TECHNOLOGIES OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL SELF: INEFFABILITY, DISTANCE, AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE *BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

by

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PREFACE

This dissertation examines the late medieval self as a conjoined construction of socially negotiated identity and privately differentiated subjectivity; in so doing, it calls attention to the complex, emphatic, deeply defined subjectivity that emerges in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. This consideration of Kempe's *Book* is informed by study of late medieval works that feature self-construction in parallel modes to Kempe's: testing in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, pilgrimage in *The Canterbury Tales* (most particularly *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*), and mystical visions in Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*. In these texts, identity emerges as a social negotiation and subjectivity as a site of inaccessibility. But, none of these selves is constructed with such complexity as Margery Kempe's, nor is the subjectivity in any of these other texts so emphatically defined as hers. Finally, the dissertation traces the continuity of self-construction that extends into literature of the Renaissance, studying selected poems of John Donne ("A Valediction of Weeping" and "Holy Sonnet VII" ["Spit in my face you Jewes"]) and prose of Margaret Cavendish (*A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life* and *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*). Given Kempe's emphatically defined subjectivity even among these Renaissance texts, the dissertation urges careful consideration in establishing and defining criteria for periodization, especially in light of the ongoing critical debate about when the self was "invented." Methodologically, the dissertation draws on modern social criticism (Aers; Beckwith; Carruthers), modern mystic criticism (McAvoy; Hollywood; Lochrie; Atkinson), and select literary theorists (Foucault; Peirce; Irigaray).

During my dissertation defense, Professor Tim Machan asked me to choose whether my dissertation is about Margery Kempe, subjectivity, or medieval literature. Despite his insistence that I choose one from among these three choices, I maintain that it is finally about all three (though it is likely more about literature generally, pursued from my starting point of medieval literature). My interest in pursuing this dissertation topic stems from a long-standing fascination with the impression each of us carries of

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our subjectivity or inwardness. In my thinking about subjectivity, I purposely have distanced myself from the more traditional psychological and deconstructionist renderings of the self. Instead, I have sought an alternative (non-Saussurean) semiotic foundation in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. In doing so, I hope to have avoided the potential trappings of "mentalist" paradigms of the self born of Cartesian philosophy. Others, too, have followed this track.[1] My interest in the construction of subjectivity also stems from observing how language can trap us and, similarly, how we can subvert language to be used for our own purposes, an interest particularly honed in Professor Mary-Catherine Bodden's course *Theft of Language*.

Twentieth-century authors' representations of the sensation of subjectivity first drew my interest (my originally intended area of focus for graduate study), but when I began to study medieval literature (in a required graduate course on Chaucer), I noticed a similar impulse of maintaining a private site of self. Later, when I studied the whole of the *Book of Margery Kempe* (rather than the anthologized excerpts to which I previously had been exposed), I was intrigued by the effect of persistent repulsion her presentation of herself (and of her self). Her *Book* annoyed and troubled me. Upon reflection, I found that the repulsion inspired by her *Book* was initiated by the same phenomenon of presenting the inner self that had fascinated me throughout my studies of literature.

So singular do I find Margery's means of representing her subjectivity that I sought to explore that singularity by comparing her work to others'. In order to do so, I recognized a need to distinguish the inner-related parts of the self that others have at times confused or conflated, the inner self (or subjectivity) and the outer self (or identity). I selected works that developed this conjoined construction of the self in modes similar to Margery's *Book*: testing, pilgrimage, and mystical visions. The works

[1] Note that I do not mean to argue for an authentic self, but rather find that we carry with us the sensation of an authentic self. It is the representation of this sense of self that I study. See my Chapter One.

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that I found best fit these modes are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Canterbury Tales* (especially *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*), and Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*. The conjoined construction of the self is evident in each of these works that I read alongside Margery's *Book* in order to demonstrate Margery's comparatively singular, emphatically defined subjectivity. Finally, to demonstrate the singularity of Margery's self construction even among works of later periods some have privileged as inventing the self or the subject,[2] I chose to study the poetry of John Donne. This choice stems from my interest in twentieth-century poetry for T. S. Eliot and others' return to Donne and other metaphysical poets' means of poetic expression. I also chose to study the work of Margaret Cavendish, a woman whose work—like Margery's—has the potential to trouble and annoy. My collective study of these works demonstrates the operation of technologies of self construction that transcend the boundaries of periodization, demonstrating the singularity of Margery's emphatically developed subjectivity.

[2] Although I turn toward the Renaissance to find other similarly constructed selves I could also have turned toward Anglo-Saxon poetry. I note briefly in the dissertation, as Coldiron has observed (176), subjectivities similarly developed there. Recently, others have identified these means of self construction in works of other periods as well. For example, David R. Jarraway has traced subjectivity in twentieth-century American literature in ways similar to those I trace in late medieval and Renaissance texts.

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I wish to express my gratitude to a number of people who have helped bring this dissertation to completion. In particular, I wish to thank my dissertation director Professor John Curran for helping me hone my ideas into a workable project. He has been a consummate advisor, patiently guiding me through each step of the dissertation process. His insight was crucial in broad improvements to my conception of the project, and his encouragement and suggestions made this work much clearer and more cohesive. I also appreciate the constructive feedback and suggestions of my other committee members, Professors Mary-Catherine Bodden and Tim Machan. Taken together, their suggestions made for a stronger project than I first envisioned. I offer my gratitude to the three of them for their work with earlier drafts of my chapters.

