

# Psychoanalysis and the Image: The Full Introduction

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Why psychoanalysis and the image? An unnecessary question, the relations between psychoanalysis and art are as old as psychoanalysis itself.

Sometimes, I encounter a different question. Do we **have** to 'use' psychoanalysis in art history or visual analysis? Apart from the misunderstanding about the 'use' of theory, addressed in this volume through performance rather than application, such anxiety stems from unfamiliarity with a body of theory foreign to art history proper. 'I do not know much about psychoanalysis,' is a frequent refrain. Reasonable ignorance and/or resistance gain support in certain new tendencies. Some cultural scholars declare that we are now in a post-theory moment, in which the challenging engagement with the difficult revolutions of modern thought can be relegated to a historical past. We no longer need that kind of detailed study, explication and engagement that characterised the intellectual climate of cultural and visual studies after 1968.<sup>1</sup> 'Theory' becomes reified and rejected.

Others confidently proclaim that we are in a post-feminist moment. Attention to the deep structuring of human subjectivity and sexuality in sexual difference as both an axis of power, meaning and pleasure is wished away as a temporary episode from which, thankfully, we have moved on. Feminist and gender questions are treated in some quarters as frankly old-fashioned, superseded by more inclusive and internationalist perspectives on other more pressing forms of difference and subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

The intervention offered by this volume is unashamedly, actively, creatively and faithfully engaged with the necessity for *theoria*: which, simply means to look at, to travel to see, to judge one thing by another, to contemplate, to think about by means of careful engagements with concepts and bodies of thought. The writers here, however, already find the source of *theoria* in the art work itself. The brutal division between reified theory and the innocent art object is displaced in the poetic encounter of theoretical writing and its already theoretical objects that provoke and call forth a depth of analysis that may travel towards the object through many related territories towards a reading.<sup>3</sup>

This volume, furthermore, testifies to the still rich potential for *feminist theoria*, thinking with and about sexual difference. Feminist thought has only just got underway, having richly equipped itself with relevant resources and charted its complex relations to a whole field of cultural analysis, theory and history. Yet, feminist thought is not a static body of *theoria*. It shifts and responds to internal and external provocation to meet the challenge of holding on to sexual difference as a deep, determining and generative structure in subjectivity and sociality. Its theoretical analysis informs studies of other axes of difference, while grappling with its inescapable texturing in social and cultural relations we name class, culture, or in my own terms, generations and geographies.<sup>4</sup> This volume offers close-read engagements with specific cultural texts and practices that are addressed through psychoanalytical thinking that is shown to illuminate our understanding the cultural specificity of textual or visual enunciation in history. This is particularly the challenge met by Karyn Ball's study of Korean American conceptual artist/writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's image-text, *Dictée* in which the tension between enclosing a subject in cultural otherness (identity or postcolonial readings) and tracking the working through of specific historical displacements through a more Kristevan sense of writing, subjectivity and avant-garde

poetics exposes the continuing theoretical difficulties we have in reading any cultural inscription in the double axis of historical emplacement and subjective structuration. This question appears in Izumi Nakajima's reading of the Net paintings of Yayoi Kusama whose doubled situation as a Japanese woman artist working in both the United States and Japan in two post-war patriarchal cultures of abstract painting creates the need for a feminist psychoanalytical proposition about the subject position of the post-war Japanese daughter. Challenging divisions which displace 'feminist' with international or post-colonial difference, these interventions address differentially positioned subjects and their cultural inscriptions which psychoanalytical theory allows us to read against the reification and exoticisation of the Other. At the same time, a thematic emerges spontaneously across several texts in this volume around the figure of the creative rather than hysteric daughter by a return in both Ettinger's and Cerne's papers to the figure of 'Dora' from Freud's infamous case study of 1905 – a case-study that holds in culture a feminine 'fascination'- *fascinante*- with looking at a image of woman: a topic of feminine spectatorship long trailled over in feminist cultural theory.

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To the opening question why *psychoanalysis and the image* I can give three answers.

Firstly, psychoanalysis is one of the major theoretical discoveries and hence theoretical resources of the twentieth century. Its topic: subjectivity or in other terms, the split sexuated subject and its affections, is clearly central to the arts and humanities. Alongside theorisations of society, language and the sign, textuality and meaning-making, and the elaboration of an anthropological concept of culture, a theory subjectivity and the specificity of the workings of the conscious and unconscious have been undoubtedly central to modern thought and cultural experience. Psychoanalysis is not an esoteric, clinical field remote from twentieth century culture. With Saussure, Proust, Einstein and Picasso, Freud and his movement are part of the modernist cultural revolution that asked: what is...questions? Asking 'what is the human mind?' psychoanalysis has radically reshaped the way we understand subjectivity **and** sexuality, and the subjectified production of meaning through word and image.

