

**Bodies, Gazes and Images between Hysteria and  
Modernism:**

**Tracing the Maternal in the Case History of 'Frau Emmy von N' and  
in Selected Paintings by Suzanne Valadon**

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We think back through our mothers if we are women.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

One can only begin to advance along the path of discovery, of discovery of writing or of something else, from the point of mourning or in the reparation of mourning. In the beginning the gesture of writing is linked to the experience of disappearance, to the feeling of having lost the key to the world, of having thrown it away.

Hélène Cixous, 'From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene  
of History'

For my mother, Janet Margaret Heath (1947-1991)

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This thesis is preoccupied in many ways with the question of what it might be to 'think back through our mothers'. It is dedicated to the memory of my own mother, and was begun from the particular perspective of the motherless daughter. The birth of my daughter, Amelia Salesse, in the later stages of its writing turned my understanding of the mother/daughter relation on its head; I thank her from the bottom of my heart for teaching me anew about the pleasures and complexities of this most significant of relationships, and for the sheer unbridled joy she has brought to both my and her father's lives.

Finally, for his unwavering support and unquestioning acceptance, his limitless patience and boundless tolerance, and for always, always backing up my work, I lovingly thank my husband, Alain Salesse.

## Abstract

This thesis is structured around the dual scenarios of doctor/patient and artist/model. Having analysed the underlying politics of class and gender that structured the relationship between doctor and patient, and between artist and model, at the fin-de-siècle, it goes on to examine how these relations were transformed by two developments: the emergence of psychoanalysis in relation to hysteria, and the growing involvement of women as artists in the field of modernist painting. Its key research questions fall, therefore, upon identifying a historical method for understanding the impact of women's self-enunciation in these scenarios that shifts the now classic image of masculinised modernism in both its psychological and aesthetic dimensions.

It is centred upon a close reading of two case studies—that of 'Frau Emmy von N' from the *Studies on Hysteria*, published jointly by Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer in 1895, and that of model-turned-artist Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938)—and examines the extent to which the scenarios of doctor/patient and artist/model underwent a radical internal transformation as a result of their reconfiguration by the women involved. Moving between psychoanalysis and modernism at the moment of their historical co-emergence, and re-reading their conjunction through contemporary feminist theory, it also interrogates one of the traditional blind spots of psychoanalysis: maternal subjectivity.

In the first two chapters, I revisit Freud's first written case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' in order to explore the significance of Freud's belated acknowledgement of his patient's ambivalent experience of motherhood to the history and theory of what would become psychoanalysis. Having tracked the shift in the relations between doctor and patient that occurred over the course of this early, proto-analytic, encounter, I go on to examine a corresponding transformation in my second identified scenario of artist/model. In the third chapter, I consider the social, artistic and psychic dilemmas faced by those self-consciously modern 'New Women' who sought in the early years of the twentieth century to participate in modernist art and culture not merely as mute objects of representation, but as creative subjects in their own right. In this chapter, I investigate how the question of the maternal might be processed in the being of women as artists in the modernist moment. Having analysed both the possibilities and limitations of those psychoanalytic theorisations that view feminine creativity as necessarily bound up with depressive mourning for the mother and the maternal body, in the final two chapters, I draw upon the Matrixial theory of Bracha Ettinger in order to consider how the traces of some different relation to the feminine/maternal may be otherwise inscribed in certain paintings of the female nude by Suzanne Valadon.

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## INTRODUCTION

### DOCTOR/PATIENT—ARTIST/MODEL

In the closing years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries, a particularly complex and mutually enriching relationship developed between the arts and the sciences. That fin-de-siècle moment is not only to be characterised by the series of significant formal innovations in the fields of art and literature which have collectively come to be labelled European Modernism; it also witnessed the emergence of a number of new disciplines which were premised upon a scientific investigation into the workings of the human mind, including psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Tracking the dense web of connections that linked these different cultural fields, Mark Micale writes of a ‘shared Modernist project’, in which the aesthetic and psychological domains were joined in a ‘common probing of sexuality, subjectivity and self-identity.’<sup>1</sup> Existing research into the cultural affinities between psychological medicine and the literary-artistic avant-garde at the fin-de-siècle has, however, been slower to acknowledge that their mutual interest in the structure of individual consciousness and in the driving forces of sexuality was fundamentally inflected by the cultural politics of class and gender, as an emergent class of male, bourgeois professionals took as their particular object of investigation, female subjectivity and sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis takes this oversight as its point of departure. It identifies the doubled structure of doctor/patient and artist/model as a conceptual framework through which to approach this particular cultural-historical moment. In Foucaultian terms, both of these scenarios may be considered particularly dense sites for the transfer of power: during the late nineteenth century, the relationship between doctor and patient, and between artist and model, both hinged on the encounter between a representing, enunciating masculine subject and a represented, enunciated female body.<sup>3</sup> Through a detailed reading of two case studies—that of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ from the *Studies on Hysteria*, published jointly by

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<sup>1</sup> Mark S Micale, ‘The Modernist Mind: A Map,’ pp.1-19 in Mark S Micale (ed.), *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> The collection of essays edited by Mark Micale as *The Mind of Modernism* (see note 1 above) remains the most detailed, cross-disciplinary examination of the intellectual traffic between psychiatric medicine and the creative arts during this period. For an exploration of the cultural affinities between the realms of psychology and the visual arts in particular, see also Lynn Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science and the Spiritual* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Debora L Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley etc: Berkeley University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the emergence of a penetrating, ‘plurisensorial’ medical gaze over the course of the nineteenth century, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* [1963], trans. A M Sheridan (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2003).

Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer in 1895, and that of model-turned-artist Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938)—I will examine the extent to which these two implicitly classed and gendered scenarios underwent a radical internal transformation at the fin-de-siècle as a result of their reconfiguration by the women involved. The thesis thus intervenes in both the history of psychoanalysis and the history of modern art. A retrospective tracking of the points of convergence and divergence between these different cultural fields at the moment of their historical co-emergence is informed by an engagement with contemporary feminist cultural and psychoanalytical theory. Thus re-read, my selected case studies are revealed to raise a further, and inter-related, series of questions around the maternal (body, subjectivity, ambivalence) and its articulation within both psychoanalytic theory and modernist art practice.

In order to appreciate the full significance of the shift that, I shall be arguing, can be tracked in the relations between doctor and patient, and artist and model, at the fin-de-siècle, it seems necessary first to come to an understanding of the underlying dynamics of power and authority that had, up to this point, characterised the interactions between both doctor and patient, and artist and model. In this introductory chapter, I shall, therefore, offer a detailed analysis of a series of late-nineteenth-century literary and visual representations of the doctor/patient, and the artist/model, relationship in order not only to establish their social and cultural significance, but further to demonstrate how certain tropes recur across these visual and textual inscriptions of the dual scenarios that I identify as key sites of investigation into questions of class, gender, sexuality, agency and authority in the late nineteenth century.

The widespread medico-cultural interest in questions of gender, sexuality and subjectivity that has been seen to characterise the fin-de-siècle coalesced around one particular figure: the female hysteric, who came at this time to serve as a privileged object of both scientific investigation and aesthetic contemplation.<sup>4</sup> As cultural historian Janet

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis has necessarily involved in dialogue with the very rich body of interdisciplinary scholarship on the cultural history of hysteria that has been published over the past thirty years. The fascination with hysteria that was so evident during the closing years of the nineteenth century has striking parallels with the remarkable renaissance of interest in the disease during the last quarter of the twentieth century. For a comprehensive overview of the history and historiography of hysteria, see Mark S Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). While hysteria appears to have gained increasing currency within the academic humanities it has all but disappeared as a clinical diagnosis over the course of the twentieth century. Several recent studies have attempted to account for this paradox. Micale proposes that, by the turn of the last century, hysteria had become overextended as a diagnostic term. What had come to be seen as a catch-all category was, he suggests, increasingly broken down into numerous smaller units, including disorders such as anorexia nervosa or multiple personality syndrome. Other studies trace the emergence of what are felt to be veritable epidemics of hysteria within late-twentieth-century

Beizer has emphasised, the late-nineteenth-century heyday of hysteria cannot be confined to the domain of medicine; it was instead a ‘broader based cultural symptom’ that also permeated the realms of literature, theatre and the visual arts.<sup>5</sup> During the late nineteenth century, a whole range of medical, literary and visual theories and images of hysteria appear to have converged in order to form what Mark Micale has termed a ‘single, integrated sociocultural milieu from which all authors could draw in the formation of a common “culture of hysteria”.’<sup>6</sup> Examinations of the literary portrayal of hysteria in particular have revealed a complex interplay between medical and fictional representations of the disease that precludes any notion of scientific ‘truth’ and literary ‘copy’.<sup>7</sup> In this introductory chapter, I want to shift the terms of this discussion from literary to visual representations of hysteria. Building upon some preliminary observations by art historians Richard Thomson and Anthea Callen, I will analyse the correspondences between medical and artistic representations of the female body in late-nineteenth-century Paris. The focus for this investigation falls upon the visual iconography of the hysterical female body developed by and for Dr Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière and the images of women bathing produced by Edgar Degas (1834-1917).<sup>8</sup>

Having revealed the dispersed politics of class and gender that structured the relationship between doctor and patient, and between artist and model, at the fin-de-siècle, it will become necessary to analyse how these scenarios were transformed by two key

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popular culture. For Elaine Showalter, the range of psychogenic syndromes endemic at the close of the millennium (she includes in her analysis chronic fatigue, Gulf War syndrome, recovered memories of sexual abuse and alien abduction) is indicative of the fact that hysteria is in fact a ‘universal psychopathology of everyday life’; see Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Juliet Mitchell has, however, taken issue with this line of interpretation, pointing out that, from a psychoanalytical perspective, there is little evidence to point to the role of either infantile conflict or sexuality in these mass events. Mitchell herself convincingly argues that the decline of hysteria as a diagnostic entity was connected with the discovery of male hysteria initially in the late decades of the nineteenth century and then subsequently during the First World War. She shows how, in Freud’s early work, male hysteria came to be displaced into the Oedipus complex. This theoretical gesture, she proposes, not only eliminated the male hysteric and realigned hysteria with femininity, but also, because of its stress upon vertical, inter-generational relationships, also radically underestimated the significance of lateral, sibling relationships. Mitchell’s own emphasis upon the centrality of such relationships to the Oedipus complex leads her to reposition hysteria as a structuring response to certain aspects of what it means to be human; see Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Mark S Micale, ‘Discourses of Hysteria in Fin-de-Siècle France,’ pp.71-92 in *The Mind of Modernism*, p.86.

<sup>7</sup> See especially Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*; Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative and the Figure of the Speaking Woman* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p.10; Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), p.52.

developments of this moment: the emergence of psychoanalysis in relation to hysteria, and the growing involvement of women as artists in the field of modernist painting that retained the female body as a key trope. The key research questions of this thesis fall, therefore, upon identifying a historical method for understanding the impact of women's self-enunciation in these two key scenarios that shifts the now classic image of masculinised modernism in both its psychological and aesthetic dimensions.

## Doctor/Patient

Historian Jan Goldstein has estimated that, between 1841 and 1881, the number of women admitted to the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris who were deemed to be suffering from hysteria rose from one percent to over 20 percent of the approximately five-thousand-strong patient population. As Goldstein emphasises, 'it takes two to make a diagnosis—a patient with a set of symptoms, and a physician who gives them the label he deems appropriate.'<sup>9</sup> This spectacular rise in the number of diagnosed hysterics can thus in part be explained by the appointment of Jean-Martin Charcot as chief physician of the Salpêtrière in 1862. Charcot remained in charge of the Salpêtrière until his death in 1893, and this period witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the scientific services and teaching facilities provided by the hospital.<sup>10</sup>

One of Charcot's earliest tasks after his appointment was to rationalise the ward in which hysterical and epileptic patients were housed. He thus worked initially to distinguish the symptoms of hysteria from those of epilepsy, and then subsequently to codify the different stages of a specifically *hysterical* attack. Where previous investigations had emphasised the unpredictable and protean nature of hysterical symptoms, Charcot instead insisted that, "hysteria is governed in the same way as other morbid conditions, by rules and laws, which attentive and sufficiently numerous observations always permit us to establish".<sup>11</sup> His clinical methodology accordingly stressed above all else the importance of close observation of the outwardly visible signs of disease:

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.322.

<sup>10</sup> By the 1880s, these included a casting room, a photographic studio, a laboratory for anatomy and pathological physiology, an ophthalmology service and an amphitheatre capable of holding an audience of five hundred. For a detailed description of this process of 'medical modernisation', see Mark S Micale, 'The Salpêtrière in the Age of Charcot: An Institutional Perspective on Medical History in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985), pp.703-731.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *Clinical Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System Volume 3* (1889), cited by Daphne de Marneffe, 'Looking and Listening: The Construction of Clinical Knowledge in Charcot and Freud,' *Signs* 17.1 (Autumn 1991), pp.71-111, p.76.



He sits down near a bare table, and immediately has the patient to be studied brought in. The patient is then completely stripped. The intern reads the “observation” while the Master listens attentively. Then there is a long silence during which he gazes; he gazes at the patient and drums his fingers on the table. The assistants are standing, crowded together, anxiously awaiting a word that will shed some light. Charcot remains silent. Then he instructs the patient to move in a certain way, makes her speak, asks for her reflexes to be measured, for her sensitivity to be examined. And again he falls silent, Charcot’s mysterious silence. Finally he brings in a second patient, examines her like the first, calls for a third, and, still without a word, compares them.

This minute observation, primarily visual, is the source of all Charcot’s discoveries. The artist who, in his case, goes hand in hand with the doctor, is not extraneous to his discoveries.<sup>12</sup>

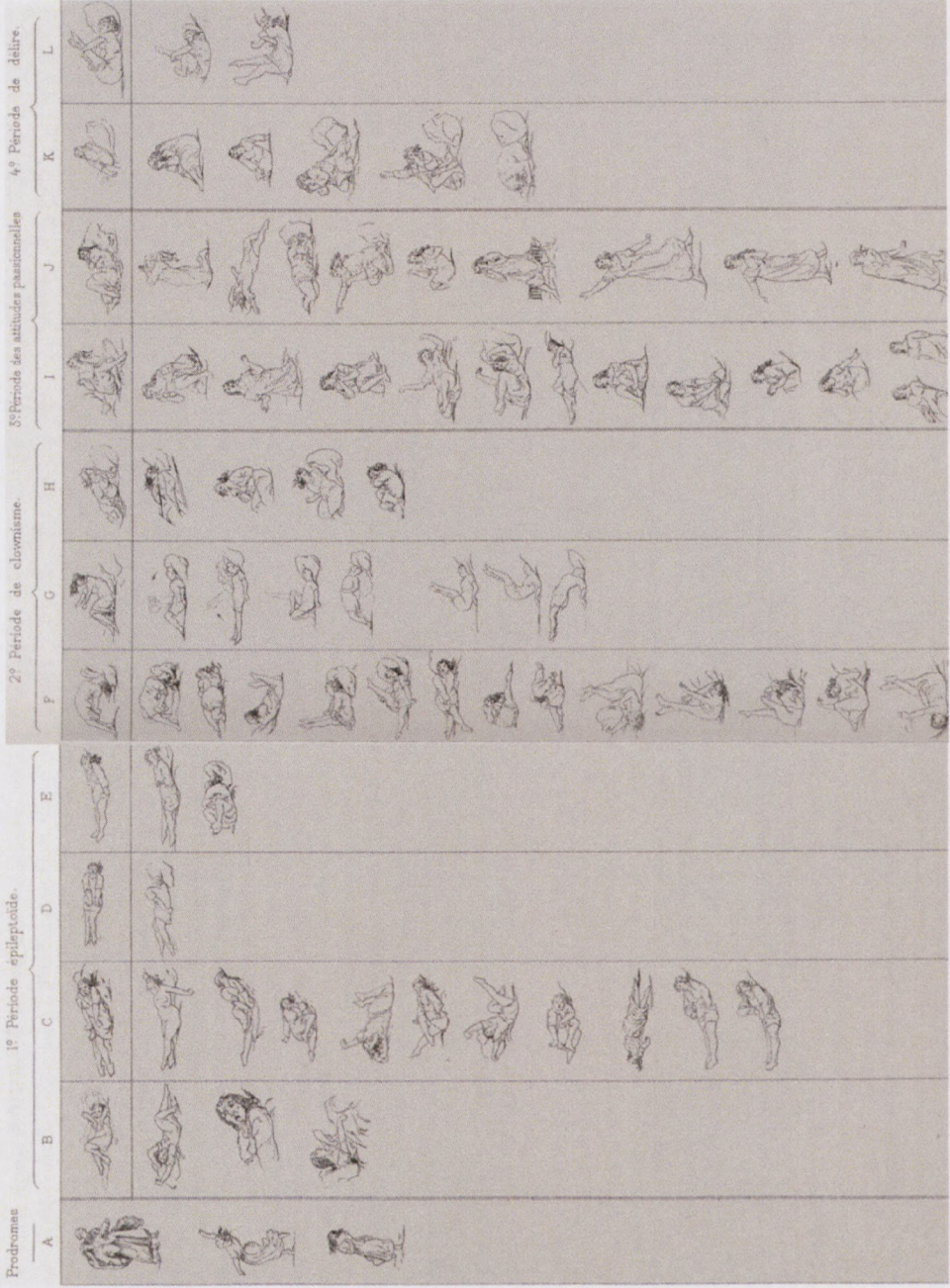
His ‘minute visual observation’ of his naked female patients led Charcot to suggest that the apparently random writhings of an hysterical attack could in fact be divided into four distinct phases—the *epileptoid phase*, which mimicked a standard epileptic fit, was followed firstly by a period of *clownism*, then by a series of *attitudes passionnelles* and finally by a period of delirium—phases which could be further broken down into a series of some eighty-six individual movements, graphically represented by Paul Richer’s ‘Synoptic Table of the “Complete and Regular Great Hysterical Attack”’ (**Figure 0.1**). Although intended to provide an exhaustive clinical classification of the symptoms of hysteria, Charcot’s investigations thus also simultaneously produced an aestheticised vision of the hysterical female body: in the ‘great optical machine’<sup>13</sup> that was the Salpêtrière under his control, the bodies of hysterical women were compared and contrasted, categorised and systematised, and recorded and reproduced, across a variety of media.

The establishment of a photographic service at the Salpêtrière appeared to provide a particular means for the objective consideration of the hysterical female body under laboratory conditions, the technical processes of photography allowing for the systematic recording of the hysterical attack according to minute divisions of time and movement. The use of photography at the Salpêtrière formed part of a wider initiative to produce some permanent record of the identity of the inmates of prisons, hospitals and asylums across Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The deployment of

<sup>12</sup> Georges Guillian, *Jean-Martin Charcot, 1825-1893. Sa Vie. Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Masson, 1955), p.51, cited by Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2003), p.22.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase is Georges Didi-Huberman’s. See *Invention of Hysteria*, p.12.

<sup>14</sup> Further examples include Hugh Diamond’s photographs of madwomen at the Surrey County Asylum in England, Alphonse Bertillon’s efforts to photograph, categorize, and classify criminals at the Préfecture de police of Paris, Italian sociologist Cesare Lombroso’s photographs of female criminals and the 55,000



**Figure 0.1**

Paul Richer, 'Synoptic Table of the "Complete and Regular Great Hysterical Attack" with Typical Positions and their "Variants"' from *Études cliniques sur la grande hystérie ou hystéro-épilepsie* (1881-1885)



photography as a technology of surveillance within these institutions was, however, dependent upon the belief that photography was an entirely objective, scientific and ‘truthful’ mode of representation: for Albert Londe, director of the photographic department at the Salpêtrière during the 1880s, the photographic plate served as ‘the scientist’s true retina.’<sup>15</sup> According to Londe, photography was uniquely able to ‘determine the facies appropriate to each illness and each affection, and to place it before everyone’s eyes.’<sup>16</sup> An image such as **Figure 0.2** was thus not ‘of the individual young woman now known to us only as ‘Augustine’, but, like Richer’s ‘Synoptic Table’, was rather intended to depict the poses and facial expressions deemed to be most characteristic of each phase of the ‘complete and regular great hysterical attack’. The captions accordingly inform the viewer that this is one a series of *attitudes passionnelles*, specifically *menace* or ‘threat’. (But just who is being threatened? Is Augustine experiencing some threat? Or is she threatening someone else, someone behind the camera perhaps?) As Georges Didi-Huberman has emphasised, however, this attempt to generalise the specific case into a clinical tableau, to freeze time and break down movement into a series of individual images, always involves delay and intermittence. What is presented to us is, he suggests, ‘an event of hysterical *jouissance* that is simultaneously open, offered and indecipherable; and then the intervention, in this aporia, of a spectacle, a semblance.’<sup>17</sup> This is, perhaps, the very paradox of the hundreds of photographs produced for Charcot at the Salpêtrière: whilst they endeavour to offer a definitive mapping of the hysterical female body, they also simultaneously appear to register the fallibility of such attempts at epistemic mastery. At the same time as the hysterical symptom is photographically framed and presented for medical inspection, so too do the images evoke a very real sense of individual anguish, which seems to resist any attempt at coherent interpretation or classification (**Figure 0.3**).

The photographs are generally taken in close up against a dark background. Augustine is for the most part pictured in bed wearing a white shift, and the sharp contrast of light and shade serves to heighten the dramatic intensity of these images. The

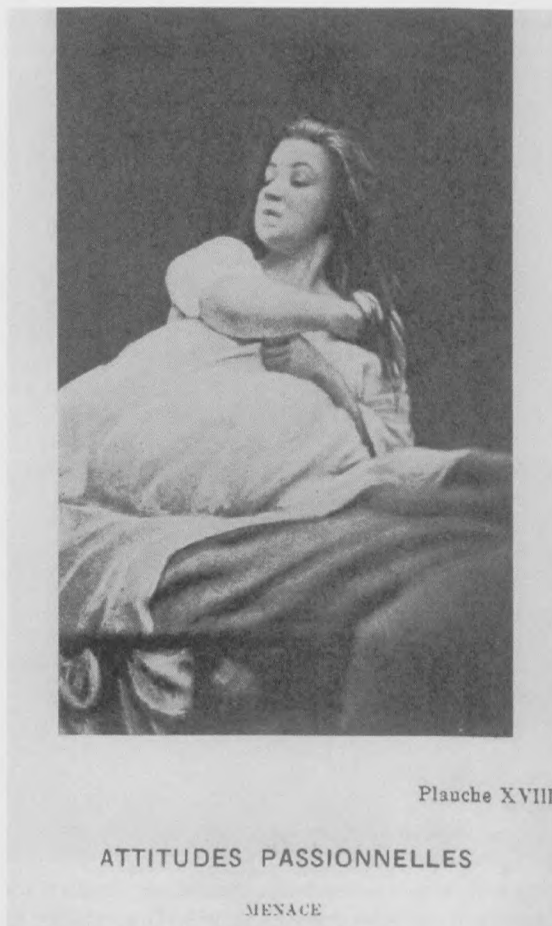
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photographs recording the progress of children at Dr Barnado’s ‘Home for Destitute Lads’. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2003), in particular chapter 2 and Sander Gilman, ‘The Image of the Hysteric’ in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, eds. Sander Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G S Rousseau & Elaine Showalter (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1993). For a Foucaultian reading of photography as an emergent technology of surveillance, see also John Tagg, ‘Power and Photography: Part One. A Means of Surveillance: The Photograph as Evidence in Law,’ *Screen Education* 36 (1980), pp.17-55.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Londe, no source given, cited by Didi-Huberman, p.32.

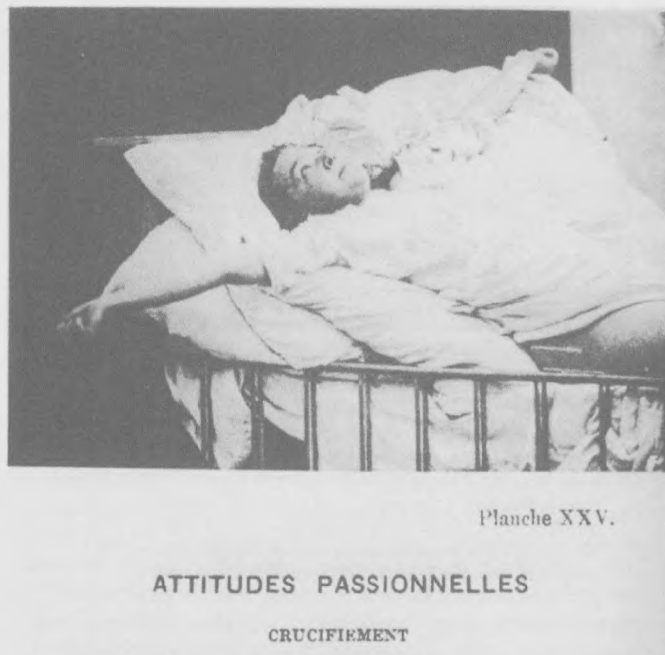
<sup>16</sup> Albert Londe, *L’évolution de la photographie* (Paris: Association française pour l’avancement des sciences, 1889), p.15, cited by Didi-Huberman, p.48.

<sup>17</sup> Didi-Huberman, p.151.



**Figure 0.2**

Paul Régnard, 'Attitudes Passionnelles: "Threat,"' photograph of Augustine from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878)



**Figure 0.3**

Paul Régnard, 'Attitudes Passionnelles: "Crucifixion,"' photograph of Augustine from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878)



nineteenth-century claim as to the objective and unmediated nature of photographic representation is further complicated by the fact that they were often touched up with paint or coloured ink in order to ‘clarify’ or ‘embellish’ key details.<sup>18</sup> Engravings were made from certain photographs, which themselves served as clinical illustrations of hysterical symptoms. Paul Richer’s engraving depicting ‘the phase of tonic immobility’ (**Figure 0.4**), for example, is based upon Paul Régnard’s photograph of ‘tetanism’ (**Figure 0.5**). In the engraving, however, the reclining female figure seems more obviously posed for the purposes of display: Augustine is no longer lying underneath the bedclothes, and her gown has ridden up to reveal her bare legs. Her facial expression is exaggerated, and she appears to foam at the mouth. The elaborate folds of her gown and the bedclothes on which she lies, together with her luxuriantly flowing hair, seem evocative of the extravagant drapery so characteristic of Baroque religious iconography (**Figure 0.6**). Although intended to provide a systematic and scientific classification of the movements, gestures and poses of hysteria, the visual language of diagnosis developed at the Salpêtrière thus also appears to have drawn something of its rhetoric from a long-established artistic iconography of religious ecstasy.

As Debora Silverman has pointed out, the chief physician of the Salpêtrière was simultaneously master of a domestic studio of the decorative arts: in collaboration with his wife and two daughters, Charcot made furniture, hammered leather bindings for books, embellished lamps, and sculpted bas-reliefs and terracotta figures.<sup>19</sup> Charcot’s interest in all things artistic was, however, not limited to the private spaces of the familial home, but also extended into his professional life; as his biographer acknowledged, in the figure of Charcot, ‘the artist went hand in hand with the doctor.’<sup>20</sup> The *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, published annually under Charcot’s directorship from 1888 onwards, interspersed case studies of patients at the hospital—themselves extensively illustrated by photographs, engravings and line drawings—with description and reproduction of images of insanity by the Great Masters, including statues by Leonardo and Michelangelo, architectural sculptures from French cathedrals and Italian chapels, and paintings by Goya and Rubens.<sup>21</sup> Many of the drawings in the *Nouvelle Iconographie* were provided by Paul

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>19</sup> Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, pp.102-06.

<sup>20</sup> Guillian, *Jean-Martin Charcot*, p.51, cited by Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p.22.

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion in this respect, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*.



**Figure 0.4**

Paul Richer, 'The Phase of Tonic Immobility or Tetanism,' plate engraved after Figure 0.5, from *Études cliniques sur la grande hystérie ou hystéro-épilepsie* (1881-1885)



Planche XVI.

TÉTANISME

**Figure 0.5**

Paul Régnaud, 'Tetanism,' photograph of Augustine from the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878)



**Figure 0.6**

Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, 1671-74, San Francisco a Ripa, Rome



Richer (who went on to become anatomy professor at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1903),<sup>22</sup> and doctor and artist collaborated on two further publications entirely devoted to artistic representations of pathology, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* (1887) and *Les Difformes et les malades dans l'art* (1889).

*Les Démoniaques dans l'art* collects together a number of images of satanic possession, exorcism and states of religious ecstasy dating from the fifth century to the eighteenth century. In their preface to the book, Charcot and Richer explained how science was 'now able to uncover the precise characteristics of a purely pathological state' in this imagery.<sup>23</sup> By subjecting their selected artworks to what they termed a 'retrospective diagnosis' (*diagnostic rétrospectif*), they aimed to demonstrate that the images served less as expressions of individual artistic creativity and more as accurate depictions of what would later be identified as the progressive stages of the 'great hysterical attack'. To enable the reader to make comparisons in this respect, the publication included a final section on 'the "diabolical convulsions" of today' (*les 'démoniaques convulsionnaires' d'aujourd'hui*), which traced a direct continuum between the gestures and poses of hysterical patients and artistic representations of religious ecstasy (**Figure 0.7**). In Richer's illustrative line drawings (**Figure 0.8**), the patient is stripped of the gown with which she is clothed in the photographs in order to show more clearly the anatomical contortions of her limbs. The visual construction of the hysteric as a dehumanised yet recognisably gendered *démoniaque* is rendered even more explicit by the sub-titling of the image and by the accompanying text, which observes that, 'the patient attempts to bite herself and to tear at her face and chest, she pulls out her hair, hits herself violently, emits terrible cries of sorrow or roars like a ferocious beast.'<sup>24</sup>

According to Martha Noel Evans, the significance of Charcot's investigations into hysteria lay in his giving the medical profession 'a scientific vocabulary to use in talking about hysteria that seemingly released them from the phenomenological language grounded

<sup>22</sup> On Richer's professorship at the *Beaux-Arts*, see Anthea Callen, 'The Body and Difference: Anatomy Training at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris in the Later Nineteenth Century,' *Art History* 20.1 (March 1997), pp.23-60.

<sup>23</sup> 'Des miniatures, des plaques d'ivoire, des tapisseries, des bas-reliefs en bronze, des fresques, des tableaux, des gravures ont retracé des scènes d'exorcisme et figuré les attitudes et les contorsions des "possédés", dans lesquelles la science retrouve aujourd'hui les traits précis d'un état purement pathologique.'

J-M Charcot & Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* [1887] (Amsterdam: B M Israël, 1972), p.vii.

<sup>24</sup> 'La malade cherche à se mordre et à se déchirer la figure ou la poitrine, elle s'arrache ses cheveux, se frappe violemment, pousse d'affreux cris de douleur ou des hurlements de bête féroce.'

Charcot & Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, p.104.



**Figure 0.7**

Left: Paul Richer, 'Période des attitudes passionnelles de la grande attaque hystérique: attitude d'attente extatique,' line drawing  
 Right: Paul Richer, 'Sainte Catherine de Sienne en extase' (fragment d'une fresque de Sodoma dans l'église Saint-Dominique à Sienne), line drawing after a photograph,  
 from J-M Charcot & Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* (1887)



VARIÉTÉ DÉMONIAQUE DE LA GRANDE ATTAQUE HYSTÉRIQUE  
 Contorsions.

**Figure 0.8**

Paul Richer, 'Variété démoniaque de la grande attaque hystérique: contorsions,' line drawing, from J-M Charcot & Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art* (1887)

in hysteria's past history of demonology and sexual license.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as Charcot himself acknowledged, 'the contortions of historical *démoniaques* as represented by artists have been incorporated into the symptomatology of hysteria.'<sup>26</sup> His conceptualisation of the hysterical female body was accordingly both explicitly and implicitly informed by this already established tradition of artistic representation: in giving the so-called *attitudes passionnelles* such labels as 'amorous supplication', 'eroticism' and 'ecstasy' (Figure 0.9), he clearly drew upon a range of centuries-old cultural associations yoking together madness, mysticism and female sexuality. Notwithstanding Charcot's claims to scientific objectivity in his work towards demystifying not merely hysteria but also artistic depictions of possession, the representation of the hysterical female body at the Salpêtrière thus also simultaneously remains bound by certain of the very terms that it purports to deconstruct. Although the division of the hysterical attack into a series of clearly identifiable phases together with the representation of those phases in the photographs and line drawings of the *Iconographie* may have provided the medical profession with the discursive tools through which to codify the unruly body of the female hysteric and to dispel popular mythologies surrounding hysteria, the visualisation of the hysterical female body at the hospital appeared at the same time to suggest that the contortions of the hysterical attack were intrinsically linked to such mythical causes as female sexuality and supernatural possession.

The collection of these photographs and line drawings into the successive volumes of the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* enabled doctors to look and look again at the hysterical female body. The notion of hysteria as a spectacle to be endlessly replayed for the viewing pleasure of another was, however, perhaps most vividly to be seen in the form of the display of hypnotised female patients at Charcot's renowned *leçons du mardi*, which were featured in popular guidebooks alongside the giraffes at the *Jardin des plantes* as a major attraction for those visiting the south-eastern quarter of Paris.<sup>27</sup> At these public lectures, Charcot would display exhibits from his self-styled 'museum of living pathology': female patients who would re-enact under hypnosis the four stages of an hysterical attack for the benefit of a spell-bound audience, which included not only such literary figures as Henri Bergson, Guy de Maupassant and Edmond de Goncourt, but also dancers and actresses

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<sup>25</sup> Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.24.

<sup>26</sup> 'les agitations et contorsions des anciens démoniaques représentés par les artistes ont été empruntées à la symptomatologie de l'hystérie.' Charcot & Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, p.91.

<sup>27</sup> See Micale, 'The Salpêtrière in the Age of Charcot.'



Planche XXIII

ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES

EXTASE (1878).

**Figure 0.9**

Paul Régnard, 'Attitudes Passionnelles: "Ecstasy,"' photograph of Augustine from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878)

such as Jane Avril and Sarah Bernhardt.<sup>28</sup> The spectacle on offer at the *leçons du mardi* was immortalised in André Brouillet's monumental oil painting *Une Leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière*, which was initially exhibited in the 1887 Salon, but is perhaps better known today through a lithograph after the original, executed by Louis-Eugène Pirodon and exhibited in the Salon of the following year (**Figure 0.10**). The image is centred upon the contrast between the swooning female patient and the erect and purposeful stance of her male physician. The heightened use of light and shade focuses the viewer's gaze upon the patient's lifeless body, her dress having been removed to the waist in order to reveal her brilliant white corset. She is supported from behind by one of Charcot's assistants, whose downward gaze also directs that of the viewer towards her exposed neck and chest, and her state of unconscious semi-undress is further accentuated by contrast with the serried ranks of attentive male observers in uniform black suits who fill the left hand side of the canvas. In its depiction of these onlookers, Brouillet's painting registers something of the complex links that developed between the artistic and medical professions during the late nineteenth century: the audience is comprised not only of medical specialists and students, but also includes Professor Mathias-Marie Duval, professor of anatomy at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, while Paul Richer (who would go on to succeed Duval to the chair of anatomy at the *École des Beaux-Arts*) is pictured, pencil in hand, at the desk behind Charcot, in the act of sketching the patient.<sup>29</sup>

Brouillet's image thus restores to visibility that which is only implied by the *Iconographie Photographique*: the medico-artistic, masculine gaze. Like the description of Charcot's diagnostic procedures cited earlier, *Une Leçon clinique* provides a vivid sense of the power relations at stake in the sexually charged encounter between the bourgeois doctor and his working-class female patients. Yet the painting also raises the question as to what extent the female patients themselves became complicit in the increasingly spectacular display of hysteria at the Salpêtrière. In the painting, the patient's backward swoon is reduplicated in Paul Richer's famous line drawing of the *arc du cercle* stage of 'grand'

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> A full key to the identity of each member of this audience is provided in the exhibition catalogue *La Leçon de Charcot: voyage dans une toile* (Exposition organisée au Musée de l'Assistance Publique de Paris, 17 septembre – 31 décembre 1986). In her article, 'Doubles and Desire: Anatomies of Masculinity in the Later Nineteenth Century,' *Art History* 26.5 (November 2003), pp.669-99, Anthea Callen offers a significant reading of Brouillet's *Une Leçon clinique* as a representation of 'male bonding and homosocial desire.' Callen's research examines the relationship between artistic and medical anatomies in constructing ideals of the modern male body, and she usefully explores the connections between the medical and artistic professions during the late nineteenth century in both 'Doubles and Desires' and in the earlier article 'The Body and Difference: Anatomy Training at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris in the Later Nineteenth Century,' *Art History* 20.1 (March 1997), pp.23-60.





**Figure 0.10**

Louis-Eugène Pirodin, *Une Lithographie: Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière*, d'après M Brouillet, 1888



hysteria, a reproduction of which is pinned to the rear wall of the lecture theatre, behind the audience and visible only to the patient herself, posing the question as to whether the women patients of the Salpêtrière may have internalised the many representations of hysteria with which they were surrounded and may have come to perform according to those representations. This is not, however, to imply that the women were simply ‘copying’ the poses of the *Iconographie* in a bid to please their male doctors: even as the patient is reproducing the pose from the drawing, Richer is pictured in the process of recording that position in a sketch (yet another version, presumably, of the one that already hangs on the wall of the lecture theatre). The image thus reveals how a stock repertoire of poses and gestures came to circulate back and forth between doctors and patients at the Salpêtrière. Georges Didi-Huberman has suggested that both parties stood to gain from this reciprocal exchange:

For the hysteric in fact, it is the sole “gain” through an illness: a bonus of seduction that the symptom offers to the physician’s gaze. A desire represents itself, stages itself, lets itself be visible (if not audible) and, though unhappy, it exists before everyone’s eyes, as a kind of affirmation.

For the physician: in transference, the hysteric makes herself over *in the image of his desire to know*, in the image of the concept of “Hysteria”.<sup>30</sup>

Moving away from any straightforward narrative of male power and female victimhood, I want to follow Didi-Huberman’s lead and to acknowledge instead the mutual complicity of doctor and patient in creating and disseminating an image of the hysterical female body at the Salpêtrière Hospital. At the same time as the images with which the hysterical female patients were surrounded provided these women with a lexicon of bodily signs through which to signal otherwise inexpressible traumas and fantasies, so too did their reduplication of that pre-existing repertoire of poses and gestures simultaneously provide their doctors with visual confirmation of what they believed themselves already to know about hysteria.

As an ambitious young doctor wishing to specialise in the field of neuropathology, Sigmund Freud found himself drawn into the febrile atmosphere of the Salpêtrière when he spent nineteen weeks studying in Paris with Charcot in between October 1885 and February 1886. During the late 1880s and early 1890s, he published several translations of his mentor’s lectures and, in an obituary written following Charcot’s death in 1893, famously wrote that Charcot was ‘not a reflective man, not a thinker: he had the nature of

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<sup>30</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p.172.

an artist—he was, as he himself said, a *visuel*, a man who sees.<sup>31</sup> Freud would carry with him his own visual reminder of Charcot’s teaching throughout his professional life. Some fifty years later, in June 1938, he and his family were forced to leave Vienna under threat of death from Nazi persecution and to take refuge in London. Above the couch in his new study-cum-consulting room at 20 Maresfield Gardens the Freud family’s housekeeper, Paula Fichtl, anxious to put her employer’s rooms in order in readiness for his arrival at what was to be his final abode, hung a framed lithographic print of Brouillet’s painting of Charcot lecturing on hysteria (**Figure 0.11**).<sup>32</sup>

In their striking juxtaposition of packed public lecture hall and empty analytic couch—a couch which, nonetheless, appears somehow crowded with the ghostly presence of Freud’s many analysands—photographs of Freud’s London consulting room seemingly dramatise the shift from visual theatre to ‘talking cure’ that has been seen to mark the beginnings of psychoanalysis. In 1978, Stephen Heath succinctly observed that, ‘Charcot sees, Freud hears,’ and this contrasting of Freud and Charcot in terms of speech as opposed to spectacle, aurality as opposed to visuality, has subsequently come to be commonplace amongst those working on the origins of psychoanalytic theory.<sup>33</sup> In Chapter One, I will argue against too neat a distinction in this respect. A close reading of the first case history that Freud personally contributed to the *Studies on Hysteria*, published jointly with Joseph Breuer in 1895, reveals that, in his treatment of Fanny Moser (‘Frau Emmy von N’), Freud borrowed elements from a range of pre-existing clinical models.

<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Charcot’ [1893] in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Volume 3, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955-74), p.12.

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Forbes Morlock for this important point. Morlock emphasises that, when the Freud family moved into 20 Maresfield Gardens, Freud himself was in hospital undergoing the last of his operations for cancer of the mouth. His extensive art collection was, therefore, unpacked and arranged in his study in his absence, by Paula Fichtl under the supervision of Martha Freud. Where most accounts of the transmission of psychoanalysis tend to focus on the passage from teacher to student (on the analytic transference, in other words), Morlock traces another route of transmission: through the domestic rather than the clinical circuit. Pointing out that, ‘in both Vienna and London, the spaces of Freud’s medical practice and his family’s residence interconnected, as if their links rendered concrete the connections between his professional and personal lives,’ he emphasises the part played by Paula Fichtl in creating a vignette that is ultimately not an image ‘of’ psychoanalysis, but which may nevertheless be considered the site of our impossible desire to see something of the analytic scenario. See Forbes Morlock, ‘The Very Picture of a Primal Scene: *Une Leçon Clinique à la Salpêtrière*,’ *Visual Resources* 33.1-2 (March-June 2007), pp.129-46. From the photographs taken by Edmund Engelman on the eve of the Freuds’ departure from Vienna, it would seem that, at Berggasse 19, the lithograph had hung on the wall opposite the couch—within the patient’s line of sight, rather than above him or her. At Berggasse 19, Freud had displayed a much more extensive range of visual material over his couch. Proposing that ‘carpets and pictures take on meaning in relation to each other and to the analytic work they attend,’ George Dimock offers a fascinating reading of this visual material as ‘an art exhibition or installation that stages the history and theory of psychoanalysis.’ George Dimock, ‘The Pictures Over Freud’s Couch,’ pp.239-50 in *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Mieke Bal & Inge E. Boer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Heath, ‘Difference,’ *Screen* 19 (Autumn 1978), pp.51-112, p.58.





Figure 0.11

Photograph of Freud's couch in the study at 20 Maresfield Gardens, London

Attention to the visualisation of the doctor/patient relationship in this first, proto-analytical, case history thus throws into question the commonly accepted notion that the movement of the discourse on hysteria from the medical site of the Salpêtrière to what would become the analytic scenario entailed a seamless transition from a physiological to a psychological mode of treatment.

Freud's treatment of Fanny Moser began in May 1889, nine years after Breuer's treatment of Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O), who was twenty-one at the time, in 1880, and some eleven years before his own analysis of Ida Bauer (Dora), who was then aged eighteen, in 1900. In its attempt to determine the history of hysterical symptoms through the use of the so-called 'cathartic procedure', the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' looks back to Breuer's treatment of Bertha Pappenheim; in its claim as to the sexual aetiology of Frau Emmy's illness, it anticipates Freud's subsequent work on hysteria. Temporally, it is situated almost exactly midway between these two pivotal cases, both of which came to play a privileged role in the formulation of a feminist discourse on hysteria during the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Feminism & Psychoanalysis I: The Reclamation of Hysteria**

The renewed interest in the history of hysteria during the last quarter of the twentieth century coincided with the revitalisation of the Women's Movement in the post-1968 period. Many interventions across the field of what has been dubbed the 'new hysteria studies'<sup>34</sup> have accordingly been written from an avowedly feminist perspective. In this section, I do not wish to offer a comprehensive review of the historiography of hysteria (for such an encyclopaedic survey, the reader is invited to refer to Mark Micale's 1995 *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations*), but rather to offer a more symptomatic reading of what I identify as the major moves and key textual moments in the evolution of a psychoanalytically inflected, feminist discourse on hysteria during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>35</sup>

The earliest feminist interventions proposed that hysteria should be considered a 'disease peculiar to the Victorian bourgeois family.'<sup>36</sup> In an important socio-historical analysis of the interaction between the hysteric, her family and her physician, first

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<sup>34</sup> The phrase was coined by Mark Micale in *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations*.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America,' originally published in *Social Research* 39.4 (Winter 1972); reprinted in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1986), p.198.



published in 1972, American historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argued that hysteria became ‘one way in which conventional women could express dissatisfaction with their lives,’<sup>37</sup> the middle-class woman’s flight into illness thus constituting a form of passive resistance to the stultifying claustrophobia of her domestic situation. This understanding of hysteria as an expression of defiance formed in response to the patriarchal oppression of Woman has continued to serve as a defining trope of much of the subsequent feminist literature—whether cultural-historical or psychoanalytical in emphasis—on hysteria: in her widely-read consideration of madness as a ‘female malady’, published in the mid 1980s, Elaine Showalter went so far as to declare the hysteric a ‘proto-feminist, fighting back against confinement in the bourgeois home.’<sup>38</sup>

In 1975, the idea of hysteria as the ‘nuclear example of women’s power to protest’ was also explored by Hélène Cixous. In a dialogical exchange with Catherine Clément, Cixous speaks of her fascination with the figure of Ida Bauer/Dora as ‘the one who resists the system, the one who cannot stand that the family and society are founded on the body of women.’<sup>39</sup> There is, however, an important distinction between these key early interventions: whilst Anglophone historians such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg understood hysteria as a ‘social role within the nineteenth-century family,’<sup>40</sup> French feminist writers including Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray utilised the insights provided by a post-structuralist reading of psychoanalysis in order to consider hysteria as the predicament of a feminine subject who is formed both within and yet also in conflict with a phallogocentric system.<sup>41</sup> In her books *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974] and *This Sex Which is Not One*

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p.146.

<sup>39</sup> Hélène Cixous in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* [1975], trans. Betsy Wing (London: I B Tauris, 1996), p.154.

<sup>40</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, p.198.

<sup>41</sup> The label ‘French feminist’ is, of course, problematic on several levels. The tendency to group together certain women writers (most particularly the so-called ‘Holy Trinity’ of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray) under the blanket term ‘French feminist’ elides both the significant differences between their individual projects and the different positions from which they write (Kristeva was born in Bulgaria, Irigaray in Belgium, and Cixous in Algeria), as well as ignoring the work of other philosophers and theorists including Catherine Clément, Annie Leclerc, Michèle Montrelay and Monique Wittig. Many of the so-called ‘French feminists’ call for a radical transformation of patriarchal power structures and for an acknowledgement of the differences between men and women. They thus in many cases reject the label ‘feminist’, a term which they associate with a bourgeois political movement designed to achieve the same status and roles for women as for men. Christine Delphy has gone so far as to consider the term ‘French feminist’ a fabrication on the part of Anglophone scholars, invented primarily to legitimate essentialist understandings of gender within Anglo-American feminism itself. “French Feminism” is, she argues, ‘an Anglo-American strand of intellectual production within an Anglo-American context, [which] was created by a series of distortions and voluntary or involuntary errors about what was happening in France from the mid-seventies on’; see Christine Delphy, ‘The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move,’ *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995), pp.190-221, p.197, p.196. It should accordingly be emphasised that I am here retaining the designation ‘French feminist’ merely

[1977], Irigaray drew attention to the ‘sexual *indifference* that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse.’<sup>42</sup> As Irigaray emphasises, within Freudian psychoanalytic theory:

Female sexuality is never defined with respect to any sex but the masculine. Freud does not see *two sexes* whose differences are articulated in the act of intercourse, and, more generally speaking, in the imaginary and symbolic processes that regulate the workings of a society and a culture. The “feminine” is always described in terms of a deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. [...] All Freud’s statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex might possibly have its own “specificity”.<sup>43</sup>

In a schema which does not acknowledge feminine sexual specificity, but which instead defines sexual difference solely in terms of having/not having the male sex organ, woman is ‘without recourse of all valid, valuable images of her sex/organs, her body. She is condemned to “psychosis”, or at best “hysteria”, for lack—censorship? foreclosure? repression?—of a valid signifier for her “first” desire and for her sex/organs.’<sup>44</sup> For Luce Irigaray, hysteria thus becomes ‘a privileged place for preserving [...] that which does not speak. And in particular (even according to Freud), that which is not expressed in woman’s relation to her mother, to herself, to other women. Those aspects of women’s earliest desires that find themselves reduced to silence in terms of a culture that does not allow them to be expressed.’<sup>45</sup> Irigaray thus acknowledges that, within a Symbolic order that is governed exclusively by the phallus, both woman-to-woman relations and the archaic desires and fantasies associated with female bodily specificity lack any means of signification. They instead become ‘paralysed and enclosed within the body,’<sup>46</sup> finding some expressive outlet only in the form of somatic symptoms. According to such a reading, hysteria is, therefore, to be considered less a form of conscious social protest and more the *structural* condition of the feminine subject who is denied any means of acknowledging her corporeality and desires within a phallogocentric Symbolic.

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as a strategic means of pointing out the main differences between the Anglophone, socio-historical approach to the study of hysteria during the 1970s, and a more psychoanalytically inflected, Francophone approach. On the difficulties associated with the term ‘French feminist’, see also Kelly Oliver, ‘Importing the “French feminists” and Their Desires’ in *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-Bind* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* [1977], trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.69, my emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974], trans. Gillian C Gill (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.55.

<sup>45</sup> *This Sex*, p.136.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

These two different approaches to hysteria—the (Anglophone) socio-historical and the (Francophone) psychoanalytical—appear to converge most clearly in the 1985 anthology *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*. Enabled by a renewed engagement with Freudian theory, and by growing access to translations of the work of both Jacques Lacan and the ‘French feminists’, Anglophone feminists had also begun in the 1970s to direct their attention towards an analysis of the psychoanalytic construction of femininity.<sup>47</sup> Central to this theoretical turn was an engagement with Freud’s ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.’ During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a series of major feminist re-readings of the ‘Dora’ case history was published, many of which were reprinted in the *In Dora's Case* anthology. In her introduction to that volume, Claire Kahane posed the question, ‘why Dora now?’, pointing out by way of answer that the ‘Fragment of an Analysis’ was ‘no longer read as merely a case history,’ but had rather become an ‘urtext in the history of women.’<sup>48</sup> Kahane outlines the ways in which ‘Dora’ appeared to resonate with the concerns of second-wave feminism:

The feminist project that took shape in the late 1960s was to re-examine cultural assumptions about femininity and female desire and to describe how those assumptions contributed to the circumspection of women. The Dora case is a particularly rich gift to this project: a paradigmatic text of patriarchal assumptions about female desire that still carry cultural authority and a vivid record of the construction of those assumptions as they emerge from the desire of the interpreter. Even more provocatively, the traces of Dora’s story that form a subtext to Freud’s oedipal narrative and continually disrupt it suggest an alternative pre-oedipal narrative that many feminists are re-inscribing.<sup>49</sup>

This quotation serves to isolate two of the main tendencies to be found within many of the feminist re-readings of the ‘Dora’ case history produced during the 1970s and 1980s: on

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<sup>47</sup> The work of Juliet Mitchell played a major part in alerting Anglophone feminism to the possibilities of a re-examination of the place of Woman within psychoanalytic theory; see Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974). A translation of Hélène Cixous’s essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ was published in the journal *Signs* in 1976, while the 1981 anthology *New French Feminisms* collected together translations of writings by, *inter alia*, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Annie Leclerc, Monique Wittig and Marguerite Duras; see *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. & intro. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981). Translations of *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One* both appeared in 1985. A selection of Lacan’s writings on the question of feminine sexuality appeared in translation in 1982 in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell & Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982). Also published in 1982, Jane Gallop’s *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter’s Seduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) opened with a (re-)assessment of Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* before moving to set up a dialogue between the work of Lacan and that of Luce Irigaray, Michèle Montrelay, Julia Kristeva, Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous.

<sup>48</sup> Claire Kahane, ‘Introduction: Part Two,’ in *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*, eds. Charles Bernheimer & Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1990), p.31.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp.24-25.

the one hand, there was a concern to expose the ideological assumptions underpinning Freud's writing of and in the case history, and thus to name and shame its author as a patriarchal figure; on the other hand, there was a desire to re-analyse 'Dora'/Dora, substituting for Freud's emphasis on the oedipal attachment to the father an insistence on the significance of the pre-oedipal relationship to the mother.

Several of the essays reprinted in *In Dora's Case* may be considered exemplary of this first approach. In his essay 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History,' originally published in 1974, Steven Marcus re-reads 'Dora' from a literary perspective, suggesting that, 'as the case history advances, it becomes increasingly clear to the careful reader that Freud and not Dora has become the central figure in the action.'<sup>50</sup> Other contributors to the anthology appeared to share Marcus's view that the Freud of the 'Dora' case history was a 'demonic Freud,' 'a relentless investigator pushing on no matter what.'<sup>51</sup> Maria Ramas and Toril Moi each offered a stringent critique of the social and historical limitations of Freud's dealings with his young hysterical patient. According to Maria Ramas, Freud's argument in the 'Fragment of an Analysis' was 'fundamentally an ideological construct, a construct that defends patriarchal fantasies of femininity and female sexuality.'<sup>52</sup> Toril Moi also found evidence of 'general ideological tendencies to sexism' at work in the case history. Freud was, she stresses, 'a male in patriarchal society, and moreover not just any male but an educated bourgeois male, incarnating *malgré lui* patriarchal values.'<sup>53</sup>

In her essay, Toril Moi discerns two competing epistemological models operating within the case history. Pointing out that both Freud and Dora were engaged in a search for information about sexual matters, she emphasises that, whilst Dora's knowledge was fragmentary and had been gained chiefly from her conversations with other women (Frau K and her own governess), knowledge for Freud was a finished, closed whole. Freud's epistemology was, she proposes, 'clearly phallogentric: the male is the bearer of knowledge; he alone has the power to penetrate woman and text; woman's role is to let herself be

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<sup>50</sup> Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History,' originally published in *Partisan Review* (Winter 1974); reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.56-91, p.85.

I shall examine the limitations of such a literary approach to Freud's writings in my discussion of the written form of the Freudian case history in Chapter One below.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Maria Ramas, 'Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria,' originally published in *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980); revised and reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.149-80, p.151.

<sup>53</sup> Toril Moi, 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora,' originally published in *Feminist Review* 9 (1981), pp.60-73; reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.181-99, p.191, p.193.



penetrated by such truth.<sup>54</sup> Moi argues that this desire for total, absolute knowledge arose out of Freud's need to defend himself against the fragmented, orally based knowledge imparted to him by his patient: 'Freud's masculine psyche perceives Dora as more fundamentally threatening than he can consciously express. [...] If he were to accept Dora's epistemological model, it would be tantamount to rejecting the penis as the principal symbol for human desire for knowledge, which would mean accepting castration.'<sup>55</sup> While I do broadly concur with the suggestion that Freud was either unwilling or unable to hear what Dora was trying to tell him, I want to return to an earlier moment in the development of his clinical practice when Freud did appear more able to engage with his female patients. A consideration of the four very different case histories that he contributed to the *Studies on Hysteria* enables us to move beyond any straightforward critique of his patriarchal prejudices in order to reveal Freud's increasing willingness to listen to and learn from these women. It will be my contention that Freud was able to enter into an intimate and mutually transformative relationship with patients such as Fanny Moser (Frau Emmy von N) in a way in which was not the case in his later analytic exchanges, by which time his ideas on femininity had become conditioned by his own self-analysis and the discovery of the Oedipus complex.<sup>56</sup>

By the time he came to write up his 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,' Freud had put in place the theoretical framework of the Oedipus complex. Whilst his interpretation of Dora's hysteria thus rests upon his identification of a complex series of triangular, oedipal relationships, beginning with Dora's protest at her place in the relationship between her father and Frau K, feminist critics have endeavoured to produce an alternative reading of the case history that emphasises the significance of the pre-oedipal mother/daughter dyad. To Sara Van den Berg, it seemed 'appropriate to discuss Dora not only as a member of an oedipal triad of child, mother and father, but also as a member of a pre-oedipal dyad of child and mother.' 'Dora's behaviour,' she argued, 'expresses her contradictory longings to merge and separate from her mother.'<sup>57</sup> Maria Ramas also positioned Dora's hysteria as an attempt 'to deny patriarchal sexuality' and so 'to preserve pre-oedipal love for the mother/woman and to retain access to the maternal/female

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>56</sup> My thinking in this respect has been greatly enabled by the observations of developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan in 'Remembering Iphigenia: Voice, Resonance and Talking Cure' in *The Inner World in the Outer World: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Edward R Shapiro (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Sara Van den Berg, 'Reading Dora Reading: Freud's "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,"' originally published in *Literature and Psychoanalysis* 32 (1986), pp.27-35; reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.294-304, p.297.

body.’<sup>58</sup> In her reading of the case history of ‘Anna O’, Dianne Hunter similarly placed hysteria in a privileged relation to the pre-oedipal. In her analysis of Bertha Pappenheim’s inability to communicate in her native tongue of German, Hunter draws on the Lacanian emphasis upon the role of the Name-of-the-Father in the passage to sexed and speaking subjectivity in order to emphasise that, ‘in patriarchal socialisation, the power to formulate sentences coincides developmentally with a recognition of the power of the father.’<sup>59</sup> In this light, ‘Bertha Pappenheim’s linguistic discord and conversion symptoms, her use of gibberish and gestures as a means of expression, can be seen as a regression from the cultural order represented by her father as an orthodox patriarch.’<sup>60</sup> For Dianne Hunter, Bertha Pappenheim’s use of signs, mutterings and made-up jargon therefore represented an attempt to return to the pre-oedipal domain, ‘to recreate the special semiotic bubble that exists between an infant and its mother.’<sup>61</sup>

In her reading of ‘Dora’, Jacqueline Rose signalled the limitations of any such attempt to read these early case histories as in some way prefiguring Freud’s later acknowledgement of the significance of the pre-oedipal attachment of the girl-child to the mother. Rose herself argues that:

while it is undoubtedly correct to state that Freud’s analysis of Dora failed because of the theory of feminine sexuality to which he then held, this concept cannot be corrected by a simple reference to his later theses on feminine sexuality (pre-oedipality, etc), crucial as these may be, since that is simply to replace one content with another, whereas what must be seen in Freud’s work on femininity is [...] nothing less than the collapse of the category of sexuality as *content* altogether.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to those feminist interventions that sought to recover some pre-oedipal content to feminine sexuality and thence to hysteria, Rose introduces into the feminist debate on hysteria a (Lacanian) concept of sexuality as ‘caught up in the register of demand and desire.’<sup>63</sup> According to Lacan, the problem of Dora’s condition was ‘fundamentally that of accepting herself as an object of desire for the man.’<sup>64</sup> This problematic was, he suggests,

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<sup>58</sup> Ramas, ‘Freud’s Dora,’ p.152.

<sup>59</sup> Dianne Hunter, ‘Hysteria, Psychoanalysis and Feminism: The Case of Anna O,’ *Feminist Studies* 9.3 (Fall 1983), pp.464-488, p.474.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Dora: Fragment of an Analysis,’ originally published in *m/f* 2 (1978), pp.5-21; reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.128-48, p.143, p.145.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Intervention on Transference,’ first published in the *Revue française de psychanalyse* (1952), subsequently reprinted in *Écrits* (1966), trans. Jacqueline Rose & reprinted in Bernheimer & Kahane, pp.92-104, p.99.

posed for Dora through the figure of Frau K. As Rose glosses, what is thus revealed by the ‘Dora’ case history is the question of ‘woman as object and subject of desire—the impossibility of either position, for if object of desire then whose desire, and if subject of desire then its own impossibility, the impossibility of subject and desire.’<sup>65</sup> Jacqueline Rose thus shifts the terms of the feminist debate on ‘Dora’ beyond any attempt to reclaim hysteria as a form of protest against the constraints of patriarchal familial structures. Her essay accordingly releases the feminist reader from the compulsion to offer either a re-diagnosis of Freud’s early female patients or else a critique of the social and historical limitations of the treatment, providing instead a mode of reading that enables us to consider the structural possibilities that these case histories offer to those concerned to trace ‘the problem of the feminine within psychoanalysis in its urgency for us now.’<sup>66</sup>

In a volume of essays published the year after the *In Dora’s Case* anthology, Mary Jacobus further cautioned against the concurrent tendency in feminist criticism to ‘rehabilitate the hysteric, [...] to view her as a form of psychoanalytic heroine.’<sup>67</sup> Jacobus instead advanced ‘another way to approach the intimate connection between women and hysteria in psychoanalytic theory: that is, by way of literature—or rather, by way of the turns and counterturns, the repetitions and reproductions, of the reading process itself.’<sup>68</sup> In her reading of the ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,’ she focuses upon Dora’s visit to the art gallery in Dresden, where she had spent two hours ‘rapt in silent admiration,’ gazing at the Sistine Madonna. Mary Jacobus contends that, ‘Freud’s own account stops here, unable to deal with the submerged presence of the (m)Other/Woman.’<sup>69</sup> As she points out, in the ‘Dora’ case history, woman-to-woman relations are either entirely dismissed (Dora’s relationship to her mother), or else are relegated to the realm of the ‘gynaecophilic’ (Dora’s relationship to Frau K). Unlike those feminist critics who sought to correct this oversight and to promote instead a reading of the case history that valorised the pre-oedipal mother/daughter relation, Jacobus argues for a more critical consideration of the role played by the mother within both Freudian and contemporary feminist theory. She proposes that, behind Freud’s attempts to determine the object of Dora’s sexual desire:

another question slides into view, Dora’s own (and perhaps ours too): what does it mean to be a woman, at once desired and desiring? Above all, what

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.200.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

does it mean to be a mother, when mothers are the waste product of a sexual system based on the exchange of women among men? Freud's question concerns hysteria: Dora's question, aimed at the blind spot of Freud's inquiry, concerns femininity; but it also implicates the mother who is strikingly absent from Freud's account.<sup>70</sup>

For Mary Jacobus, this crucial question concerning feminine/maternal desire—the one which Freud could not bring himself to ask—is initially posed by Dora, to be taken up again by the feminist critic. I want to argue, however, that this is in fact precisely the issue that Freud had earlier been led to confront in his treatment of Frau Emmy von N.

Frau Emmy is unique among the subjects of Freud's case histories in that she was, at the time she presented, a widow and mother to two adolescent daughters.<sup>71</sup> Yet this case of maternal hysteria has up to now been ignored by feminist scholars, who have seemingly preferred to focus their attention on the plight of the young hysterical daughters of psychoanalysis, Anna O and Dora.<sup>72</sup> It is my contention, however, that a return to this first case history has the potential to shift the terms of the feminist debate on hysteria away from these earlier attempts to recover the traces of a lost, pre-oedipal attachment of the girl-child to the mother. As a number of feminist scholars have already noted, the attempted feminist excavation of the pre-oedipal might in itself be seen as a form of nostalgia for an always illusory state of complete and blissful union with the mother.<sup>73</sup> In focussing upon the hitherto overlooked case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', my aim is to move beyond any such untroubled idealisation of the (pre-oedipal) mother/daughter dyad in order to attend instead to the complexities of *maternal* subjective experience.

As I shall go on to discuss at greater length in Chapter One below, the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' remains a hybrid text: at the same time as it registers Freud's first hesitant steps towards what would eventually become a psychoanalytic mode of treatment, it also documents how, in his early clinical practice, he borrowed from a range of pre-existing medical remedies. This first case history reveals in particular the central role played

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>71</sup> As Peter Swales has established, Anna von Lieben, who appears in the *Studies on Hysteria* under the pseudonym 'Frau Cäcilie M,' had five children. Frau Emmy von N remains, however, the only hysterical mother whose case history Freud wrote up at length for publication purposes. See Peter Swales, 'Freud, His Teacher and the Birth of Psychoanalysis,' in *Freud: Appraisals and Reappraisals. Contributions to Freud Studies Volume 1*, ed. Paul E Stepansky (Hillsdale NJ: The Analytic Press, 1986).

<sup>72</sup> The suggestion that hysteria may be considered a 'daughter's disease' is made by Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady*, and also recalls Jane Gallop's assessment of the encounter between feminist theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a 'daughter's seduction.' See Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Mary Jacobus, 'Freud's Mnemonic: Screen Memories and Feminist Nostalgia,' initially published in *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26 (Winter 1987); reprinted in Mary Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art and Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.1-22.



by hypnosis in Freud's initial attempts to rid his hysterical women patients of their symptoms. I want now to explore the broader cultural fascination with this particular therapeutic technique at the fin-de-siècle by turning to a literary text. In its sensationalised account of the relationship between a sinister mesmerist and an artists' model, the novel in question seems to stand at the very intersection of the two scenarios around which this thesis is structured. This literary articulation of the hypnotic mastery of a female model will be placed in conversation with the 'specimen dream' of Irma's injection, a dream that is centrally concerned with Freud's relationships—both professional and personal—with women. Such a cross-reading will begin to illuminate how, in the journey towards psychoanalysis, the underlying pattern of authority relations that had up to this point determined the attitudes of male doctors to their hypnotised female patients began, slowly and unevenly, to shift.

### Mesmerist/Model

First published in 1894, George du Maurier's immensely successful novel *Trilby* provided an eager British and American reading public with a nostalgic look back at the bohemian lifestyle of the expatriate art student in the Paris of the 1850s.<sup>74</sup> The novel opens with a lovingly detailed description of the studio in the Place St Anatole des Arts shared by the three main characters—British art students Taffy, the Laird and Little Billee—with its grand piano and antique plaster casts, cheetah skin rugs, trapeze and boxing ring. Unlike Zola's earlier evocation of bohemian Paris in his 1886 novel *L'Oeuvre*, which had depicted the struggle of the solitary artistic genius locked in a monumental representational battle with the body of Woman, the emphasis here is very much on male bonding and camaraderie—these 'three musketeers of the brush' appear to spend the bulk of their time boxing and fencing, or else consuming gargantuan quantities of both food and alcohol. The homosocial world of the studio is, however, increasingly infiltrated by artists' model

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<sup>74</sup> The novel was partly based on du Maurier's own experiences as an art student in Paris during the 1850s, and was initially published in seven monthly instalments in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, beginning in January 1894. *Trilby* became one of the best-selling novels of the 1890s on both sides of the Atlantic, spawning a range of spin-off merchandising and generating a number of parodies and stage adaptations. For a full account of this so-called 'Trilby-mania', see L Edward Purcell, 'Trilby and Trilby-Mania: The Beginning of the Best-Seller System,' *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (Summer 1977), pp.62-76.

As several more recent studies have noted, at the same time as *Trilby* nostalgically evokes the Bohemia of the 1850s, so too does the novel offer an implicit critique of the Aesthetic movement of the 1890s, exemplified by figures such as Whistler and Oscar Wilde. The serialised version of the novel included a minor character named Joe Sibley, who was obviously modelled on James McNeill Whistler, a one-time roommate of du Maurier's. When Whistler threatened to sue, this character was removed from the novel version of *Trilby*. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Jonathan H Grossman, 'The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*,' *Studies in the Novel* 28.4 (Winter 1996), pp.525-42 and Nicolas Daly, 'The Woman in White: Whistler, Hiffennan, Courbet, du Maurier,' *Modernism/Modernity* 12.1 (January 2005), pp.1-25.

Trilby O'Ferrall, 'a very tall and fully developed young female [...] who had lived much in the atmosphere of French studios.'<sup>75</sup> Trilby is seen to benefit much from her acquaintance with these three upper-middle-class Englishmen, to the extent that, overcome with shame after Little Billee unexpectedly happens upon her posing naked in front of a group of art students, she gives up her work as a life model and instead finds employment as a laundress. As she repents, she grows ever more beautiful, and the first part of the novel details Little Billee's growing attraction towards her. When Little Billee asks Trilby to marry him, however, his family intervenes to prevent what they consider to be an unsuitable liaison; Trilby flees Paris, Little Billee is taken back to England to convalesce after falling ill with grief at her absence, and the three artists' idyllic sojourn in their Parisian studio thus comes to an abrupt end.

The novel then fast-forwards five years. Little Billee has become a famous society painter and much-respected member of the Royal Academy, while Taffy and the Laird have also established reputations for their painting. News begins to reach them of the sensational success achieved by one of their acquaintances from their time in Paris, namely the hyperbolically Jewish musician, Svengali.<sup>76</sup> Svengali had played a minor, though foreboding, role in the first part of the novel, when his presence in the three artists' studio had been tolerated chiefly for the sake of his musical abilities. Now, however, a mysterious young woman with an astonishing singing voice is taking Europe by storm. Known only as 'La Svengali', she is not only Svengali's pupil, but also, it is rumoured, his wife. When our three heroes eventually manage to obtain tickets to see this singing sensation, they are amazed to discover that 'La Svengali' is none other than Trilby herself. In spite of the fact that the Trilby whom they had known was entirely tone deaf, she now performs nightly to packed theatres with Svengali 'conducting her just as if she had been an orchestra' (210) (**Figure 0.12**). Although the three artists try to renew their acquaintance with her, Trilby refuses even to acknowledge their presence, and is only restored to them following Svengali's dramatic death, when it transpires that, not only can she no longer sing, but she

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<sup>75</sup> George du Maurier, *Trilby* [1894], ed. & intro. Elaine Showalter (Oxford etc: Oxford University Press, World's Classics Series, 1998), p.13. Further references to *Trilby* will be to the World's Classics edition, and will be incorporated into the body of the text following direct quotations.

<sup>76</sup> In its rabid anti-Semitism, *Trilby* nowadays makes for uncomfortable reading. Svengali is not merely a Jew, but an 'Oriental Israelite Hebrew Jew' (244), or else a 'filthy black Hebrew sweep' (48). He is able to hypnotise Trilby simply by looking into her eyes, and the novel abounds with references both to the power of his gaze and to his 'bold, black, beady, Jew's eyes' (44). In his major consideration of Svengali as 'alien enchanter', Daniel Pick has shown how, in his representation of the mesmerist/musician, du Maurier reflects a whole cluster of late Victorian fears and fantasies, not merely around the use of hypnosis as a potential means of sexual and social exploitation, but more particularly around what were perceived to be the penetrating psychological powers of 'the Jew'; see Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000).

has no recollection of ever having performed on stage. Even from beyond the grave, however, Svengali continues to exert his sinister hold over Trilby: after unwrapping a package that contains a photograph of him ‘looking straight out of the picture, [...] his big black eyes full of stern command’ (282), she is suddenly able to sing one final song, before dying with Svengali’s name on her lips. It is ultimately left to Svengali’s assistant Gecko to clear up the mystery of Trilby’s extraordinary singing voice. There were, he explains, ‘two Trilbys’:

“There was the Trilby you knew, who could not sing one single note in tune. [...] She could no more sing than a fiddle can play itself! She could never tell one tune from another—one note from the next [...]

“But all at once—p-r-r-out! presto! *augenblicke!* ...with one wave of his hand over her—with one look of his eye—with a word—Svengali could turn her into the other Trilby, *his* Trilby—and make her do whatever he liked ...you might have run a red-hot needle into her and she would not have felt it...

“He had but to say “*Dors!*” and she suddenly became an unconscious Trilby of marble, who could produce wonderful sounds—just the sounds he wanted and nothing else—and think his thoughts and wish his wishes—and love him at his bidding with a strange, unreal, factitious love ...just his own love for himself turned inside out—*à l’envers*—and reflected back on him, as from a mirror [...]

“Well, that was the Trilby he taught how to sing—and—and I helped him. God of heaven forgive me! That Trilby was just a singing-machine—an organ to play upon—an instrument of music—a Stradivarius—a flexible flageolet of flesh and blood—a voice and nothing more—just the unconscious voice that Svengali sang with” (298-99).

Like Brouillet’s visual representation of the clinical display of hypnotised hysterical female patients at Charcot’s public lectures, du Maurier’s literary description of the encounter between mesmerist and model thus inscribes a scenario of masculine control and feminine passivity.

As the sensationalist plot of du Maurier’s novel indicates, interest in hypnosis at the fin-de-siècle clearly extended beyond the realm of medical science into the fields of literature, music and art. While medical professionals including Charcot and, in his early practice, Freud, may have championed its use as a credible form of treatment in the clinical management of hysterical disorder, it was commonly perceived as a dangerous and possibly occult practice.<sup>77</sup> In the novel, Svengali’s hypnotic skills are seen to afford him absolute

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<sup>77</sup> For an overview of the perceived dangers of mesmerism, see in particular Pick, *Svengali’s Web* and Adam Crabtree, ‘Love, Sexuality and Magnetic Rapport’ in *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993). On the cultural history of

control over Trilby, enabling him to empty her mind of all but his wishes: as she performs on stage, she becomes, quite literally, a ‘ventriloquised body’, a mere automaton who obeys his every bidding.<sup>78</sup> He appears to take possession not merely of Trilby’s vocal cords, but of her entire body: an unmistakable threat of sexual menace hangs over their relationship. Contrasting strongly with Little Billee’s asexual, boyish adoration of Trilby, the mesmerist’s predatory interest in the artists’ model may thus be said to reflect a widespread anxiety at the fin-de-siècle concerning the use—or perhaps rather the potential misuse—of hypnosis as a means of both emotional manipulation and sexual control.

Though du Maurier makes much of Trilby’s ‘lady-like’ qualities, which are seen to come to the fore thanks to the improving influence of her three upper-middle-class British acquaintances, his narrative also contains hints that beneath her ‘compassion’, ‘generosity’ and ‘warm sisterly love’ lurks a ‘thin slimy layer of sorrow and shame’ (31). As a young girl, Trilby had ‘come to grief through her trust in a friend of her mother’s’ (38), this allusion to a sexual assault at the hands of a trusted family friend thus linking her life story to that of many of the young hysterical women who passed through the gates of the Salpêtrière.<sup>79</sup> She is, furthermore, the prematurely orphaned daughter of alcoholic parents, a fact which is seen to play a significant role in determining her ‘singularly impressionable nature’ and her ‘quick and ready susceptibility to Svengali’s hypnotic influence’ (53). In his characterisation of Trilby, du Maurier clearly draws not only upon contemporary scientific models of hereditary degeneration, but also upon popular stereotypes concerning the sexual availability of the artists’ model. Retreating into Latin lest he should offend his female readership, he coyly informs us that Trilby had ‘multum amavit’: ‘with her it was lightly come and lightly go, and never come back again’ (37). Her easy sensuality and androgynous appearance—‘one felt instinctively it was a real pity she wasn’t a boy, she would have made such a jolly one’ (13)—contrast strongly with the way in which she is represented by the artists for whom she sits. She poses in the ‘altogether’ for *Salonnier* artists including the painter Gerôme and the fictional sculptor Durien, as well as for the art

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mesmerism, see also Alison Winter, *Mesmerised: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>78</sup> I use this particular phrase so as to evoke Janet Beizer’s memorable description of the hypnotised female patients who performed for Charcot at the Salpêtrière; see Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Augustine, for example, reported having been raped by her mother’s employer at the age of thirteen and a half, and then being pressured by her brother into having sexual relations with two of his friends. As Daphne de Marneffe has pointed out, her hallucinations were ‘riddled with references to her mother who betrayed her, her father who did not protect her, her employer who raped her, and her brother who procured her for his friends.’

de Marneffe, ‘Looking and Listening,’ p.87.



students at Carrel's *atelier*, where she imitates 'Ingres's famous figure in his picture called "La Source"' (81). In a lengthy digression peppered with classical references, du Maurier is at pains to emphasise that there is nothing improper in the artistic representation of the naked female body:

It would not be amiss for me to state a fact well known to all painters and sculptors who have used the nude model [...], namely, that nothing is so chaste as nudity. Venus herself, as she drops her garments and steps on to the model-throne, leaves behind her on the floor every weapon in her armoury by which she can pierce to the grosser passions of man. The more perfect her unveiled beauty, the more keenly it appeals to his higher instincts. [...] All beauty is sexless in the eyes of the artist at his work (67).

For du Maurier, art thus has the capacity to transcend the physical and the quotidian: in the hands of the academic painters of the mid-nineteenth century, all signs of sexuality and class are erased from the female body, and the model is accordingly remade as a classical ideal of female beauty.

Notwithstanding these lofty sentiments, Trilby's body also remains the object of more overtly sexual fascination. She is famous throughout the studios of Paris for the beauty of her feet: 'a true inspiration of shape and colour, all made up of delicate lengths and subtly-modulated curves and noble straightnesses and happy little dimpled arrangements in innocent young pink and white' (15). When Little Billee catches sight of these remarkable extremities for the first time, he experiences a 'curious conscious thrill that was only half aesthetic' (30), and the first thing he does after meeting Trilby is to draw a sketch of her left foot directly onto the wall of the studio. When the three artists return to Paris and revisit their former studio, they find that this sketch, now bearing the title 'Souvenir de la Grande Trilby', lies protected beneath a sheet of plate-glass. Although all three are said already to possess casts and photographs of her feet, the Laird attempts to buy the piece of wall and have it shipped back to England: 'nothing [was] so charmingly suggestive of Trilby as this little masterpiece of a true artist, this happy fluke of a happy moment. It was Trilbyness itself, as the Laird thought, and should not be suffered to perish' (202).

For the three artists, Trilby's left foot thus serves as a metonym for the model herself and, in a lengthy aside, du Maurier appears to hint at the displacements involved in the worship of this particular body-part. The human foot is, he suggests, a 'wondrous thing': although it can 'sometimes be very ugly indeed—the ugliest thing there is,' so too does the 'sudden sight of it, uncovered, come as a rare and very singularly pleasing surprise

to the eye that has learned how to see!’ (16). The fragmentation and fetishisation of her body continues, moreover, in a series of speeches given by Svengali, who first uses hypnotism for medical purposes, in an attempt to cure Trilby of her agonising headaches. Shortly afterwards, he looks into her mouth and exclaims:

“Himmel! The roof of your mouth is like the dome of the Panthéon; there is room in it for ‘toutes les gloires de la France,’ and a little to spare! The entrance to your throat is like the middle porch of St Sulpice when the doors are open for the faithful on All Saints’ Day; and not one tooth is missing—thirty-two British teeth as white as milk and as big as knuckle-bones! and your little tongue is scooped out like the leaf of a pink peony, and the bridge of your nose is like the belly of a Stradivarius—what a sounding board! and inside your beautiful big chest the lungs are made of leather!” (50-51).

Throughout the novel, Trilby’s body is thus appropriated and reduced to a series of component parts—to a foot, a mouth, a set of teeth and a pair of lungs—firstly by the artists for whom she poses, and then latterly by Svengali, whose hypnotic powers ensure that he is able, quite literally, to get inside her head. In du Maurier’s illustration of this incident (**Figure 0.13**), he appears to use some sort of optical device to look down Trilby’s throat, his ability to journey deep into the recesses of the female body seemingly enabled by his appropriation of the trappings of a doctor.

Du Maurier’s fictionalised account of the encounter between Svengali and his hypnotised female patient/model finds unexpected echo in another imagined scene, in which a male medical figure once again peers anxiously into a woman’s mouth. The year after the publication of *Trilby*, during the evening of 22 July 1895, Sigmund Freud occupied himself by writing up the case history of one of his female patients. Later that night, he had the following dream:

A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving. —Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my “solution” yet. I said to her: “If you still get pains, it’s really only your fault.” She replied: “If you only knew what pains I’ve got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it’s choking me.” —I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that. —She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled upon the turbinal bones of the nose. —I at once called in Dr M, and he repeated the examination and confirmed it. ...Dr M looked quite different from usual, he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-



'Au clair de la lune'

**Figure 0.12**

George du Maurier, 'Au clair de la lune,' illustration from *Trilby* (1894)



“Himmel! The roof of your mouth”

**Figure 0.13**

George du Maurier, “Himmel! The roof of your mouth,” illustration from *Trilby* (1894)

shaven. ...My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: "She has a dull area low down on the left." He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress). ...M said: "There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated." ...We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls... propionic acid... trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type). ...Injections of this sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly. ...And probably the syringe had not been clean.<sup>80</sup>

Freud's ensuing interpretation of this dream is offered as proof of his central thesis that, 'a dream is a fulfilment of a wish.'<sup>81</sup> The wish that lies behind this particular dream is, he suggests, his own wish to acquit himself of any responsibility for the persistence of his patient's pain. Whilst both the dream and Freud's interpretation of it have already been subject to extensive re-analysis by feminist scholars,<sup>82</sup> in the light of the stated concerns of this thesis, I wish to think more particularly about the representation of the doctor/patient relationship in this specimen dream.

In waking life, Freud had written up Irma's case notes with a view to 'justifying himself' to the leading figure in his professional circle, Dr M (Joseph Breuer). In the dream, Breuer appears in order to confirm Freud's initial diagnosis of Irma. They are then joined by two further friends and colleagues, Otto and Leopold. The four doctors proceed to subject Irma to further physical examination, 'percussing' her through her bodice before diagnosing an infection caused by an injection 'thoughtlessly' administered by Otto. Rather as Trilby is reduced to an 'instrument of music', an 'organ' for Svengali to play upon, so too does Irma seem to serve as a mute object to be 'percussed', diagnosed, injected and interpreted by Freud and his colleagues. Like Brouillet's painting of Charcot lecturing on hysteria, Freud's account of his dream of Irma's injection thus appears to rest on the contrast between the collective authority of a group of male, medical professionals and their passive object of investigation, the female hysteric. As Freud's own analysis of the dream reveals, however, behind what appears to be a confident display of male bonding

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<sup>80</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900]. *Penguin Freud Library* 4, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, reprinted 1991), p.182.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>82</sup> See in particular Shoshana Felman, 'Competing Pregnancies: The Dream From Which Psychoanalysis Proceeds' in *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, 'The Dream of Psychoanalysis' in *Freud's Women* (London: Virago, 1993) and Elisabeth Bronfen, 'The Navel of Sigmund Freud's Inaugural Dream' in *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).



and medical authority, lie a number of women, each of whom, in different ways, demonstrates her resistance to his new psychoanalytic mode of treatment. The ‘recalcitrant’ Irma is thus in fact a composite figure, who stands in for a series of other, equally intractable, women.