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I further acknowledge that this project represents the labyrinthine and ongoing development of my most sacredly held thoughts and beliefs, nurtured by teachers and mentors over the course of many years. My thinking about subjectivity was encouraged by my undergraduate professors in various disciplines at Concordia University Wisconsin, in particular Professors David Krenz, Gene Edward Veith, Thomas Wilmeth, Angus Menuge, Gaylund Stone, Patrick Ferry, William Cario, and Timothy Maschke. I also acknowledge that my thanks ought to extend further still; indeed, the kernel of my

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thinking about subjectivity was planted as long ago as fifth grade by my teacher, Mr. Salkowski. So, to these and to others from whom the clew has since unwound, I am indebted.

This work also represents the laborious efforts of the library staff at Raynor Memorial Library at Marquette University and the Forrest R. Polk Library at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh; I am grateful to them for their invaluable service and assistance. I also extend heart-felt thanks to Sandy Peterson and Deb Jelacic who are the secret force behind nearly every success of the Marquette English Department. I am grateful for their knowledge and willingness to help, whatever the circumstance.

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CHAPTER ONE

Identity, Subjectivity, and the Technologies of the Self: The Constructedness of Meaning and the Conjoined Construction of the Self

Twenty-first–century undergraduates' response to the *Book of Margery Kempe* is unempathetic, at best. Comments in my classroom have included: "What's the matter with her?" "Is she insane?" "She is *seriously* messed up." In response to Margery's decades of sobbing in public and of direct internal communication with persons of the Godhead, students claim that she must be fake, that she is selfish, that if she had lived today maybe someone could have helped her. Reactions range from confusion to out-and-out hostility. I do not mean to suggest that such responses are generated from students' incapacity for empathy. Students' reactions reflect a struggle to reconcile the *Book*'s variously juxtaposed genres, settings, and actions among other texts typically read in a survey course that they seem to receive more readily, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *The Canterbury Tales*. Further, students' collective response to Margery Kempe's *Book* seems to arise from uncertainty about who this woman is and, as a result, about how to understand her text alongside other texts commonly read in an early British survey course.[1]

[1] Reading these texts together answers Watson's call for scholarship that pays "closer attention to the issues common to works thought of as mystical and works that are not [...in order to] integrat[e] mystics scholarship with the rest of literary history" ("Middle" 540). Among those whose works Watson claims should be read with such integrative methodologies are Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the *Pearl*-poet (540, 564–65). Others have noted a related tension in the classroom, which I invoke in this opening paragraph; this tension relates to Watson's call insofar as scholarship translates to teaching. For example, most recently, Petersen observes that "trouble arises in trying to teach this 'women's' medieval literature [Julian of Norwich's and Margery Kempe's] alongside Chaucer or Langland," for as challenging as such traditional authors' texts might be, "the writings of Julian and Margery are, to the uninitiated, extremely strange" (481). Petersen therefore calls for those who teach Julian and Margery in survey courses to situate these texts "in a historical and critical context" (481). For Petersen, this context relates to the "structure and soteriology, [...the] fringes and heresies, and the creative strategies" related to "the exotically alien phenomenon of medieval Western Catholicism" (481) in these works. But my interest in answering Watson's call to study Chaucer and the *Gawain*-poet alongside mystics like Margery and Julian relates to Petersen's notions about context. By examining this broader range of texts, a wider social-historical context is opened (in addition to the religious context Petersen mentions) that allows us to seek broader parallels among texts from

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Many of Margery's contemporaries had a similar response to her way of life, as we are told in her *Book*. Some said "sche mygth wepen whan sche wold and slawndered the werk of God [. . .] And often tymes, whel sche was kept wyth swech holy spechys and dalyawns, sche schuld so wepyn and sobbyn that many men wer gretly awondyr" (I.32–33; 43–44). Scholarship and criticism shares this awed response to "this Creatur," and has called the *Book* "electrifying" and "astonishing."[2] In the earlier twentieth century, Hope Emily Allen, who was among the first to study the *Book* after its rediscovery,[3] writes that among her study of British and Continental influence on Kempe's text—in considerations of literary genres of the period and in comparison to religious models who were Kempe's approximate contemporaries—she "found no equivalent production [to Kempe's work] anywhere" (lvii).[4] Still more recently, Lynn Staley notes, "with its rich pictures of late medieval town life, its details of food and dress and travel, its look into the rituals of late medieval religion, its noisy, uncomfortable, and demonstrably pious protagonist, and its social and ecclesiastical critiques, the *Book* seems to belong to many genres without fitting precisely into the outlines of any" (Introduction vii). The *Book* traces Margery's once quite ordinary

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the late medieval period more generally. Reading these women's works in a broader context allows us to better reconcile these women's texts to a broader context of medieval literature, as Watson calls for in our scholarship and as undergraduates' reactions regularly call for us to do in a survey course.

[2] Although the *Book* has enjoyed increasing, positive critical attention over the past decade, it is still often introduced with qualifiers attached: "interesting," "remarkable," "unusual," "singular." Even those who would champion Kempe among her literary peers find Margery an "annoying character" (Glenn 68), warning that we "must not come to [the *Book*] expecting too much" (57). Others go so far as to find Margery's work a disappointment because it might "shock the reader" (Chambers qtd. in Glenn 57).

