

## Angel City and Kristeva's Identity

Payam Saeidy

M. A. English Literature, University of Isfahan

**Abstract:** *Hollywood, which is popular as an entertainment industry is a powerful media that has recently been at the center of criticism for the critics of capitalism. Sam Shepard, the American playwright wrote a play dealing with Hollywood industry. Angel City (1976) is a work that shows how Subjects are manipulated in Hollywood. Among the different ways of analyzing the Hollywoodian productions is the psychoanalytic interpretation of alienation caused by this industry. This essay mainly deals with Julia Kristeva's theories and these theories are adapted to "Angel city"; The article will show how the actors and actresses themselves are mesmerized by the movies. It is discussed that moneymaking is the main reason for the moguls to form the minds of subjects.*

**Key words:** *Angel city, Capitalism, Hollywood, Kristeva, Subject, disaster, Identity.*

"Upstage, directly behind the rectangle, is a narrow platform, raised about two feet above the stage floor and running horizontally the width of the stage. When the actors enter on this platform they become framed by the rectangle." These sentences extracted from the first page of *Angel city* (1976) are quintessential symbolic statements showing how the actors and actresses are enslaved and framed in the burgeoning Hollywood industry; a leisure industry seeking to meet the needs of Capitalism. "Industrial capitalism not only created work, it also created 'leisure' in the modern sense of the term" (Fulcher 8). Industrial capitalism is "an economic order where leisure and consumption had become processes of great symbolic and material importance" (Postmodernism 294). As Hansen argues Hollywood cinema was "the incarnation of the modern, an aesthetic medium up-to-date with Fordist-Taylorist methods of industrial production and mass consumption, with drastic changes in social, sexual, and gender relations, in the material fabric of everyday life, in the organization of sensory perception and experience" (Constable 51).

Among the late 20<sup>th</sup> century authors who have dealt with the postmodern worldview, Sam Shepard is one of the leading ones. He "was the first playwright to construct his drama out of the materials of the popular arts, to infiltrate the sounds and images of popular culture into work which rendered up its meaning less to those who approached it with an analytic mind than to those who chose to inhabit its images and respond to its rhythms on an emotional or visceral level" (Biggsby 172,173). Shepard's play *Angel city* treats Hollywoodian movies as something

with undeniable influence on people's minds all over the world. As Lanx says it is "A booming industry. Self-sufficient. Crossing fifty million in just two weeks. Our own private police." (64)

Angle city (1976) is one of Sam Shepard's plays on popular arts dealing with Hollywood and its impacts on art and society. Rabbit Brown, an artist living on the desert, is summoned by two movie tycoons named Lanx and Wheeler to come and serve as a script doctor on a movie project which was failed. Lanx and Wheeler want to exploit Rabbit's "magic" to save their movie, but ironically, Rabbit who is supposed to be a savior is himself mesmerized by the power of Hollywood and cannot remedy the problems.

"Angel city" aims to show us the changes in American society through the simulated images. As Bigsby argues in 'Sam Shepard: imagining America' "character and language were indeed subsumed in image" (Bigsby 164). The realities are changed into images of reality; our mind is changed into an object which is the place for all acceptable concepts for capitalists and the ones who want to change everything into commodity. Through images of reality they present the deformed reality in a new form and oblige people subconsciously to accept it. Wheeler says "I'm in pictures. I plant pictures in people's heads. I plant them and they grow. They grow more pictures. And the pictures grow like wildfires. People see them in front of their eyes..."(109) Thus the change of people's minds is the main focus of this play. The aim of this article is to show the change of identity which is traced in the play and is going to be analysed it through a psychoanalytic worldview theorized by Julia Kristeva. Before getting through Kristeva's analysis of Shepard's play the essay points to the intellectual context of the time "angel city" was published.

Nowadays that the grand narratives have encountered rupture "the fragments left over from these grand narratives compete with one another and with new rivals. This field, however, is governed by a new alliance between technology and capitalism, constituting what some theorists have dubbed 'post-industrial society'" (Grant 30). In post-industrial societies in which 'Late capitalism' is dominant, "no single story is left to hold things together; as many stories are told as there are groups to tell them. None, however, has any cultural, historical, philosophical or political priority over any other. It is in this field that, by common consent, postmodern politics finds itself: where there was unity, so the story goes, now there are only differences" (ibid).

