [foul] did they smell [that verily] the stench wounded the head" (Sahagún 56).⁴⁹ The victor also displayed his captive's thighbone on a pole in the courtyard of his home. He costumed the thighbone with a "sleeveless knotted cord jacket and a small spray of heron feathers"—creating, in effect, a puppet actor of immortality out of his victim's remains. "And he wrapped the thigh bone with paper, and provided it a mask. And this was called the god-captive" (57).⁵⁰

What drama was being performed by these ritual practices—at birth, at the sacrificial altar, and at the captor's family home?⁵¹ As is generally known today, the main rationale for Aztec human sacrifice was to feed the sun, lest it fail to rise again each morning. But certain Aztec origin myths reveal further mirror-stage meanings behind this rationale. Whether a god-actor or a child was being sacrificed,⁵² whether a mass execution of hundreds of captured warriors or the individual identification of live captor and dead captive was being performed, these rituals mirrored the primal myth of the gods' own sacrifices to energize the sun. (Each rite also mirrored specific characteristics of the god honored by it). The Real death and dismemberment of human bodies became the imaginary restaging of divine sacrifice at the creation of the Aztec sun, reconfirming the fragile symbolic orders of both nature and culture.

According to various Aztec myths, the gods sacrificed themselves—after the creation and destruction of four previous suns and races of humans—in order for the fifth, the current sun, to rise over the Aztec empire.⁵³ In the myth, two gods sacrificed themselves by diving into the creative fire. Thus, the fifth sun was born, but it would not move. Other gods then agreed to offer their lives, too, giving the fifth sun movement. One of the primary Aztec divinities, Quetzalcoatl,⁵⁴ cut out the hearts of these gods with a sacrificial knife—just as the human priest does to each captured warrior playing the role of a god. According to the myth, the dead gods' clothes were then gathered in sacred bundles, to be worshipped by the new race of humans under the new sun (Taube 44). This mythical detail also relates to the ritual use of a divine costume in the god-actor's various performances, from temple rehearsals to musical processions in the city streets, to his final act on the sacrificial altar, as well as the postmortem performance of his skin (worn by his captor) and of his costumed and masked thigh bone, in the home and neighborhood theatres.

From our own theoretical seats today, the mirror of the Aztec stage and its solar orientation offers a new view of the Euro-American tradition of proscenium theatre (and its relation to cinema and television). The imaginary sacrifice of the gods, reincarnated by real human actors, fuels the symbolic order of the sun's rising and setting over the Aztec empire. This solar, cosmological framework of Aztec ritual theatre provides a stark contrast to the secular, proscenium frame of early modern, European theatre—which was

eventually imposed upon the Aztecs, along with medieval stagings of religious dramas and open-air mock battles, by the Spanish conquerors (Harris, *Aztecs*). Prior to the Conquest, Aztec society clung to the symbolic order of the “fifth sun,” believing that the current solar frame was doomed to die like the four before it, yet continuing to maintain it anyway, on the life-support system of human sacrifice. Meanwhile, Europeans moved toward a human-centered, scientific theatre, onstage and in politics—though that also meant mass sacrifices (especially with the Spanish Inquisition). The symbolic order of a more humanist, sixteenth-century theatre was seen in the Cartesian coordinates of the proscenium frame and wings, producing a central vanishing point through perspective painting techniques. This new technology of performance exhibited the self-confidence of Renaissance science to conquer space by framing illusions of infinite distance and by using *trompe l’oeil* scenery to create a moving picture onstage. First, there was Torelli’s chariot and pole system, which could simultaneously change one series of flats for another, magically transforming the view. Then, there was the Bibienas’ baroque technique of *scena per angolo*, with multiple vanishing points painted in the perspective scenery, drawing the spectator’s eyes towards various directions of infinity. Thus, our modern, cinematic illusions of ego power—with the spectator’s view moving through space and cutting between camera angles—began to take shape in the proscenium mirrors of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European theatre. The beginnings of a cinematic imagination can also be found in Shakespeare’s poetics on a bare stage with spoken décor (Lehmann). But it becomes even more apparent, as a new illusion of godlike transcendence through human sacrifice, from ancient and medieval to Renaissance staging devices.