[3] H. Allen, a Richard Rolle scholar, had been working at the Victoria and Albert Museum studying the *Ancren Riwle* and its relationship to other works written for the pious instruction of medieval English women when Colonel Butler-Bowden brought in the rediscovered text to be expertly identified. See Allen's Prefatory Note to the Early English Text Society edition.

[4] Both those who called upon H. Allen to examine Kempe's text and, initially, Allen herself found the writings to have affinities to other medieval religious writers, especially those on the Continent. Further, Allen records her own initial impressions of the *Book* as "merely the naïve outburst of an illiterate woman who had persuaded two pliant men to write down her egotistical reminiscences" (lvii).

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life—as a middle-class housewife and mother—suddenly turned extraordinary—as a bold, devout Christian and the devoted servant and spouse of God. Beckoned by those clerics who were supporters—and later by God himself—to write about her way of life,[5] Margery reports her transformation with startlingly juxtaposed, sometimes incongruous elements of her life and subsequent text, replete with confrontations and trials before priests and bishops, woes and mercies of travels domestically and abroad, and visions of and conversations with Christ borne out exteriorly in her gift of tears which was dramatically and profusely exhibited for more than 20 years. These features of her life exhibited in the text are combined in an unlikely way to construct a self[6] that can be elusive or even disconcerting. Margery's constructed self—even centuries removed—startles readers because it impinges upon their own culturally situated identities by challenging their prior understanding of the world they perceive themselves to live in and of their perceptions of their place in that world.

One example of the irreconcilable nature of Margery's self that readers (and undergraduate students in particular) seem to find troubling: Margery goes about town, and the countryside, and even abroad—often accompanied by her worldly spouse (whom she wed at about age 20 and to whom she bore 14 children)—while wearing white clothes that would signify her purity and chastity. How curious that the mother of 14 children would wear such a garment; certainly her contemporaries seem to have

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[5] "[W]han it plesyd ower Lord, he comawnded hyr and chargyd hir that sche schuld don wryten hyr felyngys and revelacyons and the forme of her levyngs" (lines 57–66). Unless otherwise noted, all references to *The Book of Margery Kempe* are from the TEAMS edition, edited by Lynn Staley.

[6] I use the words *identity*, *subjectivity*, and *self* with specific intent. *Identity* is the socially constructed element of the self, comprising how one does or does not fit multiple, overlapping sets of *social* expectation (or narrative models). *Subjectivity* is the site of private experience, the interior (but not necessarily or exclusively psychological) aspect of the self which some have called the essential self or the authentic self. Subjectivity is the quality or sensation of interiority. The *self* is the holistic notion of what constitutes the full individual; it includes—but is not necessarily limited to—identity and the subject. Further discussion of this distinction appears later in this chapter. I wish to acknowledge Dr. Bodden's point raise during my dissertation defense that constructions of identity and subjectivity in the Middle Ages must surely be connected to the debate about the body and soul during the period; this connection is one for future inquiry.

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found her wardrobe troubling.[7] As her *Book* explains, Margery convinces her husband—after what we are assured was years of lusty, mutually satisfying amorousness—that their relationship should become chaste (Liber I, lines 255–71). Later, in one of her visions, Margery "consummates" another marriage (I.2102–11), a marriage to God that fulfills the commitment her white garments emblemize. In some ways, this marriage resembles the mystical visions of other women of her Age.[8] However, although other texts might describe similar changes of life and visions of Christ, Margery's descriptions are less expected and more uncomfortable. Perhaps this discomfort stems from her over-conflation of her physical persona with her spiritual one, her descriptions of their spiritual union blurring expected lines between realms of the physical and spiritual (e.g., the strikingly specific physical descriptions of her "consummated" relationship with God, noted above).[9] Or perhaps the overt physicality of her relationship with God and its distinct, uncomfortable feeling of presence results from Margery's naïveté or lack of authorial sophistication. Whatever the reason, the description does have a decided effect on her textually constructed self. Namely, the

[7] Many critics have discussed Margery's white clothes as a complex, troubled signifier of her identity. See Cleve who finds Margery's white clothes represent her vulnerability as well as her transcendent spirituality. Cleve includes commentary of society's reactions to her white wardrobe and Margery's subsequent behavior. See also Dinshaw, who reads Margery's wearing white as a signal to her social community that she wants to use her body in entirely different, non-procreative ways ("Margery [...] Answers" 257–66); Erler, whose reading is similar to Cleve's but makes several additional points ("Margery"); Salih, who discusses Margery's wearing white in light of her reclaimed virginity (*Versions* 218–24). (See also my Chapter Three: the pilgrim's garb typically would be white sackcloth.)

[8] Much has been written comparing the *Book* to other later medieval religious women's written spiritual and life experiences such as Angela of Foligno, Birgetta of Sweden, Catherine of Sienna, Dorothea of Montau, Elisabeth of Schoonau, Elizabeth of Hungary, Hildegarde von Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Marie d'Oignies, Mechthild of Hackeborn. For scholarly treatment of the relationship of these women's texts to Margery's *Book*, see Dickman ("Margery…Continental"; "Margery…English"); Ellis ("'*Flores*'"; "Margery"); Erskine; Goodlich; Kurtz; Mason; Slade; Stargardt; R. Stone; Wallace ("Mystics"); and Yoshikawa ("*Discretio*"). (In addition, the earliest twentieth-century editions of the text make these connections [i.e., H. Allen; Meech], and almost all editions of the *Book of Margery Kempe* make some mention of at least a few of these women.)

