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Thinking the Feminine
Aesthetic Practice as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metamorphosis

Griselda Pollock

Discussing art in the psychoanalytical context is inseparable, to my mind, from debating sexual difference, since we enter the function of art by way of the libido and through the extensions of the psyche closest to the edges of corporeal reality. (Bracha Ettinger, 1996a: 89)

The Matrix is not the opposite of the Phallus; it is rather a supplementary perspective. It grants a different field of desire. The intrauterine feminino/pre-natal encounter represents, and can serve as a model for, the matrical stratum of subalternation in which partial subjects composed of co-emerging Is and non-Is simultaneously inhabit a shared border space, discerning one another, yet in mutual ignorance, and sharing their impure hybrid objet a. (Bracha Ettinger, 1996a: 125–6)

This is all I have to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary and does not always sound friendly... If you want to know more about femininity, inquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information. (Sigmund Freud, 1964: 169)

Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously... Blasphemy is not apostasy. (Donna Haraway, 1991: 149)

SINCE THE foundation of psychoanalysis, the questions of alterity, difference and particularly the feminine as the paradigm of Otherness, have perplexed theorists. One of Bracha Ettinger’s foremost contributions has been to deliver an analysis of the unconscious structuring of psychoanalysis itself within a phallic paradigm without rejecting psychoanalysis or even, ultimately, Oedipus. She does this in a way that radically overturns psychoanalysis from within by way of proposing a sexual other-difference. This idea permits a theoretical breakthrough, when it goes beyond criticism and deconstruction to open up the possibility, within the formation of the human psyche, of a sexual difference that she names subjectivity-as-encounter. To think this radical innovation requires two moves. First, we must cease to imagine that the only way to understand what we theorize as sexual difference is through the limitations of the castrative model of the subject: a subject created by a clef from its lost objects that lines desire with the impossible play of absence/presence. Thus to gain access to models of subjectivity not marked by this duality and cut, we need to theorize dimensions of subjectivity that move between elements of several of subjectivities whose shared borderspaces can become thresholds of affect and even effects.

This model clearly challenges the notion of the discrete and singular subject formed by the establishment of the boundaries that distinguish it from an oceanic or undifferentiated otherness of the world or the maternal body. Instead, drawing on both clinical and aesthetic experience, Bracha Ettinger challenges psychoanalytical orthodoxy to allow dimensions of subjectivity that, without psychotic disintegration, can be both partial and what she calls co-emerging, and co-effecting along shared borderlines that always admit of minimal difference without forming absolute severances or submitting to the binaries of the One and the world. Instead the originary baseline for subjectivity is hypothesized as always-already several and hence capable of generating trans-subjective effects that may contribute, in their inevitable transformations into psychic elements, towards what we understand as both sexuality and aesthetics.

We are schooled by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to think subjectivity through the single prism of castration, that is, through an accumulation of separations, splits, cuts and cleavages, that, captured retrospectively into the traumatizing complex Freud named after the legendary Oedipus, locates sexualization, gendering and access to language in this retroactively and defining constitution of chilt and mourning subjectivity, driven by desire in search of its lost objects. We might state this theoretical proposition in diagram form (Figure 1), identifying what has been taken as the neutral and universal concept of the subject as a phallic model premised on the logic of out/off, which, as the diagram reveals, can only position the feminine both negatively and below the threshold of any kind of symbolization, the line hero marking the beyond of being that underlies but falls outside the (phallic) conception of the subject erected on this impossible-to-know real.

How can we move beyond imagining the subject as coming into being only through separations from the archaic unities of the maternal body, the imaginary mother-child dyad with its identifications, while any trace of the
The logic of the CUT = on/off

Phallic Model
+ / 1
M / +

WOMAN/OTHER/THING/DEATH/THE REAL

The feminine is also beyond in so far as the feminine is negated by the function of "f" as merely the other of the One, the specular of the Same (M = +)

Figure 1 Diagram illustrating the concept of the subject in the phallic model, which positions the feminine both negatively and below the threshold of any kind of symbolization

corpo-Real must be sacrificed to the signer as the condition of subjective articulation in language? Bracha Ettinger invites us to consider aspects of subjectivity as encounter occurring at shared borderspaces between several partial-subjects, never entirely fused or totally lost, but sharing and processing, within difference, elements of each unknown other. This is to be stressed: the encounter is between unknown elements. Here we might find ways to think not only subjectivity in this abstracted theoretical form, but aesthetic encounters of viewers and art works, and also ethical and political relations between strange, foreign, irreducible elements of otherness in our encounters with human and even non-human events in the world. Racism, xenophobia, fascism are premised on an extremity of the castration paradigm as Homi Bhabha has argued in his study of the colonial imaginary (1983). Thus this feminist re-theorization of the psychic premise of castrative subjectivity realigns the imaginary fields that underpin our social and political relations.

Subjectivity-as-encounter: almost missed, never completely lost and not only – as in the case of a theory of the subject utterly defined by the paradigm of castration – formed in desire-inducing severance, offers significant possibilities. These arise, argues Bracha Ettinger, from a sexual difference beyond/before/beside our current concept of sexual difference (which is, as Lacan argued, no sexual difference at all) fictiously signified by presence/absence and symbolized by the signer, the Phallus. Thus subjectivity-as-encounter arises from a sexual difference originally (which adamantly does not mean essentially) "in the feminine", a term which names an encounter of several subjective/subjectivizing elements in the corpo-Real of becoming life that occurs in shared borderspace of several becoming

subjectivities, unknown and unknowable to the other, and whose becoming (for both elements) the non-I other mutually co-affects in unpredictable and yet subjectivizing ways.

Bracha Ettinger proposes this sexual difference as a thinking apparatus for conductible affectivity, which gives voice to the affected body-psycho co-emerging with the other and the world. It arises from the sexual specificity of the feminine that every subject, irrespective of later sexuality or gender identification encounters in the process of becoming, and from artworking. This possibility derives from erotizable imprints and from conceptual abstractions as well as from imaginary phantasies about the sexual difference of female sexual specificity (which is not the same thing as anatomy or morphology) in its distinctive moment of jointness – as we can understand the later stages of pregnancy which form a singular interface of corporeal event and resource for fantasy – as it is collectively if differentially experienced by the several elements that compose its defining condition of severality.

As Bracha Ettinger points out, psychoanalysis has developed along two major theoretical orientations: the legend of the subject clef by its separations and alienated in the signer, drive-directed in search of its lost objects on the one hand, and on the other, the narrative of the subject formed in intersubjective relations – paradoxically called object relations. This latter tendency, associated notably with the British post-Kleinian school, both addresses earlier and more archaic moments of subjectivity than either the Oedipus complex – seen as the decisive structure from the classical Freudian point of view – or early Lacanian notions of mirror phase and access to language. It takes as its starting point archaic infant/carer relations, a field of intersubjective relations, events and passions. Bracha Ettinger can be understood as pushing back the theoretical rather than psychological back wall of these speculations to attend to the potentialities of later uterine events as co-events with always at least two subjective clusters in play (and even more through the memory-bearing of an already severalized partner).

Thus to engage with this theory, the reader needs to relax her/his grip on the classic Freudian-Lacanian paradigms which immediately hear in the invocation of the term ‘feminine’ a competing valorization of a female organ over a male organ, or the reappraisal of pre-Oedipal phases over later ones in the formation of subjectivity. The reference to pregnancy and intra-uterine experience is not an attempt to valorize the womb over the penis in some inversion of gender hierarchies premised on body parts. It is, instead, a way of thinking through the implications, for theories of subjectivity, sexuality and art, of the model of rapport, inter-and, as Bracha Ettinger develops it, trans-subjectivity in which there never was a celibate, singular subject becoming all on its own, reducing its maternal partner to mere envelope, non-human anatomy, physiology or biological/pre-linguistic environment: what Lacan would associate with the Other-Thing of subjective pre-history in the Real. More importantly, this theory is not an
essentializing investment in pregnancy as the very core of a woman's femininity. The womb in that case would be a phallic object: something someone possessed or lost. Matrrial theory does, however, raise the structure it recognizes as feminine to the level of a general dimension, element or logic in hermeneutic subjectivity. According to the Matrix, the signifier of this dimension of severability and jointiness-in-separation, the making of life cannot be grasped without its distinctive severality, its jointiness-in-separateness. It is this structure of severability/encounter - not any organ or anatomy - that matrrial psychoanalytical theory elaborates as defining, at the subject-inducing borderspace of corporeality and psychic apparatus, the feminine for us all.

In the Lacanian theoretical models through which Bracha Eitingon has carefully plotted her moves, we find adamant theorizations of an exclusively post-natal beginning of subjectivity. These can only cast what lies beneath the object, what Lacan named the Thing as synomyuous with Other-Woman, as beyond all sense-making. In contrast yet within a Lacanian frame, Bracha Eitington introduces notions of Thing-Encounter, Thing-Event to indicate that in this realm of the corporeal there can be differencing dimensions that are not about a lost Ur-Thing but register as an almost missed/lost experienced encounter that implies, at this most originary moment, a potentiality for trans-subjectivity. Even in the realm that we can only theorize by these odd propositions of the pre-imaginary and pre-articulated, she proposes not a meaningless void but events and encounters that have the potential for subject-subject rapportps if they are drawn through the filters of the psychic apparatus that subsequently form to catch up and transform into psychic and linguistic materials these truly archaic events. Drawing first an Lacanian aesthetics as outlined in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* seminar of 1957, Bracha Eittington writes:

Hidden behind the screen of phantasmatic vision, rendered inaccessible by originary repression, the *Thing* thus finds incarnation in the aesthetic art object and induces both the coming into subjective existence and the emergence of the de-signified sense. Difference in reenactments is created here, like in Duchamp's *infra-thin*, for a celibate, individual psyche, split and retaining its separation. (1999a: 89)

Then she introduces her move in which the unsigned *Thing* that presses from we know not where and why, is transformed into the subjective plane:

And what if this elusive intra-psychic remnant of the body, matrix-figure, object α, or gaze, operated in a transferential unconscious field stretched between several individuals known to each other, or between several uncognized partial-subjects - part individuals who do not know each other? . . . Art then grooves the routes of enactment of *erotic aerials* of the psyche, conducting and transmitting, dispersing and assembling joint gazes and lost figures between different subjects rendered partial through their very participation in a composite trans-subjectivity. (1999a: 89)

Traces of this co-eventing are exchanged between the desiring becoming-subjectivity of both the woman and her unrecognized-yet-infant-to-be who will later, not only in retrospect but also through her own experiences of her body and her mind, if she is a woman who chooses to have or not have a child, or to be an artist, friend, teacher, etc., reanimate that stratum which is a shared borderspace where neither absolute separation nor symbiotic assimilation are possible. The late Pierre Fédida opens his reading into Bracha Eittington's writings:

Sexual difference is here in close relation to the conception of a "primordial unconscious" whose reference to the visual makes us think of the positions like those of Rosalind Krauss (*The Optical Unconscious*). Questions pose themselves in relation to artists like Duchamp or certain theorizations of the Chôra (Derrida, Kristeva, myself). The transformability of the 'object' in all senses of the term can be thought in the movement of sexuality as if feminine sexuality was at the origin of sexuality itself. If we have to ask of the activity of deconstruction (according to a different understanding of the term from that which Derrida gives the word) in the construction of the work, it is in relation to the function of the Uncanny, here signifying how the discourse inherent in the phallic representation (the image) is defeated or where again the phallic gaze is confined at the moment that it disengages. Bracha Eittington has the merit of revealing such a deconstruction as the analytical act of the construction of a truth, and doing it within the art work, or the work of an artist. (Fédida, 1996, trans. G. Pollock)

Extrapolating the latest revisions Lacan made to his theory of the Real and phantasy towards what seems its potential yet subversive continuity, Bracha Eittington has been working to give form to a subjacent, sub-symbolic stratum of subjectivization that, nonetheless, has the effect of altering or expanding the Symbolic itself. This is a vital point for, as Fédida works to explicate, this is not a simple process of substitution or inversion or even displacement. Eittington's is a complex theoretical-aesthetic move. It serves first to alert us to the exclusivity of the dominant phallic logic. Yet it allows that logic a relativized place within an expanded Symbolic, shifted or returned, rather than overturned by a supplementary co-shaping-not-quite-logic that Bracha Eittington invokes with the term matrixial. Thus she moves beyond the phallic oppositions: masculine/feminine, phallic/other. Her theory opens space for what coexists with a phallic logic, still necessary for key elements of subjectivization and access to language. She shows, however, how it forecloses on sexual difference from the feminine and is not adequate to an understanding of what is tipped into visibility or cognition through the workings of the aesthetic. This surfaces at those interfaces of soma and psyche, archaic and corporeal-Real that psychoanalysis dares to think, and which are shared with the coming of sexuality. As Fédida suggests: we may have to allow that perhaps feminine sexuality is "at the origin of sexuality itself" (1996, n.p.).

The Matrrial surfs beneath/beside the Phallic, emerging in the
process of a deconstruction of the latter's blind domination of the subjective field while never constituting another, hence phallic, contender. To be the signifier of a different difference (not the i/4 of the phallic m/f), the Matrix cannot, by definition, be a substitute for the phallus; it cannot operate by its logic of substitution, of one and its other. Yet that does not make it nothing, nothing, absent, empty, infinite, etc. We need to imagine a theoretical space beyond the limits of phallic logic within which the feminine is merely the other term of its masculine-consolidating binary. The feminine under the Matrix marks not the phallic-negated other, but a different site of sexual difference that is not about a binary logic (Figure 2).

The Matrix emerges as the supplementary, shifting, retuning, concurrent paradigm where a non-phallic web of meaning is woven by a process the artist-theorist names metramorphosis (Ettinger, 1992). As can be seen in Bracha Ettinger's text in this volume, weaving is a potent and necessary metaphor. It provides an image of a decentered field, a textuality, a texture of vibrating threads. These metaphors resonate with, while shifting, late Lacanian theory of subjectivity in terms of the cloth, the fold, the Moebius strip.

In this introductory presentation I shall weave a pattern of ideas, rather than create separate sections. There will be certain repetitions of the core theoretical propositions, each time opening into another aspect, or taking us again through their formulations to a deeper grasp of their implications. The form of writing itself corresponds with its matrixial domain while at the same time seeking to find itself in the expected explanatory models of theoretical debate.

II Image Preface: Eurydice, no. 17, 1994–6

Discussing art in the psychoanalytical context is inseparable, to my mind, from debating sexual difference, since we enter the function of art by way of the libido and through the extensions of the psyche closest to the edges of corpo-reality. (Bracha Ettinger, 1996b: 89)

I have chosen to develop this article on a significant theoretical revolution with a painting. This is not art history, but theory coming to us via a

Figure 2 Diagram suggesting the supplementary character of the Matrixial within an enlarged and expandable Symbolic

Figure 3 Eurydice, no. 17, 1994–6, by Bracha Ettinger (80 × 56 cm, photocopy dust with oil paint on paper mounted on canvas)

'covenant' between aesthetics, psychoanalysis and feminist theory. The 'seeds' generated in a painting practice rooted in historical trauma will need to be 'transplanted', as states, to a theoretical soil fertile enough to sustain a different 'elaboration' from which 'the art slips away' (Ettinger, 1993a: 11). She argues that the collision/collusion between theory and art may transform their borders allowing theory to take on aesthetic resonance and art to be 'momentarily touched by theory' (Ettinger, 1993a: 11). This is a matrixial event midwifed by the shifting possibilities of feminist readings of late Lacanian psychoanalysis. To mark the depth of this covenant between art, theory and sexual difference as a thinking as well as a creating structure, we must stay awhile with a painting.

The painting (Figure 3) is one of a series of more than 30 works in photocopy dust and oil, on paper mounted on canvas, created over the decade of the 1990s by Bracha Ettinger. The series is titled Eurydice. Like Freud, but with a differing turn (Pollock, 1999), Bracha Ettinger calls upon a figure of Greek myth, but one she considers an emblem for the artist-woman of our times. Eurydice is a figure of trauma out of time, who looks towards us from between two deaths. She remains held in a cultural space through which both questions of femininity and sexual difference on the one hand, and on the other, questions of temporality, death, history and memory can be posed in an interwoven theoretical-aesthetic project.