The Hollywood of "Angel city" is typical of "Late Capitalism", the concept dubbed by Frederic Jameson as "a periodization in which the forces of production correspond to a stage of capitalist development and mode of cultural production" (Easthope 21). So by the passage of time and the shift of modernity to postmodernism Hollywood changes the mode of cultural production and harmonizes it with the "disaster" like postmodern discourse; The postmodern of "deregulation, dispersal and disruption as the securities of tradition and community are continually crushed" (Malpas 3); a world which as Lyotard says "presenting the existence of something unrepresentable"(Ibid 29). The creation of disaster is a postmodern sublime which is

“marked by urbanization, commodification, and technology” (Callens 199). Malpas believes that “the sublime rooted in disharmony and disruption has become a vital figure in postmodern theory” (Ibid 62). We can easily trace the disruption and the lack of harmony in the characters of this play. Rabbit states: [something] “making me daydream at night. Causing me to wonder at the life of a recluse. The vision of a celluloid tape with a series of moving images telling a story to millions... millions seen and unseen... effecting their dreams and actions...replacing their families, replacing religion, politics, art, conversation. Replacing their minds. And I ask myself how can I stay immune?... I’m ravenous for power but I have to conceal it.” (69). Wheeler says: ‘It’s turning us into snakes or lizards or something. (71)

One of the deconstructed concepts is the priority of the real and the images theorized by John Baudrillard. The postmodern French theorist presents the end of history as an abject failure of the modern aspiration to reconcile reason and the world (Malpas 90). Adjusting this failure with the capitalist use of media he states that “Images and simulations become more immediate, more apparently real, more seductive and more desirable as they produce rather than reflect the reality in which we exist: contemporary subjectivity and society is not the producer of simulations, but the product of them. In the order of simulation, meaning ‘implodes’ and we move from reality to hyperreality” (ibid 125) believing that “we are simply enclosed in a media-dominated world of signs, villainously generated by capitalism to synthesize our desires, which only really refer to one another within an entrapping chain of ideas” (Butler 114).

What repeatedly inferred from the text of “Angel city” is the manipulation of identity by different items in the movies. The focal target of this article is to show how the moguls in “Angel city” who are the icon of capitalism shape the character of both the people outside the scene and the actors and actresses to gain their chief goal, i.e, producing money. For them “money equals power, equals protection, equals eternal life” (74). They try to make people “to be a part of the industry” (73). This essay aims at showing how the capitalist industry succeeds at assimilating their ideologies into the mind of people all over the world to gain profit.

During the past centuries no one would think about the problem of identity seriously but “The issues of identity, ethics, and peaceable coexistence are particularly important questions for the twenty-first century: who we are and how we live with each other encapsulate the intertwined nature of the problem” (Abraham, 1). There are various thinkers whose ideas about identity are discussed in academies but what follows are the theories presented by “Julia Kristeva” about subjectivity, though the ideas of some other critics are briefly mentioned. Kristeva “is one of very few philosophers for whom the speaking being becomes a crucial constellation for understanding oral and written literature, politics and national identity, sexuality, culture, and nature. Where other thinkers might see these fields as separate domains, Kristeva shows that the speaking being is “a strange fold” between them all – a place where inner drives are discharged

into language, where sexuality interplays with thought, where the body and culture meet. (McAfee 1).

Julia Kristeva, Bulgaria's successful critical export argued her theory about the instability of identity in an interview with Susan Sellers. She believed that "we are constantly in what psychoanalysis calls a "transfer" (Rice and Waugh 128). "These relations are not the specular relation of the mirror stage but relations of transference that she claims can be detected in the nonspeaking child before language acquisition and the onset of the oedipal complex"(Oliver 19). As she suggests after reading Artaud's texts we "will realize that all identities are unstable; the identity of linguistic signs, meaning and even the identity of the speaker"(Rice and Waugh 128). She points out that our identities in life are constantly called into question and fixed identity is just an illusion. Considering the play it is observable that the characters' identity is constructed through the images produced in Hollywood; the art industry which deals with "mainstream popular appeal resulting in a series of shocking images lacking substance" (Sim, 307).