[9] This line between realms is one that, for example, Julian of Norwich takes greater care to respect; see my Chapter Four.

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effect of such features of the *Book* is to distance others in the text and readers, thereby creating a site of self—a sharp, singularly differentiated space of her subjectivity.[10]

This first chapter addresses some of the underlying challenges encountered in attempting to recover a textually constructed self, and particularly in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, by offering a brief overview of autobiographical criticism of the *Book*. Next, the chapter establishes a theoretical framework that undergirds the technologies of self construction in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the comparable technologies of self construction in the other representative late medieval texts under consideration: namely, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the framing narratives of the *Canterbury Tales*, and Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*. These textual selves are a conjoined construction,[11] a discursively constituted social identity and a privately experienced, differentiated subjectivity. The construction of the self in *The Book of Margery Kempe* operates in three primary modes: testing, pilgrimage, and mysticism. Three late medieval British texts that aptly demonstrate the construction of the self in these categories are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (testing), the *Canterbury Tales* (pilgrimage), and the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich (mysticism). Studying *The Book of Margery Kempe* alongside these other texts with similar

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[10] Other critics have envisioned the notion of the medieval self, subject, and identity similarly. For example, Patterson notes the relationship between the socially, historically derived medieval self and this sense of an autonomous self, the belief that individuals are "defined not by social relations, but by an inner sense of self-presence, a sense of their own subjectivity" (*Chaucer* 8); he asserts, "the dialectic between an inward subjectivity and an external world that alienates it from both itself and its divine source provides the fundamental economy of the medieval idea of selfhood," a dialectic "in which the historically particularized self serves as the oppositional term against which a subjective interiority defines itself" (*Chaucer* 8). Although Patterson notes the relationship between the two, which he refers to as a "dialectic," he states emphatically that the self is the interiorily derived notion. Another example: Leicester acknowledges the notion of the subject as an interiorily constructed site: "In modern theory the subject is not conceived as a substantial thing, like a rock, but as a position in a larger structure, a ***site*** through which various forces pass" (14; emphasis added). See also Root; Spence. I have a slightly different take, that the self is constituted both by its interiorily defined subject and its exteriorily defined identity.

[11] The notion of the conjoined construction of the self should not be interpreted as a binary that suggests two opposites, like two sides of a coin. Rather, these two elements inform one another, working interrelatedly and in concert to construct the self. See also discussion of Peircean semiotics (which follows) that offers an alternative construction to binaries. From a basis in Peircean semiotics, a conjoined construction of two contributing parts is intended to signify two intertwined parts that function together to work multiply.

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means of self construction allows for a comparison that demonstrates highly developed, emphatic nature of Margery's conjoined construction of the self, of her identity and subjectivity.

Sir Gawain calls attention to the construction of the self by means of testing, focusing initially on the negotiation of the hero's identity throughout testing that occurs on his quest.[12] At the poem's end, the text abruptly alters focus from the social construction of identity. With a sharp shift, the text denies others access to Gawain's experience, thereby differentiating his interior space of his self, or subjectivity. In this way, our perspective of Gawain's negotiated identity shifts suddenly to his sharply differentiated subjectivity. Similarly, the *Book of Margery Kempe* uses trials and testing to develop both a public, socially constructed identity and a privately constructed subjectivity. But Margery's subjectivity is more deeply concentrated because, rather than developing in a limited moment in the text as is Gawain's, Margery's subject is continually informed throughout her text as she uses her trials to authorize her claims to a private, privileged experience of God. Rather than a mere contrast, as in *Sir Gawain*, Margery's identity and subjectivity inform and enforce one another, creating a more sharply defined subjectivity.

The *Canterbury* pilgrims' construction of the self makes particular use of the liminal space of pilgrimage. This liminal space affords certain license in the negotiation of their social identities outside normative social categories, while retaining some evidence of their normative social roles. In particular, for Alisoun of Bath the liminal space of pilgrimage affords the unlikely opportunity to play homespun cleric. This role combines the liminally constructed role of a typically male social position—cleric—with an unlikely counterpart: the residual, normative domestic space where she learned this

[12] My Chapter Two focuses more heavily on the discursive development of Gawain's identity to explicate the discursiveness of the social construction of identity in general to demonstrate the discursive construction that also operates in the other texts under consideration.

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craft from her husband Jankyn. The unsettled discursiveness within liminal and normative spaces distances readers for its textual uncertainty. This distance establishes a differentiated space for private experience that contributes to the Wife's full self. Similarly, the *Book of Margery Kempe* makes use of the available narrative models that inform her socially constructed identity and create her subjectivity. But Margery's differentiated subjectivity is created, maintained, and even increased by socially and liminally transgressive behaviors that she maintains not only on her physical pilgrimage, but also on perpetual pilgrimage. Every place becomes a liminal space for Margery's perpetual pilgrimage. Her subjectivity is supported by an even greater distancing of the textual perspective near the *Book*'s end to instill a private subject that permeates the accounts of her publicly and privately experienced pilgrimage. Thus, Margery's subjectivity is even more sharply differentiated than for Chaucer's pilgrims, even the Wife of Bath.