In the preamble to his account of the dream, Freud comments that he had been only partially successful in his waking treatment of Irma: ‘the patient was relieved of her hysterical anxiety but did not lose all her somatic symptoms.’<sup>83</sup> Doctor and patient were, moreover, ‘at variance’ when the treatment had been broken off for the summer vacation, Freud having ‘proposed a solution to the patient which she seemed unwilling to accept.’<sup>84</sup> In the dream representation, Irma continues to deny Freud any confirmation of his interpretative ‘solution’, and her resistance to his narrative explanation is mirrored by her ‘recalcitrance’ in the face of his attempts to look down her throat. The image of a woman standing by a window leads Freud to make a connection between Irma and one of her ‘intimate friends’. Like Irma, her friend suffered from hysterical choking, and Freud confesses that he had often entertained the idea that she might seek help from him for this disorder. In waking life, Irma’s friend was reserved and ‘recalcitrant’ in nature, and had proved more than capable of managing her condition without any help from Freud. In the dream representation, however, her resistance to his new mode of treatment is overcome, and she proves to be the ideal patient: unlike Irma, who had so foolishly rejected Freud’s interpretative solution, ‘her friend would have been wiser, that is to say she would have yielded sooner. She would then have *opened her mouth properly*, and told me more than Irma.’<sup>85</sup> Irma’s pallor and the puffiness of her complexion elicit a further association to a third woman, who had also suffered from problems with her oral cavity, specifically ‘bad teeth’:

She again was not one of my patients, nor should I have liked to have her as a patient, since I had noticed that she was bashful in my presence and I could not think that she would make an amenable patient. She was usually pale, and once, while she had been in especially good health, she had looked puffy.<sup>86</sup>

Significantly, Freud breaks off his interpretative narrative at this point, and the identity of this figure is revealed only in a footnote:

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<sup>83</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.181.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

The still unexplained complaint about *pains in the abdomen* could also be tracked back to this third figure. The person in question was, of course, my own wife; the pains in the abdomen reminded me of one of the occasions on which I had noticed her bashfulness.<sup>87</sup>

What Freud's own recalcitrance does not allow him to acknowledge, however, is the fact that, implicit within these references to his wife's bashfulness, her puffiness and her abdominal pains, lies a veiled allusion to the fact that Martha Freud was pregnant.<sup>88</sup> The relationship between these three 'recalcitrant' women constitutes for him the blind spot or 'navel' of the dream: 'If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me further afield. There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.'<sup>89</sup> To Shoshana Felman, this unknowable knot of three women 'points not to the identifiability of any given feminine identity but to the inexhaustibility, the unaccountability, of *female* difference.'<sup>90</sup> Pursuing this point still further, we might also note the host of other female figures evoked by Freud in the course of his interpretation of the dream: his eldest daughter, Mathilde (aged seven years at the time of her father's dream), the beautiful young governess whose 'false teeth' were revealed in the course of a medical examination, the two further patients who had followed Freud's medical advice with equally disastrous consequences (one developed an 'extensive necrosis of the nasal mucous membrane', the other suffered a fatal toxic reaction to the medication that Freud had prescribed for her) and the old lady of eighty-two, to whom Freud had administered a twice-daily injection of morphine. In the ever-expanding cast of female characters—young and old, mothers and

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Shoshana Felman underscores the significance of Martha Freud's unacknowledged pregnancy to the dream of Irma's injection. Her argument emerges via an engagement with an earlier article by Erik Erikson, who had suggested that the dream is concerned with the competing pregnancies of Freud—pregnant with psychoanalysis—and his wife—pregnant with their child. For Erikson, the dream represents Freud's wish to conceive psychoanalysis with/from Wilhelm Fliess: 'that a man may incorporate another man's spirit, that a man may conceive from another man, and that a man may be born from another, these ideas are the content of many fantasies and rituals which mark significant moments of male initiation, conversion and inspiration.' Erik Erikson, 'The Dream Specimen of Psychoanalysis,' *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 2 (1954), pp.5-56, p.48, cited by Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?*, p.86.

Whilst Felman concurs with Erikson that 'the Irma dream is basically about conception—about the joint conception of Freud's child and of Freud's nascent science,' she argues that 'Freud's own wishful pregnancy is radically tied up with the dream's knot of female figures and that, rather than oneirically eliminating this knot so as to conceive psychoanalysis from Fliess, that is, to conceive psychoanalysis with no (female) resistance, through the wishful elimination of all (sexual) difference, the dream's wish is, precisely (but also most crucially), to conceive psychoanalysis from the female patient.'

Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?*, pp.109-10.

<sup>89</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.186, n.2.

<sup>90</sup> Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?*, p.115.

daughters, wives and widows, family members and governesses<sup>91</sup>—who crowd his dreaming thoughts Freud finds himself confronted with femininity in all its ages, stages and complexities. Yet, as he himself acknowledged, the dream of Irma's injection hinges more specifically on the mystery of the differences between three particular adult female subjects, two of whom were widows and so positioned by social convention outside of the reproductive cycle, the third of whom was a wife and mother, whose pregnancy serves as the visible evidence of her continuing sexual and generative capacity. Reading this specimen dream in the light of my own work on the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', I am thus particularly struck by the fact that, right at the very heart—or, to use Freud's own terminology, the 'navel'—of the dream, lies an assemblage of three women who collectively raise a number of issues having to do with bereavement and parturition, issues which, as I shall go on to argue in Chapter Two, had six years earlier, during his treatment of Frau Emmy von N, proved equally challenging to Freud's sense of himself as a doctor.

At this stage, however, I wish to focus on another moment in his narrative explanation of his dream of Irma's injection when Freud again stops himself from pursuing a particular line of interpretation. In his initial telling of the dream, Freud appears to be particularly struck by the fact that both he and Leopold were able to observe *in spite of her dress* that a portion of the skin on Irma's left shoulder was 'infiltrated.' In his subsequent explication, he emphasises that standards of modesty dictated that women patients should always be examined fully dressed:

we naturally used to examine the children in the hospital undressed; and this would be a contrast to the manner in which adult female patients have to be examined. I remembered that it was said of a celebrated clinician that he never made a physical examination of his patients except through their clothes.<sup>92</sup>

In his dream, Freud appears able to circumvent not only the cultural constraints governing the examination of female patients by their male doctors but also the physical constraints of Irma's clothing in order to gain some privileged access to her body. Yet it is at this moment of unmediated physical encounter with the unclothed female body that narrative closure once again eludes him: 'Further than this I could not see. Frankly, I had no desire

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<sup>91</sup> On the significant role played by the governess in many of Freud's writings on the family see Jane Gallop, 'Keys to Dora' in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp.132-50. As Gallop points out, the governess occupied a liminal position in the late-nineteenth-century social structure; like the nurse and the maidservant, she marked the point of intrusion of questions of economic and class difference into the very heart of the bourgeois home and family.

<sup>92</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p.189.

to penetrate more deeply at this point.<sup>93</sup> That the dream of Irma's injection is centrally concerned with feminine corporeality is, however, indicated by the association to two further female figures, one of whom is directly discussed by Freud himself, the other of whom is present only by implication.

His physical examination of Irma's oral cavity brings to Freud's mind not only his wife's 'bad teeth' but also 'recollections of other medical examinations and of little secrets revealed in the course of them,' specifically, the memory of an examination that he had carried out on another female patient—a governess, who had seemed 'a picture of youthful beauty,' but who had turned out to be wearing 'false teeth.'<sup>94</sup> Pursuing this particular line of association beyond the point that Freud himself is willing to go, Elisabeth Bronfen points out that these two women with decayed teeth—the duplicitously beautiful governess and the pregnant wife—together implicitly evoke a number of anxieties around the vulnerability, mutability and mortality of the female body.<sup>95</sup> Whilst both governess and wife are effectively erased from Freud's own interpretation of the dream in favour of Irma's friend—the ideal patient, who would have submitted to Freud's medical examination and 'opened her mouth properly'—the dream of Irma's injection thus precipitates its dreamer into a confrontation and, as I shall go on to suggest, ultimately even an identification with the materiality of the female body.

As Freud peers into the recalcitrant Irma's mouth, he is confronted by the sight of some '*extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose.*' The image elicits an association to another male friend and medical colleague, a figure who 'had a special knowledge of the consequences of the affections of the nose and its accessory cavities; and [who] had drawn scientific attention to some very remarkable connections between the turbinal bones and the female organs of sex.'<sup>96</sup> Like the formula for trimethylamin, the curly structures Freud sees at the back of Irma's throat lead him to make a connection 'not only to the immensely powerful factor of sexuality, but also to a person whose agreement I recalled with satisfaction whenever I felt isolated in my opinions,'<sup>97</sup> namely Wilhelm Fliess. A perplexing encounter with the mysteries of female corporeality and sexuality is thus replaced by a rather more reassuring image of male camaraderie: at this point in his interpretation, Freud conjures up the

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<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p.189.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, p.185.

<sup>95</sup> Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject*, p.62.

<sup>96</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.194.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*



memory of a figure who, unlike his recalcitrant female patient, would be willing to accept his interpretative solution.

As the associations to Fliess reveal, the dream of Irma's injection indexes another occasion where Freud had again collaborated with a male colleague in the treatment of an hysterical female patient. In February 1895, Fliess had travelled to Vienna in order to operate on the nose of one of Freud's patients, Emma Eckstein. Over the next few weeks, it became apparent that an infection had set in following Fliess's intervention. The patient's condition worsened to the point where Freud felt it necessary to call in another surgeon:

Rosanes cleaned the area surrounding the opening, removed some sticky blood clots, and suddenly pulled at something like a thread, kept on pulling. Before either of us had had time to think, at least half a meter of gauze had been removed from the cavity. The next moment came a flood of blood. The patient turned white, her eyes bulged, and she had no pulse. Immediately thereafter, however, he again packed the cavity with fresh iodoform gauze and the haemorrhage stopped. It lasted about half a minute, but this was enough to make the poor creature, whom by then we had lying flat, unrecognisable. At the moment the foreign body came out and everything became clear to me—and I immediately afterward was confronted by the sight of the patient—I felt sick. After she had been packed, I fled to the next room, drank a bottle of water, and felt miserable. The brave Frau Doktor then brought me a small glass of cognac and I became myself again.

[...] Since then she has been out of danger, naturally very pale, and miserable with fresh pain and swelling. She had not lost consciousness during the massive haemorrhage; when I returned to the room somewhat shaky, she greeted me with the condescending remark, "So this is the strong sex."

I do not believe it was the blood that overwhelmed me—at that moment strong emotions were welling up in me.<sup>98</sup>

Like the dream of Irma's injection, Freud's report on the aftermath of Fliess's botched operation on Emma Eckstein's nose appears to rely on the contrast between male medical professionalism and a passive and potentially pathological femininity. Both accounts are, moreover, structured around a moment when the interiority of the female body is made visibly manifest. As his letter to Fliess makes clear, there was evidently something about this incident—over and above the horrific sight of the bloodied length of gauze that was unravelled from inside his patient's nose—that Freud found deeply disturbing. As the

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<sup>98</sup> Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 8 March 1895 in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, trans. & ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge etc: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.116-7.

letter continues, he attempts first to blame, and then as quickly to exonerate, Fliess, whilst all the while struggling to come to terms with his own feelings of remorse in relation to both Fliess and Emma:

So we had done her an injustice; she was not at all abnormal, rather a piece of iodoform gauze had gotten torn off as you were removing it and stayed in for fourteen days, preventing healing; at the end it tore off and provoked the bleeding. That this mishap should have happened to you; how you will react to it when you hear about it; what others would make of it; how wrong I was to urge you to operate in a foreign city where you could not follow through on the case; how my intention to do the best for this poor girl was insidiously thwarted and resulted in endangering her life—all this came over me simultaneously.<sup>99</sup>

Freud's account of Emma Eckstein's near-fatal haemorrhage thus dramatises his own complex feelings of guilt and helplessness in the face of his hysterical patients' pain. Over the next few months, he became increasingly preoccupied with the flow of blood that continued to pour so uncontrollably from his patient's nose. Unlike the interior of Trilby's body, which appeared to yield up its secrets as smoothly as any wax anatomical model, Emma's nasal cavity steadfastly resisted all attempts at medical mastery. On 23 March, Freud wrote to inform Fliess that the surgeons were of the opinion that, 'she is bleeding from a large vessel—but which one?—on Friday they want to make a large incision on the outside while compressing the carotid artery to see whether they can find the source.'<sup>100</sup> On 11 April: 'a new, life-threatening haemorrhage which I witnessed. It did not spurt, it surged. Something like a fluid level rising extraordinarily rapidly, and then overwhelming everything. It must have been a large vessel, but which one and from where? Of course, nothing could be seen.'<sup>101</sup> In spite of the fact that there was thus seemingly 'nothing to see', Freud had nevertheless been drawn repeatedly back to the traumatising spectacle of Emma Eckstein's continuing—and seemingly inexplicable—bleeding in the months preceding his dream of Irma's injection, to the point that, when he peered into the mouth of another patient altogether, he was once again returned to the site of that bleeding.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Freud to Fliess, 23 March 1895 in *Complete Letters*, ed. Masson, p.121.

<sup>101</sup> Freud to Fliess, 11 April 1895 in *Complete Letters*, ed. Masson, p.124.

<sup>102</sup> His treatment of Emma Eckstein thus played a key role in leading Freud away from physiologically based attempts at the treatment and cure of hysteria towards an acknowledgement of the fact that, like dreams, hysterical symptoms were to be understood as the articulation of unconscious wishes and fantasies. Some twelve months after Fliess's botched operation, in two letters that blithely overlook the very real physical suffering that Emma endured as a result of Fliess's surgical intervention, Freud would write to inform his friend that, 'I shall be able to prove to you that you were right, that her episodes of bleeding were hysterical, [and] were occasioned by *longing*.' He elaborated in a second letter, dated 4 May 1896: 'She described a scene from the age of fifteen, in which she suddenly began to bleed from the nose when she had the wish to be

That he was deeply moved by his hysterical patients' suffering is, moreover, reflected in his bodily identification with both Emma and Irma.

Freud's letters to Fliess during March and April 1895 intersperse updates on Emma Eckstein's progress with detailed reports on his own medical condition. Emma and Freud appear to have shared both symptom and doctor: at the same time as Emma was suffering from repeated haemorrhaging, so too was Freud affected by a continual discharge of pus and scabs from his own nose, as well as migraines, shortness of breath, 'pain in the heart region, atactic pulse and beautiful insufficiency,' ailments for which he anxiously solicits Fliess's advice.<sup>103</sup> Freud's nasal condition continued to develop, in sympathetic correspondence with Emma's, until well into July of that year, when his medical examination of a female patient once again evoked anxiety over his own wellbeing:

The scabs on the turbinal bones recalled a worry about my own state of health. I was making frequent use of cocaine at that time to reduce some troublesome nasal swellings, and I had heard a few days earlier that one of my women patients who had followed my example had developed an extensive necrosis of the nasal mucous membrane.<sup>104</sup>

As Freud looks into Irma's mouth, he is thus confronted by the mutability and vulnerability of his own body. He finds a further correspondence between his symptoms and those of his patient in Otto's suggestion that 'a portion of the skin on [Irma's] left shoulder was infiltrated':

I saw at once that this was the rheumatism in my own shoulder, which I invariably notice if I sit up late into the night. Moreover the wording in the dream was most ambiguous: 'I noticed this, just as he did...' I noticed it in my own body, that is.<sup>105</sup>

As Freud thus comes to feel his pain inscribed within the hysteric's body and her pain within his body, traditional hierarchies break down, and the boundaries between doctor

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treated by a certain young physician who was present. [...] When she saw how affected I was by her first haemorrhage when she was in the hands of Rosanes, she experienced this as the realisation of an old wish to be loved in her illness, and in spite of the danger during the succeeding hours she felt happy as never before. Then, in the sanatorium, she became restless during the night because of an unconscious wish to entice me to go there; since I did not come during the night, she renewed the bleedings, as an unfailing means of re-  
arousing my affection.'

Freud to Fliess, 26 April 1896; 4 May 1896 in *Complete Letters*, ed. Masson, p.183, p.186.

For a more extensive discussion of the key role of his treatment of Emma Eckstein in enabling Freud to develop his theory of wish-fulfilment, see Appignanesi and Forrester, who go so far as to suggest that it should be considered 'one of the primal scenes of psychoanalysis' (*Freud's Women*, p.119).

<sup>103</sup> Freud, 'Case History' enclosed with letter of 4 March 1895 to Fliess in *Complete Letters*, ed. Masson, p.116.

<sup>104</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.187.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p.189.

and patient become increasingly fluid. Shoshana Felman has suggested that it is precisely because he comes to feel Irma's suffering in this way, 'because he feels the feminine complaint inscribed within his body, that Freud can, for the first time, cure hysteria, relieve—if only partially, Irma's anxiety.'<sup>106</sup> The dream of Irma's injection would thus appear to register how, in Freud's early clinical practice, the certainties of collective male authority and medical omniscience slowly give way to a more empathetic and relational encounter with his hysterical women patients. As I shall go on to emphasise in the first chapter of this thesis, this gradual relinquishing of medical might was, however, by no means an easy process for Freud. The pain in Irma's left shoulder—a pain that may be said to mark the site of his identification with his female patient—thus also represents one of the nodal points in the dream beyond which Freud is unwilling (or indeed unable) to 'penetrate'. In the dream of Irma's injection, Freud's bodily connection with his female patient is disavowed in favour of an emphasis upon male collaboration and authority: the dream is, in its manifest content, structured around the image of a collective examination by a group of male doctors of a prone and passive female patient, a visual trope which, as we have seen, recurred across a variety of representational sites at the fin-de-siècle, from the images produced for and of Charcot at the Salpêtrière to George du Maurier's literary re-imagining of the relationship between mesmerist and model in *Trilby*. Does this preoccupation with the feminine body as passive material for masculine creation/action persist into the realm of fine art practice? What further affinities can be identified between cultural forms and sites at the fin-de-siècle?

## Artist/Model

In 1886, Edgar Degas (1834-1917) exhibited a *Suite de nuds* [sic] *de femmes se baignant, se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner* at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition. The images were not individually titled, but six of these pastels have subsequently been identified from descriptions in contemporary reviews of the exhibition. Three depict women washing themselves in the shallow tubs known as *cuvettes* (see **Figures 0.14 – 0.16**). One is of a woman drying herself. The other two are full-length nudes, viewed from behind.<sup>107</sup> The suite of pastels is innovative in pose, technique and

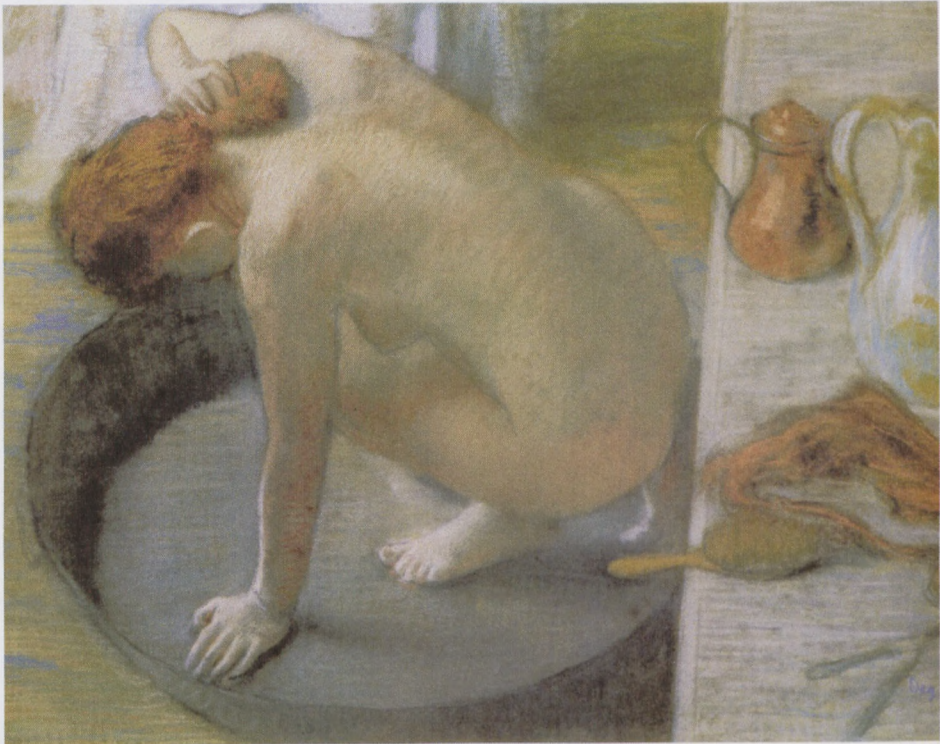
<sup>106</sup> Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?*, p.101.

<sup>107</sup> Based on critics' descriptions, Degas scholars have suggested that the other images shown at the 1886 exhibition were *Woman Dressing*, 1885 (Washington, National Gallery of Art) and *Woman Getting Up*, c.1885-86 (Pearlman Foundation). Richard Thomson suggests that *Woman in a Tub*, c.1885-86 (London, Tate Gallery) was also included. See Richard Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988). More recent research has, however, proposed that the image of a woman drying herself to which reviewers referred





**Figure 0.14**  
Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1884. Pastel on paper, 45 x 65 cm.



**Figure 0.15**  
Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1886. Pastel on paper, 60 x 83 cm.





**Figure 0.16**

Edgar Degas, *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub*, 1885.  
Pastel on paper, 81.3 x 55.9 cm.

composition. The strangely contorted figures are set close to the pictorial plane, and take up the majority of the represented space, thus positioning the spectator in intimate proximity to the female body. In *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub* (Figure 0.16), the figure hunches over awkwardly in order to rub at her left foot with a cloth. In comparison with the pastels that Degas produced in the two decades after the 1886 exhibition, with their dense accumulation of blunt, stabbing lines of vibrant colour (Figure 0.18), the image has a more muted and sketch-like quality. The contours of the body are marked out by and contained within heavy charcoal lines. The cool blue tones of the loosely smudged pastel used to convey the shallow volume of the basin contrast with the warmer hues and more pronounced hatchings that articulate the fall of light on the figure's back, hip and thigh. The left breast seems to jut out at an oblique angle from under the armpit, while the right arm and leg dangle uselessly; it is difficult to work out how either might connect to the body. In her insightful analysis of the techniques used in these pastels, Anthea Callen has shown how the images are fragmented by Degas's practice of working so closely to the model that the body cannot be perceived as a whole. The anatomical distortions of the bather pastels are, she explains, partly the result of Degas's practice of amalgamating several distinct viewpoints within a single image. In *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub*, for example, the buttocks are viewed from a different angle to that of the upper torso; the spectator seems at once to crouch on a level with the figure and yet also to gaze down on the scene from above. This sense of fragmentation is further enhanced by Degas's practice of 'piecing, tracing, transferring and cropping his compositions' and of combining elements from several studies in a finished image, and Callen eloquently describes how these working procedures are retraced in the process of looking at the pastels: 'the moving eye follows the energetic line and the erratic shifts of broken contour. The dis-located gaze travels over the segmented body, attempting to recompose its whole from the cropped and disparate views.'<sup>108</sup>

Many of the reviewers who responded to the 1886 suite recognised the challenge posed by Degas's series of pastels.<sup>109</sup> As Gustave Geffroy acknowledged, 'there will be

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was in fact *Femme s'essuyant après le bain*, 1884 (St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). See Ruth Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886. Documentation Volume II: Exhibited Works* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Anthea Callen, 'Degas' Bathers: Hygiene and Dirt—Gaze and Touch' in *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision*, eds. Richard Kendall & Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1992), p.168.

<sup>109</sup> The critical responses to the bather suite constitute the most concentrated body of writing on Degas produced during the artist's lifetime. All are reprinted in Ruth Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1888. Documentation Volume I: Reviews* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996). These



surprises for those used to [...] alabaster or pearly pink flesh [...] that conforms to the academic or fashionable formula.<sup>110</sup> Like Geffroy, Octave Mirbeau praised Degas's departure from the idealised and formulaic conventions of academic paintings of the female nude: 'those who admire pearly flesh and feline curves will,' he cautioned, 'find no joy in front of the drawings of M Degas.'<sup>111</sup> As Maurice Hermel emphasised, in Degas's hands, the nude was stripped of its 'literary, historical and sentimental' references; these were instead recognisably contemporary women, depicted in recognisably contemporary situations.<sup>112</sup> Many reviewers accordingly attempted to construct a social identity for the bathers based on the shape of their bodies and the spaces in which they were pictured. While Paul Adam referred to one of the figures as a 'fat bourgeoisie',<sup>113</sup> most were adamant that the pastels depicted working-class women. Huysmans speculated that the represented women might well be meat traders or butchers (*charcutières* or *bouchères*).<sup>114</sup> Other critics, however, preferred to use more ambiguous designations such as *maritornes* ('slatterns') or *filles* ('girls', but also 'prostitutes').<sup>115</sup> Several also described the figures as *batraciennes*

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reviews have already been subject to detailed re-reading by a significant number of Degas scholars. I will not, therefore, offer any systematic analysis of the individual reviews, but will rather endeavour to offer a more symptomatic reading of the key debates generated by the exhibition of the bather suite. For further discussion of the critical responses to the bather suite, see Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995); Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture 1870-1910* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2002); *idem.*, 'Managing Degas' in Richard Kendall & Griselda Pollock (eds.), *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (London: Pandora Press, 1992); Richard Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988) and Martha Ward, 'The Rhetoric of Independence and Innovation,' pp.421-42 in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, ed. Charles S Moffett (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986).

<sup>110</sup> 'Oui, il y aura surprise pour les yeux habitués aux chairs en bois, en sucre, en mousse de savon, en albâtre, en nacre rose, aux chairs ratissées, blanchies, rosées, soufflés, aux chairs selon la formule académique ou mondaine.'

Gustave Geffroy, 'Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes,' *La Justice*, 26 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.449-52, p.451.

<sup>111</sup> 'Les amateurs de chairs nacrées, de serpentements félins, n'ont rien à faire devant les dessins de M Degas.' Octave Mirbeau, 'Exposition de peinture (1, rue Laffitte),' *La France*, 21 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.465-66, p.456.

<sup>112</sup> 'Les pastels de M Degas ont un double mérite. Ils ravissent ceux qui aiment la belle peinture, ils exaspèrent la bêtise sentimentale et moralisante. Certaines oeuvres d'art, non des moins précieuses, ont le don de faire voir rouge au philistin: ce sont les plus désintéressés, celles qui suppriment l'attrait littéraire, historique ou sentimental auquel s'accroche le badaud.'

Maurice Hermel, 'L'Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte,' *La France Libre*, 27 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.455-457, p.455.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Adam, 'Peintres impressionnistes,' *La Revue Contemporaine: Littéraire, politique et philosophique*, April 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.427-430, p.428.

<sup>114</sup> J-K Huysmans, 'Certains,' *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Les Editions G Crès et Cie, 1929), reprinted in Berson, pp.457-458, p.458.

<sup>115</sup> 'cette maritorne, vue du plafond, debout devant son lit, mains plaquées aux fesses, semble une série de cylindres, renflés un peu, qui s'emboîtent. De face, agenouillée, les cuisses disjointes, le torse penché; une fille s'essuie.'



(‘amphibians’ or, more loosely, ‘frogs’) or else used the adjective *grenouillarde* (‘froglike’). To Gustave Geffroy, for example, it seemed that Degas had ‘hidden none of her froglike aspects—the maturity of her breasts, the heaviness of her lower body, the crooked bend of her legs, the length of her arms and the stupefying appearance of her belly, knees and feet.’<sup>116</sup> As Richard Thomson has noted, the repeated comparison of the bathers to frogs may be considered a veiled allusion to their connection to the world of prostitution: during the 1880s, the prostitutes who frequented the cafes of the Latin Quarter were known as *les grenouilles de brasserie*, and images of frogs were frequently used to make coded reference to commercial sex within the print culture of the time.<sup>117</sup>

Like the hysteric, the prostitute served as an increasingly privileged target of knowledge in nineteenth-century France, providing a focus for a series of intensely-argued debates around gender, class and sexuality.<sup>118</sup> Over the course of the century, a growing number of measures had been introduced in a bid to check the spread of prostitution in the capital.<sup>119</sup> Yet these increasing attempts at regulation also resulted in a rise in unregistered or clandestine prostitution: as Jill Harsin notes, ‘once some women were defined by their relationship with the prefecture, others, the clandestines, were equally defined by the absence of such a relationship.’<sup>120</sup> The widely held belief that clandestine prostitution was rife on the streets of Paris not only led contemporary commentators to regard all working-class women as potential prostitutes, and hence objects of suspicion and surveillance, but further ensured that the prostitute needed to be clearly recognisable so as to prevent any potentially embarrassing mistakes or misrecognitions. As Alain Corbin has revealed, a system of ever more discreet signs thus came to indicate sexual commerce in nineteenth-

‘This slattern, seen from above, standing in front of her bed with her hands plastered to her buttocks, seems to be a series of slightly bulbous cylinders fitted together. Facing us, kneeling, thighs apart, torso leaning, a girl dries herself.’

Félix Fénéon, ‘Les Impressionnistes,’ *La Vogue*, 13-20 June 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.441-445, p.441.

<sup>116</sup> ‘il n’a rien dissimulé de ses allures de batracien, du mûrissement de ses seins, de la lourdeur de ses parties basses, des flexions torsées de ses jambes, de la longueur de ses bras, des apparitions stupéfiantes des ventres, des genoux et des pieds.’

Geffroy, ‘VIII. Hors du Salon,’ reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, p.452.

<sup>117</sup> Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes*, p.142.

<sup>118</sup> On the intersection of the debates on hysteria and prostitution, see in particular Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University, 1994).

<sup>119</sup> For further discussion of these measures see Alain Corbin, ‘Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,’ *Representations* 14 (Spring 1986), pp.209-219 and Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). On the representation of prostitution within nineteenth-century art and literature, see Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill-Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1989) and Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>120</sup> Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, p.241.

century Paris: registered prostitutes were not permitted to wear hats, for example, but had to circulate bare-headed.<sup>121</sup>

Depicted outside the public sphere, the female figures in Degas's bather suite were represented devoid of any of the subtle clues that might have unambiguously signalled their sexual availability. Where Degas had, in an earlier series of monotypes, depicted specific scenes of brothel life, including images of women washing themselves prior to receiving a male client (**Figure 0.17**), the pastels of women bathing that he exhibited in 1886 were not set in any such clearly identifiable surroundings. Although many critics sensed that the images carried strong sexual connotations, few were able to be as unequivocal as Henry Fèvre, who declared that, 'M Degas lays bare for us the prostitute's bloated, pasty, modern flesh. In the shady boudoirs of registered brothels, where certain ladies fulfil their social and utilitarian role as great collectors of love, these fat-cheeked women wash, brush, soak and wipe themselves in basins as big as troughs.'<sup>122</sup> Most were able only to hint at the fact that the pastels might be representations of prostitutes. Jules Desclozeaux mimicked Degas's title for the series, but referred to the images not as a suite of nudes, but as a suite of *filles*. After praising Degas's 'truthfulness' and his 'brutality', Desclozeaux concluded that 'these violent photographs cannot be called nudes,' but instead depicted 'a serious and dreary state of undress, a taciturn indecency and a sad bestiality.'<sup>123</sup> As Heather Dawkins notes, this type of language also described the targets of censorship and was more characteristic of pornography than art.<sup>124</sup> For nineteenth-century viewers, Degas's bather pastels thus appeared to sit on the very boundary between the licit and the illicit, blurring the distinctions between fine art and erotic imagery, and between the *femme honnête* and the *fille publique*.

The uncertainties generated by the indeterminate social identity of the represented women could, however, be contained by the notion that the images were based upon accurate and truthful observation. Although he confessed that the pastels 'turn the

<sup>121</sup> Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France,' p.217.

<sup>122</sup> 'M Degas nous dénude, avec une belle et puissante impudeur d'artiste, la viande bouffie, pâteuse et moderne de la femelle publique. Dans des boudoirs louches de maisons matriculées, où des dames remplissent le rôle social et utilitaire de grands collecteurs de l'amour, des dondons maflues se lavent, se brossent, se détrempent, se torchent dans des cuvettes aussi vastes que des auges.'

Henry Fèvre, 'L'Exposition des impressionnistes,' *La Revue de demain*, May-June 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.445-47, p.446.

<sup>123</sup> 'On ne peut pas appeler du *nu* ces violentes photographies. C'est du déshabillé, [...] un déshabillé grave et morne, une indécence taciturne, une bestialité triste.'

Jules Desclozeaux, 'Chronique: Les Impressionnistes,' *L'Opinion*, 27 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.439-440, p.440.

<sup>124</sup> Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture 1870-1910* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.82.





**Figure 0.17**

Edgar Degas, *Squatting Nude Woman, Seen From Behind*, 1877. Pastel over monotype, 16 x 12 cm.

stomach,' Desclozeaux also acknowledged that they were 'admirably seen, with an inordinate intensity, with the sharp eye of the surgeon or the horse dealer, with a taste for reality that makes the canvas stink.'<sup>125</sup> Like Desclozeaux, Gustave Geffroy understood the modernity of Degas's bather pastels to lie in the objective, scientific quality of the artist's gaze:

It is indeed woman who is depicted in these six poses, but woman without facial expression, without eyes, without the deceptive decoration of her toilette, woman reduced to the gestures of her limbs, to the appearance of her body, woman considered as female, expressed in her animality alone, as if this were a zoological treatise requiring superior illustration.<sup>126</sup>

For Geffroy, the images thus provided an authoritative account of Woman in her unadorned, 'animal' state. In the bather suite, Degas had, he suggested, 'written a distressing and appalling poem to the flesh, as an artist enamoured by the grand lines that envelop a body from head to toe, and as a scientist who knows the location of bones, the play of muscles, the contraction of nerves, the mottling and the thickness of the skin.'<sup>127</sup> Like Charcot, Degas was thus seen as a figure who was able to combine the aesthetic vision of the artist with the objective precision of the scientist.

The six pastels exhibited at the eighth Impressionist exhibition constitute only a tiny proportion of the extensive array of images of women bathing produced by Degas from the 1880s through to the end of his working life (see **Figures 0.18 & 0.19**). In their repetitive chronicling of twisted and uncomfortable poses, these late bather images call to mind the images of hysterical women produced for Charcot at the Salpêtrière. Other scholars have been struck by similar correspondences in an earlier sequence of images by Degas. Both Richard Thomson and Anthea Callen have drawn comparisons between Paul Richer's pictorial classification of the successive stages of an hysterical attack and Degas's series of monotypes depicting scenes from the interior of a Parisian brothel, completed in

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<sup>125</sup> 'Le cœur se soulève, mais comment s'empêcher de considérer que c'est admirablement vu, avec une intensité exorbitante, un regard aigu de chirurgien ou de maquignon, un goût de réalité qui arrive à faire puer la toile.'

Desclozeaux, 'Chronique: Les Impressionnistes,' reprinted in Berson, p.440.

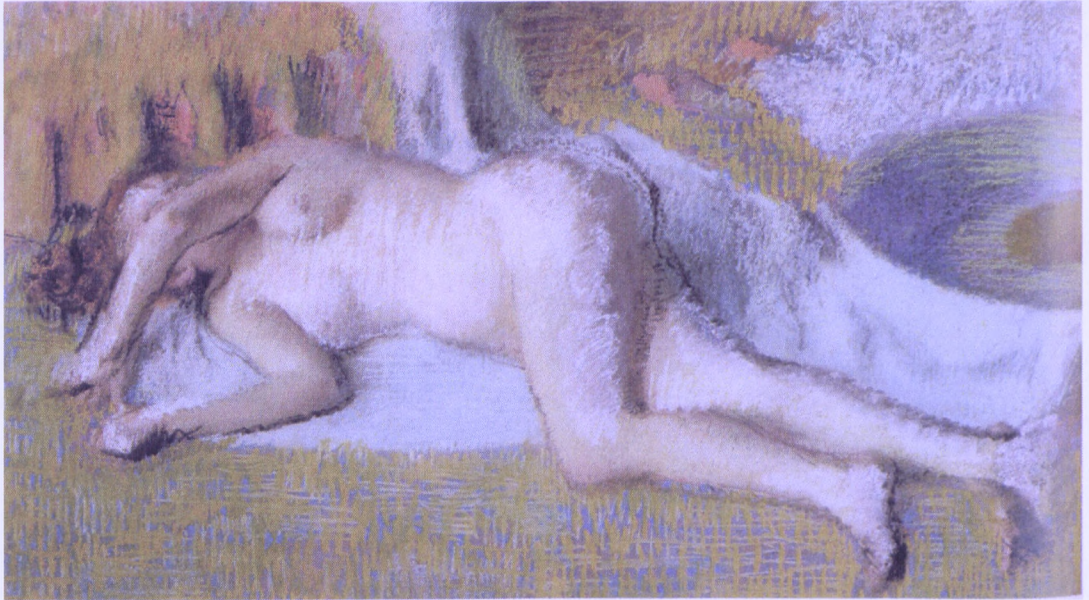
<sup>126</sup> 'C'est bien la femme qui est là en ces six postures, mais la femme sans l'expression du visage, sans le jeu d'oeil, sans le décor trompe-l'oeil de la toilette, la femme réduite à la gesticulation de ses membres, à l'aspect de son corps, la femme considérée en femelle, exprimée dans sa seule animalité, comme s'il s'était agi d'un traité de zoologie réclamant une illustration supérieure.'

Geffroy, 'VIII. Hors du Salon,' reprinted in Berson, p.451.

<sup>127</sup> 'C'est ainsi qu'il a écrit ce navrant et lamentable poème de la chair, en artiste épris des grandes lignes qui enveloppent une figure depuis la chevelure jusqu'à l'orteil, en savant qui connaît la place des os, le jeu des muscles, les crispations de nerfs, les marbrures et l'épaisseur de la peau.'

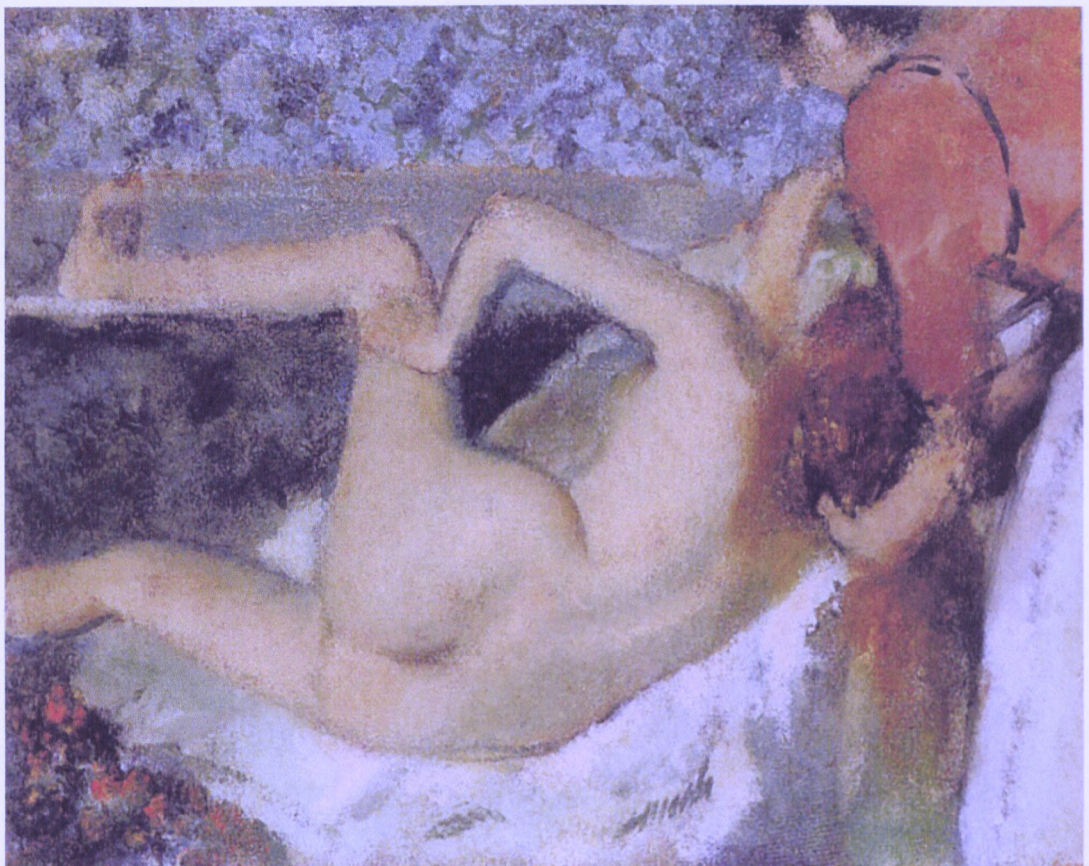
Geffroy, 'VIII. Hors du Salon,' reprinted in Berson, p.452.





**Figure 0.18**

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath*, c.1890-95. Pastel on paper, 48.3 x 83.2 cm.



**Figure 0.19**

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath, Woman Seen From Behind*, c.1893-98.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm.



the 1870s (**Figures 0.20 & 0.21**). Although it is not known whether Degas ever attended Charcot's Tuesday lectures, he had many friends and colleagues who did. The two men shared a number of acquaintances, including the novelist Jules Claretie (whose attendance at Charcot's lectures is dramatised by Brouillet in his representation of *Une Leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière*), the painter Gerôme and the sculptor Dalou.<sup>128</sup> As Anthea Callen suggests, underlying the obvious differences between Degas's and Richer's representations of women—where Degas's monotypes were made using a process that produced only one or two prints from each plate, and were mainly given away to friends or else sold into private art collections, Richer's drawings were made to illustrate a scientific text, and hence were mechanically reproduced in large numbers—there is also a notable kinship between them. 'What is remarkable,' she notes, 'is the similarities in the bizarre poses of the figures and, above all, the parallel obsession with a taxonomy of the pathological female body.'<sup>129</sup> As I emphasised above, in their visualisation of hysteria in publications such as *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, Charcot and Richer drew inspiration from a long-established art historical tradition of representations of religious ecstasy and insanity. The image of the convulsed and contorted female body produced for the purposes of medical diagnosis at the Salpêtrière appears in turn to re-emerge within fine art practice, finding its visual echo in Degas's strangely posed images of women bathing. What further links Degas's artistic project to the contemporaneous medical attempt to produce an exhaustive catalogue of the movements, gestures and poses of hysteria is their shared emphasis upon an intense and prolonged scrutiny of the female body. To contemporary commentators, it appeared that Charcot and Degas each combined the qualities of the artist with those of the scientist: both men were positioned as the masters of an objective gaze that fixed and controlled the unruly physicality and animal sexuality of the working-class female patient/model.

In his 1971 etched commentaries on Degas's brothel monotypes, Picasso renders this gaze explicit. In Degas's original sequence of images, the bourgeois spectator/client makes only a marginal appearance. In *Squatting Nude Woman, Seen from Behind* (**Figure 0.17**), his presence is implied by the conspicuously empty armchair. In other images, he lurks on the very edge of the composition (**Figure 0.22**). In Picasso's re-imagining of these scenes, this shadowy figure is substituted by a representation of Degas himself. *Degas, Jacketed, Drawing Himself in Tails, at the Girls'* (**Figure 0.23**) constitutes a double portrait of his artistic predecessor. One Degas is pictured in the process of sketching the other, who threatens to

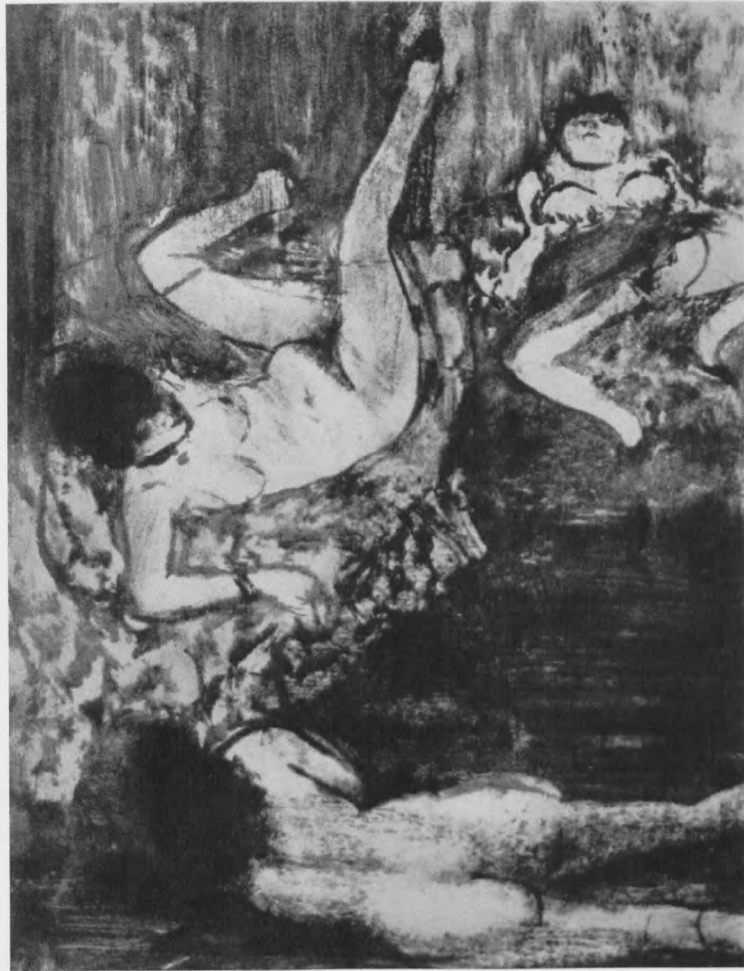
<sup>128</sup> Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes*, p.102.

<sup>129</sup> Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), p.52.



**Figure 0.20**

Paul Richer, 'Contorsion: attaque démoniaque' from *Études cliniques sur la grande hystérie ou hystéro-épilepsie* (1881-1885)



**Figure 0.21**

Edgar Degas, *Relaxation*, c.1877. Monotype, 15.9 x 12.1 cm



**Figure 0.22**  
Edgar Degas, *In the Salon*, c.1877. Monotype, 15.9 x 21.6 cm.



disappear behind a dense veil of black lines. The mirrored poses of these doubled Degas provide a visual frame for two monumental nude figures, one of whom looks down on and proffers her right breast to the Degas who is in the process of being drawn. Three other, partially obscured women are crowded together in the top left hand corner of the image. Although this group of five female figures may be placed at the visual centre of the composition, as we try to follow the lines of sight within the painting, our eye is persistently drawn to the edges of the image, to the two Degases. Notwithstanding Picasso's flagrant display of the represented women's sex, masculinity, and not femininity, is the subject of this particular work: the object of Degas's gaze is here revealed to be Degas himself. In other images in the series, however, Degas peers intently at a tangled mass of female body parts. In *The Maison Tellier. Girls to Themselves. Degas Flabbergasted* (**Figure 0.23**), Picasso offers a literal representation of the mechanics of sight, inscribing the voyeuristic gaze of the artist-spectator in the form of a cluster of diagonal lines that emanate from Degas's left eye and appear to penetrate the nearest female figure.

As Picasso's restaging of the brothel monotypes so forcefully reveals, Degas's artworks were the product of an uneven encounter between the male artist and his degraded sexual object, Woman. Feminist art historians have emphasised that the representation of this encounter in fact constitutes one of the central symbolic motifs of modern art. In an early and still powerful challenge to existing formalist art histories, Carol Duncan revealed that the encounter between an aggressively virile, masculine creativity and an objectified female body, signified in particular through representations of the artist and model in the studio, forms a major trope of modernist painting. Focussing on works produced in the decade before the First World War by artists including Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Duncan argued that, 'in both imagery and style, these paintings forcefully assert the virile, vigorous and uninhibited sexual appetite of the artist [...] and often portray women as powerless, sexually subjugated beings. By portraying them thus, the artist makes visible his own claim as a sexually dominating presence, even if he himself does not appear in the picture.'<sup>130</sup> Subsequent work has further developed this line of argumentation from its necessarily polemical beginnings in order to analyse the psychic and cultural impulses that sustained

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<sup>130</sup> Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Art,' originally published in *Artforum* (December 1973), pp.30-39; reprinted in Carol Duncan, *Aesthetics and Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.81.

the prolonged, anxious and repetitive imaging of the working woman's body by male artists in the modernist period.<sup>131</sup>

This established feminist critique of the unequal power relations of class and gender at stake in modernist representations of the female nude has up to this point precluded recognition of the contributions made to the genre by artists who were women. I want to argue, however, that an engagement with the female nude was in fact of vital importance to those women artists who sought to negotiate a position for themselves in relation to the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. The archive of informal photographs collated in the album *Kiki's Paris: Artists and Lovers 1900-1930* reveals the large numbers of aspiring artists—both men and women—who were drawn from all corners of the globe to settle in modernist Paris in the early years of the twentieth century, in many cases entering into an intimate and creative partnership with a fellow practitioner (**Figure 0.25**).<sup>132</sup> In this heady atmosphere of social, sexual and artistic experimentation, painting from—or posing for—the nude could serve as a significant declaration of emancipation from Victorian social mores, and many women freely elected not only to model for their male (or female) partner, but also took their own body, or that of a female friend or partner, as the site of their own interrogation of the genre. The work of those women artists who elected to work within a still vivid tradition of figurative representation in the early years of the twentieth century—a highly selective list might include such figures as Georgette Agutte (1867-1922), Alice Bailly (1872-1938), Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), Maria Blanchard (1881-1932), Romaine Brooks (1874-1970), Marie-Anne Camax-Zoegger (1887-1952), Emilie Charmy (1878-1974), Lucie Cousturier (1876-1925), Hermine David (1886-1970), Hélène Dufau (1869-1937), Alice Halicka (1895-1975), Jeanne Hébuterne (1898-1920), Louise Hervieu (1878-1954), Gwen John (1876-1939), Marie Laurencin (1883-1956), Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980), Marevna (1892-1984), Jacqueline Marval (1866-1932), Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907), Mela Muter (1876-1967), Chana Orloff (1888-1968), Dod

<sup>131</sup> Much of this work has focused in particular on the figure of Degas. See Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995); Heather Dawkins, 'Grief and Fascination,' *differences* 4.3 (1992), pp.66-90; Richard Kendall & Griselda Pollock (eds.), *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (London: Pandora, 1992) and Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1986). Further significant considerations of this issue include Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998) and Griselda Pollock's re-reading of the work of Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>132</sup> These artistic partnerships included Hermine David and Jules Pascin, Alice Halicka and Louis Marcoussis, Jeanne Hébuterne and Amadeo Modigliani, Renée Gros and Moise Kisling, and Suzanne Valadon and André Utter. See Billy Klüver and Julie Martin, *Kiki's Paris: Artists and Lovers 1900 – 1930* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1989).

Procter (1890-1972), Vera Rockline (1896-1934), Suzanne Roger (1899-1986), Charley Toorop (1891-1955), Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938) and Marie Vassiliev (1884-1957)—remains, however, an as yet scarcely interrogated visual archive. The 1982 exhibition *L'Autre moitié de l'avant-garde 1910-1940*, curated by Lea Vergine, was instrumental in bringing to light many hitherto neglected women artists who elected to associate themselves with progressive practices of painting and sculpture in the early years of the twentieth century, while more recent scholarship by Gill Perry and Paula Birnbaum, feminists schooled in the social history of art, has analysed the sources of institutional support available to modernist women artists at this time, from private academies and galleries run by women such as Berthe Weill (1865-1951) to collective exhibiting societies such as the *Société des femmes artistes modernes*.<sup>133</sup> The diversity of the contributions made by artists who were women has, however, been significantly overlooked by those art historians who have focussed upon the return to figuration among certain sections of the Parisian avant-garde in the period following the First World War.<sup>134</sup> They have instead been granted a borderline visibility in the footnotes to standard histories of modern art in the guise of wife or mistress, muse or model, to prominent figures within the heroic male avant-garde.

It is my contention that, despite their utilisation of the visual resources offered by early modernism, it is not possible simply to reinsert the work of such artists back into existing modernist paradigms of artistic creativity. To endeavour to position the work of *women* artists in relation to the tripartite 'avant-garde gambit' that Griselda Pollock has so

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<sup>133</sup> Lea Vergine, *L'Autre moitié de l'avant-garde 1910-1940. Femmes peintres et femmes sculpteurs dans les mouvements d'avant-garde historiques*, trans. Mireille Zanuttini (Paris: des femmes, 1982); Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde. Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Paula Birnbaum, 'Femmes Artistes Modernes: Women, Art and Identity in Inter-War France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1996).

<sup>134</sup> See in particular Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995) and Kenneth E Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Christopher Green's 2001 contribution to the Pelican History of Art series, *Art in France 1900-1940*, does offer some limited discussion of a small number of women artists. The case of Camille Claudel serves as an overreaching introduction to the 'problem of the marginalisation of women artists across the whole period between 1910 and 1940,' thus enabling the indiscriminate grouping of Marie Laurencin ('Apollinaire's mistress') and Suzanne Valadon ('Puvis de Chavanne's [sic], Renoir's and Lautrec's model from the 1880s') together with certain women artists associated with the Surrealist movement. While some degree of brevity is perhaps inevitable in any survey book, the cursory nature of Green's treatment of women artists does seem at variance with the level of analysis that he offers in other chapters. It also seems particularly unlikely that the epitaph 'hunchbacked, childless and unmarried,' as applied by Green to Maria Blanchard, would be used to characterise a male artist!

Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, Pelican History of Art Series, 2001).

aptly named 'reference, deference and difference'<sup>135</sup> is paradoxically to confirm their lack of originality and innovation. Within the narrative framework provided by conventional histories of modern art, the *difference* exhibited by such work has only negative connotations, since it is explicated solely in terms of the excessive *deference* occasioned by the artist's romantic involvement with a male contemporary. Hence, Alice Halicka and Marie Laurencin are positioned as 'minor' or 'marginal' members of the artistic grouping loosely associated with the Bateau Lavoisier, and their experimentation with a Cubist style is seen to be contingent upon their relationships with, respectively, Marcoussis and Apollinaire, while Suzanne Valadon's work is assessed predominantly in terms of its absorption of the influence of Degas.<sup>136</sup>

This thesis works, therefore, to develop a reading strategy through which to acknowledge the significance of the attempts made by artists who were women to engage with the genre of the female nude in the early years of the twentieth century. In exploring the cultural, artistic and psychic dilemmas faced by this generation of women in their bid to work with and off available cultural resources in order to represent the female body as the site and sign of feminine creative agency, two figures will serve as my initial guides: the writer Virginia Woolf, and the painter Ruth Kjær. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf famously declared that, 'we think back through our mothers if we are women.'<sup>137</sup> In *A Room*, these 'mothers' are limited to literary predecessors, as Woolf constructs for herself and for the reader an imagined genealogy of women writers extending from Aphra Behn through Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontës, and on to the fictional Mary Carmichael. In Chapter Three, however, I shall consider more particularly Woolf's attempts to think back through her own mother, Julia. As Shoshana Felman has noted, the

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<sup>135</sup> Pollock explains this tripartite gambit as follows: 'To make your mark in the avant-garde community, you had to relate your work to what was going on: *reference*. Then you had to defer to the existing leader, to the work or project which represented the latest move, the last word, or what was considered the definitive statement of shared concerns: *deference*. Finally your own move involved establishing a *difference* which had to be both legible in terms of current aesthetics and criticism, and also a definitive advance on that current position. Reference ensured recognition that what you were doing was part of the avant-garde project. Deference and difference had to be finely calibrated so that the ambition and claim of your work was measured by its difference from the artist and artistic statement whose status you both acknowledged (*deference*) and displaced.'

Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.14.

<sup>136</sup> For a rather more complex analysis of the self-positioning of, respectively, Alice Halicka and Marie Laurencin, see Paula Birnbaum, 'Alice Halicka's Self-Effacement: Constructing an Artistic Identity in Inter-War France' in *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) and Bridget Elliott, 'The "Strength of the Weak" as Portrayed by Marie Laurencin,' *Genders* 24 (1996), pp.69-109. I shall go on to address the question of Suzanne Valadon's relationship to Degas at length in the final two chapters of this thesis.

<sup>137</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* [1929] (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p.72.



legacy of motherhood was, for Woolf, also a legacy of loss: ‘marked by the trauma of the early loss of her own mother, Virginia Woolf can think back through her mother autobiographically only insofar as her mother is herself, in essence a *dead* mother—dead as a result of fulfilling only too perfectly what Balzac may have called her “woman’s duty”.’<sup>138</sup> In this third chapter, I shall offer a detailed examination of Woolf’s confrontation with her own personal legacy of premature maternal bereavement in her autobiographical writings. I shall further argue that the process of thinking back through her mother was necessarily an ambivalent one for a modernist daughter such as Virginia Woolf, in that it also entailed a deadly battle with an internalised ideal of Victorian femininity. In exploring the idea that women’s creativity in the modernist period may be considered both an act of aggression towards, and a work of mourning for, the mother, this hinge chapter makes further recourse to the work of Melanie Klein.

### **Feminism & Psychoanalysis II: The Return to Melanie Klein**

In her entry on Melanie Klein in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, published in 1992, Margaret Whitford proposed that, ‘Klein’s direct influence on feminism has been slight.’ Feminist critics had, she suggested, ‘usually preferred Freudian or Lacanian theory to Klein, because her work appears to locate femininity and feminine heterosexual desire in innate drives. Nor does she explicitly engage with the social structures that subordinate women: she is not a feminist.’<sup>139</sup> The past twenty years have, however, witnessed a significant ‘return to Melanie Klein’ amongst feminists working in the humanities. Those seeking to challenge the occlusion of the mother from Freudian and Lacanian theory have in particular been drawn to Klein’s work because of her insistence upon the central role played by the mother in the phantasy life of the child. For Melanie Klein, the infantile depressive position is to be considered ‘the central position in the child’s development.’<sup>140</sup> Her theories thus play down the significance of castration anxiety, stressing instead depressive anxiety and the consequent attempt to restore the mother as a whole object. The Kleinian emphasis on infantile aggression and sadism would, moreover, seem to offer a new way of thinking about the earliest relations between mother and baby, providing an alternative to the tendency within psychoanalytic feminism to valorise the pre-

<sup>138</sup> Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?*, p.147.

<sup>139</sup> Margaret Whitford, ‘Melanie Klein’ in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 1992), p.192.

<sup>140</sup> Melanie Klein, ‘A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States’ [1935] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (London: Vintage, 1988), p.289. I shall go on to outline the key features of the depressive position in Chapter Two below.

oedipal mother-child dyad as a state of complete and blissful union (a tendency which, as I suggested above, served as a significant trope in much of the feminist work on hysteria produced during the 1970s and 1980s). Klein nonetheless remains a controversial figure in feminist circles. Like Margaret Whitford, literary critics Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have voiced concerns with regard to her ideas on femininity and heterosexuality. They are of the opinion that Klein ‘believes in “natural sexual difference” and the inevitability of the child assuming its “correct” sexual orientation.’<sup>141</sup> At the same time, however, Doane and Hodges also confess that they find Klein’s ‘refusal to regulate motherhood wonderfully subversive.’ In her insistence on the primacy of violent infantile phantasies, Klein, they suggest, ‘takes the burden of blame off mothers.’<sup>142</sup> Yet Doane and Hodges also note that Klein does not address the question of maternal subjectivity; in her theories, the mother is only ever described as the object of the child’s phantasies. They thus view subsequent feminist attempts to draw upon Kleinian theory with suspicion, arguing that any such intervention must ultimately fall back on patriarchal definitions of femininity, reducing ‘woman’s difference to her maternal functions, that is, to a traditional notion of sexual difference.’<sup>143</sup>

In their consideration of ‘psychoanalytic feminism and the search for the “good enough” mother,’ Doane and Hodges are particularly critical of what they feel to be Julia Kristeva’s ‘unquestioning assimilation of object-relations theory.’ Kristeva’s work, they contend, ‘dramatically demonstrates the oppressiveness of object-relations discourse as it binds women to stereotypical maternal roles.’<sup>144</sup> Other feminist theorists have, however, placed the work of Klein and Kristeva in rather more complex dialogue. In an important essay first published in 1990 in a special edition of *Women: A Cultural Review* devoted to the work of Melanie Klein, Mary Jacobus also expressed some initial misgivings about any feminist return to Klein: ‘it feels like eating one’s words,’ she mused. Psychoanalytic feminism had, Jacobus suggested, been so thoroughly immersed in Lacanian theory for so long that to take Klein seriously seemed ‘to risk a kind of theoretical regression.’<sup>145</sup>

To those schooled in Lacanian thought, the apparent literalness of Klein’s account of the aggression and violence which she believes to lie at the heart of early infantile

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<sup>141</sup> Janice Doane & Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the “Good Enough” Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p.3.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p.64, p.77.

<sup>145</sup> Mary Jacobus, “‘Tea Daddy’: Poor Mrs Klein and the Pencil Shavings,’ originally published in *Women: A Cultural Review* 1.2 (Summer 1990), pp.160-80; reprinted in *Reading Melanie Klein*, eds. Lyndsey Stonebridge & John Phillips (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.91-112, p.92.

phantasy life does indeed come as a shock. My own initial encounter with the work of Melanie Klein came indirectly, via the writings of Jacques Lacan. Intrigued by Lacan's mobilisation of Klein in Book One of *The Seminar*, in which he uses the case history of little Dick as the departure point for his discussion of the subject's entry into language, I turned to Klein's 1930 paper 'The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego,' where I read with growing incredulity her account of her treatment of the four-year-old Dick.<sup>146</sup> Disconcerted not only by Klein's vivid descriptions of Dick's phantased attacks on his mother's body, but also the concrete manner in which she interpreted those phantasies to the little boy himself, I felt an immediate sympathy with Lacan's view that:

She slams the symbolism on him with complete brutality, does Melanie Klein, on little Dick! Straight away she starts off hitting him large-scale interpretations. She hits him a brutal verbalisation of the Oedipal myth, almost as revolting for us as any reader—*You are the little train, you want to fuck your mother.*<sup>147</sup>

Mary Jacobus offers us a way of reading beyond the apparent literalness of (Lacan's reading of) Klein. As she glosses, Melanie Klein's 'brutal verbalisation of the oedipal myth' is, for Lacan, 'the graft which makes it possible for little Dick to enter into a symbolic network of relations and signifiers.'<sup>148</sup> Jacobus herself is, however, more particularly struck by Lacan's 'polemical deployment of unrefined coarseness' as well as his repeated insistence on Klein's brutality, leading her to ask: what is it about Klein that so troubles Lacan? What aspect of Kleinian theory may he be afraid to discover in himself? This aspect is, she contends, 'surely nothing other than the crucial role of the imaginary, the domain which Lacan associates loosely with Klein's account of projective identification and its allied processes, but which in his system is subordinated to the symbolic and to language.'<sup>149</sup> Where Lacan uses Klein's account of her treatment of little Dick as the basis of his exploration of how the imaginary gives rise to the symbolic, Jacobus's careful reading reveals that what may also be glimpsed in Klein's case history is 'the difficulty of separating imaginary and symbolic in the very machinery of language itself.'<sup>150</sup> To lend support to her suggestions, she turns to the work of Julia Kristeva. 'The Kristevan account of abjection and transference-love allows,' she proposes, 'for the grafting of language onto Kleinian theory

<sup>146</sup> Melanie Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego' [1930] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.219-32.

<sup>147</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar Book One: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York & London: W W Norton & Company, 1988), p.68.

<sup>148</sup> Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" p.102.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p.105.



at the very limits of its appearance.<sup>151</sup> Unlike those critics who saw any return to Melanie Klein as a theoretically regressive move leading inexorably back to a static and possibly essentialist idea of the mother as origin, in Mary Jacobus's reading Klein thus becomes a figure who anticipates in hitherto unacknowledged ways concurrent attempts within feminist theory to rethink the early mother-child relationship and the processes of language acquisition.

Jacqueline Rose has further dismantled the criticisms levelled at Klein by critics such as Margaret Whitford, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges. In her major consideration of *Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein*, Rose convincingly refutes the arguments that Klein's understanding of the drives is a reductively biological one, and that her theories imply a normative pattern of development. As she demonstrates in her reading of papers by Susan Isaacs, Joan Rivière and Paula Heimann, in the work of Klein and her followers, 'negativity operates not as a primordial, biological pre-given from which an orderly sequence can be derived, but as the subversion of sequence and biology alike.'<sup>152</sup> The Kleinian concept of the death drive thus emerges from Rose's analysis as 'closer to, even if crucially distinct from, the negativity which Lacan places at the heart of subjectivity—not as instinctual deposit, but as the price that all human subjects pay for the crucial passage of the psyche into words.'<sup>153</sup> According to Jacqueline Rose, the significance of Klein's work would, therefore, appear to lie in its acknowledgement of the violent and destructive tendencies that lie at the very core of human subjectivity and society. Klein, she writes, 'brings us up against a limit: the limit of what a society, what a subject, can recognise of itself.'<sup>154</sup> For Rose, writing in the immediate aftermath of Thatcherism and the First Gulf War, any return to Klein potentially has broader socio-political consequences. 'By seeing the unconscious as the site of sexual or verbal free fall, the humanities have,' she argues, 'aestheticised psychoanalysis.'<sup>155</sup> As she points out, however, in the context of Klein's work, the dialogue between psychoanalysis and politics begins to shift: 'instead of the unconscious as the site of emancipatory pleasures, we find something negative, unavailable for celebration or release.'<sup>156</sup> A return to Melanie Klein via the work of Jacqueline Rose thus has the potential to shift the terms of the feminist engagement with

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>152</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1993), p.169.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p.143.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p.143.

psychoanalytic theory away from the analysis of sexuality and desire towards an acknowledgement of the significance of aggression and violence in both psychic and social life.

Feminists working in the field of the visual arts have, however, been slower to take on board the implications of the type of post-Lacanian, feminist return to Melanie Klein as has been advocated by literary scholars such as Mary Jacobus and Jacqueline Rose. The work of Mignon Nixon may be considered a notable exception in this respect. In *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art*, Nixon analyses the development of Louise Bourgeois's art practice from the 1940s to the early 1980s, advancing the thesis that Bourgeois's 'rebuttal to Freudian-based surrealism' was both 'theoretically and culturally' enabled by her engagement with object-relations theory.<sup>157</sup> In the early 1960s, Louise Bourgeois considered undertaking clinical training to become a child analyst. Although she did not ultimately follow this course, Nixon contends that the theoretical debates occurring around the psychoanalysis of children were of profound interest to Bourgeois as both a mother and as an artist. In her careful analysis of Louise Bourgeois's sculptural production, Mignon Nixon draws extensively and productively upon Klein's theories, most notably of the part-object and the death drive. Following Jacqueline Rose, Nixon is concerned with the question of 'how psychoanalysis came to be synonymous with sexuality and the symbolic, and so alienated from theories of aggression and the death drive.'<sup>158</sup> She accordingly affords centre stage to the role of aggressive and destructive impulses in feminine cultural production, suggesting that Louise Bourgeois's work 'argues for the potential of sculpture to encompass the death drive: to enact destruction as an early and persistent trend, but one indissolubly linked to an equally primitive and tenacious tendency towards sublimation.'<sup>159</sup>

Building upon an earlier observation by Annette Michelson, Mignon Nixon shows how 'the representation of a "body-in-pieces," of what is in Kleinian theory termed the part-object runs, like an insistent thread' through much of post-war American art production.<sup>160</sup> As she points out, in its concern with malleable materials and with process, and in its persistent yet enigmatic allusions to the body, Louise Bourgeois's artistic production shares certain similarities with that of other women artists working during the

<sup>157</sup> Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge MA & London: The MIT Press, 2005), p.7.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p.265.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p.268.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p.209, quoting Annette Michelson, "'Where is Your Rupture?'" *Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk*, *October* 56 (Spring 1991), pp.48-49, p.49.

1960s, including Eva Hesse, Nancy Spero and Yayoi Kusama. Nixon argues that the logic of the part-object which can be glimpsed within the work of these artists can be conceived as a 'proto-feminist gesture' on the basis that 'it has been effective in eroding phallogentrism from below, or before—from a subsymbolic or presymbolic position.'<sup>161</sup> She relates this body of work to a more recent body of feminist art practice which, she suggests, in its turn towards the drives and the part-object, challenges 'a new feminist orthodoxy, the Lacanian symbolic'.<sup>162</sup> While Nixon's work offers an insightful exploration of the possibilities that Kleinian theory offers to feminist art history, in this thesis I am concerned with an earlier moment in the history of women artists' engagement with modernist art practice than forms the focus of her analysis. It is with this particular moment in mind that I shall turn in Chapter Three to Klein's 1929 paper 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse,' in which she implicitly differentiates between the genesis of the creative impulse in male and female subjects.<sup>163</sup> Klein's discussion of female creativity is of particular significance to my argument in that it centres upon the work of a woman painter working within a figurative tradition of representation. Supplementing that earlier body of feminist research which provided a socio-historical analysis of women artists' negotiation of the institutional structures of the Parisian avant-garde in the early years of the twentieth century, I shall in Chapter Three draw upon the Kleinian account of feminine creativity as originating in a daughter's ambivalent relationship to the maternal body in order to offer a psychoanalytical reading of the attempts by these women to conjugate differently the relations between subjectivity, corporeality and representation via an engagement with the genre of the modernist nude.

### **Model/Artist**

It has generally been accepted that the women who participated most actively in the genre of the female nude during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not artists, but models. Heather Dawkins provides a succinct summary of this point of view:

Working-class women were central to the genre [of the nude] as models, but cultural stratification denied them the means to represent their particular view of modelling or the nude. Models were instead represented by the artists,

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<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p.249.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p.265. On the 'turn to the drives' in feminist art of the 1990s, see in particular Nixon's discussion of the work of Janine Antoni and Rona Pondick in her earlier essay 'Bad Enough Mother,' *October* 71 (Winter 1995), pp.71-92.

<sup>163</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse' [1929] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*.



which meant, generally, according to the cultural agendas of another gender and class. When it came to the nude, working-class women were mute recipients of the look, not practitioners engaged in a critical or creative practice. Seen from this perspective, the nude is a depressing symbol—an icon of mute acquiescence to a masculine gaze and a cultural hierarchy.<sup>164</sup>

Whilst earlier feminist writings tended to view the model as a silent and passive symbol of masculine creativity/virility, several more recent studies have endeavoured to provide a more complex account of the relationship between artist and model.<sup>165</sup> In her study of literary representations of the artists' model, Marie Lathers suggests that art historical considerations of the artist/model relationship can be divided into three main tendencies. The first, biographically based, approach details the male artist's intimate relationships with his female models. The second approach examines the male artist's depiction of those models; in this approach, the model is considered primarily as a representation. The third approach outlined by Lathers aims to move beyond the centrality of the male artist in order to reconsider the female model in terms of her status as an artist; this approach, she names the 'Valadon paradigm'. Marie Lathers expresses certain reservations about the 'Valadon paradigm', however, suggesting that it can be used to imply that models who were not also artists are somehow less worthy of consideration. In her own analysis, she accordingly directs her attention towards 'those female models who did not cross the artist-model threshold, those models whose work it was to pose for artists in ateliers and art institutions and whose work became, as the nineteenth century progressed, a bona fide if unofficial profession.'<sup>166</sup> This bid to reconstruct a social history of modelling 'on its own terms' in turn informs her discussion of literary representations of the artists' model. I want to argue, however, that the so-called 'Valadon paradigm' in fact merits more careful scrutiny.

As the daughter of an unmarried domestic worker, who worked as an artists' model for over ten years before going on to carve out for herself a highly successful and lucrative career as a professional painter, Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938) has been seen to effect a collapse of the social and sexual hierarchies that, as I have shown in this introductory chapter, structured the relationship between artist and model in the closing years of the nineteenth century. In her role as model, the self-trained Valadon was uniquely positioned to observe at close quarters the working procedures of the artists—both academic and

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<sup>164</sup> Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture*, p.86.

<sup>165</sup> See in particular Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture*; Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's Model* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) and Susan S Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (Aldershot & Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>166</sup> Lathers, *Bodies of Art*, p.11.

avant-garde—for whom she posed. From this perspective, the studio can, therefore, no longer be considered the symbolic site of masculine scopophilia, but instead becomes the place of a two-way transaction, in which the viewed object simultaneously acts as a viewing, and learning, subject.

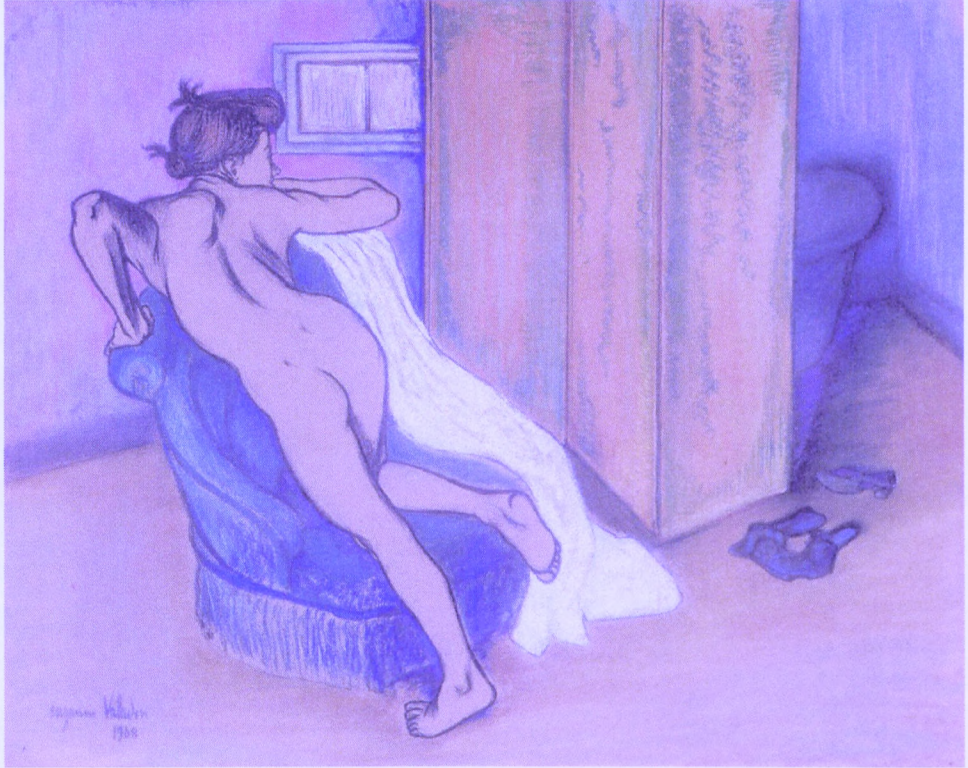
In the existing literature on Valadon, there is general agreement that her experience as a model did in some way inflect the manner in which she later painted the unclothed female figure. Yet the nature of Valadon's dialogue with the work of those artists for whom she modelled, nude and clothed, has not until now been subject to any sustained art historical consideration. Nearly every writer who has ever responded to Suzanne Valadon's paintings does, however, make some passing reference to her artistic debt to Degas. Although Valadon never modelled for Degas, she was a frequent visitor to his studio during the 1890s. Certain of her early drawings do appear to constitute a response to Degas's late images of women bathing. Valadon's 1908 pastel *After the Bath* (Figure 0.26), for example, uses a similar but reversed pose to an earlier drawing by Degas (Figure 0.27). In Degas's image, figure and background appear almost to merge into one: the left arm peters out into an area of scumbled white paint which simultaneously articulates the drapery covering the back of the chaise longue, while the head is reduced to a mere rectangular outline on the vibrant red wall. In contrast to the violently twisted pose of the Degas image, Suzanne Valadon endows her model with a far greater subjective presence: she looks up and appears to gaze intently at the screen which shields the bath. How, then, are we read these differences?

The majority of commentators confine themselves to the suggestion that Valadon was somehow better able to translate the model's innate unselfconsciousness about nudity into her painted representations of the female form. In the most complex considerations of her work published to date, feminist critics Rosemary Betterton and Patricia Mathews have further argued that, in their unique inscription of the model's viewpoint, Valadon's paintings mark a point of resistance to the objectification of the female body for an eroticised 'male gaze'.<sup>167</sup> In Chapter Four, I shall set these existing feminist interpretations of Suzanne Valadon's art practice within their broader context, offering a critical re-examination of the development of a feminist critique of visual culture during the 1970s and 1980s. This fourth chapter also considers the terms available to early-twentieth-

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<sup>167</sup> Rosemary Betterton, 'How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon,' *Feminist Review* 19 (1985), pp.3-24; Patricia Mathews, 'Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Female Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon,' *Art Bulletin* 73.3 (September 1991), pp.415-30.





**Figure 0.26**

Suzanne Valadon, *After the Bath*, 1908. Pastel on paper, 52 x 64 cm.



**Figure 0.27**

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself*, c.1894-96.  
Oil on canvas, 89 x 116 cm.



century art critics in their attempts to make sense of Suzanne Valadon's paintings. It analyses how nude studies known to have been executed by a *woman* artist stretched the boundaries of existing critical discourses, which were structured around a series of gendered, binary terms. I show how, in their bid to locate Valadon's representations of the female form within a genealogy of existing imagery, contemporary reviewers struggled to reconcile the competing expectations of two distinct categories of aesthetic judgement: the first concerning the specifically 'feminine' qualities of artworks produced by artists who were women, including their manner of painting the female body, and the second concerning the female nude as both formal convention and representation of Woman.

In contrast to these existing art historical readings of Suzanne Valadon, which have configured the range of her work as offering the viewer privileged access to the individually gendered life experiences of the singular artist-subject, in Chapter Five, I offer a detailed analysis of a selected number of drawings and paintings by Valadon from a theorised, psychoanalytical perspective. In support of my suggestion that, in their complex negotiation both of existing cultural codes of femininity and existing representational tropes, these artworks may carry the traces of a supplementary, feminine difference that cannot be wholly subsumed into a phallic economy of meaning, this final chapter will also draw upon the theories of Bracha Ettinger, who introduces a new model for considering the relations of the maternal and the feminine in both psychic life and the visual field.

### **Feminism & Psychoanalysis III: From *Hystera* to Matrix**

The term 'hysteria' is derived from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning uterus. This etymological root is reflective of the earliest medical opinions as to the nature and cause of the disease: in ancient Greece, hysterical symptoms were thought to be caused by the movements of a restless, dissatisfied uterus.<sup>168</sup> Even as Charcot attempted in the nineteenth century to redefine hysteria as a neurological disorder, the registers of the Salpêtrière continued to list inmates who were, in addition to being diagnosed with hysteria, also deemed to be suffering from such apparently inter-related symptoms as 'displacement of the uterus', 'antiflexion of the uterus', or even simply 'uterus'.<sup>169</sup> The 'displaced uterus' or 'wandering womb' of hysteria—a mobile and migratory organ that refuses to stay in its rightful place—may serve as testimony to the fact that, throughout the history of western thought and culture, the invisible sexual specificity of the female body has registered only

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<sup>168</sup> For an overview of the shifting medical definitions of and treatments of hysteria, see Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

<sup>169</sup> Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*, p.138

in pathological terms. As proposed earlier in this chapter, hysteria might thus be positioned as the plight of the feminine subject who is denied any means of positively acknowledging her own bodily specificity and the desires and fantasies to which it gives rise: to return to the quotation from Luce Irigaray cited above, woman is ‘condemned to “psychosis”, or at best “hysteria”, for lack—censorship? foreclosure? repression?—of a valid signifier for her “first” desire and for her sex/organs.’<sup>170</sup>

Bracha Ettinger further underscores the connections between hysteria, psychosis and femininity within classical Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. She argues that the question of feminine subjectivity and sexual difference is not necessarily bound up with hysteria, which is primarily concerned with repression; as a matter of foreclosure, it instead potentially falls with the register of psychosis. As she explains, ‘psychosis is characterised by non-symbolisation, by the lack of major signifiers or of a major metaphor (the metaphor of the Name of the Father). [...] The psychotic has non-symbolised experiences, which s/he cannot repress, which are treated by a mechanism other than repression (foreclosed: *forclusion* in French) and do not become unconscious’:

Usually, Freud and Lacan discuss women in relation to hysteria. It seems to me, however, that in Lacan’s logic, it would be more appropriate to discuss the place attributed to women in the context of psychosis. For the psychotic, we might say that words do exist to describe his/her experiences, but that for one reason or another, s/he cannot get into contact with them as signifiers. The woman’s situation is worse, since whatever could describe her experience of sexual difference *cannot exist even in the Symbolic*. Only the language of the Phallus is at her (our) disposal.<sup>171</sup>

Ettinger thus emphasises that, within a Symbolic order that is organised exclusively around the phallus, feminine sexual difference lacks any means of signification. With the concept of the Matrix, however, Bracha Ettinger proposes to ‘move the womb from nature to culture, making it the basis for another dimension of sense, for another sense, and a supplementary feminine difference.’<sup>172</sup>

Although Matrix is the Latin for womb, in Ettinger’s work it is not to be understood in its literal sense, as a bodily organ, but rather as a supplementary symbol for the processes through which subjectivity is formed. Neither replacing nor serving as an alternative to the phallus—the culturally privileged signifier for a subjectivity formed

<sup>170</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p.136.