The second response, argued persuasively in this volume by Mieke Bal, involves recognising that psychoanalysis is the major theorisation of the constitution of sexual difference. For feminists, from the earliest publications of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth century, down to the revival of feminist discourse at its end, psychoanalysis has held open a theoretical space otherwise not offered in other social or cultural theories for examining sexuality, gender and sexual difference. These are, importantly, not synonymous. It is precisely psychoanalytical theory that takes us beyond any idea of given, innate sexed and sexual identities, or sexualities and beyond theories of gender : socially constructed or performative notions of meanings created for sex differences which frame all discussions in terms of a heteronormative man/woman difference. Psychoanalysis enables us to theorise *sexual difference* as the very problem of creating, accessing, negotiating and inevitably failing to occupy sexually differentiated, historically contingent, psycho-linguistic positions named masculinity and femininity that are not synonymous with our sexualities, desires or phantasies. Such positions, hinged between undefined undetermined corporalities and the pre-determining signs (he/she, man/woman) provided in language, are not about men and women (a symmetrical pairing of two sexes destined for each other's completion given in biology or shaped socially). Masculinity and femininity, unevenly distributed

between and accessed by human subjects incompletely, define systems of *differentiation* and, above all, *asymmetrical* effects. These effects (never essences) hierarchically privilege the signifier masculine as a positivised, if always phantasmatic term, while rendering feminine, not the equal complement, but a negated, cipher-like other, consolidating, through its lack as simply the minus term, the positive illusion of the masculine as a sign of presence and identity. In providing, therefore, the theoretical terms to think about sexual difference as an asymmetrical hierarchy of impossible and unstable positions and effects, psychoanalysis adds considerable theoretical potential to our thinking about and transforming the meanings and positions created for masculinity and femininity in culture under the naturalised myths of gender and sex. It also enables us to study the relays of that hierarchy of constitutive difference on a plus/minus logic, into other phantasmatic axes of power such as race. The colonial and racialised other is comparably positioned in this logic of plus and minus, presence and absence and its attendant desires and narcissistic anxieties about lack.<sup>5</sup>

In this volume, Bracha Ettinger, a close but differentiating feminist reader of the later, often unpublished theoretical revisions of Jacques Lacan, the theoretical mouthpiece of sexual difference formed by [symbolic] castration that shapes this phallic logic of plus/minus, plots out the implications of this classic model of sexual difference in psychoanalysis. Reading against its phallogocentric grain, she produces from within its own changing theoretical territory, a radical shift that transforms its deepest aporia, the feminine as a sexual difference that is not premised on the feminine as simply the negative 'difference from the masculine.'<sup>6</sup> Ettinger names her supplementary signifier that expands the symbolic, 'the matrixial' that she has been researching and elaborating for over twenty years at the intersection of her own painting practice and her practice as a psychoanalyst. Here she offers a matrixial re-reading of two different but key 'literary' texts that are, none the less, theoretical: Freud's failed case-study of the hysteric he named 'Dora' [Ida Bauer] (1905) and Marguerite Duras' novel *The Ravishment of Lol Stein* (1964). She reposes Freud's despairing admission of defeat before the enigma of the feminine: what does a woman want, by reposing it to show that feminine desire and desirability is forged in a question posed by the girl not to a Man but to another Woman. To 'Dora's' longing contemplation of the Madonna, Adriana Cerne returns in the final essay in the volume, drawing on Ettinger's theory of a matrixial gaze and metramorphosis<sup>7</sup> to re-examine key questions of feminist film theory and feminist film practice in relation to visual pleasure 'in the feminine' language of desire in a poetic reading of the final shot of Chantal Akerman's film *News from Home* (1976).

Psychoanalysis has been mobilised by feminist theorists to understand the hinge between the socio-economic structures of phallogocentric/patriarchal societies and the subjectivities of its individual constituents, each of whom is accessed to the cultural formation through psycho-linguistic processes that involve imaginary identifications and submission to the symbolic systems of language through which alone we can articulate an 'I'.<sup>8</sup> Psychoanalytical theory of how the sexed, speaking human subject is formed from the animal *infans* –Latin for without speech - provides the missing link, as it were, between the larger social and cultural field of historical social relations and the conditions of individual and subjective involvement, structuration and negotiation as a historical but also passionate, affective and thinking being. No other theoretical discipline defines the problematic of the creation of the speaking and sexed subject, the vagaries and ambivalences of sexualities and their excess through the specific workings of the unconscious, and hence the possibilities of transformation. Perhaps one of the most misunderstood of Freud's pronouncements, the significance of sexuality in human subjectivity, provides the theoretical resources for