Julian of Norwich's *Shewings* construct her social identity as medieval mystic, participating in normative mystical convention while simultaneously making use of the abject by shifting among related strategies of disorientation, disruption, and distance. The unsettledness of this shifting among strategies collectively maintains Julian's differentiated subjectivity. Margery Kempe's visions likewise follow many of the conventions of mysticism and makes use of the abject through strategies of disorientation, disruption, and distance. In creating her public identity and private subjectivity, Margery not only occupies the boundaries between available normative narrative models; she also uses more abrupt, overly literalized elements that exceed the boundaries occupied in the abject. As these boundaries impinge upon one another in Margery's mysticism, they distance readers from her experience, rather than inviting their participation in her experience (as we would expect in the "emptying" of herself in positive mysticism). This exclusion of readers that runs contrary to expectations of

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positive mysticism promotes a differentiated space that not only informs her identity as mystic, but also produces a more sharply pronounced subjectivity.

In this way, the *Book of Margery Kempe* utilizes parallel modes of self construction—testing, pilgrimage, and mysticism—parallel to those in the other representative texts studied here (Gawain's testing, Alisoun's liminal opportunities on pilgrimage, and Julian's mysticism). However, in negotiating her identity and subjectivity, Kempe's text uses these same means to construct an even more sharply and emphatically defined, highly developed subjectivity as do these other works. To study these textual selves, this first chapter next borrows from Michel Foucault's technologies of the self and his related technologies (of production, of communication, and of power)—which Foucault explains "hardly ever function separately" (*Ethics* 225)—to establish a framework of operations[13] that allow for the construction of the self. It reconstitutes these technologies of self construction through the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peircean semiotics offers a foundation that can account for the differentiation and inexpressibility of private experience, or subjectivity. For Peirce, this inexpressible, differentiated private experience remains just outside our linguistic grasp. But Peirce allows us to recover such a differentiated space as more than a lack or emptiness (as, alternatively, we might expect from a Saussurean basis). Rather, it is a space rife with the potential for meaning though it remains inexpressible. Even if we cannot fully recover this differentiated subjectivity through language, Peircean semiotics offers the possibility of recovering the gesture that suggests such a space. Then, this chapter turns to the other aspect of the self, identity. It outlines the social constructionist perspectives that inform the discursive construction of social identity through the

[13] I borrow this term from Foucault, who explains of technologies of the self as the means by which an individuals "effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" ("Technologies," *Ethics* 225). These operations do not function alone, but in concert with other operations: technologies of production, of sign systems, and of power. Here, as in the other chapters, these technologies, or operations, function to formulate the self.

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negotiation of simultaneous, overlapping narrative models. Finally, this chapter provides a brief overview of the technologies of self-construction traced in each work studied in this dissertation.

The disorientation stirred by the elusively constructed self in *Book of Margery Kempe* can be detected, for example, in its complex reception as an autobiography since its twentieth-century rediscovery. First classified an autobiography by Hope Emily Allen,[14] the *Book of Margery Kempe* continues to be widely regarded as the first autobiography in English (though some recent scholarship largely discounts considerations of the text as autobiography, at least in modern day terms[15]). A brief examination of how scholars of autobiography have regarded the *Book* can help to

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[14] As H. Allen's Prefatory Note explains, the staff at the Victoria and Albert Museum when Colonel Butler Bowden first presented the manuscript believed the text to be a typical devotional meditation; the staff then logically called upon Allen to examine the piece, since it was her area of expertise. Allen, on the other hand, judged the work as more a text about a medieval layperson's life than a religious devotional text.

[15] Evidence of the *Book*'s general reception as autobiography can be found, for example, in the editorial introductions to the *Book of Margery Kempe* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*; *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*; the Penguin Classics *The Book of Margery Kempe*; and a Triumph Classics translation entitled, *The Book of Margery Kempe: The Autobiography of a Madwoman*; as well as secondary criticism (e.g., Dinshaw's "Margery Kempe" entry in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*; Mueller's "Autobiography of a New 'Creatur': Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in The Book of Margery Kempe"; Yoshikawa's "The Jerusalem Pilgrimage: The Centre of the Structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*). A. C. Spearing finds it appropriate that "*The Book of Margery Kempe* is often described, with some reason, as the first autobiography in English, but if that is what it is, it is a very odd autobiography" ("Book" 625); however, he also points to the host of problems with calling the *Book* an autobiography for all of its textual idiosyncrasies. He goes on to explore the difficulty with labeling a work as an autobiography that was written at a time when the genre had scarcely emerged and concludes the article stating, " 'This creature' ought to be a fictional character, but she was not [...] the way we want to read books is not always the way we ought to read them" (635). A strong argument could be made that the *Book*'s categorization as autobiography stems from its early reception by H. Allen as such; Allen likely sought (intentionally or instinctively) to distance this odd work from the works she herself studied, to keep the *Book* from sullying the genre her scholarship considered. Mason has identified Allen's Prefatory Note as the origin of Kempe's book as an autobiography (220). Indeed, Allen does offer a comparison of Kempe's work to what she refers to as "Suso's 'so-called' autobiography," identifying autobiography as a favorite genre of the late fourteenth-century group the "Friends of God," who composed various sorts of educational vernacular literature (lvi). Many more recent sources clarify the *Book*'s categorization as *spiritual* autobiography, rather than simply autobiography. Notably, Staley's introduction in the Norton Critical Edition avoids the term autobiography, preferring instead "sacred biography" (ix), and her introduction to the TEAMS edition notes, "Though frequently characterized as the first autobiography in English, we might instead think of it as a fiction (the first novel?)."