In the myth, Eurydice was the wife of the poet-musician Orpheus. Killed by a snake's bite she is taken down into Hades. Grief-stricken, Orpheus begs the gods to be allowed to retrieve his wife. His wish is granted on condition he leads her up from the darkness without looking back at her. He cannot fulfill this condition; his backward glance 'kills' her a second time. This moment introduces what I name the Orphic gaze, one to which
we who look back at the photographic archives of the atrocities of the 20th century are particularly vulnerable (Pollock, 1996a, 2000, 2001a, 2001b).

Eurydice, too, has a glance that falls between invocation and resonance. But Bracha Ettinger (1997) asks: what would Eurydice say? What question is posed by this figure of the feminine? There is also another question: to whose seeing/responding does her unheard voice call out? How can her predicament become a site for a matrixial gaze that is not a line of sight in which she is fixed or captured but a transferential transmission, “a re-diffusion of traumas that are not absorbed” (1997: 30) across time and space that is experienced as a subjectivizing encounter? Eurydice thus installs a subject in the space of the feminine, typically (under phallic logic) an object of a gaze rather than its subject, whose speaking face opens out towards the future — that which comes after but also before her dying. Not dead nor yet alive, as mytheme, Eurydice poses, therefore, a different question, a question of difference in an arena in which Freudian theory so often stalls: femininity; but also, in a place at which the whole question of contemporary culture’s relation to trauma, history, memory and amnesia needs to take a turn to the feminine if only to avoid the trap of the Orphic gaze that kills again (Pollock, 2001a, 2001b).

The pain is based on fragments of a traumatic photograph from 1940: it is a perpetrator document of the Aktion of the Einsatzgruppen in Miroc, Ukraine, when following the advance of Hitler’s army into the Soviet Union and the decision to implement a Final Solution, battles of soldiers and policemen were ordered cold-bloodedly to murder the Jewish populations of village after village, daily shooting thousands: men, women and children. A portion of this much-used but anonymous image, a frieze of women and children, deprived of their clothing in anticipation of summary and brutal execution, has been put through a photocopyer. The artist’s notebooks record:

Photocopying to begin, as the first work period which indicates that there is another time outside of the work at hand. Resonance of a reality, echo of a life, but also things for others, conserved.

Rereading is also an effacement. Creating the trace is also to erase it; erasing the trace is also to make it appear. But it is no more than the constant of the instant of its corrosion. That which arises from me to meet all of this, and that which arises from all of this to meet me. (Ettinger, 1993b: 27/2000a: 34)

Before the photocopy machine can complete its replication of the image, the process is interrupted at the point at which a light dusting of photocopier granules have been deposited in the shadowy spaces where light and dark begin to reconstitute the photographically captured world in its stark grammar of black and white masses. Appearing and disappearing, traced in the bleached monochrome by black ash, these spectral apparitions of a forgotten history then become the screen and support for the artist’s repeated and prolonged encounter with an affectively charged and traumatizing “memory of oblivion” — “la mémoire de l’oubli” — is the artist’s phrasing (Ettinger, 1993b: 11/2000a: 12).

This materialization of such a paradox through her specific art-making process marks a crucial move beyond fetishistic commemoration with its stalling of time, its attempted stay of execution, its disavowal of knowledge of the dreadful, unimaginable death before which the phallic subject revolts before the abjected other or fetishistically protects itself. To remember the obliterated drastically calls for an intersubjective respons-ability to the trauma of the other.

The partially constituted, disintegrating trace image is, however, bathed in a veil of colour created by the pulsing repetition of tiny horizontal paint-laden brush strokes that weave an incomplete coloured membrane across the screen that is the impossible point of meeting between the apparition, tipped into the visible field of art from the suspended but decisive moment on the edge of that traumatic death, and the incoming gaze of the artist, the child of Holocaust survivors, the sinner of the Shoah’s ashen remains. The colour builds its own, secondary skin of pulsating touch in gaze-diffusing hues at the place where the gross masses of the partially photocopied work deposited its trace in black grains/ash. The paint mark is an impossible yet intense almost-encounter that appears through colour in the field of vision. Colour, in its vibration and dispersal, is space-creating and the space it creates is an affective threshold that reaches out to embrace the viewer in a thickening of the time and space that lies between viewer and image, now and then/m, that (re)connects seer and seen, world and subject, image and psyche. It becomes a site of transgression, what the artist has named “the transport station of trauma” (Ettinger, 2000b). I name its violet freight the colour of grief (Pollock, 2000), of nichesapha, the yearning, the longing of an Eurydican subjectivity that persists as the fabric of the artist’s living because the gap that opens up before these women caught before their dying is not an absolute severance, not a scission of othership but a potential for what the artist, herself the subject of transgenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma, theorizes as “borderlinking” (Ettinger, 1996a).

Deeply personal — the larger archive of such photographic records of the genocidal gaze and act contains an obliterated family — this work addresses the historical fact of the rational, bureaucratic and administrative transformation of death into a dying ‘worse than death’ that Adorno declared is henceforth part of postmodern social and cultural normality. After Auschwitz, we shall never die as before (Kofman, 1998: 9). Industrial genocide deprived us all of security against being reduced to species being, with our own final possession, our death, stolen from us (Adorno, 1973: 362).

For Bracha Ettinger, we who come after this history-destroying rupture are the gleaning of a genocidal reaping that becomes the general ground of post-Auschwitz subjectivity, aesthetics and politics. Adorno’s chronotope, after Auschwitz, is transformed, however, by the leakage of trauma across generational boundaries, creating in the diffusion of trauma between subjects and generations a co-affectivity, an impossibility of non-sharing that puts a subjective face to the claim that the Holocaust defies the limits of history and representation (Friedlander, 1992).
This ruptured history has changed the history of art as decisively. That archive of the naked bodies in the landscape of racist murder suspends the fundamental premises of western figurative representation and landscape painting, based as they were upon a specular idealization of the human body and its theatrical rhetorization by means of which facial expression, bodily gesture and rational location in fictive space became a visual language of humanizing self-definition (Pollock, 2001a). In classical and romantic landscape painting, even the earth could become a projective screen for human subjectivity as it carried and created its centred gaze. Who can ethically paint the body after what was done to human bodies at Auschwitz and elsewhere, worse at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Auschwitz? Who can romanticize a landscape under whose greenery lies the ash of unburied millions? Has western art yet begun to grasp these implications? The artist wrote in her notebooks:

Europe and the desert of Judea. Israeli-European archaeology. The earth and all that fills underneath; underneath — Europe must be looked at. During every journey I see green everywhere, and I see Israeli underneath. Nature, and all that it has swallowed. The plain desert: blessed drought, or drought wounded. (Ettinger, 1993b: 29/2000c: 35)

Raphael, the Renaissance artist and founder of the academic tradition that determined western art until the 19th century, that was the reference against which the revolts of the 20th century posed themselves, epitomizes the image of the body that is ruptured by this particular historical trauma. His uncannily relevant painting of escape from a fiery furnace, Fire in the Borgo (1516) is a counter-reference for Bracha Ettinger as she works in her post-Auschwitz Eurydicean moment. Raphael uses the theatrically gestural body language of western Christian figurative art to represent the high drama of rescue by athletic young men from the terrible fire that threatened to engulf the Sistine section of Rome in the 7th century. Raphael's painting demonstrates the manner in which the human body and face were used to signify emotions of terror, fear, desperation and concentration, while it brings into focus a counter-archive: the averted head, the face of appeal, the gestures of anxiety that form the core of the frieze with which Bracha Ettinger works (Figure 4).

Her trio, of a woman with an averted head looking into the abyss that awaits her, a mother shielding her child, and a woman turned to the photographer where now stands the viewer in desperate appeal, form a rupturing mirror for another of Raphael's canonical and paradigmatic images: the Three Graces, whose formal perfection enshrines an image of feminine beauty and beauty as femininity only in the absence of any trace of emotion. Each as vacuous as her sister, the three graces have in effect the deadly masks of the doll, as they stare empty-mindedly at the spheres that symbolize their blank perfection.

Between the agitation of the frenzied emotion of the three women in

Figure 4 Montage of three details from Raphael’s Fire in the Borgo (1516, Rome, Vatican Museum) and three figures from the anonymous photograph from Miroc, Ukraine, 1940: face of appeal; averted no-face, mother and child that are the point of recurrent return in the paintings of Bracha Ettinger in transhistorical dialogue with and difference from Raphael’s historical painting of a disaster by fire the Borgo and the passive blank beauty of the Three Graces, the artist reaches out to a trio she has found within a horrific artifact of genocide. In this terrifying procession to a horrible death, the artist returns again and again to a woman with her head averted whom she calls ‘no-face’: what does she look at? The artist says: what she sees is inhuman (Ettinger, 1993b: 33/2000c: 46) — to a moment forever suspended in our historical imaginations in a stasis that
marks the beginning of the chronotope Adorno paradoxically named ‘nach Auschwitz’; both after and towards Auschwitz. We come after this place and must not leave this place that is now the horizon of the postmodern/after-Auschwitz universe. Yet we journey towards it from across a chasm of human history that was created by what happened just after the moment suspended before us in this photograph, which is, as Roland Barthes (1977: 30) proposed, a rare and truly traumatic photograph since someone had to be there, there then, for it to have been taken.

In Bracha Ettinger’s paintings, the emotions are not figuratively performed as in the Raphael tradition. Rather, meeting the re-screened traumatic site, in the repeated re-connection and re-facing, emotions are spread by colour-generated connectivities across the virtual space that stretches out between then and now, there and us, there and here by means of psychic linkages sustained in the present encounter-event by a form of artistic practice that I have theorized as ‘painting after painting after history’. The space created by ‘a painterial act’ (Ettinger, 1995b) becomes then not an imaging of emotion, figured through body and gesture, but the incitement to a co-affectivity distilled from a history of art or a history in art, and from historical changes in art caused by both modernist realignments (liberating colour and mark to a degree of relative autonomy) and catastrophic caesura in human culture itself. The still unharvested potentiality in high modernist painting practices, such as the colour fields and intensities of Rothko for instance, resonates across time and space through the affectivities, transmitted and inevitably shared, between subjects called into co-subjectivity at this artistically fashioned membrane which invokes this historical threshold.

What we might glean from this encounter with this art is the beginning of some connections: historical specificity of the traumatic structuring of culture ‘after/toward Auschwitz’, the site of an aesthetic practice as re-encounter, and the discovery in that intersection of a specifically feminine dimension whose resonance for history and culture breaches the partial compartmentalization to which feminist thought has been confined by a still unaltered phallocentricism with which, however, this legacy of racism is structurally aligned.

III History and Memory: Anamnesis or Matrixial Time-space

The postmodern moment gradually revealed a mournful and a dystopian vision that reflected its condition as the product of a world shattered and traumatized by the crime of the Holocaust and other 20th-century atrocities. The Shoah is a tragedy of unimaginable horror in which the question of difference – Jewish difference – was the primary although not exclusive knot. Formally, and on the grounds of aesthetic practice, Bracha Ettinger’s dual project of artwork and theorywork is innovatory in terms of the way in which postmodernist debates have forced a reappraisal, on the other side of the modernist transformation of art, of modernism’s potentials as well as its blind spots. Her work has progressively interrogated the visible/invisible relations, and what painting as a non-optical (i.e. a Duchampian) project folds into the visible via colour and the almost-touch. How can printing engage with a history so deviant as to have turned its traditional ideals to ashes in the crematoria of Auschwitz? The artist has developed a technical means of engaging (the use of photocopying) with the traces of lost generations (a selected archive of photographs) that also allows printing – the touch, colour, the mark; the structural properties revealed by modernism’s self-purification – to signify both a terminal grief and co-emergence of contemporary post-Holocaust subjectivity with the subjects – the non-Is – of that which is also, in a very different register of memory, our tragedy. This changes the understanding of history, memory and time. Jean-François Lyotard wrote of Bracha Ettinger:

The importance of the work of the artist . . . is evidently its relations to the question of memory. But memory – it’s not enough to say this. It is more its relation to the question: I remember that I don’t remember anymore . . . It is a work of anamnesis . . . not only of a historical past . . . but of painting itself and of colour itself . . . The work of Bracha Ettinger is an anamnesic work, guided by the presence of the Shoah. This ‘presence’, like the Thing, does not demand anything. It makes itself forgotten. (Lyotard, 1997: 114)

Bracha Ettinger’s artistic practice is a capital instance and aesthetic revelation of the shattering of the belief in linear-historical time. After/behind/beside remain coupled in her work, which has traversed the history of modern art and the mythic repertoire of western culture to find the terms in which to represent what takes us almost beyond the limits of the representable. This work ‘returns to the act of transmission without having the necessity to commemorate it because memory is, in essence, the colour of ash. The author certainly refers to trauma, but trauma, far from becoming an event, becomes the transcendent condition of creation’ (Fédida, 1996).

To make art and with it to think theory ‘after Auschwitz’ is to struggle with the complexities of trauma’s wounding and its repression, with its oblivion and its unconscious memory. Thinking through the feminine in terms of psychoanalysis and from this specific art practice is taking up the challenge to acknowledge the fantasies that fuel the social structure and energize political violence and violation. If Bracha Ettinger’s writings address the question of sexuality and gaze, the feminine itself is more specifically placed by her as a difference fundamental to thinking today the conjunction of the aesthetic, the political and the ethical in relation to the way we shall function as a result of catastrophic trauma that resides not on the level of selected groups of individuals only, but as the cultural legacy of the 20th century that forms our horizon. We are being shaped by this trauma whether we know it or not, acting it out, repeating or obliterating it, or possibly learning ourselves through its imprints and raising this to the level of assisting us to create a future not condemned to its repetition.

The theory of the Matrix is a radical shift in the understanding together
of feminine difference, ethics and creativity, so that the very possibility of psychoanalysis to address the question of subjectivity, nourished by the aesthetic, receives new meaning, and from an angle that shifts the field in such a way that an entire range of philosophical as well as clinical questions and possibilities arise. The matrixial feminine becomes a means to think 'after Auschwitz': that is both to think about a world reshaped by that catastrophic rupture, and to theorize the structure of its trauma to which we are now orphaned and bereaved heirs. This concerns not a fetishization of disaster by rendering it the unspeakable sublime other or the voyeuristic locus of others' suffering. It means thinking about the structure of trauma as the condition of cultural becoming, which is always a belated becoming shaped by a forgotten event that becomes the formative event only in this dual structure of forgetting and return. This is where Ettinger's pastoral and theoretical work on how to 'glean', to come after, which in Hebrew also means to come behind, links with Richard J. Bernstein's subtle and finely read interpretation of Freud's difficult last book.

Bernstein (1998: 40–2) offers an important reading of Freud's analysis of the long-term significance in determining the character of Judaic monotheism of the repressed trauma of the murder of Moses by his followers, itself a mythic re-screening of the murder of the primal father. Bernstein places Freud's Moses hypothesis at the culmination of his thinking about the value of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of cultural as well as individual patterns. Thus Bernstein argues that Freud developed a theory of culture/tradition as the structure of trauma itself which shares the pattern of neurosis: 'early trauma – defence – latency – outbreak of neurotic illness – partial return of the repressed'. The point is that latency between the traumatic event and the effect of its repression/return contains both forgetting and remembering, the combination of which creates the gap that alone explains why tradition (in his case that of Jewish monotheism) became stronger rather than weaker over time.

Thus, if we pose Auschwitz in terms of trauma, we are not placing it in history alone as an event that happened and will be slowly forgotten as time wears away its intensity. Far from leaving Auschwitz behind, the traumatic event falls into the gap – between repression and latency, unconsciously remembered, and increasing in potential strength precisely from this repression and its inevitable return. Bracha Ettinger's work addresses the question: how can we work with this trauma, grieving for others unknown and for ourselves so as to imagine a future not defined by trauma acquiring through its repression and latency the power to become a dominating tendency? The increase in violence, racism and xenophobia we have seen since Auschwitz, combined with both a revival of anti-Semitism and outbreaks of anti-Islamic or communal violence in India for instance, when we would expect that we would have 'learned our lesson', shows the desperate need for a radical and creative way to address the persistence of traumatic logics in ways that open a future beyond them, rather than defined by their unconscious increase of power to claim us again and again.