<sup>171</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Matrix and Metamorphosis,’ *differences* 4.3 (1992), pp.176-208, p.193.

<sup>172</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event,’ *Theory, Culture and Society* 21.1 (February 2004), pp.69-73, p.76.

through the opposition of the One and its Other—the matrix ‘conceptualises *not-one-ness*, prenatal experiences of *I* and *non-I(s)* in co-existence without assimilation and without rejection.’<sup>173</sup> While psychoanalytic orthodoxy demands that the prenatal state be viewed as ‘a mythical area of archaic, undifferentiated sensations prior to subjectivity and outside the order of any possible symbolisation or even discovery,’<sup>174</sup> matrixial theory is modelled on a very different image of the relationship between the expectant mother and the foetus in the final stages of pregnancy. Bracha Ettinger proposes that, by the very late stages of pregnancy, the foetus has some minimal awareness of a distinction between itself and the environment in which it dwells. So too is the pregnant woman attuned to the baby she is carrying in her womb: ‘the foetus is not entirely “me” and not a total stranger, is not rejected yet not fused with, and, from a certain point onward is no longer an object but not yet a subject.’<sup>175</sup> She suggests that this materially intra-uterine, psychological and proto-psychological encounter between subject-to-be and mother-to-be may serve as a model for a supplementary stratum of subjectivisation, which she names *matrixial*:

The idea of a *matrixial stratum of subjectivisation* implies that late intra-uterine, prenatal events already create meaning and somehow inscribe traces of their transformation, potentially producing discernible *pictograms* on the level of the *real*, which filter through to ulterior developmental phases. It also implies that the invisible specificity of the female body creates discernible sub-symbolic transformations that inscribe mental traces and can reappear in later joint-psychological processes of exchange and transformation (e.g. projection-identification, transference-countertransference, acting out and aesthetic creation and experience). The real Matrix through which we pass (the womb) and from which we are separated, like the real Matrix which we possess (or not), leaves affected joint traces, and evokes conductable sensations, perceptions and emotions. The borderlinks organise experience as they are accompanied by psychic-libidinal investments. A borderline discernibility of

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<sup>173</sup> Ettinger, ‘Matrix and Metamorphosis,’ p.178.

It should be emphasised that Bracha Ettinger has continued to explicate and expand upon the concept of the matrix in a series of texts published over the past twenty years. It is thus becoming increasingly difficult to provide any overarching introduction to what is by now a complex, expanding and evolving theory, and in the later chapters of this thesis I will accordingly work closely with specific texts in which Ettinger elaborates particular aspects of matrixial theory.

For a systematic analysis of the unfolding of matrixial theory, together with a rigorously careful assessment of Ettinger’s complex engagement with secondary sources from the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy and aesthetics, see Anna L Johnson, ‘Bracha Ettinger’s Theory of the Matrix: Contexts and Commentary’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, 2006).

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p.197.

<sup>175</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘The Feminine/Prenatal Weaving in Matrixial Subjectivity-as-Encounter,’ *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 7.3 (1997), pp.367-405, p.370.



the uncognised *non-I* emerges for me and emerges with me, since the Other is indispensable for the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation.<sup>176</sup>

In the matrixial model, infant and mother-to-be are thus not understood as initially fused and then separated, but as always already differentiated: ‘the earliest stratum already has a dimension of relative distance in co-existence and of difference which is related to connectionistic modes of organisation of experience in the infant/mother-to-be unit in terms of joint sensory surfaces, movements, time-intervals, rhythms and even voice and tangibility.’<sup>177</sup> This archaic corporeal and sensorial encounter between *I* and *non-I*—between partial subjects—at the level of the Real is not completely foreclosed (as in the Lacanian model); Bracha Ettinger rather allows that its traces may persist in a specifically unconscious manner throughout the subject’s life, co-existing and even momentarily connecting with phallically organised Imaginary and Symbolic representations. Where early Lacanian psychoanalysis proposes that the only possible route to sexed and speaking subjectivity is via the mechanism of oedipal castration, the theory of the Matrix thus acknowledges another possible pathway from the Real to the Symbolic. As a supplement to the phallic processes of metaphor and metonymy, with their reliance upon substitution and displacement, Ettinger posits the process of *metamorphosis* as a means of passage for certain sensations and affections, traumas and phantasies, that do not cohere into the process of castration:

Metamorphosis is an archaic, blurred but nevertheless indelible conductable link-lane. Indefinite compositions of experience are exchanged; phantasies and affects are conducted through slippery borderlinks, transforming the co-emerging *I* and *non-I*, their borderspace and their *shared objects* beyond distinct representation.<sup>178</sup>

With the concept of metamorphosis, Ettinger identifies another kind of sense-making through which certain ‘vague, blurred, slippery internal and external traces which are linked to non-oedipal sexual difference’<sup>179</sup> may nevertheless be allowed to seep into meaning on what she names a subjacent, or *sub-symbolic*, level. In its suggestion that the traces of a prenatal/prematernal encounter in the Real may be mobilised post-natally in Imaginative and Symbolic operations, matrixial theory has implications for the field of aesthetics. Ettinger proposes that the legacy of this originary matrixial encounter can be traced in the

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<sup>176</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Metamorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace’ in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C Welchman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p.128.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, p.125.

visual field in particular, specifically in the manner of its appeal to and formation of a distinctive kind of gazing. Thus, she theorises a ‘matrixial gaze’, whose operations she first discerned through her own work as a painter.<sup>180</sup> Metramorphosis may, therefore, be said to have a privileged relation to certain kinds of modernist painting.<sup>181</sup>

In positing a supplementary stratum of subjectivisation modelled upon a pre-natal encounter between partial subjects who are never entirely fused nor entirely separated, never entirely known nor entirely lost to each other, the work of Bracha Ettinger also shifts the terms in which it is possible to think about sexual difference. Matrixial theory acknowledges a supplementary sexual difference, one which is not the result of the cut of castration, but which is rather premised upon an encounter with the invisible sexual specificity of the female body. This feminine-matrixial difference is, Ettinger emphasises, ‘primary and originary; it is in no way dependent on phallic difference and bears no comparison to it.’<sup>182</sup> It thus cannot be conceptualised in terms of having versus not having a particular bodily organ: matrixial theory is not an attempt to privilege the womb/matrix over the penis/phallus. Rather, ‘the matrixial sphere is modelled upon intimate sharing in *jouissance*, trauma and phantasm in the feminine/pre-birth sphere, and the matrixial womb stands for a psychic capacity for shareability created in the borderlinking to a female body.’<sup>183</sup> Since every human subject—whether male or female—has shared in this space of intimate encounter, where borders and thresholds are mutually invested and transformed, the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation is not necessarily limited to those subjects embodied as female, but rather ‘serves whoever can yield and tolerate this fragile, fragmented and dispersed mode of co-becoming.’<sup>184</sup>

As Ettinger so carefully demonstrates in her rigorous rereading of Freudian psychoanalysis, and in particular its subsequent Lacanian elaboration, any trace of the prenatal encounter with the archaic m/Other is, however, consistently written out of psychoanalytic theory: ‘the foreclosure of the feminine is,’ she emphasises, ‘vital for the phallic subject.’<sup>185</sup> In her view, defensive strategies such as hysteria, disguise, masquerade, parody or revolt are to be considered ‘subjectivising responses on the part of women’ to this foreclosure of the feminine: in the context of the enlarged Symbolic proposed by

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<sup>180</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts & Histories Network, 1995).

<sup>181</sup> Alison Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler: Painting History, Writing Painting* (London & New York: I B Tauris, 2007).

<sup>182</sup> Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist,’ p.79.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p.72.

matrixial theory, 'hysteria is produced precisely when the passage to the matrixial field is blocked and when a woman cannot ask herself what is her difference from another woman (not from men) and what is her desire *au féminin*.'<sup>186</sup> In the closing chapters of this thesis, I shall accordingly explore how this major intervention in the field of psychoanalytic theory might serve to loosen the ties that have classically bound femininity not only to hysteria, but also to the domain of the pre-oedipal.

Moving between psychoanalysis and modernism at the moment of their historical co-emergence, and re-reading their conjunction through contemporary feminist theory, this thesis thus also asks what it is to work with psychoanalytically inflected theorisations of femininity in the modernist instance through close reading of two specific case studies. Over the course of the next five chapters, I shall interrogate one of the traditional blind spots of psychoanalysis: maternal subjectivity, which implies, of course, not only immediate relations to birth-giving, but also mature female desire. In the first two chapters, I revisit Freud's first written case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' in order to explore the significance of his momentary acknowledgement of his patient's highly ambivalent experience of motherhood to the history and theory of what would become psychoanalysis. Having tracked the shift in the relations between doctor and patient that occurred over the course of this early, proto-analytic, encounter, I go on to examine a corresponding transformation in my second identified scenario of artist/model. In the third chapter, I consider the social, artistic and psychic dilemmas faced by those self-consciously 'New Women'—the metaphorical daughters of a generation of late Victorian, hysterical mothers such as Frau Emmy von N—who sought in the early years of the twentieth century to participate in modernist art and culture not merely as mute objects of representation, but as creative subjects in their own right. In this chapter, I investigate how the question of the maternal might be processed in the being of women as artists in the modernist moment. Having analysed both the possibilities and limitations of those psychoanalytic theorisations that view feminine creativity as necessarily bound up with depressive mourning for the mother and the maternal body, in the final two chapters, I shall consider how the traces of some different relation to the feminine/maternal may be otherwise inscribed in certain paintings of the female nude, most notably those that stage mother-daughter relations, by model-turned-artist Suzanne Valadon.

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<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, p.73.



## CHAPTER ONE

### GUT REACTIONS: NARRATIVE, MEMORY AND THE BODY IN THE CASE HISTORY OF 'FRAU EMMY VON N'

On 1 May 1889, Sigmund Freud 'took on the case of a lady of about forty years of age, whose symptoms and personality interested me so greatly that I devoted a large part of my time to her and determined to do all I could for her recovery.'<sup>1</sup> The patient in question was Frau Fanny Moser, née von Sulzer-Wart, whom Freud was to rename Frau Emmy von N for the purposes of the first case history that he personally contributed to the *Studies on Hysteria*, published jointly with Joseph Breuer in 1895. The case notes report that Frau Emmy was one of fourteen children, who had been brought up 'carefully, but under strict discipline, by an over-energetic and severe mother' (105). When she was twenty-three, she had married a much older man, a wealthy industrialist who had died of a stroke a few days after the birth of their second child. Her first symptoms had appeared shortly after his death, fourteen years earlier. Since then, she had been 'constantly ill with varying degrees of severity,' and she herself attributed her illness to the stress of her husband's death and to the task of bringing up their two daughters alone. When she arrived in Vienna for medical treatment in the spring of 1889, she was suffering from depression, insomnia, chronic pain and recurrent hallucinations.

As I established in my introductory chapter, the case history of the adolescent Ida Bauer/Dora has come to occupy a central position in the extensive literature on early Freud and on hysteria in psychoanalysis. It is my contention, however, that insufficient attention has up to now been paid to his earlier treatment of Fanny Moser, a mature woman who was herself mother to two adolescent daughters 'now sixteen and fourteen years old, who were often ailing and suffered from nervous troubles' (105). The existing literature on this first case history can, broadly speaking, be divided into two camps: the clinical and the biographical. Those articles written from a clinical perspective have centred

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Frau Emmy von N' in Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* [1895]. *Penguin Freud Library* 3, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, reprinted 1991), p.145. Further references to the *Studies on Hysteria* will be to the Penguin Freud Library edition, and will henceforth be incorporated into the body of the text following direct quotations.

Drawing upon his subsequent biographical research into Fanny Moser and her daughters, Christfried Tögel has convincingly argued that the treatment in fact began in May 1888 and not in 1889, as the case notes suggest. In his report on the case, Freud suggests that, at the time of his treatment of Frau Emmy, he was 'completely under the sway of Bernheim's book on suggestion' (135). As Tögel points out, Freud started his translation of that book in early 1888 and published a part of his preface later that year; see Christfried Tögel, "'My Bad Diagnostic Error': Once More About Freud and Emmy v. N. (Fanny Moser)," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 80 (1999), pp.1165-73.

largely upon attempts at re-diagnosis. Thus, Else Pappenheim speculates that Frau Emmy may have suffered from Tourette's syndrome, while W W Meissner revisits the case in the light of insights gained from subsequent clinical investigations into the paranoid process.<sup>2</sup> Other articles have provided some further insight into the lived experiences of Freud's former patient. Although he did not go so far as to reveal Fanny Moser's true name, Ola Andersson was the first to uncover her identity, and his 1979 article in the *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Quarterly* remains the main source of information on her life-history.<sup>3</sup> Andersson's article has subsequently been supplemented by further archival research by Henri Ellenberger, who was the first publicly to name Fanny Moser, and by Christfried Tögel, who shed new light on the dating of the treatment.<sup>4</sup> Much of this earlier biographical research was usefully caught up and distilled by Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester in their monumental study of *Freud's Women*, and their discussion remains the most comprehensive consideration of the case history to date.<sup>5</sup> My own reading of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' departs from this existing scholarship, in that it seeks neither to pinpoint and correct the clinical errors in the treatment, nor to expose the gaps and inconsistencies in the biographical details Freud provides about his patient. Rather, it insists upon the critically incomplete, tentative and transitional nature of this first case history, in which Freud begins to move beyond the influence of Charcot and Breuer in order to develop his own independent theorisation of hysteria.

A number of more general studies of Freud's early work on hysteria have briefly considered the significance of his treatment of Fanny Moser to what would eventually become psychoanalysis.<sup>6</sup> In this first chapter, however, I wish to undertake a more detailed examination of the doctor/patient relationship as it is inscribed within the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N'. In my introductory chapter, I drew attention to the relations of power and authority that permeated the relationship between the hysterical female patient and her male physician in the late nineteenth century. I shall now explore how, premised

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<sup>2</sup> Else Pappenheim, 'Freud and Gilles de la Tourette: Diagnostic Speculations on "Frau Emmy von N,"' *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 7 (1980), pp.265-77; W. W. Meissner, 'Studies on Hysteria: Frau Emmy von N,' *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 45.1 (January 1981), pp.1-19.

<sup>3</sup> Ola Andersson, 'A Supplement to Freud's Case History of "Frau Emmy von N" in *Studies on Hysteria* 1895,' *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 2.5 (1979), pp.5-16.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Ellenberger, 'L'Histoire d'"Emmy von N": étude critique avec documents nouveaux,' *L'Évolution psychiatrique* 42.3 (July-September 1977), pp.519-41; Christfried Tögel, "'My Bad Diagnostic Error": Once More about Freud and Emmy v. N. (Fanny Moser),' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 80 (1999), pp.1165-73.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Appignanesi & John Forrester, *Freud's Women* (London: Virago, 1993), pp.91-103.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, *Early Freud and Late Freud: Reading Anew Studies on Hysteria and Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Philip Slotkin (London & New York: Routledge, 1997) and the collection of essays *Storms in Her Head: Freud and the Construction of Hysteria*, ed. Muriel Dimen & Adrienne Harris (New York: The Other Press, 2001).

on the success and failure of certain therapies old and new, the doctor/patient scenario is transformed. In intimating to her doctor the significance of free association, and of the relation between body and language, Fanny Moser challenges the conventional model of doctor/patient authority, playing a key role in enabling Freud to formulate psychoanalysis out of the hypnotic and cathartic treatment of hysteria. Yet what Freud could not hear and did not see—his patient's sexuality and her desiring agency in the intimate treatment from which he derived his later method—also emerges more symptomatically across his written case history. This first chapter thus provides a close analysis of the Freudian text and that series of scenarios onto which it appears to give access, from Freud's first encounter with Frau Emmy in a Vienna nursing home, to his account of his final visit to the castle of this wealthy, older widow.

### **The Quest for a Narrative Structure**

The case notes report that Frau Emmy 'was a hysteric and could be put into a state of somnambulism with the greatest ease' (103). Freud therefore decided that, in treating her, he would make use of 'Breuer's technique of investigation under hypnosis, which I had come to know from the account he had given me of the successful treatment of his first patient' (i.e. Bertha Pappenheim/Anna O). In his attempts to convey the results of his experimentation with this new therapeutic technique, he came to the conclusion that he would 'perhaps be able best to give a picture of the patient's condition and my medical procedure by reproducing the notes which I made each evening during the first weeks of treatment,' adding that, 'wherever later experience has brought me a better understanding, I shall embody it in footnotes and interpolated comments' (103). The case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' might, therefore, be said to provide a uniquely transparent insight into Freud's early therapeutic technique, enabling the reader to track the progress of the treatment on a day-to-day basis. This sense of immediacy and intimacy is heightened by the use of direct speech: as we listen in on the daily conversations between doctor and patient, we too are drawn into the process of discovery. These case notes are not, however, a verbatim record of what passed between Freud and his patient. As discursive psychologist Michael Billig has cautioned, 'even while he was listening to the patient, Freud was selecting some matters to remember and some to forget, always interpreting as he did



so, [...] what remains, even in the process notes, is always a summary, designed to illustrate the story that Freud was in the process of constructing.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the seeming authenticity of its mode of presentation, the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' was thus probably chosen for inclusion in the *Studies on Hysteria* for primarily didactic reasons: as Peter Swales has suggested, 'already before May 1889, perhaps more or less sporadically and spontaneously rather than methodically and with deliberation, Freud had begun experimenting with the cathartic cure in a number of cases.'<sup>8</sup> The reproduction of the original case notes made during the treatment may, therefore, be considered a rhetorical manoeuvre on the part of their author, with the ensuing theoretical discussion and footnoted commentary on the shortcomings of the analysis designed to indicate how far he had since progressed in his understanding and treatment of hysteria. In a footnote added in 1924, Freud comments that he is aware that 'no analyst can read this case history today without a smile of pity':

But it should be borne in mind that this was the first case in which I employed the cathartic procedure to a large extent. For this reason I shall leave the report in its original form. I shall not bring forward any of the criticisms which can so easily be made on it today, nor shall I attempt to fill in any of the numerous gaps in it (167, n.1).

Freud the established founder and historian of psychoanalysis thus looks benevolently down upon the naivety of his younger self, who is, nonetheless, portrayed in the case notes as an ambitious and talented young doctor, anxious to demonstrate his familiarity with all the latest and most innovative treatment techniques. Weaving together a number of narrative temporalities and stances, this first case history serves retroactively to mythologise Freud as the creator of the discipline of psychoanalysis, even as it simultaneously also functions as a literary experiment to find a narrative structure that could convey the new interactive, dialogical 'talking cure' on the written page.

Later in the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud reflects on how his professional life had changed in direction. He 'had not always been a psychotherapist,' but had instead initially specialised in the pathology of the central nervous system:

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Billig, *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.58.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Swales, 'Freud, His Teacher and the Birth of Psychoanalysis' in *Freud: Appraisals and Reappraisals. Contribution to Freud Studies Volume 1*, ed. Paul E Stepansky (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1986), p.33. On the probable timing of the treatment, see also Tögel, "My Bad Diagnostic Error".

Like other neuro-pathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own. The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection. Case histories of this kind are intended to be judged like psychiatric ones; they have, however, one advantage over the latter, namely an intimate connection between the story of the patient's sufferings and the symptoms of his illness—a connection for which we still search in vain in the biographies of the other psychoses (231).

This short passage has solicited considerable debate as to the 'literariness' of Freud's writing. Humanities scholars have honed in on this evocation of the strategies of fiction in order to position Freud as a creative writer with a talent akin to that of such key modernists as Ibsen, Joyce, Proust, Nabokov or Borges. According to Steven Marcus, the Freudian case history 'bears certain suggestive resemblances to a modern experimental novel: its narrative and expository course, for example, is neither linear nor rectilinear; instead its organisation is plastic, involuted and heterogeneous.'<sup>9</sup> Whilst acknowledging the complexity of Freud's narrative practice, other scholars have more recently cautioned against any such purely literary reading of his case histories. The issue of Freud's apparent fictionality is, they argue, largely a product of our own 'post-modern critical imaginary.'<sup>10</sup> According to Dorrit Cohn, the passage cited above cannot be taken as indicative of Freud's conversion to literature: 'he is rather asking *his readers* to convert to a different scientific code, a code in which texts that "read *like* novellas"—are not to be read *as* novellas, but as bona fide scientific contributions.'<sup>11</sup> In reading Freud's early case histories alongside case studies by other medical practitioners working in the fields of neuropathology and psychiatry during the 1880s and 1890s, Dianne Sadoff has also done much to clarify that Freud's case histories were neither novelistic nor fictional, but rather presented his medical audience with the scientific evidence to support his radically new hypotheses. As Sadoff emphasises,

<sup>9</sup> Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History' originally published in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Random House, 1975); reprinted in *On Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism*, eds. Charles Bernheimer & Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1990), p.64. In the same anthology, Neil Hertz's essay 'Dora's Secrets, Freud's Techniques' offers a comparison of the narrative strategies deployed by Freud and Henry James.

<sup>10</sup> Dianne Sadoff, *Sciences of the Flesh: Representing Body and Subject in Psychoanalysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.247.

<sup>11</sup> Dorrit Cohn, 'Freud's Case Histories and the Question of Fictionality' in *Telling Facts: History and Narration in Psychoanalysis*, eds. Joseph H Smith & Humphrey Morris (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.30.

'Freud worked indefatigably to create scientific networks along which his scientific practices could be distributed. [...] He collected data, reproduced observable events, took a wide sample of cases, and tested generalisability against repeated observation of cases. As a researcher, he clinically pictured patients' symptomatologies and portrayed patient characters; as case writer, he represented experimental results in a modernised version of case writing.'<sup>12</sup>

The work of Gillian Beer enables us further to dismantle the suggestion that Freud's case histories can be read as prototypical works of literary modernism. In her consideration of Victorian scientific writing, Beer emphasises that nineteenth-century scientists were deeply immersed in the literary culture of their time, and therefore made frequent use of classical allusion in their writings, or else expressed their ideas through simile and metaphor. 'Victorian scientists were,' she proposes, 'caught between the goals of objectivity and affect, and found ways, through literary reference, to pose necessary contradictions in their work.'<sup>13</sup> Although Beer focuses her discussion on English scientific writing, her arguments seem applicable to any consideration of the work of Freud, who was similarly the product of a nineteenth-century liberal education. Throughout his life, Freud read widely across a number of different disciplines, and in his later writings would often invoke material from the fields of contemporary archaeology and anthropology to illustrate his theories. As he came to formulate a vocabulary for the emergent discipline of psychoanalysis, he drew key ideas and terms, such as catharsis and the Oedipus complex, from the Greek tragedians. At this early stage in his career, however, he makes recourse not to ancient literature, but rather invokes the narrative devices of contemporary fiction. At the same time as Freud launched his scientific investigation into the workings of the human mind, so too were many creative writers pioneering new techniques of narration that rested on a detailed exploration of individual subjective experience. Like other late-nineteenth-century doctors who were similarly concerned to interrogate the nature and structure of human consciousness, Freud thus found himself writing case histories which, in their attentiveness to the interior life of the subject, appeared to resonate with the work of his literary coevals.<sup>14</sup> Yet, even as he acknowledges the possibilities offered by these

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<sup>12</sup> Sadoff, p.247.

<sup>13</sup> Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.197.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Goldstein has uncovered similar reference to the narrative devices of fiction in case studies by French psychiatrists Philippe Tissié and Pierre Janet. In this sense, the Freudian case history should, she emphasises, be considered 'far more a culmination than a sharp rupture or an appearance out of nowhere.' Jan Goldstein, 'The Case History in Historical Perspective: Nanette Leroux and Emmy von N' in *Storms in her Head: Freud and the Construction of Hysteria*, eds. Muriel Dimen & Adrienne Harris (New York: The Other Press, 2001), p.146.



‘imaginative writers’, he is even more careful to position his case histories in relation to an existing tradition of scientific writing.

As Freud makes clear in the passage from the *Studies on Hysteria* quoted above, his case histories were not to be read as fiction, but were rather intended as an innovative contribution to an evolving body of scientific research into the nature of psychological functioning and disorder. In this passage, he further emphasises that his new style of writing was not a matter of personal choice, but had rather been imposed upon him by his object of investigation. Although his experiences of working with hysterical women—many of whom, including Frau Emmy von N, had difficulties in using language—had placed him in a ‘strange’ and unfamiliar relationship to the written word, he downplays the peculiarity of the position he finds himself in by relating his researches back to more established modes of medical knowledge. He thus proceeds not only to differentiate his new method of treatment from his previous, neuropathological attempts to localise and hence to treat pain, but also defines his way of documenting that methodology in relation to the psychiatric case study. In this latter respect, he suggests that his new case histories have one distinct advantage over previous attempts to describe and define mental illness, namely their ability to trace the ‘intimate connection’ between the patient’s symptoms and the ‘story of his sufferings’—i.e. between what a patient suffers physically and what s/he suffers emotionally and over time. As he makes clear, it was only in the process of this attempt to map the connection between psyche and soma that he found himself the unintentional author of an entirely new mode of writing that necessarily involves the narration of individual experience, thus mimicking the novelistic, but also differentiates itself through a continual process of reworking, revision and layering so as better to capture the dynamic and multi-temporal nature of psychic life.

Some ten years later, Freud would again turn to the problem of ‘how to record for publication the history of a treatment of long duration.’<sup>15</sup> In the prefatory remarks to his ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,’ he once again differentiates his mode of presentation from that of the novel or short story. He clearly defines his case history as a ‘contribution to the psycho-psychology of the neuroses,’ which stands in direct opposition to the potential titillation offered by the ‘roman à clef.’<sup>16</sup> Defending his decision to publish such intimate revelations about his patient, Freud comments that he has ‘allowed no name

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<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria’ [1905 (1901)] in *Case Histories I*. *Penguin Freud Library* 8, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.37.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

to stand which could put a non-medical reader upon the scent; and the publication of the case in a purely scientific and technical periodical should, further, afford a guarantee against unauthorised readers of this sort.<sup>17</sup> By unambiguously positioning his case history within a 'purely scientific' publication and by taking preventative measures to deter 'non-medical', and hence 'unauthorised' (female?), readers, Freud emphasises its standing as objective, scientific truth, intelligible only to a select group with some pre-existing knowledge of his methodology: anyone unfamiliar with *The Interpretation of Dreams* will, he remarks, 'find only bewilderment in these pages.'<sup>18</sup> In seeking to redress the gaps in his textual reconstruction of his conversations with Ida Bauer, he now turns not to the rhetorical devices deployed by 'imaginative writers', but suggests that he has rather 'follow[ed] the example of those discoverers whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity.'<sup>19</sup> In this later case history, then, Freud no longer metaphorically positions himself as an unwitting novelist, whose investigations into hysteria have placed him in a 'strange' and uncertain position with regard to both knowledge and language, but rather imagines himself as a 'conscientious archaeologist,' who sifts dispassionately through his patient's store of unconscious memories.

Carol Gilligan has in this respect deduced a fundamental shift between the *Studies on Hysteria* and the 'Dora' case. In the early years of his clinical practice, Freud found himself engaged in increasingly close relations with many of his hysterical female patients. Gilligan proposes that this experience of being drawn into the world of women's conversations—a world of relationships and family secrets—greatly affected their physician: 'it was not possible [for Freud] to take in the inner worlds of hysterical women [...] and to live and function in the same way in the outer world of civilization.'<sup>20</sup> In the period between the publication of the *Studies on Hysteria* and his treatment of Ida Bauer Freud had, however, carried out his own self-analysis, and had as a consequence abandoned the seduction theory of hysteria in order to posit the Oedipus complex as the cornerstone of psychoanalysis, thus inserting the male child's fantasy of an incestuous relationship with the mother into the place of the young woman speaking of an incestuous relationship with the father. By the time Freud came to write up the 'Dora' case, Gilligan suggests, he had thus shifted his

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>20</sup> Carol Gilligan, 'Remembering Iphigenia: Voice, Resonance and Talking Cure' in *The Inner World in the Outer World: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Edward R Shapiro (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.154. Carol Gilligan also raised certain of the issues addressed in this essay in a talk given at the occasion of the launch of John Forrester and Lisa Appignanesi's book *Freud's Women* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London on 12 December 1992, and my discussion is accordingly informed by this earlier talk.

attention away from the voices of hysterical women towards the situation of the male child, and accordingly uses Ida Bauer to try to prove his theory, attempting to interpolate his patient into the narrative framework provided by the Oedipus story.<sup>21</sup>

It is my argument that the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' should be considered a *pre-analytic* encounter, both in Gilligan's sense that Freud was increasingly drawn into and affected by the relationship in a way that was not the case in his later analytic exchanges, but also in the sense that the treatment remained recognisably bound by certain of the terms of the pre-existing medical discourse on hysteria. In contrast to the 'Dora' case, in which Freud seems certain of himself as both analyst and writer, in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', he often veers—awkwardly—between different modes of expression. Here, for example, is his initial description of Frau Emmy:

This lady, when I first saw her, was lying on a sofa with her head resting on a leather cushion. She still looked young and had finely-cut features, full of character. Her face bore a strained and painful expression, her eyelids were drawn together and her eyes cast down; there was a heavy frown on her forehead and the nasio-labial folds were deep. She spoke in a low voice as though with difficulty and her speech was from time to time subject to spastic interruptions amounting to a stammer. She kept her fingers, which exhibited a ceaseless agitation resembling athetosis, tightly clasped together. There were frequent convulsive *tic*-like movements of her face and the muscles of her neck, during which some of them, especially the right sterno-cleido-mastoid, stood out prominently (104).

In its endeavour to set the scene and to construct for the reader a mental picture of his patient, this passage appears to resemble the opening of a literary short story. Yet Freud is at the same time careful to emboss his description with the 'serious stamp of science', drawing upon his training as a neuropathologist in order to isolate and identify the individual facial muscles activated by his patient's nervous tic. Michael Billig has proposed that it is as he switches in this way between descriptions of patients' actions and medical terminology that crucial gaps in Freud's writings begin to appear. In the *Studies on Hysteria*, he suggests, technical terms 'intervene at opportune moments' in order to convey 'a medical precision, which belies elision and vagueness.'<sup>22</sup> Building on Billig's argument, my reading draws attention to those moments at which Freud appears to switch between different rhetorical voices in his narrative of his treatment of Frau Emmy von N. Unlike those who have sought to reclaim Freud's case histories as either science *or* fiction, I rather

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>22</sup> Billig, *Freudian Repression*, p.31.



insist upon the hybridity of his first contribution to the *Studies on Hysteria*, seeing the abrupt shifts between different modes of description in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' as in and of themselves symptomatic of the conflicts involved in the move from a medical, physiologically-based investigation of the visible symptoms of hysteria, to what would become a psychoanalytic mode of treatment, in which not only the relations of corporeality, subjectivity and language, but also the very structure of the doctor/patient scenario, were radically realigned.

### The Treatment I: 'My Therapy Consists in Wiping Away These Pictures'

In his early efforts at treating hysteria, Freud drew upon a diverse array of pre-existing clinical remedies: an article published at approximately the same time as his treatment of Frau Emmy mentions, *inter alia*, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, gymnastics, iron medication and 'improving the blood by arsenic.'<sup>23</sup> The first condition for the successful treatment of a case of hysteria was, however, the 'removal of the patient from his regular conditions.'<sup>24</sup> Freud advocated that the influence of the patient's family should be replaced by a period 'under strict medical supervision' in a sanatorium, during which the 'avoidance of all emotional excitement' might be combined with the 'application of every kind of strengthening remedy.'<sup>25</sup> Following the principles of Silas Weir Mitchell's rest cure (as set out in the 1879 publication *Fat and Blood, and How to Make Them*, which Freud had enthusiastically reviewed in 1887), he recommended four to eight weeks' bed rest, to be supplemented with massage, faradisation and hydrotherapy.<sup>26</sup> Such a 'happy combination of *traitement moral* with an improvement in the patient's nutritional state' could, he suggested, produce recoveries that were 'often magical and permanent.'<sup>27</sup> In accordance with the assumptions laid out in this 1888 article, in which 'isolation [...] and the physician's influence remained the principal agents,'<sup>28</sup> Freud's first act upon assuming control of Frau Emmy's treatment was to separate his patient from her daughters and to isolate her within a nursing home, where he visited her every day (unlike Weir Mitchell's

<sup>23</sup> Freud, 'Hysteria' [1888], *SE* 1, p.54.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, pp.54-55.

<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Poirier, 'The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctors and Patients,' *Women's Studies* 10 (1983), pp.15-40 offers an extended discussion of Weir Mitchell's methodology. As Dianne Sadoff has noted, such treatments 'operated on the twin principles of functionalism and productivity: all refashioned sick into healthy individuals able to cope with the emotional stresses of late nineteenth-century work and family life' (*Sciences of the Flesh*, p.122). An impassioned critique of the devastating effects of the rest cure on an intelligent and independent feminine subject is, however, to be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 novella *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, 'Hysteria,' p.55.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.55.

patients, however, Frau Emmy ‘was not forbidden to see her children, to read or to deal with her correspondence.’) In addition to prescribing warm baths and twice daily massages, Freud also took the opportunity to experiment with ‘Breuer’s technique of investigation under hypnosis’ (103).

When treating Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O), Breuer had discovered that his patient’s symptoms ‘disappeared as soon as the event which had given rise to them was reproduced in her hypnosis’ (89). As Breuer himself emphasised, Anna O’s hypnoses were not induced by her doctor, but were rather ‘spontaneous auto-hypnoses on the part of the patient, and came as a great surprise to the observer’ (58).<sup>29</sup> Yet, in both the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ and, still later, in his ‘Autobiographical Study’, Freud re-writes the story of Breuer’s original treatment, recounting how Breuer ‘put the patient into deep hypnosis and made her tell him each time what it was that was oppressing her mind.’<sup>30</sup> Shifting attention away from the role of the patient in directing the cure, Freud instead lays emphasis upon the authority of the doctor, thus bringing Breuer’s treatment of Anna O back into line with what we shall see to be his own self-consciously combative and authoritarian use of hypnosis in his early clinical practice.

In his theoretical discussion of the case, Freud describes the technique he adopted in his treatment of Frau Emmy in more detail:

As is the usual practice in hypnotic psychotherapy, I fought against the patient’s pathological ideas by means of assurances and prohibitions, and by putting forward opposing ideas of every sort. But I did not content myself with this. I investigated the genesis of the individual symptoms so as to be able to combat the premises on which the pathological ideas were erected. In the course of such an analysis it habitually happened that the patient gave verbal utterance with the most violent agitation to matters whose accompanying affect had hitherto only found outlet as an expression of emotion. I cannot say how much of the therapeutic success each time was due

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<sup>29</sup> In his monumental study of the history and evolution of dynamic psychiatry, Henri Ellenberger has suggested that the case history of ‘Anna O’ should in this respect be viewed as analogous to cases of magnetic treatment dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which patients dictated to their physicians the therapeutic devices to be used and prophesied the moment at which they would be cured. By the 1880s, he argues, ‘when the authoritarian use of hypnosis had supplanted the former bargaining therapy, a story such as that of Anna O could no longer be understood.’

Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Penguin Press, 1970), p.484.

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘An Autobiographical Study’ [1925 (1924)] in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*. Penguin Freud Library 15, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986, reprinted 1993), p.203.

For an astute analysis of Freud’s retrospective role in constructing the mythology that surrounds Breuer’s treatment of Anna O, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Remembering Anna O: A Century of Mystification* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996).

to my suggesting the symptom away *in statu nascendi* and how much to my resolving the affect by abreaction (163).

Freud thus firstly used hypnosis as an instrument of suggestion, proposing to Frau Emmy that ‘she should sleep well, that all her symptoms should get better’ (106) and that her gastric pains should simply disappear. Secondly, he attempted to determine the cause of her individual symptoms so as to ‘combat the premises on which the pathological ideas were erected.’ He then tried to erase those ideas through the further use of hypnotic suggestion: ‘my therapy consists in wiping away these pictures, so that she is no longer able to see them before her’ (109). In the early stages of the treatment, he accordingly uncovered and ‘eliminated’ phobias relating to animals and to asylums for the insane, and memories relating to the death of her mother and to periods when Frau Emmy had nursed her sick daughter and morphine-addicted brother. The event that had ‘produced the most long lasting effect on her and came up most often in her memory’ was, however, the death of her husband shortly after the birth of the couple’s second daughter. Confronted by these recollections, Freud simply re-wrote Frau Emmy’s past, ‘by making it impossible for her to see anything of these melancholy things again, not only by wiping out her memories of them in their *plastic* form but by removing her whole recollection of them, as though they had never been present in her mind’ (117).

Freud’s treatment of Frau Emmy would, therefore, seem to have little in common with either Anna O’s self-hypnoses or the principles of the cathartic cure as set out in the jointly-authored ‘Preliminary Communication’ to the *Studies on Hysteria*.<sup>31</sup> In that essay, Breuer and Freud expanded upon their now-famous dictum that, ‘*hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*’ (58, emphasis in original). These reminiscences, they proposed, ‘correspond to traumas that have not been sufficiently abreacted’ (60). Since hysterical symptoms were thus held to have their origins in a traumatic event that had not been met with a corresponding ‘discharge of affect,’ the so-called ‘cathartic procedure’ consisted of the evocation and subsequent ‘abreaction’ of this unresolved affect. Breuer and Freud

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<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Macmillan has in this respect argued that Freud’s use of hypnotic suggestion to alter his patient’s traumatic memories in fact owed very little to Breuer, proposing instead the influence of Pierre Janet and Joseph Delboeuf upon Freud’s treatment of Frau Emmy. In their treatment of recurrent hysterical hallucinations, both Delboeuf and Janet had removed hysterical symptoms by modifying or effacing the mental images associated with their onset. Macmillan points out that Freud’s description of his treatment method appears to borrow from Janet in its use of terms such as ‘effacing’ or ‘wiping out’ to describe the alteration brought about in the pathogenic memories, while the influence of Delboeuf can be deduced through the use of the word ‘combat’ to describe the attack on the pathogenic memory, and in the notion that hypnotic suggestion was to be directed towards the birth of symptom *in statu nascendi*. M B Macmillan, ‘Delboeuf and Janet as Influences in Freud’s Treatment of Frau Emmy von N,’ *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 15 (1979), pp.299-309.



described how, ‘each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked [...] and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail’ (57, emphasis in original). Yet it was not enough simply to remember and describe this traumatic scene, since ‘recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result’ (57). For recollection to be effective, the recall of the originary memory had to be accompanied by the revival of the emotional affect that was attached to it. ‘The psychological process which originally took place must be repeated as vividly as possible,’ Breuer and Freud emphasised, ‘it must be brought back to its *status nascendi* and then given verbal utterance’ (57).

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen has proposed that the *Studies on Hysteria* are in this respect to be characterised by a ‘constant ambiguity’ between the re-experiencing of a traumatic event under hypnosis and the recollection of that event in a state of consciousness.<sup>32</sup> He argues that the repetition *in statu nascendi* recommended by Breuer and Freud in their ‘Preliminary Communication’ in fact entails re-living an event with all the intensity of the first time—i.e. repeating it in the present—and is thus to be differentiated from remembering—i.e. representing a past event as past. He further emphasises that this re-enactment of a traumatic event under hypnosis occurs ‘in a state of absence, unconsciousness, forgetfulness of self.’<sup>33</sup> For Borch-Jacobsen, the cathartic cure thus operates not at the level of *diegesis*, in which the speaker recounts events, but that of *mimesis*, in which the speaker enacts a role: ‘Freud’s and Breuer’s hysterics remembered nothing, had nothing to tell,’ he contends, ‘they were playing, living, and acting roles.’<sup>34</sup> Borch-Jacobsen, an outspoken critic of psychoanalysis, contentiously claims that the mimetic paradigm continued to serve as a structuring principle of psychoanalysis long after Freud had abandoned the use of hypnotic suggestion: ‘the phenomenon of transference is,’ he proposes, ‘nothing other than the re-emergence, within analysis, of the characteristic relationship (“rapport”) of hypnosis.’<sup>35</sup> While I do not necessarily concur with Borch-Jacobsen on this latter point, I do want to take up his idea of an oscillation between *mimesis* and *diegesis*—reliving and remembering—and to think more particularly about how this is played out in the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N.’

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<sup>32</sup> Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis and Affect*, trans. Douglas Brick et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.53.

In his discussion of the particular therapeutic technique he adopted in his treatment of Frau Emmy, Freud emphasises that the third element of the treatment—abreaction—‘habitually’ took place ‘in the course’ of his attempts to use his hypnotic influence to wipe away his patient’s memories. As Malcolm Macmillan has emphasised, abreaction was, therefore, ‘only a secondary and unexpected consequence of the suggestion method.’<sup>36</sup> The process was first observed when Freud placed Frau Emmy under hypnosis in an attempt to ‘disperse’ her animal hallucinations. In her hypnotic state, she recounted a series of childhood memories:

At the end of each separate story she twitched all over and took on a look of fear and horror. At the end of the last one she opened her mouth wide and panted for breath. The words in which she described the terrifying subject-matter of her experience were pronounced with difficulty and between gasps. Afterwards her features became peaceful (108).

Abreaction is thus viewed as a two-fold process, whereby the patient ‘gave verbal utterance *with the most violent agitation* to matters whose accompanying affect had hitherto found outlet only as an expression of emotion’ (163, my emphasis). In their ‘Preliminary Communication,’ Breuer and Freud would also emphasise that speech was not the only—nor even the most effective—means through which emotional affect could find release. The fading of a memory or the waning of its affect was further dependent upon ‘*whether there has been an energetic reaction to the event that provokes an affect*’ (58, emphasis in original). This ‘energetic reaction’ could, they suggested, encompass a ‘whole class of voluntary and involuntary reflexes—from tears to acts of revenge’ (58). While their account has generally been taken to privilege verbal narration as a means to discharging affect, in the ‘Preliminary Communication,’ Freud and Breuer in fact emphasise that physical, reflex reactions were most effective in producing an ‘adequate’ reaction to a traumatic event: ‘language serves as a substitute for action,’ they proposed, ‘by its help an affect can be “abreacted” almost as effectively’ (59). In the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’, affect appears not only to be delivered into language, but is also discharged into bodily movement: as Frau Emmy relives her childhood memories, her entire body twitches, she pants for breath (108), grinds her teeth and rubs her hands together (138). Abreaction is deemed to have taken place once these bodily movements ceased and her features relaxed. Freud’s therapeutic procedure at this point thus worked not with the verbal material provided by his patient but, like that of his contemporaries at the Salpêtrière, remained reliant upon close observation of his

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<sup>36</sup> Macmillan, p.203.

patient's facial expressions and the convulsions of her body. Although he might appear to provide Frau Emmy with an opportunity to verbalise her traumatic memory-traces and so to discharge their accompanying affect in accordance with the stated principles of the 'cathartic cure', Freud in fact proceeds simply to 'wipe away' those memories through the use of hypnotic suggestion.

## Doctor/Patient I

The case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' would, therefore, seem on first reading to present an image of the doctor/patient relationship that centres upon the contrast between the authoritarian figure of the male doctor and the supine body of the hypnotised hysteric, a trope which, as I emphasised in my introductory chapter, also informed the proliferation of images produced under the auspices of Charcot at the Salpêtrière—from Bourneville's pseudo-scientific line drawings depicting the masterful poses to be adopted by the practitioner of hypnosis (**Figure 1.1**) to Brouillet's high art depiction of *Une Leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* (see **Figure 0.10** above)—and which was further popularised by George du Maurier's fictionalised account of the encounter between artist's model Trilby and sinister mesmerist Svengali in his 1894 novel *Trilby*. At once rehearsing some of the habits of Charcot, *le visuel*—the observer of the hysteric's body—in the early stages of his treatment of Frau Emmy von N, Freud also enacts, like Svengali, a form of mastery over the very subjectivity of his patient, eliminating from her own subjective archive, as it were, fundamental elements of her own life narrative.

In an article written the year after his treatment of Frau Emmy, Freud would suggest that, 'hypnosis endows the physician with an authority such as was probably never possessed by the priest or the medical man, since it concentrates the subject's whole interest upon the physician.'<sup>37</sup> The hypnotised subject's attitude towards her physician, on the other hand, is described as one of child-like obedience and eroticised devotion: 'outside hypnosis and in real life, credulity such as the subject has in relation to his hypnotist is shown only by a child towards his beloved parents, [...] an attitude of similar subjection on the part of one person towards another has only one parallel, [...] namely in certain love-relationships where there is extreme devotion.'<sup>38</sup> In keeping with the pattern of authority relations described in this text, within the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', Freud portrays himself as an autocratic figure who, like the doctor in Bourneville's illustration, has

<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Psychical (or Mental) Treatment,' *SE* 7, p.298.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.295.



only to hold up a finger in order to induce a hypnotic trance in his patient. Under hypnosis, Frau Emmy is rendered a silenced figure of passive femininity. She is dehumanised—bestialised even, as she twitches and pants for breath. Far from suffering from reminiscences, Frau Emmy, it seems more accurate to say, is left afflicted by amnesia: her experiences are quite literally ‘wiped away’, to the extent that, when Freud saw her eighteen months later, she complained that ‘there were a number of important moments in her life of which she had only the vaguest memory’ (117, n.1).



Figure 1.1

Désiré Magloire Bourneville, Schema of Hypnotic Passes

In an endeavour to account for ‘the obliqueness of representations whose rhetoric aims at erasing the woman’s experiences, yet which cannot entirely repress those experiences,’ cultural analyst Mieke Bal advocates a particular mode of feminist reading which she names ‘hysterical’. Conjoining ‘visuality, imagination and identification’, this ‘hysterical’ hermeneutic reads for the detail of a literary or visual text, rather than its overall proposition.<sup>39</sup> In her discussion of the ‘specimen dream’ of Irma’s injection, Bal suggests that this mode of reading might enable us to attend to the experiences of his hysterical female patient, rather than seeing events through the eyes of her doctor. An ‘hysterical’ re-reading of the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ might, therefore, focus on a rather different image of the encounter between doctor and patient to that promoted by Freud’s account of the treatment: an image of a young doctor struggling to make a name for

<sup>39</sup> Mieke Bal, *Reading ‘Rembrandt’: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.63.

himself as a specialist in the treatment of nervous disorders, who places himself at the beck and call of a wealthy, educated, older woman.

As John Forrester has emphasised, ‘the great discoveries of hypnotism, those of Charcot and Bernheim, were made in the wards and lecture theatres of large hospitals for the poor. Bringing hypnotism home to a private medical practice in Vienna was to transplant it from the theatrical atmosphere of Charcot’s weekly display of the arts of nosology and clinical description [...] to a hushed, heavily carpeted private world of bourgeois front rooms and bedrooms.’<sup>40</sup> This shift from public hospital to private practice also resulted in a crucial shift in the class dynamics that had hitherto informed the relations between male medical professionals and hysterical female patients. As Freud himself acknowledged, much of Bernheim’s success lay in the ““suggestive atmosphere”” which pervaded his clinic at Nancy and to ‘the milieu and to the mood of the patients—things which I cannot always reproduce for the subjects of my experiments.’<sup>41</sup> At Bernheim’s clinic, ‘the ailments of each individual are discussed before a large crowd,’ a technique which, Freud emphasised, would be most unsuitable for his own ‘patients of a higher social class.’<sup>42</sup> Unlike his medical predecessors, who had carried out large-scale experiments in hypnotic suggestion on their working-class charges, Freud formed close and sustained relationships with his haute bourgeois patients. In certain instances, these patients were, moreover, not just his social equals, but his superiors. Peter Swales points out that, just three years after setting up in private practice, Freud had in treatment two of the richest women in Europe, in the persons of Fanny Moser and Anna von Lieben. Swales has found evidence that he visited Anna von Lieben (Frau Cäcilie M) at her home twice a day, every day for three years.<sup>43</sup> During his treatment of Fanny Moser, he visited her too on a twice daily basis and, at her request, subsequently made a trip to visit her on her estate near Zurich. His report of the treatment consistently emphasises his patient’s ‘moral seriousness’, her ‘intelligence and energy’, her ‘high degree of education and love of truth’, as well as her ‘humility of mind’ (165). Freud’s relationship with Fanny Moser is, throughout the case history, thus presented not only at the level of a professional curiosity about her symptoms, but also appears to have entailed a rather more personal engagement with his patient.

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<sup>40</sup> John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.33.

<sup>41</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Review of August Forel’s “Hypnotism”’ [1889], *SE* 1, p.100.

<sup>42</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Hypnosis’ [1891], *SE* 1, p.108.

<sup>43</sup> See Swales, ‘Freud, His Teacher and the Birth of Psychoanalysis.’

In his determination to restore this wealthy and influential woman to health, Freud borrowed freely from a number of conventional medical treatments. In addition to ‘warm baths, massage twice a day and hypnotic suggestion’ (107), he also prescribed a ‘feeding up’ regimen and, having failed to banish his patient’s physical symptoms through hypnotic suggestion, resorted to applying a ‘faradic brush to her anaesthetic leg’ (130). Although this poking and prodding could bear traces of the often brutal procedures meted out by his medical forebears<sup>44</sup>—as can be seen in his decision to continue with ‘systematic kneading and faradisation of sensitive muscles, regardless of the resulting pain’ (205)—Freud’s physical contact with his early female patients could also serve to underscore the intimacy of his engagement with them: an entry in the unpublished diary of Sándor Ferenczi indicates that Freud must have described to Ferenczi how, during his early years as an analyst, ‘he had even lain on the floor, sometimes for hours at a time, accompanying a patient through hysterical crises.’<sup>45</sup>

The story of Freud’s journey towards psychoanalysis is also a story of his gradual turning away from conventional medical therapies. Freud did not, however, move seamlessly to sit silently behind his patients.<sup>46</sup> Before he assumed his seat behind the analytic couch, he first lay down on the floor with these women in a bid to coax them through their worst moments of distress, or else made polite conversation with them whilst endeavouring to soothe their physical pain away through massage. It is in such moments of physical intimacy that the dynamics of the doctor/patient relationship start to shift, and Freud begins to learn for himself how to listen. In order to begin to trace the gradual shift in the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ from a therapeutic procedure based upon the mimetic repetition and hypnotic elimination of memory towards a therapy based upon the

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<sup>44</sup> On the brutal and distressing attitude of the nineteenth-century medical profession towards hysterical women, see Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1870-1980* (London: Virago, 1987) and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1985). A detailed analysis of the technique of faradisation is provided by Hannah S Decker in ‘Freud’s “Dora” Case in Perspective: The Medical Treatment of Hysteria in Austria at the Turn of the Century’ in *Freud and the History of Psychoanalysis*, eds. Toby Gelfand & John Kerr (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Cited by Swales, p.50.

<sup>46</sup> As the following excerpt makes clear, Freud’s therapeutic technique had by 1904 come to resemble what we would today recognise as psychoanalysis:

‘At the present time he [the article is written in the third person] treats his patients as follows. Without exerting any other kind of influence, he invites them to lie down in a comfortable attitude on a sofa, while he himself sits on a chair behind them outside their field of vision. He does not even ask them to close their eyes, and avoids touching them in any way, as well as any other procedure which might be reminiscent of hypnosis. The session thus proceeds like a conversation between two people equally awake, but one of whom is spared every muscular exertion and every distracting sensory impression which might divert his attention from his own mental activity.’

Sigmund Freud, ‘Freud’s Psycho-Analytic Procedure’ (1904 [1903]), *SE* 7, p.250.



patient's conscious recollection and narration of past events to someone who listens, it seems necessary to evoke a visual image of a wealthy, older woman talking to her younger doctor, while he kneads, strokes and manipulates her body. During his daily massaging of Frau Emmy, Freud began to notice that her conversation was 'not so aimless as would appear,' but instead:

often leads on, in quite an unexpected way, to pathogenic reminiscences of which she unburdens herself without being asked to. It is as though she had adopted my procedure and was making use of our conversation, apparently unconstrained and guided by chance, as a supplement to her hypnosis (112).

It is in this way that Fanny Moser demonstrates to Freud for the first time the fundamental psychoanalytic technique of free association. Functioning as a relational space in a way in which the hypnoses could not, the daily massages appear to have provided her with an opportunity to begin to collaborate in the treatment as a speaking subject, rather than as a mute and hypnotised object of investigation.

### **The Treatment II: 'I Cannot Evade Listening to Her Stories'**

Although Freud had initially been at pains to deny his patient any participatory role within the therapy, remarking that, 'she never made any comment to me about the hypnosis or asked me a single question about it' (106, n.1), as Frau Emmy began to intervene more actively in the treatment, its rhythm began to shift. In an earlier hypnosis, she had recounted a number of stories relating to the mistreatment of patients in mental asylums. Freud broke into this flow of memories in order to 'correct her ideas,' assuring her that she would henceforth 'be able to hear about institutions of this kind without referring them back to herself' (111). Three days later, however, she produced a number of new anxieties relating to the treatment of the insane: 'I now saw that I had gained nothing from this interruption and I cannot evade listening to her stories in every detail to the very end' (118). In the course of his attempts to 'wipe away' his patient's memories, Freud had thus found himself unwittingly drawn into a particular kind of attentive and intensive listening—he feels compelled to take on board 'every detail', and to remain with her narrative 'to the very end'. Yet he continued, nonetheless, to try to dictate the pace of the treatment, demanding that Frau Emmy tell him 'why she had gastric pains and what they came from' (119). She, however, responded 'in a definitely grumbling tone that I was not to keep on asking her where this and that came from, but to let her tell me what she had to say. I fell in with this' (120).

As Freud began to ‘fall in’ with Frau Emmy’s associative patterns of recall and retelling, so too did he begin to fall away from his position of purely medical authority. While it demonstrates an increasing willingness to listen to and to learn from the patient, this first case history is also marked by a certain anxiety as to where that listening might take the doctor: there are moments when Freud feels himself to be in danger of becoming ‘lost in an unnecessary maze of sign-reading’ (154, n.1). Even as he began under Frau Emmy’s guidance to take his first hesitant steps towards allowing and then using free association, Freud thus continued to cling to his hypnotic authority, persisting in his attempts to suggest away her symptoms. His faith in the power of hypnotic suggestion was indeed such that he rapidly came to feel that the treatment had reached an impasse: ‘since I did not take the initiative in looking for symptoms and their basis, but waited for something to come up in the patient or for her to tell me some thought that was causing her anxiety, her hypnoses soon ceased to produce material’ (135). Although Freud was slowly learning to listen, he was thus not yet able to enter into that state of ‘evenly suspended attention’<sup>47</sup> that would enable him to attend to his patient’s—or indeed his own—unconscious wishes and phantasies, but rather appeared frustrated by the apparent lack of linear progress in the treatment. In tracking the day-to-day shifts in this first stage of the treatment, we are indeed left with a sense of a discovery of which Freud himself had not yet fully grasped the significance, but whose import he would only gradually and belatedly realise: at the time of the treatment itself, he appeared rather more captivated by the apparent success of his attempts to cure Frau Emmy of her somatic symptoms through the use of hypnotic suggestion: ‘my patient’s condition improved so rapidly, that she soon assured me she had not felt so well since her husband’s death’ (135). After a period of some seven weeks, he accordingly discharged her from the nursing home and gave her permission to return to her home on the Baltic.

About seven months later, Breuer reported that Frau Emmy had once again fallen ill, following a chain of events that imparts much about her relationship with the medical profession in general, and Freud in particular. During their stay in Vienna, her elder daughter had developed hysterical symptoms that were remarkably similar to those of her

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<sup>47</sup> In an encyclopaedia article of 1923, Freud described this process of analytic listening in more detail: ‘Experience soon showed that the attitude which the analytic physician could most advantageously adopt was to surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity, in a state of evenly suspended attention, to avoid so far as possible reflection and the construction of conscious expectations, not to try to fix anything he heard particularly in his memory, and by these means catch the drift of the patient’s unconscious with his own unconscious.’  
Sigmund Freud, ‘Two Encyclopaedia Articles’ (1923), *SE* 18

mother. Freud had at that point referred the daughter to the gynaecologist Dr N, who had treated her for a ‘retroverted uterus’ (Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester suggest that this was probably Rudolf Chrobak, who served as Professor of Gynaecology at the University of Vienna from 1880 to 1908).<sup>48</sup> This condition had recurred once they had returned to their home on the Baltic, and Frau Emmy’s daughter had developed a ‘severe nervous illness’ following a further course of treatment by a local doctor. ‘Her mother, who had handed the girl over to the doctors with her usual mixture of docility and mistrust, was overcome with the most violent self-reproaches after the unfortunate outcome of the treatment’ (136). The case notes report that Frau Emmy also held Freud and Dr N responsible for her daughter’s illness, and Freud concluded that her own subsequent relapse was an ‘act of will,’ designed to undo the effects of their earlier work together. Although Breuer then intervened to convince Frau Emmy that Freud was not responsible for her daughter’s illness, she refused nonetheless to resume her treatment with him. On Breuer’s advice, she went to a sanatorium in North Germany for treatment, however this proved to be highly unsuccessful: ‘from the very first she seemed to have been at cross-purposes with the doctor. She went downhill, lost sleep and appetite, and only recovered after a woman friend of hers who visited her in the sanatorium secretly abducted her and looked after in her house’ (137). Exactly a year after she had first commenced treatment with Freud, Frau Emmy returned to Vienna and consulted him once more.

Freud was pleased to note that ‘much of what [he] had accomplished the year before was still maintained’ (137). Frau Emmy was, however, now suffering from states of confusion, sleeplessness, bouts of crying, stammering and clacking. Clearly still traumatised by the treatment she had received at the sanatorium, when Freud first tried to hypnotise her, ‘she clenched her fists and exclaimed: “I won’t be given any antipyrin injections; I would rather have my pains! I don’t like Dr R; he is anti-pathetic to me”’ (137). In contrast to her evident mistrust of Dr R, her faith in Freud was such that ‘she calmed down as soon as I brought her back to the current situation,’ and he was, therefore, able to put her under hypnosis once more. Where he had, in the first stage of the treatment, begun—slowly and seemingly in spite of himself—to ‘fall in’ with Frau Emmy’s narrative, he now appeared to feel the need to retreat from that more empathetic engagement with his female patient and to reassert his hypnotic authority over her. The case notes record that he accordingly ‘ventured upon a practical joke’ in one of his suggestions to Frau Emmy, assuring her that her stay in the sanatorium would become such a remote memory that she

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<sup>48</sup> Appignanesi & Forrester, *Freud’s Women*, p.95.



would not even be able to recall its name properly. At Breuer's insistence, Freud subsequently 'relieved her of this compulsive paramnesia,' and the treatment resumed its former rhythm: Freud continued to attempt to erase his patient's memories through the use of hypnotic suggestion; Frau Emmy continued to return to events he assumed to have wiped from her mind.

Perhaps even more revealing of Freud's attitude towards his early female patients than this practical joke is, however, an event which the case notes 'describe in detail, since it throws the strongest light on the patient's character and the manner in which her states came about' (140). Registering both Freud's autocratic approach and Frau Emmy's determined regeneration of her memories in the face of his systematic attempt to eradicate them from her mind, the incident seems emblematic of the tensions in the relationship between doctor and patient that subtend this first case history. Towards the end of Frau Emmy's stay in Vienna, Freud called on his patient, only to find her in the act of throwing part of her lunch out of the window. Upon further questioning, he discovered that she ate very little and would only drink thick liquids such as milk, coffee or cocoa, since she claimed that drinking water ruined her digestion. Freud accordingly 'thought it worth while to aim at feeding her up a little,' and exercised his authority over his patient by ordering her to eat more and to drink water: "I'll do it because you ask me to," she said, "but I can tell you in advance that it will turn out badly" (140). The following day, the nurse reported that, in accordance with her physician's orders, Frau Emmy had eaten a full meal and drunk a glass of water, however she then complained to Freud that she had violent gastric pains, and that she would need to starve herself for a full week to recover. In a forceful demonstration of the shortcomings of Freud's therapeutic technique, she refused to let him put her under hypnosis for the first time in the treatment: 'the furious look she cast at me convinced me that she was in open rebellion and that the situation was very grave' (141). Although Freud is at pains to reassure the reader that, 'this little scene was in very sharp contrast to our normal relations, which were most friendly,' he nonetheless rose to Frau Emmy's direct challenge to his medical authority with an ultimatum of his own, informing her that:

I would give her twenty-four hours to think things over and to accept the view that her gastric pains came only from her fear. At the end of the time I would ask her whether she was still of the opinion that her digestion could be ruined for a week by drinking a glass of mineral water and eating a modest meal; if she said yes, I would ask her to leave (141).

Upon his return, Freud found his patient ‘docile and submissive’. With this pre-condition of hypnotic rapport apparently re-established, he asked her about the origin of her gastric pains: “‘I think that they come from my anxiety,’” Frau Emmy replied, “‘but only because you say so’” (141). Freud was, however, beginning to realise that ‘a promise like this, based only on her obedience to me, never met with any success’ (160), and consequently decided that the origins of her anorexia warranted further investigation. Under hypnosis, Frau Emmy proceeded to reveal to Freud a series of experiences of food-related disgust—of being forced as a child to sit at the dinner table until she had eaten a plate of cold, fatty meat; of her consumptive brother spitting across her plate into a spittoon; and of contracting a gastric catarrh from drinking dirty water—which he then ‘naturally’ proceeded to erase from her mind through hypnotic suggestion.

### **‘It is impossible to eat with disgust and pleasure at the same time’**

Frau Emmy’s difficulties in eating and her associated feelings of disgust call to mind another ‘poor eater’ who similarly ‘confessed to some disinclination for food.’<sup>49</sup> When Herr K lures the fourteen-year-old Dora to his office and subjects her to a traumatising sexual assault, Freud does not redress his patient’s shock and distress at this attempted violation, but rather suggests that, ‘this was surely just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never before been approached.’<sup>50</sup> As Herr K presses himself against her, however, Dora feels neither pleasure nor excitement, but instead experiences a ‘violent feeling of disgust.’ In analysing how this attempted seduction left its traces on Dora’s body, Freud writes of a ‘reversal of affect’ coupled with a ‘displacement of sensation’—instead of the pleasurable, genital sensation which, according to Freud at least, ‘would certainly have been felt by a healthy girl in such circumstances,’ Dora was rather ‘overcome by the unpleasurable feeling which is proper to the tract of mucous membrane at the entrance to the alimentary canal—that is by disgust.’<sup>51</sup>

In both the case histories of ‘Dora’ and ‘Frau Emmy von N’, Freud thus confronts the question as to how the hysteric’s feelings of disgust imprint themselves upon her body. In the ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,’ he interprets Dora’s disgust as a ‘symptom of repression in the erotogenic oral zone, which [...] had been over-indulged in Dora’s infancy by the habit of sensual sucking.’<sup>52</sup> As Monique David-Ménard has

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<sup>49</sup> Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,’ *PFL* 8, p.60.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

emphasised, this discovery of an infantile sexuality persisting in the symptom had required Freud to change direction in his clinical definition of hysteria. Where his attention in the *Studies on Hysteria* had been clearly focussed on the hysterical conversion symptom, in the 'Dora' case, his point of departure was no longer conversion, but rather 'the close and specific relationship that symptom formation maintains with the history of the erotogenic zones.'<sup>53</sup>

Freud would explore this relationship further in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, published in the same year as the 'Dora' case history. In the *Three Essays*, he emphasises that infantile sexuality is auto-erotic, in that the sexual instinct is not directed towards other people, but rather obtains gratification from parts of the child's own body. The satisfaction of these erotogenic zones is, he suggests, 'associated in the first instance with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to one of the functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later.'<sup>54</sup> The example he cites is that of the infant's early experiences at the mother's breast. While sucking at the breast initially satisfies a biological need for sustenance, it also provides a surplus of pleasurable sensations, which the baby subsequently endeavours to repeat. In this way, sucking (of the thumb or some other part of the body) becomes a pleasurable activity in and of itself. Although the example of sucking demonstrates that there are certain 'pre-destined' erotogenic zones (the oral cavity and the lips), Freud also maintains that, 'any other part of the skin or mucous membrane can take over the functions of an erotogenic zone.'<sup>55</sup>

Freud's work on the question of infantile sexuality had thus led him beyond any purely physiological understanding of the body towards the realisation that any bodily surface, whether internal or external, can become libidinally cathected. 'A precisely analogous tendency to displacement is,' he suggests, 'also found in the symptomatology of hysteria':

In that neurosis repression affects most of all the actual genital zones and these transmit their susceptibility to stimulation to other erotogenic zones (normally neglected in adult life), which then behave exactly like genitals. But besides this, precisely as in the case of sucking, any other part of the body can acquire the same susceptibility to stimulation as is possessed by the genitals and can

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<sup>53</sup> Monique David-Ménard, *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan: Body and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.76.

<sup>54</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905] in *On Sexuality*. *Penguin Freud Library* 7, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.98.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.100.

become an erotogenic zone. Erotogenic and hysterogenic zones show the same characteristics.<sup>56</sup>

This passage becomes a little clearer when related back to the ‘Dora’ case. Following Herr K’s attempt at seduction, Dora not only experienced a lingering distaste for food, but also confided to Freud that she could still feel the pressure of her seducer’s embrace upon her upper body. Freud surmises, however, that Dora had not merely felt Herr K’s kiss upon her lips, but had also been conscious of his erect penis pressing against her lower body: ‘the pressure of the erect member probably led to an analogous change in the corresponding female organ, the clitoris; and the excitation of this second erotogenic zone was referred by a process of displacement to the simultaneous pressure against the thorax and became fixed there.’<sup>57</sup> The perception of (both her own and Herr K’s) adult, genital sexuality is, in other words, intolerable to Dora, and so is instead displaced upwards into a sensation of pressure against her throat. Freud argues that this hysterical displacement of sensation from the genital to the oral erotogenic zone is further bound up with Dora’s childhood habit of sucking her thumb. In Monique David-Ménard’s reading, this thumb sucking remains for Dora a ‘scene of unsurpassable *jouissance* that catches or snags everything new, or different, that might come up in the order of *jouissance*.’<sup>58</sup> Her mouth and throat accordingly become the site of Dora’s subsequent attempts to articulate questions of sexuality and sexual difference, ‘yet precisely because everything goes by way of her mouth, this articulation seems to be impossible.’<sup>59</sup> For David-Ménard, Herr K’s attempted seduction of Dora marks, therefore, the intrusion of phallic sexual difference into a privileged scenario of oral *jouissance*, transforming it into disgust. ‘There is,’ she comments, ‘something about the body of the other that the hysteric cannot “take”, cannot swallow, inhale or touch, according to the circumstances; but this refusal is played out in the erotogenic order.’<sup>60</sup>

By the time that Freud came to write up the ‘Dora’ case in the early 1900s, his investigations into infantile sexuality had thus led him radically to reconceptualise the nature of the bodily order involved in hysteria. To revisit the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ in the light of that of ‘Dora’ is, nonetheless, to raise the question as to whether Frau Emmy’s disgust may be considered an hysterogenic displacement of sexuality.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,’ *PFL* 8, p.61.

<sup>58</sup> David-Ménard, p.91.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.71.



At the time of his treatment of Frau Emmy, Freud was only just beginning to detach the hysterical symptom from its anatomical moorings. In his theoretical discussion of Frau Emmy's difficulties in eating, Freud refers the reader back to a paper based upon the research he had undertaken at the Salpêtrière under the supervision of Charcot. In this comparative study of organic and hysterical motor paralyses, initially drafted in May 1888 but eventually published in 1893, Freud would emphasise that, '*in its paralyses and other manifestations hysteria behaves as though anatomy did not exist or as though it had no knowledge of it.*'<sup>61</sup> Unlike organic motor paralyses, which were, he suggested, 'dominated by the facts of anatomy—the construction of the nervous system and the distribution of the vessels':

Hysteria is ignorant of the distribution of the nerves, and that is why it does not simulate periphéro-spinal or projection paralyses. It has no knowledge of the optic chiasma, and consequently does not produce hemi-anopsia. It takes the organs in the ordinary, popular sense of the names they bear: the leg is the leg as far up as its insertion into the hip, the arm is the upper arm as it is visible under the clothing.<sup>62</sup>

Freud's laboratory-based experiment to compare and contrast the effects of organic and hysterical motor paralyses on the structure of the central nervous system had thus led him to a somewhat unexpected conclusion: the visible symptoms of hysteria were not subject to physiological classification. Organs and limbs instead appeared to be transformed according to a symbolic or cultural logic: 'what is in question in hysterical paralysis is the everyday, popular conception of the organs and the body in general. That conception is based not on a deep knowledge of neuro-anatomy but on our tactile and above all our visual perceptions.'<sup>63</sup> Over the course of this key paper, Freud had thus begun to distance himself from any purely neurologically-based understanding of the body, and to advance the idea that a popular idea, or representation, of the body and its organs should instead be considered central to hysteria. An hysterical paralysis of the arm, he suggested, 'consists in the fact that the conception of the arm cannot enter into association with the other ideas constituting the ego of which the subject's body forms an important part.'<sup>64</sup> Freud thus here understands the ego (the term being used, it should be emphasised, in a pre-psychoanalytic sense) to be comprised of a chain of associated ideas in which the idea of

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<sup>61</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Some Points for a Comparative Study of Organic and Hysterical Motor Paralyses' [1893], *SE I*, p.169. On the dating of the paper, see Tögel, "My Bad Diagnostic Error," who emphasises that Freud was writing the first draft of this comparative study of organic and hysterical paralyses at the time of his treatment of Frau Emmy.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.166, p.169.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

the body occupies a central position. He argues that, in cases of hysterical paralysis, the subject's mental conception of his or her arm has become 'saturated in an unconscious association with the memory of the event, the trauma, which first produced the paralysis,' and is accordingly 'inaccessible to the free play of other associations.'<sup>65</sup> The arm is able physically to move again only when the 'quota of affect' associated with the precipitating trauma has been 'wiped out' and the idea of the arm thus once again becomes 'accessible to conscious associations and impulses.'<sup>66</sup> In his theoretical discussion of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', he draws on this paper in order to suggest that Frau Emmy's disgust should be considered a form of 'psychical paralysis': the act of eating had, he comments, become associated in her mind with a series of disgusting memories—whenever she sat down to a meal, she was confronted by the image of the fat congealing on the plates of her childhood (142)—an image which had 'persisted undiminished because she was obliged to suppress it, instead of getting rid of it by abreaction' (149).

While Freud was thus beginning to move towards a theoretical understanding of the body as a psychically mapped topography, rather than as a purely physiological entity, in his clinical attempts to cure Frau Emmy of her difficulties in eating, he works not to 'abreact' the unresolved affect pertaining to these childhood memories of food-related disgust, but rather intervenes directly and literally on her body, attempting both hypnotically and manually to wipe away her stomach pains. As I argued above, it is in such moments of physical connectivity between doctor and patient that Frau Emmy is able to form an emotional connection with Freud and to 'talk about the things that had most affected her':

I asked her whether, perhaps, on some occasion after a great excitement, she had forced herself to eat. She confirmed this. After her husband's death she had for a long time lost her appetite completely and had only eaten from a sense of duty; and her gastric pains had in fact begun at that time. I then removed her gastric pains by stroking her a few times across the epigastrium. She then began of her own accord to talk about the things that had most affected her. "I have told you," she said, "that I was not fond of the child. But I ought to add that one could not have guessed it from my behaviour. I did everything that was necessary. Even now I reproach myself for being fonder of the older one." (121).

As Freud attempts to rid Frau Emmy of her gastric pain, he passes his hand over the physiological site of her digestive tract. As Elizabeth Wilson notes, the case history of

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p.171.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

'Frau Emmy von N' thus provides a particularly productive departure point in thinking how the body has the capacity for psychological action:

In the case of Frau Emmy, her transference relations to Freud aren't simply in her head (or in her brain), they are in her gut. These relations are more strongly serotonergic, vagal, and mucosal than they are cognitive. [...] An effective intervention into Frau Emmy's condition requires that this natural affinity of gut and psyche be respected. Freud comes to understand that he cannot remove her symptoms didactically or cognitively; he instead intervenes locally and psychologically on her skin, in relation to the muscles and glands and nerves and fear ("I then removed her gastric pains by stroking her a few times across the epigastrium").<sup>67</sup>

In her consideration of *Feminism and the Neurological Body*, Wilson criticises the 'fierce anti-biologism' that she feels to have characterised the emergence of second-wave feminism. Feminist scholars have, she notes, tended to dismiss biological data in favour of social, cultural or linguistic analyses of the body. In theorising hysteria as primarily ideational—as the transformation of psychic conflict into somatic symptoms—feminism has in particular, she argues, overlooked the precise biological mechanisms at play in symptoms such as tics, paralyse and muscular contractions. Wilson herself contends, however, that attention to biological data might enable feminist theory to 'move past its dependency on social constructionism' in order to 'generate more vibrant, biologically attuned accounts of the body.'<sup>68</sup> In her discussion of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' Wilson thus draws upon contemporary biomedical research, which has revealed the morphological similarities between the neurons in the brain and those in the enteric nervous system, as well as the large stocks of serotonin within the gut. 'It is not just ideation that is disrupted in depression,' she argues, 'it is also the gut. The struggle to eat (or to stop eating) when depressed is a struggle to mediate difficult, attenuated, or lost relations to others and the outside world.'<sup>69</sup>

In focussing exclusively on Frau Emmy's gut as the physiological seat of her anxieties we do, however, risk overlooking—like Freud himself—the fact that his patient's abdomen is also the symbolic site of her fertility and generativity: as Freud touches her, Charcot like, not to incite an hysterical attack, but rather to wipe it away, Frau Emmy relates to him a set of inter-related experiences having to do with motherhood and loss. In physically intervening on her abdomen to treat her gastric pains, Freud thus stumbles

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p.63.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.46.

across, but does not grasp the significance of, their further sexually specific resonances with maternity. While he addresses the issue of maternal desire and sexuality in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' only in terms of its apparent absence, the set of unmanageable conflicts centring upon childbirth and bereavement that have become knotted together in Frau Emmy's gut do signal the way to another possible reading of this first case history, one which I shall advance in Chapter Two. First, however, I want to explore in greater depth Freud's misreading of the issue of sexuality in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N'.

### **Doctor/Patient II: 'A Complete Absence of the Sexual Element'**

Freud would meet Fanny Moser for the final time in the spring of the following year. In a journey that testifies not only to his close relationship with his former patient, but also to his continuing commitment to the use of hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria, he visited her on her estate in order to give his opinion on her elder daughter.<sup>70</sup> Frau Emmy had 'grown stout and looked in flourishing health,' however Freud was also forced to admit that he appeared to have had little far-reaching influence on his patient: 'in spite of all my improving suggestions there had been little change in her fundamental character' (143). She had developed a phobia of travelling by train, which Freud took to be designed to prevent her from travelling to Vienna for treatment, leading him to suspect that she was 'on the point of withdrawing from my influence' (144). When he attempted to put her under hypnosis in order to remove this new phobia, Frau Emmy 'expressed a fear that she was likely to be less obedient under hypnosis than before' (144). Rising to this challenge to his hypnotic authority, Freud responded with one final demonstration of the power of direct suggestion:

I wrote a few words on a piece of paper, handed it to her and said: "At lunch today you will pour me a glass of red wine, just as you did yesterday. As I raise the glass to my lips you will say: "Oh, please pour me a glass, too," and when I reach for the bottle you will say: "No thank you, I don't think I will after all." You will then put your hand in your bag, draw out the piece of paper and find those same words written on it" (144).

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Swales has established that this visit took place in July 1889, when Freud was on his way to visit Hippolyte Bernheim's clinic at Nancy. He then travelled with Bernheim to Paris in order to attend an international conference on psychology and hypnotism. Fanny Moser's estate was near Zurich, and Swales suggests that a contributory factor in stopping off in Zurich was a wish on Freud's part to visit the Swiss psychiatrist and neurologist August Forel, the author of a short book on hypnosis which Freud had enthusiastically reviewed in a Viennese medical periodical. Freud's theoretical and intellectual interests at the time of his treatment of Fanny Moser would thus seem to lie rather more clearly with the use of hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria than with Breuer's cathartic procedure. See Swales, 'Freud, His Teacher and the Birth of Psychoanalysis.'



The case notes reveal that the scene took place exactly as Freud had pre-arranged it, ‘so naturally that none of the many people present noticed anything’ (144). While Freud had, during the first stage of the treatment, slowly come to acknowledge the significance of the patient’s active participation within the therapy, he appears dramatically to retreat from that insight during his later meetings with Frau Emmy, instead taking refuge in hypnotic showmanship. Although the trick he plays at Frau Emmy’s expense would seem to reassert his medical authority over his unruly woman patient, Freud is ultimately forced to accept the limitations of such an authoritarian use of hypnosis. As the theoretical discussion of the case makes clear, in spite of the fact that she was ‘as amenable as the best medium to be found in any hospital, as far as irrelevant suggestions were concerned,’ Frau Emmy’s hypnotic obedience in fact only extended to ‘matters not connected with her illness’ (161). Direct suggestion is thus shown to be as ineffective as the faradic brush that Freud had earlier wielded in his clinical attempts to banish his patient’s somatic symptoms, for Frau Emmy ‘clung so obstinately to her symptoms in the face of suggestion and would only abandon them in response to psychical analysis or personal conviction’ (160). In her forcible demonstration of the significance of ‘psychical analysis’ and the patient’s own ‘personal conviction’, Frau Emmy may, therefore, be considered a pivotal figure in directing Freud’s move away from a therapy based upon the mimetic re-enactment and hypnotic elimination of memory, and in leading him instead towards a diegetic, dialogical mode of treatment. Her repeated insistence on actively articulating her own subjectivity, rather than remaining a passive object of medical investigation, entailed a crucial shift in the relations of power and authority underlying the doctor/patient relationship, a shift which Freud was, however, ultimately able to acknowledge only at a metaphorical level.

An ‘hysterical’ re-framing of Freud’s account of his final meeting with Frau Emmy might, therefore, emphasise not her apparent hypnotic obedience, but Freud’s own dawning realisation that the patient with whom he had felt himself to be so intimately involved had in fact kept certain significant aspects of her life hidden from him. When she had earlier told him of her life on her estate, Freud remarked that he ‘really found it extremely hard to reconcile activities of this kind with the picture of such a severely neurotic woman’ (124). It was, in fact, not until he came to enter into Frau Emmy’s social milieu that Freud ‘came for the first time to realise the whole extent of her duties, occupations and intellectual interests’ (143). His account of the visit thus documents his growing understanding that it was in fact his powerful and socially superior patient who had determined the course of the treatment, not only through her repeated revival of the

traumatising memories that he assumed to have ‘wiped’ from her mind, but also through her having concealed other information from him. As he looked back over the case, he was led to admit that he had overlooked another significant part of his patient’s life-history:

It has also struck me that amongst all the intimate information given to me by the patient there was a complete absence of the sexual element, which is, after all, more liable than any other to provide occasion for traumas. It is impossible that her excitations in this field can have left no traces whatever; what I was allowed to hear was no doubt an *editio in usum Delphini* of her life-story (164).

The *editio in usum Delphini* was an expurgated version of the Classics which had originally been prepared for his son by order of Louis XIV, and this passing remark on Freud’s part thus evokes a complex scenario of censorship and control which tacitly subverts the gendered hierarchy of the doctor/patient relationship. While Freud positions himself as a naïve and innocent young boy, Frau Emmy emerges from his text as a figure who shields her younger doctor from sexual knowledge.

It was, therefore, only after the treatment had ended that was Freud able—belatedly and indirectly—to acknowledge Frau Emmy’s sexual needs and desires. Presuming that she had been ‘living for years in a state of sexual abstinence,’ he speculated that:

this woman who was so passionate and so capable of strong feelings had not won her victory over her sexual needs without severe struggles, and that at times her attempts at suppressing this most powerful of all instincts had exposed her to severe mental exhaustion. She once admitted to me that she had not married again because, in view of her large fortune, she could not credit the disinterestedness of her suitors and because she would have reproached herself for damaging the prospects of her two children by a new marriage (165).

Freud’s final ‘exhaustive explanation’ of the case thus presents his patient as suffering the effects of an apparently insoluble dilemma. Forced to choose between, on the one hand, sexual satisfaction within the remit of marriage and, on the other hand, the protection of her daughters’ inheritance, Freud would have it that Frau Emmy chooses to suppress her sexual needs in favour of her maternal duties.