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identify the sources of its troublesomeness. Scholars and critics of autobiography seek a well-defined subject[16] with a high degree of self-awareness and clear access to the interior life of the constructed self.[17] Most autobiographical critics have agreed that Kempe's text fails as autobiography in this regard.[18] Such criticism of the *Book* stems in part from the text's irreconcilable lack of narrative cohesiveness, from its failure to unify

[16] That is, a developed narrative "I," distinct from the subject*ivity* or the interior sense of the self or site of private experience, as I define it for the purposes of this project.

[17] This expectation of autobiography derives from its definition—such as Lejeune's oft-cited definition—as "retrospective prose narrative that a real person makes of his own existence, when he emphasizes his individual life, especially the history of his personality" (4). According to Buckley the "ideal" autobiography presents the author's life and personality with "veracity" and "profundity"; it depicts a "voyage of self-discovery which acquires a sense of perspective and integration" (12). For Olney, autobiography represents a deep interest in the self and its mysteries (19). However, I should clarify that like any genre the parameters of what constitutes autobiography are sharply contested. Olney offers an early critical history (to about 35 years ago) of the disagreement over the nature of autobiography; he also cites Gusdorf who in 1956 traced the growing critical dissent about the nature of autobiography. Olney then attempts to set to rest anxiety about what constitutes autobiography by broadening the genre's parameters. He contends that autobiography is practiced by almost everyone. In a likely response to Bruss's "rules" for the genre of autobiography just a few years before his collection was published, Olney claims that autobiography offers the writer complete freedom: no rules to follow or requirements for form, no constraints, no necessary models, "no obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition and imposed by that tradition" (3). Here, Olney exhibits symptoms the theoretical shift for autobiographical studies, as well as others, in what constitutes the self and its relationship to language. The semiotic underpinnings of this change are discussed below.

[18] For example, among those who read Kempe's book as autobiography, Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* finds Kempe's *Book* a poor example of autobiography because she does not "understand herself" and is not "stern"; these are Pascal's measures of the rigorous reflection expected in good autobiography (186). He further criticizes her writing as "wayward and trivial and rarely ris[ing] to the level of symbolic event in which her character and her world are suddenly embodied" (186), yielding a work that is not concrete enough. Pascal further notes that Kempe's connections of faith and action are also "abstract," as the action belongs more to the faith than to the person" (97). Other critiques of the failure of Kempe's text as autobiography include Riehle's; his objection—though particular to spiritual autobiography—is to the opposite extreme, to Kempe's "excessive emotional piety" (17). He writes that "there was a grave danger that [...] popular piety would sink into a welter of sentimentality and [...] Margery Kempe did not avoid this danger (139). While Riehle feels some of the mystical passages in Kempe's autobiography have some value, he also feels the *Book* demonstrates "pathological neurotic tactics" (17). His criticism is based, in his view, upon the inability of Margery to separate the physical and spiritual; he offers the example of Margery seeing "the passion of Christ so physically present that she stretches out her arms [...] and cries loudly 'I dey, I dey,' her continence turning blue as lead" (139; though almost verbatim from Kempe's text). That Riehle sees Margery as "incapable" of maintaining this separation is key. Though questions of intentionality prevent us from knowing whether Margery's melding of the physical and spiritual was deliberate, the impact of this rhetorical move remains. The contradiction first apparent between these representative critics reveals an important but often overlooked feature of Kempe's book. The *Book* does not fail toward abstraction but establishes a singular means of expression—and an accompanying singular subject—that is the focus of this dissertation project.

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its disparate modes of apology, travelogue, and vision.[19] Although critics find that each of these disparate modes is represented at different textual moments with decided "candor" and "earthiness,"[20] the text frequently renders Margery's interior self inaccessible to readers by juxtaposing such numerous, apparently irreconcilable—or at least unexpected—and seemingly contradictory elements.[21] The result leaves readers feeling that for all that the text includes much is excluded or obscured from their perspective. Such exclusions often have been critiqued harshly as an inability of Kempe's to render an adequate interior self, as noted above.[22] However, I contend that those aspects of Margery's self that are excluded or obscured are not a failure of expression, but compose the hidden-most inner parts of her self,[23] her subjectivity. The exclusions create a differentiated space wherein the inexpressibility of private experience is maintained as a separated aspect of the self to construct her subjectivity. Margery maintains this inaccessible site of self by effectively disorienting readers with unexpected juxtapositions of incongruous elements of her identity and by actively refusing to fulfill expectations regarding genre, social roles, and disclosure of an

[19] H. Allen's early impressions of the *Book* make a similar critique, though framed in a more positive light. Allen states, "Margery's originality seems to me indisputable," and like "other creators of literary types," Kempe's *Book* yields "new combinations and developments of elements which had been previously existing in her environment" (lvii).

[20] See, for example, Pascal's discussion of the *Book* (185–87). See also Heffernan; Knowles (*English* Ch. 8). Another example of the mixed critical praise for the *Book of Margery Kempe*—in a different vein—is McEntire's; in comparing Kempe to Walter Hilton, she finds that although Kempe's tears represent "true faith," she was not a mystic of his caliber.