A future has to be made, for Freud has taught us that we are, without analysis, the prisoners of the past.

Bracha Ettinger's artworking both aesthetically and theoretically creates a means of escaping from the effacement of meaning, an effacement that she associated with the effacement of a certain femininity, but also an effacement of human commonality which heralded the end of ethics. Art is the place, the move, the act that first permits us to signify the 'impossible' jouissance and 'impossible' rapport, and to bring something from/into them into light. As an artist Bracha Ettinger has grasped this gravity of the philosophical predicaments of the West after Auschwitz, and through intense work as an artist of the second generation of the Holocaust survivors and as a practising analyst, she has come maybe closer than anyone other than the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, to imagining/theorizing a future that can reconstruct a basis for ethical existance, founded, for her, in the awareness of matrixial trans-subjectivity and of metonymic borderlinking between partial-subjects, I and non-I, me and the stranger, not just at the borderspaces of becoming but also of disappearance and of dying. (Building on the co-affectivity of becoming, her work on the Holocaust links with Antigone and Eurydice in the matter of disappearance/death.) Thus, the ethical and political implications of her writings/art take the present volume close to the writings of Levinas and of the writer Edmond Jabès (parts of their conversations with Bracha Ettinger have been published, see Ettinger, 1997; Jabès, 1992) while, nonetheless, dislodging their moves by the specific attention it pays to the feminine. But why is this possibility of a future in the feminine via the ideas of Matrix and Metamorphosis so crucial?

It is through linking the questions of trauma and the feminine that Bracha Ettinger's work unexpectedly brings Levinas and Lacan into a creative conjunction. Both thinkers met a limit in their thought, which is, precisely, the unthinkable of a feminine they placed nonetheless in strategic otherness. The feminine for both was a limit they could would not transcend even while their thoughts led both of them towards this dangerous terrain – dangerous, however, only within the phallic universe. In his last works, Lacan began to question his own thoughts, criticizing his incomplete attempts to theorize sexual difference 'from the ladies' side' (Lacan, 1975). Levinas, on the other hand, refused in his last writings (up until his conversation with Bracha Ettinger published in 1997) to speak of the feminine altogether, what Bracha Ettinger matrixially interprets not as a foreclosure but, on the contrary, as the expression of the fact that the feminine touches precisely the very core of the ethical subject which is the question of futurity, itself a matter stretched between the other's life and my dying. Ettinger says to Levinas:

What's more, you have articulated the feminine with notions that inaugurate the ethical space itself, which makes it possible. That's what overrides the rest. In relation to this, I see the possibility of conceiving of a particular
relation as feminine. I interpret even the relation of filiation as feminine-matrixial; the father/son relation of filiation is 'a woman'.

And Levinas, finally agreeing again to speak of the feminine, says:

Woman is the category of the future, the ecstasy of the future. It is that human possibility which consists in saying that the life of another human being is more important than my own, that the death of the other is more important than my own death, that the Other comes before me, that the Other counts before I do, that the value of the Other is imposed before mine.

In the future, there is what might happen to me. And then is also my death.

B.L.E.: Then is the deepest of the feminine the ultimate responsibility? Or the ultimate measure of the ethical relation?

L.E.: This is the k'halah in Hebrew. And in the feminine there is the possibility of conceiving of a world without me, a world which has a meaning without me. But we would not be able to develop this idea in so few words. Many intellectual precautions are needed. There is too great a risk of misunderstanding. One might think that I am saying that woman is here to disappear, or that there will be no woman in the future... (Levinas, 1997: 219-220; Ettinger, 1997: 27)

Enormous dangers of misunderstanding, we have already emphasized, await anyone attempting to think feminine difference, let alone pre-maternalism in relation to pre-natality, beyond the phallic in a world remaining under its sole symbolic sway — dangers of madness, of psychosis, with no signifiers to relieve phantasms and hallucinations that bleakly register both the trauma and the solace of what we now come to recognize as the matrixial dimension. First encountering Ettinger's ideas, people often rush to misinterpret what is proposed in terms that already condemn the feminine to its impossible place in phallic thought. But Levinas, much attacked by feminists, here cautiously allowed a reading of his philosophy that speaks its uses: the feminine as a complex figure of ethics and time.

Bracha Ettinger's thinking, however, equally makes us painfully aware of other kinds of danger — the dangers of not accessing the matrixial difference beyond the phallic; a danger no less, and maybe even more enormous. Brian Massumi has written first of her art work:

It was said that Ettinger's painting made a visible issue of time.
It was said that it was all about memory, in the crystalline form of facets of time directly present to each other.

It was said that since the painting is about time and memory, it is also about oblivion, the evanescence of things: as much about degeneration as senility.

Holding degeneration together with senility, oblivion with memory, meant trauma. However, the aspect of trauma as a reliving came to the fore. Art, as a practice of trauma, led ultimately (or from the point of view of the ultimate surface of inscription) to an expansive and intensifying, collective, subjective return. In this sense, it could be said that Ettinger's painting affirms trauma by the same token as it affirms community. It is often said that everything ended with the Holocaust: writing, art, feeling, even and especially history. It is just as often counter-argued that the Holocaust produces an historical imperative: that the only way to come to terms with it is to study it down to the finest empirical detail. In her art, Ettinger adopts neither of these strategies. She answers the historicizing imperative with a 'pre-historic' suspension of the empirical, and the 'end' of history with a perpetual rebeginning. The 'memory of oblivion' is not of the dead. It is for the re-living, the still-living (intensively). Together, Ettinger considers it the goal of her art to make affect transmissible. Her series are affective carriers of traumatic renewal. (Massumi, 2000: 31-2)

Thus, the implications of matrixial borderness allow us to reconsider our understanding of the major traumas of modernity in counterforce to the phallic conception of difference and its horrendous social forms of intolerance and antagonism: racism, homophobia, misogyny. But as both the citations from Levinas and Massumi suggest, this project at the interface of art and theory 'in the feminine' moves beyond the linear time of a historical beginning and end, and opens up both a space of, and a method to move towards, a future that does not involve forgetting because it cannot imagine cutting, splitting, caesura: hence time is transformed precisely by what appears as attention to a 'pre-historic' — what she will frame as a pre-birth encounter — condition of sub-symbolic connectivity precisely because in daring to rethink becoming we have some supplements with which to resist the killing, through attending deeply to the potentialities, traumatic as well as ethical, of co-affectivity and trans-subjective transmission and processing.

This doubled work at the intersection of philosophy, art and psycho-analysis also allows us, therefore, to imagine supplementary ways of approaching the other, ways rooted not less than the phallic/castration as symbol and mechanism — no less but in different, more hidden ways — in our unconscious, at the limits of what Bracha Ettinger calls the almost-absence of the corporeal Realm that first emerges into meaning via artwork. Stretching from the irrecoverable trauma to phantasy, where it — trauma — insists in a repetition but can never become its own representation, trans-subjectivity arises from the Real into the Imaginary and the Symbolic by means of a vocabulary: matrix, metamorphosis, matrialangua, borderlinking, borderspacing. The Matrix as a signifier offers a means of realigning subjectivity in tune with this possibility of the multi-levelled (re-)inscription of difference in the relation with the specificity of the humanized/humanizing female body-subject, which thus becomes a potentiality for intersubjective transactions, many of which we already, as Freud predicted, experience and find in our poetic and aesthetic encounters, but they were yet to be acknowledged in 'science', that is, in psychoanalytical theory.

The modernist criminal catastrophe, the Holocaust, became imaginable and was enacted within a model that establishes clear, even...
phobically defended frontiers between Self and Other, where the other is either fused with or rejected by the self and where transgression of the pure stands for perversion. In the matrixial perspective, however, that proposes a co-emergence of what Bracha Ettinger calls I and non-I, where the frontiers become creatively transgressive, the limits become thresholds and a non-fusional transmission becomes possible, such a catastrophe is unimaginable. In English 'I' and 'non-I' allows for a distinction between not and non: the former being an adamantly Otherness, the latter a minimal, constantly mobile and shaping differentiation between subjects who are in constant play of mutual affecting that can be as solacing as it may be traumatizing. Bracha Ettinger has borrowed the phrase from Dori Laub's work on testimony that the Shoah was 'an event without witnesses' (Laub, 1991). Ettinger moved it through 180 degrees to situate us, the gleansers, as 'witnesses without an event'. This is a move of immense importance at the level of understanding history and understanding the process of elaboration of historical time by the subjectivity in articulation with a psychic temporality introduced by the feminine.

Jean-François Lyotard elaborates the richness of this conjunction for the reader-viewer and the generosity – the 'exuberance' – of a work that offers a thinking so tightly close to the creative instant itself:

Bracha Ettinger's oeuvre is upheld only by its approach in the line, in color, and in matter – since it is true of her painting, and in words – since it is true of her writing, the mystery of apparition. She refuses imitation. She refuses reproduction. And the photocopier, which is destined to accomplish the double function of imitating and repeating, or reproducing, is deviated by an act in which I see the markings of art. . . . This gesture is an immediate and direct challenge to the diagnosis Walter Benjamin reached concerning our era: the age of mechanical reproduction . . . Traces are refracted, diffused through time, in beds ofmovings and tremblings, in the overprints, or in what should be called scriptures. Traces of writing, erasures of trembling. The sublime manifests itself by exceeding and ravishing sensitivity just until its loss. . . . In Bracha Ettinger's oeuvre we are dealing with an event that brings the anima into existence. And the anima as this event is pushed to the threshold. . . . This work, on this threshold, reveals the most singular function of art and writing, which is to testify for apparition over appearance. Yet in appearance and through the means of appearance. (Lyotard, 1995: 6-8/22-3)

One of the most challenging and unfinished projects of modernity is surely the modernization/revolutionizing of sexual difference. Hitherto we have never had an adequate theoretical basis on which to imagine such renovation. Feminist protest, militancy, political campaigns for equality, cultural battles for difference – all these have been symptomatic of feminism's struggle with the unfinished business of modernity and gender. In a matrixial logic, they are not rejected or out of place, but infiltrated and transformed from within by a different dimension. The theory of the Matrix takes contemporary philosophical efforts to suspend the oppositional logic, within which the Symbolic of the 20th century has been held, in a new direction. It opens up the means to operate within non-phallic relations of difference that can be thought through a non-phallic prism of sexual difference. These non-phallic relations of difference can resonate across the always cooperating relations of sexuality, cultural particularity and sociogeographical specificity. Difference, if remaining in the unavoidable terms of oppositions only, disintegrated into endless particles or ignored by the pretense of sameness, will run the risk of continuing to threaten, terrorize and destroy the fabric of our inner and political worlds without a counterbalancing effect. This is not to say that the matrixial difference is peaceful, harmonious or without risks. This is not at all the case. Such as they are, its dangers are very different. Thus having laid out some of the historical conditions out of which this theorectico-aesthetic project has been forged, and having hinted at some of its daring presuppositions that allow dual histories of feminism and the Holocaust to converge, we need to take a closer look at the theoretical elaboration itself.

IV Matrix and Metamorphosis

Matrix and Metamorphosis . . . describe certain aspects of human symbolic experience [that can] relativize the concept of the Phallus in Lacan's and Freud's psychoanalytical theories. The Matrix . . . corresponds to a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural and fragmented subjects composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not-assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression at the borderlines, limits, and thresholds of I and non-I emerging in co-existence. (Ettinger, 1992: 176)

Art, sexual difference, trauma and the modern history of catastrophe come together in the weaving of a story about 'the non-equivalence of the sexes, and a non-phallic feminine' (Ettinger, 1992). This gives rise to a thinking apparatus beyond/beside the Phallus to which specific aesthetic processes may give us initial, affective access. Theory can be elaborated from these traces to develop the proposition of enlarged subjectivity and an expanded Symbolic. Since we recognize that our theoretical hypotheses about the most archaic and imaginary dimensions of the subject hang upon their always-already inclusion, in a structural mode, within a Symbolic that offers signifiers through which to think these hypothesized pre- or sub-symbolic dimensions of subjectivity, it is of vital importance for us to open new pathways between Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, still to use Lacan's triple registers; in order to think anew about the supplementary bases for subjectivity itself that might, like Eurydice, allow us to theorize femininity beyond the impasse that the opening Freudian epigraph bequeathed.

Although tolerated with necessary respect for the intellectual and cultural revolution performed over the last 30 years by many 'feminisms', the potentiality of the matrixial feminine to realign what we consider the human has not yet been fully appreciated. Here it is on offer. But it is so
in a form that is transgressive of and heretical to both the psychoanalytical and feminist canons that radicalized thought in general but remain within the fortress of the Phallic (a term I shall shortly elaborate using Ettinger's theory) rather than moving into open space. Bracha Ettinger (1993a: 12) states:

'The Matrix is a pre-natal symbolic space.'

This is blasphemy both in psychoanalytical traditions for which pre-birth speculations are outlawed and for feminist thought so perpetually self-policing about any claim for the meaning of sexually differentiated body.

'The Several come before the One.' (Ettinger, 1993a: 12)

This is blasphemy against the core of Freudian and Lacanian theorization of the subject formed as a subject precisely by the cutting away of the discrete One from its undifferentiated field of Woman-Other-Thing. Any confusion of discrete entities is perceived as psychotic or perverse. Bracha Ettinger disagrees.

Right from the moment in which we may speak about the subject, we might also speak of an enlarged subjectivity. In the Matrix a meeting occurs between the co-emerging I and the unknown non-I. Each one neither assimilates nor rejects the other and their energy consists neither in fusion nor repulsion, but in continual readjustment of distances, continual negotiation of separateness and distance within togetherness and proximity. Matrix is a zone of encounter between the most intimate and the most distant unknown. Its most internal is an outer limit, and the limit as such is flexible and variable. They are potential or virtual thresholds. (1993a: 12)

Bracha Ettinger trained in both art (in Israel) and psychoanalysis (in clinical psychology in Israel, then at the Tavistock Centre with R.D. Laing and at the London Centre for Psychotherapy, and in Paris with Pierre Aulagnier, Françoise Dolto, Pierre Féchard and J.A. Miller at Paris VII and Paris VIII). In the mid-1980s she began to practice as an artist while continuing to work as an analyst. After 1992 she started to publish her theoretical interventions on a matrixial dimension of subjectivity. Her argument invites us to consider human subjectivity not only as the effect of the castrative cut so deeply lodged in cultural theory by the works of Freud and Lacan, but as operating in shifting parallel, as encounter. The proposition of 'subjectivity-as-encounter' implies aspects of subjectivity from inception as plural, at least several, but not infinite. (One infinite is part of a phallic binary and to move from one to the infinite is not, in fact, a shifting of its logic.) Subjectivity-as-encounter and matrixial severality imply, furthermore, a co- or trans-subjectivity that is not derived from, and does not come after the founding cut of castration based as that is on the One/other model. Matrixiality does not deal with whole subjects, but what

Ettinger calls subjective grains, that is, elements or partial moments of subjects. It is originary and – here is the challenge of this theory – logically, it is, therefore, 'feminine'. This feminine is not to be understood as 'of woman' (a gendering term signifying a negative difference within the phallic semantic universe). Nor is it in any sense derived from or currently gendered ascriptions of qualities to such 'women' (positively or negatively). It is a logical proposition of a dimension of psychic structuring by which all subjects, irrespective of sex, Oedipal sex/sex/gendering as boy or girl, and later sexual orientations, are potentially subjectivized: thus it is feminine in a non-phallic, non-Oedipal, non-gendering definition of a dimension of the subjectivizing processes that is, none the less, sexy and sexuating because it is 'born' in relation both to feminine sexual specificity and desire. Hence it concerns a sexual difference, and degree of difference between elements not yet named man/woman, hence pre-gendering yet engaging with what will constitute, as sexual, elements of jouissance, trauma and intersubjectivity.