While Renaissance theatre architecture, like neoclassical drama, ostensibly imitated classical Greek and Roman models, distinctive structures emerged in new symbolic directions. Ancient Greek theatre had been performed in the open air. Its *theatron* (the “seeing place”) was cut into a hillside. Its orchestra (the place of the chorus) was a flat circle of earth with an altar at the center. And its *skene* (the scene house) was initially a temporary shelter in which actors could change costumes and masks before emerging for a new scene. Eventually, the Hellenistic Greeks developed a raised stage, separating the actors from the chorus in the orchestra. The framework of Greek performance shifted away from the orchestra, as former ritual threshing floor, and away from the chorus, as bearing the heritage of Dionysian and mother/earth goddess cults. Scenic effects increased onstage as the *skene* became more elaborate—with facades on two levels (the *episkenion* and *proskenion*) and various other spectacular devices. The chorus may even have joined the actors onstage, rather than singing and dancing around the sacrificial altar in the orchestra (Brockett 42–43). And yet, the Greeks still placed their theatre under the sun, performing each tetralogy (the series of three

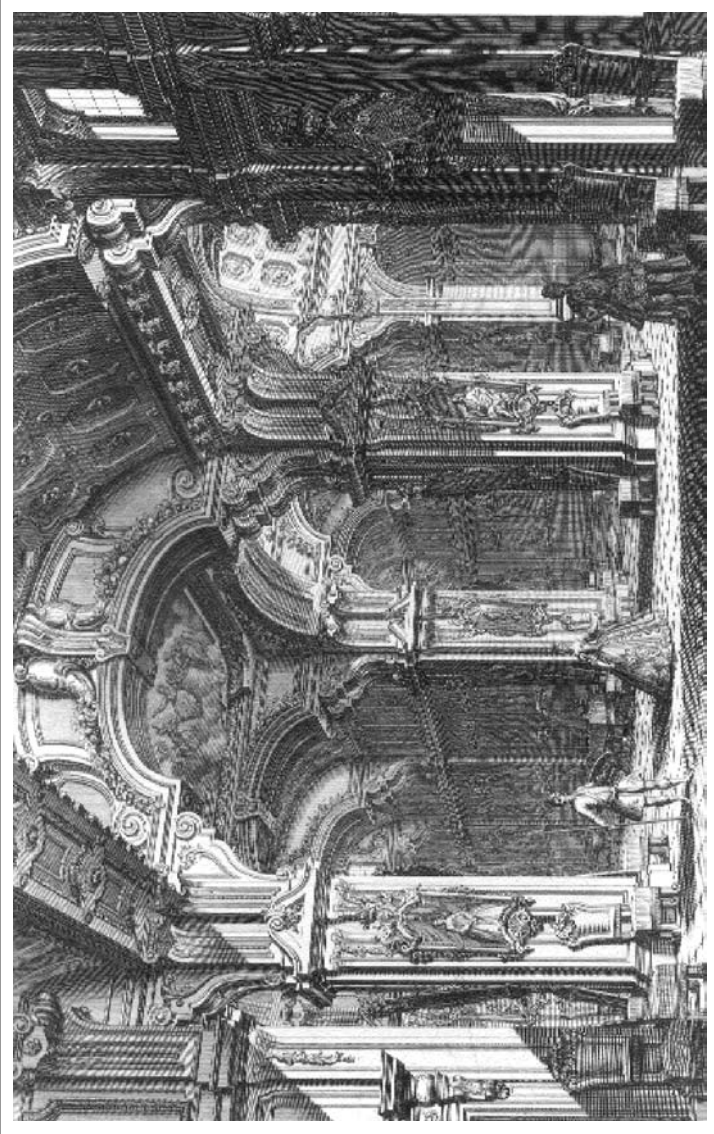


FIGURE 1.4. Baroque opera scene with multiple vanishing points (*scena per angolo*) designed by Giuseppe Galli Bibbiena, 1719. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Elisha Whittelsey Collection, the Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1951. (51.501.2731)

tragedies and a satyr play) from morning till late afternoon (Ashby 118–123), so that the sun's path in the sky formed a natural frame to the stage, along with the earth below it.