As Freud himself would note, there are significant correspondences between his own work and Arthur Schnitzler’s contemporaneous literary exploration of the modern psyche. On the occasion of Schnitzler’s sixtieth birthday, Freud wrote to congratulate the man he named his *Doppelgänger*:

Whenever I get deeply absorbed in your beautiful creations I invariably seem to find beneath their poetic surface the very presuppositions, interests and conclusions which I know to be my own. [...] your preoccupation with the truths of the unconscious and of the instinctual drives in man, your dissection of the cultural conventions of our society, the dwelling of your thoughts on the polarity of love and death; all this moves me with an uncanny feeling of familiarity.<sup>71</sup>

More recent commentators have interrogated the connection between the two writers further in order to suggest that, while Freud wrote of the universal repressions that govern civilised life, Schnitzler was concerned with the particular repressions demanded by late-nineteenth-century bourgeois society. As Sidney Bolkosky has pointed out, Schnitzler's work remains firmly rooted in fin-de-siècle Vienna and its social relationships, and his brooding psychological portraits implicitly contain an historical and sociological commentary on the difficulties that that social world posed for women in particular.<sup>72</sup> In the 1913 novella *Beatrice and Her Son*, Schnitzler explores a young widow's struggle to reconcile the 'wild and adventurous life she longed for in her most hidden dreams' with the 'respectable course of life that seemed preordained by her conventional upbringing.'<sup>73</sup> During a summer holiday in the mountains, Beatrice Heinhold and her adolescent son Hugo both embark upon doomed love affairs: Beatrice with one of her son's school friends; Hugo with a former actress, a woman of around the same age as his mother. Over the course of the novella, Beatrice is transformed from a respectable widow and concerned mother into a woman consumed by sexual passion:

She can feel it in her every pulse, her senses, throughout her whole body, that she isn't the same person as she was. She can barely collect her thoughts. They rush feverishly through her brain. She doesn't know what she wants, what she desires, what she regrets, she barely knows if she is happy or unhappy. It must be an illness.<sup>74</sup>

As Beatrice hears her young lover boasting about their affair, she begins to sense her imminent fall from bourgeois respectability. Contemplating suicide, she realises that her only hope of salvation lies with her son. On a moonlit boat trip, as a 'painful longing rose

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<sup>71</sup> Sigmund Freud to Arthur Schnitzler, 14 May 1922 in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939*, ed. Ernst L. Freud, trans. Tania & James Stern (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), p.344.

<sup>72</sup> Sidney Bolkosky, 'Arthur Schnitzler and the Fate of Mothers in Vienna,' *Psychoanalytic Review* 73.1 (Spring 1986), pp.1-15. See also Carl Schorske's seminal analysis of *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

<sup>73</sup> Arthur Schnitzler, *Beatrice and Her Son* [1913], trans. Shaun Whiteside, intro. Martin Swales (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999), p.9.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.67.

from the depths of her soul and spilled darkly into his,' she makes an impassioned plea to be recognised as both a mother and a sexually desirable and desiring woman:

"I'm your mother, Hugo, and I'm a woman. Bear that in mind, I'm a woman as well. You mustn't feel that you could hurt me, that you could wound my tender feelings. I've been through a lot recently. I'm not yet an... old woman. I understand everything. Too much my son... You mustn't think we are so far apart, Hugo."<sup>75</sup>

In Schnitzler's novella, however, maternal desire registers only as a disturbingly literal and transgressive force, punishable by death: the narrative reaches its climax as mother and son drown together, locked in an oedipal embrace. In contrast to these masculine projections of mature female subjectivity and sexuality—Freud's abstinent widow and Schnitzler's incestuous mother—my reading of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' reveals that this key text registers one woman's rather more complicated attempts to negotiate the cultural constraints and conventions that surrounded femininity, maternity, intellectuality and sexuality at the fin-de-siècle.

In her cultural history of madness as a 'female malady', Elaine Showalter proposes that hysteria should be considered a 'mode of protest for women deprived of other social and intellectual outlets.' The hysteric was, she suggests, 'fighting back against confinement in the bourgeois home.'<sup>76</sup> As one of the richest women in Europe, Fanny Moser does not, however, readily conform to any such stereotype of powerless Victorian femininity. As Freud himself noted very early on in the treatment, she had travelled extensively and had 'many lively interests' (105). Yet it was not until he paid his last visit to her estate that he came to appreciate the extent of those interests. Even during her worst bouts of illness, Frau Emmy, he emphasised, played an active role in the management of a large industrial business, kept a 'constant eye' on the education of her children, and also carried on an extensive correspondence with 'prominent people in the intellectual world' (166). Subsequent biographical research into Freud's former patient has provided some additional insight into her intellectual activities. Obituaries in several national newspapers reveal that Fanny Moser had, during her lifetime, gained a reputation as a respected philanthropist and patron of the arts.<sup>77</sup> In 1887, shortly before she sought treatment with Freud, she had

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>76</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p.147.

<sup>77</sup> Ola Andersson, 'A Supplement to Freud's Case History of "Frau Emmy von N" in *Studies on Hysteria* 1895,' *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 2.5 (1979), pp.5-16; Henri Ellenberger, 'L'Histoire d'"Emmy von N": étude critique avec documents nouveaux,' *L'Évolution psychiatrique* 42.3 (July-September 1977), pp.519-41.



purchased a chateau on one of the Swiss lakes, where she entertained a number of prominent scientists, philosophers and writers.<sup>78</sup> Fanny Moser thus belongs to a long line of *salonnières*—from the remarkable hostesses of the eighteenth century to a subsequent generation of avant-garde women including Gertrude Stein and Natalie Clifford Barney—who used their wealth and marginal social position to create influential salons dedicated to discussion of all the latest philosophical, scientific and artistic ideas.<sup>79</sup>

These investigations into the true identity of Freud's patient further revealed that, once settled in her chateau, Fanny Moser began to take a succession of lovers, sometimes establishing sexual relationships with the doctors whom she consulted at various spas, or whom she invited to live in her house as her personal physician.<sup>80</sup> In these affairs, she thus appears to have found a compromise between her maternal duties and her sexual needs that neatly circumvented the stark choice of either abstinence or remarriage envisaged by Freud. The fact that her relationships with her doctors came to be erotically charged in this manner also raises the question as to what passed between Fanny and Freud on the occasion of his visit to her estate (and here I cannot help but think back to the intimate connection between doctor and patient that was forged during the daily massages which Fanny received from Freud during her treatment in Vienna). Fanny Moser kept a guest book to be signed by all those who stayed at her chateau, and was in the habit of sticking a blank piece of paper over the signature of any guest who subsequently offended her. As Henri Ellenberger has established, the record of Freud's visit on 18 July 1889 has been pasted over in this way.<sup>81</sup> During his visit to her estate, did the young Dr Freud thus perhaps come to realise that his wealthy older patient regarded him as the object of a potential sexual liaison? Unsettled by the encounter, did he then attempt to reassert his medical authority over Fanny Moser in a final display of hypnotic trickery? Piqued by Freud's rejection, did she subsequently erase his name from her guestbook?

In a letter written to Stefan Zweig some thirty-seven years after the publication of the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud offers the following coda to Breuer's account of his treatment of Bertha Pappenheim:

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<sup>78</sup> Guests included the psychiatrists Auguste Forel, Eugene Bleuler and Otto Wetterstrand, the geologist Albert Heim, the poet Friedrich von Bodenstadt and the philosopher Ludwig Klages; see Ellenberger, p.530.

<sup>79</sup> On the significance of the salons hosted by Jewish women in particular, see Emily D Bilski & Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press in association with the Jewish Museum, New York, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Andersson, p.11.

<sup>81</sup> Ellenberger, p.530. In the case notes, however, Freud suggests that this visit took place in May 1890.

What really happened with Breuer's patient I was able to guess later on, long after the break in our relations, when I subsequently remembered something Breuer had told me in another context before we had begun to collaborate and which he never repeated. On the evening of the day when all her symptoms had been disposed of, he was summoned to the patient again, found her confused and writhing in abdominal cramps. Asked what was wrong with her, she replied, "Now Dr B's child is coming!"

At this moment he held in his hand the key that would have opened the "doors to the Mothers" but he let it drop. With all his great intellectual gifts there was nothing Faustian in his nature. Seized by conventional horror he took flight and abandoned the patient to a colleague. For months afterwards she struggled to regain her health in a sanatorium.<sup>82</sup>

As Wayne Koestenbaum has emphasised, this incident exists only in intertexts, as a secret which Breuer initially told to Freud, and which Freud then subsequently passed on to his own disciples.<sup>83</sup> In his 'official' account of the history of the psychoanalytic movement, Freud is rather more reticent about what passed between Breuer and Bertha:

In his treatment of [Anna O], Breuer was able to make use of a very intense suggestive *rapport* with the patient, which may serve as a complete prototype of what we call "transference" today. Now I have strong reasons for suspecting that after all her symptoms had been relieved, Breuer must have discovered from further indications the sexual motivation of this transference, but that the universal nature of this unexpected phenomenon escaped him, with the result that, as though confronted by an "untoward event", he broke off all further investigation. He never said this to me in so many words, but he told me enough at different times to justify this reconstruction of what happened.<sup>84</sup>

In his retrospective account of the prehistory of psychoanalysis, Freud thus implies that the break in his relations with Breuer occurred as a result of Breuer's failure to acknowledge the erotic feelings that Bertha Pappenheim was harbouring towards him. But, as we have seen, Freud himself proved similarly disinclined to confront the issue of patient desire in the first case history that he himself contributed to the *Studies on Hysteria*. Obviously, it is impossible to know with any certainty when Fanny Moser started her succession of affairs with her live-in physicians and, as Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester have emphasised, 'it would almost certainly be over-emphasising the importance of her treatment with Freud

<sup>82</sup> Sigmund Freud to Stefan Zweig, 2 June 1932 in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud*, pp.408-09.

<sup>83</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum, 'Privileging the Anus: Anna O and the Collaborative Origins of Psychoanalysis,' *Genders* 3 (Fall 1988), pp.57-81.

<sup>84</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement' [1914] in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*. *Penguin Freud Library* 2, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986, reprinted 1993), pp.68-9.

to speculate that they were instigated by that brief episode.<sup>85</sup> If, however, we allow ourselves the speculation that Freud was led to recognise Fanny Moser as an actively desiring woman only after his visit to her estate and that, during that visit, he also came to realise that he himself was the object of that desire, then it becomes possible to suggest that, like Breuer at the scene of Bertha Pappenheim's hysterical childbirth, Freud was at this point forced to confront the explicitly sexual nature of what he would subsequently come to theorise as the patient's transference. Where Freud's retrospective reconstructions of Bertha Pappenheim's hysterical labour would seem to imply that, where Breuer had failed, he himself would have triumphed, there was, in fact, 'nothing Faustian' about his own, corresponding encounter with the enigma of female desire: at the end of his treatment of Frau Emmy von N, Freud finds himself neither in the authoritarian place of the medical hypnotist, nor yet in the role of analytic archaeologist, but rather places himself in the metaphorical position of a naïve and innocent young princeling.

In Freud's subsequent accounts of his early moves towards a psychoanalytic mode of treatment, this scenario is, however, entirely rewritten. In his 'History of the Psychoanalytic Movement,' written in 1914, Freud suggests that he can take no credit for having discovered the sexual aetiology of the neuroses:

The idea for which I was being made responsible had by no means originated with me. It had been imparted to me by three people whose opinion had commanded my deepest respect—by Breuer himself, by Charcot, and by Chrobak, the gynaecologist at the university, perhaps the most eminent of all our Vienna physicians.<sup>86</sup>

Freud goes on to describe in greater detail his initiation at the hands of these three older and more experienced male colleagues, each of whom play a part—whether directly or indirectly—in his treatment of Frau Emmy:

One day, when I was a young house-physician, I was walking across town with Breuer, when a man came up who evidently wanted to speak to him urgently. I fell behind. As soon as Breuer was free, he told me in his friendly, instructive way that this man was the husband of a patient of his and had brought some news of her. The wife, he added, was behaving in such a peculiar way in society that she had been brought to him for treatment as a nervous case. He concluded: "These things are always *secrets d'alcôve*!" I asked him in astonishment what he meant, and he answered by explaining the word *alcôve*

<sup>85</sup> Appignanesi & Forrester, *Freud's Women*, p.99.

<sup>86</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement' [1914] in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*. Penguin Freud Library 15, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986, reprinted 1993), pp.69-70.

(“marriage-bed”) to me, for he failed to realise how extraordinary the *matter* of his statement seemed to me.<sup>87</sup>

In this first anecdote, Freud thus positions himself as a deferential ‘young house-physician,’ grateful for Breuer’s attention and agog at the sophistication and worldliness of his mentor.

In the second anecdote, he hovers awkwardly in a Parisian drawing room:

Some years later, at one of Charcot’s evening receptions, I happened to be standing near the great teacher at a moment when he appeared to be telling Brouardel a very interesting story about something that had happened during his day’s work. I hardly heard the beginning, but gradually my attention was seized by what he was talking of: a young married couple from a distant country in the East—the woman a severe nervous sufferer, the man either impotent or exceedingly awkward. [...] Charcot suddenly broke out with great animation: “*Mais dans cas pareils c’est toujours la chose génitale, toujours... toujours... toujours;*” and he crossed his arms over his stomach, hugging himself and jumping up and down on his toes several times in his own characteristically lively way. I know that for a moment I was almost paralysed with amazement and said to myself: “Well, but if he knows that, why does he never say so?”<sup>88</sup>

Freud thus plays the role of the impressionable youngster, eavesdropping on the risqué conversation of his elders. He once again positions himself as the dutiful pupil: this illicitly obtained information was, he suggests, ‘soon forgotten’ in favour of his official duties as Charcot’s assistant—‘brain anatomy and the experimental induction of hysterical paralyses absorbed my attention,’<sup>89</sup> his own ‘paralysed amazement’ at Charcot’s revelation thus displaced into a scientific investigation of the hysteric’s paralysed limbs. The year after his stay in Paris, Freud was ‘still as ignorant and innocent as one could expect of a promising student trained at a university’:

One day I had a friendly message from Chrobak, asking me to take a woman patient of his to whom he could not give enough time, owing to his new appointment as a university teacher. I arrived at the patient’s house before he did and found that she was suffering from attacks of meaningless anxiety and could only be soothed by the most precise information about where her doctor was at every moment of the day. When Chrobak arrived he took me aside and told me that the patient’s anxiety was due to the fact that although she had been married for eighteen years she was still *virgo intacta*. The husband was absolutely impotent. [...] “The sole prescription for such a malady, he added, is familiar enough to us, but we cannot order it. It runs:

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, pp.70-71.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p.71.



‘R Penis normalis

dosim

repetatur!’”

I had never heard of such a prescription, and felt inclined to shake my head over my kind friend’s cynicism.<sup>90</sup>

The image of an older woman patient who shelters her younger doctor from sexual knowledge is thus replaced with that of a series of male mentors who jocularly instruct their naïve junior colleague in the ways of the world. Denying the role of his early women patients, including Fanny Moser, in guiding him towards what would eventually become psychoanalysis, in his retrospective account of the ‘History of the Psychoanalytic Movement,’ Freud instead places his emphasis upon male collaboration and filiation. A close analysis of the doctor/patient scenario as it comes to be inscribed within the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ reveals, however, that his relationship with Fanny Moser not only challenged Freud’s sense of his own authority as a medical practitioner, but also led him to acknowledge his patient’s role in the treatment as an actively desiring, mature, maternal subject, thus reconfiguring the boundaries of the conventionally classed and gendered relations between doctor and patient.

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, pp.71-2.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ARRESTED PASSIONS: DEATH, PARTURITION AND AMBIVALENCE IN THE CASE HISTORY OF 'FRAU EMMY VON N'

Among the patients analysed by Freud, one seeks in vain for mothers and their problems. [...] The fact remains, as far as the complexities and pitfalls of maternal experience are involved, that Freud offers only a massive *nothing*.<sup>1</sup>

A man of about thirty strikes us as a youthful, somewhat unformed individual, whom we expect to make powerful use of the possibilities for development opened up to him by analysis. A woman of the same age, however, often frightens us by her psychological rigidity and unchangeability. Her libido has taken up final positions and seems incapable of changing them for others. There are no paths open to further development; it is as though the whole process had already run its course and remains thenceforward insusceptible to influence—as though, indeed, the difficult development to femininity had exhausted the possibilities of the person concerned.<sup>2</sup>

As Freud himself would acknowledge, his thinking on the question of female subjectivity was 'certainly incomplete and fragmentary and does not always sound friendly.'<sup>3</sup> His late essays on femininity in particular paint a depressing picture of the situation of the adult woman, who remains, it is implied, psychically decimated by her painful and complicated journey into maturity, perennially caught between her unresolved, pre-oedipal love for her mother and her later oedipal attachment to her father, her only hope of 'unlimited satisfaction' lying in the birth of a son, through whom she may be able vicariously to fulfil the 'ambition she has been obliged to suppress in herself.'<sup>4</sup>

In exposing the masculinist bias of Freud's theorisation of the formation of sexed subjectivity, feminist interventions into psychoanalytic theory have drawn upon his belated recognition of the importance of the pre-oedipal phase in girls in an endeavour to explore what is specific to a daughter's relationship to her mother.<sup>5</sup> As Marianne Hirsh has noted,

<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' [1977] in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1986), pp.160-86, p.179.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity' [1932] in *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*. *Penguin Freud Library* 2, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, reprinted 1991), p.191.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.168.

<sup>5</sup> 'We have to reckon with the possibility that a number of women remain arrested in their original attachment to their mother and never achieve a true change-over towards men. This being so, the pre-Oedipus phase in women gains an importance which we have not attributed to it hitherto.'

Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality' [1932] in *On Sexuality*. *Penguin Freud Library* 7, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.372.

For a discussion of the evocation of the pre-oedipal within the feminist literature on hysteria, see my Introduction above. For a major analysis of the pre-oedipal mother as a 'spectral presence' within both

however, while such revisions may have added the perspective of the female child to that of the male, they have not succeeded in inscribing the perspective of the adult woman:

In all psychoanalytic writing, *the child* is the subject of both study and discourse. [...] The adult woman who is a mother, in particular, continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function, she remains an object, always distanced, always idealised or denigrated, always mystified, always represented from the small child's point of view.<sup>6</sup>

The absence of the mother from Freud's writings on hysteria is made particularly conspicuous in the 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,' in which he dismisses Dora's mother as an 'uncultivated woman and above all a foolish one,' who suffers from what he names "'housewife's psychosis.'"<sup>7</sup> As discussed in my introductory chapter, many feminists working on the 'Dora' case history have attempted to recover the traces of a lost, pre-oedipal attachment to the mother embedded within Freud's oedipal narrative. Such interventions continue, however, to read from the perspective of the daughter, and not from that of the mother. Unlike the 'Dora' case history, in which Freud negates the role of the mother in order to focus on the young hysterical daughter's relationship to her father, the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' details his treatment of a mature woman who was herself mother to two adolescent daughters. This early text, written prior to Freud's 'discovery' of the Oedipus complex and consequent positioning of the mother as the child's object within an oedipal scenario, should, therefore, be considered of particular significance in that it remains the only one of his case histories in which Freud addresses the complexities of maternal subjective experience. In this second chapter, I mobilise a range of contemporary, feminist engagements with psychoanalytical theory in order to draw out from this singular case history set of complexly unresolvable conflicts centring upon birth-giving, maternity and death.

In her major consideration of medical writings on and cultural performances of hysteria from the 1800s to the present day, Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that, by shifting our interest away from a gender-based understanding of hysteria, and by returning instead to Freud's early writings, in which he attempted to find a traumatic, rather than a sexual,

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Freud's writing and feminist theory, see Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana State University Press, 1989), p.167.

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' [1905 (1901)] in *Case Histories I. Penguin Freud Library* 8, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.49.

aetiology of hysteria, we may discover that, ‘what the hysteric in fact broadcasts is a message about vulnerability—the vulnerability of the symbolic (the fallibility of paternal law and social bonds); the vulnerability of identity (the insecurity of gender, ethnic and class designations); or, and perhaps above all, the vulnerability of the body, given its mutability and mortality.’<sup>8</sup> Pointing out that death pervades the clinical histories of the patients on whom Freud based his early theories, Bronfen argues that:

Freud, in his interpretation of each case, either overlooks the connection between hysterical trauma and mortality, or translates it into issues of sexually encoded loss: castration (e.g. the loss of the penis) or abandonment (e.g. the loss of love.) [...] Freud’s work on hysteria, in which he reads hysteric symptoms not as representations of death anxiety and traumatic impact but as articulations of a sexual scenario (an actual event of sexual abuse or a phantasy of seduction) resulted in the so-called “riddle of femininity”. The narrative of phallic monism posits woman as an enigma, eliding the other story that Freud’s hysteric patients were telling him: a story about real death anxiety.<sup>9</sup>

In her suggestion that the hysteric’s complaint revolves around a traumatic knowledge of vulnerability, mutability and mortality, Elisabeth Bronfen effects a significant structural revision to the feminist debate on hysteria: where earlier feminist interventions had turned to Freud’s individual case histories as a means to highlight femininity’s predicament under patriarchal conditions of sexual difference, she develops a theory of hysteria as a ‘structuring of the subject, as a strategy using multiple self-fashionings, even as these are constructed over—but also shield from—radical negativity.’<sup>10</sup> I am arguing, however, that we need to focus on the specific encounters with death, loss and abandonment that haunt

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<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.xiii.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.35. In *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*, Bronfen takes Freud’s early work on the traumatic aetiology of hysteria as the basis for her theorisation of a ‘knotted’ subjectivity that is constructed out of and over an originary traumatic wounding. She proposes the navel—‘a knotted scar that covers and touches upon a nonrepresentable wound’—as a signifier for this knotted subjectivity. Elisabeth Bronfen thus introduces into discussions of the psychic formation of the subject another anatomical sign, the navel or omphalos: ‘this cut, this knotted scar, marks a moment of castration not only in the sense that commemorates the loss of the mother but also in the sense that it marks our mortality, the vulnerability of our bodies, and thus radically protests against any phantasies of omnipotence and immortality’ (xiii). In contrast to the emphasis within classic psychoanalytic theory on castration as the defining moment in the formation of sexed and speaking subjectivity, Bronfen emphasises instead ‘another moment of the uniquely unrepeatable cut that binds each human together, a wound which is parallel to but not subsumed by symbolic castration’ (9), namely the cutting of the umbilical cord and consequent severing of a primary physical attachment to the maternal body. While this emphasis on the navel/omphalos may appear on first glance to share certain similarities with Bracha Ettinger’s proposal to introduce the matrix/womb as a supplementary symbol for the processes through which subjectivity is formed, in the light of Ettinger’s sustained challenge to the very bases of psychoanalytic thought, it is possible to qualify Bronfen’s intervention as remaining caught within a phallic paradigm that can only conceive of subjectivity in terms of cut, separation and loss, rather than the co-emergence proposed by Ettinger.



one individual woman's life-narrative. Taking Bronfen's emphasis on the hitherto overlooked connection between hysterical trauma and mortality as my departure point, I suggest that, in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', a traumatic knowledge of mortality is further and intricately bound up with the patient's experiences of parturition and maternity.

Fanny Moser, *née* von Sulzer-Wart, had thirteen brothers and sisters; the eldest born sixteen years before her, in 1832, the youngest six years after her, in 1854. Four of her siblings had died as infants before she was born. Another three died during her early childhood: two as infants, one at the age of thirteen. Her fifteen-year-old sister died when Fanny was aged eighteen; and a brother, aged thirty-three, when she was twenty years old.<sup>11</sup> During childhood, she had witnessed both her mother and a female cousin being taken away to an asylum (111), and many of her most pressing phobias were centred upon the treatment of the insane—patients were, she maintained, 'treated with douches of ice-cold water on the head and put into an apparatus which turned them round and round until they were quiet' (118)—and upon occasions when she had treated sick relatives: a brother who was addicted to morphine, and her own child, who had 'caught hold of her so forcibly in its delirium that she was almost choked' (113). When she was fifteen, she found her mother lying unconscious on the floor after having suffered a stroke; when she was nineteen, she came home to discover her mother's dead body (111). Fanny von Sulzer-Wart's early life was thus punctuated by a series of losses and separations. Her childhood reminiscences are, moreover, centred upon the traumatic sighting of death: during her first hypnosis, she tells Freud how, when she was five, her elder siblings pelted her with dead animals; how, when she was seven, she unexpectedly saw her sister's body in its coffin; how, when she was eight, her brother used to dress up as a ghost in order to frighten her; and how, when she was nine, she saw her aunt in her coffin and the corpse's jaw suddenly dropped (108).

In her autobiographical 'Sketch of the Past,' Virginia Woolf recounts the impact on her fifteen-year-old self of the death of her half-sister Stella, an event which had occurred just two years after the death of her mother:

My mother's death had been a latent sorrow—at thirteen one could not master it, envisage it, deal with it. But Stella's death two years later fell on a different substance; a mind stuff and being stuff that was extraordinarily unprotected, unformed, unshielded, apprehensive, receptive, anticipatory. [...] But beneath the surface of this particular mind and body lay sunk the other death. Even if I were not fully conscious of what my mother's death meant, I had for two years

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<sup>11</sup> Andersson, pp.8-9.

been unconsciously absorbing it through Stella's silent grief; through my father's demonstrative grief; again through all the things that changed and stopped; the ending of society; of gaiety; the giving up of St Ives; the black clothes; the suppressions; the locked door of her bedroom. All this had toned my mind and made it apprehensive; [...] I remember saying to myself after [Stella] died: "But this is impossible; things aren't, can't be, like this"—the blow, the second blow of death, struck on me; tremulous, filmy eyed as I was, with my wings still creased, sitting there on the edge of my broken chrysalis.<sup>12</sup>

Like Fanny Moser, Virginia Woolf suffered a series of losses during her adolescence. She here movingly describes how her mother's death occurred too suddenly and prematurely for her to be able fully to grasp its impact. It required, she seems to suggest, a 'second blow of death' to colour and give meaning to that other, earlier loss. Freud too would come to acknowledge that the incompletely processed memory-traces of anterior events may be rekindled by later experiences. In the period immediately after his treatment of Fanny Moser, he would explore the hypothesis that, 'hysteria is the consequence of a presexual sexual shock.'<sup>13</sup> Initially constructed in 1893 and definitively abandoned in 1897, his theory of childhood seduction was based on the premise that, in the early years of life, the child had been subjected to an approach from an adult which, although sexual in nature, occurred too early in his or her development to be cognised as such.<sup>14</sup> This initial event, he proposed, acquired meaning only after the fact, when a second, later event, occurring after the individual had reached puberty, revived and revised the memory of the earlier one. In a letter written to Wilhelm Fliess on 6 December 1896, he explained that he was accordingly:

working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances—to a *retranscription*. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past' [1939-40] in *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, rev. & intro. Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.130. I shall return to this text at length in the following chapter of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Freud to Fliess, 15 October 1895 in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, trans. & ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.144.

<sup>14</sup> Freud's renunciation of his belief in an actual seduction occurring during childhood is signalled by a letter to Fliess dated 21 September 1897, in which he confided in his friend, 'the great secret that has slowly been dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my *neurotica*.' Freud to Fliess, 21 September 1897 in Masson (ed.), p.264.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 6 December 1896, in Masson (ed.), p.207.

According to the temporal logic of what Freud named ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’ or ‘deferred action’, trauma is thus constituted by a relationship between two events and is subject to a period of latency and delay.<sup>16</sup> In her influential study of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth draws upon Freud’s later work on this issue in order to offer a more general definition of trauma as ‘the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena.’ Traumatic experience, she emphasises, entails a certain paradox:

the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably bound up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing.<sup>17</sup>

Caruth’s emphasis upon the belated and unassimilable nature of traumatic experience can, I think, shed some light on the way in which Fanny Moser’s repeated encounters with illness and death come to be inscribed in her fragmented life narrative.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J Laplanche & J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), s.v. ‘deferred action’, ‘theory of seduction’.

Something of this logic can be glimpsed in the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’. As Freud inquires into the origins of Frau Emmy’s stammer, she recalls two separate occasions on which she had been out driving in a carriage with her daughters. In the first instance, the horses had suddenly bolted. In the second, they were driving through the forest in a thunderstorm when a tree in front of them was struck by lightning and the horses again shied. On this second occasion, she had thought to herself, “‘You must keep quite still now, or your screaming will frighten the horses.’” Her stammering had begun on the first of the two occasions, but had disappeared shortly afterwards; it then ‘came on for good after the second, similar occasion’ (114).

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins, 1996), pp.91-2.

<sup>18</sup> I am aware that, in evoking Caruth’s writings after having first discussed Freud’s early theory of childhood seduction, I run the risk of attempting to reconcile two different models of psychoanalytic trauma: Caruth’s observations are based upon Freud’s later work on trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In her consideration of ‘early Freud and late Freud’, Ilse Grubrich-Simitis has, however, drawn out a common thread linking the first and last of Freud’s major writings. *Studies on Hysteria* and *Moses and Monotheism*, she suggests, ‘represent two completely different stages in the development of the psychoanalytic concept of trauma’ (10). As Grubrich-Simitis points out, Freud’s early work on trauma placed its emphasis on an *external* event—an instance of seduction occurring during childhood, whose effects were registered only in a delayed fashion. As he came to realise that his patients’ reports of such seductions did not always correspond to actual events, but reproduced recurring phantasy configurations, Freud was concomitantly led towards the discovery of infantile sexuality and of an unconscious *internal* world shaped by the drives. Grubrich-Simitis brings out the shift in his thinking in this respect: ‘whereas the more conventional trauma model applied to the *pathogenesis* of the comparatively small number of people who had been sexually violated in childhood, the revolutionary drive model is concerned with the *psychogenesis* of everyone’ (63). His belief in the primordial importance of the internal infantile drives led Freud in his mature work on trauma to place his emphasis upon *internal*, psychic events—what Grubrich-Simitis describes as ‘the wide range of subtle *narcissistic* injuries—that is ones that take effect only by summation or cumulation—which the child sustains during the pregenital phase of development in its dealings with its primary objects

Although he would shortly come to acknowledge a very different model of psychic temporality ('memory is present not once but several times over'), in his theoretical discussion of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N,' Freud places his emphasis upon linearity and causality. 'When one is resolving a current hysterical delirium,' he argues, 'the patient's communications are given in a reverse chronological order, beginning with the most recent and least important impressions and connections of thought and only at the end reaching the primary impression, which is in all probability the most important one causally' (134, n.1). Although Fanny Moser's memories may frequently be presented in chronological order, they remain, paradoxically, out of time. She continues to be haunted by the series of losses and separations she had endured as a child, to the extent that events in the present which recalled those in the past could cause her to fall into a state of delirium:

The transition between a normal state and a delirium often occurred quite imperceptibly. She would be talking quite rationally one moment about matters of small emotional importance, and as her conversation passed on to ideas of a distressing kind I would notice from her exaggerated gestures or the appearance of her regular forms of speech, etc., that she was in a state of delirium (157).

The past thus repeatedly irrupts into the present as Fanny Moser switches almost imperceptibly between different psychic states and different temporalities. Her childhood encounters with death and disease return to her belatedly and yet repeatedly in the form of hallucinations—"there's a dead rat among them—one that's been gn-aw-aw-ed at!" (107)—and dreams—"she had had to lay out a number of dead people in coffins, but would not put the lids on' (123).

Although these memories of illness and mortality have become compressed and condensed—"she told me them in a single sentence and in such rapid succession that they might have been a single episode in four acts' (113)—one particular event stands out with

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and which have the consequence of permanent alterations of the ego by way of identifications' (11). Grubrich-Simitis speculates that Freud was, in his very late work, attempting to reconcile these differing models. Reading *Moses and Monotheism* as a 'daydream', she points out that, towards the very end of his life, when he himself was feeling the pressure of a traumatic political reality in the form of the rise of Nazism, the octogenarian Freud returned to some of the concerns that had preoccupied him in the early stages of his career, and emphasised once again the significance of *external* reality in the aetiology of trauma; see Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, *Early Freud and Late Freud: Reading Anew "Studies on Hysteria" and "Moses and Monotheism"*, trans. Philip Slotkin (London & New York: Routledge, 1997). By evoking Caruth's work on trauma, I do not intend to blur the distinctions between these two differing models of trauma, but rather to think about the particular mechanisms by which traumatic events become imprinted on the psyche.



painful clarity. When she was twenty-three, Fanny von Sulzer-Wart had married Heinrich Moser, a well-known and extremely wealthy Swiss industrialist some forty years her senior. In an incident which seems oddly premonitory of the 'women's weepies' of the 1940s, the couple had met on a train: Fanny von Sulzer-Wart broke her glasses and romance blossomed when Heinrich Moser came to her aid. They were married in December 1870, and had two daughters, Fanny and Mentona, who were born in 1872 and 1874 respectively.<sup>19</sup> The marriage was, however, short lived, as Heinrich Moser died suddenly (Freud states of a stroke, Ola Andersson of a heart attack) shortly after the birth of the couple's second daughter. When, during her treatment with Freud, he asked 'what event in her life had produced the most lasting effect on her and came up most often in her memory,' Fanny Moser described the death of her husband, 'with every sign of deepest emotion but without any stammering or clacking':

How, she began, they had been at a place on the Riviera of which they were both very fond, and while they were crossing a bridge he had suddenly sunk to the ground and lain there quite lifeless for a few minutes but had then got up and seemed quite well; how, a short time afterwards, as she was lying in bed after her second confinement, her husband, who had been sitting at breakfast at a small table beside her bed, reading a newspaper, had got up all at once, looked at her so strangely, taken a few paces forward and then fallen down dead (116-17).

Fanny Moser thus experiences the impact of her husband's death as a doubly traumatic blow. On two separate occasions, he falls down before her very eyes. On the first occasion, he gets up again; on the second occasion, he does not, nor can she get up to help him, for she is confined to bed after having recently given birth. Other, earlier, bereavements, moreover, lie sunk beneath the surface of this later death (to paraphrase Virginia Woolf). The peculiar temporal logic of deferred action provides that this later event may have conferred a new and traumatic meaning on the series of losses and separations that Fanny Moser had earlier endured as a child. The affective traces of these childhood encounters with death and disease appear to have been retroactively revived and revised in the light of this later loss, returning to her in the fragmentary form of hallucinations and dreams.

Central to Cathy Caruth's work on trauma is an exploration of the relationship between trauma and survival. Trauma, she proposes, 'is not simply an effect of destruction

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<sup>19</sup> Andersson, p.9.

but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival.<sup>20</sup> For Caruth, trauma consists not in the moment of encounter with death (an event which takes place too suddenly and too unexpectedly to be fully grasped by consciousness), but more particularly in the survival of that incomprehensible encounter: ‘trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it.*’<sup>21</sup> Cathy Caruth thus places at the heart of Freud’s writings on trauma, ‘the urgent and unsettling question: *What does it mean to survive?*’ I want to ask more particularly, what does it mean to survive death in the post-partum bedroom?

Fanny Moser witnesses the sudden death of her husband just four days after giving birth to their second child. The two events remain indelibly linked in her mind: after describing to Freud the particular circumstances of her husband’s death, she goes on to confide that, after he had died:

she had hated her child for three years, because she had always told herself that she might have been able to nurse her husband back to health if she had not been in bed on account of the child. And then after her husband’s death there had been nothing but insults and agitations. His relatives, who had always been against the marriage and had then been angry because they had been so happy together, had spread a rumour that she had poisoned him (120).<sup>22</sup>

The enormous responsibility of tending to the needs of a new-born baby during her own post-partum mourning for the man with whom she had two children, coupled with her stepchildren’s accusations that she herself had had a hand in her husband’s death, appears to have made caring for and about that baby extremely difficult for Fanny Moser. Torn between the competing demands of wifeness and motherhood, she throws out a list of grievances against her younger daughter ‘with an angry look on her face, in the way one would speak of someone who had become a nuisance’: as a baby, she had screamed all the time and would not sleep, she had been late in learning to walk and talk, and had had a number of health issues when growing up: ‘according to the doctors, it had had encephalitis and inflammation of the spinal cord and she did not know what else besides’

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<sup>20</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.58.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>22</sup> In a bid to put a stop to the rumours that she had poisoned him, Fanny Moser applied to have her husband’s body exhumed. Even though a post-mortem examination revealed no traces of poison, the children of Heinrich Moser’s first marriage instituted legal proceedings against his widow in respect of the division of their father’s estate. While Fanny Moser eventually inherited the greater part of her husband’s property ‘her name was so surrounded by scandal that, when she visited health resorts and spas, she sometimes forbade her children to tell people their name.’ Andersson, p.10.

(117). In his final 'exhaustive explanation' of the case, Freud recognises Fanny Moser as caught between her sexual needs and her maternal duties:

I cannot help suspecting that this woman who was so passionate and so capable of strong feelings had not won her victory over her sexual needs without severe struggles, and that at times her attempts at suppressing this most powerful of all instincts had exposed her to severe mental exhaustion. She once admitted to me that she had not married again because, in view of her large fortune, she could not credit the disinterestedness of her suitors and because she would have reproached herself for damaging the prospects of her two children by a new marriage (165).

As Freud here acknowledges, in being widowed at such a young age, Fanny Moser would have been denied any further sexual life, given the risk posed to her daughters' fortunes by a second marriage. The price of good mothering is seen to be not only the loss of her husband, but also the suppression of her own sexual needs and desires. While Freud accordingly rushes, as discussed in the previous chapter, to attribute his patient's ensuing illness to the fact that she appeared to him to have 'been living for years in a state of sexual abstinence' (148), I propose that in the process he significantly overlooked the complexity of her relationship with her daughters.

In her first meeting with Freud, Fanny Moser herself attributes her illness to the shock of her husband's death and to 'the task of bringing up her two daughters, now sixteen and fourteen years old, who were often ailing and suffering from nervous troubles' (105). Sequestered in the nursing home during her treatment with Freud, she suffered from acute gastric pains after a visit from her daughters, reproached herself for leaving them by themselves (109) and fretted continually about their safety, confiding to Freud that she was 'frightened to death' that 'something might happen to her children, that they might fall ill or lose their lives' (130). During their separation, her elder daughter also developed symptoms similar to those of her mother and, on Freud's recommendation, received treatment for a gynaecological condition. This condition worsened once mother and daughters were reunited; after further medical intervention, the daughter too succumbed to a 'severe nervous illness'. The strain of coping with her daughter's illness caused Frau Emmy's own condition to worsen, and she eventually returned to Vienna to seek further help from Freud. One of her most striking symptoms during this second stage of the treatment was what she herself described as "'storms in the head'":

When I first saw her in one of these states she was lying on the sofa with her features distorted and her whole body unceasingly restless. She kept on

pressing her hands to her forehead and calling out in yearning and helpless tones the name “Emmy” which was her eldest daughter’s as well as her own (139).

She informs Freud that this was a ‘repetition of the many fits of despair by which she had been overcome during her daughter’s treatment’: overwhelmed by anxiety, she had ‘determined that whatever had to do with the girl must be kept free from confusion, however chaotic everything else in her head was’ (139).

Fanny Moser’s feelings for her daughters thus appear to oscillate between extreme resentment and excessive solicitude. The difficulties in their relationship evidently persisted after they left Vienna: the year after the treatment, Fanny asked Freud to visit her on her estate in order to give his opinion on her elder daughter. Freud ‘formed an unfavourable impression of the psychological changes that had occurred in the girl,’ noting that she was ‘disobedient and even violent towards her mother’ (134). He was, however, unwilling to attend to the evident complexities of the relationship between mother and daughter, but preferred to understand them as a neuropathic family unit:

In arriving at a prognosis I also had to take into account the fact that all her step-brothers and sisters (the children of Herr von N by his first marriage) had succumbed to paranoia. In her mother’s family, too, there was no lack of a neuropathic heredity, although none of her immediate relatives had developed a chronic psychosis (143).

Whilst Freud’s narrative of the treatment here falls back on conventional nineteenth-century medical models of a hereditary disposition to nervous disorder, from the clues scattered within this first case history, it would seem that Fanny Moser and her daughters were and remained locked in a highly vexed relationship, which appears to have culminated in an attempt by the daughters to have their mother declared mentally unstable. A footnote added in 1924 suggests that, some twenty-five years after the original treatment, Freud was contacted by his former patient’s elder daughter. Fanny Moser had, he reports, broken off all relations with her daughters and was refusing to assist them in their financial difficulties. The daughter was intending to take legal proceedings against her mother, ‘whom she represented as a cruel and ruthless tyrant’ (168, n.1), and had approached Freud for a report on her mother’s mental condition. Freud wrote in reply:



But will you please bear in mind that at that time I also did not understand anything about your mother's case, although on two occasions she had been my patient for a number of weeks...

It was precisely in connection with this case and its outcome that I recognised that treatment with hypnosis is a meaningless and worthless procedure and received the incentive to create psychoanalytical therapy more in accordance with reason. Your mother's behaviour towards you and your sister is far from being as enigmatical to me as it is to you. I can offer you the simple solution that she loved her children just as tenderly as she also hated them bitterly (what we term ambivalence); and this was already so then—in Vienna. By nature your mother was a highly estimable, serious and morally austere woman who was guided by the strictest sense of duty—it is quite possible that this noble creature was ruined by the unsolved conflicts of her life.<sup>23</sup>

Some quarter of a century after the original treatment, Freud evidently continued to hold his former patient in high esteem, and explicitly acknowledges her role in directing his attention towards a psychoanalytic mode of treatment. Without fully cognising the import of what he has said, he also locates ambivalence at the heart of the case of Fanny Moser. The work of psychoanalytic psychotherapist Rozsika Parker, who argues that such ambivalent feelings play a significant and necessary part in the work of mothering, enables me to take this belated acknowledgement by Freud into a different territory.<sup>24</sup> Having uncovered this crucial, but hitherto unexamined, reference to a specifically *maternal* form of ambivalence in an early text by Sigmund Freud, we need first to take a moment to examine more deeply how the concept of ambivalence is developed first in his work, and then subsequently in that of Melanie Klein, before it is then reconfigured for a different, feminist reading by Rozsika Parker. This analysis will, furthermore, lay the foundations for my discussion of the significance of the concept of ambivalence to the psychoanalytic theorisation of both the work of mourning, and the creative impulse, in the following chapter.

## Metapsychological Perspectives on Ambivalence

The letter to Fanny Moser's daughter was written in 1918, almost exactly midway between the great cycle of papers on metapsychology, written during the spring and summer of 1915, and the 1920 text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which Freud significantly revised his earlier theory of the instincts, or drives.<sup>25</sup> In the metapsychological papers, the

<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud to Fanny Moser, 13 July 1918 cited by Andersson, pp.14-15.

<sup>24</sup> Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> As Jean Laplanche has emphasised, any consideration of the concept of the drive within Freudian theory must necessarily confront a problem in translation. The word 'instinct' has, he points out, in fact been used

term 'ambivalence' is initially introduced in connection with a consideration of the developmental history of the drives. In 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,' Freud suggests that the development of each drive can be conceptualised as:

a series of separate successive waves, each of which is homogenous during whatever period of time it may last, and whose relations to one another is comparable to that of successive eruptions of lava. We can then perhaps picture the first, original eruption of the instinct as proceeding in an unchanged form and undergoing no development at all. The next wave would be modified from the outset—being turned, for instance, from active to passive—and would then, with this new characteristic, be added to the earlier wave, and so on.<sup>26</sup>

In emphasising the co-existence of each overlapping stage in the development of the drive, Freud initially introduces the term 'ambivalence' to describe the fact that, in the later, active stage of an instinctual impulse, 'its (passive) opposite may be observed alongside it.'<sup>27</sup> In a footnote, James Strachey explains that Freud had adopted the term from the work of Eugene Bleuler, who had differentiated between three different kinds of ambivalence: emotional, i.e. oscillation between love and hate; volitional, i.e. inability to decide on an action; and intellectual, i.e. belief in contradictory propositions.<sup>28</sup> As Strachey points out, Freud more generally uses the term in the first of Bleuler's three senses. Thus, in this same essay, he writes that, 'since it is particularly common to find both love and hate directed simultaneously towards the same object, their co-existence furnishes the most important example of ambivalence of feeling.'<sup>29</sup>

Freud goes on to suggest, however, that 'love and hate, which present themselves to us as complete opposites in their content, do not after all stand in any simple relation to each other. They did not arise from the cleavage of any common entity, but sprang from

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to translate two distinct German words, namely *Instinkt* and *Trieb* (from the German *Trieben*, to push, and having overtones suggestive of pressure). According to Laplanche, 'it has been insufficiently noted that the term *Instinkt* is used to designate something entirely different from what is described elsewhere as sexuality. *Instinkt*, in Freud's language, is a preformed behavioural pattern, whose arrangement is determined hereditarily and which is repeated according to modalities relatively adapted to a certain type of object'. The use of the term *Trieb*, which Laplanche suggests should be translated as 'drive', on the other hand, 'designates not so much a precise goal as a general orientation, and draws attention to the irresistible nature of the pressure rather than to the stability of its aim and object.'

Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* [1970], trans. & intro. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.9-10; Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.214.

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' [1915] in *On Metapsychology*. *Penguin Freud Library* 11, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, reprinted 1991), p.128.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.128, n.2.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.130.

different sources.<sup>30</sup> For Freud, the word ‘love’ is most appropriately used to describe ‘the relation of the ego to its sexual object’. It is, more specifically, to be associated with the final, genital organisation of sexuality: ‘the word can only begin to be applied in this relation after there has been a synthesis of all the component instincts under the primacy of the genitals and in the service of the reproductive function.’<sup>31</sup> He goes on to propose that it is not possible to trace any such ‘intimate connection’ between hate and sexual pleasure; in the case of hate, the relation of *unpleasure* is to be considered the decisive factor: ‘the ego hates, abhors and pursues with intent to destroy all objects which are a source of unpleasurable feeling for it.’<sup>32</sup> Freud accordingly comes to the conclusion that, ‘the true prototypes of the relation of hate are derived not from sexual life, but from the ego’s struggle to preserve and maintain itself.’<sup>33</sup> The relation of hate to objects is, therefore, to be considered more archaic than that of love, and always remains closely bound up with the self-preservative instincts.

As he seeks to explain why it is that love is so frequently accompanied by feelings of hate, Freud suggests that these hateful impulses are ‘in part based on reactions of repudiation by the ego-instincts’—i.e. upon the ego’s struggle to preserve itself and to destroy all objects that are a source of unpleasurable feeling—and are ‘in part derived from the preliminary stages of loving that have not been wholly surmounted.’<sup>34</sup> The early stages of libidinal development are, he emphasises, highly ambivalent: in the first few years of life, love ‘is hardly to be distinguished from hate in its attitude towards the object.’<sup>35</sup> During the oral stage, the aim is to incorporate or devour the object, while during the anal-sadistic stage, the aim is to master and control the object; at this moment in time, the potential annihilation of the object is thus a matter of complete indifference. Hate can, he suggests, accordingly acquire an erotic character whenever there is a regression to these earlier stages of libidinal development. In this 1915 paper, Freud thus comes to the conclusion that love and hate cannot be clearly separated, but that hateful and sadistic impulses may play an important role in maintaining an erotic relationship to the object.

Freud’s plotting of the relationship between love and hate in ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes’ reflects the distinction he was, at that stage in his thinking, positing between

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

the instincts of self-preservation, or ego-instincts, and the sexual instincts.<sup>36</sup> In accordance with this distinction, hate is seen to have its origins in the ego-instincts—i.e. those instincts which have as their aim the preservation of the biological individual—while love is seen to originate in the sexual or libidinal instincts. In this same essay, however, Freud also emphasises that his distinction between ego-instincts and sexual instincts was ‘merely a working hypothesis, to be retained only so long as it proves useful.’<sup>37</sup> As he himself would subsequently acknowledge, this distinction was in fact initially complicated by the introduction of the concept of narcissism. As he came to recognise that the ego itself may be taken as or instead of an object of love—i.e. that the ego itself is cathected with libido—Freud revised his earlier opposition between the self-preservative instincts and the sexual instincts, and proposed instead a distinction between ego-instincts and object-instincts, both of which he now understood to be of a libidinal nature.<sup>38</sup>

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a paper written in the immediate aftermath of the First World War and which took as its starting point a consideration of the so-called ‘war neuroses’, Freud noted the prevalence of a ‘compulsion to repeat’ in many of his patients, which led him to postulate the existence of a very different kind of drive, ordered by imperatives other than the pleasure principle. He accordingly renounced his earlier distinction between ego-instincts and sexual instincts, and proposed instead a new distinction between life instincts, or Eros, and death instincts:

With the hypothesis of narcissistic libido and the extension of the concept of libido to the individual cells, the sexual instinct was transformed for us into Eros, which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance. What are commonly called the sexual instincts are looked upon by

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<sup>36</sup> This distinction was initially proposed in his 1910 essay on ‘The Psychoanalytic View of the Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision,’ in which Freud wrote of the ‘undeniable opposition between the instincts which subserve sexuality, the attainment of sexual pleasure, and those other instincts which have as their aim the self-preservation of the individual – the ego-instincts. As the poet has said, all the organic instincts that operate in our mind may be classified as “hunger” or “love.”’

Sigmund Freud, ‘The Psychoanalytic View of the Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision’ [1910] in *On Psychopathology*. *Penguin Freud Library* 10, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979, reprinted 1993), p.110.

<sup>37</sup> Freud, ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,’ *PFL* 11, p.121.

<sup>38</sup> In a footnote added in 1921 to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud usefully clarifies the transformations through which the concept of the ego-instincts had passed as follows:

‘To begin with we applied that name to all the instinctual trends (of which we had no closer knowledge) which could be distinguished from the sexual instincts directed towards an object; and we opposed the ego-instincts to the sexual instincts of which the libido is the manifestation. Subsequently we came to closer grips with the analysis of the ego and recognised that a portion of the “ego-instincts” is also of a libidinal character and has taken the subject’s own ego as its object. These narcissistic self-preservative instincts had thenceforward to be counted among the libidinal sexual instincts. The opposition between the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts was transformed into one between the ego-instincts and the object-instincts, both of a libidinal nature.’

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920] in *On Metapsychology*. *PFL* 11, p.335, n.1.



us as the part of Eros which is directed towards objects. Our speculations have suggested that Eros operates from the beginning of life as a 'life instinct' in opposition to the 'death instinct' which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance.<sup>39</sup>

Freud expands upon this new distinction in *The Ego and the Id*, suggesting that, while the life drive aims to complicate and to preserve life, the task of the death drive is to reduce tensions arising from the process of living and to lead the organism back into an inanimate state. 'Life itself,' he proposes, 'would be a conflict and a compromise between these two trends.'<sup>40</sup> The relationship between Eros and the death drive may thus be understood as dialectical rather than oppositional: the life and death drives are, Freud suggests, 'fused, blended and alloyed with each other.' 'That this takes place regularly and very extensively is,' he writes, 'an assumption indispensable to our conception.'<sup>41</sup> Freud argues that, in ideal human development, the aggressive and destructive impulses associated with the death drive are more or less completely integrated into the sexual function, in what he names a 'serviceable instinctual fusion'. At the other end of the scale, 'instinctual defusion and the marked emergence of the death instinct' are to be considered a hallmark of severe neurosis: in such cases, Eros no longer has the power to bind the destructive impulses that were combined with it, and violence and cruelty are allowed to reign unchecked. Freud's final classification of the drives would lead him once more back to the question of ambivalence. In *The Ego and the Id*, he ponders the question as to whether feelings of ambivalence might be the result of a splitting apart of the life and death drives, but comes instead to the conclusion that 'ambivalence is such a fundamental phenomenon that it more probably represents an instinctual fusion that has not been completed.'<sup>42</sup> In such cases, the destructive impulse has not been wholly fused with Eros, nor has it been entirely detached from it, thus allowing two apparently contradictory impulses—love and hate—to exist simultaneously alongside one another.

In its psychoanalytic sense, the term 'ambivalence' is thus used not to describe an oscillation or alternation between loving and hateful impulses, but rather to emphasise that such impulses exist simultaneously and inseparably, and may be directed towards the same object. This insight would prove central to the work of Melanie Klein. In her attempts to identify and describe what is at stake in the earliest months of life, Klein proposed that the

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.334, n.1.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *The Ego and the Id* [1923] in *On Metapsychology*. PFL 11, p.381.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.382.

new-born infant initially relates to its environment as a field of part-objects to be possessed or destroyed via the mechanisms of introjection and projection:

From the beginning the ego introjects objects 'good' and 'bad' for both of which the mother's breast is the prototype—for good objects when the child obtains it, for bad ones when it fails him. But it is because the baby projects its aggression onto these objects that it feels them to be 'bad' and not only in that they frustrate its desires: the child conceives of them as actually dangerous—persecutors who it fears will devour it, scoop out the inside of its body, cut it to pieces, poison it—in short, compassing its destruction by all the means which sadism can derive. These imagos, which are a phantastically distorted picture of the real objects upon which they are based, become installed not only in the outside world but, by the process of incorporation, also within the ego.<sup>43</sup>

In the first two or three months of life, the child's object-world is thus split into extremely good or else extremely bad parts. In this very early, 'paranoid-schizoid' stage of mental life, 'the ego's power of identifying itself with objects is as yet very small,'<sup>44</sup> and anxiety is experienced on account of itself. As the ego becomes more developed, however, it comes to identify more fully with good objects, and hence to experience anxiety on their behalf: 'the dread of persecution, which was at first felt on the ego's account, now relates to the good object as well and from now on the preservation of the good object is regarded as synonymous with the survival of the ego.'<sup>45</sup> Klein further emphasises that, 'hand in hand with this development goes a change of the highest importance; namely, from a partial object-relation to the relation to a complete object.'<sup>46</sup> The baby is thus now able to perceive of his mother as a real and separate person. He therefore begins to relate to her as a whole object, rather than as a series of fragmented part-objects. This shift in the relationship to the object also, however, generates further anxieties: 'the ego is faced at this point of its development—roughly between four and five months of age—with the necessity to acknowledge psychic reality as well as the external reality to some degree. It is thus made to realise that the loved object is at the same time the hated one; and, in addition to this, that the real objects and the imaginary figures, both external and internal, are bound up with each other.'<sup>47</sup> The infant thus has to come to terms with the fact that the same object can provoke both loving and destructive feelings: 'the breast that feeds him is also

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<sup>43</sup> Melanie Klein, 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' [1935] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* [hereinafter abbreviated *LGR*] (London: Vintage, 1988), p.262.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.263.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.264.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp.285-86.

the mother that makes him wait.<sup>48</sup> The struggle to deal with these ambivalent emotions is, therefore, to be considered one of the key features of what Melanie Klein names the 'depressive position'.

As the child comes to realise that the good and the bad object are in fact one and the same, so too is he forced to confront the idea that he may have harmed the good object in the course of his sadistic attacks on the bad object:

Only when the ego has introjected the object as a whole, and has established a better relationship to the external world and to real people, is it able fully to realise the disaster created through its sadism and especially through its cannibalism, and to feel distressed about it [...]. The ego then finds itself confronted with the psychic reality that its loved objects are in a state of dissolution—in bits—and the despair, remorse and anxiety deriving from this recognition are at the bottom of numerous anxiety situations.<sup>49</sup>

This new level of recognition thus gives rise to a complex range of new emotions. As Klein emphasises, the infant's full identification with the object 'goes hand in hand with anxiety for it (of its disintegration), with guilt and remorse, with a sense of responsibility for preserving it intact against persecutors and the id, and with sadness relating to expectations of the impending loss of it.'<sup>50</sup> Overwhelmed by these feelings of anxiety, guilt and grief, the ego tries to protect itself using a system of manic defences:

the ego is unwilling and unable to renounce its good internal objects and yet endeavours to escape from the perils of dependence on them as well as from its bad objects. [...] It succeeds in this compromise by *denying the importance* of its good objects and also of the dangers with which it is menaced from its bad objects and the id. At the same time, however, it endeavours ceaselessly to *master and control* all its objects.<sup>51</sup>

For Klein, the manic defences against the anxieties associated with the depressive position thus include a denial of psychic reality and a sense of omnipotence. This sense of omnipotence allows the ego at once to triumph over its loved object—to belittle its importance and hence to feel contemptuous towards it—and to put right the damage it feels that it has inflicted on that object. Klein further emphasises that 'the depressive state is based on the paranoid state.' Paranoid fears and suspicions may, she therefore suggests,

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<sup>48</sup> R D Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), p.140.

<sup>49</sup> Klein, 'Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States,' p.269.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.270.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.277.

‘be reinforced as a defence against the depressive position.’<sup>52</sup> There may accordingly be a renewed splitting of the object into its good and bad components:

Ambivalence, carried out in a splitting of the imagos, enables the young child to gain more trust and belief in its real objects and thus in its internalised ones—to love them more and to carry out in an increasing degree its phantasies of restoration of the loved object. At the same time the paranoid anxieties and defences are directed towards the ‘bad’ objects.<sup>53</sup>

According to Klein, these repeated attempts at restoring the loved object ‘play an all-important part in the normal process of overcoming the infantile depressive position’—as the infant makes what he feels to be increasingly successful attempts at reparation, so too does he come to master his aggression and to trust in his own capacity to love, and hence to restore and retain his good objects. This increasing confidence in his own internal world is further augmented by reassurances from the external world: ‘through being loved and through the enjoyment and comfort he has in relation to people his confidence in his own as well as in other people’s goodness becomes strengthened, his hope that his “good” objects and his own ego can be saved and preserved increases, at the same time as his ambivalence and acute fears of internal destruction diminish.’<sup>54</sup>

For Melanie Klein, the depressive position is, therefore, to be considered the ‘central position in the child’s development’: ‘the normal development of the child and its capacity to love would seem,’ she suggests, ‘to rest largely on how the ego works through this nodal position.’<sup>55</sup> Hanna Segal neatly summarises the significance of the depressive position within Klein’s thinking. The working through of the depressive position is, she emphasises, accompanied by a radical alteration in the infant’s view of reality:

When the infant begins to perceive of his dependence on an external object and the ambivalence of his own instincts and aims, he discovers his own psychic reality. The infant becomes aware of himself and of his object as separate from himself. He becomes aware of his own impulses and phantasies, and begins to distinguish between phantasy and external reality. [...] The whole relationship to objects alters as the depressive position is gradually worked through. The infant acquires the capacity to love and respect people as

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p.274.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p.287.

<sup>54</sup> Melanie Klein, ‘Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States’ [1940] in *LGR*, p.347.

<sup>55</sup> Klein, ‘Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States,’ p.289.



separate, differentiated individuals. He becomes capable of acknowledging his impulses, of feeling a sense of responsibility for them and of tolerating guilt.<sup>56</sup>

Crucially, however, Klein refers to a 'depressive position' rather than a 'depressive stage'. As Julia Kristeva notes, the Kleinian concept of the 'position' thus 'challenges the strict chronology claimed by proponents of psychoanalytic stages' and instead connotes a 'certain structure of emotional life—one that appears at a particular moment of history and that is susceptible to reappearing in the unconscious.'<sup>57</sup>

### **'She loved her children just as tenderly as she also hated them bitterly'**

In her 1937 essay 'Love, Guilt and Reparation,' Melanie Klein emphasises that the struggle between loving and destructive impulses initially associated with the infantile depressive position remains a significant feature of adult psychic life. She suggests that the experience of becoming a mother may allow the adult woman in particular to make reparation for emotions that she initially felt towards her own mother during childhood:

To act as good parents towards other people may also be a way of dealing with the frustrations and sufferings of the past. Our grievances against our parents for having frustrated us, together with the feelings of hate and revenge to which these have given rise in us, and again, the feelings of guilt and despair arising out of this hate and revenge because we have injured the parents whom at the same time we loved—all these we may undo in retrospect [...] by playing at the same time the parts of loving parents and loving children.<sup>58</sup>

As Rozsika Parker notes, Klein thus understands maternal ambivalence primarily as a 'replayed form of infantile process.'<sup>59</sup> In her own work on this issue, however, Parker emphasises the need to differentiate between adult and infantile modes of ambivalence:

The development of feelings of responsibility and concern for the other is intricately linked with and even stimulated by hatred and harming impulses. But the ways in which such feelings unfold in a small baby and an adult woman

<sup>56</sup> Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1973), pp.73-4.

<sup>57</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.67. In her 1940 essay 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,' Klein emphasises that our subsequent experiences of grief and loss thus always also entail a revival of the particular fears and anxieties initially associated with the infantile depressive position. I shall go on to examine this idea in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

<sup>58</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Love, Guilt and Reparation' [1937] in *LGR*, p.312.

<sup>59</sup> Parker, *Torn in Two*, p.18.

may not be identical. If we do not take care to make these careful discriminations, all kinds of confusions can follow.<sup>60</sup>

Rozsika Parker takes Klein's theorisation of the depressive position as the departure point for her own psychoanalytical and socio-cultural reconsideration of maternal ambivalence. She proposes that, in becoming a mother, the adult woman has to negotiate entry into what she identifies as a *maternal* depressive position. This does not, however, simply entail a repetition of her infantile feelings towards her own mother. Rather, the maternal subject is obliged to confront new forms of emotional adversity, which, nonetheless, share certain similarities with those associated with the infantile depressive position:

The mother's achievement of ambivalence—the awareness of her co-existing love and hate for the baby—can promote a sense of concern and responsibility towards, and differentiation of self from, the baby. Maternal ambivalence signifies the mother's capacity to know herself and to tolerate traits in herself that she may consider less than admirable—and to hold a more complete image of her baby. Accordingly idealisation and/or denigration of self and, by extension, her baby, diminish.<sup>61</sup>

While earlier psychoanalytic considerations of maternal ambivalence tended to focus on its impact—whether positive or negative—upon the child,<sup>62</sup> Rozsika Parker thus dares to propose that feelings of anger, resentment and frustration may have a positive and transformative role to play in the development of maternal subjectivity. Her work also, however, reveals the extent to which any acknowledgement of those feelings remains culturally taboo. Drawing upon extensive examples from her own clinical practice and from interviews with women who are mothers, Parker shows how the social conditions of mothering can work to render maternal ambivalence manageable or unmanageable. The simultaneous idealisation and denigration of motherhood within contemporary culture work, she suggests, to augment and intensify maternal guilt. In such circumstances, the maternal subject may feel unable to acknowledge and manage her mixed feelings towards her child, but may rather fall back on primitive defence mechanisms such as projection and splitting.

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>62</sup> As Rozsika Parker points out, a discussion of the positive impact of maternal ambivalence is provided by D W Winnicott in his paper 'Hate in the Countertransference.' In this paper, Winnicott analyses how maternal hatred facilitates the development of the baby's capacity to hate. As Parker emphasises, however, Winnicott's description of the mother's response to hatred is 'determined and limited by his basic conception of maternity as unconscious and innate. [...] What Winnicott misses is the creative role of the mother's hatred in the development of maternal thinking, not restricted to its role in the infant's capacity to think.' *Torn in Two*, p.63.

The notions of ‘self-abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance and unalloyed pleasure in children’ which Rozsika Parker identifies as the defining tropes of ideal motherhood within late-twentieth-century culture were, however, also particularly prevalent in the construction of an idealised bourgeois femininity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Mark Poster has demonstrated in his critical analysis of the intensified emotional and ideological structure of the bourgeois family, during the nineteenth century, new ideas of maternal bonding and personalised infant care fostered new levels of intimacy between mothers and their children, as well as generating new feelings of guilt and anxiety in both parties.<sup>63</sup> Struggling to come to terms with her husband’s sudden death, while at the same time dealing with the demands of a new-born baby, Fanny Moser appears to have found her ambivalent feelings towards that baby particularly unmanageable. Blaming her husband’s death on the birth of her daughter, yet at the same time endeavouring to conform to the socially prescribed role of the dutiful mother, she confides in Freud: “I have told you,” she said, “that I was not fond of the child. But I ought to add that one could not have guessed it from my behaviour. I did everything that was necessary” (121). Failing to form an emotional connection with her daughter after witnessing the death of her husband just days after giving birth, yet experiencing a strong sense of duty towards that child, Fanny Moser thus attempts to ward off the guilt and anxiety generated by her hostile feelings towards her daughter with a type of *maternal* masquerade.

In writing of a maternal masquerade, I am quite deliberately evoking Joan Riviere’s well-known paper ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade.’ In this paper, first published in 1929, Riviere discusses her treatment of a highly successful woman intellectual who, after speaking in public, felt compelled to engage in what Riviere describes as compulsive ‘ogling and coquetting’ with her male colleagues. Joan Riviere interprets this behaviour in oedipal terms. ‘The exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency,’ she suggests, ‘signified an exhibition of herself in possession of the father’s penis, having castrated him,’ while the inappropriate flirtation she deems a compensatory attempt at “disguising herself” as merely a castrated woman.<sup>64</sup> When read from a socio-historical perspective, Riviere’s essay may be said to register the profound tensions that the struggle to reconcile their professional aspirations with culturally prescribed ideals of femininity could generate in those so-called

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), pp.171-78.

<sup>64</sup> Joan Riviere, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade,’ initially published in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929); reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald & Cora Kaplan (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

'New Women' who sought to carve out a career for themselves as both practising psychoanalysts and practising artists in the early years of the twentieth century—including, of course, Riviere herself. While I shall, in the following chapter, go on to examine in more detail the dilemmas faced by that particular generation of modernist women, in this chapter I am concerned with the difficulties confronting an earlier generation of women such as Fanny Moser, for whom motherhood was construed by nineteenth-century gender ideologies as a matter of duty or destiny. In evoking the idea of a specifically maternal form of defensive masquerade, I thus want to distance myself from Riviere's emphasis on castration and masculine rivalry, while nevertheless borrowing something from her account of her analysand's exaggerated display of her womanly attributes as a 'device [that] was worked to death, and [that] sometimes almost worked her to death,' for this memorable description seems to me to convey something of the profound psychic effort it took Fanny Moser to play the role of the dutiful mother.

In her exploration of the more unmanageable facets of maternal ambivalence, Rozsika Parker draws upon Klein's description of persecutory and depressive anxiety in order to suggest that:

Maternal persecutory anxiety involves a mother's phantasised experience of herself as punished and persecuted by her infant—no matter the difference in power between them, no matter that it may mostly be due to projections. She can literally feel annihilated, devoured and decimated by a child's apparently wilful determination to humiliate her and to frustrate her needs. [...] Maternal depressive anxiety, on the other hand, relates to a mother's usually unrealistic worry that she will have damaged the baby by her destructive impulses towards her or him.<sup>65</sup>

Following Klein, Rozsika Parker further emphasises that these two kinds of anxiety are intricately related to and may alternate with each other. Her reworking of Klein's theses seems particularly helpful in thinking about Fanny Moser's feelings for her daughters which, as we have seen, veer between extreme resentment and excessive remorse. On the one hand, Fanny appears to see herself as the good, persecuted mother, while her daughters are experienced as primarily bad and persecuting. On the other hand, she demonstrates an excessive concern for her daughters' well-being, her anxiety that 'something might happen to her children, that they might fall ill or lose their lives' (130) possibly reflecting an inexpressible fear that she herself might have injured them as a result

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<sup>65</sup> Parker, *Torn in Two*, p.88.



of her own aggressive and destructive phantasies. Her unmanageable feelings towards her children are, moreover, intimately bound up with her gastric pain.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, in this first, proto-analytical case history, Freud stumbles upon, but does not grasp the significance of, the connection between Fanny Moser's difficulties in eating, her grief following her husband's death and her ambivalent feelings towards her daughters. In that chapter, my consideration of the question of disgust in hysteria led me back to the 'Dora' case history, in which Freud understands Dora's feelings of disgust as a form of infantile sexuality persisting in the symptom. Although the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N' does go so far as to allude to Fanny Moser's childhood memories of an orally-based disgust at food, Freud had not yet been led to acknowledge the significance of early infantile experiences in configuring the internal world of the subject, nor had he begun to loosen the ties that bound sexuality to its adult, reproductive function. As he began to develop his theory of the component instincts, however, he came to emphasise the intimate connection between nourishment and sexuality. In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he emphasises that, in the oral stage:

sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food; nor are the opposite currents within the activity differentiated. The *object* of both activities is the same; the sexual *aim* consists in the incorporation of the object—the prototype of a process which, in the form of *identification*, is later to play such an important psychological part.<sup>66</sup>

As Em Farrell notes, this passage leads in two potential directions. On the one hand, it invites consideration of the extent to which eating remains a libidinally cathected activity. On the other hand, Freud also acknowledges that the taking in of nourishment may in addition be considered a prototype of a way of relating to objects based on introjective identification.<sup>67</sup> Farrell places particular emphasis on this second aspect in her consideration of the psychoanalysis of anorexia and bulimia. Her clinical experience in dealing with eating disordered patients leads her to emphasise the impact of a mother's conscious and unconscious phantasies on her daughter. While Farrell focusses in particular upon the clinical presentation of the anorexic daughter, her work seems to me to open up a way of thinking about Fanny Moser as anorexic *mother*.

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<sup>66</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905] in *On Sexuality*. Penguin Freud Library 7, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.117.

<sup>67</sup> Em Farrell, *Lost for Words: The Psychoanalysis of Anorexia and Bulimia* (New York: The Other Press, 1995), p.22.

In *Lost for Words*, Farrell describes a very particular dynamic, in which mother and daughter remain caught up in a 'state of mutual and perhaps terrifying confusion and entanglement of bodies and mind.'<sup>68</sup> She argues that, where a mother has not successfully established a secure internal world, she may unwittingly use her baby as an intermediate or transitional object in an attempt to confirm her own body boundaries and body image. She thus cannot safely contain or process her baby's emotions, but instead uses her child as a 'leaky and chaotic' container for her own feelings.<sup>69</sup> Farrell observes that mothers who have attempted to use their children in this manner are often experienced as 'over-controlling and intrusive; no separation by the baby is possible.'<sup>70</sup> We can at this point, I think, recall not only Fanny Moser's complicated and overbearing relationship with her daughters, but also her relationship with her own 'over-energetic and severe' mother, who had forced her as a child to sit at the dinner table until she had eaten a plate of congealed, fatty meat. Em Farrell suggests that many anorexics carry this feeling of excessive control with them throughout their lives: 'they use their body as their own and their only arena of control and selfhood, which they can unconsciously and consciously use to attack and attempt to separate from mother.'<sup>71</sup> Although I do not wish to venture too far down the path of clinical re-diagnosis (nor indeed am I qualified to do so), I nevertheless think that Farrell's work may shed some light on Fanny Moser's difficulties in eating, enabling us to understand her determination to control what food passed into and out of her body as an attempt to clarify the boundaries between internal and external worlds, and to differentiate between self and other, daughter and mother, mother and daughter.

In her work on maternal ambivalence, Rozsika Parker departs from Julia Kristeva's observation that, 'motherhood makes passions circulate,' proposing that, 'it is ambivalence, in particular, that makes passions circulate.'<sup>72</sup> In this chapter, I have argued that, in the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N', maternal passion was arrested by the accumulated traumas of death, the death of the patient's husband shortly after the birth of her second child

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.61. Farrell derives the concept of the 'intermediate object' from the work of Kestenberg and Weinstein, who suggest that intermediate objects act as a precursor to true transitional objects. Intermediate objects are attached and linked to the body in a way in which true transitional objects are not: 'they are linked to particular organs, such as vomit being linked to the mouth and faeces to the anus, and are essential in the development of a secure body image. They are objects that are in themselves transitional to transitional objects. They are not fully transitional because of both their source and their function. They change and decay and are indestructible unlike true transitional objects. [...] They add an extra stage in the move from the body itself to the use of a blanket or teddy bear, a stage where, as yet, there is neither a secure internal mother, nor a secure internal body image' (*Lost for Words*, pp.38-9).

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Parker, *Torn in Two*, p.20.

bringing to the surface many incompletely processed childhood encounters with death. Drawing upon a range of recent feminist psychoanalytical research, from Elisabeth Bronfen's emphasis on the connection between hysterical trauma and mortality, to Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, and thence to the clinical interventions of Rozsika Parker and Em Farrell, I have proposed that this early case history registers a series of complex and inter-related conflicts around maternal sexuality and desire, interwoven with anxieties associated with mortality and bereavement, intersecting with the dramas of parturition and ambivalence. Freud was not able to recognise or attend to this dense web of conflict, which has, just as significantly, been overlooked in the subsequent feminist literature on hysteria. But I think that we can add yet one more layer to our re-theorisation of the case, by considering a specific concept of matrixial wounding and maternal trauma.

Bracha Ettinger has on several occasions alluded to the fact that the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation may hold a 'special resonance' for those embodied as female, for whom the matrix/womb is not only an 'archaic out-side and past-site', but also, potentially, an 'in-side and future-site as well.'<sup>73</sup> Matrixial theory thus enables us to rethink pregnancy as a repetition with a difference, rather than as a primarily biological process in which there is little chance of subjective participation.<sup>74</sup> With the concept of the Matrix, Ettinger invites us to consider the possibility that the becoming maternal subject might be transformed not just physiologically but phantasmatically by her encounter with an

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<sup>73</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, 'Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 21.1 (February 2004), pp.69-73, p.77.

Ettinger is, however, meticulously and consistently careful to emphasise that her theories do not privilege or essentialise pregnancy or motherhood:

'I am in no way implying that women *must* be mothers. I do not speak of woman-as-mother, nor of the womb as an "organ" whose "natural" existence "makes" a sexual difference, nor of the woman as owner of this organ (versus the man as owner of that organ); nor again do I speak of the womb as origin, as a passive receptivity or passive internal container. [...] My hypothesis, though it appeals to the womb, should not in any way be understood as calling for a limitation on women's rights over their bodies—quite to the contrary. Though any discussion of the pre-natal may seem at first glance to support the assumed claim of the infant on the mother's body, or the phallic seizure and essentialising of women's bodies, in fact my approach is an act of resistance to this seizure because the matrixial apparatus dissolves the ground it stands on from within: it dissolves the unitary subject and transgresses it. The phallic imaginary mistakenly posits the prenatal infant as a separate entity with a separate desire, so that anybody may make a claim to protecting it against the mother's desire. [...] From the point of view of the matrixial, it makes no sense to speculate on what an unborn infant "needs" separately from the mother-to-be's body/trauma/phantasy/desire complexity.' *ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, the opening paragraphs of Julia Kristeva's study of the Italian Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini, in which she describes the body of the mother-to-be in terms of a potentially psychotic disintegration or split: 'cells fuse, split and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realise it, but it goes on." Motherhood's impossible syllogism.' Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' [1979] in *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1980), pp.237-70, p.237.

unknown, not-yet-other. In this pre-natal encounter, there is neither fusion nor repulsion, neither assimilation nor rejection. The mother-to-be thus does not fully incorporate the foetus into her own body schema, nor yet does she acknowledge it as an entirely separate entity. Ettinger writes more specifically on what she terms the ‘com-passionate hospitality’ of the becoming mother towards the becoming infant. The mother-to-be, she suggests, lends to the intra-uterine encounter her ‘growing adult responsibility and empathy in actual hospitality during a long process of becoming a mother from the always there position of a daughter.’<sup>75</sup> The originary matrixial zone of encounter is thus to be considered a mutually yet asymmetrically subjectivising borderspace, in which ‘pre-maternal hospitality, empathy and responsibility encounters pre-natal, pre-mature response-ability, compassion and fascinancy.’<sup>76</sup> Matrixial theory also acknowledges, however, that this borderspace of co-emergence and co-fading is traumatising for the pregnant m/other-to-be:

The mother, now as an *I*, will never get over the trauma of that phantasmatic and corporeal co-incidence with an Other (now: the infant) who is emerging into the world inside her entrails. From the side of the woman-other as subject—a woman in her unique singularity—we must recognise the triple trauma of maternity and prematernity: the traumatic proximity to the Other during pregnancy, the traumatic regression to a similar archaic sharing (of the mother as infant with her own m/Other) and the traumatic separation from the *non-I* during birth-giving.<sup>77</sup>

In the originary matrixial encounter, the boundaries of the discrete subject are transgressed and relinquished, and its participants are rendered fragile and vulnerable. Ettinger emphasises that, in order to share in this intimate and transformative encounter, the m/other to be is required to have the capacity to ‘dwell in jointness without “schizoid” or “paranoid” defences so that a matrixial web would become creative.’<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, then, it might be possible to suggest that a sudden and traumatic external event such as the death of her husband just four days after birth-giving had separated her from this archaic matrixial space of prenatal/prematernal severality might have served as an additional blow to an already fragile Fanny Moser, causing her to fall back on such defensive mechanisms

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<sup>75</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Com-passionate Co-response-ability, Initiation in Jointness and the *link ∞* of Matrixial Virtuality,’ in *Gorge(l): Oppression and Relief in Art*, ed. Sofie van Loo (Antwerp: Museum of Fine Art, 2006), p.11.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘From Proto-Ethical Compassion to Responsibility: Besidedness and the Primal Mother-Phantasies of Not-Enoughness, Devouring and Abandonment,’ *Athena: Philosophical Studies* 2 (2006), pp.100-35, p.105.

<sup>78</sup> Ettinger, ‘Compassionate Co-Response-ability,’ p.13.



(splitting, projection) as we have seen in operation in her later relationship with her daughters?

In an early, and properly ‘pre-matrixial’ paper, Bracha Ettinger and her co-authors draw upon psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto’s distinction between body schema and body image. As they explain, Dolto’s concept of the body schema deals with the ‘physical-physiological-biological level of bodily existence.’ The concept of the body image, on the other hand, is an ‘unconscious image, a kind of internal code, in which the history of one’s drives and desires, pains and object relations are recorded.’<sup>79</sup> Following Dolto, Ettinger *et al* emphasise the role of language in enabling the subject to symbolise experiences relating to the body schema within the body image, and so to give them cultural and historical meaning:

in order for words to have meaning, they have to be metabolised in a body image relating to human relationships with meaningful others (first of all with the mother). To some extent, in order for this to be possible—to digest in the body image those experiences that are tied in with the body schema—they must undergo symbolisation through language. [...] If experiences are not connected with language, a gap or disconnection, or “hole” may be created in the body image.<sup>80</sup>

In a move which may in retrospect be seen to anticipate Ettinger’s subsequent radical re-conceptualisation of the pre-natal state, the authors suggest that the subject’s body schema is created ‘from the moment of conception’. They emphasise in particular that, in a ‘normal, healthy pregnancy’, there should be no dramatic changes to the body schema of the foetus. This situation is to be contrasted with a potentially pathogenic pregnancy, which may involve ‘dramatic changes that concern the foetus or the mother’s attitude towards the foetus during pregnancy, extraordinary noise or bodily injury, diseases which harm the mother or the foetus, traumatic events such as general anaesthesia of the mother or the foetus for the purpose of an operation.’<sup>81</sup> Such traumatic events can, they propose, ‘create traumas in the body schema, scars at the level of the body schema and “holes” in the body image, which may later find verbal expression through verbal hallucination, whether the events took place during pregnancy, at birth or during early infancy.’<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, Avi Telerand, Yuvial Kronenberg & Bracha Gaoni, ‘Verbal Hallucinations in Psychotic Patients,’ *Israeli Journal of Psychiatry & Related Sciences* 28.2 (1991), pp.39-49. I am grateful to Anna Johnson for drawing my attention to this paper.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

While Ettinger *et al* are here concerned specifically with the traumatising effects of such a pathogenic event during pregnancy upon the infant, their remarks also seem pertinent to my attempts to think about the traumatic impact of a sudden and unexpected death upon a recently post-partum subject. At his first meeting with Fanny Moser, Freud is particularly struck by her difficulties in speaking:

every two or three minutes she suddenly broke off, contorted her face into an expression of horror and disgust, and exclaimed in a changed voice, charged with anxiety: “Keep still! Don’t say anything! Don’t touch me!” These interpolations came to an end with equal suddenness and the patient took up what she had been saying, without pursuing her momentary excitement any further, without explaining or apologising for her strange behaviour—probably, therefore, without herself having noticed the interpolation (105).

In the light of Ettinger *et al*'s observations, it becomes possible to consider this tripartite formula a ‘verbal hallucination’ of a traumatic experience relating to parturition and mortality which has become disconnected from language, but which has nevertheless left its mark on the patient’s body schema in the form of hysterical symptoms, in particular her gastric pains. As discussed in my introductory chapter, according to Bracha Ettinger’s subsequent theories, hysteria is produced when the passage to the matrixial field is blocked or interrupted. In this sense, the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’ registers the profound difficulties faced by the feminine subject for whom access to her own sexual specificity is not merely socially and culturally taboo, but symbolically foreclosed.

### **Coda: On (Modernist) Daughters**

Fanny Moser died on 2 April 1925, at the age of seventy-six. In the existing critical literature on this first case history, she has remained a rather two-dimensional character: coming to be represented as either a misdiagnosed schizophrenic who, from an early age, ‘developed pathological symptoms to deal with her continual victimisation,’<sup>83</sup> or else a tragicomic figure who, in the last years of her life, fell in love with a younger man who swindled her out of a large part of her fortune, and who as a result became increasingly subject to the delusion that, ‘she was not only ruined but destitute, that nothing was left for her, and that she would not even have enough to eat for the next meal.’<sup>84</sup> In an interpretative move which finds its echo in the attention paid to a younger generation of women within the feminist historiography on hysteria, much of this critical literature has

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<sup>83</sup> W W Meissner, ‘Studies on Hysteria—Frau Emmy von N,’ *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 45.1 (January 1981), pp.1-19, p.16.

<sup>84</sup> Andersson, p.13.

laid its emphasis upon the eventual fate of her two daughters.<sup>85</sup> Her elder daughter, also named Fanny, whom Freud had felt ‘exhibited unbridled ambitions which were out of all proportion to the poverty of her gifts,’ in fact qualified first as a doctor and then as a research zoologist. After attending a number of séances, she became increasingly fascinated by the spirit world, and dedicated the latter part of her scientific career to an investigation of the paranormal. In 1935, she published a two-volume work on occult phenomena, and sent a copy to Freud for his approval. Freud wrote to thank her, and also reiterated his earlier thoughts on the strength and significance of his former patient’s ambivalent feelings towards her daughters:

When I received the two volumes on occultism, I had not the slightest doubt who its author was. [...] I cannot blame you that you still haven’t forgiven my bad diagnostic error at that time. Not only was I inexperienced, but our skills in reading the hidden psyche were still in their infancy.