This core idea must be grasped: we can theorize a 'feminine' that is not an after-effect of the phallic or Oedipal structure with which we are familiar from Freud and Lacan. 'Tough news, girls, you just don't have it.' It is, therefore not about gender in Oedipal terms: what makes boys and girls which is determined by phallic logic around who fantasizes having or not having a relation to the phallus. Bracha Ettinger proposes an originary 'feminine' that pre-exists the gendering structure yet the effects or imprints of the encounter that this feminine describes are sexuating: generative of erotic, libidinal, desiring, longings effects which will play out differently for men and women as they are sexuated under the Oedipal processes, but will never be erased by or entirely framed according to its phallic terms.

Under the Matrix, one alone is not thinkable; for here, where the subject-to-be becomes, its becoming is from outset a co-becoming with the unknown other whose subjectivity is being transformed into a becoming m/other by this shared eventing at the level a common corpo-Real. That becoming m/other is herself re-eventing her own initiating severality when s/he was a subject-to-be. Thus any trace of pretty pictures of mummies and babies must be excised from the reader's imagination at this point as much as those anatomical cross-sections of headless maternal anatomies which reveal a single baby inside the uterine muscle. Rather than a medical textbook, we should think this problem through post-Newtonian physics of fields, receptors and transmissions. Thus a rigorously if utterly sensual proto-psyche space must be opened up composed of at least two temporalities and non-originary complexes of repetition and re-staging. I am tempted to represent this severality on two temporal registers in the form of a simple diagram (Figure 5).

The I and non-I – always a plural they – in diverse and different ways (she' repeating at a new register what once she co-evented at the register of her own becoming) share the space and process of co-affecting co-potisis. This is asymmetrically operative between a changing subject – the
with it, the subjective implications of the non-phallically defined feminine (encounter and severality) for all subjectivities.

These very late pre-birth processes logically share the potential of the just-born child to register, in as yet chaotic sensate traces, pulsations and intensities — what Christopher Bollas terms aesthetic evenments — trauma, the effects of as yet inarticulable change.

The mother's idiom of care and the infant's experience of this handling is one of the first if not the earliest human aesthetic. It is the most profound occasion when the nature of the self is formed and transformed by the environment. The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition or a painting, or for that matter, any object, rests on those moments when the infant's internal world is partly given form by the mother since he cannot shape them or link them together without her coverage. . . . The aesthetic experience is not something learned by the adult, it is an existential recollection of an experience where being handled by the maternal aesthetic made thinking seemingly irrelevant to survival. (Bollas, 1987: 32–3)

Bollas thus locates the origins of a human aesthetic in the earliest 'idiom' of the mother's primary care and the infant's experience of this handling which cause certain still (for the infant) unthinkable transformations to occur to the latter's internal world. Bracha Ettinger will glean these still post-natal possibilities from Bollas as well as from Pierre Férida and Wilfred Bion who also work at this archaic frontier and open the borderline to its preceding but also subjectivizing threshold. While birth is a radical trauma, containing the seeds of a whole psychic apparatus based on the violence of separation and intensification of spatial difference, there is an equally good case to be made that the later inter-uterine infant is registering sensations of a different order. These are sensations of a co-inhabitation, of joint events that are, nonetheless, based on a minimal but sufficient alterity to be an event/encounter, a transformative occurrence, of the aesthetic order of which Bollas speaks.

Neither becoming-mother nor becoming-infant know their co-affecting other. Yet we can think of the condition of human generation within the sexual body of a subject transformed by this co-eventing with a radical, because in a sense a not-yet-human but still humanizing other, fantasized, of course, as a human other in relation to the history and memory of the becoming-mother's own subjectivity and becoming. This is not a theory, therefore, of essences and origins, but of the potentialities of event-encounters that, while conditioned by the corpo-Real event, nonetheless, can only resonate at the level of human subjectivity, since they are drawn through the psychoically idealized pathways of phantasy and thought by images and significants, to achieve symbolic articulation: to move beyond being, in Bollas' terms, the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987) to be made known through an event-encounter that is of itself an aesthetic and may be retracted through aesthetic or other social practices.

Denied such recognition, these traces, will, nonetheless, since
logically they must occur, haunt the subject in a variety of symbolically foreclosed but affectively pressing ways such as hallucinations or displaced fantasies: moments of the uncanny. These Freud acknowledged in his terminal essay, "The Uncanny," when he posited at the foundations of the aesthetic both castration fantasies and phantasies of the mother's body: Mutterschlafphantasien, translated with his approval as 'inter-uterine fantasies'. He thus recognized the possibility of other tracks than castration and the phallus as foundations of human subjectivity and its unconscious (Freud, 1985: 369).

Thus the invocation of the pre-natal must be understood as a means of posing a supplementary stratum and potentiality for our ways of thinking the fundamental questions of human subjectivity - self and other - but in terms that allow us to think about the sexual specificity of our intimate beginnings in relation to a feminine, desiring subject experiencing her own transformation by this event of another's becoming within her corpo-real but always also imaginary body/subjectivity space that is lined with the as-yet-unthought sensate memory of being on the other side of this shared threshold of the several in becoming. This combination of sensate, sensation-intense co-emergence in radical but proximate distance that is also intimacy of the most exceptional, incestuous kind opens new pathways to phantasy and thought with radical implications for thinking subjectivity beyond the sadistic-aggressive structure of separation and radical alterity signified by Phallus and Castration: without displacing or rejecting either. To be clear, we are still in a Symbolic universe of meaning-making:

The womb and the pre-natal phase are the referents to the Real to which the imaginary Matrix corresponds. But as a concept, the Matrix is no more - but no less - related to the womb than the Phallus is related to the penis. That, the Matrix is a symbolic concept. (Ettinger, 1993a: 12)

In this matrixial dimension, subjectivity is expanded to allow several strata, including the co-pontis of I and the non-I, conceived through terms such as borderlinking, bordespaces, relations-without-relating and co-emergence that shift the phallic model of clear-cut oppositions without knocking them out entirely. Thus the Matrix also enlarges subjectivity to allow of its several trajectories, severalized by the effects of matrixiality itself.

The Matrix is not about women, but about a feminine dimension of plurality and difference of the several in joint subjectivity. The matrixial prism can alternate, in men and women, with the phallic prism of being either subject or Other, sometimes aware of the links with the extimate non-I or ignorant of these, sometimes fused with or disconnected from the Thing or replacing it, to the extent that the matrixial and phallic perspectives participate side by side in the real, the imaginary and the wider symbolic. A matrixial stratum of subjectivation allows for a network of relations-without-relating leading to awareness-becoming-recognition of presence in absence, while the phallic stratum of subjectivation allows for distinct alternations between subject and Other, relations and non-relations, presence and absence. (In the Matrix) several partial subjects are parts of the same stratum, sharing and shored by the same borderlinks. Traces belonging to the co-emerging I and non-I - recorded in joint bordespaces - can be redistributed after their initial distribution. In addition, passages are made between the matrixial stratum and the phallic stratum of the same subject. We are at the same time both one and several, on different trajectories. (Ettinger, 1994ca: 152-3)

Let us be clear: the matrixial invocation of a pre-natal severity refers not at all to our common or sociological ideas about motherhood or to the post-natal dyad of mother and baby, for the mother and child are, after birth, already involved in becoming 'phallic' objects for each other and for the psyche in terms of desire and processes of splitting and loss. The non-phallic I and the non-I encounter, moreover, refers to moments of partial subjectivity, emerging before either partner becomes an object for the other subject (and its drives) in psychic terms. Through the Matrix, they are not lost for they were never (retrospectively) fantasized as unified, fused or united. The I and the non-I are, furthermore, unknown and unknowable to their partner-in-difference. They refer to an irreducible strangeness or foreignness that cannot, however, be utterly Other, yet remain close and co-constitutive. This is not about fusion, symbiosis or any sentimentalization of a cozy togetherness, immersion or oceanic unity that often springs to mind as the opposite pole of the phallic model of separateness. In the Matrix, which never was one, and never longed to be so, there is always otherness, difference and, however minimal, separation across which, however, there is the equal potential for traumatizing as well as constructive or aesthetic deposits of this shared jouissance. The stress on bordespaces, borderlink, encounter and separality iterates the distinctively non-phallic mode of thought and model of subjectivity that marks forms of connectivity, plurality, multiplicity, asymmetry, partiality.

The Algerian-born French novelist Mariam Céline's autobiographical novel about her own psychoanalytic breakdown and passage back to life through psychoanalysis, The Words to Say It (2000), reminds us in an exemplary fashion of this traumatic potential of the unconscious garnering of this co-emergence in proximity-distance. The novel opens with a terrifying and compelling account of a woman who suffers from continuous uterine bleeding that has persisted for years, possessing and demoting her. This haemorrhaging is coupled with persecutory visual hallucinations and the intense physical symptoms of anxiety verging on psychotic breakdown. Fleeting a mental institution in which she fears her own permanent alienation, the writer enters Freudian analysis with an analyst who opens their sessions by asking her to speak of something other than the obsessively observed bleeding. Shockingly, in response to his indifference, the blood stops flowing. Through the long analysis the persecutory eye-in-a-tube
hallucination is tracked back to a childhood event and she feels 'relived'. But this is not the final resolution – there is no cure – but the journey must go further backwards and forwards until the nature of the writer's relation with her 'divorced' Catholic mother grieving for her prematurely dead first-born, her separated, consumptive husband is finally recalled in a chilling moment of unremembered revelation when the author was 14: since the mother found herself pregnant with the child of a tubercular man she was leaving, she attempted repeatedly to abort her child: the author herself. The writer's psychotic collapse into a permanent haemorrhaging of her own womb was the dormant, forward-thrown register of the traumatic co-event of what we might now read as the murderous rupture in the matrixial dimension.

Thus for Bracha Ettinger, the matrixial situation is not determinate in the nature of its effects, except in so far as the recognition that there are such effects opens possibilities of analysis beyond that imagined by phallocentric orthodoxy.

The acknowledgements of other subjects as unknown but not hostile or intrusive, as 'foreigners' and nevertheless connected to the self, as taking part in and producing change in a collective subjectivity (multiple/divided/ephemeral/partial) through neither fusion nor rejection, differentiates the idea of the Matrix from those of symbiosis and from the basic phallic operations in the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal stages. (Ettinger, 1993a: 12–13)

Thus the Matrix also speaks to the strangeness in me as well as of the intimate other that is irreducible to what, under later phallic constructions, will form the basis of identifications and rejections, incorporations and expulsions by which boundaries are marked, identities created in discrete territorialized subjects for whom such porousness or breaching of boundaries can only be experienced as perversion.

Joanne Chaaq-Smirgel presents the castrative separation as a universal principle of order, and not as related to social conventions or ideology, and the breach of separation between subject and object is presented as perversion. Where indeed such transgression in the phallic paradigm does stand for the collapse of the difference between desire, phantasy and event while castration establishes the difference between event and representation, my argument is that in the matrixial paradigm, differentiation-in-transgression stands for a creative principle which does not correspond to phallic Law and Order and does not replace them either. (Ettinger, 1996c: 87)

Thus it is vital to suspend momentarily from the mind all the phallically constituted images of its other: be that of fusion, symbiosis, confusion, unity, undifferentiation or the phantasy of the phallic Mother and so forth. The Matrix tries to inscribe into thought conditions and processes that are not the opposite of the phallic order's preferred terms, Bracha Ettinger writes:

Matrix is an unconscious space of simultaneous emergence and facing of the I and the unknown non-I which is neither fused nor rejected. (Ettinger, 1996a: 125)

Now comes the introduction of a second term, the figure of this matrixial co-subjectivity. Matrix is based on:

... feminine/prenatal inter-relations and exhibits a shared borderspace in which what I call differentiation in co-emergence and distance in proximity are continuously related and re-organized by metamorphosis ... created by and further creating relations without relating on the borderspace of presence/absence subject/object, me and the stranger. In the unconscious mind, the matrixial borderline dimension, involved in the process of creating feminine desire and meaning both co-exists with and alternates with the phallic dimension. (Ettinger, 1996a: 125)

It is important to underline this principle of non-substitution when introducing the discussion of the matrixial feminine as a meaning-donating structure. Our phallically trained reflex is to understand the term feminine only in its pairing with the 'masculine' and thus, to imagine any assertion of a value or meaning for the feminine to be a kind of inversion of the current gender hierarchy. This is not the case. Two elements of the quotation underline this further. The Matrixial plays within/ on a borderspace. This implies the spatial co-presence which is also the spatial co-difference of the several. If the feminine is to gain non-phallic meaning, it must not be thought of in relation to organs (penis vs womb) or anatologies (inside vs outside). Instead it invokes a psychic event-encounter grasped through concepts of borderspace, borderline, borderlinking that are traced in the subject at all three levels. Such borderspaces are subject to a perpetual retuning and rehaving, thus they are never stabilized as a cut, split or division. The borderlinking borderspace is neither confusion nor separation but offers the possibility of moments when the borderslines may become thresholds and passage from one to other may occur producing possible translations, circulations, sharings, processings. This provisionality is also part of this system, since such co-aflocations are contingent on specificities of singular subjectivities, histories, conditions and semiotic offerings.

The metaphor of re-tuning moves us from the highly scopic imaginary within which Freudian and Lacanian theories of the subject have operated and from which our dominant speculations in cultural theories of the gaze and the field of vision have occurred. Opening onto acoustic, sonorous and tactile potentialities that themselves move beyond the limits of bodies and boundaries between inside and outside, retuning also suggests wavelengths and forms of audiosomatic sounds resonating that come into and move out of connection without ever being completely held or lost. Thus this thesis links with the Deleuzian enlargement of philosophies of non-Oedipal bodies: bodies without-organs and rhizomatic transferences (Ettinger, 2002). This process of transmissibility and 'relating without relations' is named metamorphosis:
Metamorphosis is the process of change in borderlines and thresholds between being and absence, memory and oblivion, I and non-I, a process of transgression and fading away. The metamorphic consciousness has no centre, cannot hold a fixed gaze — or if it has a centre, it constantly slides to the borderlines, to the margins. Its gaze escapes the margins and returns to the margins. Through this process the limits, borderlines, and thresholds conceived are constantly transgressed or dissolved, thus allowing the creation of new ones. (Ettinger, 1992: 201)

Metamorphosis is a term that stands to the Matrix as metaphor and metonymy stand to the Phallus in the process of generating meaning. If the latter two are figures of substitution, metamorphosis is a figure without centre, focus or division and can perhaps most effectively be glimpsed in certain historic passages created through the aesthetic practice we name “painting after painting”.

I relate the Matrix to the process I call metamorphosis dealing with I and non-I in emergence and co-existence, with neither symmetrical nor identical mirroring relationships. These are processes of change without domination. I and non-I may relate to one another or simply turn their backs on one another, but they neither swallow nor kill each other — symbolically or in reality — while transforming in one another’s presence. The borderlines between them are surpassed and transformed to become thresholds. When these transformations related to transformations in the borderlines and shared spaces metamorphosis may occur, creating redistribution in the shared field and a change in common subjectivity. (Ettinger, 1992: 200)

To deal with this process of distribution and diffraction rather than production of an object-meaning, Bracha Ettinger introduces another key qualifier, the sub-symbolic. This indicates another difficulty for the exposition of this theory. In so far as meaning depends upon the circuits of signifiers which constitute the Symbolic, one which must be qualified and relativized as phallic and not sovereign and universal, we must find ways to articulate this matrices proposition as a theory through a language in which the matrixial dimension appears as paradox. Slippery, incomplete but never lost for it was never possessed, metamorphosis may be experienced more compellingly via painting or other aesthetic processes rather than in the logical rigours of explicatory language. Yet we can bend the phallicism of language through play and neologism, through paradox, irony and indeed blasphemy as we shall see, to spread a net in which to catch the play of this sub-symbolic dimension that, once theorized, then also becomes, despite this defining character, speakable and communicable as an idea.

The idea of the Matrix as signifier, articulated in/with a pluralized Symbolic, offers the structuring of signification and representation to dimensions of subjectivity that we have in a sense always known but not yet thought. The closest parallel for what I am trying to say lies in the work of Julia Kristeva — in relation to whose work matrixial theory stands, none the less, in radical dissonance. Julia Kristeva (1984) poses two poles within language: the semiotic and the symbolic. As part of the Symbolic (in the Lacanian trio of registers: thought/words), the semiotic is one modality that is porous to those elements of the process of becoming a speaking subject that are pre-symbolic: rhythm, colour, tonality and so forth. Thus to arrive at the idea of poetic language, we must have both a theory of signification, and a thesis about the materiality and process upon which it is founded and that is what perpetually reassess or even undoes the attempted fixities and unites to which the symbolic end of the signifying spectrum aspires.