Since this worldwide behemoth deals with people, the bulk of their activity is on the mind of the population in order to make them their subject, as a result the subjects are subconsciously invigorating the Hollywood industry. Our appetite is manipulated through the movies which are produced, as a result the identity of their subjects are formed through images as they desire. Helplessly "with larger high-definition TV sets and vast cinema screens, with the enclosed and carefully calculated spectacle of the shopping centre or theme park – art had to compete" (Stallabrass, 64). Referring as "a society of the spectacle" Kristeva "formulated as a fundamental question the possibility of linking the psychic economy of the subject with a social context. [She] think[s] this is a continuing necessity, and even more important in the contemporary era which is more and more a world of the image" (Pallock, 7). Some lines later She suggests that "In the contemporary image, whether it is on television or in a museum of contemporary art, we witness an exposure of a phenomenon that is both psychological and political: the pulverisation of identity. This occurs through violence and carnage, as I have just suggested. But it is also evident in the kinds of objects we find in our museums of current art" (ibid, 7).

The evidences in "Angel City" suggest that the images produced by moviemakers cause the change of characters' identity so that they are alienated from their own life. This postmodern alienation differs from the modern one. Based on what Easthop mentions "The 'alienation of the subject', enforced by modernism ..., is displaced in postmodern culture by 'the fragmentation of the subject'; there is no affect, no depth, because there is 'no longer a self present to do the feeling'" (Eastrope 22,23). Wheeler: "create mass hypnosis. Suicide. Autodestruction. Something which will open entirely new fads in sadomasochism. Penetrating every layer of their dark subconscious and leaving them totally unrecognizable to themselves" (Angel City 71) Or what tympani says "I am experimenting with various rhythm structures in the hope of discovering one which will be guaranteed to produce certain trance states in masses of people"

(Angel City 72) attests to what Eastrope calls as fragmentation. What Julia Kristeva calls subjectivity tries to deal with these kinds of fragmented selves, “a life cut off from all life” (Angel City 86). The quotation attests to the fact that characters have become fragmented subjects in danger of being manipulated by the industries who follow capitalist desires.

The first step to deal with her theory is to elucidate the concepts of Semiotic and Symbolic; the terms bearing relations with linguistic and psychoanalytic background. Based on Kristeva “The Semiotic is the pre-linguistic residue of language, made up of sounds, rhythms, the babbling incoherence of the child, the language of poetry and the language of psychosis. It is not precisely meaningless, but it cannot be subsumed in the Symbolic”( Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 89). Though “the semiotic includes both the subject’s drives and articulations ... The symbolic is a mode of signifying in which speaking beings attempt to express meaning with as little ambiguity as possible. The expressions of scientists and logicians are paradigmatic examples of people trying to use symbolic language, whereas expressions found in music, dance, and poetry exemplify the semiotic” (McAfee 17). Tympani: No, you don’t understand. I was playing a rhythm on the drums and she was moving to it. I must’ve hit on the one that I was looking for and didn’t even know it. (88) shows his playing with the rhythm he is not aware of based on unconscious desire. Generally speaking, the symbolic order shows the observation of rules and the semiotic represents the lack of order and rule. These terms conform to the idea of postmodern “disaster” which, as will be discussed in the following, can be traced in “Angel city”. As mentions: “The scission between semiotic and symbolic is marked by a break within the symbolic itself – between signifier and signified” (McAfee 22). It is this rupture which creates some of her terms such as “chora” and “abjection”.