thinking about art itself as an activity, as well as its specific processes and modes. Freud's scandalous proposition of infantile sexuality – a passionate pursuit of pleasure not at all tied to what we think of as adult, genital or reproductive sexual aims, lays down a foundation of drives, aims, objects, frustrations, displacements, and sublimations that provide the structural characteristics of our adult activities. This is not to reduce humans to children, but to lend to our adult, measured and oblivious lives, the energetic traces of the intense passions and anxieties into which the becoming-human infant is born. Thus psychoanalytical readings of the image offered here are not iconographic, teasing out a hidden, neurotic content. They are structural, thinking about the processes and forms that bear the stamp of these intensities and formative matrices of sexually differenced subjectivities.

Finally, the co-emergence of art/cultural history as a scholarly and critical discipline in later nineteenth century German-language culture at the same time as Freud's foundation of the psychoanalytic movement in Vienna, ensures that psychoanalysis has always been a party to modern re-thinking about art's and culture's histories and meanings. Most of the originating thinkers and critics in the discipline were aware, if not of psychoanalysis itself – though many were - of the sources in Nietzsche and other thinkers that also formed Freud's ideas about irrationality, the unconscious and split subject.<sup>9</sup> By the 1930s, many artists and art historians were keenly interested in what it offered to artists and to aesthetics. I could mention Adrian Stokes or Meyer Schapiro to name but a few.<sup>10</sup>

By the same token, from its start, art was studied by psychoanalysts as a supplementary archive for the study of subjectivity and its fantasies. Psychoanalysis strove to comprehend creativity in human subjectivity towards whose analysis psychoanalysis could make its specific contributions about sublimation, repressed memory, anxiety, defence, eroticism, delusion and above all the coded structure of psychic representation by displacement and condensation, metonymy and metaphor, in the dream which, with the joke, is the paradigm for the poetic and aesthetic image. The opening essay in this volume addresses one of Freud's earliest forays into analytical criticism of a novella at whose heart was an image, a Roman bas-relief of a running woman, delusively fixated upon by a young archaeologist of the ancient world who has turned to lapidary fixation in lieu of living eroticism. Freud's writings on artists such as Leonardo, on Michelangelo's *Moses*, as well as his references to Greek myth, European literature and drama are already well known as are some of Melanie Klein's or Julia Kristeva's studies in art, creativity and literature.<sup>11</sup>

There is, therefore, nothing novel about the creative intersection of psychoanalysis and the study of the arts. What of the image specifically? In the last quarter of the last century, there was a renewed engagement fostered by the cultural dissemination of the work of Jacques Lacan. Lacan's teaching re-read Freudian writings through the prism of semiotics and structuralism, neo-Hegelianism and phenomenology as well as Kleinian revisions of the archaic period of infancy. As influential as his work was challenging, and even baffling to lay readers, 'Lacan' energised the interactions between psychoanalysis and the intellectual field of arts and humanities through participation in the intellectual revolutions of Paris circa 1968 which included the politicised re-emergence of feminist discourse.<sup>12</sup> The Paris-based Marxist-feminist group *Psychoanalyse-Politique* already acknowledged the double necessity for social and psychic theories to effect radical change.<sup>13</sup>

After 1968, the unfinished business of the modernisation and theorisation of sexual difference, initiated within the first and still scandalous Freudian revolution was resumed beyond the professional field of the psychoanalytical movement. Psychoanalysis was taken up in the Anglo-phone world through the impact of Lacanian psychoanalytical innovations on emergent film theory mediated by theorists such as Christian Metz and Raymond Bellour.