Julia Kristeva identifies the aesthetic practices of painting, music, dance and poetry — once utilized by institutions such as religion now veiled in secularized forms — as specialist semiotic agents of transmission between the symbolic and the semiotic poles and what lies beyond the latter. Religion, Kristeva argues, once served a social function in managing on behalf of the dominant social and political Symbolic (Lacanian capitalization suggests the social management of her concept of the symbolic pole of language) the aesthetic and affective potentials of the semiotic: performing and orchestrating its plays with subjectivity and desire for re-attunement with these primordial becoming dimensions of fluid subjectivities en procès.

In the case of Bracha Ettinger, for reasons as historically astute as those that made Julia Kristeva attend to the avant-garde literary moment of late 19th-century France, the specific correlations between the catastrophe of the Holocaust, a postmodernist re-development of modernist painting and a post-Lacanian theory of the feminine provide the foundations upon which she, too, is asking about how transformative elements of an expanded subjectivity hypothesized through the Matrix might be understood as coming into imaginative and theoretical acknowledgeability to shift the Symbolic.

V Matrix/Hysteron/Hystera: Dehysteronizing the Feminine

Matrix is the Latin for womb. Used abstractly, it means a grid or frame. This latinate usage needs to be linked with the Greek term, hystera, which, at the basis of the condition named hystera, marks the spot at which woman’s sexuality was pathologized by pre-Freudian medicine and then newly psychoanalyzed by Charcot, Janet and Freudian psychoanalysis. Thus the figure of the invisible sexual specificity of the female body has a long metaphorical history in western thought, both fascinating and horrifying it. Feminine sexual specificity has so often been reduced to an organ, as in medical anatomy and its illustrations. It can be imagined as a force of interiority, the Chora, spatialized as a cave, home, enclosure from which the subject must come forth, bathed forevers in uncurable home-sickness. It can be considered maternal, the bodily, the substance from which masculine spirit must free itself through rejecting this clinging, viscous connectivity.

For Bracha Ettinger, Matrix, however, signifies an external dimension as a structure of shared borderspace inscribed within the sense-collecting registers that may infiltrate and become the psyche. This implies a figure of severality, an I and a non-I, which is not two subjects, fully self-defined

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and aware, for which separation/castration is required. It is not a matter of
cosy two-ness as images of babies nestling inside expanded wombs in matern-
ity books might suggest. Matrix refers to a tracing in the becoming/being
transformed psyches of phantasies of separateness-in-an-extreme intimacy,
of a ‘distance that is experienced even within the greatest proximity’ we can
imagine, an intimacy that is an event in the Real, hence falls under the
psychoanalytical rubric of trauma (in the real that we cannot know but that
presses its trace within the psyche) that is sexual in any definition of that
term psychoanalytically, and that can, but won’t necessarily, rise into
phantasy and thought if certain signifiers and processes of ‘meaning-
donation’ are re-recognized. If not, this dimension, nonetheless, presses upon
the subject through hallucination or other forms of unrecognized psychic
disturbance, linking back evocatively to those Greek and even modern
medical images of the hysterical derangement of women.

Hysteria, for all its foolish displacement of women’s psychic ills onto
a wandering organ, the womb, poetically/unconsciously registers exactly
what the Matrix brings into theoretical logic: the effects of the non-acknow-
ledgement of the meaning-creating dimension of feminine sexual difference
for subjectivity in general. Further, if this is foreclosed from signification,
it will have the terrible effect of exiling women subjects in a kind of perpet-
ual madness of the non-equivalence of the (phallic) Symbolic in which the
subject must locate its/her-self adjusting to its dimensions a traumatically
and unconsciously registered surplus of always unexhausted potential. Both
Luce Irigaray’s (1991) concept of women’s derision and Julia Kristeva’s
(1989) acknowledgement of a chronic condition of feminine melancholia
register this disaster that phallocentrism’s sovereignty wreaks upon the
feminine subject who cannot access her sexual difference under what Teresa
de Lauretis names the ‘indifference’ of a phallic economy of the One and
its Other (de Lauretis, 1993). Neither Irigaray nor Kristeva fully resolves
the problem of thinking beyond the phallic dimension as radically and
creatively as Bracha Ettinger, whose purpose is not merely to define the
shape of phallocentrism but to allow a feminine matrixial shifting/supple-
menting of its hegemony.

VI On Femininity: Woman as Artist to FFaM

Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. . . .
Blasphemy is not apostasy. (Haraway, 1991: 149)

As Freud signed off in his famous passage in his 1933 lecture ‘On Femi-
ninity’ (cited in the opening epigraphs) psychoanalysis was left, as so many
critics have since impressed upon us, with the blind spot that, nonetheless,
defines psychoanalysis itself. Almost half a century after his encounters with
the hysterical daughters of the bourgeoisie who invented with him the
talking cure, Freud wrote to his French colleague, Marie Bonaparte,
expressing his confusion before a question: ‘The great question, the great
question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to
answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is “What
does a Woman want?”’ (Freud, 1953-7 [1937]: 474). Embodying cited
to condemn the old doctor out of his own mouth, this question has been re-
appraised by the Lacanian literary theorist Shoelana Fehman (1993) for its
shocking, radical transgressivity. She asks us to pause to reconsider its
revolutionary impact. Jane Flax (2004) too endorses the scandal of Freud’s
having dared to ask: what do women desire? His question acknowledges the
possibility of feminine desire that might not merely be directed to the fulfil-
ment of a masculine fantasy of Woman. Both ask that the still unfinished
business following from Freud’s acknowledgement of defeat be retrieved as
an inspiration for further, heretical questioning: what is the field of feminine
desire? How can the question of sexual difference be posed via the speci-
ficity, the difference of a desire ‘in, of and from the feminine’ (Pollock,
1990b)?

Is “want” in its English translation of the German “will” in ‘Was will das
Weib’? allows us both to hear desire and its founding condition of lack, we
can paraphrase it anew as the statement of a longing ‘in, of and from the
feminine’ that is not premised only on (phallically imagined) lack. This
allows us to imagine that the term ‘feminine’, so debased by its function in
popular parlance as the stereotypical attribute of a mythical collectivity
named by the term ‘woman’, and condemned before we start to relative,
partial, local interest (the collectivity of women as a sub-section of the
human), might be allowed to signify something of profound importance for
discussions of human subjectivity and indeed sociality. If the feminine
signifies only in relation—linguistically or psychically—to the phallus, it
is the nothing against which the phallic mark becomes the signifier of the
presence/absence distinction.

But Freud’s phrasing of the question registers both what is lacking that
would fulfill feminine desire (as understood in a masculine economy defined
by the signifier of desire, the phalus) and that feminine desire can be a
supplementary engine for change, creativity and thought,desiring what is
wanting in an exclusively phallic order. If the major theoretical and clinical
practice through which human subjectivity and desire have been articulated
in modern discourse can be praised for posing the question that it, nonethe-
less, has failed to date to answer, leaving feminine sexual difference and
desire not as the perpetual enigma imposed by masculine narcissism but as
the research question for the present, we can, with justification, return to
psychoanalysis to take Freud’s advice. We can look to the poets or artists,
speak from our own experience and listen to advanced theoretical research.
That is where we come in now to think the question of the feminine in the
light of both major developments in psychoanalysis and philosophy, and the
massive cultural revolution created by feminist politics and thought since
the 1970s. We are also poised at the new interfaces between the philo-
sophical and the aesthetic, between cultural practice and theory. This in
turn allows us to attend to the poietic/aesthetik as a means, if indirectly, of
knowing, as a way to thought.
Bracha Ettinger has utterly transformed our thinking about the inherited blind spot of psychoanalysis: femininity. Yet, the very process of breaching the foreclosure of psychoanalytical thought on a feminine sexual difference by the most attentive reading and feminist critique of the full trajectory of Lacan’s later thought, especially on the real, trauma, and sinthome, simultaneously disseminates a transformative aesthetic theory undoing the impasse of current feminist and related cultural notions of the gaze to reconnect visibility, corporeality, affectivity and trauma in culture. Resonating with much that is most difficult and challenging in contemporary culture and its advanced philosophies which blasphemously challenge the discrete subject, the boundaries of the body, the distinctions between self and world (Deleuze’s body-without-organ for instance, as well as Haraway’s postgender, non-Oedipal cyborg), the theory of Matrix and Metamorphosis challenges even more. Why?

I have invoked Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ as an additional epigraph, and notably her posteco-political notion of a feminist blasphemy against our most cherished beliefs, even in political circles, of what can constitute the foundations of feminist politics themselves. The articles in this special section of Theory, Culture & Society propose a theory as daringly creative as that which Haraway herself advanced in breaking with gender identity as the cornerstone of a feminist politics in favour of a subjectivity unashamedly hybridized (organic-machine), in (political) alliances of non-Oedipal affinity, in resistance to myths of origins with their naturalist and evangelical nostalgic and phobic horror of transformative interface between non-singular, porous, self-defining entities. Blasphemy is not apologetic, declared Haraway. Blasphemy dares to challenge not ideas but beliefs, not thought but ideologies by which both ideas and thought are regulated to conform with dominant, vested interests. Blasphemy takes things very seriously and is, as transgression of the ideological unconscious that passes for common sense and agreed understanding, a creative and necessary undertaking to ensure knowledge and politics are not sacrificed to majoritarian belief. This matters to feminist theory itself, for its unconsciously re-performs its own foreclosure through anxiety about what it desires to know and dares to find out.

Woman, hence gender, has always been a problem for feminism in its struggle with its own political unconscious, invested as that is with what is possible/ permissible to think within a phallocentric universe. Indeed it is only when an outside of what was hitherto experienced as the intellectual universe is proposed that the once exclusive mode of phallic thought becomes helpfully relativized and we are released from its intellectual policing. Thus feminist thought until now has hit its head against the walls of phallic logic without realizing that these limits were but walls to a chamber which is but one, an important one, in the house of a more multiple, expanded Symbolic.

So feminism has struggled within the question of gender inside the phallic room and this presents us with a deep contradiction. In relation to real issues, we politics in the name of a category, women, we know theoretically to be deeply problematic. ‘Woman’ cannot be, fissured as real social subjects are by divisions of class, ethnicity, culture, history, sexuality, ability and other determining markers of the social and cultural. Furthermore, following the psycho-semiotics of Julia Kristeva, writing already in 1974, we might insist ‘that woman does not exist’, that woman is not in the realm of being as the sign ‘woman’ marks a psycho-linguistic position and a fragile moment of psycho-sexual identifications in a psycho-symbolic chain of signification: thus what can woman want without ontological being to give a name or even a body to this desire (Kristeva, 1980)?

The direction of cerebral, theoretical feminist thought has been against the claims of bodies and corpo-realized being and hence against any dangerously essentializing import from the bodily into the Imaginary and Symbolic, although this radical disembodiment has been challenged from important feminist quarters (Grosz, 1994). Hence the agony of feminist thought caught on its own impossibility. Essentialism of any kind that uses as a referent woman as a being, a body or a social identity, is deemed the worst transgression, even though it has also been justified if used strategically (Fuss, 1989). Enrichedly policed, those who are even suspected of a hint of such naïveté are expelled from respectable intellectual company with sad disdain. But what if we puzzle, as Kaja Silverman (1988) did so revelingly in her study of the trajectory of Julia Kristeva’s thought, as to why the very possibility of a corpo-Real dimension to sexual difference from the feminine is deemed to be so unthinkable, so undesirable, so dangerous in feminist thought itself that it must be expelled utterly from the heart of feminist analysis, aligning itself thereby with masculine corporeal narcissism?

Attentively reading Freud’s important essay on ‘Das Unheimliche/The Uncanny’, in which he acknowledges both castration and womb phantasies, Muttersleibphantasien, Bracha Ettinger points out that Freud himself acknowledged the psychic necessity for a denial of feminine sexual specificity (Freud, 1965: 367). He linked the denial of the womb with the narcissism necessary to ‘the child’. What child? It is only for the becoming-masculine child for whom organs/potentialities are the matter of their fantasies and form foundations on which to build the phantasy that is subject position. Ettinger writes:

Freud did not deny the denial of the womb [Muttersleibphantasien/phantasies of the mother’s body] nor its implications… On the contrary. He insisted on the necessity of such a denial, measured by the importance of what is at stake for males. The penis is considered the central support for the child’s narcissism (what child we may ask – male or female?) while the enigma of the sphinx: ‘where do babies come from?’ is central for the sexual development of the male child. It is maybe the first question for boys, says Freud, but ‘certainly not’ for girls. The womb is dismissed since it was only logical that the child should grant women the painful prerogative of giving birth to children that is, since the ‘neutral’ child does not have a womb but would
not give up on such an important issue, the 'child's' solution is denial and displacement: 'if babies are born through the anus, then a man can give birth just as well as a woman.' (Etinger, 1990c: 97)

Wiped out by the imaginary corporeal schema of the (neutral? universal? or rather masculine) human subject, the invisible sex difference of the feminine becomes the blank on which the One visualizes a masculine phantasy of possessing all the organs that matter. The time has come, simply, to explode that scotomization of invisible feminine sexual specificity and allow theoretical, analytical and aesthetic thinking to proceed beyond this masculine narcissistic violence against the potentiality of the feminine as an element of human subjectivity that has something of its own to contribute at all levels to subjectivity and to thought.

Despite the polite indulgence that has allowed a formal acknowledgement of the place of feminist thought at the table of contemporary cultural theory and practice, the depth of the resistance to thinking, 'in, of and from the feminine' is rarely plumbed and fully appreciated until the blockage rears up to ask (please vocalize with the appropriate tone of surprise and scorn): why would it be interesting or important to think anything 'in, of, and from the feminine'? I have often asked this when lecturing on the theory of the Matrix, as if the utter dismissal of any reference to the feminine, in and of itself so frankly embarrassing, trivial or partial, can be immediately accepted as proper, intellectual, sensible.

This is a good question that must be confronted head-on before we proceed. The tolerance of feminism (and its waning today) is premised upon the binary of hetero-normative gender that produces as a given axis of meaning the couplet: man/woman. From the depleted and historically neglected side of this hierarchical pairing a historical and theoretical resistance formed over the long period of the modern era (however early you date its beginning). In the name of an oppressed other, feminism emerged with a conflicted agenda, either to advance 'women' to the civic status of 'men' or to advocate the equal cultural value of the distinctive quality of 'her' difference only as defined in this oppositional pairing. Hence woman or femininity is only thinkable in terms of an opposition masculine/feminine. I name this feminine = P (the feminine to the power of the Phallus as signifier of the opposition). In both cases the intellectual gymnastics of feminist thinkers, poets and artists have been performed within the already standing arena of what Bracha Eitinger exposes so definitively as phallic thought. (This is more precise than the phallogcentricity or phallogocentrism proposed by Cixous and Derrida.) Phallic logic, Eitinger argues, is premised on absence/presence, on/off, self/other and cannot but cast its representations of sexual difference in its own terms, privileging the one/man/on/ presence over its distinguished and consolidating other/woman/off/absence or, relegating the feminine to the unsignifiable beyond, in the Lacanian triplet, 'Woman/Other/Thing'. Thus performing a necessary logical function as the other term, the ground of non-meaning, the negated void around which phallic meaning emerges, the feminine is pre-/non-human, yet a necessary otherness of no specific shape or meaning. Women, however, become subjects through submission to the subjectivizing dimension of the phallus and take their place in an order from which the difference of the feminine beyond this phallic negativity is unknowable to the feminine = P subject as it is to its masculine counterpart. Hence masquerade, hysteria . . .