[21] Bruss notes the tendency of some autobiographers who seek to establish the particularity of the autobiographical subject by "extending or upsetting expectations or simply by combining what is expected of him in his own way (172). Though Margery Kempe was among the first autobiographers, she achieves this type of differentiation to remarkable effect. As form mimics content, she violently upsets expectations of her as a writer and as an autobiographical subject in her textual world.

[22] See some examples mentioned in n. 10, above. Pascal describes the sensation of the awareness of hidden interiority as a "cone of darkness." This "cone" requires the autobiographer to "recognise that there is something unknowable in him" (184–85).

[23] I loosely borrow the notion of the hidden-most inner self from Jim Holstein. See, for example, Holstein and Gubrium.

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interiorily located self. This differentiated space is an unexplorable but profound and significant element of the conjoined construction of the self;[24] it constitutes the inexpressibility of her private experience, or her subjectivity.

The rift in the way the autobiographical self and subject are read might be figured as the purists' construction versus the postmodernists' construction of the autobiographical self.[25] The purists hold the traditional notion of the absolute representability of the full autobiographical self, identity, and subject. Their position is perhaps best expressed with Georges Gusdorf's vision of the representation of the autobiographical subject: "No one can know better than I what I have thought, what I have wished; I alone have the privilege of discovering myself from the other side of the mirror" (35). However, as more recent theorists have pointed out, this notion of the full accessibility of the autobiographical self to its author is anything but certain. We cannot be certain of recovering the author from a text. We cannot be certain of recovering reality from a text. These theorists find this lack of certainty derives at least in part from the necessary reliance upon language. Language, a public, social (rather than private, personal) construct, is slippery and presents obstacles to an adequate expression of the

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[24] This description of how the subject is represented as a differentiated, inaccessible space should not be construed as akin to poststructuralist notions of meaning deferred or of differance. A subject constructed by means of an inaccessible site is not to be understood as an emptiness or a lack. Such formulations of this sort of lack (sometimes figured as the Other)—what Derrida observed (claiming to side with Kant) is all we are able to know: "only, at best, some negative conditions, a 'negative wisdom'" ("Principle" 19), a barrier to full knowledge. The relevance of such poststructuralist notions of meaning is discussed below.

[25] Over the past several decades, our general notions of the self—and perhaps in particular an autobiographical self—have become fraught with complexity, as theories of truth and meaning have evolved. The effects of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories that explore what constitutes a text, how it is constituted, the relationship of truth to the text, the role of the author, the role of the subject, and other related issues have produced a host of fallacies—fallacies of mimesis, authorial intention, and so on. The lines between textual matters and "reality" have blurred. Such considerations have led Holstein and Gubrium (and a host of others) to conclude that "the self has fallen upon hard times" (3), for it has become increasingly difficult to parse who we are among the many available narratives and texts that constitute our selves. This anxiety not only describes the state of our selves our Age, but also necessarily colors the way we consider selves constructed in earlier Ages. Perhaps nowhere is this anxiety more apparent than in autobiography where, because of the subject matter, the textual self is laid particularly bare and its convergence with reality becomes decidedly pronounced. Over the past several decades, an accompanying rift has become apparent in the way the autobiographical self and subject are read.

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self. Shifting theories of language and the social construction of meaning have carried implications for the self—particularly for narrative selves, and more particularly the autobiographical self.

The rift in autobiographical criticism reveals an accompanying shift in considerations of the construction of the self generally. By extension, the traditional notion of the integral, private, authentic self—and the autobiographical self—has shifted from a referential construct to a symbolic one. That is, more recent models of the self no longer find a unified psychological representation that exists *prior to* the language that expresses it. Instead, these more recent notions of the constructions of the self find the self to be constituted by language itself (and language itself is unstable, shaping discursive knowledge). These two factions of self-construction divide along opposing lines of the relationship of language to the self: the traditional view finds that the self exists prior to language, while the opposing view conceives of language existing prior to the self. Like all that we perceive to be "real," the self is signified through language, which produces a private self, or subjectivity, whose meaning and essence can only be approximated by what it is not (since we can not know with any certainty what is). The transparent self the autobiographer previously relied upon has been refigured as a fiction of language.

In a purportedly autobiographical text like the *Book of Margery Kempe* where the textual "I" claims to be a reified version of a historical person, the problems poststructuralists pose relating to the representation of the self (outlined above) become particularly relevant. Yet poststructuralists' figuring of texts as self-referential language-play *ad infinitum* does not hold up under the test of lived human experience, for we experience the sensation of the authentic self. Any autobiographical act relies inherently upon such a sensation of the authentic self, even if we accept poststructuralists' (and others') complaint that this romantic notion of the self is an outdated, overly romanticism notion. Poststructuralists' point that the self is more likely constructed of a

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fragmented reification through language than upon a preexisting romantic, authentic, timeless essence must wane slightly in light of this autobiographical sensation. Whether in telling one's own personal experience or reading another's experience, an undeniable sense or belief lingers that an authentic self resides within each of us, formulated of our individual experiences and private reflections. Reality might be nothing more than a product of the linguistic expression of the shape of social forces acting together, but this certain sensation remains, of an inexpressible private experience.