Ten, maybe five years later, I couldn’t have helped guessing that the unlucky woman fought a serious battle against her unconscious hatred for her children and tried to defend herself by means of over-tenderness.

I have read some paragraphs of your book. I appreciate it as a brave and honest deed, one step further on the most stony path of work. You won’t be surprised that I can’t agree entirely with the pure theoretical chapters on hypnotism, dream, hysteria, especially with that on the ‘subconscious’.<sup>86</sup>

Fanny Moser went on to publish a further book in 1950, based on the research she had conducted into the phenomenon of haunted houses. She died in Zurich in 1953. The younger daughter, Mentona, published a series of pamphlets criticising the limited education afforded to young girls from wealthy families. Taking Florence Nightingale as her example, she urged young girls from a similar social background to herself to pursue a career in nursing or social work. Mentona Moser joined the Swiss Communist Party in 1919, and in 1926 moved to Russia, where she founded a home for abandoned children two years later. She subsequently moved to East Berlin, where she lived until her death in 1971. As has already been noted, there are thus significant similarities between her career and that of Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O) who, in later life, founded the first feminist

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<sup>85</sup> For a detailed account of both daughters’ subsequent careers, see in particular Ellenberger, ‘L’Histoire d’“Emmy von N.”’

<sup>86</sup> Sigmund Freud to Fanny Moser, 13 July 1935 cited by Christfried Tögel, “‘My Bad Diagnostic Error’: Once More About Freud and Emmy v. N. (Fanny Moser)”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 80 (1999), pp.1165-73, p.1165.

Jewish Women's Union and became an important figure in the nascent field of social work.<sup>87</sup>

Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester suggest that Fanny Moser's daughters' careers may be said to symbolise 'two very different paths open to the generation that followed their stifled neurotic mothers: the path of assimilation to the masculine professional and scientific world, and the path of feminist protest and of dedicated social work.'<sup>88</sup> In tracking the susceptibility of that earlier generation of late Victorian women, including Fanny Moser, to suffering, we have been led into the realm of medicine, and thence to psychoanalytical theorisation and treatment. In considering the new opportunities that opened up to their self-consciously modern daughters, another scenario opens up: that of the professional artist and writer. What, then, were the very different dilemmas—social, artistic and psychic—faced by a subsequent generation of 'New Women', who would displace their struggles between body and language, subjectivity and representation, from the medical consulting room into the writing room and artist's studio while still, however, having to negotiate the place of the mother, as both intimate feminine other and as representative of an often constraining cultural and social order? What does modernism offer if viewed from this perspective?

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<sup>87</sup> The comparison is made by both Ellenberger, 'L'Histoire d'"Emmy von N,"' p.539 and W W Meissner, 'Studies on Hysteria: Frau Emmy von N,' *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 45.1 (January 1981), pp.1-19, p.10.

<sup>88</sup> Appignanesi & Forrester, *Freud's Women*, p.103.



### CHAPTER THREE

## THINKING BACK THROUGH THE (VICTORIAN) MOTHER: MODERNIST DAUGHTERS AND THE CREATIVE PLAY OF AMBIVALENCE

Everything to do with dress—to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress—still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1924, Virginia Woolf was nominated for inclusion in *Vogue* magazine's 'Hall of Fame'. Her nomination was accompanied by a photograph of Woolf wearing a dress that had belonged to her mother, taken by *Vogue*'s chief photographers, Maurice Beck and Helen Macgregor (**Figure 3.1**). The Victorian dress, with its fussy lace edging and voluminous sleeves, looks too big for her, and the sense of fragility and ethereality that pervades the image is further enhanced by her wistfully averted gaze. The photograph bears a striking resemblance to an earlier and rather better known image: the studio portrait of the twenty-year-old Virginia Stephen taken by George Beresford in 1902 (**Figure 3.2**), an image which has played a key role in the making and maintaining of what Hermione Lee has aptly named the 'Virgin Virginia' legend.<sup>2</sup> In this later photograph, however, Virginia Woolf is forty-one years old, a full-time professional writer with three published novels, not to mention a considerable body of short stories, essays and reviews to her name; her inclusion in the 'Hall of Fame' is justified on the following grounds:

Because she is a publisher with a prose style: because she is a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen and a sister of Vanessa Bell: because she is the author of *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*: because in the opinion of some of the best judges she is the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation: because she also writes admirable criticism: because with her husband she runs the Hogarth Press.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time as this text serves to situate Virginia Woolf within a set of patriarchal relations (as the 'daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen' and as the wife of the publisher Leonard Woolf), so too does the accompanying image allude to her position within a maternal genealogy: in its staging, the photograph further echoes a portrait of Woolf's

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past' [1939-40] in *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, rev. & intro. Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.81.

<sup>2</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p.246. On the central role of the Beresford portrait in effecting Virginia Woolf's posthumous transformation into a cultural icon, see also Brenda R Silver, *Virginia Woolf Icon* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *Vogue*, late May 1924, cited by Nicola Luckhurst, *Bloomsbury in Vogue* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1998), p.4.

mother, Julia Stephen (née Jackson), taken by her great-aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron (**Figure 3.3**), which was itself reproduced in *Vogue* in late December 1926.<sup>4</sup>

As a recent essay by Lisa Tickner has demonstrated, the *Vogue* photograph thus proves a productive starting point from which to consider the question of a specifically matrilineal artistic heritage. In ‘Mediating Generation: the Mother/Daughter Plot,’ Tickner focusses in particular on the work of contemporary practitioner Rachel Whiteread (1963-), the sculptor-daughter of a feminist artist-mother, Pat Whiteread (1931-2003). Rachel Whiteread’s generation is, she emphasises, ‘the first generation in which women artists have grown up with both parents’ as potential intellectual and creative role models. According to Lisa Tickner, this fact eases, even if it does not eradicate, what Harold Bloom termed the ‘anxiety of influence’:

Finding (real and elective) artist-mothers releases women to deal with their fathers and encounter their siblings on equal terms. [...] What has been won here is not a place in a separate, parallel, maternal line so much as the right to inhabit, appropriate, or “swerve” from the example of fathers and brothers as well as mothers and aunts.<sup>5</sup>

Lisa Tickner is concerned to track the changing relations of gender and generation as they are inscribed first in a painting of her mother by Woolf’s sister, Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), and then as they are reconfigured in the work of Rachel Whiteread. In this chapter I want, however, to focus on the historically specific contradictions faced by a generation of ‘New Women’, including both Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, in the early years of the twentieth century, before the easing of which Tickner writes had come into force. Having examined how the doctor/patient scenario was reconfigured by women’s self-enunciation within the nascent field of psychoanalysis, I will now consider how a second scenario in which gendered relations of power had also operated, that of artist/model, was transformed by women’s intervention in cultural modernism as subjects, rather than objects, of representation.

One key difference is this. Unlike Rachel Whiteread, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell were *motherless* daughters. As Shoshana Felman has pointed out, in Woolf’s case, ‘the

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<sup>4</sup>Jane Garrity, ‘Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry and 1920s British *Vogue*’ in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L Caughie (New York & London: Garland, 2000), p.202.

<sup>5</sup>Lisa Tickner, ‘Mediating Generation: The Mother-Daughter Plot’, originally published in *Art History* 25.1 (February 2002), pp.23-46; reprinted in *Women Artists at the Millennium*, eds. Carol Armstrong & Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge MA & London: The MIT Press, 2006), p.91, p.94.





Figure 3.2  
George Beresford, photograph of Virginia Stephen, July 1902.



Figure 3.3  
Julia Margaret Cameron, photograph of Julia Jackson, c.1867.

legacy of motherhood is not merely that of a life giver but, equally, a legacy of death.’<sup>6</sup> How, then, was this dual legacy of the maternal processed in the work of women artists and writers in the modernist moment? While recognising Woolf’s painful confrontation with her own personal history of premature maternal bereavement in her autobiographical writings, we need also to acknowledge that Virginia Woolf’s attempts to ‘think back through her mother’ have a significance that transcends the purely biographical. The photograph of Woolf so uncomfortably wearing her mother’s dress can, therefore, serve as a departure point from which to consider the particular dilemmas faced by these self-consciously modern and modernist women in terms of negotiating generational legacies and differences. In this chapter, I argue that, in their bid to carve out a career for themselves as professional artists and writers in the early years of the twentieth century, these modernist daughters found themselves not only ‘swerving’ from the example of fathers and brothers, as Tickner mentions, but also having to battle against an anachronistic and creativity-stifling ideal of Victorian femininity exemplified, in many cases, by their own mothers, aunts or older sisters.

The *Vogue* photograph is puzzling on several levels. From 1922 to 1926, under the editorship of Dorothy Todd, the British edition of *Vogue* was transformed from ‘a women’s magazine whose staples were high society, the rich and famous, plus high fashion—into a review for the *avant-garde*.’<sup>7</sup> Beauty and style advice thus sat alongside literary and artistic reviews by writers including Clive Bell, Roger Fry, D H Lawrence, Ottoline Morrell, Bertrand Russell, Vita Sackville-West, Edith Sitwell and Leonard Woolf. During Todd’s editorship, Virginia Woolf herself contributed five articles to *Vogue*, seemingly attracted by the high rates of pay the magazine offered; letters and diaries from this period explore her ambivalent feelings about ‘whoring after Todd’<sup>8</sup> and ‘sweeping guineas off the *Vogue* counter.’<sup>9</sup> In her study of the magazine, Aurelea Mahood highlights the ‘very real confluence between fashion and literature’ in the pages of *Vogue* during the 1920s, citing

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<sup>6</sup> Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.147.

<sup>7</sup> Luckhurst, *Bloomsbury in Vogue*, p.3. On the contributions made by the *avant-garde* to *Vogue* during the period of Dorothy Todd’s editorship, see also Aurelea Mahood, ‘Fashioning Readers: The *Avant-Garde* and British *Vogue* 1920-9’, *Women: A Cultural Review* 13.1 (2002), pp.37-47 and Christopher Reed, ‘A *Vogue* That Dare Not Speak its Name: Sexual Subculture During the Editorship of Dorothy Todd, 1922-26’, *Fashion Theory* 10.1-2 (March-June 2006), pp.39-72.

<sup>8</sup> ‘whats the objection to whoring after Todd? Better whore, I think, than honestly and timidly and coolly and respectably copulate with the Times Lit Sup.’

Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 1 September 1925 in *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume III: 1923-1928*, eds. Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p.200.

<sup>9</sup> Entry dated 27 June 1925 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell & Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975-1980), Volume III, p.33.



the editorial of the April 1925 issue, which declared that ‘*Vogue* has no intention of confining its pages to hats and frocks. In literature, drama, art and architecture, the same spirit of change is seen at work, and to the intelligent observer the interplay of suggestion and influence between all these things is one of the fascinations of the study of the contemporary world.’<sup>10</sup> Given the fact that *Vogue* thus positioned itself on the cusp of all the latest developments in both fashion and literature, why did they not photograph ‘the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation’ wearing the most up-to-date designs of a cutting-edge couturier such as Paul Poiret or Coco Chanel? As Jane Garrity has observed, the magazine’s textual celebration of Woolf’s modernism and her intellect appears at odds with the photograph’s reliance on the conventions of an idealised and outmoded femininity. For Garrity, the representation of Virginia Woolf in the pages of *Vogue* is thus to be considered indicative of the magazine’s ‘precarious position in the 1920s: poised between a desire to celebrate women’s artistic achievements and unable fully to incorporate their intellectual authority and importance.’<sup>11</sup>

In her diary from this period, Virginia Woolf regularly returns to the issue of what she herself termed her ‘frock consciousness’.<sup>12</sup> ‘I must remember to write about my *clothes* next time I have an impulse to write,’ she noted on 14 May 1925; ‘my love of clothes interests me profoundly: only it is not love; & what it is I must discover.’<sup>13</sup> The following year, the midst of the General Strike found her preoccupied with sartorial matters: she was at that time ‘involved in dress buying with Todd; I tremble & shiver all over at the appalling magnitude of the task I have undertaken.’<sup>14</sup> Although the thought of a shopping trip with Dorothy Todd was at that point sufficient to make her blood ‘run cold’, Woolf did, with the *Vogue* editor’s evident guidance, purchase a dress and hat at around that time; the new outfit provoked much excited comment at a gathering in Gordon Square:

Clive suddenly said, or bawled rather, what an astonishing hat you’re wearing! Then he asked where I got it. I pretended a mystery, tried to change the talk, was not allowed, & they pulled me down between them, like a hare; I never felt more humiliated. Clive said did Mary choose it? No. Todd said Vita. And the dress? Todd of course: after that I was forced to go on as if nothing terrible had happened; but it was very forced & queer & humiliating. So I

<sup>10</sup> *Vogue*, early April 1925, cited by Mahood, ‘Fashioning Readers,’ p.39.

<sup>11</sup> Garrity, ‘Intellectual Harlotry,’ p.204.

<sup>12</sup> Entry dated 27 April 1925, *Diary* III, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Entry dated 14 May 1925, *Diary* III, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> 6 May 1926, *Diary* III, p.78.

talked and laughed too much [...] Leonard got silent, & I came away deeply chagrined, as unhappy as I have been these ten years.<sup>15</sup>

Virginia Woolf's on-going preoccupation with the question of what to wear also worked its way into the short story 'The New Dress', written in early 1925 and published in *Forum* in May 1927, in which the forty-year-old Mabel Waring attends a party hosted by Clarissa Dalloway, wearing a 'pale yellow, idiotically old-fashioned silk dress with [a] long skirt and high sleeves' that she had had made up from 'an old fashion book of her mother's'.<sup>16</sup> As Mabel tries on the dress at her dressmaker's, 'an extraordinary bliss shot through her heart. Suffused with light, she sprang into existence.'<sup>17</sup> This intense, private pleasure quickly gives way, however, to a very public sense of shame and humiliation: as she arrives at the party, Mabel experiences a growing conviction that the dress was 'not quite right,' 'and at once the misery she had always tried to hide, the profound dissatisfaction—the sense that she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people—set upon her remorselessly, with an intensity she could not beat off.'<sup>18</sup> For the fictional Mabel, the attempt to clothe herself in a dress similar in style to that worn by her mother precipitates only a sense of overwhelming alienation and anxiety: 'now she could see flies crawling slowly out of a saucer of milk with their wings stuck together. [...] She saw herself like that—she was a fly, but the others were dragon-flies, butterflies, beautiful insects, dancing, fluttering, skimming, while she alone dragged herself up out of the saucer.'<sup>19</sup>

Given Virginia Woolf's profound 'frock consciousness'—her complex relationship both to the world of high fashion and the art of dress—her decision to pose for *Vogue* magazine wearing an outfit that had belonged to her long-deceased mother must ultimately remain an enigma.<sup>20</sup> Her attempt to forge an imaginary identification with the Mother, in this instance through clothing, does, however, raise a number of questions which can be explored psychoanalytically.

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<sup>15</sup> 30 June 1926, *Diary* III, p.91.

<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The New Dress' [1927] in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt, 1989), pp.170-71.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.171.

<sup>20</sup> From her letters and diaries, it appears unclear as to whether the suggestion that she should be photographed in her mother's dress came from Woolf herself, or was made by either Beck and Macgregor, or Dorothy Todd. The diaries do, however, make reference to a party held at 46 Gordon Square on 7 January 1923, at which Woolf wore her 'mother's laces' and felt the blood racing in her veins 'brilliant and pricking like champagne.' *Diary* II, p.223.

## Thinking Back Through Julia Stephen: Loss, Memory and Working Through

### i. The Relief of Signification<sup>21</sup>

Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth Stephen died at the age of forty-nine on 5 May 1895; her death was, her youngest daughter would subsequently acknowledge, ‘the greatest disaster that could happen.’<sup>22</sup> In an early endeavour to set down her memories of her mother, Virginia Stephen wonders, ‘Where has she gone? What she said has never ceased.’<sup>23</sup> This play between the irrevocable absence of death and the continuing presence of memory structures both the 1908 text ‘Reminiscences’ and the much later ‘Sketch of the Past’ (1939-40), in which Virginia Woolf tries once again to record her earliest memories of her mother and to describe the traumatic aftermath of Julia Stephen’s premature death. The ‘Reminiscences’ were written when Virginia Stephen was a young woman aged twenty-five, whose adult life had not yet fully taken shape and who was very consciously in the process of learning her craft as a writer. In ‘Sketch of the Past,’ she writes both as an established author and as a mature woman whose own mortality is pressing upon her (‘Nessa said that if I did not start writing my memoirs I should soon be too old. I should be eighty-five and should have forgotten’<sup>24</sup>), and thus looks back on her childhood and adolescence from a very different perspective. Both texts, however, hinge in different ways on the difficulties in conveying a sense of her mother as a vital, subjective—and subjectivising—presence. As Virginia Stephen acknowledges in ‘Reminiscences,’ ‘written words of a person who is dead or still alive tend most unfortunately to drape themselves in smooth folds annulling all evidence of life.’<sup>25</sup> In ‘Sketch of the Past,’ the problem is no longer conceived as one of the inadequacy of language, but rather concerns the fallibility of

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<sup>21</sup> I borrow this concept from the work of Griselda Pollock, who originally articulated it in relation to the art practice and Matrixial theory of Bracha Ettinger: ‘art may be, as [Ettinger] describes it, *symbologenic*. It may be able to generate not an image of the trauma but a symbol that allows the forecluded the relief of signification, a pathway into language.’

Griselda Pollock, ‘Gleaning in History or Coming After/Behind the Reapers: The Feminine, the Stranger and the Matrix in the work and theory of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger,’ pp.266-88 in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p.274.

<sup>22</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Reminiscences’ [1908] in *Moments of Being*, p.11.

For further discussion of the significance of her mother to Virginia Woolf, see Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986). More recently, psychologist Katherine Dalsimer has offered a sensitive analysis of the impact of the death of her mother on the young Virginia Stephen in *Virginia Woolf: Becoming a Writer* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001). My ensuing discussion is also indebted to Hope Edelman’s account of the profound effects of premature mother loss on a surviving daughter; see Hope Edelman, *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* (Reading MA: Addison Wesley, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Reminiscences,’ p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Sketch of the Past’ [1939-40] in *Moments of Being*, p.78.

<sup>25</sup> Woolf, ‘Reminiscences,’ p.8.

memory: 'can I get any closer to her without drawing upon all those descriptions and anecdotes which after she was dead imposed themselves upon my view of her?'<sup>26</sup>

Virginia Stephen's early 'Reminiscences' take the form of a letter about her sister, addressed to Vanessa Bell's firstborn son, Julian. As Hermione Lee notes, the text thus inherits and imitates a nineteenth-century patriarchal tradition of autobiography written as a letter to one's children.<sup>27</sup> Composed in the months of her sister's first pregnancy, the writing of this text must surely have led Virginia Stephen not only to relive the past loss of her mother, but also to think about her own future potentiality for motherhood. In the first chapter of the memoir, she offers a lengthy eulogy to her mother. Julia Stephen was, we learn, 'not only the most beautiful of women [...] but also one of the most distinct.' The text offers an idealised account of a life entirely devoted to, and eventually worn down by, the service of others—'anyone coming for help found her invincibly upright in her place, with time to give, earnest consideration, and the most practical sympathy'—and a 'perfect' marriage based upon principles of mutual respect—her parents had, she suggested, found in each other 'the highest and most perfect harmony which their natures could respond to [...] she knew with just but always delighted pride that he worshipped in her something as unchallengeably high as the lofty remote peak which she honoured in him.'<sup>28</sup>

In these early 'Reminiscences,' Virginia Stephen also, however, finds herself struggling with the structural limitations of the traditional memoir format: 'you will not find in what I say, or again in those sincere but conventional phrases in the life of your grandfather, or in the noble lamentations with which he fills the pages of his autobiography, any semblance of a woman whom you can love.'<sup>29</sup> Though her writing remains for the most part stiffly formal and strangely distant, it is at certain moments suffused with the longing for the mother whom she had lost thirteen years earlier: 'what would one not give to recapture a single phrase even!', she exclaims, 'or the tone of the clear round voice, or the sight of the beautiful figure.'<sup>30</sup> Her bid to evoke the vividness of this early relationship would prove crucial to the much later 'Sketch of the Past,' in which she works to develop a new form of writing capable of addressing the interdependency of past and present. On 2 May 1939 she notes that:

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<sup>26</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' p.94.

<sup>27</sup> Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p.18.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf, 'Reminiscences,' pp.4-9.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.



I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time.<sup>31</sup>

In this hybrid diary-memoir, Virginia Woolf thus explores her relationship with her mother from the dual perspective of a 'child of seven or eight' and a 'woman now older than she was when she died.'<sup>32</sup> She looks back not only to her childhood, but also to her attempts to use elements of that childhood as a basis for her own creative practice. In an oft-quoted passage, she goes so far as to liken the process of writing to that of undergoing an analysis:

Until I was in the forties—I could settle the date by seeing when I wrote *To the Lighthouse* [...]—the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life.

[...] It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another. Blowing bubbles out of a pipe gives the feeling of the rapid crowd of ideas and scenes which blew out of my mind, so that my lips seemed syllabbling of their own accord as I walked. What blew the bubbles? Why then? I have no notion. But I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.

I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.<sup>33</sup>

But what is it that psychoanalysts do for their (women) patients? Lacanian psychoanalyst Michèle Montrelay has proposed that the analyst's interpretations provide the analysand with a 'structuring discourse' that affords her some relief from an otherwise nameless and shapeless anxiety.<sup>34</sup> Montrelay shows how, from a Lacanian perspective, language must intervene in order to turn us away from the immediate real of the (maternal)

<sup>31</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' p.87.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, pp.92-93.

<sup>34</sup> Michèle Montrelay, 'Inquiry into Femininity,' *m/f* 1 (1978), pp.83-101.

As Montrelay emphasises, 'to represent to oneself the motive of one's fear is already to give a reason for it.' For Montrelay herself, however, anxiety is, more particularly, '*without reason*'. What we mean is that it supposes the impossibility of any rational thought. In other words, anxiety appears as the limit-moment when conscious and unconscious representation are blocked off (86).

body: ‘discourse,’ she writes, ‘makes impossible any direct and peaceable relation to the body, to the world and to pleasure.’<sup>35</sup> The process of symbolic castration thus cleaves the subject from a state of undifferentiated plenitude, delivering him or her from a time when ‘nothing was thinkable, [when] the body and the world were confounded in one chaotic intimacy which was too present, too immediate.’<sup>36</sup> As Montrelay stresses, signification is accordingly contingent upon the loss of the desired maternal object: ‘hence the repression that ensures that one does not think, nor see, nor take the desired object, even and above all if it is within reach: this object must remain lost.’<sup>37</sup>

Michèle Montrelay analyses the particular difficulties that this schema presents for the feminine subject, who has an altogether more complicated relationship to the maternal body. She cannot lose the object of desire, but rather becomes it:

The real of the body, in taking form at puberty, in charging itself with intensity and importance and presence, as object of the lover’s desire, re-actualises, re-incarnates, the real of that other body, which, at the beginning of life was the substance of words, the organiser of desire; which, later on, was also the material of archaic repression. Recovering herself as maternal body (and also as phallus), the woman can no longer repress, “lose”, the first stake of representation. [...] Nothing is forbidden for the woman; there is no statement or law which prohibits the recovery of the stake since the real which imposes itself and takes the place of repression and desire is, for her, the real of her own body. From now on, anxiety, tied to the presence of this body, can only be insistent, continuous. This body, so close, which she has to occupy, is an object in excess which must be “lost”, that is to say, repressed, in order to be symbolised.<sup>38</sup>

Montrelay’s inquiry into the psychoanalytic theorisation of femininity thus reveals feminine sexuality to be less subject to repression than that of the masculine subject. Within the strictly Lacanian framework of her analysis, the feminine subject is seen to retain an excessively close relationship to her own, and by extension, the maternal body.<sup>39</sup> Montrelay suggests that she may accordingly attempt to disguise the immediacy of her relationship to bodily *jouissance*—her lack of lack—through masquerade, ‘piling up crazy things, feathers, hats and strange baroque constructions which rise up like so many silent insignias.’<sup>40</sup> As we saw in the short story ‘The New Dress’, however, the attempt to masquerade in,

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.87.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>39</sup> As I shall go on to discuss, in its theorisation of a supplementary girl-to-m/Other feminine-matrixial difference, the work of Bracha Ettinger moves us beyond this impasse.

<sup>40</sup> Montrelay, ‘Inquiry into Femininity,’ p.93.

specifically, her mother's dress precipitates only an overwhelming feeling of anxiety in the fictional Mabel.

Montrelay goes on to propose that the analytic interpretation may structure what would otherwise be experienced only as an intolerable pressure, an inchoate anxiety that threatens to dissolve the very boundaries of the feminine subject. In interpreting, the analyst 'verbally articulates something of a sexuality maintained till then in a state of nature, in the "dark".'<sup>41</sup> Yet this is not to imply that his or her interpretation reveals some hidden desire or else lifts some inhibition:

What is essential in the cure of a woman is not making sexuality more "conscious" or interpreting it, at least not in the sense normally given to this term. The analyst's word takes on a completely different function. It no longer explains, but from the sole fact of articulating, it *structures*. By verbally putting in place a representation of castration, the analyst's word makes sexuality pass into discourse.<sup>42</sup>

The analyst's words symbolically 'castrate', in that they serve to release the analysand from any direct and unmediated relationship to the body, enabling sexuality and corporeality to pass into the realm of signification.

In 'The New Dress,' Mabel experiences a series of 'delicious moments' that afford her some relief from an otherwise paralyzing anxiety: 'reading the other night in bed, for instance, or down by the sea on the sand in the sun at Easter—let her recall it—a great tuft of pale sand-grass standing all twisted like a shock of spears against the sky, which was blue like a smooth china egg, so firm, so hard, and then the melody of the waves—"Hush, hush," they said, and the children's shouts paddling—yes, it was a divine moment, and there she lay, she felt, in the hands of the Goddess who was the world.'<sup>43</sup> She makes her escape from Mrs Dalloway's party vowing that:

She would go to the London Library tomorrow. She would find some wonderful, helpful, astonishing book, quite by chance, a book by a clergyman, by an American no one had ever heard of; or she would walk down the Strand and drop, accidentally, into a hall where a miner was telling about life in the pit and suddenly she would become a new person. She would be absolutely transformed. She would wear a uniform; she would be called Sister Somebody;

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>43</sup> Woolf, 'The New Dress,' p.175.

she would never give a thought to clothes again. [...] And it would be always, day after day, as if she were lying in the sun.<sup>44</sup>

For the fictional Mabel and, I would propose, for her creator, intellectual enquiry and social engagement thus appear to hold the dual possibility of some release from an overwhelming feeling of proximity, a bodily identification with the mother that is signified in the short story in the restrictive form of the Victorian dress, holding forth the possibility of a different kind of connection to a feminine/maternal other (the oceanic feeling that Mabel intuits on the beach).

## ii. The Work of Mourning

In his 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia,' Sigmund Freud coined the phrase 'the work of mourning' to describe the process of grieving for a loved one. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, the term transforms our understanding of the grieving process from something which entails a 'gradual and apparently automatic attenuation of suffering' (here, we might think of the banal observation that 'time is a great healer,' so often offered up as comfort to the recently bereaved) into a 'whole internal process implying an activity on the part of the subject.'<sup>45</sup> According to Freud, profound mourning entails a loss of interest in the outside world, an inability to form new emotional attachments and a reluctance to participate in any activity that is not connected with the lost loved one. Freud suggests that, in order for the bereaved subject to be able to go on to form new relationships, the ego has first actively to sever all of its libidinal attachments to the lost object. This break can, however, be achieved only after the mourner has recalled and relived each and every one of his or her memories of the person whom they have lost: 'each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.'<sup>46</sup> As Melanie Klein would subsequently emphasise, the testing of reality is, therefore, an essential part of the work of mourning.<sup>47</sup> The mourner's memories of their loved one have to be tested against the reality that he or she is gone forever: 'each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the object is met

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.176.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Laplanche & J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p.485.

<sup>46</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' [1917 (1915)] in *On Metapsychology*. *Penguin Freud Library* 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, reprinted 1991), p.253.

<sup>47</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Mourning and its Relationship to Manic-Depressive States' [1940] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (London: Vintage, 1988), p.344.



by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished.<sup>48</sup> Faced with the reality of the loss of the object, the ego has to choose whether it too should give up its existence. Where mourning is successful, the ego elects to preserve itself, and does so by slowly, systematically and painfully cutting each of its ties to the lost object.

If we were to take Virginia Woolf at her word, we might suggest that the writing of *To the Lighthouse* in some way enabled her to complete the work of mourning for her mother ('when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her'). According to Freud, the withdrawal of libido from the lost object is, however, a painful and drawn out process, not a sudden letting go. Notwithstanding her comments in 'Sketch of the Past,' Woolf continued to live alongside the 'invisible presence' of her mother long after the writing of *To the Lighthouse*. In her diaries, she continues to commemorate both her mother's birthday and the anniversary of her death; news of Roger Fry's death precipitates her abruptly back to the scene of that other, earlier loss:

I'm too stupid to write anything. My head all stiff. I think the poverty of life now is what comes to me. A thin blackish veil over everything. Hot weather. A wind blowing. The substance gone out of everything. [...] I remember turning aside at mother's bed, when she had died, & Stella took us in, to laugh, secretly, at the nurse crying. She's pretending, I said: aged 13. & was afraid I was not feeling enough.<sup>49</sup>

In 'Sketch of the Past,' Virginia Woolf again returns to the actual moment of her mother's death and describes the family's bewildered attempts to adjust to her absence. She struggles to understand not only the impact of the loss of her mother on her adolescent self, but more particularly the relationship she had had with her prior to that loss. Her earliest memories of her mother return as a kaleidoscopic series of tactile, visual and aural fragments:

My first memory is of her lap; the scratch of some beads on her dress comes back to me as I pressed my cheek against it. Then I see her in her white dressing gown on the balcony; and the passion flower with the purple star on its petals. Her voice is still faintly in my ears—decided, quick; and in particular the little drops with which her laugh ended—three diminishing ahs... "Ah—ah—ah..." I sometimes end a laugh that way myself. And I see her hands,

<sup>48</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' p.265.

<sup>49</sup> 12 September 1934, *Diary IV*, p.242.

like Adrian's, with the very individual square-tipped fingers [...]. She had three rings; a diamond ring, an emerald ring, and an opal ring. My eyes used to fix themselves upon the lights in the opal as it moved across the page of the lesson book when she taught us [...]. Also I hear the tinkle of her bracelets, made of twisted silver, given her by Mr Lowell, as she went about the house; especially as she came up at night to see if we were asleep, holding a candle shaded; this is a distant memory, for, like all children, I lay awake sometimes and longed for her to come.<sup>50</sup>

According to Melanie Klein, mourning is doubly painful, in that it also involves a re-awakening of other, earlier experiences of grief and loss. In her paper on 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,' Klein proposes that the loss of a loved one revives certain anxieties initially associated with the infantile depressive position. As outlined in the previous chapter, the depressive position is reached when the infant begins to be able to perceive of her mother as a real and separate person. Where earlier she had been aware only of a series of part-objects, which she experiences as either good *or* bad, now she sees a whole object, at once both good *and* bad. This new recognition ushers in a period of mourning for the good object, which the infant now fears she has lost as a result of her own destructive phantasies. Klein argues that, in later periods of mourning, the bereaved subject also relives these early feelings of anxiety, guilt and longing: 'the poignancy of the actual loss of a loved person is,' she writes, 'greatly increased by the mourner's unconscious phantasies of having lost his *internal* "good" objects as well. [...] These too are felt to have gone under, to be destroyed, whenever the loss of a loved person is experienced.'<sup>51</sup> Klein's theories would thus seem to imply that the loss of a mother in later life is especially difficult in that it also entails a revival of certain early infantile anxieties and phantasies around that mother: as Virginia Woolf tries to make sense of Julia Stephen's death, she is led inexorably back to a moment when her mother—imagined primarily as a fragmented series of parts—was 'central' to her internal world: 'I suspect the word "central" gets closest to the general feeling of living so completely in her atmosphere that one never got far enough away from her to see her as a person.'<sup>52</sup>

For Melanie Klein, the slow and painful process of reality-testing which Freud viewed as essential to the work of mourning is associated not only with the need to establish a connection to the external world, but also with the need to 'rebuild with anguish

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<sup>50</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' p.93.

<sup>51</sup> Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,' p.353.

<sup>52</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' p.93.

the inner world, which is felt to be in danger of deteriorating and collapsing.<sup>53</sup> As the mourner slowly renews his links to the external world, so too does he begin to trust in his inner world again: 'he feels more strongly that life inside and outside will go on after all, and that the lost loved object can be preserved within.' 'At this stage in mourning,' Klein suggests, 'suffering can become productive.'<sup>54</sup> Hanna Segal further draws out the link between mourning and creativity in Kleinian thinking, proposing that:

all creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self. It is when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments and we ourselves in helpless despair—it is then that we must re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life.<sup>55</sup>

Virginia Woolf writes of her feeling that 'everything had come to an end' with her mother's death:

With mother's death the merry various family life which she had held in being shut forever. [...] There were no more parties; no more young men and women laughing. No more flashing visions of white summer dresses and hansoms dashing off to private views and dinner parties, none of that natural life and gaiety which my mother had created. [...] There were none of those snatched moments that were so amusing and for some reason so soothing and yet exciting when one ran downstairs to dinner arm in arm with mother; or chose the jewels she was to wear. There was none of that pride when one said something that amused her, or that she thought very remarkable.<sup>56</sup>

In 'Sketch of the Past,' she lovingly rebuilds the shattered world of her Victorian childhood, summoning up her earliest memories in a bid to construct for herself a portrait of her mother. Yet, as she endeavours to piece together this fragmented series of infantile impressions, Woolf comes to realise that her memories of her mother are in fact 'all of her in company; of her surrounded; of her generalised; dispersed.'<sup>57</sup> She finds that her mother has become over time 'rubbed out and featureless,' 'dominated by the beauty of her own face.'<sup>58</sup> In the process of looking back as an adult woman on her relationship with the mother whom she had lost as a child, she is, nonetheless, able to arrive at an awareness of

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<sup>53</sup> Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,' p.354.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.360.

<sup>55</sup> Hanna Segal, 'A Psycho-analytical Approach to Aesthetics,' originally published in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 33 (1956), pp.196-207; reprinted in *Reading Melanie Klein*, eds. John Phillips & Lyndsey Stonebridge (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p.209.

<sup>56</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' pp.104-05.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

‘why it was impossible for her to leave a very particular and private impression upon a child.’ In a passage that shuttles between infantile rivalry and adult acceptance, she writes that:

I see now that she was living on such an extended surface that she had not time, nor strength, to concentrate, except for a moment if one were ill or in some child’s crisis, upon me, or upon anyone—unless it were Adrian. Him she cherished separately; she called him ‘My Joy’. The later view, the understanding that I now have of her position must have its say; and it shows me that a woman of forty with seven children, some of them needing grown up attention, and four still in the nursery; and an eighth, Laura, an idiot, yet living with us; and a husband fifteen years her elder, difficult, exacting, dependent on her; I see now that a woman who had to keep all this in being and under control must have been a general presence rather than a particular being to a child of seven or eight. Can I remember ever being alone with her for more than a few minutes? Someone was always interrupting.<sup>59</sup>

In ‘Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,’ Melanie Klein suggests that, as the mourner begins to acknowledge that their lost loved one was not perfect, but is nevertheless able to continue loving and trusting in that person, ‘important steps in the work of mourning and towards overcoming it have been made.’<sup>60</sup> As Virginia Woolf revives and revises her infantile memories of her mother in ‘Sketch of the Past,’ so too does she journey slowly towards a more complete and complex understanding of Julia Stephen, not simply as the idealised centre of her childhood world, but as an adult woman struggling to hold together the fabric of a large Victorian stepfamily.

### iii. Killing the Angel in the House

Melanie Klein also emphasises, however, that ‘in normal mourning early psychotic activities are reactivated; the mourner is in fact ill.’<sup>61</sup> Thrown back into the depressive position, the bereaved subject feels not only sorrow and concern for the lost loved object, but is also beset by feelings of rage, persecution and hatred. He or she may thus react to the intense pain of bereavement by falling back on the same system of manic defences that was initially mobilised in order to counter infantile depressive anxiety. In the Kleinian schema, feelings of denial, contempt and, particularly, triumph therefore play an inevitable part in the grieving process:

Infantile death-wishes against parents, brothers and sisters are actually fulfilled whenever a loved person dies, because he is necessarily to some extent a

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, pp.94-5.

<sup>60</sup> Klein, ‘Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,’ p.355.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.354.



representative of the earliest important figures, and therefore takes over some of the feelings pertaining to them. Thus his death, however shattering for other reasons, is to some extent felt as a victory, and gives rise to triumph, and therefore all the more to guilt.<sup>62</sup>

In 'Sketch of the Past', Virginia Woolf appears to reserve much of her contempt for her father. In her feelings towards him, 'rage alternated with love. It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence.'<sup>63</sup> In both her early 'Reminiscences' and 'Sketch of the Past,' she bitterly describes Leslie Stephen's prolonged and histrionic displays of grief following his wife's death, and the excessive emotional demands which he placed firstly on his stepdaughter Stella and then, after her death, on his own adolescent daughters:

Never have I felt such rage and frustration. For not a word of what I felt—that unbounded contempt for him and of pity for Nessa—could be expressed. [...] Even now I can find nothing to say of his behaviour save that it was brutal. If instead of words he had used a whip, the brutality could have been no greater.<sup>64</sup>

Her own and her sister's particular battles with their father and stepbrothers are seen to form part of a broader struggle against Victorian social conventions:

We lived under the sway of a society that was about fifty years too old for us. It was this curious fact that made our struggle so bitter and so violent. For the society we lived in was still the Victorian society. Father himself was a typical Victorian. George and Gerald were consenting and approving Victorians. So that we had two quarrels to wage; two fights to fight; one with them individually; and one with them socially. We were living say in 1910; they were living in 1860.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.354.

<sup>63</sup> Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past,' p.116.

On Virginia Woolf's engagement with the work of Freud, see Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Pointing out that Melanie Klein's delivered her 1925 lectures on child analysis at 50 Gordon Square, the home of Adrian and Karin Stephen, while Virginia Woolf was next door writing *To the Lighthouse*, Abel argues that, during the 1920s, 'Woolf's narratives move back towards a maternal point of origin that Freud, in the same decade, both acknowledged and occluded and that Klein mapped with greater complexity. In the 1930s, however, Woolf swerved abruptly and reluctantly from Klein towards Freud as the ideologies of motherhood that flourished in the 1920s and that fostered her critique of Freud were appropriated and inevitably contaminated for her by the fascist state' (p.xvi).

For further discussion of the historical presence of psychoanalysis within modernist culture in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, see also Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, pp.149-50.

I want to suggest, however, that the feelings of rage and contempt that Virginia Woolf directs against her father, here imagined as the embodiment of outmoded and repressive Victorian patriarchal values, may also have played a role in her relationship with her mother. At the same time as she grieved deeply for the loss of her mother, Woolf also reacted violently against the idealised conventions of self-sacrificing Victorian femininity exemplified in the person of Julia Stephen. To think back through her mother—or indeed to dress in her clothes—was, therefore, necessarily an ambivalent act for this modernist daughter.

On 21 January 1931, Woolf delivered a talk to the London and National Society for Women's Service, an edited version of which was subsequently published as the essay 'Professions for Women'.<sup>66</sup> Addressing a group of women who were 'for the first time in history' able to pursue a career as 'barristers, architects, decorators, solicitors', she spoke of her own experiences as a professional reviewer and novelist. Her assumption of a public role as a writer had, she suggested, necessitated a deadly struggle with a figure who had already succeeded in killing 'writer after writer, painter after painter.'<sup>67</sup> This 'intensely sympathetic', 'immensely charming', 'utterly unselfish' figure she named the Angel in the House, after the eponymous heroine of a popular mid-nineteenth-century poem by Coventry Patmore:

The Angel in the House was the ideal of womanhood created by the imaginations of men and women at a certain stage of their pilgrimage. [...] They agreed to accept this ideal, because for reasons I cannot now go into—they have to do with the British Empire, our colonies, Queen Victoria, Lord Tennyson, the growth of the middle classes and so on—<a real relationship> between men and women was then unattainable.<sup>68</sup>

The power of this literary and cultural stereotype was such that she assumed an actual, physical presence and so Virginia Woolf was forced to turn upon the Angel in the House and to seize her by the throat: 'I did my best to kill her. My excuse—if I were to be had up

<sup>66</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women' in *On Women and Writing*, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

<sup>67</sup> Virginia Woolf, untitled transcript of a speech given before the London and National Society for Women's Service, 21 January 1931, transcribed in Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of 'The Years'*, ed. & intro. Mitchell A Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p.xxxii.

Editorial revisions to the transcript are given as follows:

[word] = a reading supplied by the editor.

<word> = an insertion made by Virginia Woolf.

Omissions within quotations are indicated by an ellipsis.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxx.

in a law court and charged with murder—would be that I acted in self-defence. If I had not killed her, she would have killed me—as a writer.<sup>69</sup>

For Virginia Woolf, creativity was thus contingent upon the violent destruction of the bourgeois feminine ideal. Only after committing such an act of aggression towards this fictitious embodiment of Victorian gender ideologies was, she suggests, a woman free ‘to be herself <and to write>.’ She goes on to ask, however:

But what is ‘herself’? I mean, what is woman? I assure you, I don’t know; I do not believe that you know [...]. <What a woman [is]> is a discovery which you here are in the process of making [...]. All I can tell you is that I discovered when I came to write that a woman—it sounds so simple, but I should be ashamed to tell you how long it took me to realise this for myself—is not a man. Her experience is not the same. Her traditions are different.<sup>70</sup>

The version of the speech subsequently edited for publication accentuates the extent to which the effort to formulate a creative practice capable of addressing this particularity of experience and tradition was, for Virginia Woolf, further bound up with issues of sexuality and corporeality. Despite having won her initial battle against the Angel in the House in order to be ‘herself’, Woolf goes on to suggest that the burden imposed by patriarchal prejudice and censorship was such that she had failed to overcome a second obstacle, that of ‘telling the truth about my own experiences as a body.’<sup>71</sup> Any attempt on the part of the woman writer to say ‘something about the body, about the passions’ would, she argues, inevitably be ‘impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex.’

The composition of this short talk would generate an idea for a lengthier piece of writing: the day before she delivered her speech, Woolf excitedly noted in her diary, ‘I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book—a sequel to a *Room of Ones Own*—about the sexual life of women: to be called *Professions for Women* perhaps—Lord how exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read on Wednesday to Pippa’s society.’<sup>72</sup> This proposed book on ‘the sexual life of women’ would gradually evolve from its initial watery conception into *The Years*, a novel which begins with a daughter’s dispassionate response to the death of her Victorian mother.<sup>73</sup> In its earlier

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxxi.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxxiii.

<sup>71</sup> Woolf, ‘Professions for Women,’ pp.61-2.

<sup>72</sup> 20 January 1931, *Diary IV*, p.6.

<sup>73</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Years* [1937], ed. & intro. Jeri Johnson (London: Penguin, 1998), pp.33-4. As has often been noted, there are striking similarities between Woolf’s treatment of this fictional deathbed scene, and her description of her own, strangely detached reaction to the death of Julia Stephen in both her diaries and ‘Sketch of the Past’.

stages, however, it took the form of a hybrid ‘novel-essay’, in which episodes from the lives of the fictional Pargiter daughters and their cousin Kitty Malone alternated with essays offering a socio-historical analysis of the constraints imposed on women by Victorian mores. The essays are based around the twin themes of money and sexuality, or what Woolf herself somewhat evasively terms ‘street’ or ‘common’ love. In the first essays, she reveals how the unspecified but seemingly ever-present threat of ‘street love’ curtailed the Pargiter girls’ movements through the public spaces of the modern city: ‘a large radius of the West End was closed to them, whether by day or by night, unless they went with a brother or their mother; and even the hansom cab, in which they were forced to make their transit of the dangerous area, had to have both flaps of its door shut.’<sup>74</sup> As she goes on to explore further the concerted attempts to police women’s sexuality in the Victorian era, the lines between fictional extracts and factual essays become increasingly blurred. Kitty Malone dreams of escaping a never-ending round of tea and dinner parties to become a farmer. She recognises, however, that her desire for independence is profoundly entangled with a number of other issues including:

not going for walks alone, and always calling undergraduates “Mr”, and never meeting them except with her mother [...]; it was involved also with the opinions of great men like Gladstone who thought that women must be chaste, [...] of Oscar Browning who thought that the lowest man is intellectually the superior of the cleverest woman; it was so complicated, further, by the fact that there was no way in which a woman could earn her living; and therefore no way in which she could be independent of such opinions; and therefore no way in which she could bear a child without being married. And finally, it was so profoundly affected by the fact that Kitty’s body had been trained to send out and to receive a multitude of impressions about her body and other people’s bodies.<sup>75</sup>

In this early draft, Virginia Woolf thus forcibly exposes the patriarchal assumptions that served not only to oppress women socially but also to alienate them from their bodies and their desires. Her ambitious attempt to track the radical modernisation of sexual difference in the period between 1870 and the mid-1930s would, however, take her perilously close to the edge.<sup>76</sup> As she acknowledged in her original speech to the London and National

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<sup>74</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of ‘The Years’*, ed. & intro. Mitchell A Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p.37.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>76</sup> The process of writing and then painstakingly transforming her first draft of *The Pargiters* into *The Years* would take Woolf the best part of five years. She revised and corrected the first proofs of the novel during the spring and summer of 1936. In early April, she collapsed with intense symptoms of headaches and drumming blood, faintness and sickness, sleeplessness and anxiety. After a period of some two months’ silence, she was able to record a brief note in her diary, in which she writes of an ‘almost catastrophic illness’.



Society for Women's Service, the difficulties associated with any such attempt to address the vexed topic of female sexuality were indeed such that it might be 'another fifty years' before a woman artist or writer would be able to 'speak the truth about her body'.<sup>77</sup>

### Exchanges and Encounters: Reading Woolf with Cixous

Taking Virginia Woolf at her literal word, I am thus struck by an unexpected point of coincidence between 'Professions for Women' and certain post-1968 endeavours by women writers to reclaim the materiality of the female body as a semiotic resource. I should like, therefore, at this juncture to recall Hélène Cixous's exhortation that, 'woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their own bodies':

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her. [...] To write. An act which will not only 'realise' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.<sup>78</sup>

Hélène Cixous thus shares with Virginia Woolf a concern to produce texts that endeavour to transcend patriarchal censorship in order to write from and of the sexual specificity of the female body. Cixous stresses, however, that existing orders of language are governed by a system of binary logic, in which 'woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different styles.'<sup>79</sup> Within the hierarchically organised, dualistic oppositions of this 'Empire of the Selfsame',<sup>80</sup> 'there is no

Never, she suggests, had she been 'so near to the precipice of my own feeling since 1913' (when she had suffered an extended period of illness after completing her first novel, *The Voyage Out*). 11 June 1936, *Diary V*, p.24.

A couple of weeks later, she detailed the process of revising *The Years*: 'I do ½ hour down here; go up, often in despair. Lie down; walk round the square: come back, do another 10 lines.' 21 June 1936, *Diary V*, p.25. For a further discussion of the painful and complicated genesis of *The Years*, see Lee, *Virginia Woolf* and Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> Woolf, untitled transcript, ed. Leaska, p.xl.

<sup>78</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' [1975], trans. Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs* (Summer 1976), pp.875-93. Reprinted in *New French Feminisms*, ed. & intro. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), p.245, p.250.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p.257.

<sup>80</sup> This particular phrase may serve to introduce some of the difficulties of reading Hélène Cixous in translation, since, in the original French, a single phrase may carry a multiplicity of meanings. To read in translation is thus to have only an indirect relationship to the richness of Cixous's wordplay. Whilst Betsy Wing here renders the French '*L'Empire du Propre*' as 'the Empire of the Selfsame,' the translators of the 1991 edition of 'Coming to Writing' prefer 'the Empire of Appropriation.' Although Wing's 'Selfsame' forcefully conveys the dualistic system of classification that structures phallogocentric thought, as Deborah Jensen emphasises, the French *propre* also evokes social hegemonies of possession and the divisive force of

place for the other, for an equal other, for a whole and living woman.<sup>81</sup> Instead, ‘woman’ signifies only difference from and for ‘man’—‘she’ represents only what ‘he’ is not. As Cixous emphasises, in a Symbolic order that registers only one (masculine) sex and its negated Other, feminine sexuality is, therefore, deemed an unrepresentable abyss—a ‘dark continent’, as Freud would have it.

Even though his later writings repeatedly hinted at a (pre-oedipal) dimension of feminine subjectivity that lay beyond his interpretative abilities, Freud’s account of the formation of sexed subjectivity takes as its template the experiences of the male child and is centred upon the dynamics of sight. In the Freudian schema, sexual difference is only inscribed at the moment of the discovery of the anatomical distinction between the sexes and is experienced by both male and female children in terms of either having or not having the male sex organ. Up until that moment, Freud suggested, both sexes pass through the early stages of libidinal development in the same manner. In a series of papers written in the 1920s, he amended his account of infantile ‘polymorphous perversity’ to include a phase of development in which the child’s attention is focused on the genitals as a source of pleasure.<sup>82</sup> This so-called ‘phallic stage’ of infantile sexuality is, however, distinct from the final genital organisation of sexuality instituted at puberty in that the penis serves as the primary erotogenic zone for both sexes. During the phallic stage, ‘for both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account [...] *maleness* exists but not femaleness. The antithesis here is between having a *male genital* and being *castrated*.<sup>83</sup> Explicitly denying the little girl any knowledge of the ‘truly feminine vagina’, Freud argues that her genital pleasure is at this stage derived solely from her clitoris, which serves as an

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appropriation. As Jenson notes, the phrase is particularly hard to translate since there is in English no one equivalent of the French *propre* in its dual function of adjective and noun—from numerous possible meanings, she highlights ‘clean’, ‘suitable’, ‘own’, ‘a distinctive feature’, ‘a particularity’.

See Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle & Susan Sellers (Cambridge MA & London: Yale University Press, 1991), p.25, p.199, n.13.

In discussing the more theoretical implications of Cixous’s writings, I have elected to quote from the English translation, whilst always keeping the original French close at hand. When considering the poetic effects of Cixous’s language, however, I feel that it is necessary to cite the original French and to give the English translation in a footnote.

I am grateful to Eric Prenowitz for our conversations on the perils of reading Cixous in translation.

<sup>81</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties’ in Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *La Jeune Née* (Paris: Union Générale d’Editions, 10/18, 1975), translated as *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, intro. Sandra M Gilbert (London: I B Tauris, 1996). References will hereafter be abbreviated *JN* and *NBW*, with page numbers following. *JN*, p.145; *NBW*, p.79.

<sup>82</sup> The relevant papers are ‘The Infantile Genital Organisation: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality’ [1923]; ‘The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex’ [1924] and ‘Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes’ [1925].

<sup>83</sup> Freud, ‘The Infantile Genital Organisation: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality’ [1923] in *On Sexuality. Penguin Freud Library* 7, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), p.308, p.312.

exact equivalent to the penis. Thus, 'with the entry into the phallic stage, the differences between the sexes are completely eclipsed by their agreements. We are now obliged to recognise that the little girl is a little man.'<sup>84</sup>

For the male child, the phallic phase is correlative with the Oedipus and castration complexes. The little boy fears castration, which he perceives as a threat that could potentially be meted out by his father in response to his incestuous desires for his mother. This fantasised fear is given validity by the recollection of his earlier discovery of anatomical sex distinction. Where previously he had disavowed what he saw, now he is obliged to accept that, not only do women not have a penis, but also that his own narcissistically invested organ could potentially be taken from him. According to Freud, the threat of castration therefore plays a determining role in forcing the little boy to desexualise and sublimate his oedipal desires. These cathexes are transformed into an identification with his parents, in particular his father, whose authority and severity are internalised, providing the foundations for the formation of the super-ego. A 'severe super-ego' therefore becomes the heir to the Oedipus complex, perpetuating the paternal prohibition against incest (in Lacanian parlance, the symbolic '*non*'/*nom du père*) and thus paving the way for the masculine subject's entry into the socio-symbolic order.

Although he admits that the material relating to the corresponding development in little girls is 'far more obscure and full of gaps,'<sup>85</sup> Freud nevertheless postulates that the phallic phase and the castration complex play a similarly decisive part in female infantile development. Where paternal interdiction and the apprehension of anatomical difference played a mutually constitutive role in triggering the little boy's fear of the possibility of castration, the little girl is deemed to accept her apparent anatomical inferiority on the strength of an immediate visual perception: 'she makes her judgement and her decision in a flash; she has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.'<sup>86</sup> She thus experiences sexual difference only as a lack or deficiency for which she must compensate:

She slips—along the line of a symbolic equation, one might say—from the penis to a baby. Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift—to bear him a child. One has an impression that the Oedipus complex is then gradually given up because this wish is never fulfilled. The two wishes—to possess a penis and a child—

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<sup>84</sup> Freud, 'Femininity' [1932] in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. *Penguin Freud Library* 2, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, reprinted 1991), p.151.

<sup>85</sup> Freud, 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,' *PFL* 7, p.320.

<sup>86</sup> Freud, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes,' *PFL* 7, p.336.

remain strongly cathected in the unconscious and help to prepare the female creature for her later sexual role.<sup>87</sup>

The logic of the Freudian narrative would indeed seem to imply that anatomy serves to propel woman towards a destiny of biological reproduction ('her later sexual role') at the expense of cultural production. Whilst the fantasised threat of castration serves to shatter the male child's Oedipus complex, precipitating the formation of his super-ego and thus securing his future position as a fully-fledged participant in the domain of culture, Freud emphasises that, since she has already accepted the anatomical 'fact' of her castration, the little girl lacks the main motive for surmounting her Oedipus complex. He also belatedly realised that, not only does the little girl remain apparently arrested within the oedipal situation, but that he had hitherto underestimated the strength and persistence of her pre-oedipal attachment to her mother. 'In these circumstances,' he hypothesised, 'the formation of the super-ego must suffer; it cannot attain the strength and independence which give it its cultural significance.'<sup>88</sup>

The work of Hélène Cixous raises the possibility of a different relationship of the feminine subject to her body and to creativity, a relationship that is not haunted by the spectre of lack. 'Let masculine sexuality gravitate around the penis,' she declares, 'woman does not perform on herself this regionalisation [...] she doesn't create a monarchy of her body or her desire [...] her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide.'<sup>89</sup> In Cixous's writing, I thus hear the intimation of a sexual difference that is not defined solely by the mechanism of castration nor bound to the phallus, but which instead recognises the 'infinite and mobile complexity of [woman's] becoming erotic.'<sup>90</sup> For Hélène Cixous:

*sexual difference* is not determined simply by the fantasised relation to anatomy, which depends to some extent on catching *sight* of something, thus on the strange importance that is accorded to exteriority and that which is specular in sexuality's development. A voyeur's theory of course.

No, the difference, in my opinion, becomes most clearly perceived on the level of *jouissance*, inasmuch as a woman's instinctual economy [*l'économie pulsionnelle d'une femme*] cannot be identified by a man or referred to the masculine economy.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Freud, 'Dissolution,' *PFL* 7, p.321.

<sup>88</sup> Freud, 'Femininity,' *PFL* 2, p.163. For further discussion of the implications of the classic psychoanalytic theorisation of femininity, see also Michèle Montrely's 'Inquiry into Femininity'.

<sup>89</sup> Cixous, 'Sorties,' *JN*, p.162; *NBW*, pp.87-88.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, *JN*, p.174; *NBW*, p.94.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, *JN*, p.151; *NBW*, p.82.



It is not sufficient, however, merely to experience bodily *jouissance*. As Cixous emphasises in her essay ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, it is also vital for woman to be able to speak of her pleasure—to find a way of acknowledging that *jouissance* in the Symbolic. By inscribing her experiences in this way, the feminine subject will begin, Cixous suggests, ‘to unblock a sexuality that’s just as much feminine as masculine, “de-phallocalise” the body, relieve man of his phallus, return him to a libido that isn’t stupidly organised around that monument, but appears shifting, diffused, taking on all the others of oneself.’<sup>92</sup>

Hélène Cixous thus acknowledges a ‘decipherable libidinal femininity’ hitherto disavowed by the classic Freudian model of a single, masculine libido.<sup>93</sup> This feminine libidinal economy does not, however, belong to ‘women only’, any more than libidinal masculinity is to be considered the sole preserve of men, but may rather be thought of as a difference in the organisation of psychic life. As Cixous herself stresses, ‘just as there is always, in every human being, a complex relationship between death drives and life drives, there is a complex relationship between different libidinal economies which would be active and passive, constantly binding and unbinding themselves, exchanging, spending and retaining.’<sup>94</sup> Although these differing libidinal economies are dependent neither upon anatomical sex nor upon gender identity, Cixous nevertheless emphasises that, ‘the economy said to be feminine—which would be characterised by features, by traits, that are more adventurous, more on the side of spending, riskier, on the side of the body—is more liveable in women than in men.’<sup>95</sup> ‘The masculine return to the Selfsame [*le rapport du masculin au Propre*] is,’ she writes, ‘narrower and more restricted than femininity’s. It all happens as if man were more directly threatened in his being by the non-selfsame [*le non-propre*] than woman.’<sup>96</sup> Whilst the structural logic of phallocentrism ensures that anything that is not the same registers only as an irremediable Other, an intolerable threat to the (masculine) Self which has either to be rejected or assimilated, Hélène Cixous suggests that a feminine libidinal economy might be characterised by a different relationship to the Other:

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<sup>92</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7.1 (1981), pp.41-55, p.51.

<sup>93</sup> ‘There is only one libido, which serves the masculine and the feminine sexual functions. To it itself we cannot assign any sex; if, following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers trends with a passive aim. Nevertheless the term “feminine libido” is without any justification.’

Freud, ‘Femininity,’ *PFL* 2, p.166.

<sup>94</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘An Exchange with Hélène Cixous’ in Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p.131.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>96</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties,’ *JN*, p.160; *NBW*, p.87.

I am speaking here of femininity as keeping alive the other that is confided to her, that visits her, that she can love as other. The loving to be other, another, without its necessarily going the route of abasing what is the same, herself.<sup>97</sup>

The model for this mutually transformative, ‘ceaseless exchange of one with another’ is that of the experience (both actual and potential) of pregnancy and childbirth:

There are a thousand ways of living a pregnancy, of having or not having a relationship of another intensity with this still invisible other. Really experiencing metamorphosis [*d’être réellement en métamorphose*]. Several, other, and unforeseeable. That cannot but inscribe in the body the good possibility of an alteration. It is not only a question of the feminine body’s extra resource, this specific power to produce something living of which her flesh is the locus, not only a question of rhythms, exchanges, of relationship to space, of the whole perceptive system, but also of the irreplaceable experience of those moments of stress, of the body’s crises, of that work that goes on peacefully for a long time only to burst out in that surpassing moment, the time of childbirth. In which she lives as if she were larger or stronger than herself. It is also that experience of a ‘bond’ with the other [*du ‘lien’ à l’autre*], all that comes through in the metaphor of bringing into the world.<sup>98</sup>

The evocation of such a passage may appear grist to the mill of those Anglophone feminists who, during the 1980s, criticised what they viewed as a tendency towards mysticism, idealism and essentialism in Cixous’s writings.<sup>99</sup> I do not believe, however, that Hélène Cixous here privileges motherhood either as a ‘natural’ state or as a necessary precursor to creativity. Instead, she seems to me to suggest that certain dimensions of bodily experience specific to women—the pregnant mother-to-be’s ongoing sensitivity towards the subject-to-be dwelling inside her—might serve as the conceptual model for a relation to the ‘other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing’—a relation that is based not upon fusion or repulsion, but upon permeability and receptivity.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, JN, p.159; NBW, p.86.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, JN, p.167; NBW, p.90.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Writing the Body: Towards an Understanding of “l’écriture féminine,”’ *Feminist Studies* 7.2 (Summer 1981), pp.247-63; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 1985) and Domna C Stanton, ‘Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva’ in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>100</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties,’ JN, p.158; NBW, p.86.

My interpretation of this passage is informed by my engagement with the work of Bracha Ettinger. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Ettinger proposes that the intra-uterine encounter between subject-to-be and mother-to-be might serve a model for what she names a *matrixial stratum of subjectivisation*. I am in particular struck by the resonances between this passage from Cixous and Bracha Ettinger’s description of the matrix as ‘an unconscious space of the simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the *I* and uncognised *non-I* which is neither fused nor rejected. It is based on feminine/prenatal

Hélène Cixous proposes that this feminine relation to the other may find some cultural inscription through certain types of writing. ‘How could the woman, who has experienced the not-me within me, not have a particular relationship to the written?’ she asks. [*La femme qui fait l'épreuve du non-moi entre moi, comment n'aurait-elle à l'écrit un rapport spécifique?*]<sup>101</sup> Cixous's widely disseminated notion of an *écriture féminine* is not, however, to be thought of in terms of writing ‘as a woman’ in order to express either a set of gendered life experiences or some essential ‘truth’ about the body, but may rather be understood as a creative process that is marked by the rhythms and pulsions of the drives. As she suggests in ‘Castration or Decapitation?’:

Let's not look at syntax but at fantasy, at the unconscious: all the feminine texts I've read are very close to the voice, very close to the flesh of language, much more so than masculine texts... perhaps because they don't rush into meaning, but are straightaway at the threshold of feeling. There's *tactility* in the feminine text, there's touch, and this touch passes through the ear. Writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic.<sup>102</sup>

According to classic psychoanalytic theory, the male child's journey to sexed and speaking subjectivity is achieved at a cost, firstly, of the renunciation of the satisfaction that he previously obtained from pre-genital part-objects and, secondly, of the ruthless destruction of his desire for the maternal body. As Freud emphasises, ‘in ideal cases, the Oedipus complex exists no longer, even in the unconscious... [it] is not simply repressed, it is literally smashed to pieces by the shock of threatened castration.’<sup>103</sup> His belated acknowledgement that the little girl retains some access to the pre-oedipal sphere can thus for Freud only be understood as damaging or limiting her capacity for sublimation: as he notoriously declares in the final paragraph of his 1932 lecture on femininity, ‘we also regard women as weaker in their social interests and as having less capacity for sublimating their instincts than men.’<sup>104</sup> One of the most significant aspects of the feminist challenge to existing phallic accounts of subject formation is, however, the recognition of the possibility that certain dimensions of female experience—of bodily *jouissance*, of motherhood and

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inter-relations and exhibits a shared borderspace in which what I call *differentiation-in-co-emergence* and *distance-in-proximity* are continuously re-honed and re-organised by metamorphosis (accompanied by matrixial affects) created by—and further creating—*relations-without-relating* on the borders of presence and absence, object and subject, me and the stranger.’

Bracha Ettinger, ‘Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace’ in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp.125-59, p.125.

<sup>101</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties,’ *JN*, p.167; *NBW*, p.90.

<sup>102</sup> Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, p.54.

<sup>103</sup> Freud, ‘Anatomical Distinction,’ *PFL* 7, p.341.

<sup>104</sup> Freud, ‘Femininity,’ *PFL* 2, p.169.

daughterhood—‘cut out’ or foreclosed by a phallogocentric Symbolic might nonetheless remain available as an imaginative resource to the feminine, creative subject. I thus read Hélène Cixous’s call for woman to ‘write her body’ as leading not in the direction of essentialism, but rather as testifying to the need to invent new economies of meaning through which elements of a feminine difference hitherto designated as outside language (as non-linguistic or pre-symbolic) might find some form of symbolic inscription. Cixous emphasises that:

At the present time, *defining* a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be *theorised*, enclosed, coded, which does not mean that it does not exist. [...] But one can begin to speak. Begin to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives [*quelques composantes pulsionnelles*], some relations of the feminine Imaginary to the Real [*quelques rapports de l’imaginaire féminin au réel*], to writing.<sup>105</sup>

The urge to explain, to theorise, to define and to master is, Cixous suggests, a central tenet of phallic modes of thought and knowledge. To endeavour to categorise or define *l’écriture féminine* as either philosophy *or* poetry, theory *or* fiction, would accordingly be to ensnare it within the hierarchies of sameness and/or opposition that structure phallogocentric discourse. Some trace of a feminine libidinal economy may, however, be momentarily intuited on the very margins of the phallic Symbolic, at the level of what Cixous names the ‘unconscious’ or ‘flesh’ of language. A feminine practice of writing—and, I propose, of reading—resists the violence of interpretation so as to intimate another dimension of meaning: ‘getting to know things by letting ourselves be known by them... to transmit: to make things loved by making them known.’<sup>106</sup> I can at this point perhaps do no better than to cite in full the final paragraph of her autobiographical essay ‘Coming to Writing’, in which Cixous deploys a series of poetic images in order to convey something of the potentially fluid relationship between the feminine, corporeality and writing:

Comme si je vivais directement en prise sur l’écriture, sans relais. En moi le chant mais qui, dès l’émission, accède au langage: un flux immédiatement texte. Pas de coupure, sonsens, chantson, sangson, tout est toujours déjà écrit, tous les sens sont jetés. Plus tard si je sors de mes eaux toute ruisselante de mes plaisirs, si je remonte le long de mes rives, si j’observe depuis mon bord les ébats de mes poissons, je remarque les figures innombrables qu’ils produisent dans leur danse; ne suffit-il pas que coulent nos eaux de femmes

<sup>105</sup> Cixous, ‘Sorties,’ *JN*, pp.169-70; *NBW*, p.92.

<sup>106</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Coming to Writing’ in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle & Susan Sellers (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.57.



pour que s'écrivent sans calcul nos textes sauvages et populeaux? Nous-mêmes dans l'écriture comme les poissons dans l'eau, comme les sens dans nos langues et la transformation dans nos inconscients.<sup>107</sup>

Reading Cixous becomes a bodily process, for I find that I am compelled to read passages such as this aloud, to feel the words forming in my mouth, against my palette, on the tip of my tongue, to hear them 'passing through the ear.' Lending my body to the text in this manner, dwelling in Hélène Cixous's language, I encounter elements of a feminine imaginary that are inscribed not at the level of narrative, but in the flow and texture of the writing itself: in its inflections, its rhythmic fluidity, and in the movement between sound and meaning—spoken aloud, the written distinction between *sons* (sound), *sens* (meaning) and *sang* (blood) dissolves. In the work of Hélène Cixous, the relationship between signifier and signified itself is thus deconstructed and, as Françoise Defromont so beautifully describes, 'language is made to stretch, to shift or even to swell as though it were matter and as though we could hear it working—a musical modulation, the singing of the signifier, of the musical flesh of the word.'<sup>108</sup>

Let us turn now to Virginia Woolf's account of the creative process in 'Professions for Women':

I want you to imagine me writing a novel in a state of trance. I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. The image that comes to mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every nook and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced away through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute and difficult distress. To speak without

<sup>107</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'La Venue à l'écriture' [1976] in *Entre l'écriture* (Paris: des femmes, 1986), p.69.

'As if I were living in direct contact with writing, without interruption or relay. In me the song which, from the moment it's uttered, gains instant access to language: a flux immediately text. No break, soundsense, singsound, bloodsong, everything's always already written, all the meanings are cast. Later if I emerge from my waters dripping all over with pleasures, if I go back the length of my banks, if from my shore I observe the revels of my dreamfish, I notice the innumerable figures they create in their dance; isn't the current of our women's waters sufficient to unleash the uncalculated writing of our wild and populous texts? Ourselves in writing like fish in the water, like meanings in our tongues, and the transformation in our unconscious lives.' Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing' in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, p.58.

<sup>108</sup> Françoise Defromont, 'Metaphorical Thinking and Poetic Writing in Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous' in *The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching*, eds. Helen Wilcox, Keith

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, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer.<sup>109</sup>

Bank – shores – waters – pools – depths – dark places – dreams – trances – the imagination – the unconscious – the feminine. A richly provocative chain of associations resonates across these two excerpts. Compare, however, the soaring cadences of the Cixousian 'sext' to the staccato rhythms through which Virginia Woolf conveys the abrupt interruption of her state of imaginative reverie. Although 'Professions for Women' addresses the need for a mode of writing capable of acknowledging feminine corporeality and desire, Woolf here appears stymied by her consciousness of the overwhelming pressures of her own historical moment: the essay vividly evokes—both metaphorically and syntactically—the crushing weight of the socio-cultural attitudes that conspired to censor female sexuality during the early years of the last century.

Thus far, I have proposed that 'Professions for Women' may reflect its author's own complex and ambivalent struggle against the literary and psychological heritage of a particular bourgeois family in order to create new modes of fiction and new modalities of living and working. In the essay, Woolf suggests that, for the woman writer, imaginative and symbolic access to the body and its pleasures was contingent upon the violent destruction of an internalised imago of the bourgeois feminine ideal. Elsewhere in her writings, she also, however, confronts the real and painful loss of her own mother, who fell victim to this very ideology of dutiful self-sacrifice. Yet Virginia Woolf's particular struggles with this double-edged feminine-maternal legacy may more broadly reflect the dilemmas faced by that generation of 'New Women' who sought to emancipate themselves from Victorian morality and social convention. In this sense, Woolf's writings may further stand as testimony to the mass of contradictions faced by those women artists and writers who, weighed down by the legacy of the rigidity of nineteenth-century categorisations of Woman, nevertheless sought in the early years of the twentieth century to find some means of representing their 'experiences as a body'. In their attempts to explore crucial aspects of their own subjectivity, sexuality and corporeality, these women were, however, unable to take their Victorian mothers as their role models. These modernist daughters may,

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<sup>109</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women,' pp.61-62.

therefore, be considered *metaphorically* motherless, in the sense that they were unable to position themselves in relation to a vital and creative, maternal genealogy.

For those women who wished at this moment to participate in modernism as visual artists, the attempt to say ‘something about the body, about the passions’ assumed, moreover, not only a generational, but also a cultural, complexity: in their bid to re-imagine sexual difference and to reclaim the female body as the site and sign of feminine creative agency, they had in addition to negotiate the iconography of abject female physicality and primal sexuality that formed so significant a part of the visual terrain of early-twentieth-century modernism.

### **Modernist Women and the Nude: Historical Debates and Formal Dilemmas**

Even painting, which seems so simple an art, needs a room with a north light and models. Milly had a turn for painting. But though it would have been possible for her to go to the Slade (the Slade was opened to women in 18—), painting at the Slade meant painting from the nude. Without going so far as his father (Canon Pargiter, 1800-1865) who positively forbade his daughter, Caroline, from painting, because it was unthinkable that a girl should see a naked man, Colonel Pargiter did not like the idea. So that Milly joined a sketching club which went for expeditions in the summer—and painted flowers in her bedroom.<sup>110</sup>

As Virginia Woolf here acknowledges, the right of access to established institutions of training and display was of fundamental concern to those women, including the fictional Milly Pargiter, who sought in the early years of the twentieth century to move beyond the culturally sanctioned role of the ‘lady painter’ as either refined amateur or skilled craftswoman in order to claim for themselves a position as professional fine artists. As Tamar Garb’s extensive research has revealed, the debate provoked by the late-nineteenth-century campaign by the *Union des Femmes peintres et sculpteurs* for women’s entry to the *École des Beaux-Arts* in France focussed in particular on the issue of their participation in the life-drawing classes that were at that time still regarded as the basis of any serious art education. Contemporary commentators perceived the gaze of the female student at the naked model as a threat not only to public morality and decency, but also to the capacity of art to transform the naked into the nude:

The presence of women as *artists* in the life-class, or even the anatomy lesson, would introduce a degree of self-consciousness which could expose the repression on which the institution of the life-class was premised. In their

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<sup>110</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters*, p.29.

presence, neither the sex of the artist nor the bodily identity of the model could be overlooked. Both threatened to assert themselves. Such an assertion would hit at the heart not only of propriety, accepted morals and decency, but at the institution of the nude and thereby at the beleaguered traditions of *le grand art* which the *École* was so anxious to defend... While the male artist, with all his intellectual powers, had the capacity to transform physicality into spirituality, women artists were not so endowed. In their company, the body was the body.<sup>111</sup>

As the debate continued to wage, ambitious women artists who sought the formal academic tuition that would equip them for an artistic career—and who could afford the prohibitively high fees (double those of their male counterparts)—flocked to one of the private academies such as the *Académie Julian* or the *Académie Colarossi*, which gave them the opportunity to study from the naked or partially draped female figure in strictly segregated *ateliers*.<sup>112</sup> The *Académie Julian* held several competitions a year, and a prize-winning nude study such as Cécile Baudry's *Nude Woman* of 1901 (**Figure 3.4**) could serve as a crucial statement of a woman artist's aspirations towards traditional accolades and professional legitimacy.

But what of those women artists who chose to associate themselves with more progressive painting practices in the closing years of the nineteenth century? Feminist art historians have noted the relative paucity of representations of the female nude in the oeuvres of both Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) and Berthe Morisot (1841-1895).<sup>113</sup> Although Morisot did attempt to depict the naked or partially clothed female figure on several occasions, Anne Higonnet emphasises the awkwardness and hesitancy of these images. As she points out, Morisot's painting *At the Psyché* (1891) (**Figure 3.5**) is posed in such a way as to minimise the artist's confrontation with the body; the partially draped figure turns her back to the viewer and looks into a large mirror, the firm modelling of her back, neck and

<sup>111</sup> Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.89.

<sup>112</sup> For a contemporary account of the experiences of these women art students, see Clive Holland, 'Lady Art Students' Life in Paris,' *The Studio* (December 1903), pp.225-30. More recent research into the new opportunities that opened up for women artists in Paris at the fin-de-siècle includes Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*; Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Diane Radycki, 'The Life of Lady Art Students: Changing Art Education at the Turn of the Century,' *Art Journal* (Spring 1982), pp.9-13; Siân Reynolds, 'Running Away to Paris: Expatriate Women Artists of the 1900 Generation, from Scotland and Points South,' *Women's History Review* 9.2 (2000), pp.327-44 and Gabriel P Weisberg & Jane R Becker (eds.), *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian* (New Brunswick NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

<sup>113</sup> See in particular Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.169-94 and Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



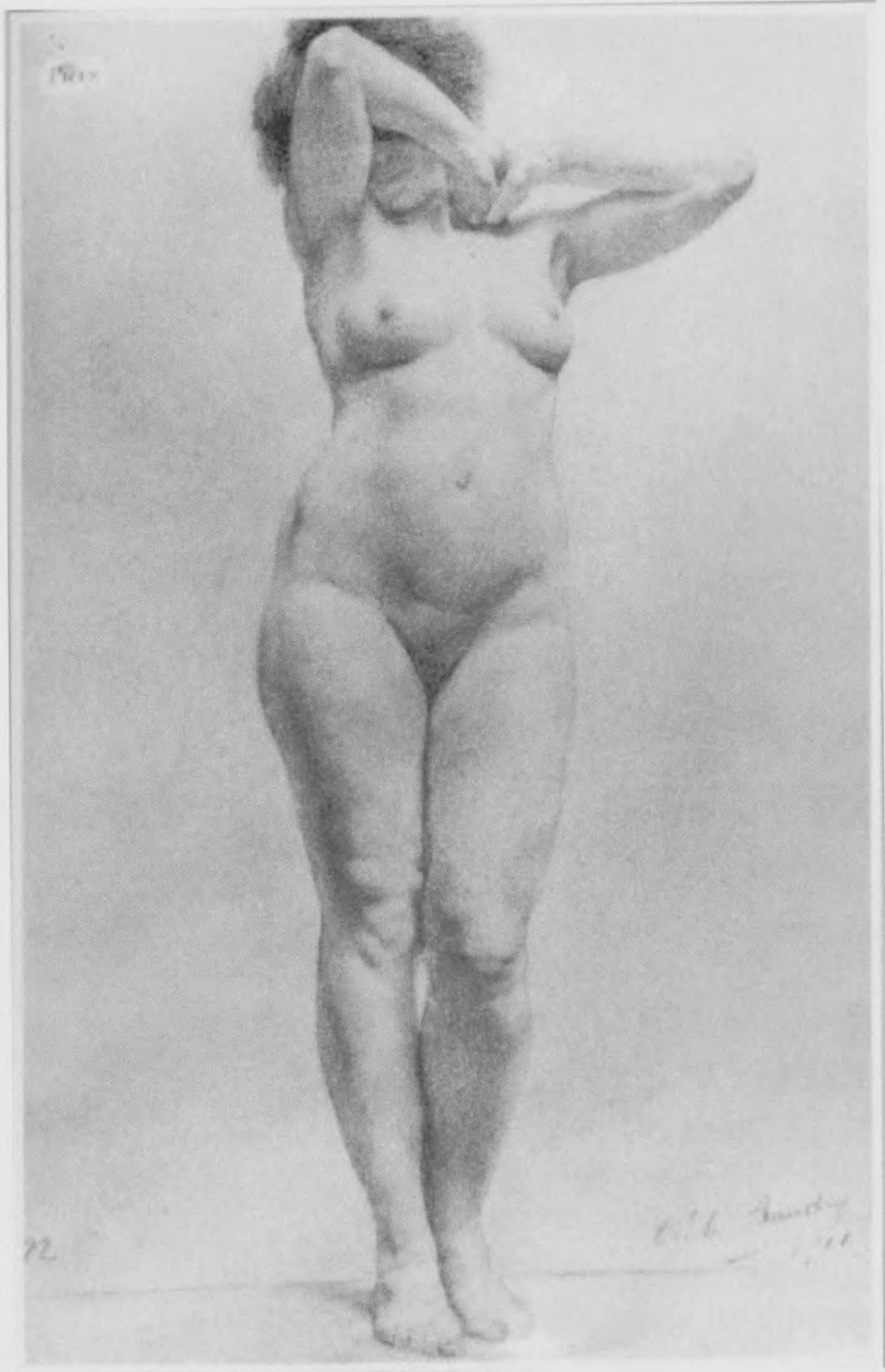


Figure 3.4

Cécile Baudry, *Nude Study*, 1901. Charcoal drawing on brown paper, 65 x 42 cm

arms contrasting strongly with the almost featureless face and amorphous body reflected in the glass. Comparing *At the Psyché* to Mary Cassatt's colour print *The Coiffure* (Figure 3.6), also produced in 1891, Higonnet concludes that both artists failed to resolve the dilemmas associated with the representation of the female body:

Cassatt and Morisot's images do not offer us any solutions to the problem of the nude. Perhaps what they do represent is the impossibility, from their point of view, of any such solution. [...] No women went further in the nineteenth century than Cassatt or Morisot, but with the nude they had reached an impasse. They were blocked not by a lack of technical skill, nor of intellectual courage, but by the ineluctably gendered relationship between the masculine artist and the female body.<sup>114</sup>

Both artists, therefore, ultimately turned away from the genre of the female nude in order to focus instead on the pictorial analysis of what Griselda Pollock has named 'modernity and the spaces of femininity.'<sup>115</sup>

While both Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot remained bound by the strictures that rigorously policed bourgeois women's relations to their bodies and their sexuality in the nineteenth century, for a succeeding generation of self-consciously modern upper and middle-class women, the depiction of the naked female body could serve as a significant gesture of liberation from the limiting moral codes and social conventions that had governed their late Victorian upbringings. Paula Becker (1876-1907) made her first visit to Paris in 1900, where she enrolled at the *Académie Colarossi* and attended the anatomy class at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, which had finally opened its doors to women students in 1897. Following her marriage to Otto Modersohn, and the couple's setting up home together in the artistic colony of Worpswede, she spent further extended periods studying alone in Paris at both the *Académie Colarossi* and the *Académie Julian*. Letters and journals from this time in Paris document her on-going struggle to forge for herself an independent artistic identity in the face of familial and social disapproval, and to reconcile a professional commitment to her artwork with her own personal expectations of marriage and motherhood.<sup>116</sup> Unlike many of her fellow women students at the *Académie Julian*, who sought acceptance into established institutional structures, and who painted 'as artists did a hundred years ago, as if they hadn't seen paintings since Courbet,' Paula Modersohn-

<sup>114</sup> Higonnet, p.186.

<sup>115</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,' pp.50-90 in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>116</sup> See Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The Letters and Journals of Paula Modersohn-Becker*, trans. & annotated J Diane Radycki (Metuchen NJ & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1980) and Gill Perry, *Paula Modersohn-Becker: Her Life and Work* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).