To break out of this phallic logic in which, as Lacan argued, we cannot imagine a sexual relation because there is no sexual difference, that is, difference from/of the other sex, we need to imagine other frames, other logics not premised only on one, the Phallus, its signifier of +/- We need to think of a frame in which the feminine does not signify the meaninglessness of the phallically constituted masculine but names a human possibility arising from the specificity of invisible feminine sexual corporeal-Reality understood, however, non-essentially but psychoanalytically as a humanizing, subjectifying dimension of psychic life concerning trans-subjectivity and plurality. This feminine arises from the psychic representation of its traumatic corporeal-Reality space of encounter in just the same way that phallic logic, its Symbolic and Imaginary can be derived from the corporeal-Reality of orality, anality, phallic genitality, resting analytically upon material and bodily processes that become psychically and libidinally invested and thus transformed, fantasized, separated, sublimated and intellectualized.

If the capacity to read and understand my words now is premised on incorporation, restating its abstract process in the infantile taking in of initial nourishment, through the complex chains of association, displacement, investment and symbolization with which we are familiar, why can we not seriously entertain other passageways and processes of meaning – and hence subject formation – premised on dimensions of such material, corporeal situations when these refer to such obvious and profound conditions as those of our coming into life at all in the 'matrix' of feminine sexuality and desire? To allow something that can only logically and sexually be defined as feminine (because it refers to the sexual specificity of invisible corporeal-Reality) to frame some of the possibilities of human subjectivity is so logical, so obvious and so expanding of human possibility, that its absolute censorship, negation, foreclosure and ridiculing must be read, psychoanalytically, as a symptom of a specifiable negation and repression conditioned by the defensive narcissism of those who exert this censorship.

Here I anticipate some questions: how can we resist essentializing the female body while invoking the impact on human subjectivity of contact with the invisible sexual specificity of feminine sexual desire at the level of performance: pregnancy? This is a key project of psychoanalytical thought which tries both to hypothesize some link between what we might call life – the physical, physiological, neurological processes by which we are living beings – and the psyche – the subjective site of their representation through psychological ideations that mean that we never experience our physicality in unreflect, unfantasized or unsymbolized ways – except as what we call
ur-trauma. As Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley (1982: 160) clearly conclude their study of psychoanalysis and social relations, Freud's theories are radically anti-naturalist and anti-essentialist:

But if Freud is right about human sexuality, there is no given ‘nature’, a biological realm of possible actions, to be denied. It is not merely that ‘incest’ is a cultural category. All organisation of the sexual instincts is psychical and symbolic. ‘Nature’ is a cultural category, too. Freud's arguments lead us to recognise that there is no nature separate from the psychic and symbolic.

Lacan's later theorizing, however, brought us back to what he termed the Real. Late Lacan thought about the bracing with, rather than the absolute splitting off of, the Real from the Symbolic and the Imaginary (RSI; Figure 6) (Ettinger, 2003).

This forced the rigorously structural and constructionist Lacanian psychoanalysis to re-think the space between trauma and phantasy – while allowing that psychoanalysis is not interested in the field of speculation we call biology; it remains merely X outside the scope of psychoanalytical inquiries. Lacan's revisions to the ways in which the Real participates in subjectivity serve to address the psychic implications of our becoming alive and, of course, of dying. Laplanche's study of Life and Death in Psychoanalysis (1976) is perhaps the most cogent re-reading of the Freudian relation to and delegation of the somatic underbelly of psychic processes to psychic representatives. Thus with the brutal frankness of psychoanalytical attention to the meanings of sex, digestion, defecation, etc., the medical view of birth as a celibate event of a fertilization of an egg implanted in a passive womb must be displaced. It is replaced by the psychoanalytical reflections upon the delayed effects of the spasm of (an always-already psychically structured yet synaesthetically sensed) feminine sexuality in which the conception might take place, which register psychically for the mother-to-be long before it has any substantially knowable physiological effects. This spasm is an event in phantasy for the subject: whether this event is desired or dreaded, caused by consent or rape, planned or accidental. In contrast to Julia Kristeva's (1979) image of pregnancy as an event without a subject, Bracha Ettinger refuses this exiling of feminine subjectivity and sexuality from the site or space of this fundamental event of severaling, humanizing becoming. As such our becoming, as later men or women subjects, happens in an intimate framing of that which touches most intensely and exclusively on feminine sexual difference and sexuality.

To supplement this thinking of the feminine as only feminine P, Bracha Ettinger introduces into/through psychoanalytical thought the possibility of 'a different difference', a feminine from which a sex-difference can originate that is not relative to masculinity. This feminine that I designate as Feminine m (Feminine via the Matrix), is a sex difference from the beginning and not as a result of the phallic signification of the cut of castration. The Feminine m is not relative to the masculine or based in any way on the division of the sexes we know as Oedipal or as gender. The feminine is not the field of Phallus-minus or minus-Phallus. Feminine m provides a logic not of one and the other, but the sexualizing co-emergence of at least the several who are non-gendered, yet for whom this eventing may have some significant repercussions in their sexuality. This Feminine m suggests a dimension of human subjectivity that is from its emergence, several, joint-in-separateness, distant-in-proximity. Paradoxes in a phallic logic of absolute binarism, these phasings mark processes that historical events and aesthetic encounters already know but have not yet thought (Bollas, 1987).

I have introduced the concept 'human' which can ring many philosophical bells and alert political sensibilities. Contemporary cultural critiques are, as we know, framed largely by anti-humanism, or at least a deep refusal of the ideologies of liberal humanism, with its false universalism and monistic privileging of autonomous white masculinities. I am not invoking the ‘human’ to make an argument for liberal humanism, or universalizing humanity that suspends the difficulties of difference. The word marks the spot where the definitions 'we' create of ourselves are, as always, premised on a repressed second term. The human, in so far as it loosely stands for whatever and at whatever stage in history 'we' (whoever that 'we' was to decide) think 'we' are, categorically, is roughly defined in a series of relational differences. In theological models it is gods/mortals, divine/human, human/animal; in secular philosophies and sciences, we might invoke human/animal at one end of the spectrum and human/machine at the other futurist end. As anthropologists and historians of religion have pointed out, wherever these kinds of differences are operative in constituting, in precariously semiotic ways, notions of the human, the feminine/female quivers undecidably across the slash, more often than not cast into alignment with the ‘other’ side of the binary: more animal, more

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**Figure 6** Two models of RSI: (1) Linguistically dominated and severed RSI, (2) Braided RSI
machinic, certainly never clean-cut, risking the necessity for boundary, clarity and division with ambiguity and simultaneity (Kristeva, 1982). Thus, as Simone de Beauvoir (1974) astutely concluded: man's humanity and his masculine gender never appear in conflict because the definition of the former is modelled on the body schemas and ideals of the latter. They have become philosophically and existentially synonymous. Whereas for the feminine subject, access to 'humanity' thus defined and access to gendered specificity are logically and sociologically at perpetual odds.

I want to ask: how can any element of human being have become suspended, qualified, differential, partial or worse, relegated as Bracha Ettinger argues to the place of no-sense, no human meaning at all? Especially, how is it possible, when has been suspended is precisely the psychically charged corpo-Real ground of becoming human? Translating into the political sphere, this suspension of the co-subjectivity that is the premise of the feminine, forms the psychic basis of the range of racisms which fractionalize the human community even unto rights to life and death. Thus I would argue that pursuing the questions of the feminine here, rather than becoming over-concerned only with 'gender', precisely offers philosophical and theoretical routes into these related questions of racisms, genocides, xenophobias: anything that suspends what Habermas calls 'the deep layer of solidarity among all that wears human face' (Habermas, 1989 in Friedlander, 1992: 3).

As the reader will see in the article by Bracha Ettinger in this volume, the mythological casting of the feminine, and specifically of the creative feminine into alliance with the animal and the natural or its fantastic mechanical soulless other, is simultaneously an exile of anything specific to, and hence within, the sexual difference of the feminine from what is generally considered to be the human, the imaginary reference point for a notion of what it is to be a subject, a self, a person, a being, a thinker, an artist, a writer, a poet, a creator, and a means for the installation of the autogenic phantasy of masculine creativity. Thus her article analyses/ deconstructs the phallic paradigm at the heart of the myth of the artist to provide, in the end, an elegant solution of all feminist thinking about art and sexual difference. If, as Roszika Parker and I argued in the late 1970s (Parker and Pollock, 1981), the term artist already performatively exiles the feminine from creativity, there is no simple way to readdress the structure, to promote 'women artists' only draws attention to the very qualifiers of negative difference that are the condition of her particularism and hence exclusion.

Twist and turn as we will, we remain trapped in either assimilation or separatism: the two generations of feminism identified by Julia Kristeva (1980a) in 'Women's Time'. Julia Kristeva called us to move beyond anthropomorphism, to imagine subjectivity in general, equally subject to the symbolic castrative cut and yet seeking to realize its own singularity beyond the confines of gendered anthropomorphism. Bracha Ettinger addresses a similar historical dilemma but without the phallic recoil that must once again wipe out the potentialities of the feminine to realign our thinking about subjectivity. Thus she is not opposing or endorsing a gendered woman as artist. Instead she is carefully and psychoanalytically tracking the aesthetically performative moment of an artist-woman effect, what she called in her conversation with Levinas a structure named Woman. That is to say, that the subject, who may be an artist and a gendered woman, may through a particular kind of aesthetic practice generate a matrixial borderspace with a non-I other, not because of what she is or even who she is, but by the practice's praxis of an aesthetic co-eventing not related to any one's bodily identity while never unrelated to the psychic inscriptions of embodied becoming.

The Matrix is a psychic space where the m/Other/Thing-Encounter-Event is not eliminated, and the object is not entirely lost. In the aesthetic layer, the 'awakening' of the object toward the subject becomes possible without a scission, the link to the archaic m/Other-Encounter-Event being always maintained in some aspects and on a certain level between no-Thing and something... In the matrixial borderspace another artist appears... Since metamorphic swerving is a sexual difference based on webbing of links and not on essence or negation, I call this 'interfacial subjectivity that is not confined to the contours of a one-body with its inside versus outside polarity 'Woman'. This gives rise to an idea of the artist as working-through traces coming from others to whom she is borderlined. The artist who opens pathways and deepens metamorphoses in the matrixial field thus turns into a woman when she wanders with her spirit's eyes and her erotic antennas in a psychic space and in a world where the gaze is a veil, a trail of event, or a borderlink... The artist-woman channels new trauma(s) and jouissance(s) coming from non-I's that are linked to her... (Ettinger, 2004: an earlier version of the essay in this volume, p. 38)

Anyone working on this material becomes intensely aware of a need to meet the anxieties of subjectivities disciplined by phallic thinking to deny any other possibilities: from accusations of essentialism to sheer disdain for the idea of thinking about pregnancy and its psychic resources for its dual subjects, from dismissals of gender hierarchy inversions to the young woman's dread that this theory repositions motherhood as true womanhood. All these discontents have to be acknowledged and dealt with in order to shift the field of debate beyond the phallic, to open up this possibility and to stay with it awhile as we consider its implications. Thus I find myself constantly stressing that this theory is not just about women, for women, but since we are all, so far, born of woman, we, boys and girls, men and women, straight and lesbian or gay, frigid, celibate, childfree or childbearing, share in the potential for matrixial trauma and jouissance, while as a thinking apparatus it has larger repercussions in the field of racism, xenophobia, homophobia and difference studies as well as sexuality and aesthetics.

But the time has come, also, to insist that this theory has huge implications for the subject psycho-symbiotically positioned as feminine P", and further open to a corpo-Real in of and from the 'Feminine m'. If Freud's
radical question ‘What does a woman want?’ opened a field we have only just begun to research competently, Eurydice’s unspoken question is another to which we must turn.

In a presentation given in Paris VIII to the seminar of Jacques Alain Miller on 7 June 2000, Bracha Ettinger spoke of the matrixial through a discussion of a scene in Marguerite Duras’s novel _The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein_ (Ettinger, 2003). Using it as a continuation of her re-reading of Freud’s infamous case study of ‘Dora’, Bracha Ettinger posed the much more radical question: ‘What is a woman for a woman?’ She argues that before the Oedipal triangle with its desolate scenario that negates the feminine, the femininity-to-be subject addresses her questions of sexuality and subjectivity to a feminine Other. Once stated thus, it is so obvious that we must again marvel at our own willingness to accept its unthinkability. Luce Irigaray has already considered this a little with her question about the ‘fort-da’ game. In her article on the ‘Gesture in Psychoanalysis’ (1987), Luce Irigaray notes the different kinds of games boys and girls play. Girls play with dolls; they spin and hum. These rituals of separation indicate, for Irigaray, that the mother cannot be reduced to an object for the little girl for theirs is a shared subjecthood:

The mother always remains too familiar, and too close. In a way, the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity. (1987: 98)

Bracha Ettinger is not addressing these pre-Oedipal relations/separations of a daughter and a mother which, although logically reminding us that the daughter has no reason to puzzle over difference since she can in this phantasy reanimate the thought through acoustic and gestural connection/continuation ritual, remain in the realm of castration and separation. Bracha Ettinger, a more rigorous Lacanian, fixes her attention on a deeper riddle addressed by the girl-subject to the woman/other through but also beyond the staging of this encounter in the frame of her own daughter/mother scenario. The question is about feminine desire/subjectivity, which brings us back to sexuality and the feminine. Thus in Duras’s novel, Lol is engaged to Michael Richardson. At a party, another woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, enters with her daughter. Anne-Marie Stretter is thus textually marked as a mother — a sexually active and desiring adult, signified by her child. She is not, however, Lol’s mother. She is another woman who captures the gaze of Lol’s fiancé Michael as well as Lol’s. Bracha Ettinger pays acute attention to what is revealed only in the novel’s cryptic writing, words evoking on the page a scenario, a primal scene of sorts, for on this outcome Lol’s sanity and subjectivity depend. Looking on at the attraction between Michael and Anne-Marie Stretter, Lol is described as smiling. Something is held before our literary eyes by Duras’s writing about a suspended moment of eternity as a girl looks at the ‘woman’ in the ‘mother’: not seeing her as an object of Michael’s desire, not seeing her as an object of a lesbian desire. Bracha Ettinger (2003: 95) argues that:

The sexual difference any human being embodies as female is defined with and in reference to another woman or other women who is the site of the Woman-beneath-the-mother enveloped inside the archaic m/Other within a relational field of encounter. Thus before and beside Oedipus, a feminine sexual difference concerns the difference of the female child from another woman/m/Other and not from men, boys or the father. In other words, the enigma of feminine difference is posed from the start between female subjects, and between the woman-beneath-the-mother and the woman-beneath-the-girl...

She then devises a formula in her attempt to account for this other gaze, a gaze that, like the matrixial gaze is not from a point of view, and does not set up see/seen relations but spreads to encompass its partners in an illuminating ravishment that we can hardly name. The term devised is _FFaM_ — which spoken aloud forms the French word _femme_ : woman. It stands for _femme-fatale-autre-Mère_ : the fatal woman is the woman/other as figure of desire and desirability, the little w/o/autre/other is linked with the matrixial maternalizing of this archaic other as m/Other; another of Bracha Ettinger’s post-Lacanian neologisms. To this she adds a formula: that the girl looks to see the ‘woman’ (f-f) in the mother (m-m), the desirability in the feminine that is not identical with the person who is the/other/mother, who may for Oedipal or ageist reasons no longer signify a sexual being. The girl looks to see the ‘woman’ in the other/mother in order to discover the ‘woman to come’ in the girl (that she still is); this formulation finds in a literary work that selects itself for such a theoretical reading of an already aesthetically created matrixial scenario whose decipherment, however, depends upon its insertion into a psychoanalytical theorization to enable its aesthetic ravishment and solacing of its feminine readers to become a means of thinking what the novel already ‘knows’. Thus Bracha Ettinger (2003: 95) writes:

We must, therefore, see the difference between ‘woman’ as desired object and ‘woman’ as desiring subject, and this subjectivising ravishing that is created or discovered without fore-sight and redistributed, for an instant, or eternity, in a moment of encounter-event where the limits of all the participating subjects open up so that each of them is becoming a partial-subject of the same encounter, for an instant that is eternity.