Lacan's work on the mirror phase and on its revision in his 1963 seminar as 'the gaze as objet a' contributed a further revolution in which the paradigms of art or literary history that had shaped film studies. Authorship, the great work, expression, formalism gave way to a reconceptualisation of the apparatus as a whole. Instead of studying a discrete film (or art work), we moved on to analyse 'cinema' as a system that comprehended the conditions of industrial capitalist production, creating as the means of its ideological effectivity a structured relation between spectator and textuality in conditions of 'imaginary' capture that were founded on the specular and the scopic dimensions of subjectivity and sexuality that Freud had intimated but never fully theorised.<sup>14</sup> Terms that are now so commonplace as to have been banalised in cultural theory, namely the *spectator* and the *gaze* broke the mould of art history or film history's conventional attention to authors and their expressive works by attending to our investments in looking. Combined with the concept of the text (a weaving of many threads of potential meaning drawn from both the maker and the culture of making rather than the film or art work as discrete, expressive communication), spectator and gaze need to be recognised as conceptual tools that allowed radical changes in how we studied practices of representation. Spectator, gaze and text challenge the idealist and romantic notions of a self-defining artist creating personal meaning and depositing it in the art or film where the viewer or reader merely receives it in an appraising manner. Instead, the processes of producing meaning are stretched between the decentred if not entirely displaced 'producer' and the productivity of reading/viewing through the active semiotic processes of textuality that always take place in culture and history. This, furthermore, means that there is no one meaning secured by the projected fiction of the author as origin before and outside the text, art work or film. The activity of cultural analysis is always a situated, ethical process of reading the meaning-producing elements of the cultural languages and forms that are always already culturally embedded in histories and moments, but are infinitely negotiable and productive of meaning at all levels. In this space, furthermore, the disciplinary divisions between literature, art and cinema break down to allow us to work with the processes of representation that involved linguistic/visual elements and poetics in complex relays and overlaps.<sup>15</sup>

While Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical schools offered materials for philosophy, ethics, literature, poetry as well as art, a decisive historical feature of the later twentieth century, probably as itself a symptom of its own increasingly spectacular turn in postmodern culture, was the attention to a dimension of subjectivity, sexuality and meaning-making that we can provisionally identify with the image and the scene/seen, even while changing our understanding of what these are.

Freudian legends of the subject posits two decisive moments, or 'scenes' that involve seeing. The 'primal scene' where an infant may witness its parents' sexual congress, and a later encounter with the sexual specificity of the female body that precipitates the subject into the crises of castration anxiety. In both cases, Freud reverses the typical association of perception with knowledge. What is seen cannot be comprehended. Its meaning eludes the subject because the scene it witnesses occurs prior to the existence of any psychological apparatus through which it could be apprehended. None the less, the sight leaves a trace whose affects will be loaded onto successive 'sights' that retrospectively confer their meanings belatedly onto the originally indecipherable primal scene.

In the other, later, scene of the sight of genital difference, an event in the realm of sight potentially holds open traumatic meanings about the possibility of mutilation, to escape which psychological defences come into play to re-write the 'seen', or to write over its threatening implications. This is the foundation of the structure of fetishism, which involves

simultaneously knowing and not-knowing in the same endless circle of fright and disavowal that calls forth the fetish to disavow the very knowledge that it will commemorate. Both situations are scenes, as indeed is another scenario used by Freud to discuss masochism in his essay 'A Child is Being Beaten.'<sup>16</sup> Freud theoretically conjures up for the reader an image, a situation in which the mind's eye sees a scene involving the formative effects of an encounter experienced not verbally but visually. Yet in describing what happens internally as its psychic imprinting, Freud has to propose a kind of speaking of the subject to a him/herself that will become a him/herself precisely as the effect of the incomplete cognition of this encounter. The effect of the traumatic, inexplicable sight that is witnessed is to generate the place of its inscription: a phantasy explanation – an explanation not yet in language, communicable and hence to be checked against any one else's or common understanding. Phantasy is already an interpretation framed by the premature psychological state of the subject with its limited resources for explaining the possible meanings of sights that are traumatic – i.e. have an impact that cannot yet be known- but have not yet a meaning for the subject. It is this gap, between the traumatic impact of encounter with some intimations of sexuality, desire and sexual difference in the field of vision and the child's integration into the cultural world of language which provides the structure of communicable and shared meanings, that generates the realm of phantasy. It is phantasy that was the special concern for Lacan in his development of a theory of the registers across which human subjectivity is thus stretched: the Real (events without meaning hence happening at what could be called the corpo-real level of non-verbal intensities and affects), the Imaginary (the level of phantasy and its key element, the image) and the Symbolic ( the realm of thought and linguistically signified meaning).

Lacan's infamously early work positing the mirror phase took up the incomplete theorisation of the spectacular dimension of human subjectivity implied in Freud's metaphors of scenarios and *mise-en-scène*. These theatrical and cinematic metaphors are as inevitable as they are significant in reminding us of the relays between modern cultural technologies and forms and psychoanalysis as a theoretical resource for noticing and exploring their implications. The implications of the mirror phase are taken up in this volume in a number of papers, notably Korean art historian Young-Paik Chun/Chun Young-Paik's detailed analysis of the inhuman image in the work of French painter Paul Cézanne and in the important study by the late Andrea Fisher of documentary photographs of working women by American woman photographers in the 1940s.