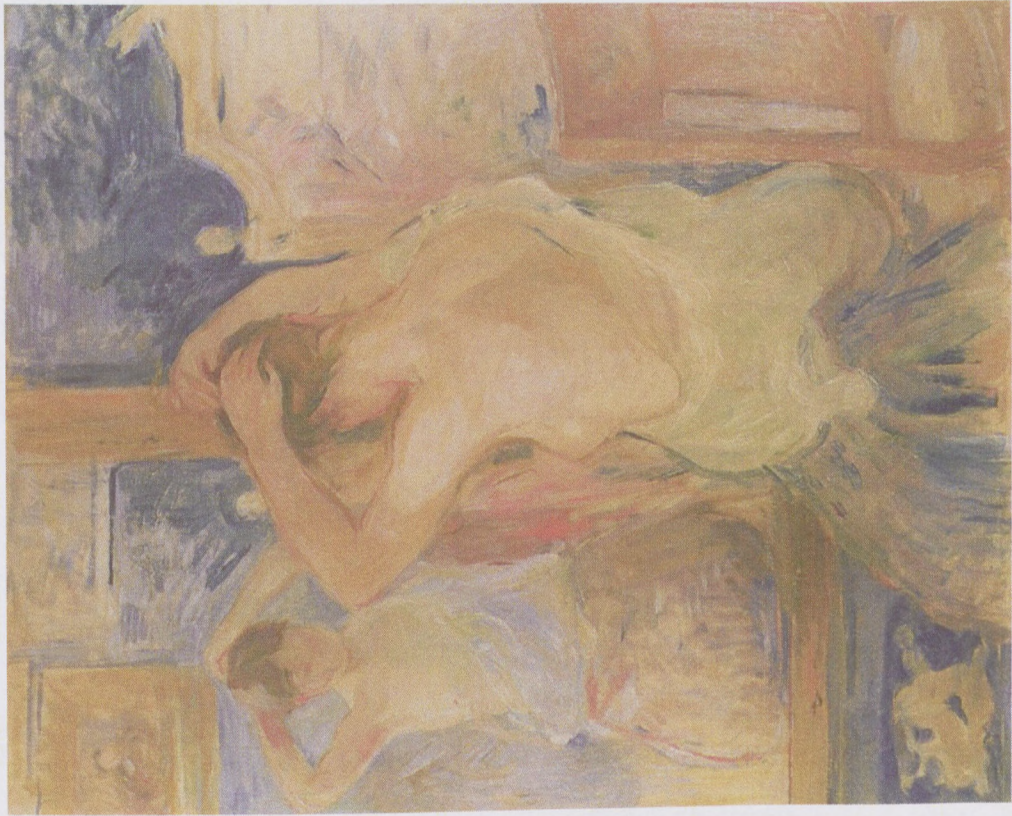


Figure 3.5  
Berthe Morisot, *At the Psyche*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm.



Figure 3.6  
Mary Cassatt, *The Coiffure*, 1891. Drypoint and aquatint on paper, 36.5 x 26.7 cm



Becker professed her admiration for ‘the most modern painters’: Manet, Degas, Cézanne and Gauguin.<sup>117</sup> In contrast to Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, who had each employed professional models in their rare attempts to engage with the female nude, in a number of paintings executed just before her premature death in 1907, Modersohn-Becker boldly took her own body as the site of her interrogation of the genre. In these nude self-portraits, she developed an idiolect inspired by the formal experimentation of Gauguin and the Nabis, by the pre-Cubist work of Picasso and by antique works in the Louvre, from which she made copies during her Parisian studies.<sup>118</sup> In *Self-Portrait with an Amber Necklace* (**Figure 3.7**), she draws upon natural imagery in order to represent her own creativity as an artist, using a simplified, monumental style to depict her own nude torso against a background of lush foliage. Wearing a simple bead necklace, and crowned with a garland of flowers, she calmly meets and returns the gaze of the spectator. In this and other nude self-portraits, Paula Modersohn-Becker thus attempted not only to position her art practice in relation to that of the major players in the Parisian avant-garde but, perhaps even more ambitiously, appropriated the key tropes of the modernist nude, refashioning them in a still challenging attempt to signify herself—both formally and iconographically—as a modern, embodied, creative, feminine subject.<sup>119</sup>

### Figuration and Reparation: The Case of Ruth Kjär

Melanie Klein’s 1929 paper ‘Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse’ affords some psychoanalytic insight into the dilemmas faced by those women artists, including Paula Modersohn-Becker, who elected to work within a figurative tradition of representation in the early years of the twentieth century. Having analysed the internal world of the male child protagonist of Colette’s libretto for Ravel’s opera *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, Klein turns her attention to an article written by the Danish novelist Karin Michaelis, which provides a biographical sketch of her friend, the painter Ruth Kjär. Ruth Kjär, we learn, ‘possessed remarkable artistic feeling, which she employed especially in the arrangement of her house, but she had no pronounced creative talent.

<sup>117</sup> Paula Modersohn-Becker to Otto Modersohn, 23 February 1905 & 28 February 1905 in *Letters and Journals*, p.259, p.260.

<sup>118</sup> See Perry, *Paula Modersohn-Becker*.

<sup>119</sup> For an important consideration of the significance of Paula Modersohn-Becker’s attempts to use the image of the (pro-)creative female body as a means to imagine an embodied, feminine creativity, see Rosemary Betterton, ‘Maternal Figures: The Maternal Nude in the Work of Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn-Becker,’ pp.159-79 in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London & New York: Routledge, 1996).



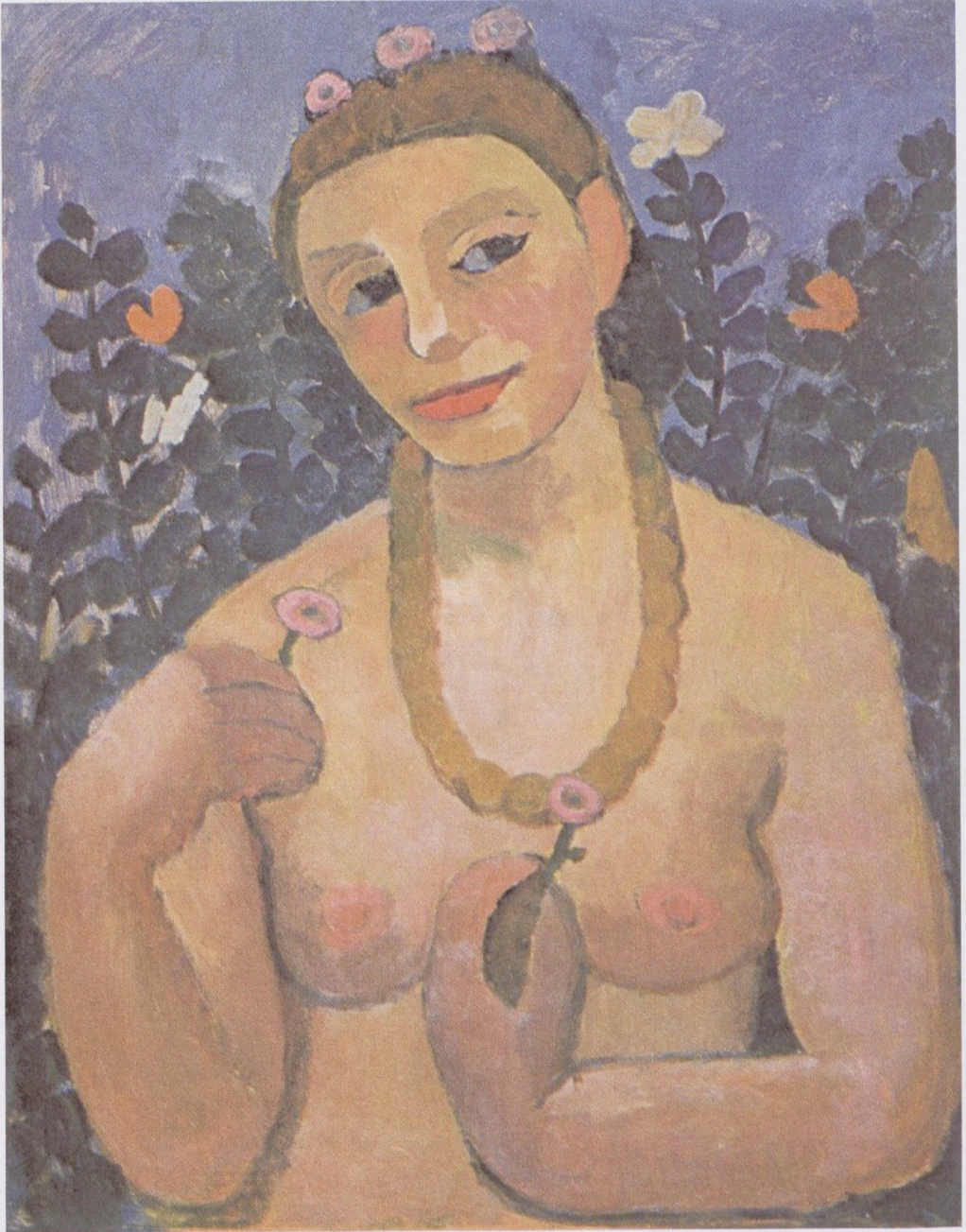


Figure 3.7

Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Self-Portrait with Amber Necklace*, 1906. Oil on board, 62.2 x 48.2 cm.



Beautiful, rich and independent, she spent a great part of her life travelling.<sup>120</sup> In spite of these apparent advantages, she suffered from bouts of severe depression, which Karin Michaelis describes in the following terms:

There was only one dark spot in her life. In the midst of the happiness that was natural to her, and seemed so untroubled, she would suddenly be plunged into the deepest melancholy. A melancholy that was suicidal. If she tried to account for this, she would say something to this effect: "There is an empty space in me, which I can never fill!"<sup>121</sup>

Ruth Kjär's home was a veritable 'gallery of modern art,' filled with the paintings of her brother-in-law, 'one of the greatest painters in the country.' When one of these paintings was removed and sold, 'this left an empty space on the wall, which seemed in some inexplicable way to coincide with the empty space within her.'<sup>122</sup> Karin Michaelis tells of how her friend was filled by a sudden desire to fill the empty space left by the missing canvas; 'in a perfect fever', she ordered up paints, brushes, a palette. Whilst waiting for their arrival, 'she stood before the empty wall with a piece of black chalk in her hand and made strokes at random as they came into her head.'<sup>123</sup> By evening, the painting was finished, and Ruth Kjär felt herself to be 'on fire, devoured by ardour within. She must prove to herself that the divine sensation, the unspeakable sense of happiness that she had felt could be repeated.'<sup>124</sup> Her husband was utterly transfixed by the image she had produced—'he could not take his eyes from the sight; could not take it in, did not believe it, *could* not believe it'—and summoned his artist-brother to ask for a second opinion:

Ruth palpitated with anxiety at the verdict of the connoisseur. But the artist exclaimed immediately: "You don't imagine you can persuade me that you painted that! What a damned lie! This picture was painted by an old and experienced artist. Who the devil is he? I don't know him!"<sup>125</sup>

Karin Michaelis reports that, notwithstanding the disbelief and dismissal she suffered at the hands of her male relatives, this first picture marked the beginning of a successful artistic career for Ruth Kjär: she continued to make work, and went on to exhibit her paintings to critical and public acclaim.

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<sup>120</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse' [1929] in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, p.215.

<sup>121</sup> Karin Michaelis, 'The Empty Space,' quoted in Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety Situations,' p.215.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p.216.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

In her reading of Karin Michaelis's article, Melanie Klein interprets the empty space within Ruth Kjär as a 'feeling that there was something lacking within her body.'<sup>126</sup> She relates this feeling of lack back to the 'most profound anxiety experienced by girls'—an anxiety which she suggests is 'equivalent' to the male child's fear of castration—namely, the fear of being robbed of the contents of her body by an angry and vengeful mother:

The little girl has a sadistic desire, originating in the early stages of the Oedipus conflict, to rob the mother's body of its contents, namely, the father's penis, faeces, children, and to destroy the mother herself. This desire gives rise to anxiety lest the mother should in her turn rob the little girl of the contents of her body (especially of children) and lest her body should be destroyed or mutilated.<sup>127</sup>

For Klein, feminine creativity is bound up with this early infantile aggression towards the mother, and with the desire to make reparation for the damage inflicted on the maternal body in phantasy. She develops this thesis via an analysis of two paintings by Ruth Kjär, citing Karin Michaelis's description of these two works. The first painting represents 'an old woman, bearing the mark of years and disillusionments,' who 'gazes before her with the disconsolate resignation of old age, with a look that seems to say: "Do not trouble about me any more. My time is nearly at an end!"'<sup>128</sup> The second image is a portrait of Ruth Kjär's own mother:

This lady has a long time before she must put her lips to the cup of renunciation. Slim, imperious, challenging, she stands there with a moonlight-coloured shawl draped over her shoulders: she has the effect of a woman of primitive times, who could any day engage in combat with children of the desert with her naked hands. What a chin! What force there is in the haughty gaze! The blank space has been filled.<sup>129</sup>

Klein argues that, 'the desire to make reparation, to make good the injury psychologically done to the mother and also to restore herself was at the bottom of the compelling urge to paint these portraits':

That of the old woman, on the threshold of death, seems to be an expression of the primary, sadistic desire to destroy. The daughter's wish to destroy her mother, to see her old, worn out, marred, is the cause of the need to represent her in full possession of her strength and beauty. By doing so the daughter can

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<sup>126</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations,' p.216.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, p.217.

<sup>128</sup> Karin Michaelis, 'The Empty Space,' quoted in Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations,' p.217.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

ally her own anxiety and can endeavour to restore her mother and make her new through the portrait.<sup>130</sup>

Like Virginia Woolf's account of a writing career founded upon a murderous attack upon the Angel in the House, Melanie Klein's analysis of Ruth Kjär's artistic production would thus seem to place aggressive, even matricidal, impulses at the heart of the feminine creative impulse: for Klein, the creative act of painting may be traced back to the desire to repair a maternal imago damaged by the daughter's own destructive phantasies.

In her reading of Klein's essay, feminist art historian Briony Fer pays particular attention to its use of metaphor. As she notes, the idea of an empty or blank space suggests both invisibility and lack, and thus 'can usefully serve to dramatise the problems of art and its relation to both language and to femininity.'<sup>131</sup> Karin Michaelis's narrative is, she emphasises, organised around metaphors of shadowy obscurity, empty space and bright light. This constellation of terms leads Briony Fer back to the work of Eva Hesse (**Figure 3.8**). In 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism,' Fer proposes that Hesse's work 'embodies an economy of loss in its very procedures.'<sup>132</sup> In contrast to those readings that have viewed the recurrence of a so-called 'window motif' in Hesse's art as a response—whether conscious or unconscious—to the artist's mother's suicide in 1946 (it was mistakenly believed that Ruth Marcus Hesse died after jumping from a window), Fer argues that 'to see either forms or materials as iconic symbols simply introduces a subject matter where there is none.'<sup>133</sup> For Briony Fer, Eva Hesse's artistic practice, with its play on blankness and discontinuity, its insistence on 'leaving unrepaired the structure of the gap,' resonates rather with Klein's description of an unconscious dimension of loss and anxiety related specifically to the girl child's experience of the maternal body. Fer's engagement with Klein's paper thus opens up a way of thinking about the relationship between the structure of subject formation and the formal structure of aesthetic practices: as she herself notes in her discussion of Karin Michaelis's description of the two portraits painted by Ruth Kjär, her 'concern is not with literally "picturing" the mother.'<sup>134</sup> In the

<sup>130</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations,' p.218.

<sup>131</sup> Briony Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism,' *Art History* 17.3 (September 1994), pp.424-49, p.438.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p.437.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, p.427. For an analysis of the 'window motif' in the work of Eva Hesse in its presumed connection to an absent maternal figure, see Anne Wagner, 'Another Hesse' in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>134</sup> Fer, 'Bordering on Blank,' p.439.



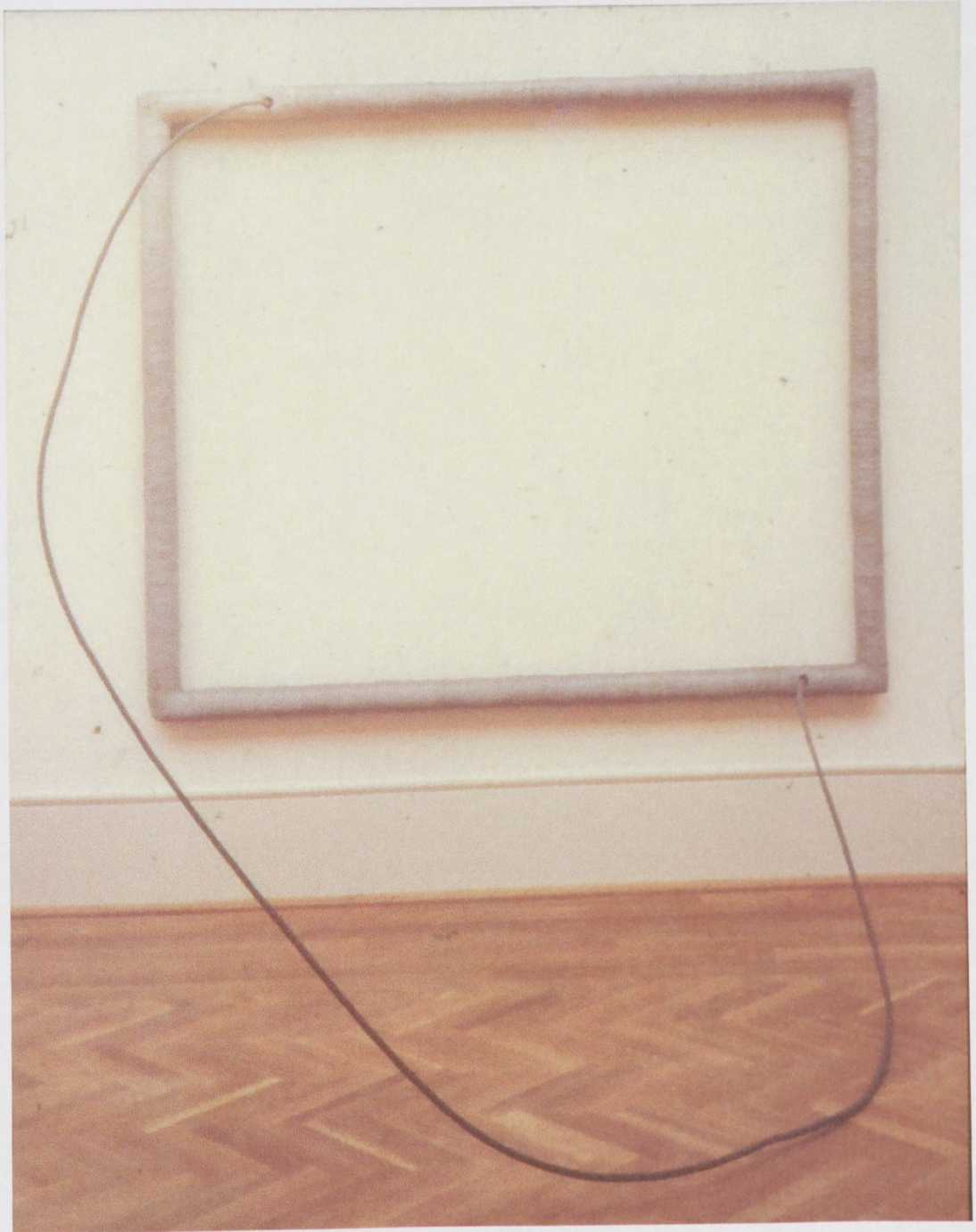


Figure 3.8

Eva Hesse, *Hang Up*, 1966.

Acrylic paint on cloth over wood, acrylic paint on cord over steel tube,  
182.9 x 213.4 x 198.1 cm.



context of this chapter, however, I want to follow the letter of the Kleinian text and to insist that the subject matter of Ruth Kjär's art is of particular significance.

In outlining her ideas on the reparative function of the creative act, Klein remarks that, 'it is instructive to consider what sort of pictures Ruth Kjär has painted.'<sup>135</sup> She chooses, however, to base her analysis around Karin Michaelis's description of two of Kjär's latest works: the portraits of the elderly woman and of her own mother. Ruth Kjär's first artwork, which she had painted 'in a perfect fever' directly onto the wall of her dining room, is mentioned only in passing. Of this image, we learn only belatedly that, 'she filled the empty space on the wall with the life-sized figure of a naked negress.'<sup>136</sup> Ruth Kjär's attempt to claim for herself a place within the realm of high art hitherto exclusively associated with her artist-connoisseur brother-in-law thus hinges upon her execution of a female nude. Yet she does not draw upon a long-established art historical tradition of representations of the unclothed reclining white female body: the body which Ruth Kjär paints is black. Karin Michaelis's description of this represented figure would thus seem to place Kjär's painting in dialogue with such 'primitivist' representations of naked, non-European women as Gauguin's *Mana'o Tupapa'u* (**Figure 3.9**). (The connection to the 'primitive' is indeed made directly in Michaelis's subsequent description of the portrait of the artist's mother as depicting a 'magnificent woman of primitive times.')

That artists who were women could participate too in this traffic in images of sexual exoticism is indicated by the presence in the oeuvre of Suzanne Valadon of a series of nude studies of a mixed race model, executed in 1919. In these works, which owe a clear stylistic debt to the work of Gauguin, the model is pictured in a natural setting. In *Mulâtresse nue tenant une pomme* (**Figure 3.10**), a further visual analogy is made between the curves of the model's breasts, belly and thighs, and the bowl of fruit that features so prominently in the foreground of the image, thereby strengthening the association between (the racially differentiated) Woman, nature and the 'primitive'. Perhaps, then, we could imagine that it was an image such as this that Ruth Kjär painted onto the wall of her dining room? It has, however, recently been suggested that the 'life-sized figure of a naked negress' which served to define Ruth Kjär as an artist may in fact have been a representation of the African-American dancer and performer Josephine Baker (1906-1975).

Ole Andkjær Olsen argues that Karin Michaelis's article was based upon the Danish painter Ruth Kiær, who exhibited under her maiden name of Ruth Weber. Ruth Weber

<sup>135</sup> Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations,' p.217.

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*



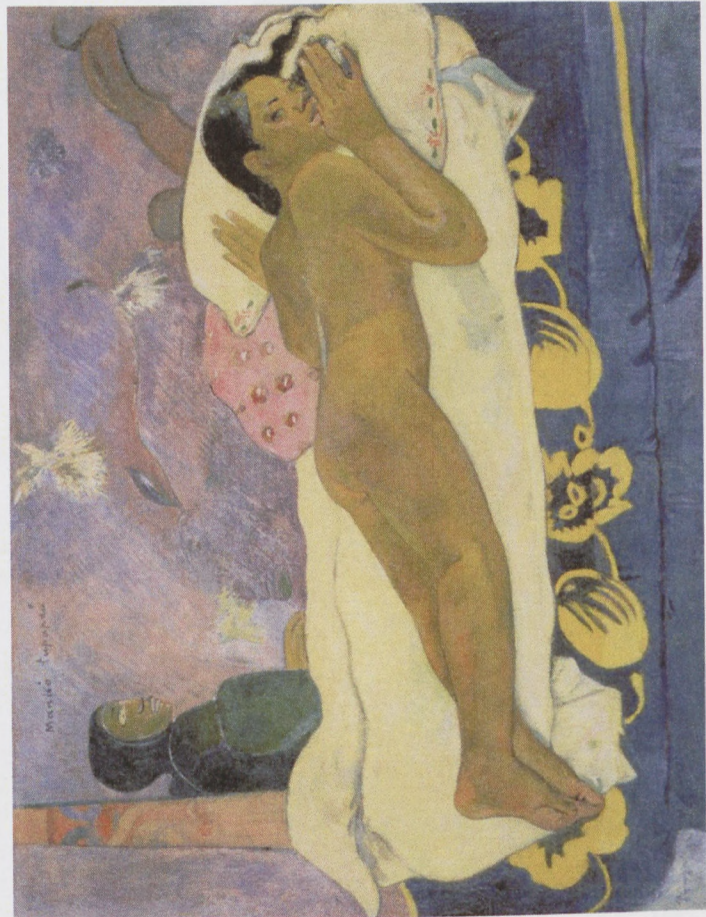


Figure 3.9  
Paul Gauguin, *Manao Tupapau (Spirit of the Dead Watching)*, 1892. Oil on burlap mounted on canvas, 92.1 x 113 cm.

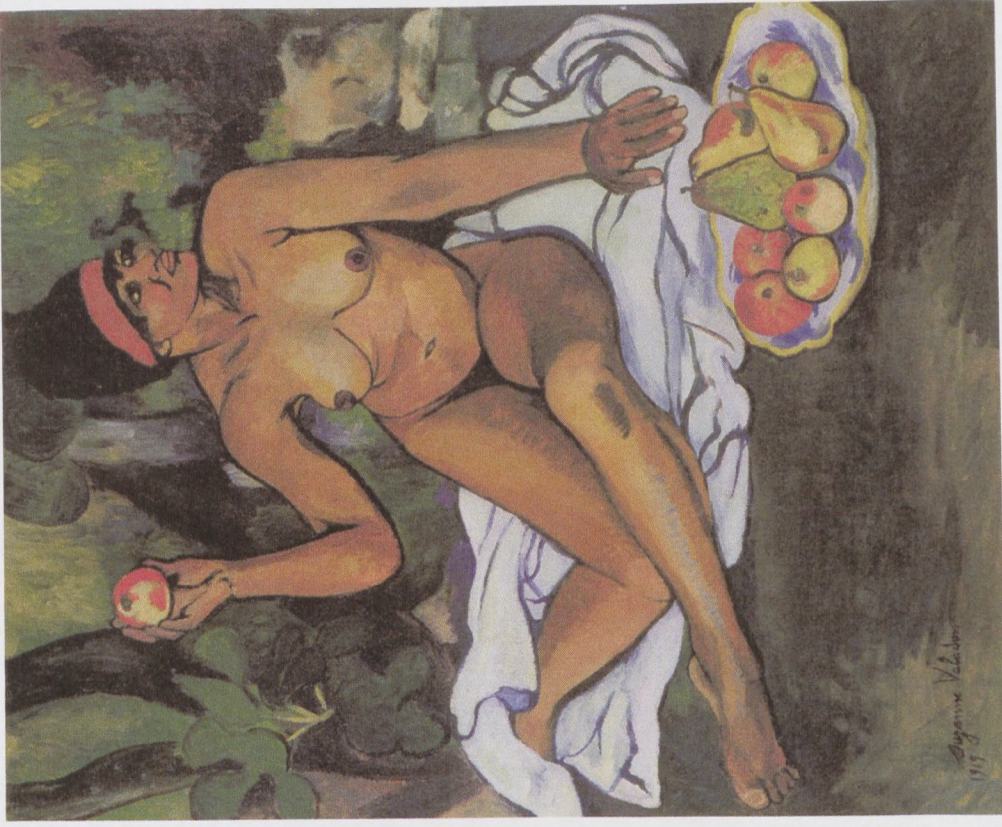


Figure 3.10  
Suzanne Valadon, *Mulâtresse nue tenant une pomme*, 1919.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.5 cm.



(1894-1977) was a member of a wealthy Danish family, and as a young woman had moved in the highest echelons of society. She was married to the well-known art collector Axel Kiær, who was related by marriage to the Symbolist artist Niels Hansen (presumably the famous brother-in-law who, according to Karin Michaelis, was so dismissive of Ruth Kjær/Weber's first artistic endeavour). After the breakdown of her marriage in the late 1940s, she became increasingly reclusive, but continued, nonetheless, to make art, producing mainly figurative paintings. She appeared to find it particularly difficult to finish work, however, and also destroyed many of her earlier paintings, including her first portrait of Josephine Baker.<sup>137</sup> A black and white photograph of this image (**Figure 3.11**) reveals a seated nude figure in an interior setting. While her body is presented for inspection by the viewer, her left leg drawn up so as to emphasise the display of the pubic region, her gaze is averted, leading me to speculate that the artist may have intended to convey a sense of private repose and inner contemplation.

The image of Josephine Baker had become indelibly engrained on European consciousness following her performance on the opening night of *La Revue Nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris on 2 October 1925 (**Figure 3.12**).<sup>138</sup> The spectacle lodged itself vividly in the mind of the expatriate writer and journalist Janet Flanner (1892-1978), who offered a 'belated tribute' to Josephine Baker some fifty years after the event. Flanner comments that, at the time of the performance:

I wrote about it timidly, uncertainly, like a dullard. As a matter of fact, it was so incomparably novel an element in French public pleasures that its star, hitherto unknown, named Josephine Baker, remains to me now like a still-fresh vision, sensual, exciting, isolated in my memory today, almost fifty years later. So here follows what I should have written then about her performance, as a belated tribute.

She made her entry entirely nude except for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs; she was being carried upside down and doing the splits on the shoulder of a black giant. Midstage, he paused, and with his long fingers holding her basket-wise around the waist, swung her in a slow cartwheel to the stage floor, where she stood like his magnificent discarded burden, in an instant of complete silence. She was an unforgettable female ebony statue. A scream of salutation spread through the theatre. Whatever happened next was unimportant. The two specific elements had been established and were unforgettable—her magnificent dark body, a new model that to the French

<sup>137</sup> Ole Andkjær Olsen, 'Depression and Reparation as Themes in Melanie Klein's Analysis of the Painter Ruth Weber,' *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 27 (2004), pp.34-42.

<sup>138</sup> On Josephine Baker's performances, see in particular Karen C C Dalton & Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen Through Parisian Eyes,' *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Summer 1998), pp.903-34 and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).



proved for the first time that black was beautiful, and the acute response of the white masculine public in the capital of hedonism of all Europe—Paris.<sup>139</sup>

Comparison of Josephine Baker's 'magnificent dark body' to the African art forms that so captivated avant-garde artists such as Picasso in the early years of the twentieth century was commonplace. To dance critic André Levinson, it seemed that, 'certain of Miss Baker's poses [...] had the compelling potency of the finest examples of Negro sculpture. The plastic sense of a race of sculptors came to life and the frenzy of African Eros swept over the audience.'<sup>140</sup> As such reviews make clear, Josephine Baker's infamous *danse sauvage* offered to a white, male audience increasingly infatuated by all things African a spectacle that registered as at once thrillingly modern and 'uncivilised,' 'savage' and 'primitive.'<sup>141</sup>

Yet the cult of 'negrophilia' so prevalent in modernist Paris during the 1920s also offered to expatriate African-Americans a range of possibilities denied to them in the United States. Relocation to the 'capital of hedonism of all Europe' provided black entertainers and musicians, artists and writers, with an opportunity to live for the first time in a society that was not organised around principles of racial segregation and discrimination.<sup>142</sup> The conscious performance and manipulation of white masculine fantasies around the 'primitive' and 'exotic' nature of black female sexuality in her stage acts enabled Josephine Baker in particular to forge for herself a highly successful and lucrative career: in addition to her stage performances, she also starred in several films, launched a hair care product (known as 'Bakerfix'), and opened her own nightclub, Chez Joséphine. Her self-fashioning onstage thus contrasted strongly with her offstage identity as a modern, financially independent, career woman: in a photograph taken in early 1928 (see **Figure 3.13**), she is pictured at her office desk, sporting fashionably cropped hair and a loose, flapper-style dress, reading the newspapers and surrounded by photographs of herself in her stage costumes. Might Josephine Baker thus have served as an icon of modern femininity, professional independence and sexual liberation to an aspiring (modern) woman artist such as Ruth Weber? In contrast to Paul Colin's lithographic images of Baker, which convey a sense of sexualised exoticism and sinuous movement (in

<sup>139</sup> Janet Flanner, *Paris was Yesterday 1925-1939*, ed. Irving Drutman, intro. James Campbell (London: Virago, 2003), pp.xxix-xxx.

<sup>140</sup> Cited in Dalton & Gates, p.915.

<sup>141</sup> For a discussion of white avant-garde interest in black culture in Paris during the 1920s, see Petrine Archer-Shaw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

<sup>142</sup> For an account of expatriate African Americans in Paris in the inter-war period, see Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).





Figure 3.12

Photograph of Josephine Baker and Joe Alex performing their *danse sauvage* with *La Revue Nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, October 1925.



Figure 3.13

Photograph of Josephine Baker at her office desk in Montmartre, early 1928



**Figure 3.14**, for example, her physical energy is such that she has literally to be contained behind bars), Weber's representation of Josephine Baker gives rather an impression of a woman confidently at ease with her own corporeality and sexuality.

## Conclusion

Feminist interventions in the history of art have emphasised that the stylistic development of modern art is frequently imagined as a series of oedipal struggles, in which a succession of modernist sons react against their artistic forefathers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the female body served as a key site of this filial struggle, as a progressive series of artists—from Manet through to Gauguin, Picasso and Matisse—sought to surpass the formal innovations of their predecessors in order to make their own distinctive contribution to the genre of the female nude.<sup>143</sup> In their acknowledgement of the strength and significance of *daughterly* aggression, Woolf's account of her fatal battle with the Angel in the House and Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic interpretation of the paintings of Ruth Kjär would seem to offer some alternative to such all-male narratives of stylistic genealogy and influence. Perhaps, then, we could take these two texts as the basis of our attempts to construct a matrilineal account of modernism, reading the attempts by artists who were women to intervene in the genre of the female nude in the early years of the twentieth century as an attempt to repair the damage inflicted in phantasy on the maternal body? In this chapter, I have drawn upon these two key early-twentieth-century texts on ambivalence and creativity in order to explore the historically specific contradictions faced by that generation of modernist women who, in their bid to forge for themselves a professional career as artists and writers, and to represent elements of their own corporeality and sexuality in their creative practice, also found themselves reacting against an outmoded ideal of bourgeois femininity which stymied them as creative subjects. As a counterpoint to this idea of a violent rupture between modernist women and the generation of their mothers, I introduced the work of Hélène Cixous in order to suggest another way in which a maternal/feminine dimension could inform aesthetic practices by women.

More recent psychoanalytical considerations of feminine creativity have emphasised the need to differentiate between the Kleinian concept of reparation as directed towards an object, and reparation of the self. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel argues that, 'the creative act

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<sup>143</sup> For an astute analysis of this game of 'reference, deference and difference,' see Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).



which aims at the subject's own reparation implies a discharge of the drives in a sublimated fashion. On the other hand, the creative act which builds the object is based on the repression of these same sadistic drives, and on the use of reaction formations.<sup>144</sup> For Chasseguet-Smirgel, a creative act which has as its aim the reparation of the subject thus involves an ability to tolerate and to mobilise aggression. She concludes her paper with the tantalising suggestion that, 'further research on factors which inhibit creativity in women might elaborate the notions set forth here.'<sup>145</sup> It is this very issue which is subsequently taken up by Rozsika Parker in her consideration of creativity, femininity and aggression. Parker argues that the Angel in the House should be considered both a 'persecuting internal object' and a 'personification of a mode of relating'.<sup>146</sup> She takes issue, however, with Woolf's suggestion that the Angel in the House must necessarily have an inhibiting effect on creativity, proposing instead that:

the angel represents a concern with the impact of a piece of work on the other—a concern that is integral to the creative process. Rather than annihilating the angel, the task of those engaged in creative endeavour is [...] to allow an element of aggression, assertion and ruthlessness into the relationships that determine creativity without losing the critical awareness of the conditions of reception that is the positive attribute of the angel.<sup>147</sup>

Rozsika Parker's insights seem to me particularly helpful in thinking about the relation of women artists to the modernist canon. Shifting our attention away from a particular aesthetics of reparation involving the maternal body (or its figurative substitute), her emphasis upon creativity as an object relationship leads us to consider in both broader and more complex terms the question of women artists' engagement with existing traditions of representation: as Parker proposes, 'identification, separation, emulation, rejection, destruction and conservation are all dynamics that can come into play with the relationship to tradition.'<sup>148</sup> What specific strategies, then, did artists who were women use in their endeavours to intervene in the genre of the modernist nude and to refashion it as a sign of feminine subjectivity, sexuality and creativity, rather than of masculine fantasy? And how were their attempts to negotiate that genre understood by early-twentieth-century art critics?

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<sup>144</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, 'Thoughts on the Concept of Reparation and the Hierarchy of Creative Acts,' *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 11 (1989), pp.399-406, p.403.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p.405.

<sup>146</sup> Rozsika Parker, "'Killing the Angel in the House": Creativity, Femininity and Aggression,' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 79 (1998), pp.757-74, p.757.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, p.758.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p.760.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### NUDE/WOMAN/ARTIST—WOMAN/ARTIST/NUDE: THE FORMATION OF AN ART CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON SUZANNE VALADON

In 1924, some twelve years before Alfred H Barr produced his famous diagram charting the chronological development of abstract art (**Figure 4.1**), the French poet and critic Francis Carco (1886-1956) produced a book-length study of the nude in modern painting.<sup>1</sup> Carco's survey is of interest in that, in contrast to Barr's retrospectively ordered map of successive formal innovations, it acknowledges the plurality of stylistic developments that occurred across the genre of the female nude during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where Barr's account of modernist art leads inexorably in the direction of abstraction, Carco's narrative reveals the female nude to be a central, and increasingly fissured, site of avant-garde art practice. Beginning in 1863 with Manet's *Olympia* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), his analysis takes in not only such established modern masters as Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne and Degas, but also many artists today considered peripheral to any account of the history of modern painting as it has been canonically constituted, making what may to twenty-first-century scholars seem extravagant claims as to the significance of artists such as André Derain, Raoul Dufy and Félix Vallotton, as well as praising the work of now largely overlooked figures including Albert Marquet, Emile Othon Friesz and Maurice Asselin. Although feminist art historians have tended to regard the nude as 'a subject linked almost exclusively to male artists,'<sup>2</sup> *Le Nu dans la peinture moderne* in fact devotes an entire chapter to the question of 'la peinture féminine et le nu', discussing the work of several women artists who are still relatively well-known today—Berthe Morisot, 'Miss Mary Cassatt', Suzanne Valadon and Marie Laurencin—as well as assessing the contributions made to the genre by a number of women painters whose names may well be unfamiliar to a contemporary audience—Hélène Dufau, Georgette Agutte, Emilie Charmy, Jacqueline Marval, Lucie Cousturier and Louise Hervieu.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I shall analyse the terms available to contemporary reviewers such as Francis Carco to make sense of paintings of the female nude known to have been executed by a *woman* artist. Having examined early-twentieth-century art critical responses to the work of

<sup>1</sup> Francis Carco, *Le Nu dans la peinture moderne 1863-1920* (Paris: Les Éditions G Crès et Cie, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Betterton, 'How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon', *Feminist Review* 19 (1985), pp.3-24, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Gill Perry has already gone some way towards restoring the work of both Emilie Charmy and Jacqueline Marval to visibility; see *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).



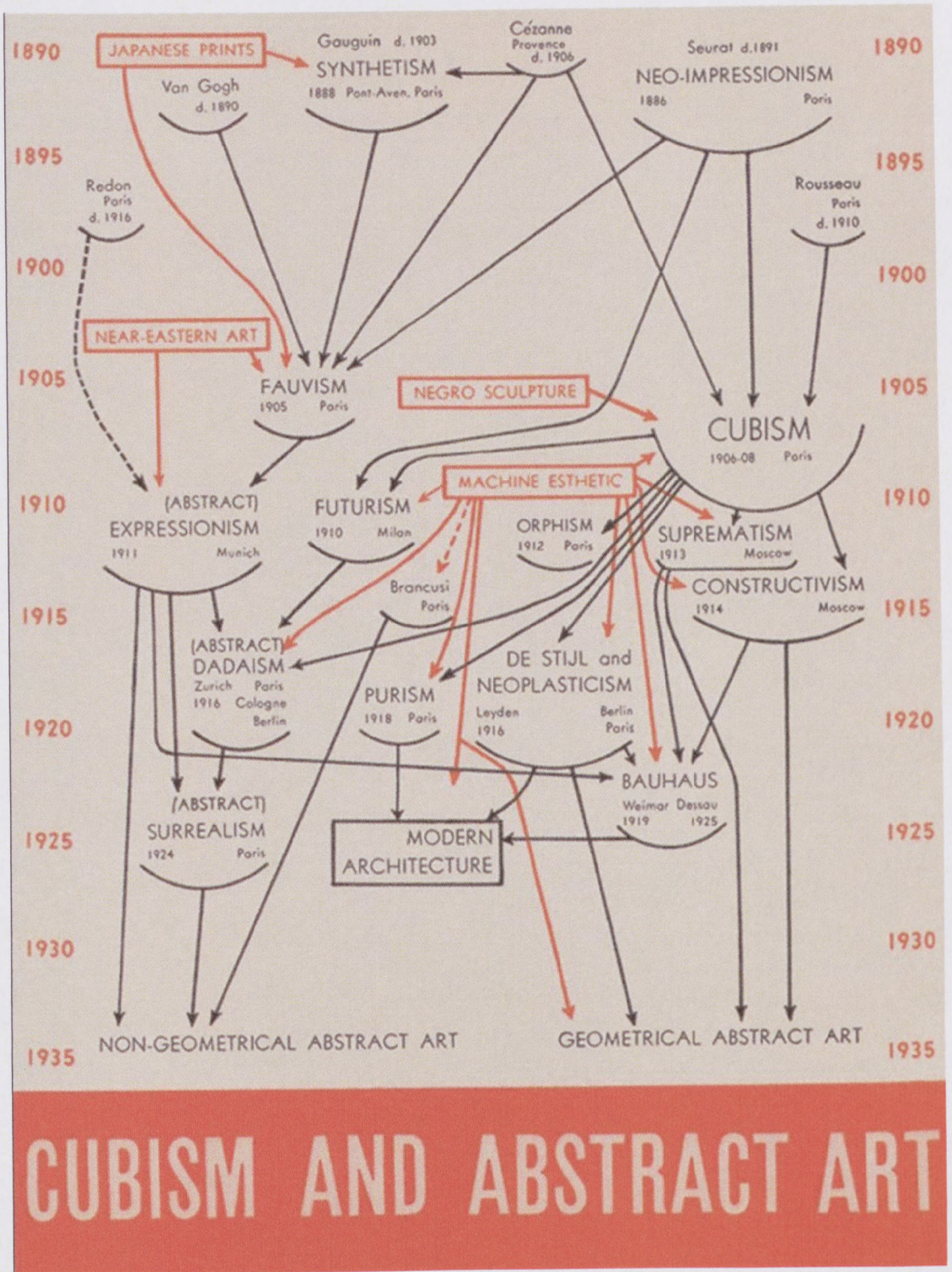


Figure 4.1

Cover chart prepared by Alfred H. Barr for *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936)



Suzanne Valadon, I shall then offer a critical re-reading of more recent, feminist analyses of her representations of the female nude. It will be my contention that all of this existing literature remains, in different ways, caught within binary conceptualisations of class and gender. My own work on the maternal, drawing upon both Kleinian and Ettingerian models, is offered as a means of moving beyond these confinements. Rather than focussing on the gendered ideas that sustained the discourse on both *la féminité* and *l'art féminin* in later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century French culture and art, or else working with notions of classed subjectivity as advanced by more social feminist art historians, I argue that a consideration of the maternal-feminine through the psychoanalytically founded theory of the Matrix can open up readings of the work of Suzanne Valadon that are not trapped within the binary terms which I identify in the historical archive on this woman painter.

Suzanne Valadon's work was first placed on public display in 1894, when she submitted five drawings to the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*. From 1911 up until her death in 1938, she showed work regularly at both the *Salon des Indépendants* and the *Salon d'Automne*, and also had numerous group and solo exhibitions both in Paris and abroad. Valadon's exhibiting career thus spans a five-decade period which not only encompasses significant formal innovations within the field of modernist art, but that is also, as I suggested in the previous chapter, marked by the increasing professionalisation of women's artistic practice. By 1881, the year of the founding of the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, Suzanne Valadon was already working as an artists' model. Lacking both the private income and the room of her own that Virginia Woolf would later feel to be a prerequisite for creative endeavour, as a self-taught artist, Valadon attended neither the *École des Beaux-Arts* nor the private academies that provided training for those aspiring women artists who could afford the fees. Unlike the 'lady art students' of the *Académie Julian* and the *Académie Colarossi*, Valadon's social position afforded her access to the privileged recreational spaces of the male avant-garde artists of the late nineteenth century, while her role as an artists' model enabled her to observe at close quarters the working procedures and techniques of artists such as Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec. Although her class background differentiated her from many of her female colleagues, and in spite of the fact that she was widely reported to have disliked the concept of separate exhibitions for women artists and so resisted submitting work to all-female shows until the final years of her life, by the 1930s Suzanne Valadon could be embraced by the *Union des Femmes Artistes Modernes* as both artistic foremother and contemporary

practitioner: in keeping with founder Marie-Anne Camax-Zoegger's policy of foregrounding current trends in painting whilst simultaneously constructing and transmitting a history of women artists, one reviewer of the 1935 Salon of the *Union des Femmes Artistes Modernes* hailed Valadon as 'perhaps the best woman painter of yesterday and today'.<sup>4</sup>

The longevity of Suzanne Valadon's professional life is further emphasised by a recent biography, which compares her early work to that of Berthe Morisot (1841-95), and juxtaposes her later career with that of Marie Laurencin (1883-1956). In the former comparison, Valadon's drawings of 'sullen, adolescent children in awkward poses that ignored the conventions, unadorned and quite unselfconscious in their nakedness' are contrasted with Berthe Morisot's representations of maternal experience, which are characterised as depicting 'delicate young women, pensive on sofas, surrounded by flowers, plants and lace curtains or looking lovingly on cherubic babes nestling in their cradles'.<sup>5</sup> In the latter comparison, Marie Laurencin serves as Valadon's 'opposite in every respect':

Laurencin prided herself on her 'femininity': she was demure, discreet and happy to defer to the male. Nor was she adverse to displaying her 'womanly' qualities, almost to the point of caricature. "Each day I make myself do some sewing, as it is the most feminine exercise there is: it reminds me that I am a woman." [...] Valadon, temperamentally incapable of ingratiating herself with anyone, took up her needle only for practical purposes and hardly needed reminding of her gender.<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, these quotations from Rose's *Mistress of Montmartre* raise a series of questions: questions that have to do with what it means to be 'feminine', what it means to make art, and whether being 'feminine' and making art, if not mutually incompatible

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<sup>4</sup> 'peut-être la meilleure des femmes peintres d'hier et d'aujourd'hui'.

Charles Fegdal, 'Femmes Artistes Modernes', *Revue des Indépendants*, September 1935, cited by Paula Birnbaum, who provides a comprehensive discussion of the aims and exhibiting practices of the *Union des Femmes Artistes Modernes* in 'Femmes Artistes Modernes: Women, Art and Identity in Inter-War France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> June Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1998), p.110. This idealised view of Berthe Morisot's images of maternity has, however, been challenged by feminist critics; see Linda Nochlin, 'Morisot's *Wet Nurse*: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting' (1988), pp.37-56 in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), in particular pp.212-52 and Mary Jacobus, 'Narcissa's Gaze: Berthe Morisot and the Filial Mirror,' pp.269-96 in *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art and Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.218, citing René Gimpel, *Diary of an Art Dealer* (London, 1986).

A similar comparison is made by Christopher Green, who suggests that, 'Valadon was in many ways her [Marie Laurencin's] polar opposite, a female exception to every rule'.

Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, Pelican History of Art Series, 2001), p.67.

activities (as Marie Laurencin's compensatory needlework would seem to imply), will result in the production of a qualifiably 'feminine art'.

These same questions also gained considerable currency in late-nineteenth-century art criticism. In fin-de-siècle France, public debate on the relationship between women and art had initially been provoked by the campaign by the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs* for women's entry to the state-funded *École des Beaux-Arts*. The annual exhibitions staged by the *Union* were to provide a further focus for discussions as to the nature and standard of women's artistic production.<sup>7</sup> As Tamar Garb has demonstrated in her detailed reading of contemporary reviews of these annual *Salons des Femmes*, the belief that work by women painters should visibly and collectively express the essentially feminine nature of its producers became commonplace amongst reviewers:

what critics wanted was not a show of "women painters," but a demonstration of "paintings by women," that is "paintings which express their peculiar views, which show the feminine spirit." In men's art, quality and uniqueness were what was at stake. At the *Salon des femmes*, what was important was that the overall effect was evocative of the "feminine". Individual works were judged by many, therefore, not only in relation to current stylistic notions of good drawing, design, imaginative composition and so on, but according to a more particular test of adequacy, their capacity to express an essential femininity, to encapsulate Woman.<sup>8</sup>

As Garb points out, this discussion owed much of its intelligibility to broader debates on the so-called 'Woman Question': in criticising the 'weak' and essentially imitative quality of works by women artists, and in praising their 'delicacy', 'purity', 'grace' and 'spontaneity', critics implicitly built upon a range of popular assumptions concerning women's intellectual deficiencies, their heightened perceptions and emotional lability, appropriated from the disciplines of medicine, psychology and social policy.<sup>9</sup>

The attempts during the late nineteenth century to characterise the specifically 'feminine' qualities of paintings by women thus both drew upon and contributed to widely endorsed views of the 'natural' and biologically determined distinction between the sexes formed across a number of discursive sites at the fin-de-siècle. As Francis Carco's scathing assessment of the academic women painters of the preceding century illustrates, this

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<sup>7</sup> See Tamar Garb, "'L'Art Féminin': The Formation of a Critical Discourse in Late-Nineteenth-Century France", *Art History* 12.1 (March 1989) and *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, p.111.

<sup>9</sup> See Garb, "'L'Art Féminin'" and *Sisters of the Brush*, pp.105-52.



ongoing belief in their innate difference served further to exclude women from the pantheon of great art:

In the nineteenth century, the woman painter increased in number. With a few exceptions, which we would be happy to discuss, she tackled all the subjects that seemed to have been reserved for men without any originality or vigour [...] As for the efforts of Louise Abbéma, Virginie Demont-Breton, Juana Romani, Madeleine Lemaire etc, these are characterised by a poverty and a feebleness that is truly lamentable. They are nothing more than a dim reflection of the worst masculine conventions. Woman makes reference to the most solid—and in consequence, the most clichéd—aspects of traditional art. Does she wish to try to transcribe the delicate charm with which she is deemed to be endowed? She succeeds only in externalising the least interesting aspects of her being, neglecting the spontaneity and instinctive grace through which she might transform an irritating sentimentality.<sup>10</sup>

To Carco, *la peinture féminine* thus appeared a feeble attempt at copying the conventions of a tired and already outmoded academicism. The bids by nineteenth-century women painters to engage with subject matter that had up to this point been the sole preserve of male artists (he is, presumably, referring to the genre of the nude) could not even be redeemed as a spontaneous expression of their instinctively feminine grace and charm, but were rather to be characterised by their sickly sentimentality.

The protracted debate around gender, creativity and national identity in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not, however, limited to discussion of those women artists who worked within conservative pictorial traditions. For many critics, including Carco, the solution to the search for an appropriately ‘feminine’ art was seen to lie in the work of avant-garde practitioners such as Berthe Morisot and Marie Laurencin, both of whom came in the inter-war period to be heralded as emblematic of a particularly timeless—and uniquely French—femininity. In contrast to his damning condemnation of those women artists associated with the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, Carco heaps effusive praise upon Berthe Morisot:

You will find in her work neither a sudden rush of enthusiasm nor a hint of bitterness. There are only gentle waves of delicate pleasure and soft nostalgia.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la femme peintre va se multiplier. Elle abordera tous les sujets qui semblaient réservés aux hommes, et—à quelques exceptions près que nous serons heureux d’examiner—sans originalité ni vigueur [...] Quant aux expressions des Louise Abbéma, Virginie Demont-Breton, Juana Romani, Madeleine Lemaire, et coëtera, elles sont d’une pauvreté et d’une faiblesse nettement désolantes. Elles ne montrent qu’un reflet atténué de la pire convention masculine. La femme se réfère à ce que le passé d’art a de plus solide—et par conséquent, de plus poncif—dans l’ordre traditionnel. Veut-elle essayer de traduire les qualités de charme délicat dont on la juge pourvue? Elle n’aboutit qu’à extérioriser le moins intéressant de son être, négligeant la spontanéité, la grâce instinctive pour transposer une agaçante mièvrerie.’ Carco, *Le Nu dans la peinture moderne*, pp.139-40.

It is a true expression of femininity, unpretentious, without the least hint of coquetry. Its plasticity is hazy, blended with a subtle and exquisite colouring.<sup>11</sup>

In his enthusiasm for the ‘delicate pleasure’ and ‘exquisite colouring’ of Morisot’s imagery, Carco echoes the views of a previous generation of critics, for whom the Impressionist emphasis upon the reflex recording of sensory impulses and visual sensations had made it a style uniquely suited to the feminine sensibility. Unlike her contemporary Mary Cassatt, whose interest in linearity and draughtsmanship was deemed to be an inherently ‘masculine’ preoccupation, late-nineteenth-century critics had repeatedly praised Berthe Morisot’s work for its ‘feminine charm’, isolating its delicate brushwork, its subtle use of colour and its refinement, grace and elegance as particularly worthy of comment: ‘close the catalogue and look at the work full of freshness and delicacy, executed with a lightness of brush, a finesse which flows from a grace which is entirely feminine,’ exhorted one enthusiast; ‘it is the poem of the modern woman, imagined and dreamed by a woman.’<sup>12</sup>

As Tamar Garb has emphasised, the myth of Berthe Morisot’s paradigmatic femininity was dependent not only upon the notion that her Impressionist method of mark-making constituted an unmediated expression of her intrinsically feminine nature, but was further reliant upon the construction of a very particular social identity for the nineteenth-century *femme peintre*:

In her refined person and her secluded domestic life-style, [Morisot] was seen to embody the dignity, grace and charm regarded as the mark of a peculiarly French femininity. In comparison with the deviant women who threatened to disturb traditional social and moral values, the *femmes nouvelles*, [...] Berthe Morisot, wife, mother, and elegant hostess, could be acclaimed as a suitably womanly woman.<sup>13</sup>

The *femme nouvelle* or ‘New Woman’ was the focus of much discussion and frequent caricature in the Parisian press of the 1890s. The last decade of the nineteenth century saw a rise not only in organised feminist activism (the first International Congresses on Women’s Rights and Feminine Institutions were held at the 1889 Paris exposition), but also

<sup>11</sup> ‘On n’y trouve ni l’élan de l’enthousiasme ni l’écho de l’amertume. Il n’y passe que de légères ondes de plaisir délicat, de nostalgie atténuée. Mais c’est un véritable témoignage féminin, sans prétention, hors de tout petit esprit de coquetterie. La plasticité est voilée, fondue en un coloris d’une subtilité exquise.’ *ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>12</sup> ‘L’Oeuvre de Berthe Morisot,’ *Moniteur des arts* 2227 (20 March 1896), p.125; cited by Tamar Garb, ‘Berthe Morisot and the Feminising of Impressionism’ in *Perspectives on Morisot*, ed. Teri J Edelstein (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1990), pp.57-66, p.61. On the association of the Impressionist style with femininity, see also Anne Higonnet, ‘Writing the Gender of the Image: Art Criticism in Late Nineteenth-Century France,’ *Genders* 6 (Fall 1989), pp.60-73.

<sup>13</sup> Garb, ‘Berthe Morisot and the Feminising of Impressionism,’ p.60.

significant changes to the legal and professional opportunities available to middle-class women in France. Abandoning home and family in order to pursue a professional career, the seemingly de-feminised figure of the *femme nouvelle* served as a concrete manifestation of the threat that women's perceived refusal of their designated social roles and domestic duties posed to the essential divisions ordering bourgeois life at the fin-de-siècle.<sup>14</sup>

Over a decade after Berthe Morisot's death, Guillaume Apollinaire managed to overcome an initial expressive difficulty through recourse to an already well-rehearsed critical vocabulary:

I find no words adequate to define the totally French grace of Mlle Marie Laurencin. She is endowed with the greatest number of feminine qualities and is free from all masculine shortcomings. Perhaps the greatest error of most women artists is that they want to surpass their male colleagues, and in attempting to do so, they lose their feminine taste and gracefulness.

The case of Mlle Laurencin is very different. She is aware of the profound differences that exist between men and women: difference in origins, difference in ideals. Mlle Laurencin's personality vibrates with joyfulness. Purity is her natural sphere; she breathes in it freely. [...] *Diana at the Hunt*, *Allegory*, and *Artemis*, their faces wet with tears of happiness, are the tender manifestations of this childlike and fabulous aspect of the feminine mind.<sup>15</sup>

Menaced by the spectre of those women artists who endeavour not merely to compete with their male colleagues but to usurp them entirely (and who thus, like the *femmes nouvelles*, threaten to divest themselves of their femininity in the process), Apollinaire here proclaims Marie Laurencin's belief in an originary difference between the sexes and offers a eulogy not merely to her femininity but also her Frenchness. In his praise for Marie Laurencin's 'taste', 'gracefulness', 'purity' and 'tenderness', he not only re-rehearses a set of gendered critical terms previously applied to Berthe Morisot, but also establishes a precedent for subsequent art criticism, in which 'everything about Marie Laurencin—her artistic practice, her temperament, her appearance, and even her voice—has been saturated with signs of femininity.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On the perceived menace of the New Woman, see Michelle Perrot, 'The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women's Condition at the Turn of the Century,' pp.51-60 in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987) and Debora L Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, 'The Salon des Indépendants', *La Revue des lettres et des arts*, 1 May 1908, reprinted in Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, ed. Leroy C Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p.44.

<sup>16</sup> Bridget Elliott, 'The "Strength of the Weak" as Portrayed by Marie Laurencin', *Genders* 24 (1996), pp.69-109. Elliott remains one of the few feminist writers to have grasped the complexity of Marie Laurencin's



Marie Laurencin was the daughter of an unmarried dressmaker, whose place on the periphery of any account of Cubism has been chiefly secured through her relationship with Apollinaire and her widely reproduced portraits of the Bateau Lavoir group. After a brief marriage to the German painter Otto van Watjen and a wartime exile in Spain, Laurencin returned to Paris and enjoyed considerable popular and commercial success through her graphic work and portraiture. In her working-class background, and in both her pre-war guise as Cubist muse and mistress, and post-war identity as a divorced, childless, financially independent, professional woman, Marie Laurencin fails to conform to the image of the maternal, bourgeois *femme peintre*, exemplified in the critical imaginary by the figure of Berthe Morisot. In the art critical discourse of the inter-war period, however, the names of both artists came to serve as privileged signifiers in the production of a gendered rhetoric surrounding artistic production by women, fulfilling a nostalgic masculine fantasy of absolute feminine difference.

In her extensive research into the gendered rhetoric that surrounded women's artistic practice in France, Tamar Garb focuses on the emergence of *l'art féminin* as a critical category in the late nineteenth century. In this chapter, I shall build upon her scholarship by tracking the perpetuation of this rhetoric on into the 1920s and 1930s. The longstanding tendency to view women's art as a distinct entity within French art critical discourse should, I propose, be seen as an attempt to negotiate and affirm sexual difference in the light of the wider cultural malaise that surrounded the perceived erosion of normative gender roles in France in the period following the First World War. In post-war France, 'debate concerning gender identity became a primary way to embrace, resist or reconcile oneself to changes associated with the war.'<sup>17</sup> Mary Louise Roberts has shown how this debate came to be structured around three symbolic figures—the 'modern woman', the 'mother' and the 'single woman'. Where the modern woman, or *garçonne*, with her cropped hair and loose sexual morals, served as a privileged symbol of rapid social change and moral crisis, the loving wife and mother represented both cultural continuity and traditional ideals such as family and self-sacrifice, thus providing a 'badly needed fiction of stability in a time of great turbulence and change.'<sup>18</sup> Roberts proposes that the

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attempts to negotiate for herself a position in relation to the male avant-garde; see also 'The Making of Genius: Gertrude Stein and Marie Laurencin' in Bridget Elliott & Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)Positionings* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilisation Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Post-War France 1917-1927* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.5.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.11. As Roberts explains, the popular image of the *femme moderne* owed much to the fin-de-siècle stereotype of the New Woman, with one important exception. 'The New Woman had embodied a modernist ideal of womanhood, pioneered by cultural radicals, and representing economic and social freedom. But she

third image of Woman—that of the single woman—arose out of an attempt to reconcile the old and new world orders, and to mediate between tradition and change. Although she worked outside the home and was economically independent, the *femme seule* was seen not to have abandoned traditional domestic ideals; unlike the *femme moderne*, she also remained celibate. In the light of Roberts's work, it thus becomes possible to understand how, in the art criticism of the interwar period, the concept of the *femme peintre* could come to encompass not only historical figures such as Berthe Morisot—construed as the guardian of the traditional bourgeois havens of home and family—but also self-consciously modern *femmes seules* such as Marie Laurencin. Despite their social and stylistic diversity, what mattered to critics was that, in both their work and their artistic persona, Morisot and Laurencin each displayed attributes that sustained the fiction of a specifically French femininity.

June Rose's comparison of Suzanne Valadon with Berthe Morisot and Marie Laurencin thus inserts Valadon into a genealogy of women modernists around whom very particular meanings had accrued, reduplicating the terms of previous critical responses to the latter two artists in its emphasis upon the 'delicacy' of Berthe Morisot's imagery and the 'femininity' of Marie Laurencin. In Rose's reading, Valadon's more sexual access to the body and her working-class necessity to sew serve to set her apart from stereotypical notions of the 'feminine' (Morisot's idealised maternity, Laurencin's ladylike craft). Rose thus seems unwittingly to echo the terms of early-twentieth-century reviews of Valadon's paintings, in which her artistic practice signified both within the terms of, and in opposition to, the established critical discourse on *la féminité* and *l'art féminin*. While both Berthe Morisot and Marie Laurencin could be accommodated to this discourse, I shall in this chapter plot out the varying strategies adopted by her contemporaries, by twentieth-century biographers and by feminist revisionists to deal with the challenges that Suzanne Valadon and her work appeared to pose to this configuration of the woman artist.

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had also been considered strictly a bohemian, avant-garde phenomenon, confined to the eccentric fringes of society, where her lifestyle served as a critique of Victorian bourgeois culture. By contrast, the *femme moderne* could be the bourgeois girl next door.' *ibid.*, p.19.

On the anxieties associated with the *femme moderne* in the inter-war period, see also Carolyn J Dean, *The Self and its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992). Dean is particularly interested in the question of 'how representations of female deviance both symbolised and shaped a new representation of the (male) self as other in the work of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts,' particularly Jacques Lacan. She analyses how the deviance of the *femme moderne* became a metaphor for 'the new utilitarianism, frivolity and selfishness that contemporaries viewed as characteristic of the post-war years' (p.58, p.63).

### ‘There is nothing soft, indecisive or feminine in her painting’

While Florent Fels, writing in 1921, prophesied that Suzanne Valadon would ‘one day be recognised as one of the glories of French feminine painting,’<sup>19</sup> some two years later, the writer Gustave Coquiot was equally emphatic that he could see ‘nothing soft, indecisive or feminine in her painting.’<sup>20</sup> Like Coquiot, many contemporary reviewers found themselves confronted by traits in Suzanne Valadon’s work that unsettled their expectations of the recognisably ‘feminine’ quality of works by women painters. During her lifetime, Valadon’s work appears to have registered as the site of a more or less precarious oscillation between accepted gender poles, with critics repeatedly characterising it in terms of its ‘strength’, ‘brutality’, ‘sensuality’ and ‘virility’, even as they sought to isolate certain redeeming qualities that would identify it as the work of, specifically, a *woman* artist. These insights have been insistently maintained in posthumous descriptions of both artist and artworks. In a 1947 monograph on Suzanne Valadon, Nesto Jacometti wrote that:

She sculpts feminine nudes brimming with vigour and health who lead a happy and instinctive life. Their flesh is moulded with a masculine sensuality. Gifted with a virile power, with an energy unheard of in a woman and that is infused with ardour and love, she paints in a direct and instinctive manner, without experimentation or regret.<sup>21</sup>

The following year, François Fosca felt that Valadon had:

nothing in common with those of her sisters who, refusing to recognise their limitations and to acquire what they lack, persist in trotting out the same kind offerings. She knew very clearly what she wanted to do and where she was going. Blessed with many virile qualities, above all she asserted an astonishingly decisive spirit.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Qu’attend-on pour reconnaître, en Valadon, l’artiste qui sera un jour l’une des gloires de la peinture féminine française.’

Florent Fels, *L’Information*, 25 June 1921, reprinted in Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1922), p.15.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Rien, dans sa peinture, n’est mou, irrésolu, féminin.’

Gustave Coquiot, *Cubistes, Futuristes, Passésistes* (Paris: Librairie Ollendorf, 1923), p.164.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Elle sculpte des nus féminins nourris de sève et de santé et qu’alimente une heureuse vie animale. Les chairs sont pétries avec une mâle sensualité. Douée de virile puissance, d’une énergie insoupçonnée chez une femme, toute parcourue de fougue et d’amour, elle peint d’une manière directe, instinctive, sans tâtonnements ni repentirs.’

Nesto Jacometti, *Suzanne Valadon* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1947), unpaginated.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Femme peintre, elle n’était en rien pareille à celles de ses sœurs qui, se refusant à reconnaître leurs infirmités et à acquérir tout ce qui leur manque, persistent à ressasser les mêmes gentilleses. Elle savait très nettement ce qu’elle voulait faire et où elle allait. Douée de qualités viriles, elle affirmait par dessus tout un étonnant esprit de décision.’

François Fosca, *La Peinture en France depuis trente ans* (Paris: Éditions du Milieu du Monde, 1948), p.50.



This line of interpretation became even more firmly cemented into the critical discourse on Suzanne Valadon on the occasion of a major retrospective of her work held in 1967 at the *Musée d'Art Moderne* in Paris. In his preface to the catalogue of that show, Bernard Dorival suggested that:

Her works have, in effect, nothing in common with those of lady painters. The latter may be characterised by the delicacy of their sensibility, the refinement of their technique, their tenderness and charm [...], the former are animated by a greedy sensuality, they show decisiveness, even brutality. [...] Perhaps the only feminine trait in the art of Suzanne Valadon, that most virile—and the greatest—of all the women in painting, is to be found in her disregard for logic, her inconsistency and indifference to contradictions.<sup>23</sup>

In a founding feminist interrogation of the assumptions underpinning the construction of the canon of western art, initially published in 1971, Linda Nochlin first alerted us to the fact that the very idea of a ‘great woman artist’ remains an impossible conjunction of terms.<sup>24</sup> This impossibility is thrown into particularly bleak relief during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, owing to the widely endorsed view of a distinct formal and expressive language for women artists. The ubiquity of the discourse on *l'art féminin* during that period has determined not only how women artists were initially written into the history of art, but also why they were subsequently written out of canonical accounts of the stylistic development of western modernism: tracking the presence of these women in the many survey books published over the course of the last hundred years or so, it becomes possible to isolate the precise moment—around the 1950s—when they ‘fall out’ of that history. While the perceived ‘delicacy’ and ‘charm’ of their imagery has served to condemn many early-twentieth-century women painters to obscurity, the very lack of such ‘feminine’ attributes has worked to secure Valadon’s continued visibility. ‘Suzanne Valadon is not a woman painter, she is a painter, in the way in which Rosa Bonheur or Vigée-Lebrun never were,’ declared Jean Bouret in 1947. ‘It is for that reason,’ he continued, ‘that she has earned the great position that we give to her, a position which has never been held other

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Rien de commun, en effet, entre ses ouvrages et ceux des dames de la peinture. Autant ceux-ci valent par la finesse de la sensibilité, la distinction du métier, la tendresse, le charme [...], autant les siens, qu’anime une sensualité goulue, accusent de décision, voire de brutalité.

Et peut-être y a-t-il là, dans ce dédain de la logique, dans cette inconséquence et cette indifférence aux contradictions, le seul trait féminin que présente l’art de Suzanne Valadon, la plus virile – et la plus grande – de toutes les femmes de la peinture.’

Bernard Dorival (Préface), *Suzanne Valadon*, exh. cat., (Paris: Musée National d’Art Moderne, 1967), p.5, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, initially published in *Art News* 69 (January 1971), pp.22-39; reprinted in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*.

than by those men who have surpassed her.<sup>25</sup> For Florent Fels, 'greatness' and 'femininity' were likewise held to be mutually exclusive terms: his assessment of Suzanne Valadon's artworks rests on the antinomy that, 'even though she is the only great woman painter of modern times, she will never make a feminine painting.'<sup>26</sup> For such reviewers, including Bernard Dorival, writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, artistic 'greatness', with its modernist connotations of originality and individuality, was to be imagined through the use of a sexualised vocabulary that served to delineate creativity as an explicitly masculine activity. Yet even as he disavows Valadon's femininity and proclaims instead her 'sensuality', 'brutality' and 'virility', Dorival's essay simultaneously falls back upon stereotypical notions of feminine illogicality and inconsistency in order to position her safely alongside other 'lady painters'.

The critics who commented on Suzanne Valadon's work during her lifetime were likewise compelled to deploy a series of rhetorical manoeuvres which subverted and transcended the polar oppositions that structured the established discourse surrounding paintings by women. In *Le Nu dans la peinture moderne*, Francis Carco explicitly differentiates Valadon from the exponents of *un grand art féminin* such as Marie Laurencin, Lucie Cousturier and Louise Hervieu, suggesting that:

The nude figures of Mme Suzanne Valadon strike an exact balance between the rigour of a masculine vision and that something which, out of an intention that is pitilessly equal, but from an obscurely defensive instinct, is left to the feminine touch. Mme Valadon does not treat bathers too harshly. They are no longer alone. On viewing, the line becomes more human. At this point it is apparent that Mme Suzanne Valadon is a woman. In many other ways, her professional confidence and certain eccentricities, which seem almost virile, cannot disguise the indefinable expression through which women always betray themselves.

The art of today can look upon her as the most realistic woman painter of the nude. At this moment, she alone has formulated a fundamentally plastic ideal of the representation of the modern nude figure, synthesised, envisaged as pure abstraction and made concrete. A new and indisputable feminine symptom.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 'Suzanne Valadon n'est pas une femme peintre, c'est un peintre, ce que n'aurait jamais été Rosa Bonheur ou Vigée-Lebrun et c'est à cela qu'elle doit la magnifique place qui nous lui donnons tous, place que n'auront jamais certain hommes qui l'ont devancée.'

Jean Bouret, *Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Editions Odette Pétrides, 1947), cited in Daniel Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*, exh. cat., (Martigny, Switzerland: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 1996), p.76.

<sup>26</sup> 'Elle ne fera jamais une peinture féminine, encore qu'elle soit le seul grand peintre femme des temps modernes.'

Florent Fels, *L'Art Vivant de 1900 à nos jours* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1950), p.142.

<sup>27</sup> 'La figure nue de Mme Suzanne Valadon établirait assez exactement les rapports entre la rigueur d'une vision masculine et ce qu'un souci, d'une intention impitoyable égale, mais d'instinct obscurément défensif,

Notwithstanding the significant formal innovations she may have made in the representation of the modernist nude, to Carco, Suzanne Valadon remains an anomaly, an exception that proves the rule of the inherent inferiority of paintings made by women.

Though Carco praises the modernist qualities of plasticity, synthesis and abstraction that he discerns in Suzanne Valadon's work, he also suggests that there is a certain indefinable something about her paintings which marks them out as the work of a *woman* artist. In his suggestion that the innate difference of the woman artist was visible not merely in her choice and treatment of certain subjects, but was further embedded in the very materiality of her art practice, Carco implicitly draws upon a long-established tradition of art critical writing in which gender difference was seen to be inscribed into painting on a specifically technical level. In his widely-read *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, published in 1867, Charles Blanc defined drawing as 'the masculine sex in art, colour in it is the feminine sex.'<sup>28</sup> This privileging of drawing over colour has a long history going back through the lengthy discussions that took place between the Poussinistes and the Rubenistes within the French Academy during the seventeenth century and thence to Italian Renaissance debates over the relative merits of *disegno* versus *colore*.<sup>29</sup> Anthea Callen usefully summarises how this 'historical polarisation of line and colour, masculine and feminine, parallels the emergence of modern ideas of the two sexes as quite separate and distinct—as incommensurate.'<sup>30</sup> She shows how, by the time of the publication of Charles Blanc's treatise in the latter half of the nineteenth century, colour (the feminine) had come to represent 'formlessness—an absence of distinguishing traits which produced incoherence. It was drawing (the masculine) which carried meaning: it signified legibility, individuality, character. Line was dependable, whereas colour, like woman, was changeable, unreliable.'<sup>31</sup> In the work of Suzanne Valadon, this gendered hierarchy was thrown into question. To early-twentieth-century reviewers, it seemed that, in Valadon's paintings, even the

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laisserait au labeur féminin. Par Mme Valadon, les baigneuses échappent aux crudités trop vives. Elles ne sont plus seules. On les voit et la ligne s'humanise. C'est en ce point sensible que Mme Suzanne Valadon est femme. A beaucoup d'autres égards pourtant, la fermeté de son métier, certain «cingle» presque virils ne cachent pas l'expression indéfinissable par quoi la femme se trahit toujours.

[...] La peinture d'aujourd'hui peut la considérer comme la femme peintre la plus réaliste du nu. En effet, seule, à notre moment, elle s'est constitué un idéal foncièrement plastique sur la représentation générale de la figure nue moderne, synthétisée, envisagée en abstraction pure et devenue concrète. Nouvel et irrécusable symptôme féminin.'

Carco, pp.144-45.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (Paris, 1867), p.22; cited by Anthea Callen, 'Coloured Views: Gender and Morality in Degas' *Bather* Pastels,' *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (1993), pp.22-29, p.23.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of this debate, see Georges Roque, 'Writing/Drawing/Color,' *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994), pp.43-62.

<sup>30</sup> Callen, 'Coloured Views,' p.23.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.24.



apparently abstract, ‘masculine’ quality of line became infused with the physical presence of the feminine: in Carco’s analysis, ‘line’ serves as a direct and unambiguous index to an artist-subject who cannot help but express her gender through her particular method of mark-making. The distinction between the masculine and the feminine in painting is, in this instance, re-conceptualised as a distinction between vision and gesture/touch, with Valadon’s tangibly ‘feminine touch’ (*le labeur féminin*—literally, labour or toil) serving to temper the apparently ‘masculine’ qualities of confidence, virility and rigour that Carco perceives in her work.

Like Francis Carco, André Warnod deemed the perceived ‘rigour’ of Valadon’s gaze at the female body particularly worthy of comment. The erotic appeal of Suzanne Valadon’s nudes was, he suggested, directly dependent upon the truthfulness of her observations:

The black outline of the nudes makes the contours clear, but leaves intact the touching sensitivity of the flesh, flesh which is sometimes tired and sometimes slack. The pitiless line, precise and firm, may sometimes emphasise the defects, the folds of the stomach, the sagging breasts—a good drawing is not always a pretty one—but the flesh is always alive and beautiful because of the life that breathes through it, and fresh because of the blood flowing beneath the skin. The nudes that Suzanne Valadon paints with such a clear and radiant palette are enchanting because of the truth that emanates from them, nudes that are full of strength and movement, and also nudes lying on a divan. What sensual power is evoked by the broad hips and the smooth stomach, by this woman who offers herself and lies waiting.<sup>32</sup>

In their emphasis upon the ‘realism’, ‘plasticity’ and ‘modernity’, or else the ‘clarity’, ‘truthfulness’ and ‘sensuality’, of Suzanne Valadon’s nudes, critics such as Warnod and Carco not only distanced her work from that of other women painters, but also, as I shall go on to discuss below, implicitly invited comparison with those male artists who were deemed to have rejected academic conventions of the nude in favour of the sustained observation and representation of the materiality of the female body. As they sought to find a critical vocabulary capable of addressing the apparent paradox of boldly linear, unidealised images of the female nude known to have been executed by an artist who was a

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Le trait noir qui cerne les nus en précise les contours, mais laisse intacte la sensibilité émue de la chair, chair quelquefois molle, quelquefois lasse. L’impitoyable trait, précis et ferme, souligne parfois les tares, les plis du ventre, les seins qui s’affaissent – un beau dessin n’est pas toujours un dessin joli – mais toujours chair vivante et belle justement par la vie qui l’anime, fraîche parce qu’on sent le sang circuler à fleur de peau. Les nus de Suzanne Valadon peints dans une gamme si claire, si radieuse, enchantent par la vérité qui émane d’eux, nus en pleine force, en plein mouvement et aussi nus étendus sur un divan. Quelle puissance sensuelle évoque ce bassin large, ce ventre lisse, cette femme enfin, offerte et qui attend’.

André Warnod, *L’Avenir* (19 December 1921), reprinted in Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.15.

woman, the binary terms structuring the discourse on *l'art féminin* were, however, increasingly thrown into question. While Warnod secures Valadon's difference from other *femmes peintres* by emphasising the clarity of her observations and the 'pitiless' quality of her line, the instability of 'line' as a gendered critical category in early-twentieth-century assessments of Suzanne Valadon's work is indicated by Carco's mobilisation of the 'human' quality of her line as a clear demarcator of gender, which signifies in opposition to her 'masculine vision'. Displaced from their position within traditional gendered hierarchies, terms such as 'colour', 'line', 'vision' and 'touch' rather become relative values, subject to subtle shifts in meaning from critic to critic.

Like Warnod and Carco, the anonymous reviewer for the *Beaux-Arts* magazine arrived at Suzanne Valadon's work with a set of pre-conceived ideas of what to expect in terms of both subject matter and style from paintings known to be by a woman artist. He accordingly attempted to identify such qualities as 'fragility', 'grace' and 'charm' in the colouring and execution of her flower paintings. Failing to discern these expected attributes in her handling of this most 'feminine' of subject matters, he was instead compelled to comment on the 'vulgar' tonal qualities of her studies of the female nude:

It is not a question of evaluating the technique of these works. [Suzanne Valadon's] talent is indisputable. Praise of the artist has been expressed too often... If Suzanne Valadon has painted hideous shrews in tones of great vulgarity, it is because she wants to. That is the most disturbing thing. Apart from two or three works, the most recent, like the large bather studies which are normal and healthy if not graceful, her female nude studies are treated as caricatures... As for her flower paintings, the charm of their colour, their fragility, is always spoilt by a detail, a basket or a ladder, placed there to look unpleasant. Does it spring from her poverty or her spite?

[...] A beautiful nude is as real and as well able to provide the subject of a canvas as a hideous matron; only the choice of the painter intervenes... Perhaps Suzanne Valadon is a mystic who wants to make the human race divine by portraying the weakness of the flesh as disgusting.<sup>33</sup>

The most striking feature of this particular review is the vehemence that is reserved for Suzanne Valadon's representations of unclothed women. In order to explore further the disgust that the anonymous critic so repeatedly and forcefully expresses towards these 'hideous' 'shrews' and 'matrons', I want initially to draw on Lynda Nead's feminist critique of the connoisseurial distinction between the naked and the nude, first proposed by Kenneth Clark in his 1956 survey book on *The Nude*. In Clark's analysis, the naked body is

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<sup>33</sup> *Beaux-Arts*, July 1929, cited by Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, p.220.

a body deprived of clothes; ‘huddled and defenceless’, ‘shapeless’ and ‘pitiful’, it provokes reactions of embarrassment, disillusionment and dismay. The nude, on the other hand, represents a ‘balanced, prosperous and confident body: the body reformed.’<sup>34</sup> As Lynda Nead glosses:

The category of the nude always holds within it a theory of representation. The nude is precisely the body in representation, the body produced by culture. But this formulation is achieved by positing, at the same time, the notion of a naked body that is somehow out of representation and an unmediated residuum of anatomy and physiology.<sup>35</sup>

Nead’s reading reveals the extent to which the transformation from the denotation of ‘the naked’ into the connotation of ‘the nude’ always entails the regulation and containment of female corporeality. ‘The forms, conventions and poses of art have,’ she suggests, ‘worked metaphorically to shore up the female body—to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other.’<sup>36</sup>

According to André Warnod, Suzanne Valadon’s use of heavy, black outlining served to define and clarify the flowing contours of the nude. Her ‘pitiless line’ appears to hold in check the materiality of a lived and aged female body—the ‘wrinkled belly’ and ‘sagging breasts’. The specificity of that body is disavowed, and Valadon’s paintings can accordingly be raised to the status of a timeless and universal ‘nude’, allowing them to be processed in conventionally eroticised terms. It is precisely this attempt at the erasure and/or containment of female corporeality that, it might be suggested, fails to operate in the *Beaux-Arts* review. Within that review, the ‘beautiful nude’—a genre felt to be particularly suited to the application of paint on canvas—is diametrically opposed to Suzanne Valadon’s ‘caricatures’ of ‘hideous matrons’, which thus implicitly fall on the borderlines of what may be considered a suitable topic for representation. In these ‘shrews’ and ‘matrons’—married, older women, who may well have borne children—the anonymous reviewer finds himself confronted not with the female body ‘reformed’ and repackaged for high art consumption as ‘the nude’, but rather with the female body as the site and sign of social and sexual difference. His commentary thus slips from an aesthetic condemnation of the strident tonal qualities of Valadon’s painting style to a moral

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956), pp.1–4.

<sup>35</sup> Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.14–15.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.6.



condemnation of the women portrayed. Despite the isolation of their 'health' as a redeeming feature of certain of her more recent nude studies, the negative stereotyping of these represented figures as 'shrewish' and 'matronly' implies that they somehow exceed the boundaries of an acceptable femininity—they are perhaps too voluble, too fleshly, too old.

The discomfort and disgust evinced by the *Beaux-Arts* reviewer is not, however, entirely without precedent in modernist art criticism. The exhibition of Manet's *Olympia* at the 1865 Salon and Degas's *Suite de nuds* [sic] *de femmes se baignant, se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner* at the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition of 1886 had each elicited a range of highly emotive responses from contemporary reviewers.<sup>37</sup> In both instances, the images of women that were placed on public display constituted a profound shock. Fracturing the available discursive conventions on the female nude, these representations may be considered, in and of themselves, traumatic events. Several recent interventions in modernist art history have explored the possibilities that a psychoanalytic understanding of trauma offers to the study of a tradition of representation that has been understood to be primarily concerned with stylistic rupture, transformation and renewal.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to those histories of modern art that place their emphasis upon linear progression and chronology, Hal Foster has traced the recurrence of key motifs such as the grid and the readymade across pivotal moments in twentieth-century art practice. Drawing upon the Freudian concept of '*Nachträglichkeit*' or 'deferred action', he proposes that the relationship between the avant-garde practice of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Constantin Brancusi and Alexander Rodchenko in the early part of the century and that of

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<sup>37</sup> T J Clark provides a detailed analysis of the critical responses to *Olympia* in 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865,' *Screen* 21 (1980), pp.18-41; see also *idem.*, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984). For a discussion of *Olympia* in relation to the crisis of the nude in French painting during the 1860s, see Beatrice Farwell, *Manet and the Nude: A Study in Iconography in the Second Empire* (New York & London: Garland, 1981). For an overview of the critical debates surrounding Degas's 1886 bather suite, see Introduction above.