In the event-encounter, its participants are partialized, fragmented and opened up to this matrixial dimension in which what happens, happens between them. One may never open us thus; some, on the other hand, may be excruciatingly sensitive and fragmented to such transmissions. Vocabulary changes. Woman means different conditions: not just object or subject but the structure of transitivity. Ravishment is a spreading of the affect across the entire severity, not an act performed by a subject on an object. Thus we imagine the linings of eroticism, sexuality and human contactability in non-phallic metaphors.
The transgression of the borderlines between subjects creates not a One and a separated subject vis-à-vis another subject, a woman, but an aggregated subjectivity or what I call a subjectivity-in-severality that includes momentarily in a traumatic and phantasmatric way the woman-beneath-the-girl in a relationship with a desired 'man' desiring another woman ('man' here can stand for a female subject; it stands for the Lover . . . ) and the other woman-beneath-the-mother in a relationship with a desiring 'man'.

These relationships take place, in fact, with the same man discovered in front of the desiring woman-beneath-the-girl as desiring the other woman-beneath-the-mother, but the alliances that mark the becoming-subject-girl are those that take place between herself, as a woman-beneath-the-girl and the other woman, as the woman-beneath-the-mother that somehow carries and echoes, for the girl, her own archaic m/Other in the primordial encounter of the primal scene. The encounter-event replicates the enigma of the primal scene out of which the subject-girl is phantasmatically about to emerge, and again, and again, and not, I repeat, the Oedipal complex in which the subject-girl is already embedded. In The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein Marguerite Duras unfolds the fragility of this moment of becoming-subjectivised. (Ettinger, 2003: 95)

Bracha Ettinger's dense prose has to perform a textual weaving of simultaneous times and spaces, neither knocking the other one out, while one, fragile and culturally foreclosed, flashes onto the cultural screen through Duras's writing, tipping into our theoretical visual field the supplementary relay of desiring gazes, scenes and screens as well as an encompassing visual encounter which is a subjectivizing event that, like all structures of the psyche, is activated in a delayed, deferred action which is, in effect, an originary repetition, the anamnestic moment when something that occurred too soon for the not-yet-subject to process registered a deposit of intensity or potential affect for which secondary events provide the activating scenario.

Thus far from lodging some primordial femininity in the cavities of the hysteriofied, muted and thingified female body, Bracha Ettinger's post-Lacanian attentiveness to the potential traces of the traumatic jouissance corpo-Real of late uterine/late pregnancy severity activates dimensions of the fantasizing and thinking feminine subject in a structure, a relay as rigorous as that of the Oedipal triangulation with which we are so familiar. Just as this Oedipal structure is the retroactively symbolizing structure through which archaic and thinking feminine moments achieve their subjective registration and effect (see Freud on the Wolf Man, and Lacan's 1966-7 seminar on the primal scene), so the Ravishment of Lol V. Stein, rather than Sophocles' play, provides an image-text through which to think the Matrix as both a real encounter-event and one that subjectivizes us in the time-looping retro-active deferred action that is the hallmark of psychoanalytical thought's rigorous anti-narrative, anti-development thesis on subjectivity.

For Lol [on the brink of becoming a woman through her prospective marriage in the novel – GP addition] there is something that is even more urgent,
VII Art and Theory: Beyond the Phallus and Beyond Matricide: The Matrixial Gaze and Co-poïesis

In 2000, a retrospective exhibition Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: Artworking 1985-1999 was held at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels in planned simultaneity with an exhibition Azteta of woven carpets by Berber women weavers of North Africa (Ettinger, 2000c; Vandenbroek, 2000). The theorization and selection of the latter exhibition of women's textiles was based on the Matrix and metamorphosis. These exquisitely saturated coloured carpets are non-geometrical, free-form weavings created by women within an aesthetic-symbolic tradition that runs relatively unbroken back to very ancient times. The curator of both exhibitions, Paul Vandenbroek, asked his viewers to read the aesthetic of the Berber carpets – with their flooded fields of colour, punctuated by the woven event or motif that appeared in the evolution as the weaver proceeded to create in her weaving an analogy of her mental and corporeal unconscious space – as an instantiation of a matrixial subjective feminin dimension to which only belatedly western art has approximated as it moved beyond its figurative confinements into a reconnection with the potentialities of aesthetic affectivity through 'abstract' colour, rhythm, field and gesture.

The abstract forms of Berber weaving are not empty. They do not play a decorative role. Rather they bring into form, colour and rhythm, sensations born at the psycho-corposorial borderline, just as dance and music operates with movement, timbre and rhythm. One would be wrong to determine the meaning of each motif, as if in a catalogue or lexicon. This art rarely operates with univocal symbols. Above all, the forms which translate sensations are founded upon one another. It is a play of rupture and continuity, of imperceptible changes and temporal repetitions... The motifs in this art are not substitutive symbols. They are often a visualization of a mental process which is at the basis of language. At the beginning was not the word, but this being in between, sensorial perceptions and dislocation. At the borderline of flesh and intelligence take shape colour and forms, images of sensations and of thoughts that have not yet received a name. The matrix is the psychic field in which a new kind of meaning emerges. (Wall Text)

This matrixial effect emerges through the metamorphic potential of weaving for the Berber artists and 'painting after painting' for Bracha Ettinger. This changes the status of painting in terms of both the prioritization of poetic language as the site of rupture and innovation, and the art/craft division so typical of western art, unable to move with metaphors of textile and textuality to appreciate the potentiality of understanding the aesthetic beyond the museum's categories of conservation and art history's categories of author-based evaluation.

As I proposed at the beginning of this article, Bracha Ettinger suggests the gracious and non-antagonistic yet non-symmetrical relation between art and theory (Ettinger, 1993a: 11). This is where her work uniquely echoes Freud's concluding call for new ways to consider femininity via experience, analysis, poetry and science (theory). The theoretical propositions of the Matrix and metamorphosis that are elaborated in a complex relation of affiliation to and critique of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis in which she also clinically practises, emerged in an artist's poetic reflections on her daily practice in the studio. Thus, her radical theoretical innovation is based on the experience of art on the one hand and, on the other, a most scrupulous reading of traces in the Freudian and the late Lacanian texts for a potentiality to articulate femininity with difference, moving from Freud's key theorization of the aesthetic in 'The Uncanny' on to Lacan's notions of objet a and synthème and towards a Relational psychoanalysis project that is in some aspects Deleuzian, though not anti-Oedipal but clearly beyond and beside Oedipus. The book The Matrixial Gaze (1995a) elaborates an extension of the major rupture in Lacan's theoretical project signalled by the phenomenological re-theorization of the gaze in The Four Fundamental Concepts (Lacan, 1964/1977).

My immersion in painting... has led me to apprehend a matrixial border-space beyond-the-phallus in the field of experience and of representation and so in turn to enter a dialogue with Lacan, and with Merleau-Ponty whose work on the gaze strongly influenced Lacan. Via the subject's early contact with a woman, I suggest, there emerges a 'weave' and a borderlining (connection, rapport) – sexual in the broad psychoanalytical sense – which engorges a kind of unconscious sub-knowledge that is not appropriated by the phallus and which has surfaced for me in painting. I have named 'weave' a differentiating potentiality in the field of affective, analogic, up to a point, to Merleau-Ponty's tocar in the field of sensible perception, and 'borderlining' (after Lacan's 'impossible feminine rapport') is an operation of joining-in-separating-with/from the other. My interpretation of this is to propose processes and operations metamorphosis. (Ettinger, 1999c: 4)

The critical instance of Lacan's 1964 seminar on the gaze was to bind Merleau-Ponty's thesis on the scape with the visible and the invisible and on a primordial voyage (seeing as the eternal reflex of seeing) with Freudian theories of the drives, notably the scopic drive. Lacan re-theorizes the gaze, not as an Oedipal mastering gaze (now so disseminated in a Foucaultian social and visual cultural theory). He re-theorized the gaze as a phallic objet a, a non-optical psychic inscription of a trace of what came to be felt to be lost as the subject emerges through its successive severances from archaic unity with the m/Other. Bracha Ettinger conjugates this Lacanian move with an overlooked passage in Freud's thesis on the uncanny aesthetic effect of Mutterleibphantasien: womb fantasies and with Lacan's own later developments to propose a matrixial gaze – where the gaze is further theorized as a matrixial objet (a) – not the psychic inscription of what is forever lost whose scar forms the incitement to desire, but as a borderlining mechanism that is never totally lost as it is not phantasied in retrospect as being had or being submerged. In between shared thing and lost object a screen spreads itself out to alter our understanding of the
and processes of subjectivity are met by Bracha Ettinger ‘whose ideas of Matrix and Metamorphosis’, says Pierre Férida, ‘deliver her own conception of auto-potetic’ which may be linked to Merleau-Ponty’s investigations.

Auto-potesis is the theoretical construct of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980), who worked at the borders of biological and cognitive science to propose that “each living system constructs its environment through the “domain of interactions” made possible by its autopoetic organisation” (Hayles, 1999: 137). Drawing from the value of this recognition that the world we inhabit is constructed according to the system that is constructing it, which includes that which observes or reflects upon it, Bracha Ettinger expands the celibate imaginary of the isolated auto-potetic organization to imagine the psyche as a co-potetic organization, trans-subjectively constructing shared worlds.

Matrical awareness is promulgated in human beings via the mother-to-be’s potentiality for trans-subjective inscription — via her capacity for elaboration of joint traces of I and non-I, and of a joint voyage, ramified between inside and outside and diffused between I and non-I, between different partial subjects and partial objects. This voyage and this inscription compose what I call a co-potetic metamorphosis which registers affected, shared-in-difference traumas and jouissance on ontogenetic memory. (Ettinger, 1999b: 25)

In their theory, Maturana and Varela applied their theoretical insights from science to ethics and politics to challenge both the thrall of realism and objectivism in scientific discourse and the philosophical idea of liberal individualism. Katherine Hayles explains:

Emphasizing that autonomy always takes place in the context of structural coupling, auto-potesis rejects the objectivism that drives a wedge between the scientific-observer and the world being observed. For Maturana, observation does not mean that the observer remains separate from what is being observed; on the contrary, the observer can only observe because the observer is structurally coupled to the phenomenon she sees. Expanded to social ethics, this implies ‘in man as a social being … all actions, however individual expressions of preferences or rejections, constitutively affect the lives of other human beings and, hence, have ethical significance’. Structural coupling requires that human beings as ‘components of a society, necessarily realize their individual worlds and contribute to the individual worlds of others’ (Hayles, 1999: 142).

Bracha Ettinger, moving this onto the psychoanalytical terrain that deals with unconscious organizations of subjectivity, theorizes the implications of auto-potetic theory’s ‘structural coupling’ (with its heteronormative associations) as our capacity, via the trace of the matrical feminine, for co-potetic tran-subjectivity. This suggests elements or moments within subjectivity in which it is impossible not to share.
I have named Matrrixial border-space a psychic sphere of encounters of (e) and non-(e) where traces, imprints and waves are exchanged and experienced by fragmented and assembled (e) and non(e) in trans-subjectivity and sub-subjectivity. The concepts of Matrrixial gaze and screen enable us to perceive and theorise different links connecting artist, viewer and art-work.

(Ettinger, 1999b: 7)

With her theoretical developments Bracha Ettinger has taken the most complex elements of contemporary psychoanalysis both bequeathed by Jacques Lacan and developed in the British school of object relations and pushed them beyond the limits of ‘the phallic model’ which she, at the same time, deconstructs. No longer confined within the Oedipal/pre-Oedipal/anti-Oedipal modelling of femininity as either lack and absence vis-a-vis phallic masculinity, or as an essentially different or innately disposed sexuality (the Jones and Hornsey position advanced in the 1920s debate with Freud’s thesis of a single, masculine libido), or as an endless fragmentation, the work of Bracha Ettinger makes it possible to suggest the feminine-as-the-Matrix as a basis for a non-phallic domain of meanings and trans-subjective affects. This is where her thinking corresponds with a Deleuzian move to de-throne the Oedipal, overdeterminately heterosexuality and fixed orders of sexual difference in favour of a partializing, hybridized and more rhizomatic subjectivity.

The crucial difference from other projects lies, however, in that most theoretical moves tried to de-phallicize notions of the subject but did not escape this deeply rooted structuring perspective that continues to haunt even the anti-Oedipal thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, at least with regard to the feminine, through a false neutrality and an infinite pulverization of the feminine into a ‘thousand sexes’ for example, while the Matrix succeeded in escaping it. In yet another way, a non-Oedipal proposition like Jean Laplanche’s theory of a primary non-gendering mode of seduction leaves us unable to specify, or even to think anything about a sex difference or the feminine. Given the occlusion of the feminine as anything other than either within phallic thinking, or the assimilation of difference to biology, it would have been premature to dispense with this third possibility, that will be discerned to the reader of Bracha Ettinger’s texts, where there may be found-and-invented vitaly important models and processes, structuring subjectivity and ultimately shaping social and cultural forms, that derive from a sexual difference in the feminine conceived of as neither essence nor a hole in meaning nor an endless fragmentation.

Bracha Ettinger’s covenant between artistic exploration and psychoanalytical elaboration allowed her to come up with a signifier by means of which the Symbolic – the place of thought, ideas, articulated meaning, philosophy and politics – can filter in and register traces of a sexual difference that impacts and transforms us, diversely masculine as well as diversely feminine subjects, in different ways. I will try to give the reader a sense to what an extent this field of meaning is radically dehysterizating for feminine subjectivity, and to what an extent creative women were struggling over and over to arrive at some intelligible way of sharing their glimpses into this possibility, and their agony about its lack in culture, at the risk of losing their sanity and even their own life. As Scott Rudin’s piercing film, The Hours, a film about feminine melancholia, love, creativity, generosity and suicide, circulates to professional acclaim in 2003, the troubling and even tragic life-end-death nature of the question of such feminine exile is given a poetic cinematic form that may give some concrete urgency to these more theoretical reflections.

Feminist thinking about the specificity of the feminine has, of necessity, taken up what psychoanalysis from its origins foreclosed or obfuscated: the daughter’s relation to the mother as something quite different from the maternal function within the masculine imaginary where the mother is a place, a habitus, a totalizing inside from which the (masculine) subject must escape, and where the cut of the umbilical cord prefigures as the earliest of the castrating divisions that later empower his organ with the illusion of approximation to all that ensures access to the place of the Subject. We need to think the early maternal beyond the pre-Oedipal idealization or its abjection (Kristeva, 1982) and imagine a subject in that place as a subject, already, of desire. Only the idea of becoming in co-emergence with an unknown partial-other, whose affected existence lies with and within another, can raise that interior female bodily/psychic cavity to the level of a subjectuating borderspace, where one’s invisible and innermost recess, saturated acoustically in a resonating and tactile intimacy, functions as meaning-creating transgressive imprint.

Giving a lecture in 1931, one year before Freud wrote his lecture on ‘Femininity’ whose dispiriting yet open conclusion I cite at the head of this article, Virginia Woolf dramatized the struggle of the woman artist or writer for access to the sense of a sexuated subjectivity necessary for any woman to write or make art. She described a phantom that haunted her and held her back from saying what she thought, because she was a ‘woman’. Woolf named the monitory spectre the Angel in the House, a figure from a poem by the 19th-century British poet Coventry Patmore celebrating the ideal of imperial British domesticated bourgeois femininity that Virginia Woolf’s own mother, Julia, had lived through, and from which she had died prematurely, all dutiful self-sacrifice and beautiful submission. Virginia Woolf fought against this phantom, an idealized but also deadly image of femininity. She was obliged to murder ‘her’.