“Abjection” is a term introduced by Kristeva in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982). In her work Kristeva argues that “entrance to the symbolic order is dependent upon a rejection of the mother before the acquisition of language and the child’s unconscious derives to expel or reject her” (Malpas and Wake, Ed. 143). What she theorizes is verified when in Angel city Miss scoons speaks in latin “El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciuncuta. En la ciudad. En todo el mundo. la muerte, esta es el rey supremo. Viva la muerete ! »(89). “In this phase of abjection, however, the borders between child and mother, between nature and culture, between subject and other are called into question” (Olive 4). As stated in “routledge companion to critical theory” “following progression into the symbolic order, acts of abjection continue to determine the individual’s personal development. In this secondary role, abjection manifests itself as a ‘narcissistic crisis’, embodying everything we do not wish to see in ourselves, an antithesis of the ego ideal” (Malpas and Wake, Ed. 143). Hence Miss Scoons monologue: The authorities. The powers. The principalities. The archangels. The Angels.

TYMPAN: (watching Miss Scoons) I think she's going deeper. She's definitely contacting other entities. Listen to her entities. Listen to her breathing.

LANX: GET HER OUT OF HERE!SHE'S UPSETTING THE WHOLE PROJECT!

She believes that Abjection is "in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded"(Trans.Roudiez 5). For Kristeva "abject represents those ambiguous elements that challenge the boundaries of our experience... Abjection is that which challenges order and identity and must be continuously jettisoned from the psyche(ibid, 143). So as stated above MISS SCOONS should reject "mother" to enter the new order which is the order of Hollywood. The reality of the outer world is driven out of their mind when the omniscient narrator of the play says: "from this point on every one is in their own world. They speak to themselves"(AC 89).In "Angel city" the grand narrative of reality is violated through using the simulacra and the real is an abject which should be rejected in order to enter the new order which is just the simulacra of the symbolic order. When Miss Scoons says: "I look at the screen and I am the screen. I'm not me. I don't know who I am. I look at the movie and I am the movie. I am the star... I hate my life not being a movie... I hate being myself in my life which isn't a movie and never will be... people living in dreams which are the same dreams I'm dreaming but never living." (AC 77) The life for her has turned to an Abject which Miss Scoons dislikes. She longs for becoming movie (the simulacra).

The desire to enter the symbolic causes the ambition to cause *disaster*. Arguing about the entrance to symbolic, in Black sun, Kristeva uses the word disaster as follows: "..., bonds, being appear alien, absurd, impossible. Such is the "supreme, metaphysical lucidity" of suffering subjectivity" (keltner 53). Somewhere else, contrasting idiot and the people who have encountered psychosis, she mentions that "for the subjects who really are exposed to the disintegration of the invisible limits between 'normality' and psychosis, the experience is a disaster"(Sjöholm 87).Lanx's statement is an evidence testifying the mogul's wish of dealing with a *disaster*. He says: "We have an idea that this town is ripe for another disaster".

RABBIT: (pause) Disaster?

WHEELER: Cinematically speaking. (nervous laugh)

Lanx: In the profit sense of the word of course. A disaster on the screen, not in the office box.(Laughs).

The change from Semiotic to symbolic is like the change that exists in Hollywood industry from meeting the capitalist needs to seek the desires of the "Late capitalism", as Jameson used the term, after the postmodern rupture. As mentioned in 'postmodernism for beginners' "among all the fragmentation and chaos, amidst everything falling apart, modern artists began to look for some eternal value that was beyond all the chaos"(Powel 13) but the

postmodern world replaced form, center, design and hierarchy with antiform, dispersal, chance and anarchy. As Lanx says: (looking out through rectangle) once there was an industry! A magnificent industry!... Then there was order! Everyone knew their place. (90) As Thus these fragmentations cause the disaster. And the result of all disasters created by them is what MISS SCOONS said earlier: "You've created more disasters in your time than the whole of Hollywood put together. You're known as "The master of Disaster" (82). Wheeler: ...No focus, no structure. No structure spells disaster. And disaster is our business. Simple (95).

As Kristeva suggest "I think this is a continuing necessity, and even more important in the contemporary era which is more and more a world of the image; it is, in a well-known phrase, a society of the spectacle. We must go on examining both the psychic economy of the subject—for example what are its pleasures, especially in the society of the image—and interrogating the nature of the social and economic determinations". Calling it "the pulverization of identity" she states that "Instead of the images of a kind which produce totality, created by art practices aspiring to a kind of completion, as we find in the art of the nineteenth century, for example, in our times, we notice a cult of the fetish, of kitsch, of ugliness, of installation. These all function as forms of fragmentation which belong to a logic of non-identity which concerns us all when we see it" (Pollock 7). Hollywood is the fittest icon of spreading images throughout the world and through these images "sutures the subject in an illusory coherence and identity," (Wollaeger 67) which provides "public sphere through which the masses became visible to society and themselves by sharing new forms of sensory experience" (ibid 67).