These papers also point to the range of ways of reading images made possible by working with the implications of Lacanian hypotheses about a moment in human becoming that involves 'the assumption of the image'. This contradicts common-sense notions of our having eyes to see so that an image is understood to be a perceived mimesis of something in the world, which we recognise for its likeness and process perceptually and intellectually in one cognitive movement. Lacan posits, as does Freud, the infant as pre-or even not yet human. To be a human subject is not a matter of simple biological development. It is a matter of psychological precipitation that is, in fact, a tragic tale of loss.

The psyche is precipitated in the human subject by the gap that lies between the huge neurological potentials with which the human baby is born and its complete physical prematurity that makes it unable to survive without intervention from an Other; from the start intersubjectivity must be established. Furthermore, in such life and death dependence, the infant will be physically subjected to extremes of desperate lack – hunger, cold, comfortlessness that register as the imminence of annihilation – and absolute bliss –

plenitude, warmth, comfort that overcome, erase and envelop the child in an ecstatic state between pleasure and pain named *jouissance* – for a moment. In the patterning of swoops between these extremes begins the grooving of what will become the psychic space that is called forth to hold and register these currents of alternating anxieties, intensities and bliss. It is here that the shift from what animals have: instincts which are neuro-chemical prepatterned responses that foster survival, give way to what Freud theorised as the drives – pathways and their energies surging towards the satisfactions that are associated initially with survival, namely nourishment, but which simultaneously become supplemented by associated experiences of comfort, movement, pleasure, and significantly contact physical, scopic and acoustic. Drives, furthermore, because of the infant’s dependency on something other than its own capacities, are characterised by having **aims** : satisfaction achieved by means **objects**, that will do the satisfying. Initially, these are partial: the breast, milk, and so forth and later they will be consolidated in others (hence the field of Kleinian psychoanalysis that contested Freud’s drive-base theory with a study of the archaic world of the child’s earliest **object**-relations). In the initial turbulence of early, archaic *relations* that not yet differentiated into bounded self and others, certain areas of the infant’s body become intensely, erotically, associated with the play of these life-seeking drives that are attended with increasing surplus: pleasure. The mouth and digestive tract are obvious candidates. But Freud specified and Lacan elaborated the scopic drive: the eroticisation, that is, the libidinal investment with the potential to bring satisfaction of the drives, of the field of vision, rendering eyes infantile-erotic organs and the gaze of the m/Other ( a term explained more fully by Bracha Ettinger in this volume reminding us of the femininity of the primary other before ‘she’ is recognised as the/my Mother in the Oedipal triangle) an object of lost desire. Andrea Fisher’s lyrical study of a photograph of a woman asleep in her car, reprinted here as an exemplary work of psychoanalytical reading of the photographic image, plots out the complexity and profundity of our psychic involvement with the field of vision because of the many levels of anxiety and pleasure, phantasy and projection to which this archaic legacy and its rewritings give rise.

Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase first posited the specific role of the specular in the formation of human subjectivity. The not-yet-subject can only become a subject if the conditions for imagining oneself as a discrete ‘I’ are laid down . But these conditions have to enter the subject from outside, from the field of the Other, from those Others already there in language and culture who mediate the latter to the baby Lacan imagined as an *hommelette* punning on the notion of a not yet man/homme and the broken eggs of the omelette. Thus the metaphor of the mirror phase is not about the self-knowing child looking into the mirror and recognising itself – a logical impossibility if it can only have the basis of an ‘I’ as a result of this misrecognised encounter. It is about a network of looks between baby, screen/mirror, Other in the mirror and outside that marks out a field of vision within which the subject will be found/displaced – by the gaze of an Other. It is a theory of another scenario possibly performed with actual mirrors, but phantasmatically happening over an twelve month period in so far as the baby witnesses the constant representation of humanness to it from the world around it. The adult’s faces, looks, handling, words, and practices are all the mirrors through which an ‘imago’ is being formed that will be projected from the screen of culture into the baby. Recognition is more a moment of active alignment than perceptual understanding of the imago. Lacan speaks of the capture of the baby by the image: something in it fascinates and draws the baby to what it offers as an ideal beyond its own experienced and oscillating incoherence. In the mirror phase, the baby takes into itself this other – the imago - as a kind of armature around which to arrange its chaotic and

disconnected sensations and impulses into an internalised phantasy of a bounded, territorialised proto-subject. Thus does the subject come to have a body as its imaginary space with its skin as psychic boundary. Its apertures become frontiers marking inside and outside as the terms of self and other. This theory poses the paradox of the alien origin of the self as an effect of internalising an imago /from an Other – so the baby held up in the mirror *appears* to be self-defining and supporting in contrast to the shapelessness the baby itself feels. The apparent ‘recognition’ is always a mis-recognition of an ideal-other that is enthralling but also a rival leading to an identification with the ideal that is incorporated to provide the skeleton for a self that is at heart alienated. It is this formative structure that enables us to begin to theorise our fascination with the image, our capture by image culture, our phantasies of identification with what is not us: heroes, film stars, celebrities, characters. The workings of ideology, advertisement, ideological colonisation, visual pleasure in art and cinema are massively enlarged by this theoretical concept.