Had I not killed her, she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review a book without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality and sex. (Woolf, 1979: 83)

In this famous allegory of the making of the woman writer, we find a veiled episode of matricide, a structurally antagonistic relation between the
signifier and the maternal image in relation to which the daughter finds herself culturally mute and imaginatively hobbled. The daughter's access to her own speech and thoughts requires that this culturally installed distortion of the maternal superego be eternally silenced by a kind of psychic violence that is enacted against part of the feminine self. The necessity of such self-destruction condemns the feminine subject to the typical condition of the depressive, oscillating between a dazzling intellectual display and an inner self-directed deadliness. Later in her lecture, Virginia Woolf confronted another kind of violence in the struggle for women to gain access to their own intellectual and emotional identity that must, but does not include imaginative and symbolic access to the specificity of feminine sexuality. Woolf describes in very Freudian terms the would-be woman writer as a fisherman, lying sunk in day-dreams on the edge of a river, with a rod held out in deep water, her line trailing amidst the rushing streams — the semi-conscious artist fishing in the depths of the unconscious. The imagination rushes heedlessly along its flowing bed, only to be brutally halted by a sudden smash against something hard and resistant, stunning the flow of creativity by its absolute prohibition. The artist/woman is in distress. 'To speak without figure, she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men would be shocked. She could write no more.' At this point in Woolf's text, it is a masculine internal censor that stuns the flow of creative imagination and poises the deepest moment of exchange between the traces of the body and its pleasures with the poiesis of writing. Woolf concludes that although she did kill off the Angel in the House, and find her own voice, she resolved never to tell the truth about her own experiences as a woman's body — and she concluded: 'I doubt that any woman has solved it yet.' And we can add: her insight touches precisely upon not the lack of pressure of desire, but the absence of a uncensored signifier for what was, nonetheless, repeatedly encountered in the semiotics of her own brilliant writing.

The importance of the Woolfian allegory of the anguished foreclosure of femininity can be further elaborated byreference to the writings of the contemporary psychoanalytical theorist and literary critic, Julia Kristeva. In her theory of melancholia — to which the feminine subject appears to be constitutionally susceptible — the necessity of matricide is also seen to be fundamental. Following Kant, Kristeva (1989) argues that the melancholic is riveted not so much to a psychic object that is lost as to a memory event, a blurred representation kept in a psychic tomb, in a truncated time. Kristeva, nonetheless, concludes that what underlies this condition is the unfilled mourning for the maternal object. Surely the logic of the argument that correlates melancholia with time rather than place, and memory trace rather than object, should be able to reconfigure the maternal in non-objectual terms. But this would be impossible in terms of a theory still tied to a phallic logic that can only posit the condition of subjectivity upon the loss of the object as cut, the founding severance which locates any trace of the maternal on the other side of all meaning and conceives of femininity as destined either to melancholia (refusal of the negation of the mother) or mourning (sublimation of this negation). Matricide is our vital necessity, Julia Kristeva writes, because it is the sine qua non of our individuation (1989: 27).

Virginia Woolf historically wrote as a woman who struggled acutely with the profound psychic pain of real maternal bereavement and as a modernist conflicted by the psychic condition of femininity condemned by the limits of her culture's Imaginary and Symbolic to an unrelieved mourning occasioned by the impossibility of acknowledging through the Symbolic a memory trace of the time of being with the mother that might, beyond the role of lost object, figure back to the feminine subject an opening to another, feminine sublimation and a means of thinking, knowing and creating from her own sexual specificity, without killing either self or mother. A spectre is raised here, the spectre of what we now, from the matrixial angle, can understand as relating to a different, not necessarily matricidal feminine desire, interwoven in creativity, if we work with a different difference from that which is assigned to the term 'feminine' in a phallocentric system. This difference has nothing to do with any determinism derived from anatomical or biological conditioning or from essence, and yet the thinking of/from the feminine corporeal edges of the psyche is crucial.

There must be no confusion about this, but when the theory police are so anxious and so quick to dismiss anyone who dares to pose this question, Freudians must be alert to what presses from behind such a powerful taboo. The matrixial difference which Bracha Ettinger traces must and can only be conceived in the same terms in which psychoanalysis has always theorized the complex relations between soma and psyche, where, sooner or later, an abstract signifier must organize meaning, taking into account phantasies that are to some extent homologous with, but never reducible to the real of the body. Up till now only male sexuality was 'allowed' to create a universe imaginatively and linguistically hospitable to the corporeality upon which its subjecthood was obliquely figured. The female body, when not reduced to nature, is the hole in this universe. But for whatever is human, there is never pure construction just as there never is a pure nature, and psychoanalysis is precisely the discourse that makes the psychic relation between matterality and signification a dialectical one. Thus the corporeal imagination that delivers to masculinity a subjective home in phallic terms can, logically, expand to encompass what that might be for the feminine subject, and for the masculine subject, who also bears the imprint of the feminine sexual specificity in a primal unconscious, another kind of creative hospitality.

Just how violently our culture and even most of its advanced thinkers repudiate the very possibility that any aspect of the feminine-reproductive corporeal-Real might not only be imagined beyond the phallus but formulated to become conceptually feminine, or that such an aspect as feminine might
generate a dimension of meaning that structures subjectivity or sociality, can once again be traced in another dimension of what, for Julia Kristeva, is the predicament of the feminine. In her article, ‘Un nouveau type d’intellectuel: le dissident’, first published in the Paris journal Tel Quel in the winter of 1977, Kristeva (1986b) wrote concerning Mallarmé’s question: what is there to say regarding childbirth? She argued that his question is probably just as poignant if not more so than the famous Freudian Che vuoi? Julia Kristeva’s answer to the question is that here the desire of the child lays down the law, resulting in a tendency towards paranoia that may well constitute the repressed basis of any feminine specificity. In the famous opening pages of her study of the Italian Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini, the recently pregnant author gave a powerful evocation of the uncanniness of the experience in terms of a space, both double and stranger, where there is no one to signify the experience. Where it is happening, according to her, I am not there (Kristeva, 1979: 237). The I cannot think it. For all its evocative power, Kristeva’s text, in total agreement with Lacan of the 1973 Seminar (Lacan, 1975), shows the event of the female body as so impossible to think, so impossible to signify, that the woman to whom it happens becomes temporarily dispossessed, psychotic in her own body, unhinged from language itself. At that point there can for her be no subject, thus her body is occupied by an it that objectifies the woman it deranges. In the same spirit, in her bold and poetic self-analysis of maternal subjectivity, ‘Stabat Mater’ (Kristeva, 1966c), the fold between the site of this bodily proceeding, and the speaking subject who desires the father’s law to hold back the threatened disintegration of a psychosis-inducing jouissance, is literally represented on the page as a tear, an unbridgeable wound, that literates the mark of castration. Kristeva’s writing articulates precisely the limits that phallocentric thought places upon women attempting to reflect upon any kind of meaning in what Lacan in his vision calls ‘beyond the phallus’.7 Kristeva continues to say that pregnancy is first of all an institutionalized form of psychosis and an on/off choice: me or it; that it is an identity that splits, a threshold between nature and culture, biology and language with no singularity and no relations to an ethical Other – an Other so difficult in her mind to achieve, for a woman. Now, by pregnancy, in addition to paranoia, woman succumbs to psychotic disintegration and is also divorced from ethical relations. For any ethical subject to emerge, according to Kristeva, this unsignifiable and psychosis-inducing condition of the pregnant-maternal and its body-space-memory must be abjected, an interior killing in a manner that recalls the necessity for killing the mother. Linking this problematic with artistic creativity, Kristeva offers a distilled exemplar of ‘creation’ as fundamentally inscribed in the son’s (male) rivalry and identification with the mother whom he must also destroy and reinvent by his act. A woman artist who, by destroying the mother will also destroy herself, is, therefore, condemned to the anguish to which Virginia Woolf attested in her work. In her analysis of the gendering of melancholia as an artistic trope since the Renaissance, Juliana Schiessari (1992) addresses the implications of this position in terms of the necessity of rethinking a different kind of symbolic loss. Kristeva’s ‘matricidal’ therapy for depression is shown to be disturbingly complicitous with the same symbolic order that privileges the artistic expression of male melancholia and devalues the depression of women as a personal failure. I want to draw from Schiessari the feminist utopian dream of the necessity to think about a feminine space, and therefore, about subjectivity in general, that is not complicitous with a Symbolic order in and by which the feminine is condemned to a relation to her formation as a subject that aligns femininity only with pathology, self-alienation, hysteria, psychosis, depression, dereliction and madness, whether in Kristeva’s or in Irigaray’s terms.

VIII To Conclude

Modern psychoanalysis is framed by reference to a linguistic signer that lends its support to the phantasmatic morphology of the masculine body and its narcissistically defining sexual organ: the penis sign. Yet most would be outraged were we to dare positively to articulate in non-pathological terms the unconscious effects of this very domain of invisible sexual female specificity that is so politely contained in the foreignness of the Greek word hystera, derived from the word hysteron, meaning womb. Anything that so powerfully attracts a phobic response of dread of the collapse into ‘essentialist’ or ‘biological’ thought, indicates just how proscribed is the human-female sexed and sexualizing invisible corporeal Real, so that even in the much studied case of hysteria, the associations with the situation from which we are all born are pitifully forestalled or reduced to mere organ, an organ that goes, or drives us crazy. Even philosophers who readily agree that we cannot have any meaningful theory concerning the feminine without acknowledgement of the female body, mostly pale before speaking of pregnancy or the processes of human becoming: a terror before the (here still phallic) Mother that bespeaks the overlaying of the phallic image of engulfment or identity. Rightly and wrongly. Within what Bracha Ettinger proposes, using the Latin term Matrix, the womb ceases to be mere organ. The investment in any organ, male or female, falls within the phallic model in which its presence or absence becomes a determinant of meaning. Nor is it merely an archaic, non-subjective space, an envelope, Chêne, a vessel, Nirvana, undifferentiatedness, autism. The Matrix refers to a structure, a logic, a process of subjectivization and meaning-making that traverses all the registers Lacan proposed. The Matrix is a signer, like the Phallus, thought, phantasy and its corpral which is never anatomy or nature.

It is vital to stress that we make no advance if we merely attempt to substitute for the phallic-penis another kind of organ, even if it is anatomically feminine-female. Luce Irigaray (1991) has proposed the placenta to speak about the imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother, abandoned in darkness and madness.
Other writers, like Elisabeth Bronfen (1998) for example, have advanced a theory of subject formation via the traumas of the umbilical cut and its scar which marks all bodies in an ungendered way. But whether it is a female organ such as the placenta or an undifferentiated mark/wound like the umbilicus, they both function within a model of presence/absence, severance and loss by castration and hallucinatory return of the repressed. The Matrix, on the other hand, concerns the subjectivizing process of several partial-subjects who cannot ever be entirely thought apart from their encounter as subject–subject and not only as subject/object, and where it is by definition, and not as a result of any previous assumption, impossible to reach absence without presence, presence without absence. Here, subjectivity is original, spatial, pluralizing and partializing.

There is a tracing of a pysicality that holds a libidinal and signifying potential via the signifier Matrix only when it passes through the channels and levels (from trauma to phantasy and thought) by which psychoanalysis identified the emergence of a psychic apparatus that, rising to the most elaborate of symbolic articulations, nonetheless rests upon, but always retrospectively semiotically and libidinously invests, sensory zones, intensities and sites of memory traces of contactability and conductability: a matrixial borderspace. This borderspace is susceptible to profound misunderstanding. Therefore, as a subtle reader of the later seminars of Jacques Lacan, where he re-struggled with questions of the feminine through a new alertness to the transactions between the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic through notions of sūstisēma and the Moebius strip, Bracha Ettinger carefully re-brands, with a Deleuzian twist and a feminized Merleau-Pontianiser, these three levels of the human unconscious in their relation to the transgressive co-emergence-in-difference with the m/Other. Brian Massumi, a distinguished specialist in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, summarizes the profound implications for this move as it spreads out upon the aesthetic, the analytical and the philosophical planes of contemporary cultural theory. I shall end with a substantial quotation from his work on Bracha Ettinger to allow other voices of interpretation to lead on to further readings and thinking about this important contribution.

In Ettinger's theory, therefore, Massumi suggests that the subjective is radically reconceived:

The subjective, in the psychoanalytic sense of symbolic and discursive ordering, returns. It returns as an effect of the separateness. It is not structuring of the process. It is structured by it. It follows the self-referencing of feeling. The subjective is the end product of the artistic process. . . . Theoretically, Ettinger combines a Lacanian analytic perspective with Deleuze and Guattari's emergent model. . . . This hybridization of psychoanalysis with schizophrenia involves a significant revision of the former. . . . This approach has major consequences.

He suggests that this subjectivity re-attached to its intensities reconstitutes the symbolic:

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First, it reattaches the T to an infra-subjective (trans-subjective) dynamic operating as a generative matrix for subjective variation (metamorphosis). The return of the subject is not the same. Following the snowballing of 'severed' feeling, it returns displaced, redistributed, and artistically augmented. Through art, the subject, like feeling — and with feeling — coincides with the distances separating it from itself. This is not as simple as an alienation. Repeat: subjectivity returns with feeling. . . . It relives, intensively, more intensely at every beat, even as it wanders through the associative chains of the symbolic . . .

Finally, he stresses the ontological priority of the matrixial feminine is to be understood as the other of the masculine—feminine opposition of Oedipal and phallic thought and thus it has both general and particular implications for our concepts of sexuality, aesthetics and the subject.

Since the 'feminine' is logically and ontologically prior to the reciprocal definition of the sexes, Ettinger will sometimes characterize it as a 'space before subjectivity.' Ettinger carefully emphasizes that this matrixial femininity is not the opposite of the phallic masculine. It is more accurate to say that it is the other of the masculine—feminine opposition. Since the matrixial is generative, its otherness to phallic oppositional structure may still be considered a sexual difference. In fact, it is the sexual difference, as against the difference between the sexes. The matrixial, according to Ettinger, is a dynamic that may attach itself to bodies that are masculine or feminine by phallic definition. The 'feminine,' she insists, is not only accessible to women. It is accessible to any body — on the condition that it surrenders itself to the several, to its own co-poietic variation and return, intensely, artistically relieved. (Massumi, 2006: 26–7)

Notes

1. Psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg first gave the term 'transposition' to unconscious cross-generational transmission of massive trauma in her work with the children of Holocaust survivors. Although the experience of cross-generational dialogue and exchange is an ordinary art of cultural transmission and the social education of children through imitation and reception of cultural norms, transposition of massive trauma involves much more significant disturbances and reversals of parent and child, of time and history. As Louise Kaplan explains, transmission trauma, the unconscious passing to the child of the parent's traumatized affects from a history the child has not known, involves:

   . . . reversals of ordinary time, whereby the temporal positions of parent and child are exchanged. Since the parent's past occupies the psychological space that would ordinarily belong to the current life of the child, the child must give up her right to exist in her own present. (Judith Kestenberg, 1972, in Kaplan, 1995: 224; see also Wardi, 1992)

2. Painting after painting refers initially to a resumption of painting as a critical practice after the high modernist interventions that made painting the paradigm for a modernist practice. After history locates the caesura of Auschwitz which symbolically lies between painting (Ettinger's now) and the modernist moment of
its self-investment that was suspended in the 1960s–90s by what now looks interestingly topical as the triumph of lens-based artistic practices: the triumph of the gaze (see Pollock, 1996a).

3. Shortly after completing this article I discovered Josh Cohen (Cohen, 2003), who also seeks to read these authors for a philosophical foundation for thought after Auschwitz as a movement not of completion but of openness, hence futurity.

4. 'And yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasty is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain unrecognizability—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence' (Freud, 1925: 367). In the German this is named Mutter-keksphantasien. See also The Wolf-Man (1979), in Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 9, p. 342) where Freud elaborates the role of the womb-phantasy in his patient's psychosexual disposition.

5. Irigaray writes: 'The imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother . . . where are we to find them? In what darkness, what madness, have they been abandoned?' (Irigaray, 1991: 29).

6. This difficult concept emerged in the later teaching of Lacan in a seminar on how James Joyce avoided psychosis. Lacan used an archaic spelling of the word 'symptom', which acoustically associates both with St Thomas (St Théone in French, as in doubting Thomas) and synth-homme, a synthetic man, in order to propose that there may be a way to braid together the strands of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic which prevents psychosis while not consisting in the conventional resolutions of their relations. Lacan also proposes that this particular slippage is 'Woman' – the other sex for the masculine subject, leaving open the question of what constitutes this possibility for the feminine subject. Ettinger is proposing that the matrixial dimension comes close to functioning as this for feminine subjectivity. The elaboration of these ideas of Lacan's is not yet published but can be accessed in Harari (2002), Thurston (2002), Ettinger (2000a).

7. The idea of a split page as the mark of a scar comes from Kelly Oliver (1993: 53).

References

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