<sup>38</sup> See in particular Hal Foster, 'What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?', *October* 70 (Fall 1994), pp.5-32 and the recent collection of essays, *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, eds. Lisa Saltzman & Eric Rosenberg (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 2006).

In this latter collection, a significant essay by Isabelle Wallace examines in particular the traumatic impact of Manet's *Olympia*. In a rather different argument to my own, Wallace contends that the trauma of *Olympia* may lie in its exposure of the inherent gap between signifier and signified, or what she terms the painting's 'refusal to maintain the fiction that painted image and referent exist as expressive totality.' Wallace argues that the traumatic impact of *Olympia* remained obscured until the mid-1970s, when it re-emerged in Jasper Johns's painting *Corpse and Mirror* (1974, New York, Collection of Mrs Victor M Ganz). Her pairing of these two paintings leads her to characterise the aesthetic experience as itself a traumatic one, in which the spectator is exposed to the mortifying image of a lifeless object that uncannily resembles but nevertheless fails to restore its ostensible referent. For Wallace, Manet's and Johns's paintings therefore reveal the process of death at work within any signifying system; see Isabelle Wallace, 'Trauma as Representation: A Meditation on Manet and Johns,' pp.3-27 in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, eds. Saltzman & Rosenberg.

‘neo-avant-garde’ artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre and Ad Reinhardt in the late 1950s and early 1960s might be understood as:

a complex relay of reconstructed past and anticipated future [...] that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition. On this analogy the avant-garde work is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments. It cannot be because it is traumatic: a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately, at least not without structural change. This is the other scene of art that critics and historians need to register: not only symbolic disconnections but *failures to signify*.<sup>39</sup>

Foster’s analogy seems to me particularly helpful in thinking about the impact of Degas’s representations of the female nude. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the exhibition of the infamous suite of bather pastels at the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition in 1886 had provided the occasion for a complex and unresolved argument around the female body and its representation within modern art. It is my contention that some of the unanswered questions initially posed by those images re-emerge as early-twentieth-century art critics attempt to articulate their responses to Suzanne Valadon’s paintings of the female nude. In their discussion of Valadon’s artworks, early-twentieth-century reviewers echoed—whether consciously or unconsciously—certain tensions around the spectatorship and meaning of ‘the nude’ that had initially been articulated in the previous century in relation to Degas’s bather pastels. On the one hand, the critical debate on Degas appears to have provided the terms for these writers to begin to make sense of Valadon’s imagery. Yet we might also view the belated reprise of that debate in the Valadon archive as in itself marking a continuing struggle with some of the difficulties posed by the bather suite. In the following section, I want, therefore, to begin to tease out how—or perhaps more precisely, what—‘Degas’ comes to signify within the critical writings on Suzanne Valadon.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hal Foster, ‘What’s Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?’, p.30. I offer a more detailed discussion of the concept of ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’ in my reading of the case history of ‘Frau Emmy von N’; see Chapter Two above.

<sup>40</sup> I am here using ‘Degas’ – as opposed to Edgar Degas, the historical individual – to signify ‘a set of procedures, resources, competencies, stylistics and effects which are collectively recognised only at the point of consumption or art historical analysis.’ See Griselda Pollock, ‘Agency and the Avant-Garde: Studies in Authorship by Way of Van Gogh,’ originally published in *Block* 15 (1989), pp.5-15; reprinted in Fred Orton & Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) for an exposition of this distinction.

## ‘A Hint of Misogyny à la Degas?’<sup>41</sup>

Suzanne Valadon was first introduced to Degas by either Toulouse-Lautrec or the sculptor Bartholomé.<sup>42</sup> She was a frequent visitor to his studio during the 1890s, and her drawings from this period demonstrate a concerted working through of the formal possibilities offered by ‘Degas’.<sup>43</sup> Degas was an important source of support to Suzanne Valadon during the early stages of her artistic career. He taught her the technique of soft-ground etching, and was one of the earliest collectors of her work, eventually owning seventeen of her drawings. The story of their first meeting has become one of the cornerstones of the Valadon myth. Centred upon the contrast between the beautiful, young model and the elderly and irascible Impressionist master, it has served to define Valadon’s transition from model to artist: ‘you are indeed one of us,’ Degas is said to have informed her.<sup>44</sup> The first monograph on Suzanne Valadon, written by Robert Rey in 1922, includes several previously unpublished letters written by Degas to ‘terrible Maria’, praising her ‘harsh and supple drawings’, which have been reprinted in almost every monograph and biography of Valadon subsequently published.<sup>45</sup>

The aesthetic judgement of Degas is as a consequence frequently mobilised as a means of lending cultural legitimacy to Suzanne Valadon’s pictorial production. Claude Roger-Marx emphasised that, ‘Degas has already described her drawings as harsh and

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Dès les débuts avec une pointe de psychologie à la Lautrec et de misogynie à la Degas—ses dessins et ses gravures ont une puissance de style et d’acuité rare.’ Suzanne Valadon & Germaine Bazin, ‘Suzanne Valadon par elle-même’, *Prométhée* 2 (March 1939), pp.53-54, p.53.

This article purports to be a series of responses to a questionnaire formulated by Germaine Bazin, written by Valadon herself. Given the paucity of other written statements by Suzanne Valadon, and the fact that it is written in the third person and published posthumously, I think it is reasonable to assume that Bazin probably had a hand in its composition. The text has, however, been taken at face value by subsequent biographers, who have embroidered upon its account of an ‘exceptionally gifted, innate talent’ who, as a child, drew ‘comme une enragée’.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald Pickvance has suggested 1894 as the most probable debate for their first meeting, pointing out that Degas’s correspondence with Valadon appears to begin in that year and that, out of the seventeen of her drawings owned by Degas, only two are dated—also to 1894.

See Ronald Pickvance, ‘“Terrible Maria”: Degas and Suzanne Valadon’ in Daniel Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*, exh. cat., (Martigny, Switzerland: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 1996), pp.23-29.

<sup>43</sup> I shall go on to argue this point more fully in Chapter Five below.

<sup>44</sup> This pronouncement was first reported by John Storm in his 1959 biography *The Valadon Story*, and subsequently reiterated by June Rose in her later *Mistress of Montmartre*.

<sup>45</sup> See Robert Rey, *Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1922).

Named by her mother ‘Marie-Clémentine’, Valadon was known to the many artists for whom she modelled as ‘Maria’. She is said to have subsequently assumed the name ‘Suzanne’—an apparent reference to the Biblical story of Susanna and the Elders—at the behest of Toulouse-Lautrec. “You who pose for old men,” he sneers in June Rose’s telling of the story, “you should call yourself Susanna.” *Mistress of Montmartre*, p.86. On the different names assumed by Suzanne Valadon over the course of her professional career, see also Thérèse Diamand-Rosinsky, ‘Suzanne Valadon’s Many Identities: Marie-Clémentine, “Biqui”, or “Terrible Maria”?’ pp.31-53 in Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*.



supple.’ ‘Is it possible,’ he asked, ‘to clarify their power any more tersely?’<sup>46</sup> Robert Beachboard also deferred to Degas: ‘Degas characterised both Suzanne Valadon’s drawings and her personality as “terrible”. They are terrible because of her strength—she is so sure of herself that she does not submit to any judgement but her own—and moreover pitiless.’<sup>47</sup> The ambiguity and ultimate instability of ‘Degas’ as a referent begins to become apparent, however, at the point at which critics endeavour to elucidate the stylistic similarities or differences between Valadon’s work and that of Degas. Does Suzanne Valadon share Degas’s ‘exhaustive intensity of observation’,<sup>48</sup> his ‘cruel vision’,<sup>49</sup> or even, perhaps, his ‘misogyny’?<sup>50</sup> Is her work ‘less intense, less abstract’<sup>51</sup> than that of Degas, or else ‘more awkward and immediate’?<sup>52</sup>

According to Robert Rey, author of the first monograph on Valadon, there was a clear analogy between the two artists. ‘Is it surprising,’ he asks, ‘that models who are so alike, and who are viewed from an equally realistic angle, should have been given such a similar appearance?’<sup>53</sup> Like those nineteenth-century commentators who suggested that Degas depicted ‘woman reduced to the gestures of her limbs, to the appearance of her body, expressed in her animality alone, as if this were a zoological treatise requiring superior illustration,’<sup>54</sup> in Suzanne Valadon’s nudes, Rey finds himself confronted with the female body in all its untrammelled physicality, and again imagined as bestial:

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Durs et souples, disait déjà Degas de ses dessins. Peut-on préciser plus laconiquement ce dont est fait leur pouvoir?’

Claude Roger-Marx, *Suzanne Valadon. Dessins—Pastels* (Paris: Galerie Pétridès, 1962); cited in Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.190.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Degas l’avait caractérisée en qualifiant de ‘terribles’ et les dessins et la personne de Suzanne Valadon.

Terrible parce que consciente de sa force, assez sûre d’elle-même pour ne soumettre à aucun jugement que le sien, d’ailleurs le plus impitoyable’.

Robert Beachboard, *La Trinité Maudite: Valadon—Utter—Utrillo* (Paris: Amiot Dumont, 1952), p.37.

<sup>48</sup> Maurice Raynal, *Modern French Painters*, trans. Ralph Roeder (London: Duckworth, 1929), p.161.

<sup>49</sup> Adolphe Basler, *Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Les Éditions G Crès et Cie, 1929), p.4

<sup>50</sup> Valadon & Bazin, ‘Suzanne Valadon par elle-même’, p.53.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Moins intense, moins abstrait que l’accent de Degas, cet accent n’est pas d’un réalisme vulgaire.’

Carco, *Le Nu dans la peinture moderne*, p.144.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemary Betterton, ‘How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon’, *Feminist Review* 19 (1985), pp.3-24, p.16.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Est-il surprenant que des modèles à peu près semblables, vus d’un angle également réaliste, aient donné des aspects voisins?’

Rey, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.10.

<sup>54</sup> ‘la femme réduite à la gesticulation de ses membres, à l’aspect de son corps, la femme considérée en femelle, exprimée dans sa seule animalité, comme s’il s’était agi d’un traité de zoologie réclamant une illustration supérieure.’

Gustave Geffroy, ‘Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes,’ *La Justice*, 26 May 1886, reprinted in Ruth Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1888. Documentation Volume I: Reviews* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), pp.449-52, p.451.

Valadon's admirable sketches depict real girls, with spindly shoulders, and female nudes without any false elegance, in which a leg or an unshod foot is no longer anything more than the limb of a heavy ankled, flat-footed beast.<sup>55</sup>

Yet these initial similarities conceal a rather more deep-rooted difference between the two artists:

But whatever one may say, there is a feeling of bitterness and a sinister hint of misogyny in Degas's work from 1865 onwards. In his painted oeuvre, we can see that he must have received some terrible and very well hidden blow to his heart between the *Sémiramis* and the *Femmes au Bar*. Throughout Valadon's oeuvre, on the other hand, the human forms for which she feels such strong affection bathe in a limpid breath of air. She is obsessed with the expressiveness that radiates from tip to toe of the human form, naked and free in the breeze. How many portrait painters would be capable of depicting in a carefully observed and painstakingly painted face what Valadon is able to express through the curvature of the back or the hip?<sup>56</sup>

The protracted and shifting debate over the alleged misogyny of the 1886 bather suite has been central to what Heather Dawkins has so aptly named the 'managing' of Degas.<sup>57</sup> The charge of misogyny was first levelled at Degas in contemporary reviews of the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition:

These drawings are evidently not meant to inspire passion for women, nor desire for the flesh. In these nude studies, M Degas did not seek voluptuousness or grace; he was not concerned with the type of sentimental pose which inspires pretty love songs to curved hips, to round breasts pushed forward when arms are stretched, to a head tilting back, swooning on a swan-

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<sup>55</sup> 'Valadon multiplia ces admirables croquis montrant des fillettes vraies, aux épaules grêles, ces nus féminins où sans fausse élégance une jambe, un pied, n'est plus, toute chaussure tombée, qu'un membre de bête plantigrade à la lourde cheville.'

Rey, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.10.

<sup>56</sup> 'Mais quoi qu'on dise, il y a dans Degas, à partir de 1865, une aigreur de sentiment, une misogynie un peu sinistre. Nous lisons dans son œuvre peinte qu'entre la *Sémiramis* et les *Femmes au Bar*, il dut recevoir au cœur quelque affreuse et très secrète blessure. Au contraire, dans toute l'œuvre de Valadon se trouve comme un grand souffle bien limpide, un besoin d'air où baigner ces formes humaines dont elle avait si fort l'amour. La forme humaine, libre et nue dans l'air, l'expression qui s'en dégage de la tête aux pieds, voilà sa hantise. Combien de peintres de portraits seraient capables de mettre dans une face longtemps observée et longuement peinte ce que Valadon exprime avec l'architecture d'un dos, d'une hanche?' *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

<sup>57</sup> Heather Dawkins, 'Managing Degas' in *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision*, eds. Richard Kendall & Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp.133-45. For an earlier feminist refutation of the charge of misogyny levelled at Degas, based upon psychological analysis of the artist's social relationships with female family members and colleagues as revealed through his personal correspondence and portraiture, see also Norma Broude, 'Degas's "Misogyny"', *Art Bulletin* 59.1 (March 1977), pp.95-107.

like neck. On the contrary, they have a ferocity that speaks loudly of a contempt for women and a horror of love.<sup>58</sup>

and, just as quickly, refuted:

To represent M Degas as a raging misogynist who wilfully reduces women to animal and almost simian functions is going too far. On the contrary, he is a feminist, and more of a feminist than many manufacturers of Venuses and Ledas, if by feminist we mean that he has the gift of divining and defining Woman (a certain kind of woman if you will) in her most characteristic features. Where others seek the beauty of lines and the idealised grace of poses, clearly what strikes and enchants him is comical expressions, unconscious antics, coarse charm, naïve depravity, the paradoxical appeal of eccentric toilettes, the deformation of technique, the artifice of the learned pose and mechanical gesture—all that in the context and milieu that explain it. His irony is, moreover, never heavy-handed and never crosses over into brutal caricature; it is a minute dose of humour added to the truth. With his dancers, milliners and café-concert screamers, M Degas may be said to have given the wittiest commentary on those current metaphors that rank *filles* according to their natural affinities in the order of ruminants or amphibians, rodents or waders.<sup>59</sup>

Both reviewers stress Degas's independence from the 'sentimental' and 'idealised' conventions of academic painting, and praise instead the realistic quality of his depictions of the female form. For Mirbeau, the contortions of the bather suite were seen to stem from the artist's contempt for the opposite sex. Hermel, on the other hand, suggested that Degas knew and understood women, positioning the pastels as a witty contribution to contemporary, pseudo-scientific discussions that emphasised the affinities between working-class women (particularly prostitutes) and animals. Thirty-six years later, Robert

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<sup>58</sup> 'Evidemment, ces dessins ne sont pas faits pour inspirer la passion de la femme, ni le désir de la chair. M Degas n'a point, en ces études de nu, cherché la volupté ni la grâce; il ne s'est pas préoccupé de la pose sentimentale qui fait chanter de si *jolies* romances aux hanches arquées, aux globes des seins tendus par l'étirement des bras, aux nuques qui se renversent, pâmées, sur des cous de cygne. Il y a là, au contraire, une férocité qui dit bien haut le mépris de la femme et l'horreur de l'amour.'

Octave Mirbeau, 'Exposition de peinture (1 rue Laffitte),' *La France*, 21 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.465-6, p.456.

<sup>59</sup> 'C'est étrangement forcer la note que de représenter M Degas comme un féroce misogyne qui volontairement ravale la femme à des fonctions animales et presque simiesques. Il est féministe, au contraire, et plus féministe que maint fabricant de Vénus et de Lédas, si l'on entend par là le don de deviner et de définir la femme (un certain genre de femme si l'on veut) en ce qu'elle a de plus caractéristique. Mais où d'autres cherchent la beauté des lignes et la grâce idéalisée des poses, visiblement ce qui le frappe et l'enchanté, c'est la drôlerie des mines, les singeries inconscientes, le charme canaille, la dépravation naïve, l'attrait paradoxal des toilettes excentriques, la déformation du métier, l'artifice de l'attitude apprise et du geste machinal, tout cela dans le cadre et le milieu qui l'explique. Avec ses danseuses, ses modistes, ses hurleuses de cafés-concerts, M Degas aura donné le plus spirituel commentaire des métaphores courantes qui rangent les filles, selon des affinités naturelles dans l'ordre des ruminants ou des batraciens, des rongeurs ou des échassiers.'

Maurice Hermel, 'L'Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte,' *La France Libre*, 27 May 1886, reprinted in Berson, *The New Painting*, pp.455-56, p.456.



Rey is equally adamant that Degas's personal history, attitudes and feelings were writ large across his canvases. Like many subsequent writers, he argues that Degas's bather images served as a precedent for Suzanne Valadon's paintings of the female nude: like Degas, Valadon is seen by Rey to prefer objective scrutiny to untruthful idealisation, depicting 'real girls' without any of the 'false elegance', sentimentality and artifice that otherwise characterised images of the female nude.

Whether this capacity for detached observation stemmed from Valadon's affection for, or cruelty towards, women was, as in the case of Degas, open to debate from critic to critic. Where Robert Rey proposed that her innate affection for the human form endowed Valadon's nudes with all the psychological verisimilitude of a portrait, Jean Vertex declared that, 'she detests women and takes her revenge for any charm they may have by damning them with her brush.'<sup>60</sup> In a similar vein, Adolphe Basler argued that Suzanne Valadon took from Degas his 'cruel vision', rather than his intellectuality.<sup>61</sup> Valadon's work was, he suggested, to be characterised by its 'male brutality' and its 'corrosive colour'. 'The harsh and even repellent nature of her oeuvre,' he wrote, 'has not been altered by any falsehood, any posturing or any feminine simpering.'<sup>62</sup> In his 1929 monograph, Basler thus distanced Valadon from any established notion of *l'art féminin*, proclaiming that she and Utrillo were instead the 'last heirs to Impressionism'.<sup>63</sup> For Basler, mother and son constituted the end point of a modernist trajectory that took in not only Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and Cézanne, but also stretched back to Manet and Courbet:

Her impetuous frankness has been able to take on great painting. The name of Manet has been evoked many times in front of her huge compositions whose intensely worked surfaces, like those of the master of *Olympia*, evoke the sensation of depth. Her nudes above all radiate the beautiful animal-like quality so dear to the initiator of Impressionism as well as to Courbet.

[...] The hostile stance of the young girl to whom her thickset and vulgar mother holds up a mirror is full of the subtle nuances of character. Suzanne tortures her nudes with diabolically sensual delight. Her forms are as expansive as they are concise. If she sometimes succeeds in finding a certain

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<sup>60</sup> Jean Vertex, *Le Village Inspiré* (1950), cited by Warnod, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.73.

<sup>61</sup> 'Et ce n'est pas l'intellectualité de Degas, imprégnée d'Ingres et d'Holbein, mais sa vision cruelle des choses qui alla droit au cœur de Suzanne Valadon.'

Adolphe Basler, *Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Les Éditions G Crès et Cie, 1929), p.4.

<sup>62</sup> 'Sa forme, d'une mâle brutalité, et sa couleur corrosive sont les expressions sincères d'un sentiment aigu. [...] Aucun mensonge, aucune pose, aucune minauderie de femme n'ont altéré le caractère âpre et même rébarbatif de son œuvre.'

*ibid.*, p.7, p.12.

<sup>63</sup> 'elle et son fils [...] sont, en ligne directe, les derniers héritiers de l'impressionnisme.'

*ibid.*, p.12.

feline grace, the sluts in *After the Bath*, with their air of being trivial yet also wise, have the verve of Jacques Callot.<sup>64</sup>

Like the anonymous critic from the *Beaux-Arts* magazine, Basler comments upon the ‘vulgarity’ of Suzanne Valadon’s nudes. In characterising the represented figures as ‘shrews’, ‘matrons’ or ‘sluts’, both writers insist upon a social and cultural identity for the women portrayed, rather than positioning the paintings as generic representations of ‘the nude’. Where the *Beaux-Arts* reviewer was discomfited by the disturbing signs of corporeality, sexuality and class that had been allowed to seep into the genre of the female nude, Basler locates Suzanne Valadon within a very particular artistic genealogy, and is accordingly able to make sense of her depictions of these recognisably classed bodies. ‘Her remarkable case,’ he writes, ‘would have provoked the piercing curiosity of a J-K Huysmans; her artistic production would have deserved the praise of an Octave Mirbeau.’<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Valadon’s nudes are thus deemed worthy of attention from two eminent nineteenth-century art critics, both of whom had responded eloquently to the challenges posed by Degas’s 1886 bather suite. In the artistic and critical genealogy he constructs for Valadon and in the way in which he himself frames her nudes—his description of their ‘animal-like quality’ and ‘feline grace’, his sense of a violence done to these bodies, his attention to facture—Basler implicitly establishes continuities between Valadon’s artistic production and that of Degas.

In their monographs, both Robert Rey and Adolphe Basler thus recognised Suzanne Valadon as the heir to a nineteenth-century tradition of realist correctives to formulaic depictions of the academic nude. The language and categories of aesthetic judgement they used to evaluate her representations of the female form were accordingly reminiscent of those deployed by a previous generation of critics, and could be more firmly secured by means of explicit comparison to the work of Degas, Manet and Courbet. To Basler, it seemed that Valadon’s paintings also had direct appeal for the contemporary

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Sa franchise impétueuse a pu s’attaquer à la grande peinture. Que de fois le nom de Manet a été prononcé devant ces vastes compositions où la surface intense, comme chez le maître de l’*Olympia*, joue en profondeur! Ce sont les nus surtout qui respirent la belle animalité chère à l’initiateur de l’impressionnisme aussi bien qu’à Courbet.’

‘L’anatomie ingrate de la fillette à qui son épaisse et vulgaire maman tient le miroir est toute en nuances de caractère. Suzanne torture ses académies avec une volupté diabolique. Mais elle est aussi concise qu’éruptive dans ses volumes ramassés. S’il lui arrive parfois de rencontrer une certaine grâce féline, ses maritornes d’*Après le Bain*, aux poses violemment déjetées, aux airs d’une trivialité pourtant savoureuse, ont la verve de Jacques Callot.’

*ibid.*, p.8, p.11.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Son cas singulier aurait dû tenter la curiosité pénétrante d’un J-K Huysmans; sa production eût mérité les louanges d’un Octave Mirbeau.’

*ibid.*, p.7.

viewer. ‘The grating of their dissonant chords speaks,’ he suggested, ‘to our innermost selves, to our stretched and frayed nerves.’<sup>66</sup> Her work might, therefore, benefit from explanation via a novel—and quintessentially modern—interpretative paradigm:

In our time, the art of this woman painter would lend itself marvellously to psychoanalytic investigation. The violence of her drawing, her harsh distortions, the “psychological realism” that she takes to an extreme would without doubt merit an explicatory essay based upon her childhood as an untamed and free spirit, upon the melancholy of a vagrant orphan or upon the scarcely repressed instincts of a youth that was too full of promises.<sup>67</sup>

The newly emergent discourse of psychoanalysis appeared to Basler to endow the critic with X-ray vision, enabling him to see the tormented childhood of the artist hidden beneath the painted surfaces of Suzanne Valadon’s canvases, and providing him with a means through which to track this intimate connection between art and life. Basler’s sense that art may be revelatory of the psychological motivations of the singular artist-subject is not, of course, new. In the previous century, Degas’s bather suite had been taken by critics including Octave Mirbeau to reveal his attitudes towards women. Degas’s ‘misogyny’ was, however, linked in the critical imaginary to his objective, even scientific, gaze at the female body and could, therefore, be accommodated as a key signifier of his modernity. While other critics, such as Maurice Hermel, may have declared Degas a ‘feminist’, they did not understand his feminism to lie in his sympathy for women, but rather in his capacity to capture the ‘comical expressions, unconscious antic, coarse charm and naïve depravity’ of the working-class woman.<sup>68</sup> Though the terms they used to describe the artist’s relationship

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<sup>66</sup> ‘le grincement de leurs dissonances répondent au plus intime de nous-mêmes, jusqu’à la distension de nos nerfs ébranlés.’

*ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>67</sup> ‘De nos jours, l’art de cette femme peintre se prêterait merveilleusement aux investigations psychanalytiques. Les violences de son dessin, ses âpres déformations, son «réalisme psychologique» tendu à l’extrême recevraient sans doute un essai d’explication par son enfance de petite baladine indomptée, par la mélancolie de l’orpheline vagabonde, par les instincts mal refoulés d’un printemps trop plein de promesses.’ *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>68</sup> Hermel, ‘L’Exposition de peinture de la rue Laffitte,’ cited in Berson, *The New Painting*, p.456.

For a different take on Degas’s relationship to feminism, see Norma Broude, ‘Edgar Degas and French Feminism, ca. 1880: “The Young Spartans,” the Brothel Monotypes, and the Bathers Revisited,’ *Art Bulletin* 70.4 (December 1988), pp.640-59. In support of her argument that Degas’s series of brothel monotypes should be considered ‘an indictment of the system of state-regulated and sanctioned prostitution’ (651), she cites the artist’s association with the Italian critic Diego Martelli, who also campaigned on feminist and anti-regulationist issues. For Broude, the brothel monotypes, as ‘unprecedentedly direct images of female degradation [that] present an often harrowing vision of state-regulated and sanctioned prostitution’ (652), are to be contrasted with the bather pastels, which she positions as ‘lyrical appreciations of the female body and of private moments of female self-absorption and sensual experience’ (657). The idea that Degas’s images of women bathing should be considered expressions of autonomous female experience has, however, more recently been subject to critical re-examination by Heather Dawkins, who examines the complex and shifting identifications needed to sustain a viewing relationship with the bather pastels in ‘Frogs, Monkeys and Women: A History of Identifications Across a Phantastic Body,’ pp.202-17 in *Dealing with Degas*, eds. Kendall



to women may have differed, both Mirbeau and Hermel thus sought implicitly to align their own viewing experience with that of Degas, with both (male, bourgeois) artist and critic being positioned as masters of a panoptic gaze that isolated and controlled an abject female physicality and sexuality. As this chapter has emphasised, it appears to have been equally impossible for a succeeding generation of critics to feel any empathy whatsoever towards the 'hideous' 'shrews' and 'matrons' who modelled for Suzanne Valadon. Yet to identify themselves with an artist who was herself a working-class woman proved just as problematic, requiring critics to enter into a complicated re-negotiation of the conventionally classed and gendered boundaries between viewer, artist and model.

Their repeated insistence upon Suzanne Valadon's 'virility' and the 'rigour' of her gaze enabled critics not only implicitly to differentiate Valadon from the 'sluts' whom she represented, but also served to maintain their own identification with the artist as a 'masculine' figure. Traditional viewing hierarchies were thus upheld, and Valadon's paintings of the female nude could accordingly be made to signify as significant interventions in a tradition of representation that exposed and analysed the inherent bestiality of the working-class woman. Yet the positioning of Suzanne Valadon as a detached and objective spectator was not without its attendant anxieties. Once again implicitly echoing the judgement of Degas, Gustave Coquiot wrote that, 'Behind her spectacles, this terrible woman has a scornful and hostile gaze.'<sup>69</sup> Jeanine Warnod narrates her childhood impressions of the elderly, 'mannish and gypsy-like', Valadon in similar terms: 'I was intimidated by the piercing eyes behind the glasses that seemed to look straight through you.'<sup>70</sup> This sense of a medusa-like gaze, magnified by a pair of spectacles, seems to strike a suggestive chord with more recent work by feminist film theorists. Mary Ann Doane writes of the transgressive power connoted by the visual cliché of the woman who wears glasses:

Glasses worn by a woman in the cinema do not generally signify a deficiency in seeing but an active looking, or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. [...] There is

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& Pollock. Broude's positioning of the brothel monotypes as critiques of the system of state-regulated prostitution has been further complicated by subsequent research by Anthea Callen, who examines Degas's representation of the female nude body in both the brothel monotypes and the bather suite in relation to the discourse on prostitution in late-nineteenth-century Paris in *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> 'Derrière ses lunettes, cette terrible femme a un regard méprisant, hostile.'

Coquiot, *Cubistes, Futuristes, Passésistes*, p.166.

<sup>70</sup> Warnod, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.5.

always a certain excessiveness, a difficulty associated with women who appropriate the gaze, who insist upon looking.<sup>71</sup>

In her transition from model to artist, Suzanne Valadon seemingly embodies this shift from being seen to actively looking. As I shall go on to discuss in the following section of this chapter, work by feminist film theorists including Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey was indeed fundamental to the articulation of an explicitly feminist discourse on Suzanne Valadon during the 1980s. While this body of work attempted to reclaim Valadon's gaze as an exceptional instance of female spectatorship that inverted a gendered hierarchy of looking based on male power and female passivity, in thinking more particularly about the troubling effects that that 'scornful' and 'hostile' gaze had on early-twentieth-century art critics, I want to return to Laura Mulvey's founding analysis of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' Moving beyond what now seems the somewhat simplistic appropriation of Mulvey's arguments by feminist art historians, I wish to draw out from this now much-quoted essay the full complexity of Mulvey's analysis of the formative elements of scopophilic pleasure and identification. As this chapter has demonstrated, contemporary commentators appeared to find both Valadon's artworks, and her personality as reflected in those artworks, 'pitiless' and 'terrible'. But who is the real object of Suzanne Valadon's pitilessness? The female body or the male spectator?

In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' written in 1973 and first published in *Screen* magazine in 1975, Laura Mulvey suggested that, in early infancy, pleasure in looking develops along two tracks: originally, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud identified scopophilia as one of the component instincts of infantile sexuality. Later, in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,' he proposed that, in its narcissistic aspect, scopophilia also plays a key role in the constitution of the ego. Mulvey analyses how these primary forms of visual pleasure are replayed in the cinematic situation:

The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands

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<sup>71</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,' originally published in *Screen* 23.3-4 (1982); reprinted in Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.27.

identification of the ego with the object on screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like.<sup>72</sup>

Laura Mulvey goes on to show how, as patriarchy comes to structure and organise the infantile world, active/passive pleasures in looking become split, and gendered as masculine/feminine: 'in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.'<sup>73</sup> Mulvey argues that patriarchal systems of representation (the example she uses as the focus of her analysis is mainstream, narrative cinema) offer the masculinised spectator, on the one hand, scopophilic pleasure in an image of the female form that is displayed for his enjoyment, and, on the other hand, the pleasure of seeing an image of his like displayed on the screen in the form of the male protagonist. As she points out, the first implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object, while the second demands an identification of the ego with the object.<sup>74</sup> Suzanne Valadon's paintings of the female nude appear to have failed to deliver visual pleasure to her male reviewers on either of these two levels. Like Degas's bather pastels, these 'caricatures' of 'hideous' 'shrews' and 'matrons' were clearly unable to sustain an unambiguously pleasurable erotic viewing. Yet, unlike Degas's images, they also failed to offer to the male spectator the possibility of a narcissistic identification with the figure of the artist.

Laura Mulvey goes on to show how, with Oedipalisation and the formation of sexed subjectivity through castration, what was once good to look at becomes the very locus of castrative terror:

In psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.<sup>75</sup>

The masculine subject has two defences against this castration anxiety: sadistic voyeurism (investigating, punishing and controlling the guilty object), and fetishistic scopophilia: 'a complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' originally published in *Screen* 16.3 (1975); reprinted in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, pp.14-26, p.18.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, pp.19-21.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*



Faced with an actively looking, ‘scornful’, ‘hostile’, and hence potentially castrating, woman, early-twentieth-century reviewers sought to disavow Suzanne Valadon’s femininity and to read into her work such apparently ‘masculine’ qualities as ‘brutality’ and ‘virility’. The anxieties generated by Valadon’s seemingly ‘virile’ style of painting could also be differently allayed through the construction of a very particular persona for the artist. Gustave Coquiot writes, in by now familiar terms, of the ‘vulgarity’ of Valadon’s representations of the female nude:

There is boundless strength—and a nervous and eccentric quality—about this woman who looks so slight and frail. She does not content herself with painting in a virile manner, but also outlines her nudes with a pronounced line in order to clarify her stubborn and faultless drawing. She does not make any concessions: sometimes she even prefers obvious vulgarity to a beautiful expression which she cannot abide.<sup>77</sup>

Coquiot’s analysis thus rests upon the disparity between the ‘virility’ of Valadon’s painting style and the ‘frailty’ of her frame, between the slightness of her person and the firmness of her line. The physical contrast between the aged body of the artist and the nude bodies she represents is underscored still further in Michelle Deroyer’s personal reminiscences of her meetings with the elderly Valadon:

Her genius is perhaps rather more virile than tender, but what balance there is in her lesser works! What a sureness of touch! What strength in her structures! What harshness in those faces and in those bodies which she never softens with an insipid romanticism! Nothing is less like her own appearance. Everything about them is strong, while she seems fragile.<sup>78</sup>

For writers such as Coquiot and Deroyer, the ‘virility’ of Valadon’s work could thus be accommodated as the idiosyncratic expression of an elderly eccentric, rather than as a mark of the originality and modernity of her vision. In these instances at least, the stereotyping of Suzanne Valadon according to culturally acceptable notions of an appropriately aged femininity as a frail and eccentric old lady could go some way towards circumventing the

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<sup>77</sup> ‘Il y a une force illimitée—et d’une qualité nerveuse extravagante—en cette femme d’apparence menue et frêle. Elle ne se contente pas de peindre virilement, elle cerne encore ses nus de traits accusés, pour préciser un dessin entête et impeccable. Elle ne se plie à aucune concession: elle préfère même la vulgarité évidente à la jolie expression qu’elle ne veut pas subir.’

Coquiot, *Cubistes, Futuristes, Passésistes*, p.165.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Son génie est peut-être plus viril que tendre, mais quel équilibre dans la moindre de ses tableaux! Quelle sûreté dans le trait! Quelle force dans ses architectures! Quelle sévérité dans ces visages, ces corps qu’elle n’amollit jamais d’aucun romantisme fade! Rien qui ressemble moins à son apparence. Tout est fort, alors qu’elle semblait fragile.’

Michelle Deroyer, ‘Quelques souvenirs autour de Suzanne Valadon,’ *Les Œuvres Libres* 15 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1945), pp.179-220, p.220.

critical discomfiture provoked by the prospect of a discriminating gaze located in the body of a *woman* painter.

To Adolphe Basler, on the other hand, Valadon's paintings were the product of the 'scarcely repressed instincts' (*les instincts mal refoulés*) of her childhood and adolescence. In his 1929 monograph, he ultimately denies her work the intellectuality that was the hallmark of 'Degas', proposing that it should instead be considered the 'spontaneous' expression of her 'entirely physical sensibility'.<sup>79</sup> The idea that Valadon's canvases should be considered an unmediated inscription of her emotional and sensual experiences is, however, most extensively developed in John Storm's 1959 publication *The Valadon Story*.<sup>80</sup> Based largely upon anecdotes provided by eyewitnesses or extrapolated from the published reminiscences of various Montmartre stalwarts, Storm's book remains the major source of biographical information on Suzanne Valadon, and has heavily influenced subsequent publications such as June Rose's 1998 *Mistress of Montmartre*. Appearing just seven years after Robert Beachboard's equally scurrilous book on the so-called 'Unholy Trinity' of Suzanne Valadon, André Utter and Maurice Utrillo, *The Valadon Story* marks the point at which life begins to eclipse art in the Valadon archive. Where early-twentieth-century writers such as Basler and Rey had been able to intimate something of the complexity of Suzanne Valadon's engagement with the genre of the female nude, placing her work in dialogue with that of such key modernists as Manet and Degas, Storm proclaims her ignorance of artistic tradition. He instead views her work as 'primitive, strong and frank', or else 'savage and extremely personal'.<sup>81</sup> 'Unconnected with any "school" of the past or present,' it is rather to be considered 'expressive of her turbulent passions':

For all the enjoyment she found in their society as a model, she was uneasy about her association with artists on an intellectual level. [...] She was intellectually incapable of understanding the multifarious new concepts about which the artists seemed to live in constant turmoil. The history of the development of art was a subject about which she knew nothing. To her, art was purely a personal expression, the product of her own emotion. Before any theory she believed in her own natural gifts and her own physical power to express her feelings in her drawings. Capricious in almost everything else, in one thing she remained constant—to make her work expressive of her turbulent passions.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> 'Sa sensibilité, toute physique, trouve spontanément des accents très humains.'

Basler, *Suzanne Valadon*, p.7.

<sup>80</sup> John Storm, *The Valadon Story: The Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Longmans, 1959).

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.110.

In a recently published study of Cézanne's bather paintings, Aruna D'Souza analyses how, faced with a series of highly challenging representations of the female body, critics increasingly took refuge in biographical interpretation:

As a form of art criticism, biography became a way of writing about the elements of Cézanne's painting in terms that were as yet unavailable at that moment in modernism's early history. Left without adequate language to deal with the radicality of Cézanne's practice, critics turned to the narrative of the artist's personal history as a means of articulating the meaning of his paintings.<sup>83</sup>

As D'Souza thus reminds us, any retreat into biography should not be taken at face value. The pronounced biographical turn in the Valadon archive should, therefore, I propose, be considered as in and of itself symptomatic of some deeper, underlying difficulty with her art practice. By the mid twentieth century, the troubling question of Suzanne Valadon's femininity—in particular her physicality and sexuality—which had been disavowed or circumvented in earlier critical responses to her paintings, resurfaced in the form of Storm's salacious detailing of the artist's many love affairs, her bohemian lifestyle and her largely ineffectual attempts to find a way of coping with Utrillo's alcoholism (which was itself precipitated, the book implies, by Valadon's neglect of her son in pursuit of her own sexual pleasures). The momentum of this melodrama cannot, however, sustain itself into its subject's old age:

Suzanne had been an amalgam of worldly pleasures, of all good things. But now her beauty was fading rapidly. She was an old woman, a hysterical shrew, except for the infrequent bursts of animal sexuality which would still seize her.<sup>84</sup>

Where art history has celebrated the continued sexual potency of male modernists into old age—from the elderly Renoir's comment that he 'painted with his prick' to tales of the sexual prowess of the octogenarian Picasso—in the case of an ageing woman artist, the fine line between 'virility' as a category of (albeit uneasy) aesthetic judgement and a disturbing and excessive 'animal sexuality' is easily crossed. It is at this point in the formation of a critical discourse on Suzanne Valadon that the distinction between representing subject and object of representation that early-twentieth-century critics had worked so hard to maintain finally crumples: like the women she represents, 'Suzanne' is here bestialised and reduced

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<sup>83</sup> Aruna D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers: Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p.13.

<sup>84</sup> Storm, *The Valadon Story*, p.220.



to a 'hysterical shrew'. Though Degas may have declared her 'one of us', for Storm it proves impossible to maintain any sense of Valadon as a modernist artist. *The Valadon Story* ultimately positions 'Suzanne' not as a creative subject, but as an irremediable Other, whose difference is marked socially, sexually, and even racially: in a final collapse, it is not simply Valadon's art which is characterised as 'primitive' and 'savage', but the artist herself: in a self-portrait, she exhibits the 'pendulous breasts of a dissolute savage'.<sup>85</sup>

This chapter has shown how, in the early-twentieth-century critical literature on Suzanne Valadon, an on-going debate as to the role of the female nude within modernist painting came to cut across the discursive accommodation of the growing pressure of women to enter and be seen in the field of art during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has examined how contemporary reviewers struggled to insert the artist and her paintings into two pre-existing, yet mutually antagonistic, interpretative frameworks: on the one hand, Valadon's 'exhaustive intensity of observation' and her capacity to see 'reality in its purified essence'<sup>86</sup> appeared to affirm her credentials as a serious modernist painter of the female nude; on the other hand, the perceived 'brutality' and 'sensuality' of her painting style directly confounded expectations of what constituted an appropriately 'feminine' art. The discourse on *l'art féminin* in France during this period was not merely an art critical one but also a means of securing certain gender ideologies in culture. While qualities such as 'weakness' and 'imitativeness' were, through a nexus of wider associations, negatively identified as quintessentially 'feminine', the language available to articulate a transgression of those accepted gender codes was equally always already gendered: binary logic ensures that their opposites—'strength' and 'brutality'—were confirmed as 'masculine'. The signs of modernity and originality that critics glimpsed in Suzanne Valadon's paintings were thus explicable only via the trope of the artist's 'virility'. Having analysed the divergent strategies used by early-twentieth-century reviewers in their attempts to negotiate the vexing issue of Valadon's femininity in order to sustain a viewing relationship with her representations of the female nude, I will now go on to consider how questions of gender and also class come to be differently mobilised in later, feminist readings of Suzanne Valadon.

### Resisting the Gaze? The 'Feminist' Valadon

Two articles by Rosemary Betterton and Patricia Mathews, published in *Feminist Review* in 1985 and in *Art Bulletin* in 1991 respectively, have been of vital importance in

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.222.

<sup>86</sup> Raynal, *Modern French Painters*, p.161.

reclaiming Suzanne Valadon from the primitivising and sexualising life narrative furnished for her by publications such as John Storm's *The Valadon Story*.<sup>87</sup> Looking back over her initial article in the 1996 book *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, Rosemary Betterton comments that she is 'aware how much visual theory has moved on' in the decade since the original publication of 'How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon'.<sup>88</sup> As one of the few publications of substance on Valadon, Betterton's article, together with Mathews's 'Returning the Gaze', remains, however, the first point of encounter with Suzanne Valadon's work for many interested parties. The way in which her artistic practice is framed by both Betterton and Mathews has thus been of central importance in the articulation of a critical, feminist discourse on Suzanne Valadon. While acknowledging both the political expediency of their interventions and my own personal indebtedness to a previous generation of feminist scholars, I nevertheless agree with Griselda Pollock's assertion that, as feminist writers, 'we must take responsibility for the feminist fantasies and mythologies created around the woman artist by feminist discourse.'<sup>89</sup> Having analysed the terms available to early-twentieth-century reviewers in their attempts to make sense of Valadon's paintings of the female nude, I now want to examine both what could, and perhaps more importantly, what could not be said about Suzanne Valadon at a particular moment in the development of a feminist critique of visual culture.

In the early 1970s, a revitalised feminism focussed much of its attention on issues around the body. Looking back over this period, Laura Mulvey charts her growing realisation that, 'the question of the woman's body had a significance that crossed the frontiers of the physical, organised by the discourses of the law and medicine, into the realm of representation. Women's struggles to gain rights over their bodies could not be divorced from questions of image and representation.'<sup>90</sup> Campaigns for the right to control reproduction and motherhood—for access to free contraception, to safe and available abortion, and to affordable childcare—were thus accompanied by demonstrations against the Miss World competition and the 'this ad exploits women' campaign. As the Women's Liberation Movement called attention to the proliferation within both high art and popular

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<sup>87</sup> Rosemary Betterton, 'How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon,' *Feminist Review* 19 (1985), pp.3-24; Patricia Mathews, 'Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Female Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon,' *Art Bulletin* 73.3 (September 1991), pp.415-30.

<sup>88</sup> Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p.2.

<sup>89</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p.xiv.

<sup>90</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989), p.xii.

culture of images of female sexuality displayed for the enjoyment of men, feminist theorists began to draw on the theoretical vocabulary provided by psychoanalysis and semiotics in order to think through this positioning of ‘woman as image, man as bearer of the look’. In her seminal analysis of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ Laura Mulvey exposed woman’s position within patriarchal culture as a ‘signifier for the male other,’ a ‘bearer not maker of meaning’:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: [...] she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire.<sup>91</sup>

Both Rosemary Betterton and Patricia Mathews draw their readers’ attention to this particular passage. As they each note, there are significant correspondences between the sexual structures of looking outlined by Laura Mulvey in relation to classical Hollywood cinema and those at stake in the genre of the female nude:

Based on the conventions of this genre, paintings of the nude [...] have fashioned the female body according to male desires and fantasies, without regard for women’s experiences of their own bodies. [...] Rather than being inhabited by a consciousness, these bodies become vessels to be inhabited by male desire. They can thus never represent female sexuality except as defined in male terms.<sup>92</sup>

The critique of the gender politics of sexuality and vision by feminist visual theory during the early 1970s thus provides the theoretical framework for their discussion of Suzanne Valadon, whose representations of the female nude serve as illustrations of an exceptional instance of female spectatorship that disrupts and disturbs the gendered hierarchy of looking laid so forcibly bare by Laura Mulvey. Hence, for Patricia Mathews, Suzanne Valadon’s ‘decision to assert her own vision through and on the body of woman’ was ‘necessarily a transgressive act’ that ‘played havoc with the position of woman as object of the male gaze,’<sup>93</sup> while Rosemary Betterton argued that Valadon’s depictions of the female form demonstrated a ‘consciousness of women’s experiences which challenges the

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<sup>91</sup> Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ p.15, p.19.

<sup>92</sup> Mathews, p.417.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*



conventions of the nude,' and thus constituted a 'point of resistance to dominant representations of female sexuality in early-twentieth-century art.'<sup>94</sup>

How, then, does Suzanne Valadon's work effect this transgression of, or resistance to, the conventions of the female nude? Patricia Mathews undertakes a careful iconographic reading of a series of paintings, from which she deciphers a number of 'alternative narratives' that are 'almost always contained within the female body, as the subject of a woman's experience rather than as a sexual object.'<sup>95</sup> She offers a series of generalised comparisons between Valadon's work and that of her male contemporaries, from which she concludes that Suzanne Valadon's nudes demonstrate a 'much greater sense of being present in the world as bodies, and as individuals.' For Mathews, 'it is this consciousness of body and mind that interrupts the normative psychological process of the male gaze.'<sup>96</sup> Rosemary Betterton similarly suggests that Valadon differs from her male contemporaries in the attention that she pays to the individuality of the sitter. 'The formal characteristics of her drawing and painting,' she suggests, 'deny the sensuous illusionism of the painted pin-up and render the woman's body less available to a voyeuristic gaze.'<sup>97</sup> Like many earlier commentators, Betterton secures her argument through comparison with Degas:

In [Degas's] images, then, the viewer is given a privileged access to a private, narcissistic moment: seeing a woman alone and caught unawares, intimately framed. Compared with the sensuous and intimate voyeurism of Degas, Valadon's drawings on the same theme look curiously awkward. Where [Degas's] pastel is soft and sensuous, suggestive of the softness of flesh or the blurring half-tones of shadow, Valadon's lines are abrupt, edgy and harsh, denying any erotic sensation. Valadon's drawings transform the narcissistic and private gesture of Degas' woman [...] into a movement that is both more awkward and immediate. [...] The beautiful, undulating line of Degas' figure has become lumpy and discontinuous, the lines are sharper and no longer voluptuous.<sup>98</sup>

Although 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' had provided a forceful critique of masculine scopophilia, the question of what it would be to be pleurably involved in looking as a woman proved more vexed. Within the binary terms of the early feminist critique of existing regimes of representation—male/female, active/passive, gazing subject/object of the gaze—female spectatorship was recuperable only in terms of

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<sup>94</sup> Betterton, p.4, p.10.

<sup>95</sup> Mathews, p.419.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp.427-8.

<sup>97</sup> Betterton, pp.20-21.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p.17.

‘transvestism’ or ‘masquerade’.<sup>99</sup> The female spectator remained, it was suggested, caught between a transsexual identification with the sadistic impulses of the male voyeur and a narcissistic (over-)identification with the object of (his) desire, an uncomfortable oscillation which is here registered in Rosemary Betterton’s response to Degas. Unlike the male art critics of the late nineteenth century, who appeared to find it impossible to feel any sympathy for the represented women, Betterton understands Degas’s bather pastels as expressions of feminine interiority and privacy, which implicitly invite an empathetic identification.<sup>100</sup> Yet the images also seem to her to tread a fine line between narcissistic self-absorption and instinctive physicality: Degas, she suggests, ‘reproduces precisely the ideology of women as nature, absorbed in their physical beings—like cats they perform purely instinctual and reflexive rites of cleanliness.’ Her assessment thus moves unevenly between censure of the voyeuristic impulses that underpin Degas’s repeated imaging of women bathing, empathy with the represented women and aesthetic enjoyment of the tactile and sensuous quality of his medium. In contrast, Suzanne Valadon’s nudes are seen to sacrifice both ‘erotic sensation’ and visual pleasure in favour of a prosaically realistic view of the female body in all its ‘lumpiness’, ‘awkwardness’ and ‘discontinuity’. For Rosemary Betterton, the woman artist—a maker, not bearer, of meaning, and the author of a series of uniquely unidealised representations of the female form—accordingly appeared to offer a third possibility for identification that did not fall into the clear-cut binaries provided by early theories of female spectatorship.

As Griselda Pollock has noted, however, the argument that male artists fashion fictional women for their visual pleasure while women artists are ruggedly realistic about the body is ‘an impoverished way of looking at art made by women; it does not allow for desire or fantasy.’<sup>101</sup> While acknowledging the significant and necessary work that has been done over the past forty years to restore neglected women artists to cultural visibility, in her 1999 book *Differencing the Canon*, Pollock also proposed that, as feminist scholars, we need

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<sup>99</sup> See Laura Mulvey, ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946),’ originally published in *Framework* (1981), reprinted in *Visual and Other Pleasures*; Mary Ann Doane, ‘Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,’ originally published in *Screen* 23.3-4 (1982), reprinted in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>100</sup> The idea that Degas’s images of women bathing should be considered representations of autonomous female experience has been explored by feminist critics including Eunice Lipton and Norma Broude; see Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1986) and Norma Broude, ‘Edgar Degas and French Feminism, ca. 1880: “The Young Spartans,” the Brothel Monotypes, and the Bathers Revisited,’ *Art Bulletin* 70.4 (December 1988), pp.640-59. This idea has, however, more recently been subject to critical re-examination by Heather Dawkins, who analyses the complex and shifting identifications needed to sustain a viewing relationship with the bather pastels in ‘Frogs, Monkeys and Women,’ pp.202-17 in *Dealing with Degas*, eds. Kendall & Pollock.

<sup>101</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p.146.

to think more analytically about the nature of our investment in those artists. The burgeoning interest—both academic and more popular—in artists who are women has resulted in an ever-increasing array of biographies, novels and films offering inspirational stories about historical figures who heroically overcame personal vicissitudes and potential victimhood in order to make art. In such publications, ‘Artemisia’ (Gentileschi), ‘Frida’ (Kahlo), ‘Suzanne’ (Valadon) *et al* are seen to speak to us in a direct and unmediated manner through their artworks.<sup>102</sup> While June Rose suggests that Valadon’s paintings are ‘as telling as any diary,’<sup>103</sup> the clearest sense of the extent to which it is felt that ‘we’ have access to the singularity of her life experiences and hence are able to identify with ‘Suzanne’ is to be seen in the two first-person, ‘novelised biographies’ written in her name.<sup>104</sup> The blurb on the back of Elaine Todd Koren’s 2001 publication *Suzanne: Of Love and Art*, for example, informs us that:

This illegitimate daughter of an alcoholic charwoman and an unknown father became a model and mistress for Renoir and Lautrec. Seldom before had a French woman steeped in poverty achieved greatness and respectability by the sheer talent of her artistic craft and then turned about to shock Paris with an unorthodox love affair. She fought her desperate desire for her son’s friend, twenty-one years her junior, and lost the battle overwhelmed by passion.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> In the past fifteen years alone, Artemisia Gentileschi has been the subject both of a filmic biography: *Artemisia*, dir. Agnès Merlet (Miramax, 1997) and two novels: Alexandra Lapierre, *Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness* (London: Vintage, 2001) and Susan Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia* (London: Headline Review, 2002), while the on-going interest in life of Frida Kahlo is reflected in the 2002 biopic *Frida*, dir. Julie Taymor (Miramax, 2002). I analyse the persistency of the tendency to see Kahlo’s work in particular as the unmediated expression of her personal, gendered trauma in my discussion of the critical responses to the 2005 retrospective of her work at Tate Modern; see Joanne Heath, ‘Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective,’ in Alexandra M Kokoli (ed.), *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp.20-40.

<sup>103</sup> Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, p.139.

<sup>104</sup> See Sarah Baylis, *Utrillo’s Mother: An Inspired Novel Based on the Imagined Life of French Painter Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1987) and Elaine Todd Koren, *Suzanne: Of Love and Art* (New York: Maverick Books, 2001). Valadon’s friendship with Degas has more recently also been the subject of a play by Timberlake Wertenbaker, which premiered at the Arcola Theatre, London, in November 2009; see Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The Line* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). We can, I feel, be a little too quick to dismiss such texts as ‘reading like novels’ and so lacking the ‘serious stamp of Art History.’ As I suggested in my consideration of the written form of the Freudian case history in Chapter One above, the evocation of the strategies of fiction could serve to signal the inadequacy of pre-existing epistemological models in conveying certain dimensions of feminine subjective experience. In her work on Victorine Meurent, artist and model for Manet’s *Olympia*, feminist art historian Eunice Lipton endeavoured to weave together feminist desire, historical research and fictionalised narrative in a bid to produce a radically new way of writing about an artist who was a woman; see Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman’s Search for Manet’s Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).

Though certain aspects of these ‘novelised biographies’ do merit criticism (Todd Koren’s crude Oedipalisation of the Valadon/Utrillo relationship in particular), they do on another level provide a space for the unlicensed roving of the feminist imagination, allowing us to speculate on, for example, the conversation that might have occurred had Suzanne Valadon unexpectedly met Mary Cassatt on one of her many visits to Degas’s studio.

<sup>105</sup> Todd Koren, *Suzanne: Of Love and Art*, back cover.



Like June Rose's *Mistress of Montmartre*, with its emphasis upon Valadon's eccentric behaviour and many love affairs, Todd Koren's fictionalised account of Suzanne Valadon's life provides us with what is effectively a re-gendered version of the modernist myth of the socially and sexually liberated artist-hero.

While these overtly populist accounts of Suzanne Valadon's life and art seek to make of the artist a bohemian heroine, whose passionate struggle for sexual freedom and self-expression in the face of social disadvantage is transparently reflected in the artworks she produced, more scholarly accounts of Valadon's artistic production have been equally quick to emphasise the singularity of her social position as the key to Valadon's uniquely unidealised representations of the female nude. Confronted by image after modernist image of prostituted or bestialised sexuality, and of bodies violently distorted, feminist art history has sought to create of Suzanne Valadon's paintings a counter-archive of images which express some quintessential truth about the body as the 'subject of a woman's experiences'. To Patricia Mathews, for example, it appeared that:

The consciousness of Valadon's subjects intrudes upon the role of images of the nude as objects to fulfil a lack by engendering erotic desire. Their bodies are very tangibly and physically present; they radiate life and flesh through the physical touch of her brush and vibrant colors; but they rarely allow the use of their bodies without consideration of their personhood. [...] Their reality as women rather than signs [...] disrupts the coherence of her depicted narratives.<sup>106</sup>

Not only is Suzanne Valadon's work seen to look demonstrably different from that of her male colleagues, but that difference is further understood—by both academic and more popular writers—to result from the uniquely classed and gendered subject position of the artist. Thus, 'her work was based on direct experience of the way her own body was used as a model.'<sup>107</sup> 'Her comparative ease with nudity allows her to explore the potential of the female nude body for generating nonstereotypical meanings.'<sup>108</sup> 'In becoming an artist Valadon translated the model's unselfconscious confidence about the female body and the freedom to scrutinise it into images.'<sup>109</sup> 'Having modelled so often naked, she was

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<sup>106</sup> Mathews, p.428.

<sup>107</sup> Betterton, p.14.

<sup>108</sup> Mathews, p.416.

<sup>109</sup> Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.90.

completely unselfconscious about her body, and the naked figures in her paintings reflect her freedom from false shame.<sup>110</sup>

Although Suzanne Valadon's social position undoubtedly permitted her greater access to the sight of the unclothed female body than that available to many other upper- or middle-class women artists working at the fin-de-siècle, I do think that we can be too quick to assume that to work as an artists' model is to have an entirely 'natural' or 'unselfconscious' relationship to one's body. This somewhat ingenuous idea has already been complicated by a number of recent studies, which have examined the emergence and increasing systemisation of modelling as a *bona fide* profession over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Viewed from this perspective, Suzanne Valadon's decision to pose for the nude seems less a gesture of bohemian liberation, and more a pragmatic means of earning a living (prior to commencing work as a model, Valadon had trained as an acrobat with Ernest Molier's circus, before a bad fall from the trapeze halted her career). Psychoanalysis has, furthermore, taught that none of us has an entirely fixed or 'natural' relationship to our bodies; even from earliest infancy, our experience of our own corporeality comes to be overlaid with both psychic fantasy and socio-cultural significance. The tendency by both feminist scholars and more popular women writers to view Suzanne Valadon's paintings as the unmediated expression of her innate unselfconsciousness about the body not only remains perilously close to the earlier troping of Valadon as a purely 'instinctive' or 'primitive' artist, but also seems to me to speak rather more closely to and of our own contemporary, desires and fantasies around the body. As we continue to be placed under pressure to conform to the increasingly unattainable ideals of airbrushed perfection held out to us by an evermore celebrity-obsessed culture, it seems more impossible than ever for women to be entirely unselfconscious about their own physicality and sexuality.<sup>112</sup> In this sense, the attribution of a heedless bodily freedom to Suzanne Valadon seems to me to say more about our continuing insecurities, desires and fantasies around the female body, than about the individual attitudes of a woman who lived and worked in the first half of the last century.

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<sup>110</sup> Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, p.146.

<sup>111</sup> See in particular Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's Model* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) and Susan S Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (Aldershot & Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>112</sup> The emergence in recent years of a new wave of grassroots activist organisations, including OBJECT, concerned to tackle what they name as our contemporary 'sex object culture' (the growth in 'lads' mags', lap dancing clubs and overtly sexual and sexist advertising) would appear to put the issue of the representation and objectification of women in popular culture firmly back on the feminist agenda.

During the early 1970s, the feminist engagement with psychoanalysis had as its immediate and urgent aim the exposure and analysis of the ‘unconscious of patriarchal society’. Laura Mulvey’s polemical essay on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ appropriated psychoanalytical theory as a ‘political weapon’ through which feminist activists could ‘at least advance our understanding of the *status quo*, of the patriarchal culture in which we are caught.’<sup>113</sup> While such work may have provided the theoretical means through which to analyse the sexual politics of vision, it remains equally trapped in a paradigm in which looking can only be understood in terms of domination and control. During the 1970s and 1980s, many of the figures now most strongly associated with the development of feminist visual theory and practice in its British context accordingly distanced themselves from any idea of pleasure in the image, particularly that pleasure which could potentially be derived from looking at representations of the female form. Laura Mulvey’s call for a ‘total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film’<sup>114</sup> clearly informed her own practice of film-making during this period, while Mary Kelly’s large-scale installations, *Post-Partum Document* and *Interim*, are equally marked by their refusal to represent the woman’s body. Many second-wave feminists clearly found the direct representation of the female body inherently problematic, with a collective response to Rosemary Betterton’s article ‘How Do Women Look?’, published in a subsequent edition of *Feminist Review*, accordingly arguing that Suzanne Valadon ‘should not be held up as the initiator of positive images of women.’ The respondents felt that Valadon’s departure from the conventions of the female nude amounted ‘only to slight shifts in emphasis.’ Having clearly taken on board the implications of Laura Mulvey’s critique of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ they concluded that, ‘the “to-be-looked-at-ness” may be less potent but the nude still entices the viewer because the constraints of a convention were not easily shaken off.’<sup>115</sup>

The naming of an oppressive structure of male gazing and female body objects by feminist visual theory during the 1970s has thus simultaneously opened up and closed down the Valadon archive. (At a recent conference, I was asked what I was working on. ‘I’m looking at Suzanne Valadon’s paintings of the female nude,’ I gamely replied. ‘Oh,’ came the swift response, ‘hasn’t she already been done?’) Within the terms of this critique of phallogocentric regimes of representation, Valadon’s nudes are made to signify as a point

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<sup>113</sup> Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ pp.13-14.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>115</sup> Tracey Brunt, Nicola Burbridge, Liz Farrelly, Flavia Hewitt & Maggie Hunt, ‘A Response to Rosemary Betterton,’ *Feminist Review* 21 (Winter 1985), pp.122-23, p.123.



of proto-feminist resistance to the objectification of the female body for an eroticised ‘male gaze’; the recognisable products of a woman artist, they are instead seen to express some quintessential truth about the female body as the ‘subject of a woman’s experiences’. It seems to me that it is now necessary to move beyond this uncritical investment in the figure of Suzanne Valadon. In this thesis, I am concerned to examine how a psychoanalytical interrogation of the maternal might transform our understanding of women’s art practice in the early years of the twentieth century. In the previous chapter, I examined the possibilities that Melanie Klein’s account of feminine creativity as originating in a daughter’s ambivalent relationship to the maternal body might offer to any consideration of the work of those women painters working within a figurative tradition of representation during this period. In the final section of this chapter, I want to turn to a theoretical intervention that displaces both the Kleinian account of daughterly aggression towards, and rivalry with, the mother, and the classic Freudian model of spectatorship deployed by feminist visual theorists during the 1970s and 1980s. The work of Bracha Ettinger has the potential radically to transform our understanding of the relations between femininity, creativity and the maternal. Not only does Ettinger provide a supplementary way of positioning the maternal other for all human subjects, but in theorising a specifically *matrixial* gaze, she also introduces a different psychic register through which to read what might be produced in the event of the aesthetic encounter.

### **The Woman Artist and the Gaze: A Matrixial Shift**

In a matrixial encounter, the private subjectivity of the individual is momentarily unbounded. The psyche momentarily melts, and its psychic threads are interwoven with threads emanating from objects, images and other subjects. In a matrixial encounter with an image, a transformation occurs.<sup>116</sup>

In her consideration of the woman artist—understood, it should be emphasised, as a particular psychic configuration, rather than as a gendered individual identity—Bracha Ettinger takes as her departure point Otto Rank’s psychoanalytic reading of the myth of the genius/hero. In traditional stories of the birth of the hero, which Rank reveals to have their basis in the Oedipus complex, the mother is generally relegated to a minor role, coming to be represented as ‘either a copulating animal or a nourishing animal.’<sup>117</sup> As Ettinger stresses, between copulating and nursing there is, however, a void. She proposes

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<sup>116</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Fascinace and the Girl-to-m/Other Matrixial Feminine Difference,’ pp.60-93 in *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Griselda Pollock (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2006), p.62.

<sup>117</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event,’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 21.1 (2004), pp.69-93, p.69.

that the 'begetting mother' is in fact the 'evacuated possibility' that holds the myth of the self-creating hero together:

It is only with the disappearance of [...] the woman-becoming-mother figure, that the hero-son-god—torn between rebellion, rivalry and admiration towards his father, his own ex-hero-father-god—can give birth to itself and establish a male filiation in the same stroke.<sup>118</sup>

Ettinger thus shows the myth of the artist-hero not only to be modelled upon Oedipal lines of father/son rivalry, but to be further contingent upon the foreclosure of maternal gestation:

The birth-giving mother is not killed and then symbolically resurrected, like the father. She is not even rejected as an abject. For the hero to be born of himself, the archaic becoming-mother must melt into obscurity and senselessness as a Thing of no human significance.<sup>119</sup>

As Bracha Ettinger emphasises, the patriarchal legend of the genius-hero thus rests on the absolute eradication of the gestating and birth-giving mother (in Matrixial terms, the m/Other).

According to psychoanalytic orthodoxy, this excision of the archaic m/Other is in fact vital both to the formation of the subject and to the creation of meaning: Lacanian theory emphasises that the journey from a chaotic and undifferentiated corporeality (the Real) to sexed and speaking subjectivity (the Symbolic) always entails a cut or separation from the mother. Lacan derives the term *objet a* to describe those fragmented part-objects such as the mother's breast, her gaze and her voice which first set desire in motion and which are irretrievably cut from the subject by the process of symbolic castration. As Ettinger explains, the *objet a* is 'created during the primal split of the subject, when language blurs its archaic modes of experience and when discourse, introducing the laws and orders of language, nestles in their place and constitutes them as forever unattainable.'<sup>120</sup> Although the *objet a* is created by the entry into language, it has no means of imaginary or symbolic representation. It is rather to be considered an inaccessible and unrepresentable trace of a lost part-object, which 'resides on the borderlines of corporeal, sensory and perceptive zones, but eludes them all.'<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>120</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts & Histories Network, 1995), p.1.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

In his 1964 seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan paid particular attention to the gaze as *objet a*. This gaze is, he emphasises, ‘not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.’<sup>122</sup> In its guise as *objet a*, the gaze is thus to be understood not as an instrument of domination and control at the conscious disposal of an actively looking subject (the ‘determining male gaze’), but rather as a remnant left behind by the introduction of the Symbolic in the Real—a lost part-object from which the subject is forever split. As *objet a*, the gaze is, Lacan writes, ‘presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety.’<sup>123</sup> He goes on to suggest that this ‘strange contingency’ which appears to hover at the very limits of subjective experience—the affective anxiety associated with the gaze as lost and lacking *objet a*, in other words—may approach consciousness via the artwork:

in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested. [...] Looking at pictures, even those most lacking in what is usually called the gaze, and which is constituted by a pair of eyes, pictures in which any representation of the human figure is absent, like a landscape by a Dutch or a Flemish painter, you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze.<sup>124</sup>

As Bracha Ettinger explains, this approach of the *objet a* via painting—an approach that, for Lacan, is closely associated with castration anxiety—always threatens to wipe out the subject:

Subject and *objet a* are as inseparable to one another’s opposite side, like the recto and verso of one and the same piece of paper. When the subject appears, the *objet a* disappears and when the *objet a* finds a way to penetrate its other side (through painting, for example) or to reappear as hallucinations in the Real, the signifying meaning (symbolic and imaginary, which is exchangeable through discourse) disappears and goes into hiding; the symbolic Other is “knocked out” and with it the subject fades away.<sup>125</sup>

Ettinger herself theorises a supplementary stratum of subjectivisation, in which partial-subjects and partial-objects are never wholly merged together, nor yet subsequently and definitively separated by a cut, but are rather ‘borderlinked by resonance and vibrations’. In what Ettinger acknowledges as a pre-natal space and time of encounter, a co-emerging

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<sup>122</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1964], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, intro. David Macey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p.84.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p.101.

<sup>125</sup> Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze*, p.1.



and co-fading *I* and *non-I* inhabit a joint space in which they share and transmit diffused affects and sensations, traumas and phantasies:

In the matrixial late pre-natal period, where the fluctuations of light and darkness accompany a touching-in-separating movement within the shadowy, palpable world of visible and invisible, pre-subject and pre-object intersect and imprint poietic archaic traces in a web which is plural-several from the outset.<sup>126</sup>

Matrixial theory thus proposes that the originary encounter with the archaic m/Other—with female bodily specificity—is not completely foreclosed (as per the Lacanian model), but that its affective traces may be inscribed in a web or network of non-conscious links woven and shared between several partial-subjects. The psychically inflected traces of this trans-subjective borderspace are not confined to the plane of the forever too early and inaccessible Real, but may potentially, Ettinger suggests, emerge again on the very margins of the Symbolic via certain kinds of non-verbal, unpredictable, empathetic and intuited encounters, such as might occur in the transferential relationship between analyst and analysand, for example, or else in the aesthetic experience.

Moving beyond the Lacanian conceptualisation of the gaze as a ‘phallic ghost,’<sup>127</sup> Bracha Ettinger theorises a *matrixial gaze*. Where the phallic *objet a* is created during a primal separation in which the subject is irrevocably split from the m/Other, in the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation, partial-subjects and partial-objects are never entirely fused and then subsequently separated. The matrixial *objet a* is thus ‘never *completely* lost, excluded or fused for all the different partners of the matrix.’<sup>128</sup> Its approach, therefore, does not necessarily overwhelm or obliterate the subject:

A primary slight awareness of the matrixial object/*objet a* shared by the co-emerging *I* and *non-I*, seeps into subjectivity without splitting away completely from the one or the other, like the phallic *objet a* does, and retroactive matrixial “making sense” is possible, in which *subject* is not opposed to *object*, and transformation is produced by transgression of the borderlinks between *I* and *non-I*. In the matrixial stratum, the *objet a* appears and yet the subject does not completely fade away.<sup>129</sup>

The matrixial *objet a* is, furthermore, shared between several partial-subjects: ‘borderlines between subjects and objects become thresholds, borderlinks between partial-subjects are

<sup>126</sup> Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist,’ p.82.

<sup>127</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.88.

<sup>128</sup> Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze*, p.27.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p.29.

transgressed, and traces of diffused objects are shared between—and are transferred among—several partial subjects in active-passive metramorphosis.<sup>130</sup>

Bracha Ettinger's work has profound implications for the ways in which it is possible to think about artistic creation and reception. Through the matrixial gaze in painting, some borderline awareness of the affective traces of the encounter with the archaic feminine m/Other may, she suggests, be incarnated in the shared and transformative encounter between artist, viewer(s) and artwork:

Being shared, the flickering of the matrixial gaze for one partial subject is not its exhaustion for the other, and, therefore, is never a complete atrophy, not even when one of the partial subjects totally disappears. Thus, the matrixial subjectivity may carry from one to an unknown other, and also from one generation to another, the “trace of the trace” (Derrida) and the “mother of the mother” (Fédida). The matrixial *objet a* in artwork incarnates traces of traces, mothers of the mother and “events without witness”. The emotional and mental conduct of an artwork may reflect on far away matrixial unconscious events. An affected matrixial encounter creates in its participants simultaneously (but not *the same*) diffused traces of the unthought-of and unknown, but charged-with-some-awareness, events. [...] That is, the matrixial gaze is not merely relegated to the level of invisible figurality or unintelligibility. Sub-symbolic tunings, that do not function on the level of distinct units of signification, create meanings that broaden the boundaries of culture.<sup>131</sup>

A matrixial aesthetic encounter is thus primarily affective, rather than purely visual. In this sense, the artwork is no longer to be considered as a representation or symbol, but rather becomes a ‘transport-station’ for the trans-subjective and sub-symbolic transmission of certain affects and sensations associated with the originary matrixial encounter-event.<sup>132</sup> Artistic production is thus re-conceived as an act of co-creation, or, to use Ettinger's own term, *co-poiesis*, that is woven across and between several partial-subjects. From a matrixial perspective, the very concept of the artist as a discrete individual dissolves:

In the matrixial borderspace another artist emerges: a *she*. [...] Since metramorphic swerving is a sexual difference based on webbing of links and not on essence or negation, I call “Woman” this interlaced subjectivity that is not confined to the contours of a one-body with its inside versus outside polarity. This gives rise to an idea of the artist as working-through traces coming from others to whom she is borderlinked. The artist who opens pathways and deepens metramorphoses in the matrixial field thus turns into a woman when she wanders with her spirit's eyes and her erotic antennae in a

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>132</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Art as the Transport-Station of Trauma,’ in *Artworking 1985-1999*, exh. cat., (Ghent & Amsterdam: Ludion, 2000).

psychic space and in a world where the gaze is a veil—a trail of event, or a borderlink [...]. The artist-woman channels anew trauma(s) and *jouissance*(s) coming from non-I(s) that are linked to her. She bifurcates, disperses and rejoins anew-but-in-difference their remnants and traces, and she acts on the borderline, transcribing it while sketching and laying it out and opening it wide to turn it into a threshold and to metamorphose it into a borderspace.<sup>133</sup>

Transcending both biology and gender, the matrixial ‘artist-woman’ may be thought of as a particular psychic configuration that emerges in the process of what Ettinger, a practising artist as well as a practising psychoanalyst, terms ‘artworking’.<sup>134</sup> In a matrixial aesthetic encounter, a psychic borderspace may open up in which several participants, who are never entirely known to nor wholly estranged from each other, share and exchange affective sensations through *metamorphosis*, ‘a process of inter-psychic communication and transformation that transgresses the boundaries of the individual subject and takes place between several entities,’<sup>135</sup> which is analogous to and derived from the minimal sharing and processing of affects that occurred in the originary prenatal encounter between an uncognised yet intimate *I* and *non-I*. Individual psychic limits are thus rendered fragile and transformed into thresholds, via which diffracted traces of archaic trauma and *jouissance* can be transcribed in an asymmetrical process of exchange and encounter that takes place between several, partial-subjects.<sup>136</sup>

In providing a means of thinking about artistic practice and experience as an encounter between several, co-emerging and co-fading, partial-subjects, the work of Bracha Ettinger enables us to move beyond any notion of an heroic woman artist who knowingly expresses her life experiences in her work, experiences to which we as viewers can later lay claim. A matrixial aesthetic experience rather has the potential to evoke new instances of trans-subjectivity—of ‘relations without relating,’ in Ettinger’s terminology—in which the affective traces of a psychic dimension that is linked to the originary encounter with the invisible sexual specificity of the female body may become shareable via the artwork. Moving beyond those existing feminist readings which have tended to configure the range

<sup>133</sup> Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist,’ pp.90-91.

<sup>134</sup> See in particular the exhibition catalogue *Artworking 1985-1999*.

<sup>135</sup> Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist,’ p.77.

<sup>136</sup> This is not to imply, however, that this is an entirely easy or comfortable process that is within the conscious control of the subject. As Ettinger emphasises, ‘The desire to join-in-difference and differentiate-in-joining with the Other doesn’t promise any peace and harmony, because joining is first of all joining with/by the trauma that weakens and bifurcates me, and creates a danger of regression and dispersal in the process of receiving, passing on and transmitting. [...] The matrixial *impossibility of not-sharing* with the Other and with the world is profoundly fragilising. We are sharing in, beyond our intention or will, and this sharing within requires its price and initiates its beauty.’

Ettinger, ‘Art as the Transport-Station of Trauma,’ p.113, p.98.



of Suzanne Valadon's artwork as in some way offering imaginary access to the individually classed and gendered life experiences of the singular artist-subject, the final chapter of this thesis will, therefore, offer a matrixially informed analysis of a small number of drawings and paintings. Transcending the binary, gendered identifications that have so far structured the Valadon archive—from the early-twentieth-century emphasis upon the 'virility' and 'brutality' of her painting style to the subsequent feminist valorisation of the artist as bohemian heroine—I will instead propose that, in their complex negotiation of both existing cultural codes of femininity and existing representational tropes, these images may carry the traces of a supplementary, matrixial-feminine sexual difference that cannot be wholly subsumed into a phallic economy of meaning.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**WHAT IS A WOMAN FOR A WOMAN?**  
**FIGURING FEMININE DIFFERENCE IN SELECTED PAINTINGS**  
**BY SUZANNE VALADON**

It is perfectly clear that there needs to be found another name for what becomes a “woman” for a woman, because a “woman” for a woman cannot remain a radical Other as she can remain to men, or else, all women would be psychotic when coming into contact with their own difference.<sup>1</sup>

In 1913, Suzanne Valadon painted a large-scale portrait of her niece and great-niece, *Marie Coca and her Daughter Gilberte* (Figure 5.1). In their surroundings and tightly buttoned dress, the artist’s relatives appear the epitome of respectable petit bourgeois femininity. Marie Coca, wearing a high-necked cream blouse and dark blue skirt, is ensconced in a large, floral-patterned armchair. The chair acts as a framing device, the gentle curve of its back repeated in the form of Marie Coca’s rounded, open arms, which appear in turn to shelter her daughter, who sits on a cushion at her mother’s feet, dressed in a blue dress with an immaculate white lace collar, her hand protectively cradling the head of the doll that sits in her lap. This central group is balanced on the right hand side by a table supporting two vases containing flowers and holly, and on the left by a small canvas depicting a scene from the ballet. While this painting within the painting and the severe cropping of both the side table and the larger canvas that hangs above the armchair indicate a knowledge and understanding of both Degas’s style and subject matter, Valadon’s organisation of the pictorial space remains on the whole conservative: child and doll are positioned in the foreground, while the armchair occupied by the mother links the middle ground to the background. A further sense of depth is created by the diagonals of the floor and skirting boards, which have been painstakingly drawn according to conventional perspectival rules.

In its exploration of modern, bourgeois family relations and spaces, *Marie Coca and her Daughter Gilberte* opens onto a significant archive of Impressionist paintings that had, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, similarly engaged with the topic of the social and familial interaction between women and girls, mothers and daughters, and sisters. In its formal grouping of three female figures, including a doll, Valadon’s portrait calls to mind

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<sup>1</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Some-Thing, Some-Event and Some-Encounter Between Sinthôme and Symptom,’ pp.61-75 in Catherine de Zegher (ed.), *The Prinzhorn Collection: Traces Upon the Wunderblock*, exh. cat., (New York, The Drawing Center, 2000), p.66.





Figure 5.1

Suzanne Valadon, *Marie Coca and Her Daughter Gilberte*, 1913, oil on canvas, 161 x 130 cm



Auguste Renoir's *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont* (1884, **Figure 5.2**). Like Renoir's earlier *Portrait of Madame Charpentier and her Children* (1878, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), this portrait of banker Paul Berard's daughters marks the emergence of a new kind of domestic, rich but bourgeois, portraiture that necessarily differed from the officially sanctioned, dynastic imagery of royalty and aristocracy that had been produced during the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont* may be considered at once a privately commissioned portrait, and a visual inscription of an emergent nineteenth-century, bourgeois discourse on childhood, in particular girlhood.<sup>3</sup> All three girls are shown engaged in conventionally gendered childhood activities: ten-year-old Marguerite sits on a sofa, her ankles demurely crossed, reading a storybook; to the right of the composition, her elder sister, Marthe, concentrates on her sewing, while the youngest of the three sisters, Lucie, stands close beside her, resting her doll on her big sister's knee. Just as Lucie plays at being mother to her doll, so too does Marthe appear to watch over her younger sister with quasi-maternal concern. The three girls and the doll all share the same long, blonde hair, porcelain smooth skin and rosy cheeks, while the doll's frothy, white dress and red belt are further mirrored in the adolescent Marthe's white and red spotted muslin frock, with its matching red sash and stockings. The painting thus depicts the harmonious acculturation of wealthy young girls to bourgeois codes of femininity, maternity and domesticity, implying that Lucie will grow from a doll-like child into a good little girl like Marguerite, and eventually into a mature young lady like Marthe. While the setting of Suzanne Valadon's painting is more modest, it too appears at first glance to emphasise the cyclical reproduction of middle-class femininity. The three progressively diminishing female figures seem to nestle within one another as neatly as a set of Russian matryoshka dolls: the bodies of mother and daughter form a pyramidal structure that is echoed in the triangular shape of the doll, while a further formal link between all three figures—woman, girl and doll—is to be found in the gradually lightening shades of blue that are used to depict their clothing.

When *Marie Coca and her Daughter Gilberte* was subsequently exhibited in the 1934 Salon of the *Union des Femmes Artistes Modernes*, contemporary reviewers accordingly singled

<sup>2</sup> Melissa McQuillan, *Impressionist Portraits* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> An extended analysis of the painting in the light of contemporary discourses on childhood has been provided by both Anna Green and Greg Thomas; see Anna Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence 1848-1886* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp.130-43 and Greg M Thomas, 'Impressionist Dolls: On the Commodification of Girlhood in Impressionist Painting,' pp.103-125 in *Picturing Childhood: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R Brown (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), p.105.





**Figure 5.2**  
Auguste Renoir, *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont*, 1884, oil on canvas, 127 x 173 cm



it out for praise, alongside a number of other paintings in the show that were seen to celebrate the mother/daughter relationship. Research into the aims and exhibiting practices of the *Union des Femmes Artistes Modernes* has, however, revealed that critics in fact mismatched the painting with the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* of 1912 (**Figure 5.3**).<sup>4</sup> It would, therefore, seem that, in the art criticism of the inter-war period, *Marie Coca and her Daughter Gilberte* came to function as a kind of public fantasy of the relationship between the artist and her mother, signifying as an idealised image of *maternité* in a way in which the portrait of the frail and elderly Madeleine Valadon apparently could not. In this chapter, I will argue that Suzanne Valadon's representation of female intergenerational relationships in this and other paintings cannot be made so readily to conform to any such idealised notion of motherhood and/or daughterhood. In proposing that these images may instead stage a series of rather more complicated questions concerning girl-to-woman, woman-to-girl and woman-to-woman relations, I take my initial cue from the artist herself, who is said to have referred to *Marie Coca and her Daughter Gilberte* as the 'portrait of Madame Bovary',<sup>5</sup> for this reference to Flaubert's classic novel of adultery and hysteria—of feminine desire denied all other expressive outlet—complicates the contemporary reading of the painting as a straightforward glorification of motherhood, instead inviting focus on the figure of Marie Coca as a complex and desiring, ambivalently maternal, mature female subject.