These Hollywood images are what Jean Baudrillard calls simulacra; "For Baudrillard the postmodern world was a world of simulacra, where we could no longer differentiate between reality and simulation. Simulacra represented nothing but themselves: there was no other reality to which they referred." (Sim 11). As we observe in "postmodernism and film" about Baudrillard's viewpoints on "Simulacra and the real" the author states "The effect of granting precedence to the disaster movie, and other images, is that the real itself becomes film-like" (Constable 43,4). Later she adds "Baudrillard's analysis of America demonstrates this point in that he views the country through the lens provided by Hollywood cinema. "It is not the least of America's charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic. The desert you pass through is like the set of a Western, the city a screen of signs and formulas". (Constable 44) It is this sense of a reality that has been completely pervaded by cinema, resulting in the apprehension of the real as film, which is one of the key metaphors for the postmodern". (ibid 44)

"We are left yearning for the things we have killed, and "nostalgia assumes its full meaning" as we create ever more signs to simulate those lost things. This is "the vengeance of the dead," who haunt us in their absence" (Leitch 1730).Miss Scoons Says that You've created more disasters in your time than the whole of Hollywood put together. You're known as "The master of Disaster". Wheeler: No focus, no structure. No structure spells disaster. And disaster is

our business. Simple (AC 95). This happens exactly before lanx wants Tympany to get her out of that place.

Lanx: PLEASE! I NEED SOME KIND OF ORDER! SOME KIND OF ARRANGEMENT!WHEELER'S SKIN IS TURNING GREEN!WE'LL ALL BE EATEN ALIVE!"

The reality stands for "mother" that should be repudiated to enter the world of simulacra. Before entrance to the symbolic order the child experiences "chora"; "a pre-Oedipal space characterized by the dissolution of boundaries and signifying systems and a resistance to patriarchal discourse and authority" (Castle 235). Though repressed by the symbolic, "this semiotic Chora remains active beneath the rational discourse of the speaking subject and manifests itself in the 'vocal or kinetic rhythm' of poetry and other non-rational discourses, threatening to disrupt the stability of meaning and subjectivity" (Kristeva 1984: 26) (Malpas and Wake 161). Kristeva uses the word chora to define "the most archaic memory of our link with the maternal body-Of the dependence that all of us have vis-à-vis the maternal body and where a sort of self eroticism is indissociable from the experience of the (m)other. We repress the vocal or gestural inscription of this experience under our subsequent acquisitions and this is an important condition for autonomy...mother and child are in permanent stricture in which one holds the other" (Rice and Waugh 130). Then she suggests that "at this point we witness the possibility of creation, of sublimation. I think that every type of creation, even it's scientific, is due to its possibility of opening the norms, towards pleasure, which refers to an archaic experience with the maternal pre-object" (ibid 131). Regarding what Miss Scoons's speech "the urge to create works of art is essentially one of ambition. The ambition behind the urge to create is no different from any other ambition. To kill. to win. To get on top"(77). She regards the movie subconsciously as a maternal body which is indissoluble from her. So it is analogous to a choral relationship between the mother and child which forms the identity of child. Angel city can be analyzed through Kristeva's beliefs.

Human being's identity has turned into an object for Hollywood moviemakers so that they change it whenever it is profitable or advantageous to them. The subjects discussed above suggest the mainstream tendency shared by artists controlled by capitalist worldviews. The Hollywoodian abuse of art is to the extent that they put all their effort to shatter the traditional concept of man's identity for their monetary success. So through worldwide movies they have entered the life of all people in the world to destabilize the identity of them in order to succeed commercially. During the recent years Hollywood prospered with quick speed and solidified its power in film-making industry.

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