The Romans reduced the orchestra to a semicircle in their freestanding, permanent theatres. But they still left an opening to the sky, with an awning to protect spectators from the sun. Medieval theatre also exposed itself to the elements—except when played in the cosmological space of a cathedral. Whether indoors or out, medieval drama staged heaven, earth, and hell, with their respective residents, as intimately associated. However, in the Renaissance (especially in seventeenth-century Italy and France), European theatre changed its relation to natural and supernatural forces, harnessing such perceptual and conceptual energy through new modes of representation. Mythic beings would still appear in intermezzi or masques as decorative entertainments, but they came to reflect human rulers as primary signifiers and social imagos. The sun's frame was replaced by the Cartesian proscenium. The fated tragic hero was supplanted by a Machiavellian *cogito*, then by the Enlightenment man of sentiment, and then by the modern freethinker. These historical steps eventually produced the twentieth-century theatres of cinema and television with their distinctive proscenium frames: focusing the view of a mass audience through illusions of infinity onscreen, as if controlled by the mind's eye. Today, movies and TV offer the spectator a godlike vision, flying through various subjective and objective spaces. But they also fix the viewer's body in a seat at the screen's edge, demanding attention at the vicarious sacrifice, by catching the eye and ear, for the sake of ticket money and commercial offerings.

THE BOTTOM OF THE FRAME

The comparison here with the Aztec ritual stage and its solar order requires a further consideration of the underside of that frame as well. Whereas European theatre, from Greek to Roman to medieval to Renaissance, gradually displaced the forces of myth and nature in favor of human scenic controls, Aztec sacrifice found its *raison d'être* in the sun and the earth. As the logic of another Aztec origin myth shows, ritual sacrifice not only nourished the sun's daily life (and the empire's expanding shadow), but also the earth. In order for water and food to arise from the earth and sustain Aztec life, the earth, like the sun, had to be fed with human blood and hearts. For the earth goddess herself had been dismembered by the gods Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl; they tore her in half to form the earth and the sky. Then the other gods created trees from her hair, grass from her skin, springs and caverns from her eyes, rivers and large caves from her mouth, mountains from her shoulders, and mountain valleys from her nose. Thus piecemeal, the earth monster would continue to cry out each night—as she swallowed the sun and passed

it as sacred excrement in the morning. She would refuse to produce food for humans, the Aztecs believed, unless she was continually fed by human flesh and blood. “It is she who is obsessively represented on the underside of the ritual vessels designed to receive human blood and hearts. Whatever the icons they bear on their upper surfaces, whatever great forces they invoke, underneath she is there, her insatiable maw wide open, great claws at elbows and knees, in the squatting position Aztec women adopted to give birth” (Clendinnen, “Cost” 78).⁵⁵

This monstrous earth mother formed the underside of the Aztec’s solar performance frame, regarding the temple stage as sacred mountain and the prop bowl for human blood. Here the Aztec frame directly shows the sacrificial *corps morcelé* (fragmented body) usually hidden under the proscenium illusions of ego power in Euro-American theatre, film, and television. The Aztec earth monster, Tlaltecuhli (Earth Lord), is both male and female. From a psychoanalytic view, this points to the infant’s fantasy of a phallic mother, who threatens to re-engulf the child (like the earth does to the sun) although giving it birth and sustaining its life.⁵⁶ The phallic mother also seems to dismember the child, when the child develops a separate sense of itself and loses her as an extension of its own body, whether through breast weaning and toilet training (Klein) or through symbolic castration and linguistic alienation (Lacan).⁵⁷ Aztec society acted out this fundamental fantasy with the sacrifice of real human bodies, dismembered at the altar and rolled down the temple steps, and with the offering of human blood in a sacred bowl bearing the earth mother’s image.⁵⁸

Preconquest Aztec theatre bears insights, especially in its mythological frame, for our secularized tradition, which has tended, since the European Renaissance, to bury its ritual heritage beneath the illusions of a Thespian ego and Cartesian proscenium. Lacan’s statement, “the gods belong to the field of the real” (*Four* 45), relates in this case to the intimacy of Real sacrifice, mythic dismemberment, and human mortality in the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of Aztec performance—or to the extimacy of that Real at the heart of our own proscenium media. The Aztecs used the imaginary roles of their gods to justify mass sacrifice and thereby expand the symbolic order of their warring, imperialistic culture.⁵⁹ Euro-American mass-media capitalism uses the glamorous roles of film and TV stars to justify, yet hide, the sacrifices of many bodies behind and beyond the screen, as its symbolic order expands through the nearly worldwide popularity of violent dramas and seductive commercials. But that sun will lose its force, too, someday. In the meantime, we may become more wary of our submission to its demands—and find pleasure in the sacrificial roles we inevitably play—through further comparisons of our ritual theatre to that of the Aztecs and ancient Greeks, regarding the postmodern subject, split and multiplied by the mass media.

ANIMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY, PUPPETRY,
AND DANCING HEARTS

C. Fred Alford has recently used Kleinian object relations theory along with Lacanian psychoanalysis to describe parallels between postmodern subjectivity (as split by the Other's desires, beyond the wholeness of the modern ego) and the sense of self in Greek tragedy. Despite historical distance and cultural differences, Greek drama shows what postmodern theory postulates: the lack of autonomous being, as the desire of the Other (of the gods) acts upon and within character,⁶⁰ so that "man is the object, but not the subject, of his own desires" (23). Alford sees this sense of *psyche* within Greek tragedy emerging historically from prior sacrificial blood rites, through a progressive "Dionysian crisis" akin to the healthy shift in human infancy from a paranoid-schizoid stage to that of depressive integration of good and evil object relations (11–12, 50–58, 72–76).⁶¹ These Kleinian stages also relate, in my view, to the melodramatic and tragic paradigms of ritual sacrifice and theatre, from ancient to postmodern. Melodrama onstage and onscreen, like ritual sacrifice, displays a paranoid fear of the monstrous villain (or angry god), a schizoid splitting of good versus evil characters, and a justification for violence in the victim's and hero's sacrifices—the former as abject, the latter as ultimately triumphant. Tragedy, however, when it appears in ancient Greece, in modern theatre, and in postmodern (tragicomic) media screens, shows a more complex, mature stage of depressive integration of good and evil forces in each character, involving its audience in the cathartic clarification, not just purgation, of violent fears and desires. Thus, in Lacanian terms, the spectator may experience, along with the tragic hero, a sacrifice of the sacrifice: a crossing of sacrificial, mimetic repetitions of melodramatic violence and vengeance. This Lacanian sense of tragic sacrifice as cathartic rite of passage offers the ancient and postmodern insight that Alford relates—that one is the object, not the subject of one's desires. But tragic sacrifice also subjectifies the lost cause (of the Other's desire) in the ethics of the Real, so that a change in destructive, symptomatic repetitions can occur. A tragicomic reintegration of postmodern split-subjectivity may be possible, through a reconstruction of fundamental fantasies, not just a (Kleinian) bolstering of the depressive-integrative ego as a mask covering the lack of being and the impossible Real.

This theory will be fully elaborated in the chapters ahead, through dramatic examples from the stage and screen. But a tragic edge can also be found in the melodrama of Aztec human sacrifice, disclosing a rhythmic *chora* of multiple souls in various body parts as properties of the ritual dance, tied to animistic forces in nature and culture.⁶² Such a sense of Aztec "psychology" illuminates further parallels between Greek, Mesoamerican, and postmodern theatres of the mind and society—disturbing the conventional distinctions

between such cultures (or the good and evil oppositions of melodrama), which may mask the Real violence they share.⁶³

In retrospect, the ancient Greeks demonstrated the beginnings of modern ego individualism with their theatrical and democratic experiments. Yet they also show the contrasting edges of postmodern subjectivity—not only with the tragic hero subjected to (objectified by) the Other’s desire, as Alford points out, but also with the schizoid subjectivity of multiple souls in each person’s character. In fact, the belief in multiple souls was common in ancient Greece and among the early Christian theologians. Even Aristotle, who argued for the soul’s unity, defined the vegetative, sensitive, and rational parts of the soul—the first two of which humans shared with plants and animals.⁶⁴ The belief in a single, whole, unfragmented soul, independent of the material body and natural world, and original to each person, only developed gradually in Christian Europe, from the Roman Augustine to the medieval Aquinas to the Renaissance’s Fifth Lateran Council (Furst 6–7).

At a time when the modern, whole soul—and secular ego—reached a crucial codification during the European Renaissance, the Aztecs continued to display a premodern sense of multiple souls in the body and in the body parts of the sacrificial god-actor. These pieces of the Aztec body and soul relate in uncanny ways to today’s dispersion of identity in the very different, virtual realities of postmodern media theatres. We experience a piecemeal sacrifice of body and soul at the film and TV screens, with closeup cuts of stars’ body parts as fetish objects and with the audience’s psychic investment split between numerous images within the drama and through the juxtaposed commercials of TV. Current brain research has also discovered that there is no single center to the mind, no physical seat for the Cartesian ego, but a chorus of various areas working in some degree of harmony (Dennett and Damasio). Such choral harmony (or dissonance) within the brain, according to cognitive science and neurology, along with the postmodern experience of schizoid spectatorship, finds uncanny echoes in Aztec, premodern psychology—through a very different view of cosmic forces tied to other body parts beyond the brain, which were crucial to that culture’s sacrificial theatre.