Lacan was, however, to recognise deep logical flaws in this thesis.<sup>17</sup> In his 1963 seminar he developed the concept of the gaze as *objet a* – *object a* : another baffling formula that is well-worth struggling to understand.<sup>18</sup> The reader of this book will soon realise how deeply dependent psychoanalytical theory is on metaphors. Here we need the metaphor of a kind of cloth or web. According to classic Freudian-Lacanian theory, the infant’s passage to human subjectivity is precipitated not by natural development but by a series of more or less traumatic severances from its confusion with the world and others. Thus the beginning is posited as a kind of undifferentiated enmeshment in which the flows of intensities and energies that shuttle the baby between extremes of despair and bliss pulsate across its as yet undefined corporeality in continuity with everything. Slowly slight separations occur through space and sight allowing the caretaker/mother’s face to come into view and be associated with the bliss of fulfilment. With each advance in cognition and location, however, comes the chilling threat of separation from that which she holds – the breast, the milk, the love, that are vital for survival and may, because they are not continuous with the baby, be withheld. Thus, in order to become a subject, the baby has to be cut out from the continuous cloth of its archaic undifferentiated state of continuity with the world and its need-fulfilling partial objects. Where these separations occur, a trace, a scar is left on the now external ‘skin’ border of the psyche, marking the severance that renders what was once continuous with the child as ‘lost’. Thus, and this is paradoxical, the breast only comes to be registered as the lost-breast. Before its loss it was but there. Only with the gap, does it inherit/signify longing. The mother’s gaze becomes longed for only as something from which the child is now cut: it is a lost-gaze. What it was that is now lost also has no real shape or meaning. Its register in the psyche is only as the psychic trace of a lostness for which the subject that can only become a subject if this has happened, is condemned to mourn. So Lacanian theory beautifully and poetically – because this is not everyday logic – conjures up this tragic condition of subjectivity as eternal mourning (that is what desire is) not for its lost objects but its never known but bliss-producing pre-objects as lostnesses that carve the very space of the subject as this shape in a tissue of scarified wounds. The subject is condemned to impossible desire. Thus the subject will forever scan the world for the *objets a* (that we suggest are the mother’s body, breast, voice, gaze and so forth). But if the subject encountered the *objet a* as object, the subject would be knocked out of the picture, because the subject *is* only an effect when it is severed from its pre-objects whose lostness is the negative field from which its delusory positive is cut. This model has, however, hugely gendered implications. Lacan argues that what the subject is cut from – the maternal gaze, touch, voice and breast – i.e. elements of the corporeal, sensory zones of the real, are lost as



the condition of subjective emergence. The feminine-maternal is hence cast into the realm beyond knowing and meaning, the realm Ettinger names Woman-Other-Thing that lies beyond primary repression – marked in the Lacanian scheme by psychic scars or *objets a*.

In this volume, Bracha Ettinger theorises through a reading of a novel – that has already thought in advance of the theory that comes to recognise it - another scenario and another kind of gazing that has specific repercussions for theorising femininity beyond this phallic model of the cut. She writes of links, encounters and shared events that involve notions of trans-subjective transformations of subjects momentarily caught in shared scenarios and encounters in which strings attach various poles that co-vibrate.

Paradigmatically the analytic encounter and its transferences already intimate shifts within subjects that occur when borders are opened without confusion. The aesthetic experience itself is another instance of encounter-exchange of shared intimacy between partially-open borders of several subjective partners where a unknown other, the viewer, may process and make sense of an other's –the art work's – materials. Hitherto only thinkable in mystical or idealistic terms, feminist matrixial theory offers a way to understand aesthetic and transferential experiences that we not only have when reading, watching or seeing art forms, but which, we can show, art forms have already intimated and raised to the level of cultural visibility. She also shows starkly what is the cost to subjects, particularly feminine subjects, if this sphere is not respected but brutally ignored.