Therefore, neither the traditional nor the poststructuralist notion of the self and of the autobiographical subject proves entirely satisfying. To reconcile these competing positions about the construction of the self, this dissertation project turns to Michel Foucault's technologies of the self by way of social semiotics to consider how Margery's self, her identity, and subsequently her subjectivity are constructed in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. It borrows from a growing body of theory that locates a socially constructed self as an alternative to Cartesian- or Saussurean-derived notions of an internally, psychologically, or linguistically located self. This alternatively constituted self consists of both a socially constructed identity and a differentiated subjectivity. The socially constructed identity is discursively constructed in relation to the overlapping available narrative models, prescribed and inscribed by forces of social expectation and interaction. Subjectivity is differentiated as a separate space, indicated as a gesture toward the inexpressibility of private experience. However, this differentiated space of subjectivity, constructed as an alternative space to the socially constructed identity, is not to be understood as a lack, an emptiness, a shadow of identity. Some theories of meaning propose such a site of difference (particularly those, like poststructuralism, that critique Saussurean bases for meaning). Peircean semiotics, used—for example—by social constructionists and practitioners of social semiotics, provides a means to account for such a differentiated space that is not a void or a lack, but that has meaning, albeit a meaning that rests just outside our linguistic grasp.

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Representations of the self—of how its various elements are constructed—became the concern of Michel Foucault in his later work. Near the end of his life, during an interview with Rux Martin, Foucault dubbed the opus of his intellectual endeavors a building to the "technologies of the self" (*Technologies* 15). Foucault identified four sorts of "technologies"[26] connected to the various "ways that humans develop knowledge about themselves" (*Ethics* 224). These ways of knowing ourselves he called "truth games"—the "so-called sciences" such as economics, psychiatry, medicine—which are played, one might say, through these four technologies, or "specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves" (224). These techniques fall into four related "technologies":

> (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject;[27] (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies

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[26] Foucault's notion of technologies seems to stem from his intellectual mentor Heidegger. However, Foucault clearly cannot mean "technology" in the sense of modern technology (as in Heidegger's "question concerning technology"). Rather, if he was influenced by Heidegger in the way he conceived of these technologies, Foucault instead must draw upon Heidegger's revival of "the premodern understanding of technology as craft or art (*techne*)" (Sawicki 66). To our contemporary sensibilities, we might think more accurately of Foucault's technologies as techniques or ways of accomplishing something. Technologies of the self are the means to constructing the self, our acting through various "truth games" in which we participate and by which we formulate who we are. (More about truth games appears below.) By way of further explication, one critical application of Foucauldean technologies of the self is Cohen's example of how all medieval people in Europe, by function of history and social circumstance, defined themselves in relation to the horse (*Medieval* 45–47).

[27] Foucault uses the term "subject" differently than I; his "subject" refers to the knowable self. For example, in his discussion of Seneca in "Technologies of the Self," he writes of "discovering truth in the subject" ("Technologies" 34). His notion of the subject is who an individual knows himself to be. Further, he writes, "the subject [...] is the point where rules of conduct come together in memory" (34), an apparently psychological self-figuring. My notion of *subjectivity* in this study is, instead, the part of oneself that is *un*knowable, what Foucault calls the "secret self" (35).

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> and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (225)

These four technologies, Foucault explains, "hardly ever function separately" (225), which suggests that we formulate our selves through all three other technologies. Although Foucault imagined and applied his notion of the technologies of the self it in somewhat different terms,[28] this notion of the technologies of the self (particularly as a combined functioning with his other technologies) can be applied to the understanding of how Margery's self is constructed in her *Book*—that is, her full self, her identity and subjectivity.

Foucault's prolific work over several decades produced a range of theoretical positions, some of which have been harshly criticized in more recent decades, in particular for their structuralist underpinnings.[29] I seek to reconstitute Foucault's notion

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[28] Foucault applied his notion of technologies of the self to questions of ethics and morality, particularly in their intersection with the connected technologies of power and with individual freedom. In his "Technologies of the Self," he provides examples of three main "techniques" or "technologies" whereby we have come to know the self in the foundations of the Western tradition: the Cartesian examination of one's thoughts in correspondence with reality; the Classical (Stoic and Senecan) assessment of how one's thoughts align with a set of rules; and the Christian consideration of the relationship of hidden thought to inner impurity. This three-pronged pursuit he called care for the self, techniques for aligning our inner selves with the ways that we present outer ourselves. Foucault was interested in accounting for how these various techniques represent different "truth games," such as these three—the Cartesian, the Classical, and the Christian.

[29] This might be suggested in his term "truth games" to express the means by which one comes to know oneself; Wittgenstein, for example, chooses the term "language games" to describe a similar definitional function. The assumption that one might locate truth, or even might attempt to do so, pushed Foucault out of fashion for a time. Derrida criticized these assumptions of Foucault's. For more recent critiques of Foucault's structuralism, see, for example, Thibault (*Social* 3) where he aligns Foucault with outdated structuralist and poststructuralist notions of truth and meaning. Indeed, Foucault's descriptions of the technologies of the self, outlined briefly above, clearly find their basis in what Thibault and other practitioners of social semiotics call "mentalist" constructions, the Cartesian notion that thought and meaning precede language. However, throughout Foucault's work, he catalogs such "truth games" in a way that builds toward an understanding of the many factors that influence our perceptions of ourselves as individuals within society. In part, intellectual criticisms of Foucault prove difficult since his work spans decades, and he changed and developed many of his ideas over time. When asked during an interview late in his life whether he was a philosopher, historian, structuralist, or Marxist, Foucault replied, "I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (R. Martin 9).

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