The Aztecs believed that all social and natural objects shared certain energies. The sun needed the nourishment of *teyolia* to rise each morning after passing through the bowels of the earth and the land of the dead. *Teyolia* was a psychic and cosmic power within the human heart, the force of movement shaping one’s sensibilities and thought patterns.⁶⁵ A god-actor was infused with an “extraordinary amount” of *teyolia* through his or her theatrical performance (Carrasco, *Religions* 69). The extraction of the god-actor’s heart then released *teyolia* to the sun, empowering its morning rise. The earth also cried out at night for nourishment; the earth goddess needed the energy of human and animal blood to produce in return the fruits that nourished man.⁶⁶

But the human head, hair, and blood carried a different animistic power, *tonalli*, which shaped individual temperament and destiny.⁶⁷ These body parts and fluids also became props in the performance of ritual warfare and human sacrifice, increasing the *tonalli* of victorious warriors, of their city, and of the hungry gods (Carrasco, *Religions* 68).⁶⁸ The hair of captured warriors was kept by their captors. The skulls of sacrificed god-actors were strung together on the temple “skull rack.” And their blood was offered to the lips of stone icons. Thus, Aztec sacrificial actors were not just mimetic victims. They became holy objects, before and after death, sacred puppets who absorbed a particular god’s power and personality through symbolic costumes and props.⁶⁹ “It was not men who died, but gods—gods within a corporeal covering that made possible their ritual death on earth. If the gods did not die, their force would diminish in a progressively aging process. Men destined for sacrifice were temporarily converted into receptacles of divine fire” (López Austin 376–377). They then gave the ultimate, cathartic performance. The divine power in these god-actors rejuvenated the sun and earth and all of Aztec culture.⁷⁰ Without that theatre, the Aztecs believed their world would end.

The Aztecs’ sacrificial theatre shows the collective power of performance when it is invested with cosmic and natural, as well as social and psychological meanings—unlike the secular rites of technological magic in film and TV watching today. At their various monthly festivals (each dedicated to a different god), the Aztecs not only cast captured warriors as god-actors, they also created divine puppets out of nonhuman materials. These *ixiptlas*, primarily made out of maize dough, were costumed in the god’s symbolic attire, paraded through the streets, then sacrificed and dismembered at the appropriate temple, like the human *ixiptlas*—with blood from the god-actor sprinkled on the vegetable icon and both at certain points consumed.⁷¹ This view of Aztec ritual reveals, to the postmodern spectator, a revolutionary *chora* of human and material interrelatedness, prior to mirror-stage individualism and Cartesian humanism, but persisting at the premodern heart of those modern illusions. The multiple animistic souls of Aztec psychology, connecting individual minds, social powers, and natural orders, show that the postmodern, schizoid subject is not an entirely new phenomenon. The sensibilities, thought patterns, temperaments, and destinies of our desires (i.e., our *teyolia* and *tonalli*) are channeled today by mass-media consumerism. Thus, like the *chora* of ancient Greek ritual sacrifice, repressed by, yet sometimes erupting through theatre’s Thespian ego, mimetic mirrors, and eventual proscenium frame, Aztec sacrificial god-acting can speak in an uncanny way across the edges of Cartesian frames and screens, from the pre- to the postmodern.⁷²

As Artaud pointed out, early in the history of film: “The human skin of things, the derm of reality—this is the cinema’s first toy” (*Collected* 21). Though he later became disillusioned with film and turned fully toward the ritual element of theatre, Artaud at this point (1927) also found his hope in