In this volume, subtitled 'transdisciplinary perspectives in cultural analysis, theory and history', the authors do not operate within the confines of disciplines: art history, cultural studies, philosophy, literary criticism. That does not mean, however, that the specificity of either their objects of study or their methods are eroded in favour of some new interdisciplinary confection. Art History has certain protocols. For most of my academic career, I have been in conflict with many of its normalised conventions for the study of art. What I am seeking is not an alternative disciplinary home, but a reconfigured continuity with the long history of intellectual challenge and theoretical research into methods adequate to the complexity of that which we claim to study. To my mind, there is no going back to business as usual untransformed by the intellectual revolutions of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nor is there any pretending that we have moved on from them. What has changed is not the horrible addition of a lot of alien theories imported from philosophy or literary criticism or film studies or psychoanalysis. Change has happened at the level of concepts.

The Art History or Literary or Film Studies that think in terms of artists, authors, movements, styles, genres, periods, greats and minors will remain the curatorial keepers of heritage and tourism, dependent on class-ridden notions of civilisation and the sponsorship of corporations. Serious intellectual work acknowledges that advances have been made because we now think with concepts that transcend curatorial categories of artist, name, period, school and style.<sup>19</sup>

Visuality, sexuality, space, gaze, spectator, difference, resistance, poesis, identification, and the image inform the terms of analysis in this collection. Psychoanalysis in all the aspects I have discussed so far informs, but critically, the work done on and with these concepts. Melancholia, trauma, hysteria, delusion and the dream are specific areas addressed through its terms. All the authors, however, share a method: close-readings of the image in texts that require all the wealth of scholarship, historical documentation and attention to cultural, historical, classed, gendered and sexual specificity. Thus the intervention we hope to make in art history and its relatives comes through the expanded space of *transdisciplinary cultural analysis, theory and history* in which the articulation of the latter

three terms is performed in each piece of writing while the *transdisciplinary* allows space and specificity to each area of cultural practice that is being addressed: video installation, conceptual exhibition, conceptual word-image writing, abstract painting, documentary photography, modernist self-portraiture, and avant-garde film making.

Being faithful to the still rich potential of theoretically precise, historically specific and practice-specific analysis, this collection presents a varied set of engagements between psychoanalysis and the image that address one other, often asked question: what is the relevance of psychoanalysis beyond its culture of origin? No one can simply predict. The work done here on artists from Korea and Japan and by Korean and Japanese art historians provides a more nuanced space for considering this as a matter of concepts and practices that travel and traverse shared and differentiated intellectual and artistic spaces. Karyn Ball's substantial analysis of the critical difficulties and turns in post-colonial and identitarian politics of reading the work of Theresa Kyung Cha in the 1990s reveals both how hard it is to avoid the very illusions of identity and the desire for masterful knowing that psychoanalytical theory helps us to recognise, and how helpful psychoanalysis itself becomes as a monitor of our delusions and desires as scholars.<sup>20</sup>

As Jacques Derrida painfully pointed out, the frequent mistake that is made in working with and on Freud is not to imagine that Freud's work itself changed the terms of all of our work as scholars. To work with psychoanalysis, a psychoanalytically, to imagine that one's desires, fantasies, aggressions and delusions are not always in play, is to fall at the very first hurdle. Freud's texts have themselves been studied for their own unconscious and this appears in his own private museum, discussed in this volume. We need not merely to work with but also to work on psychoanalysis. Mieke Bal explores the troubling implications of psychoanalysis as something we cannot do without, without denying ourselves a theoretical route into subjectivity and its plays. Yet it is implicated. Her paper moves between a study of the dream-as-artwork-as-dream re-theorised by an installation by Bill Viola and the British analyst Christopher Bollas and a reading of an installation by American artists Kathleen Gilje and Joseph Grigely who staged a parodic exhibition on a 'recovered' painting by Italian Baroque painter Caravaggio 'restored' to 'reveal' its eroticised underpainting by Gilje. In this installation parody of 'art historical, psychoanalytical and museal conventions', our desires for origins and truths behind layers of obscuring amnesia are played off against the projections and fantasies in play in scholarly interpretation. Mieke Bal raises here the questions of sexuality and sexual difference to allow a mobility that responds to the invitation to play that allows the artist to perform art history 'with psychoanalysis'.