cinema: “It does not separate itself from life but returns to the primitive order of things.” If Artaud was right, then cinema and television today bear an even greater potential to reveal the “human skin of things,” like the Aztecs wearing human skins to portray their gods. (Artaud not only read Sahagún, but also traveled to Mexico to commune with the native Tarahumara in 1936.) Usually, however, film and TV idealize actors as godlike puppets without materiality, separating them from real life and encouraging the substitution of such images for life, in the minds of the mass audience. One way to perceive “the derm of reality,” onscreen and off, might be through a return to the “primitive order of things,” by comparing how today’s actors offer their skins for the illusion of transcendence, apparently becoming what the Other desires on millions of screens.⁷³ The Aztec *ixiptla* gave his or her skin as a post-mortem epidermis; current performers give theirs through another technology, while still alive. Yet they also suffer the loss of their ideal, youthful skins, immortalized by the screen media, as their real bodies age—despite the best efforts of plastic surgery. They are thus sacrificed, like the Aztec *ixiptla*, to produce an immortal imago of face and body, in the half-life of the media limelight, for millions of fans to absorb and mimic, with a similar, fatal futility. But the awareness of such collective mirror-stage theatrics, in mass-mediated life today, also relates to the primal perception of hearts and blood, in Greek as well as Aztec performance.

In ancient Greece, as Marcel Detienne describes, the Dionysian maenad’s dance was a “dance of the heart,” a leaping (*pedesis*), “when Terror rose ready to scream and the heart began to leap, to dance to an accompaniment of clacking crotala. The heart stamped its feet on the diaphragm, dancing a wild round on the body’s entrails” (*Dionysos* 57). Dionysian dance, in ancient theatre and cult rites, was a return to the infant’s primal energy. “A newborn is a frenzied little animal, crying and gesticulating without rhyme or reason and imbued with an instinct to jump (*to kata phusin pedan*), always ready to jump or leap. Without this instinct neither rhythm nor harmony would exist” (58). Even today, in the *chora* of stage and screen sacrifice, the spirit of Dionysus recalls the mimetic drama of the mirror stage, between six and eighteen months, when each of us experienced an early climax in the theatre of human lack: caught between the fragmented, leaping, infantile body and the ideal mask of ego reflected in the (m)Other’s eyes. As Detienne puts it: “In Dionysian anthropology, the heart muscle is like an internal maenad in the body of the possessed, constantly leaping within” (59).

Aztec ritual performance removed that dancing heart from its corporeal theatre to show it leaping beyond death, as immortal food for the sun. The heart thus became im-mortal, an object of desire (or Lacanian *objet a*) surviving beyond the death of the body—yet bearing the interdependency of divine, human, and natural worlds. The extracted Aztec heart, like the leaping Greek dancer, expressed the heart within the bodies of the audience as

well: the inaccessible, yet Real beating of life and death together. With such a tragic (or tragicomic) awareness, today's spectators might also realize the mortal, cathartic leaps of their own hearts in the action and music of the drama—rather than simply escaping from life through the pervasive, melodramatic mirrors of stage and screen violence.

CATHARTIC ENCOUNTERS WITH THE REAL

Various Aztec and Greek props exemplify Real elements that might touch us cathartically today, disrupting the imaginary and symbolic simulacrum of media violence and revealing its mimetic, sacrificial pressures. Blood was used by both cultures; it was collected sacrificially from the dying human or animal, then sprinkled upon the altar and specific icons to show the movement of desire between Real bodies (of actors and spectators), imaginary gods, and symbolic demands.⁷⁴ This circulation of blood and desire within the social body also related to the wearing of human or animal skins, in Aztec and Greek performance. (Greek vases show the significance of animal skins in the costuming of satyr and maenad figures, from the mythic Dionysian chorus to its theatrical correlative.) The skin upon the body was a surface form put into play between certain actors, showing the submission of both performers and spectators to the transience of character. The Aztec use of human skulls as ritual props, like the Greek use of sacrificial animal skulls and theatrical masks,⁷⁵ showed the hidden structure of identity transformed into an exoskeleton. The Real of death (as Lacanian *das Ding*) was represented in the skull, which would outlive the living faces onstage and in the audience, becoming an immortal, yet material face—like the mask of mythic character in Greek drama. Unlike the virtual perfection of the made-up or surgically remodeled face of today's movie and TV stars (especially in closeup), the Greek mask and Aztec skull offer a more ethical reminder of the Real of the actor's body decomposing behind it.

This encounter with Real mortality, displayed in the ritual theatres of the Greeks and Aztecs, is the most significant way in which their collective mirror stages can illuminate the transcendent deceptions and symbolic demands of our own. Our culture displays plenty of sacrificial violence onscreen, but usually in order to purge our fears and sympathies, allowing the audience an illusion of transcendence over the suffering of screen characters. We can vicariously participate in the dangerous adventure, yet leave the movie theatre or change the TV channel unscathed. Such simple catharsis may have intoxicated and relieved the ancient Greek audience, too, as a purgative interpretation of Aristotle would attest. Perhaps the Aztec audience also felt a thrill and release of sympathetic fears at the sacrifice of the *ixiptla*.⁷⁶ The scapegoat in each case, whether a Greek tragic hero (with warrior chorus) or a captured Aztec warrior, could be seen as a safety valve,

siphoning off the desire for violence within the community, as René Girard's modern theory insists.⁷⁷ And yet, the mythic, ritual, and familial framework of sacrifice in these cultures points to another possibility, related to our own times as well. The performance of violence may not only function as a cathartic fetish to purge and thereby control rebellious impulses in the social body. It may also present a cathartic purification of desire and clarification of lacking being: a collective mirror-stage experience that reveals the Real losses behind idealized imagos, shaped by certain symbolic pressures.⁷⁸ Each of us today, like the Greek victim/hero or Aztec *ixiptla*, is fated to play out a mortal role—to fight for a meaningful identity in a limited lifetime. If we cling to screen illusions as fashionable identifications, we miss the Real drama of our own heart, blood, skin, and skull.

Of course, there remains a great difference between the Aztec and ancient Greek world views—as between theirs and our own. Theatre history has conventionally mapped its Western lineage through Greek drama's original distinction from ritual, especially in the tragic hero's defiance of the gods, yet ultimate submission to fate. The admiration, by neoclassical rule-makers, for that humanist struggle helped to solidify the metanarrative of theatre's separation from the womb of ritual. However, theatre's umbilical cord to ritual's bloody show has often been resurrected, in theory and practice, in various anticlassical experiments throughout the Renaissance, Romantic, and modern periods. It may be time now, in the postmodern, as we realize a new sense of multiple, schizoid subjectivity, split by the Other's desire, to discover our uncanny kinship not only to the Greek hero's fate as ritual *pharmakos* (scapegoat), but also to the Aztec *ixiptla*.

The Aztec world view involved a sacrificial anxiety like, yet unlike the imperialist culture of their Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian conquerors. Although the Aztecs, like the conquistadors, imposed their beliefs and rituals on other cultures, the Aztecs captured human bodies, precious objects, and territory in order to feed and extend a solar order that would inevitably fail. Whereas the Spanish brought Franciscan missionaries to the New World who believed their conversion of the natives to Christianity would lead to a millennial kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ (Carrasco, *Religions 5*), the Aztecs captured souls to feed a dying sun. According to the oracle of the Aztecs' mythic calendar, their theatre of human sacrifice displayed a tragic defiance of, yet submission to fate—on a much broader scale than the Greek hero's. Their world would end, they believed, along with the current sun, at a certain point in time—as it did with the conquistadors' arrival.

Such fatalism may seem a self-fulfilling prophecy; but all cultures transform over time, as did that of the Spanish invaders as they merged with the Aztec (Mexica) to form the Mexican and Mexican-American heritage. Now, in a new millennium, our postmodern, capitalist culture appears to be the opposite of the Aztec sun: an immortal, high-tech amoeba, spreading world-

wide forever. Aztec animism involved the life and death forces of the natural world; ours finds its spirits through electric circuitry, digital codes, broadcast waves, and Internet webs in various virtual worlds.⁷⁹ But our “\$un” is also dying through its thriving—through its environmental, economic, and cultural transformations. In each of our lives, we sacrifice time and emotion to feed it, as we watch its mass-media mirrors and stages, trying to make sense (as the apparatus makes money) out of the desire for violence. Yet we often forget, while participating as spectators in that simulacrum, how our blood and bodies also feed the earth and sun of the mass-media *agora*,⁸⁰ through the fetishizing of certain god-actors whom we then imitate commercially, buying the props that the stars make sacred onscreen. A new triangulation of theatre’s ritual history is needed, from Greek and Aztec to postmodern,⁸¹ to get a better view of this curse of mimetic sacrifice inherited, but vastly expanded from the days of Aristotle, which today’s ordinary, mass-media theatres perpetuate, especially in the repetition compulsion of violence, onscreen and off. The next chapter will consider further parallels between ancient European, Amerindian, and postmodern sacrifices—to discover not only ritual submission and mimetic repetitions of violence in sublimated forms, but also the potential catharsis of that curse, from melodramatic to tragic stage edges.