It was precisely because psychoanalysis emerged in the hybrid space between modernist aspirations for verifiable, valid, scientific understanding of its object: the human subject, and, on the other hand, a consciousness that the subject is far more complex and fissured by its own aporias and repressions, projections and phantasies : that it was a figure of oblivion and memory, that we can learn from Freud ways of working self-critically, with the necessary reserve of inevitable self-exposure and blindness. The monitory example of Freud and the undoing of fixed forms of knowledge that saw Freud ranging for his resources over art, literature, anthropology and archaeology as well as in dialogic intimacy with actual, suffering individuals who lay upon his carpet-covered couch amidst his collection of antiquities has been exceptionally fruitful for feminist practice. Without real intention, this collection is written about women by women in the strange affectionate, respectful and

never uncritical engagement with the still open, challenging and productive legacy of the psychoanalysis Freud founded – writing it in the presence of so many images - but that so many others have taken up, extended and made vivid in relation to the challenges of understanding not only the image in contemporary culture and cultural analysis but the image-makers and the image-readers.

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<sup>1</sup> One example might be a fellow volume in this series, *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* edited by Gavin Butt, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005 who raised in his introduction the query as whether ‘theory’ was any more a fertile ground or had in fact become a new prisonhouse of

<sup>2</sup> For a critical countering see Jane Flax, ‘Can Psychoanalysis Survive in the Post-modern West?’ From *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy*, (New York; Routledge, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> This position is argued here by Mieke Bal and others, but see Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider: the Architecture of Art-Writing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001)

<sup>4</sup> Griselda Pollock, ed. *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> The strongest case for this cross reading between post-colonial theory and psychoanalysis is put forward in Homi Bhabha, ‘The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,’ *Screen*, 1983, vol. 24. No.6, 18-36.

<sup>6</sup> Her matrixial theory has been published in many arenas over the last ten years. For a long introduction and a key paper see the special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2004, Vol.21. Griselda Pollock, ‘Thinking the Feminine: Aesthetic Practice as an Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metramorphosis, 5-69 and Bracha L. Ettinger, ‘Weaving the Woman Artist with-in-the Matrixial Encounter-Event, 69-94.

<sup>7</sup> Bracha Ettinger, ‘Matrix and Metramorphosis,’ *Differences*, 1992, Vol.4, no. 3, 176-210; *The Matrixial Gaze*, (University of Leeds.; Feminist Arts and Histories Network Press, 1994) reprinted in Bracha Ettinger, *Matrixial Gaze and Borderspace: Essays on the feminine and the artwork*, ed. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> The founding text of this tendency is Gayle Rubin’s ever influential ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,’ in Rayn a R. Reiter, ed. *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, 157-210.

<sup>9</sup> Freud’s own reading of Jacob Burckhardt, himself influenced by Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* is a case in point. For further details on Freud’s reading see Sander L. Gilman et al., *Reading Freud’s Reading*, (New York; New York University Press, 1994) See also Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (New York: Basic Books, 1970)

<sup>10</sup> On Roger Fry’s ambivalent response to psychoanalysis and art history see Roger Fry, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1974) and my ‘Does Art Think?’ in Dana Arnold and Margaret Iverson, ed. *Art and Thought*, (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2003), ppp. 129-156.

<sup>11</sup> Many of these are collected in Volume 14 of the Penguin Freud Library, Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey, (London; Penguin Books, 1985). See also Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud’s aesthetics*, trans Winifred Woodhull, (New York; Columbia University Press, 1988) Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979). Melanie Klein, ‘Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse,’ *Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-45*, (London: Vintage Books, 1998) 210-18

<sup>12</sup> I recommend Darian Leader’s and Judy Groves’ superb *Lacan for Beginners* (London: Icon Books, 1995) or Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>13</sup> This group was the inspiration in part for Juliet Mitchell’s decisive intervention *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974)

<sup>14</sup> The key text here is Christian Metz, ‘The Imaginary Signifier,’ in C. Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982)

<sup>15</sup> On the necessity for going beyond the word /image opposition see Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

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<sup>16</sup> On the problems of seeing and knowing in these Freudian texts see Stephen Heath, 'Difference' *Screen*, 1978, Vol.19, no.3, 51-112. On the feminist implications of the 'Child is being beaten' see Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, (Basingstoke:MacMillan, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> On the perplexities of the original essay, 'The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytical experience,' [1949] in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* trans Alan Sheridan, (London:Tavistock Books, 1977,) pp 1-7, see Jane Gallop, "'Where to Begin?'" *Reading Lacan*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 74-92.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, [1963] ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977. Bracha Ettinger defines the objet a as residing' on the borderlines of corporeal, sensory and perceptive zones, but it eludes them all, itself being a psychic entity produced and lost according to the lanes carved by libidinal energy invested in the drives. It is a borderline mental inscription of the residues of the separation from the partial object.' *The Matrixial Gaze*, op.cit. p.1.

<sup>19</sup> For the strong explanation of the move from theories to concepts produced by theories see Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> For a world perspective on psychoanalysis in an international frame of analysis see Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)