In a way that differentiates her artistic project from Renoir's emphasis on the externalities of classed femininity in society portraits such as *Madame Charpentier and her Children* and *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont*, American painter Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) explored modern, bourgeois femininity not only in its social, but also in its psychological dimensions.<sup>6</sup> In *Louisine Havemayer and her Daughter Electra* (1895, **Figure 5.4**), the seven-year-old Electra sits on her mother's knee. One arm is draped across her mother's shoulder, while the other rests on her own knee, her hand clasped by that of her mother. Although this circle of hands and arms physically connect mother and daughter, the different direction of their gazes seems to cut across this connection. While Cassatt's pastel portrait thus recognises the emotional bond between mother and child, so too does

<sup>4</sup> Paula Birnbaum, 'Femmes Artistes Modernes: Women, Art and Identity in Inter-War France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> The claim is made by Michelle Deroyer in 'Quelques souvenirs autour de Suzanne Valadon,' *Les Œuvres Libres* 15 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1945), pp.179-220, p.208, and is also reported in the catalogue of the retrospective of Valadon's work held at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in 1967; see *Suzanne Valadon*, exh. cat., (Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1967), p.38.

<sup>6</sup> For a major analysis of the significance of Cassatt's project, see Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).





Figure 5.3

Suzanne Valadon, *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, 1912, oil on canvas, 80 x 64 cm





Figure 5.4  
Mary Cassatt, *Louisine Havemeyer and her Daughter Electra*, 1895, pastel on paper, 61 x 77.5 cm



it acknowledge them as discrete individuals at different stages in their lives.<sup>7</sup> Although Suzanne Valadon frames her composition more conservatively and poses her figures more conventionally, she seems, like Cassatt, to evoke a sense of the psychological difference and distance between mother and daughter. Although Gilberte leans against her mother's knee, there is little sense of the casual intimacy which characterises many of Cassatt's studies of mothers with young children, nor any visual contact between mother and daughter: Marie Coca, apparently lost in thought, gazes off somewhere to the right, while both Gilberte and her doll look directly out towards the viewer.

Some eight years later, Marie Coca and Gilberte posed again for their aunt (**Figure 5.5**). The scene has shifted from the relative formality of a bourgeois sitting room to the more intimate space of a bedroom, and the composition is focussed upon the figure of the now adolescent Gilberte who sits, naked, upon the bed. Although her torso faces the viewer, the contours of her pubescent body emphatically picked out in Valadon's characteristic black line, Gilberte twists around to look over her left shoulder into a small hand mirror. Unlike conventional art historical depictions of Venus at her toilette, in which the putative spectator of the painting is invited to share in the naked woman's narcissistic contemplation of her mirrored beauty, in Valadon's painting the mirror is angled so that Gilberte's reflected image remains inaccessible to the spectator, and visible only to those within the frame of the painting. In contrast to such paintings, which actively solicit and engage with the (male) spectator's gaze at the unclothed female body, this blurred reflection, together with the averted eyes of both mother and daughter, bespeak a lack of direct address to the viewer. In comparison with Valadon's earlier portrait of her niece and great-niece, there is far greater physical contact between mother and daughter: Gilberte leans back towards her mother, who leans forward to place a towel over her daughter's exposed shoulders. The abandoned doll that gives the painting its title lies in the bottom right hand corner of the canvas, its blue dress similar to the one worn by Gilberte in the previous painting, the pink bow in its hair identical to the one which perches so jauntily atop Gilberte's head in this image.

The work of Mary Cassatt once again seems to provide a potential means of locating this representation of a mother engaged in the intimate care of her child's body (**Figure 5.6**). Yet, where Cassatt's interest lay in the bathing routines of very young infants, whose sex often remains indeterminate, Valadon here depicts the toilette of a much older child—a girl

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp.206-07.





Figure 5.5

Suzanne Valadon, *The Abandoned Doll*, 1921, oil on canvas, 135 x 95 cm





Figure 5.6

Mary Cassatt, *Mother About to Wash her Sleepy Child*, c.1880, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 65.8 cm



on the cusp of womanhood. The painting thus also begs to be considered not only in relation to the Impressionist exploration of modern, bourgeois femininity, but also in connection with a series of paintings produced in the early years of the twentieth century by artists including Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) (**Figures 5.25** and **5.26**), which similarly placed on display the naked body of the adolescent girl.

In this chapter, I will set Suzanne Valadon's work in conversation with that of her artistic predecessors and contemporaries. Moving beyond that earlier moment of feminist idealisation of Valadon as a painter of women's bodies and women's experiences analysed in the previous chapter, I want to promote a sense of Suzanne Valadon as a self-reflexive woman artist seeking to negotiate for herself a position in relation to the early-twentieth-century avant-garde and having as a result to engage with the genre of the female nude. Having revealed the complexity of her dialogue with a range of modernist representations of the clothed and unclothed female form, I shall then return to *The Abandoned Doll* in order to offer a detailed and psychoanalytically informed analysis of this particular painting.

My broader argument in this chapter unfolds from an initial consideration of a small detail in *The Abandoned Doll* (**Figure 5.7**). Mieke Bal has laid emphasis upon the process of reading art as:

an act that requires the present tense to interact with the past tense. It is an act that declares the image and even its tiniest details to be saturated with meaning, its semantic density constituting its social, cultural relevance. But, and this is perhaps the most important aspect of such a view, precisely because of this density, the image loses its apparent coherence. Small elements turned into signs can subvert the overt, overall meaning so as to inscribe something that didn't seem to be there, yet appropriates the image for a counter-message, a counter-coherence.<sup>8</sup>

In my reading of *The Abandoned Doll*, the pink bow in Gilberte's hair—as an uncanny visual echo of the orchid which Victorine Meurent wore tucked behind her left ear when she modelled for *Olympia*, Edouard Manet's infamous exploration of contemporary sexuality (**Figure 5.8**)—becomes one of these small, but potentially transformative, details. This resemblance may be an odd, but nevertheless meaningful, coincidence which—and this is the significance of Mieke Bal's theoretical gesture—comes to light *in the present*, in the

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<sup>8</sup> Mieke Bal, 'Reading Art?', pp.25-41 in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p.39.



Figure 5.7

Suzanne Valadon, *The Abandoned Doll* (detail)



Figure 5.8

Edouard Manet, *Olympia* (detail)



encounter between (this particular) viewer and artwork.<sup>9</sup> Or it may perhaps be intentional, a deliberate quotation that serves as a conscious declaration of artistic allegiance, like the Degas-esque painting of ballerinas that Valadon placed on the background wall in *Marie Coca and Her Daughter Gilberte*. Certainly, as discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary critics understood Suzanne Valadon's intensely worked surfaces and use of thick black outlining to be derived from Manet, while, in the most extensive art historical contextualisation of Valadon's work published to date, Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky has posited a still more direct relationship between the work of Manet and certain of Valadon's canvases.<sup>10</sup>

Mieke Bal has, however, underscored the limitations of such attempts to seek out similarities in composition, pose or motif between a work of art and its visual predecessors. This type of iconographical analysis is, Bal suggests, but one aspect of canonical art history's propensity towards she identifies as 'anteriority narratives'.<sup>11</sup> As Bal points out, in much traditional writing on art, individual artworks tend to be evaluated in terms of their similarity to, or difference from, a prior text or image. This approach may also find an anterior source in the artist's life. Iconography thus blends with biography, itself another form of anteriority narrative, in which the artist's life 'allegedly inhabits the work it yields, shaping it and informing its affective and aesthetic power.'<sup>12</sup>

Bal identifies a key limitation in this tendency towards anteriority in the writing of art historical narratives, pointing out that the visual artwork tends in the process to be reduced to 'an illustration of the narrative that precedes it and to which it is subordinated, its success being measured in terms of the degree to which it matches the story.'<sup>13</sup> Her critique is of particular relevance to the study of artists who are women, whose works cannot necessarily be categorised according to the neat stylistic labels provided by canonical stories of modern art, and the pattern of whose lived lives tends not to accord with the modernist myth of the bohemian artist-hero. Within the terms of these always-

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<sup>9</sup> As Mieke Bal emphasises, 'reading is an act of reception, of assigning meaning. The viewer reframes the work—which is, in this specific sense, a "text"—not simply as it suits him or her, according to contingent circumstances [...]. She reads according to a "vocabulary", a selection of elements taken to be signs, and connected in a structure that is a syntax in the semiotic sense: a connection between signs that yields a coherent meaning which is more than the sum of the meanings of the individual elements. Vocabulary and syntax can be learned, taught. They guarantee the right to reading, each person's access to culture. But according to the "I"/"you" interaction, each viewer can bring her own frame of reference.'  
*ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>10</sup> Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994), p.69, p.88.

<sup>11</sup> Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001); see in particular Chapter Three, 'Narrative and its Discontents'.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.31.

already-established narratives, in which the lives and works of the great modernist masters serve as the gold standard against which all others are judged, the work of women artists is all too often found wanting, coming to be dismissed as 'lesser' or 'minor' examples of a particular artistic style, or else related back to key events in its maker's life and interpreted as illustrative of her troubled personal relationships. Bal's acknowledgement of a more mobile and fluctuating dialogue between past and present than that allowed by chronological accounts of stylistic development would thus seem to provide a potential means of loosening the interpretative knot that has bound the work of women modernists to that of their better known male contemporaries. In a major challenge to the accepted methodologies of traditional art history, Bal questions whether the art of the past has necessarily to be seen as exerting a foundational influence on everything that follows in its wake, 'to be seen as *source*, as the traditional view would have it.'<sup>14</sup> Taking its cue from the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* or 'deferred action', Bal's notion of a *preposterous* art history instead proposes that certain artworks do not merely follow passively on from, but may instead actively address—or, as the author herself puts it, 'beckon' to—other, earlier artworks.<sup>15</sup> This 'beckoning' cannot be reduced to mere stylistic imitation, influence or reconstruction, but rather allows for a more creative and mutually transformative encounter between art made at different historical moments, an encounter which can enrich our understanding not only of the later, but also the earlier, art practice. Releasing us from a logic which ensures that an artistic practice such as Suzanne Valadon's reads only in relation to that of her male contemporaries (as 'derived from' or 'influenced by' Manet or Degas), Mieke Bal's insights may serve to provoke a more critical consideration of precisely how Valadon's paintings of the nude actively engage with a series of pre-existing modernist treatments of the female body. In drawing attention to this inscribed connection between Victorine's orchid and Gilberte's bow, I am thus displacing the straightforward notion of stylistic 'influence' in order to ask, what did *Olympia* (Figure 5.9) put into the field of visual representation that Suzanne Valadon might have wished to invoke? What possibilities did 'Manet' offer Valadon?

<sup>14</sup> Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.3.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of a 'preposterous history' is first elucidated in *Quoting Caravaggio*, in which the concept of quotation serves as the central theoretical focus of Bal's analysis. Tracking the use of the concept within the disciplines of both iconography and intertextuality, Mieke Bal suggests that quotation 'stands at the intersection of these two disciplines' and, as such, might prove a productive point from which to begin breaking down the rigid barriers between them in order 'to begin integrating visual and linguistic traditions of interpretation' (*Quoting Caravaggio*, p.8). The notion of a 'preposterous' connection between artworks of different historical periods is also central to Bal's discussion of the relationship between the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois and those of Bernini, where she introduces the term 'beckoning'; see 'Beckoning Bernini' in *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*.





Figure 5.9  
Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863-5, oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190 cm



### *The Blue Room: Re-dressing Olympia*

As several earlier studies have noted, there are striking similarities between *Olympia* and another canvas by Suzanne Valadon, *The Blue Room* of 1923 (**Figure 5.10**).<sup>16</sup> In *The Blue Room*, a heavily built female figure reclines, in a similar but reversed pose to *Olympia*, on a vibrantly patterned blue sofa. The composition is framed by two side curtains which mirror the green drapes in *Olympia*'s bedroom, and the painting demonstrates an attention to surface pattern that echoes not only Manet's rendering of the green and gold Japanese screen which forms the backdrop to *Olympia*, but also the richly decorated backgrounds of many of Valadon's portraits. There are, however, significant differences between the two paintings. Most crucially, 'Olympia' is naked, whereas the woman in *The Blue Room* is casually dressed in a pink camisole and a pair of loose-fitting, green and white striped pyjama pants. The pose, attire and swarthy features of this figure call to mind another, earlier image by Manet, the *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* (1862, **Figure 5.11**). Like the *Young Woman Reclining*, *The Blue Room* blurs the distinctions between portrait and nude, and between dressed and undressed: while the pose and obvious art historical references code the represented figure as an 'odalisque', the clothing appears to protect the body from sexualised scrutiny.<sup>17</sup> Yet where Manet's painting emphasises the theatricality and artifice of costuming, the tight-fitting matador's livery serving at once to conceal and to draw attention to the naked female flesh it ostensibly covers, the clothes of the figure in *The Blue Room* seem to have been chosen primarily for comfort, rather than for their erotic appeal. Eschewing all connotations of exotic otherness, in *The Blue Room* Suzanne Valadon instead seems to offer a rather more prosaic representation of a contemporary working woman at rest. It is in this respect, I would suggest, that she works with and off certain possibilities initially inscribed within *Olympia*.

T J Clark has argued that much of the shock of *Olympia* lay in Manet's refusal to erase the signs of class from the painted female body. In *Olympia*, he proposes, class is not represented by outward signs, such as costume and slippers, make up and jewellery—the recognisable trappings of the contemporary *courtisane*—but is rather inscribed across a

<sup>16</sup> See Diamand-Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon*, pp.69-72, Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.205-07 and Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, Pelican History of Art Series, 2001), p.172.

<sup>17</sup> The complex rhetoric of dress/undress which characterises the *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* is further enhanced by the painting's clear reference to the pair of nude and clothed *Majas* executed by Goya in 1797-98. For an extended analysis of the significance of Manet's borrowings from Spanish art and culture, see Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.71-114.



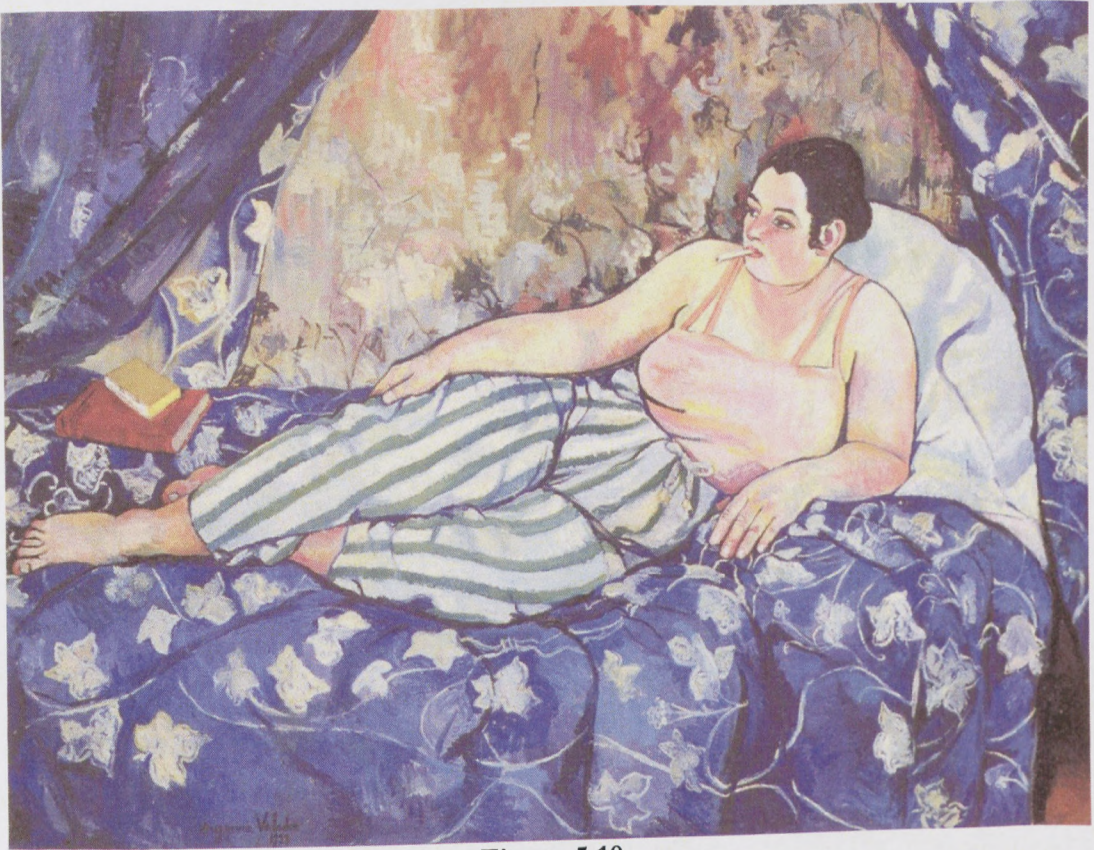


Figure 5.10  
Suzanne Valadon, *The Blue Room*, 1923, oil on canvas, 90 x 116 cm



Figure 5.11  
Edouard Manet, *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume*, 1862,  
oil on canvas, 94 x 113 cm



specific body.<sup>18</sup> In confronting the spectator not with a generic and timeless female nude, but rather with the naked body of the modern *faubourienne*, *Olympia* opened the floodgates for innumerable images of the abject physicality of the working-class prostitute, from the brothel scenes of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, through to those of Rouault and Picasso.<sup>19</sup> Might the painting have offered a different legacy to a working woman who, as a model, spent much of her time naked before the gaze of another, and who, like Victorine Meurent, the young woman who modelled for *Olympia*, was herself also an artist?<sup>20</sup> *Olympia* not only imputed a social and sexual identity to the female body, but also inscribed the particularity of the sitter: Victorine Meurent meets and returns the gaze of the spectator, her resolute stare retaining the capacity both to captivate and to disconcert even some 150 years after the painting's execution. Could 'Manet' thus have provided Suzanne Valadon with a precedent—with the visual 'raw materials', so to speak—through which to depict the female body as the site of classed and sexed subjective experience?

Unlike Victorine Meurent, who looks intently out towards the viewer, challenging us, it would seem, to look directly back at her naked body, the woman in *The Blue Room* appears unaware of our presence, but rather lounges casually, a cigarette dangling from her lips. Valadon uses a mottled palette of pink, purple, yellow and green to convey her ample flesh, her attention to her sitter's ruddy and uneven skin tone contrasting with Manet's stark rendering of *Olympia*'s uniformly waxy pallor. The face and neck in particular bear the marks of recent exposure to the sun, thereby giving the impression that the woman here represented has just returned home from a day's physical labour in the heat of the summer sun. *Olympia*'s hissing black cat—generally taken to be an ironic sign of the fantasised sexual promiscuity of the working-class prostitute—has been replaced by a small stack of books, signifying that this is a representation of an independent, thinking subject. Valadon's portrayal of this moment of solitary relaxation and introspection thus differs dramatically from Degas's class prejudiced depictions of alienated young women drowning their sorrows in cafés, and his even more rebarbative images of the women who worked in the *maisons de tolérance* resting in between clients (see **Figures 0.21** and **0.22** above), in which all trace of subjectivity is effaced in favour of pseudo-scientific, physiognomic

<sup>18</sup> T J Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> On the representation of the figure of the prostitute in nineteenth-century French painting, see in particular Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill-Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1989) and Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> On Victorine Meurent, see Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).



classification. While *Olympia* undoubtedly served as a lodestone for those modernist artists, including Degas, who subsequently sought to re-imagine the female nude as the site and sign of contemporary, commercialised sexuality, in its insistence upon the historical actuality of the model, the painting also appears to have carried an additional iconographic freight, whose legacy can be glimpsed in a painting such as *The Blue Room*, in which the model is no longer identified solely by her nudity, but is rather depicted in her social and cultural particularity.

*The Blue Room* was painted when Suzanne Valadon was aged fifty-eight, and may be considered an example of what is generally labelled her 'mature' style. In response to a questionnaire produced by Germain Bazin, Valadon herself provided the following summary of her development as an artist:

Towards 1909, she gave up engraving and drawing in order to concentrate solely on painting. Her family portraits, nudes, still lifes, landscapes and flower paintings all date from this time.

In these paintings, the highly coloured surfaces are simplified and enlarged, without losing their subtly changing and balanced life. Each day she worked with greater mastery. She achieved the highest levels of classicism, to which she brought her own unique style, devoid of any trace of formulaic academicism.<sup>21</sup>

This shift from drawing and engraving into oil painting has been understood as a direct consequence of Suzanne Valadon's relationship with fellow artist André Utter (1886-1948), which also began in 1909. As biographers delight in informing us, Valadon was forty-four, while, at twenty-three, Utter was some three years younger than her son, Maurice Utrillo. According to June Rose, the effects of this new relationship were clearly legible within Suzanne Valadon's art practice. The 'rebirth of passion,' she suggests, 'released a softer, more sensuous flow to her line':

For the first time in her life Valadon discovered a well of uninhibited sensual pleasure. Lovemaking for Valadon in the past had partly been a meal ticket, an entrée to a way of living, even a means of educating herself. She had enjoyed it, been a willing receptacle of the passion of older or less handsome men, but

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<sup>21</sup> 'Vers de 1909 elle cessa de graver et de dessiner pour uniquement peindre, de ce moment date ses portraits de famille, ses nus, ses natures mortes, ses paysages, ses fleurs. Peinture où les surfaces, toujours hautement colorées, ce sont simplifiées, agrandies, sans perdre de leur vie nuancée et modulée, que chaque jour elle exécute encore avec plus de maîtrise et arrive sans formule ni scolastriquement à retrouver le classicisme le plus haut, en y apportant son style.' Suzanne Valadon et Germain Bazin, 'Suzanne Valadon par elle-même,' *Prométhée* 2 (March 1939), pp.53-4, p.54.

now the passion was shared and she was in love with a young man who adored her body and admired her as an artist.

As telling as any diary, her beautiful drawings and paintings of the nude in the first years with André echo her sense of release. Instead of bending painfully over a bathtub or reclining awkwardly on a couch in a bleak room, her nudes stretch and romp about on the grass in a new mood of playfulness.<sup>22</sup>

In my reading of the case history of 'Frau Emmy von N,' I explored the profound difficulties faced by a mature female subject for whom access to her sexuality and her desires was disallowed by the dominant cultural discourse on Woman. I thus do not wish to deny the significance to Suzanne Valadon of her relationship with André Utter. Indeed, Valadon herself wrote that, 'one of life's accidents caused her life to be renewed when André Utter married her, for it was through him that she met his colleagues and friends.'<sup>23</sup> Prior to meeting Utter, Suzanne Valadon had spent much of her time at the country house of her first husband, a stockbroker named Paul Mousis, whom she had married on 5 August 1896.<sup>24</sup> During her thirteen year marriage to Mousis, she appears to have drawn only sporadically and to have painted very little, so it is not hard to imagine how her new-found personal happiness with Utter, coupled with a move back to Montmartre and consequent contact with a younger generation of avant-garde artists (among Utter's friends and colleagues, the *Prométhée* text cites Apollinaire, Picasso, Braque and Modigliani, as well as the critics Gustave Coquiot, André Salmon and Francis Carco, all of whom wrote enthusiastically about Valadon's work) may well have released Suzanne Valadon into a period of sustained and self-conscious creative practice. I do, however, think it necessary to be suspicious of the degree of biographical literalness afforded to these post-1909 nudes by June Rose. I want, therefore, advance an alternative interpretation of the trajectory of Suzanne Valadon's art practice.

### **The Early Drawings: Working Through 'Degas'**

In the period up to 1909, Suzanne Valadon concentrated primarily on life drawing, using herself, her mother and her son, or women and children in her social circle, as

<sup>22</sup> June Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre: A Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1998), p.121, p.133, p.129.

<sup>23</sup> 'les hasards de la vie firent que sa vie fut en quelque sorte renouvelée lorsque André Utter l'épousa, car par lui elle connut les camarades et amis de celui-ci.' Bazin & Valadon, p.54.

<sup>24</sup> The marriage certificate is reproduced in Daniel Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*, exh. cat., (Martigny, Switzerland: Fondation Pierre Giannada, 1996), p.250; see also Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky's biographical essay, 'Suzanne Valadon's Many Identities: Marie-Clémentine, "Biqui" or "Terrible Maria",' pp.31-53 in Marchesseau.

models. Like many of Degas's pastels from the late 1870s onwards, the drawing *Woman Bathing* of 1894 (Figure 5.11) portrays a single nude figure in a domestic interior. In Valadon's drawing, a heavyset woman, viewed from behind, dries herself with a towel. With great economy of form, Valadon evokes her model's solid build, her sturdiness further accentuated by her awkward pose, which throws her weight unevenly onto the left hand side of her body. The recognisably contemporary setting, together with the emphasis upon line as the primary structural component of the drawing, clearly proclaims a close stylistic relationship to the work of Degas (Figure 5.13). Heather Dawkins has in this respect emphasised what she feels to be the 'derivative' quality of Suzanne Valadon's art practice. The 'strong similarity' between Valadon's work and that of Degas is, she proposes, 'often ignored in order to establish Valadon's originality.' Valadon, she claims, 'used poses and settings similar to Degas but not his sophisticated, protomodernist techniques of representation.'<sup>25</sup> Even to feminist art historians, an image such as the red chalk drawing *Young Girl Kneeling in a Tub* (Figure 5.14) which depicts a woman crouching to wash herself in a shallow basin, thus appears to register only as 'less technically inventive'—and thus implicitly less 'modern'—than a pastel on the same theme by Degas (Figure 5.15) since Valadon apparently fails to adopt the formal innovations that canonical art history has lauded as the artistic signature of 'Degas': his use of multiple and fragmented viewpoints, his radical cropping of the pictorial plane, etc, etc. Can we, therefore, come to some different understanding of the nature of Suzanne Valadon's engagement with the work of Degas in the early years of her artistic career?

As he grew older, the focus of Degas's artistic production grew increasingly selective. In the latter stages of his artistic career, he returned again and again to the theme of women washing and drying themselves, using this motif as a vehicle for sustained compositional experimentation. Degas's repeated engagement with the topic of the female bather has, however, proved troubling to contemporary commentators and feminist art historians alike.<sup>26</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, research by feminist art historians exposed the social conditions through which an unmarried, bourgeois man such as Degas might have had access to a woman's toilette in the late nineteenth century. Their analysis of contemporary scientific discourses on hygiene and sexuality revealed that, while a glimpse of a bourgeoisie bathing was strictly proscribed even to her spouse, the sight of working-class women at

<sup>25</sup> Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture 1870-1910* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.88-89.

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of the extensive critical debate generated by these images, see both the Introduction and Chapter Four above.



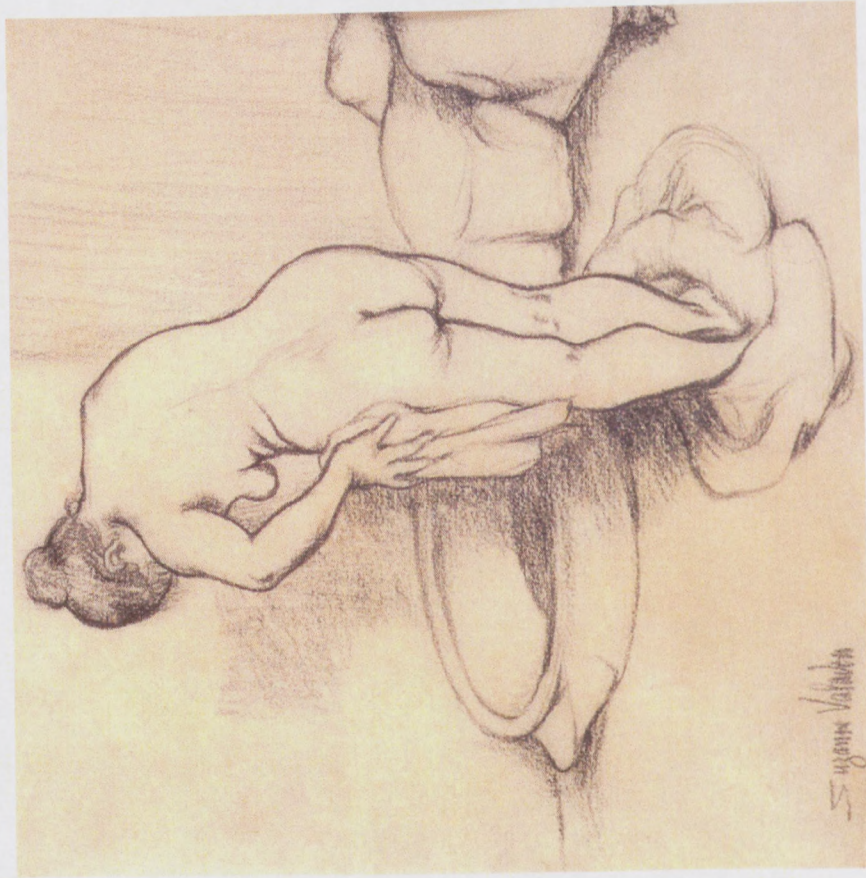


Figure 5.12

Suzanne Valadon, *Woman Bathing*, c.1894, pencil on laid paper, 15 x 15 cm

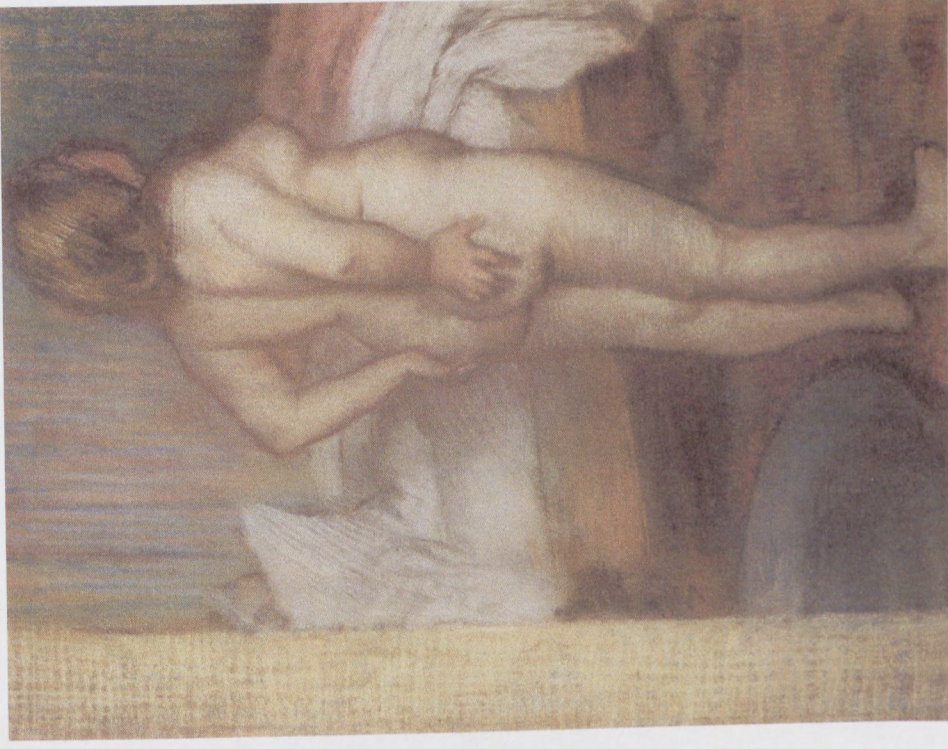


Figure 5.13

Edgar Degas, *Femme à son lever* (also known as *La Boulangère*), c.1886, pastel on paper, 67 x 52 cm





Figure 5.14

Suzanne Valadon, *Young Girl Kneeling in a Tub*, c.1910, red chalk on paper, 19 x 27 cm

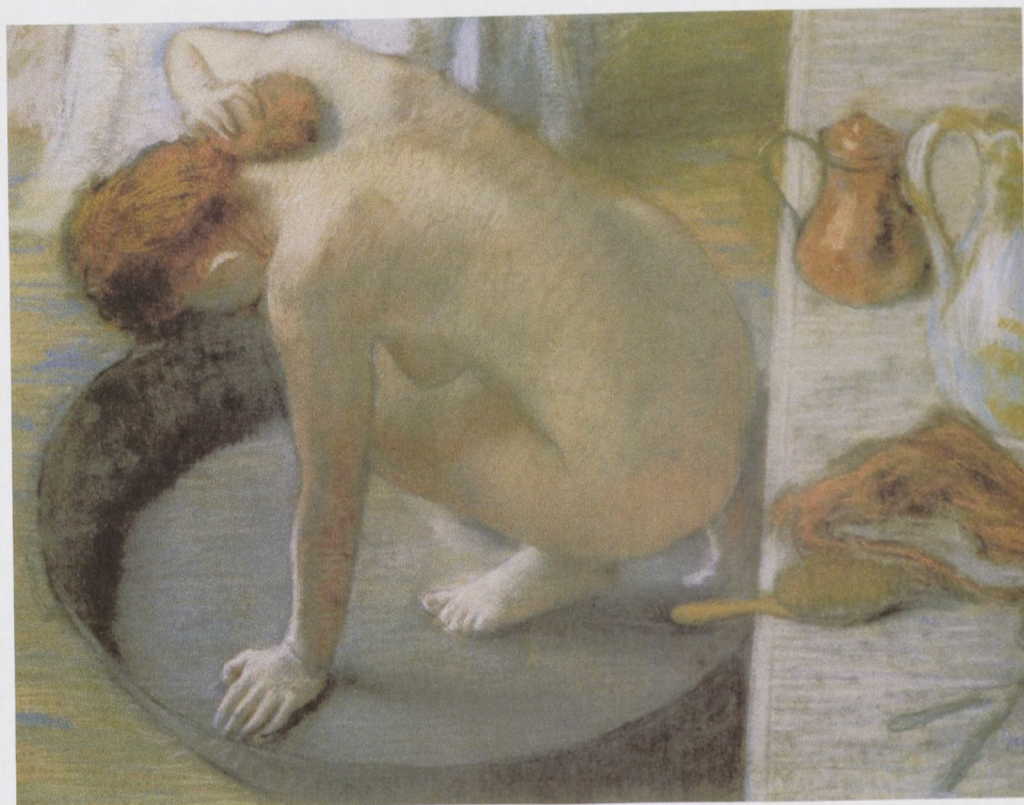


Figure 5.15

Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1886, pastel on paper, 60 x 83 cm



their baths could readily be bought in many Parisian brothels, or by renting a peephole at a public bathhouse.<sup>27</sup> Reviewing the 1886 suite of nudes, Gustave Geffroy rendered such voyeuristic impulses explicit when he suggested that Degas had attempted to paint 'the woman who does not know she is being observed, seen by someone hidden by a curtain or looking through a keyhole.'<sup>28</sup> Though posed in such a way so as to connote unselfconsciousness, Degas's late pastels are thus in fact the product of a very particular studio set-up, in which the elderly artist tried to work repeatedly through a psychologically and historically over-determined fascination with the subject of women bathing by manipulating his hapless models into ever more demanding and uncomfortable poses.<sup>29</sup>

Where, for Degas, access to the privileged sight of women bathing could be obtained only clandestinely, in the private room of a brothel or through a peephole, or vicariously, through painstaking reconstruction in the hermetic world of his studio, for a working-class woman such as Suzanne Valadon, bathing in the presence of another woman, or having another woman bathe in her presence, would have been part of her day-to-day reality. Valadon appears to have shared a single-room lodging with her mother in the rue Poteau until shortly after Utrillo's birth, when grandmother, mother and son moved into three rooms on the first floor of 7 rue Tourlaque (possibly thanks to the financial assistance of either Puvis de Chavannes or Miguel Utrillo).<sup>30</sup> While, as Heather Dawkins notes, the example of Degas may well have 'validated the nude as an entirely domestic subject for Valadon,' allowing her to depict 'ordinary moments of domestic nakedness without the

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<sup>27</sup> See Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 1986) and Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995). In her reading of contemporary critical responses to the exhibition of the 1886 bather suite, Heather Dawkins refers to a comment made by one of Degas's critics on the artist's intimate knowledge of the vestibules and rooms of the Turkish bath. Her research reveals that, during the 1880s, at least one public bath rented rooms by the week or month which were equipped with a peephole through which paying spectators could watch unsuspecting women bathe; see Heather Dawkins, 'Managing Degas,' in *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision*, eds. Richard Kendall & Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp.143-44.

<sup>28</sup> 'il a voulu peindre la femme *qui ne sait pas regardée*, telle qu'on la verrait, caché par un rideau, ou par le trou d'une serrure.'

Gustave Geffroy, 'Salon de 1886: VIII. Hors du Salon: Les Impressionnistes,' *La Justice*, 26 May 1886; reprinted in Ruth Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1888. Documentation Volume I: Reviews* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), pp.449-452, p.452.

<sup>29</sup> For an important psychoanalytic reading of Degas's fascination with the subject of women bathing, see Heather Dawkins, 'Grief and Fascination,' *differences* 4.3 (1992), pp.69-90. In detailing the artist's compulsive return to the same poses, his inability to complete work and his unapologetically cruel attitude towards both his female models and his long-suffering housekeeper, Zoë, a memoir published by a woman named Alice Michel provides a significant insight into the experience of modelling for Degas. For a major analysis of the significance of this unique enunciation of a working-class woman's cultural perspective on Degas, see Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture*.

<sup>30</sup> Rose, *Mistress of Montmartre*, p.64.



need to transform those moments into an aesthetic ideal requiring a privileged education,<sup>31</sup> the anatomical contortions of Degas's single figure nudes appear to have offered only so many representational possibilities to Suzanne Valadon. In a way that marks them apart from Degas's fictive images of the instinctive self-absorption of women at their toilette, many of Valadon's early drawings depict a young woman preparing for her bath in the presence of an older woman (Figure 5.17). Like the images of the naked Utrillo with his grandmother (Figure 5.18) they evoke some sense of the complexities and intimacies of the social relations between women, and between women and children. Yet the daily interactions of women and children do not appear to have held the same fascination for Suzanne Valadon as they so evidently did for Mary Cassatt, for whom the topic served as a long-term theme for formal research (see Figures 5.3 and 5.6 above). Where Cassatt returned, in the final decades of her artistic career, repeatedly to the subject of adult woman/child relations, charting again and again the exchange of glances and relay of gestures between young children and their caregivers in a series of rigorously tight and radically compressed compositional spaces, Valadon did not make the topic of either women or children bathing the focus of any such sustained artistic experimentation. As she sought to develop her art practice beyond small-scale drawings made in a domestic setting, she rather appears to have looked beyond the seemingly limited formal possibilities offered by Degas's single figure studies of women bathing, and to have begun to explore instead the narrative potentiality of figurative oil painting.

### *La Joie de vivre*: Reference and Deference

In the period immediately following 1909, Suzanne Valadon produced a significant number of large-scale paintings of both male and female nudes. In *La Joie de vivre* (1911, Figure 5.19) a group of four women are being observed from across a forest clearing by a young man (modelled by André Utter), who is positioned in the right hand foreground of the canvas, his arms folded across his chest, coolly appraising the naked bodies before him. The women remain seemingly unaware of his gaze, and indeed of each other; each faces in a different direction, each remains apparently absorbed in her own toilette. In depicting a group of female bathers in a landscape setting, Valadon at once responds and contributes to a complex genealogy of modernist painting, which had, by the first decade of the twentieth century, encompassed attempts both to debunk and to revive the traditional *topos*

<sup>31</sup> Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture*, pp.89-90.



**Figure 5.47**  
Suzanne Valadon, *La Toilette*, 1894, pencil on paper,  
42.7 x 22.5 cm



**Figure 5.48**  
Suzanne Valadon, *Maurice Utrillo nude and the scated Grandmother*, 1894, pencil  
on paper, 43 x 21 cm



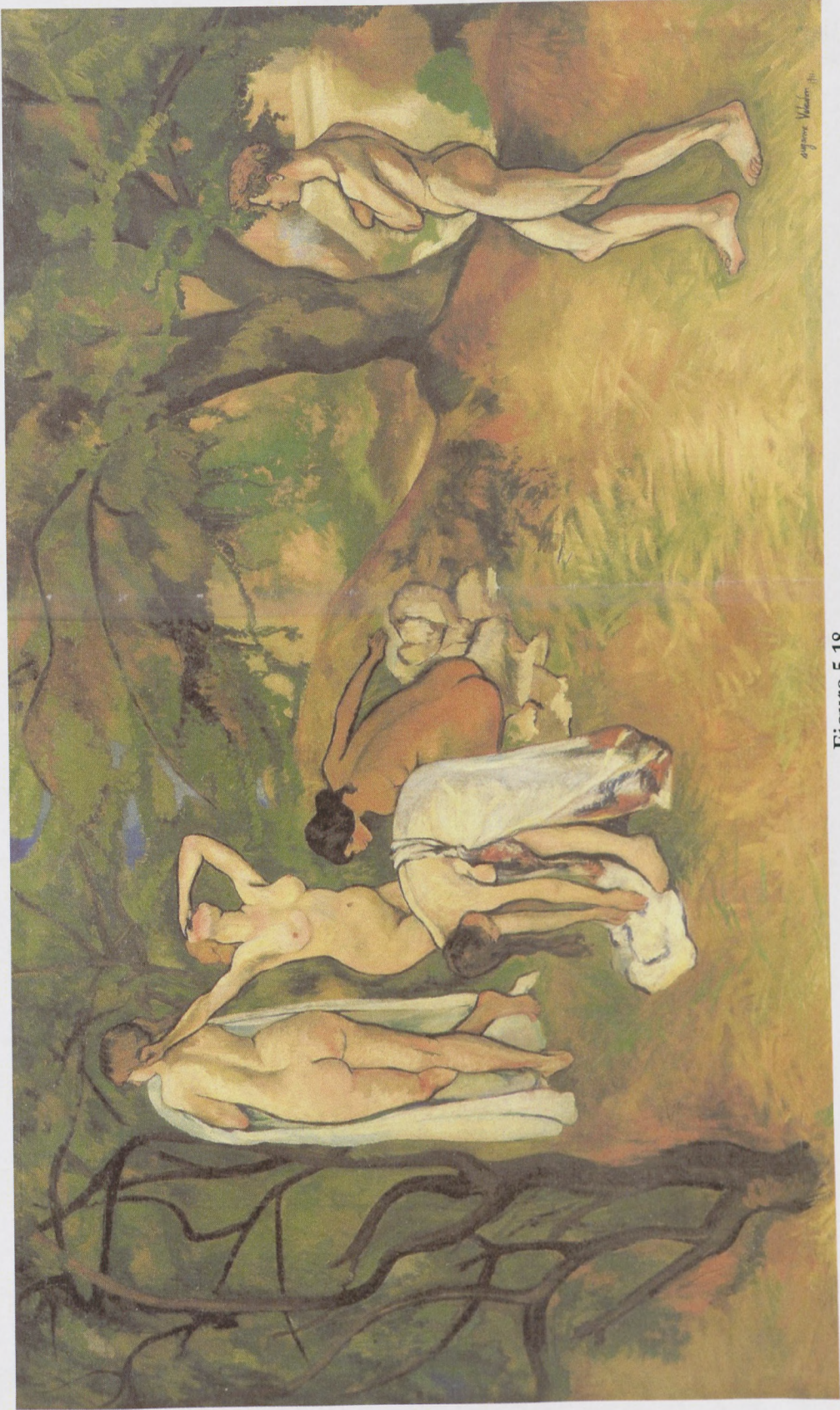


Figure 5.18

Suzanne Valadon, *La Joie de Vivre*, 1911, oil on canvas, 122.9 x 205.8 cm



of the female bather in nature.<sup>32</sup> The choice of this particular subject may, however, also have served as a useful compositional exercise for an artist who had only just begun to work on such a monumental scale, providing an opportunity to illustrate a variety of different poses. Thérèse Diamand-Rosinsky has suggested a number of possible sources for the four female figures who form the main focus of *La Joie de vivre*. As she points out, the back and hips of the figure on the far left hand of the group are reminiscent of Courbet's *Bathers* (1853, Montpellier, Musée Fabre). In contrast, the central figure of the group is more dramatically posed, her head flung back and her arms stretched out in a gesture that, Diamand-Rosinsky suggests, mimics that of the woman on the extreme left of Matisse's *Bonheur de vivre* (1905-06, Merion, Barnes Foundation). This central figure is partially obscured by a semi-draped woman bending down, in a pose which Diamand-Rosinsky proposes to have been inspired by the nymph in the background of Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay).<sup>33</sup> Once one gets drawn into this game of pictorial source hunting, potential referents for all four figures do indeed seem to proliferate: this third figure stoops to dry herself in a gesture reminiscent of many of Degas's late bather pastels. Behind this third figure sits a darker skinned, Gauguin-esque woman, while the influence of Gauguin can be further discerned in the curvilinear arabesques of the tree in the left-hand foreground of the painting. Although feminist art historians have endeavoured to read this dislocated group of female bathers as a conscious attempt on Valadon's part to 'interrupt the continuity of the singular narrative "woman as nature" and [to] expose its assumptions about universal woman,'<sup>34</sup> I would argue that the disjunctions of this particular composition may rather arise from its awkward attempt to montage together a number of different art historical references. Though *La Joie de vivre* is undoubtedly an ambitious attempt to stake a place for its creator within a particular tradition of modernist representation, Valadon's dialogue with this tradition does, in this

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<sup>32</sup> In the 1850s and 1860s, both Courbet and Manet had introduced into their paintings of female bathers contemporary references. Where images such as Courbet's *Bathers* (1853, Montpellier, Musée Fabre) and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) rely on the tension between their self-conscious appropriation of the visual past and their calculated references to the present day, by the final two decades of the nineteenth century artists including Renoir, Cézanne, Signac, Denis and Matisse were increasingly distancing themselves from the attempt by a previous generation of avant-garde painters to depict scenes of modern, urban life and were instead making diverse use of classical and pastoral precedents in their paintings of female bathers. On the significance of the idyllic figure in the landscape as a major trend in fin-de-siècle painting, see Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 2002). For further discussion of the representation of the female bather in nineteenth-century France, see also Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Diamand-Rosinsky, p.88.

<sup>34</sup> Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, p.202.

particular canvas at least, appear to remain at the level of direct citation, rather than critical re-engagement.

*La Joie de vivre* was first exhibited at the 1911 *Salon des Indépendants*. In a gesture indicative of a renewed commitment to an artistic career, Valadon began to show work regularly at both the *Indépendants* and the *Salon d'Automne* during the 1910s, as well as participating in a number of exhibitions—both solo and group—in private galleries in Paris, including that of Berthe Weill.<sup>35</sup> At the same time as she began to achieve increasing professional recognition, so too were her son Maurice Utrillo's paintings growing in popularity amongst dealers and collectors alike. In a post-war cultural climate characterised not only by a collective desire for national regeneration but also by a generalised nostalgia for a lost way of life, Utrillo's paintings of Montmartre street scenes held widespread appeal. In the period immediately after the First World War, the price of his paintings rocketed from approximately 3,000 francs in 1919 to 60,000 francs in 1926.<sup>36</sup> Although Suzanne Valadon's canvases never attained the astronomical prices fetched by those of her son, her growing reputation did ensure that she received a number of significant commissions during the late 1910s and early 1920s to paint portraits of wealthy figures in the Parisian art world, including the critic Gustave Coquiot and his wife Mauricia (**Figure 5.69**). The commercial success of both mother and son is further indicated by the fact that, in 1924, Valadon and Utrillo signed a contract with the *Galerie Bernheim Jeune*, which guaranteed them a combined income of one million francs per annum, funding the purchase of a château and fuelling rumours of an increasingly eccentric extravagance on Valadon's part.<sup>37</sup> Situated on the Right Bank, the *Galerie Bernheim Jeune* was a prosperous

<sup>35</sup> Berthe Weill was one of only a few dealers in Paris during the early years of the twentieth century who specialised in vanguard art, opening a gallery dedicated to showing the work of 'young artists' in 1901. She was the first Parisian dealer to sell the work of Picasso, and the *Galerie Berthe Weill* was also one of the first commercial galleries to exhibit the work of the Fauve group. Her commitment to 'young artists' also extended to many women artists working within an avant-garde idiom, including Suzanne Valadon, Marie Laurencin, Jacqueline Marval and Emilie Charny; see Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) for further information on Berthe Weill, including (Appendix 2) a list of all exhibitions held at the *Galerie Berthe Weill* in the period 1901-26.

<sup>36</sup> See Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995) for a discussion of the rise in popularity of Utrillo's paintings in the post-war period. On the impact of the Great War on French painting during the 1920s, see also Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> On the development of the contract system, see Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors of Modern Painting: Aspects of the Parisian Art Market Between 1910 and 1930* (New York & London: Garland, 1981), pp.37-41. Gee highlights the fact that, in the post-war period, the contract system became the preferred method for a dealer to buy from an artist. The contract generally provided for the purchase of all or a given quantity of the output of an artist over a fixed period at a fixed price per number or format. The dealer paid a regular sum to the artist, thus guaranteeing him or her a regular income, in exchange for which the paintings became the





Figure 5.17

Suzanne Valadon, *Portrait of Madame Coquiot*, 1915, oil on canvas, 93 x 73 cm



and influential gallery, which owned large stocks of nineteenth-century academic painting, together with an established collection of Impressionist work. Their contemporary art department, managed by the critic Félix Fénéon, specialised in the sale of figurative paintings designed to appeal to a wealthy clientele.<sup>38</sup> From the mid-1920s onwards, perhaps with this very lucrative contract in mind, Suzanne Valadon began to paint in a smaller format, and to concentrate more on still lifes and flower paintings. As Malcolm Gee has demonstrated, she was also one of the first artists to send work to the regular auctions of contemporary art that began to be held at the Hôtel Drouot from the early 1920s onwards.<sup>39</sup> It thus seems plausible to speculate that those of Valadon's works which were not painted for a specific patron were produced at least partly in response to the vagaries of the contemporary art market. From a noticeably uneven body of work it is, however, possible to isolate certain paintings in which Suzanne Valadon moves through a necessary process of reference and allegiance-defining deference in order to produce her own different and distinctive re-working of key modernist tropes.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Future Unveiled: A Dis-Orient(alis)ing Gesture*

*The Future Unveiled* of 1912 (**Figure 5.2b**) depicts a nude female figure reclining on a divan, her left leg bent, and her left hand resting on her knee in a relaxed pose. In defiance of academic convention, the rich red tones of the luxuriously wavy hair that cascades down her back are echoed by a vivid lick of orange paint in her pubic region. Though her voluptuous body is angled towards the viewer, the model looks down towards the Romany woman who kneels at the foot of the divan, reading her fortune in the cards. In its pairing of a reclining, nude, European woman with an ethnically differentiated attendant, and in its attention to such authenticating details as the rug on which the cards are laid out and the throw draped over the back of the divan, the painting draws upon a nineteenth-century French tradition of Orientalist imagery. In Ingres's *Odalisque with Slave* of 1842 (**Figure**

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property of the dealer. The dealer could then freely dispose of those paintings at any price that he chose without incurring any further obligations to the artist.

On Valadon's extravagance, see John Storm, *The Valadon Story: The Life of Suzanne Valadon* (London: Longmans, 1959). Storm's account has Suzanne Valadon dressed to paint in haute couture, feeding beluga caviar to her cats, and randomly throwing 100 franc notes out of the window.

<sup>38</sup> Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors*, pp.67-73.

<sup>39</sup> Auctioneer Alphonse Bellier began to hold regular sales at the Hôtel Drouot during the early 1920s, with the express intention of creating a market for contemporary art. He persuaded artists including Suzanne Valadon, Raoul Dufy and André Derain to give him work to sell by guaranteeing them a minimum price. As Malcolm Gee notes, these sales 'represented a rather conservative view of contemporary painting,' tending to favour those artists whose work was 'relatively easy to appreciate, because it related directly to past styles.'

Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors*, pp.23-36.

<sup>40</sup> I am here drawing on Griselda Pollock's formulation of 'reference, deference and difference' as a key stylistic gambit of the avant-garde; see Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.14.



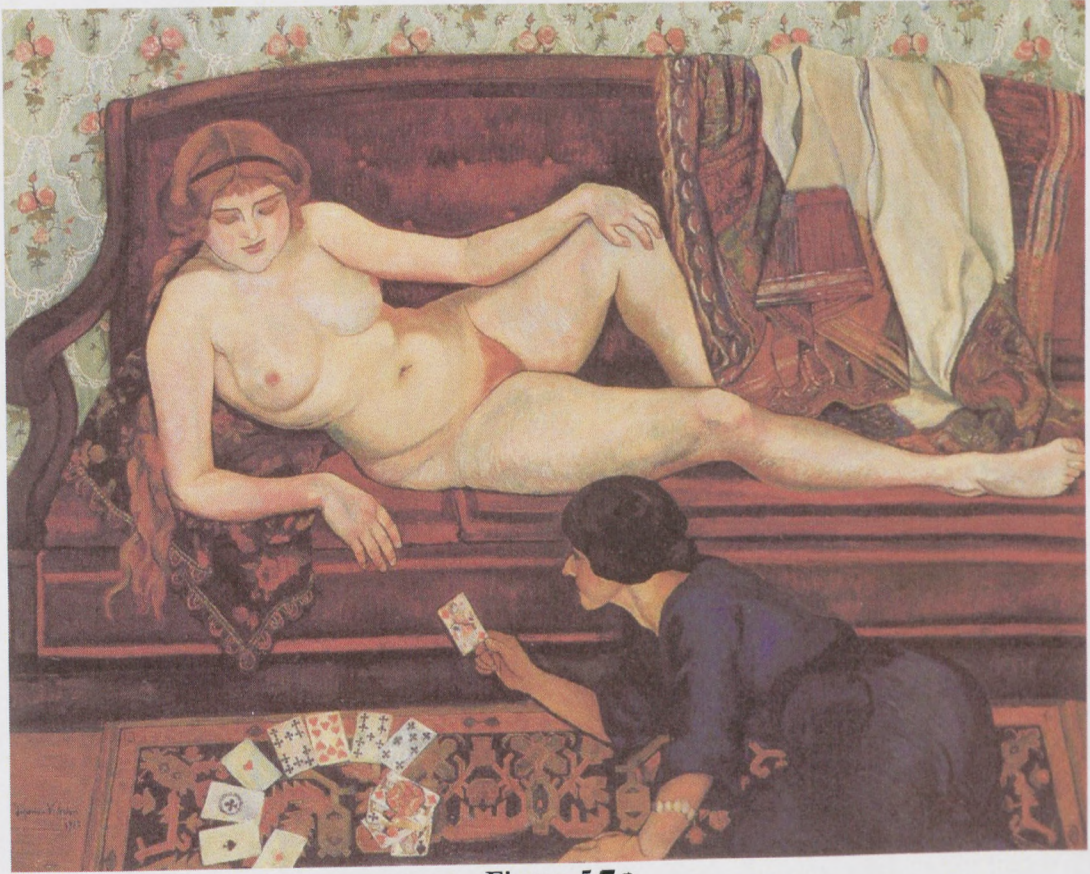


Figure 5.70  
Suzanne Valadon, *The Future Unveiled*, 1912, oil on canvas, 63 x 130 cm



Figure 5.81  
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with Slave*, 1842,  
oil on canvas, 76 x 105 cm



5.21 for example, a nude woman is being entertained by a darker-skinned female musician. The nude figure stretches languorously, her creamy flesh exposed for the view of the spectator, her blonde hair flowing loosely across the cushion against which she leans. Her eyes are dreamily averted and she appears completely taken in by the music. The musician seems equally absorbed in playing her lute, her unseeing eyes turned upwards. Numerous visual clues, such as the hookah pipe in the lower right hand corner of the composition, the decoration of the interior space and the architectural structure that constitutes the vanishing point of the painting, serve to locate the scene in the 'Orient' or, more specifically, in the Oriental harem. This juxtaposition of nude, European woman and non-Western female attendant within the exoticised space of the harem or bathhouse in fact forms a major trope of nineteenth-century French painting, running from the work of Ingres and Delacroix through to that of a subsequent generation of *Salonnier* painters such as Jean-Léon Gérôme.<sup>41</sup> As feminist art historian Linda Nochlin first pointed out, within these paintings, 'the Orient' exists primarily as a projection of the western, masculine imaginary, 'a fantasy space or screen onto which strong desires—erotic, sadistic, or both—could be projected with impunity.'<sup>42</sup> Such imagery thus offers to the male viewer a fantasy not only of sexual control over the white woman's body but also of colonial domination over his non-European Other.

How, then, might an artist who is also a woman attempt to negotiate such a heavily freighted tradition of representation?<sup>43</sup> In Suzanne Valadon's painting, the two female figures have been transported from the fantasy space of the seraglio to that rather more familiar site of modern sociability, the bourgeois drawing room. In contrast to the state of dreamy abstraction and individual absorption conveyed by Ingres, they both appear intensely focussed on the cards laid out on the floor. It is in this respect instructive to compare *The Future Unveiled* with an image painted the same year by Félix Vallotton (1865-1925), which also features a nude woman playing cards (Figure 5.12). Though Vallotton portrays his model as apparently engrossed in her game of solitaire, her pose is clearly

<sup>41</sup> See Donald A Rosenthal, *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting 1800-1880*, exh. cat., (Rochester NY: Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, 1982)

<sup>42</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient' in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p.41.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the work of an earlier generation of nineteenth-century women painters, including in particular Henriette Browne (active 1855-78), who worked within the academic Orientalist tradition, see Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996). There remains, however, significant research still to be carried out on those modernist women artists, including not only Suzanne Valadon but also such figures as Jacqueline Marval and Georgette Agutte, who attempted to engage with Orientalist subject matter, most notably the female odalisque, in their painting practice.



designed to accentuate her buttocks and hips, which are angled towards the viewer. The complete lack of background detail and harsh overhead lighting serve further to focus our gaze upon her putty-like flesh; it seems fair to say that this painting is more about the control and objectification of the female body, than the evocation of any state of psychological interiority. In contrast to the atmosphere of isolation and alienation that pervades Vallotton's painting, Suzanne Valadon imagines her card player as engaged in a sociable relationship with another woman, their mutual yet distinct involvement in the shared activity of reading the cards intersecting with and interrupting the prostitutional narrative that scholars have previously endeavoured to read into the image.<sup>44</sup> It is, furthermore, my contention that, in its representation of a relationship between two women that is 'premised on both difference and convergence through questions of class and race,'<sup>45</sup> *The Future Unveiled* revives and revises a project initially begun by Manet in the 1860s.

Most discussions of *Olympia* tend to focus exclusively on the figure of the naked white woman lying on the bed. Yet the painting also contains a second figure: a maidservant of African descent bearing an oversized bouquet of flowers. To acknowledge the presence of this second figure is to place *Olympia* in dialogue with that series of Orientalist paintings which similarly rely on the juxtaposition of nude, white woman and ethnically differentiated attendant (see **Figure 5.8** above). Griselda Pollock goes one step further. *Olympia* should, she argues, be considered an *anti-Orientalist* work. Supplementing those earlier feminist interventions which provided the beginnings of a life narrative for Victorine Meurent, the working-class woman who modelled for the figure of the white nude in *Olympia*, Pollock insists upon a social identity for the woman who posed for the figure of the black maidservant.<sup>46</sup> Her research into this woman, who is referred to in Manet's notebooks only by the Francophone name 'Laure', revealed that she was in fact

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<sup>44</sup> Patricia Mathews cites the traditional symbolic associations of the queen of diamonds which, she argues, when placed in conjunction with the four kings in the circular arrangement of the cards, signifies a prostitute or courtesan. In her reading, 'the painting thus implicates the folly of indulgence in card games and fortune telling, generally an activity performed by gypsies assumed to be thieves in the most common representations of them during the seventeenth century, and the eroticism of the odalisque or the courtesan, leading to a moralising reading of the nude.' According to Mathews, 'the symbolism of the queen of diamonds can also be read as a celebration of the female body as physical, sensual and sexual, with overtones of an essential femininity, or its opposite, a working woman/prostitute.'

Patricia Mathews, 'Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon,' *Art Bulletin* 73.3 (September 1991), pp.415-30, p.420.

<sup>45</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p.254.

<sup>46</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the Dark, Seeing Double, at Least, with Manet,' pp.247-315 in *Differencing the Canon*. For a discussion of the life of Victorine Meurent, see Lipton, *Alias Olympia*.

born in Paris in 1839 of African-Caribbean parentage, and that she subsequently worked as a nursemaid for a wealthy Parisian family. When she modelled for *Olympia*, she wore an oversized, European-style dress that, Pollock proposes, may have been purchased from a second-hand clothes market in one of the working-class districts of Paris, together with a richly coloured head wrap. While this head wrap indexes *Olympia* to contemporary Orientalist imagery, Pollock argues that Laure's dress serves to undercut the Orientalist fantasy of the African woman as exotic and sexualised Other, instead assigning her a recognisable place within the modern metropolis. For Griselda Pollock, the modernity of *Olympia* accordingly lies in a two-fold gesture. Not only, as much previous scholarship has already suggested, does the painting serve to locate the naked white woman within specific time, space and class relations, but so too does it make 'calculated and strategic revisions to the trope of the African woman—now also signalled as a figure located in time, space and class relations, that is in the history of the then present, as another Parisian proletarian.'<sup>47</sup> It is this aspect of Manet's key intervention in the genre of the female nude which, I would propose, may be *preposterously* intuited in *The Future Unveiled*. In its location of ethnic difference not in the fantasy realm of 'the Orient' but rather in the concrete historical present, the painting appears to 'beckon' to *Olympia*.<sup>48</sup>

But what did it mean to invoke *Olympia* in avant-gardist Paris in 1912? In their major artistic statements of 1907, *Nu bleu: Souvenir de Biskra* (Baltimore, The Baltimore Museum of Art) and *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. K. No. 145)* (New York, The Museum of Modern Art) respectively, Matisse and Picasso each drew upon a wide range of antecedents from the history of western art, including *Olympia*, as well as deploying forms derived from the masks and sculpted art forms of non-European cultures. In Picasso's brothel scene, the figure who draws aside a curtain to enter the tableau from the top right hand corner, her face represented in the shape of an African mask, recalls the figure of the maid in Manet's picture, while the presence of 'Olympia' herself, multiplied and rotated through ninety degrees, is registered in the rigidly repetitive poses of the two central figures, who stare out to confront the spectator head-on. In Matisse's *Nu bleu*, a female figure reclines in what appears to be a North African oasis, her lower body flattened against the canvas even as

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<sup>47</sup> Pollock, p.294.

<sup>48</sup> This is not, however, to imply that this issue is by any means consciously or consistently worked through in Suzanne Valadon's oeuvre. As discussed in Chapter Three, in the period 1919-20 Valadon executed a series of nude studies of a mixed race model which clearly reduplicate commonly held stereotypes as to the 'primitive' and exotic nature of black female sexuality. By placing *The Future Unveiled* in conversation with *Olympia*, my aim is to show how something of the 'unfinished business' of Manet's intervention in the Orientalist tradition during the 1860s resurfaces in Valadon's painting.

certain other body parts, most notably her breasts, remain emphatically three-dimensional. While the painting clearly invokes—if only to refute—a whole series of recumbent nudes from the tradition of European art, including *Olympia*, so too does it testify to Matisse's borrowings from non-western, specifically African art forms, as refracted through his own sculptural practice. A more detailed analysis of each of these canvases' complex engagement with both the art of the past and the cultural artefacts of non-European societies lies beyond the scope of my argument in this chapter. In evoking these two canonical works of avant-gardist painting, my purpose is rather to draw attention to the fact that, in the first decade of the twentieth century, *Olympia* continued to serve as a vital point of departure in the on-going modernist struggle with the genre of the female nude, whether imagined as the site of a primal sexuality (the prostitudinal bodies of Picasso), or utilised as a vehicle for formal experimentation (the insistent foregrounding of painterly process in Matisse's *Nu bleu*).

During this same period, several key events cast the work of Manet in a new light. In February 1907, *Olympia* was transferred from the Musée du Luxembourg to the Louvre, where it was hung as a pendant to Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* (1814, Paris, Musée du Louvre). The juxtaposition of the two paintings rekindled the terms of a debate in avant-garde circles over the respective merits of Ingres and Manet that had initially been provoked by the retrospective exhibitions of the two artists' work organised by the *Société du Salon d'Automne* in 1905.<sup>49</sup> Roger Benjamin has analysed the significance of the re-presentation of Ingres at the 1905 *Salon d'Automne* to a new generation of progressive painters, who sought increasingly to distance their own artistic project from the earlier, Impressionist endeavour to record scenes of contemporary, urban life. He contends that the anatomical distortions and spatial condensations of Ingres's nude studies came to serve as a significant visual resource for both Matisse and Picasso in their diverse attempts to break the mould of academic anatomy in their representations of the female nude, pointing out that, when Matisse went to see *Olympia* in its new location at the Louvre, he was said to have preferred

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<sup>49</sup> This paired retrospective of sixty-eight works by Ingres and thirty-one by Manet were the third set in a series mounted in the first decade of the twentieth century by the fledgling *Société du Salon d'Automne*, which had first opened its doors in 1903. These annual retrospectives quickly became a key feature of the annual *Salon d'Automne*, and indicate the extent to which the showcasing of the latest developments in modern painting were intimately bound up with attempts to establish an artistic lineage for that work. Artists featured included Gauguin (1903), Cézanne, Redon, Renoir, Puvis de Chavannes and Toulouse-Lautrec (1904), Manet and Ingres (1905), Gauguin and Courbet (1906), Cézanne, Eva Gonzalez and Berthe Morisot (1907), El Greco (1908). For a useful overview of the founding of the *Société du Salon d'Automne* and its position within the institutional framework of the early-twentieth-century Parisian art world, see Green, *Art in France*, pp.39-43. For a more detailed discussion of art critical responses to the juxtaposition of the work of Manet and Ingres in 1905/07, see Roger Benjamin, 'Ingres Chez Les Fauves,' *Art History* 23.5 (December 2000), pp.743-71.



Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*: according to fellow Fauvist Jean Puy, 'the sensual and wilfully chosen line of Ingres seemed to him more suited to the needs of painting.'<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to those avant-garde artists, including Matisse, whose interest increasingly came to lie in a formal distillation of the very processes and procedures of painting itself, and for whom the apparent 'realism' of *Olympia* began, therefore, to seem of limited interest, Suzanne Valadon continued to engage with *Olympia* in her representations of the female nude from the period 1909 onwards. Manet, I propose, was a crucial figure in enabling and then sustaining Valadon's move from small-scale drawing and engraving into figurative oil painting in the 1910s and 1920s. Some measure of the difference between her artistic project and that of her contemporaries can be gained through comparison of a later painting by Valadon with one from the same period by Matisse. Like Suzanne Valadon's *The Blue Room* (Figure 5.10), Matisse's *Odalisque au coffret rouge* of 1926 (Figure 5.23) plays with the idea of dress/undress, depicting a semi-clothed figure reclining on a divan, set against an ornamental background. Yet the two artists intervene in the Orientalist tradition differently. In Matisse's hands, the figure of the odalisque becomes an iconic type, a vehicle for formal experimentation, rather than an historically situated individual; the modernist gesture of the *Odalisque au coffret rouge* would seem to lie in its use of simplified, abstracting forms and bold blocks of contrasting colour. Valadon's canvas, on the other hand, signals its modernity through its treatment of its subject, opening up as it does a space within the genre of the female nude for the representation of an isolated moment in the daily existence of a uniquely classed and gendered human subject. It is in this respect that Suzanne Valadon may be considered a particularly attentive reader of 'Manet'. *Olympia*, I have argued thus far in this chapter, held out to Valadon the possibility not only of representing the female body as the site of classed and sexed subjective experience (*The Blue Room*), but also, newly reframed for an emergent generation of avant-garde painters as a result of its elevation to the Louvre and consequent juxtaposition with the work of Ingres, of reworking Orientalist visual fantasy in order to portray a relationship between two women, each represented in her social and cultural specificity (*The Future Unveiled*), a possibility which is then registered symptomatically in a subsequent attempt to explore another dimension of female inter-subjective experience, in the form of the passage of pink paint that makes its unexpected way from 'Olympia'/Victorine's orchid to Gilberte's bow in *The Abandoned Doll*.

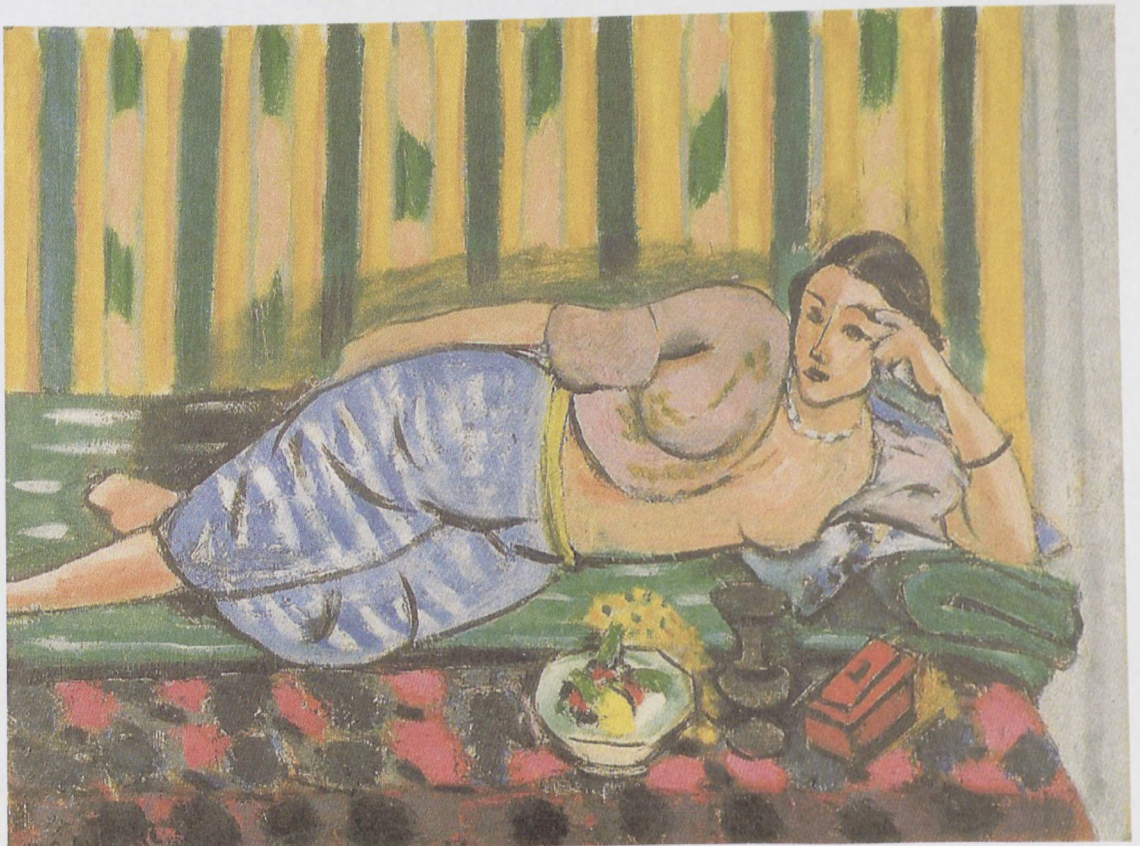
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<sup>50</sup> Jean Puy, 'Souvenirs,' *Le Point* 21 (July 1939), p.36; cited by Benjamin, 'Ingres Chez Les Fauves,' p.763.





**Figure 5.22**  
Félix Vallotton, *Solitaire (Nude Playing Cards)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 89.5 x 117 cm



**Figure 5.23**  
Henri Matisse, *Odalisque au coffret rouge*, 1926, oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm



## ***The Abandoned Doll: Female Adolescence and Feminine Difference***

*The Abandoned Doll* begs, in addition, to be considered in relation to a number of other paintings produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that also took as their topic, female adolescence. As several major studies have noted, the emergence of a specifically modern concept of adolescence at the fin-de-siècle should be seen as inseparable from the coterminous development of new literary and artistic forms.<sup>51</sup> In her analysis of the depiction of both childhood and adolescence in Impressionist painting, Anna Green shows how, as adolescence increasingly began to be understood as a distinct stage of psychosocial development between childhood and adulthood, to be characterised by such traits as fleetingness and ephemerality, self-consciousness and uncertainty, so too did it come to serve as a significant cipher not only for modernity, but for modernist painting as well.<sup>52</sup>

Both Anna Green and John Neubauer, in his earlier comparative study of adolescence as a *topos* in fin-de-siècle literature and art, tend to view adolescence as an implicitly male phenomenon. Green's attention is primarily directed towards the depiction of the male adolescent in paintings such as Manet's *Luncheon in the Studio* (1868, Munich, Neue Pinakothek), Renoir's *Riding in the Bois de Boulogne* (1873, Hamburg, Museum of Art) and Seurat's *Bathers, Asnières* (1883-4, London, National Gallery), while Neubauer discusses the portrayal of male adolescence in a range of literary works including Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913) and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).<sup>53</sup> His discussion of female adolescence is restricted to its representation in the work of visual

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<sup>51</sup> Cultural historian Philippe Ariès was the first to point out that adolescence was fundamentally a modern concept. In his pioneering analysis of shifting attitudes to childhood from medieval to modern times, he points out that, although the term *adolescens* was not unknown prior to the nineteenth century, it was used interchangeably with *puer*, the word for 'boy'. 'People had no idea of what we today call adolescence,' he contends, 'and the idea was a long time taking shape' (Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* [1960], trans. Robert Baldick, intro. Adam Phillips [London: Pimlico, 1996], p.27). Other studies have built upon these preliminary observations in order to analyse how the emergence of an idea of adolescence as a distinct stage of development was intimately bound up with the broader social transformations occasioned by modernity (industrialisation, urbanisation, the growth of the middle classes and concomitant reorganisation of the structure of the family). Erik Erikson argues that, where adolescent children had previously been educated at home or else began work at an early age, over the course of the nineteenth century, a growing proportion of young people spent longer years at school: 'as technological advances put more and more time between early school life and the young person's final access to specialised work, the stage of adolescence becomes an even more marked and conscious period' (Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* [New York & London: W W Norton & Company, 1968], p.128). On the intersections between adolescence and literary and artistic modernism, see John Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992) and Anna Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence 1848-1886* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*.

<sup>53</sup> Although Green does devote several chapters to the representation of girlhood in Impressionist painting, the figure of the female adolescent by and large escapes her consideration.



artists including Edvard Munch (1863-1944), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) and Egon Schiele (1890-1918) and in Freud's 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905).<sup>54</sup>

While both Neubauer and Green provide only a limited analysis of the representation of female adolescence in the work of artists and writers who were men, feminist scholars have been drawn to Berthe Morisot's paintings of her adolescent daughter, Julie Manet. Mary Jacobus has perceptively analysed how these images function not only as inquiries into a key subjectivising moment for both mother and daughter, but also reflect Morisot's evolving formal preoccupations as a modernist artist: 'dissolving the literality of the feminine figure in the play of light and shadow, or abstracting it as pure form, Morisot also demarcates the space of her canvasses as an interstitial space—the space of feminine (self-) difference and self-loss—rather than as the space of sight or possession. This liminal space questions not only the limits of maternal preoccupation, but the limits of figuration.'<sup>55</sup> In *Julie Daydreaming* of 1894 (**Figure 5.16**), Julie, wearing a virginal white dress, appears entirely lost in her own thoughts. Unlike so many of the other paintings she produced of her daughter, Morisot here portrays Julie not in the recognisable spaces of the bourgeois family home (compare, for example, *Julie Playing the Violin* [1893, Private Collection]) but rather against a flat and featureless background, her loose, chestnut hair seeming almost to meld into that green and brown wash. Julie stares absently out of the canvas, her enigmatic and oddly impenetrable gaze finding its visual counterpart in the blankly unreadable space against which she is represented.

It is tempting to draw a comparison between Morisot's evocation of this state of adolescent self-absorption, and Edvard Munch's near contemporaneous representation of *Puberty* (**Figure 5.15**), in which a painfully vulnerable young girl attempts to shield her naked body from exposure, her huge eyes staring back in fright at the artist/spectator, whose shadow looms threateningly over her. This amorphous dark shape was taken by contemporary commentators to represent the 'spirit of masculinity', which descended upon the young girl at the moment of menarche (signified, it was proposed, in the painting by the streaks of red paint on the figure's hands and feet). Julius Meier-Graefe vividly

<sup>54</sup> Although Neubauer does place the 'Dora' case history in dialogue with the published adolescent diaries of psychoanalyst Karen Horney, which describe both her experiences of coming of age in fin-de-siècle Germany and her adolescent encounter with psychoanalysis, he ultimately dismisses both Horney and Dora as 'victim[s] of the adolescence of psychoanalysis' (*Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence*, p.140).

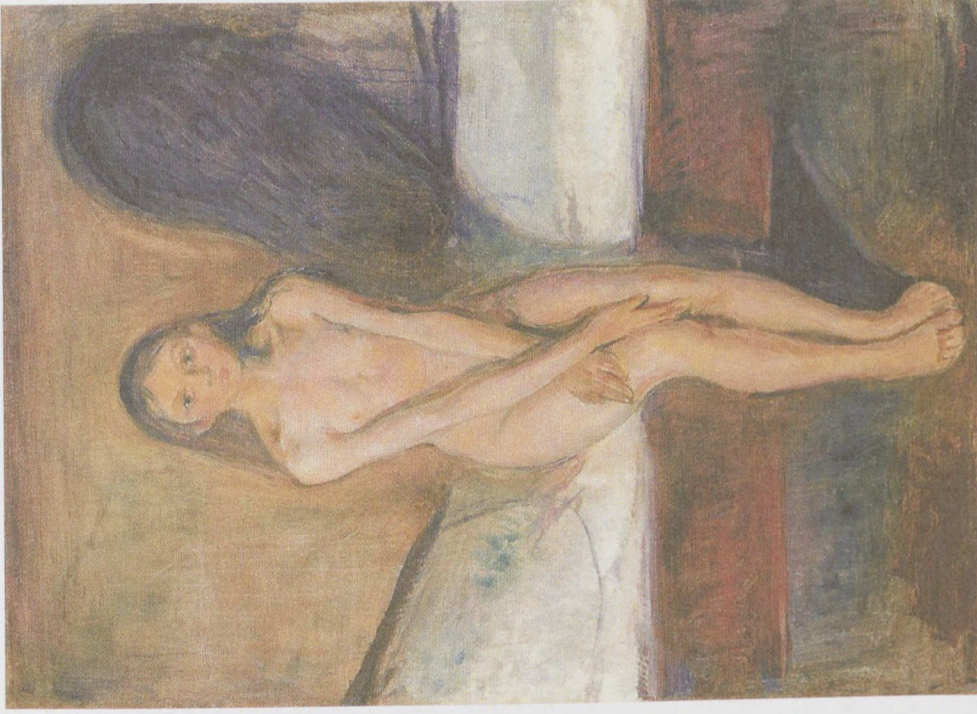
<sup>55</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Narcissa's Gaze: Berthe Morisot and the Filial Mirror' in *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art and Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p.274. On Morisot's paintings of Julie, see also Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.212-52.





**Figure 5.14**

Berthe Morisot, *Julie Daydreaming*, 1894, oil on canvas, 64 x 54 cm



**Figure 5.15**

Edvard Munch, *Puberty*, 1892, oil on canvas, 149 x 112 cm



imagined how the intervention of this male spectre would serve to awaken a hitherto dormant sexuality in the young girl, instantly transforming her, not merely into an adult woman, but into a terrifyingly voracious *femme fatale*: ‘now she goes forth and she’ll torment the first man as though she had tormented hundreds, and she will be so profligate, as though she had already been a whore in the womb.’<sup>56</sup> Where the narrative Meier-Graefe constructs for Munch’s painting thus places its emphasis on the young girl’s initiation into adult sexuality at the hands of an external, male force, in her representation of her adolescent daughter daydreaming, Berthe Morisot chooses rather to focus on a moment of self-contained introspection—even, perhaps, of autoeroticism: Julie rests her left hand against her face, her little finger absently caressing her cheek in a gesture that, to Mary Jacobus, suggests ‘the pleasure of a body discovering itself.’<sup>57</sup> The social and cultural constraints that, in the late nineteenth century, conspired to censor the access of haute-bourgeois women such as Berthe Morisot and Julie Manet to their bodies were, however, such as to inhibit both mother and daughter from directly acknowledging and exploring such sensual pleasures. The painting is thus ultimately able to make only this most oblique reference to female adolescence as a time of awakening sexual desire. In *Julie Daydreaming*, Morisot rather depicts a moment of private reverie, her attempt to give pictorial form to this state of psychological interiority contrasting with Munch’s flagrant display of the barely developed body of his adolescent model.

Munch’s painting would subsequently serve as a precedent for a significant series of drawings and paintings of naked adolescent girls executed by the Brücke group of artists in the period c.1909-10. Max Pechstein later recalled how, in their desire to paint the unclothed female body in nature, the group were initially attracted to the seemingly unrehearsed posturing of these young girls, the daughters of a local artist’s widow, ‘who were not professional models and would therefore guarantee us movements free from training.’<sup>58</sup> Yet many of the group’s most telling paintings of the two sisters depict them not *en plein air*, but rather in the self-consciously bohemian setting of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s Dresden studio. In his portrait of *Marcella* (**Figure 5.12**), Kirchner positions his young model on a sofa with her arms folded across her naked body. While the pose may have been derived from Munch, the painting is executed in a highly coloured, simplified

<sup>56</sup> Julius Meier-Griebe in Stanislaw Przybyszewski (ed.), *Das Werk des Edvard Munch. Vier Beiträge* (Berlin, 1894), cited by David Ehrenpreis, ‘The Figure of the Backfisch: Representing Puberty in Wilhelmine Germany,’ *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 67.4 (2004), pp.479-508, p.499.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobus, *First Things*, p.285.

<sup>58</sup> Max Pechstein, *Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1960), pp.41-43, cited by Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence*, pp.97-98.



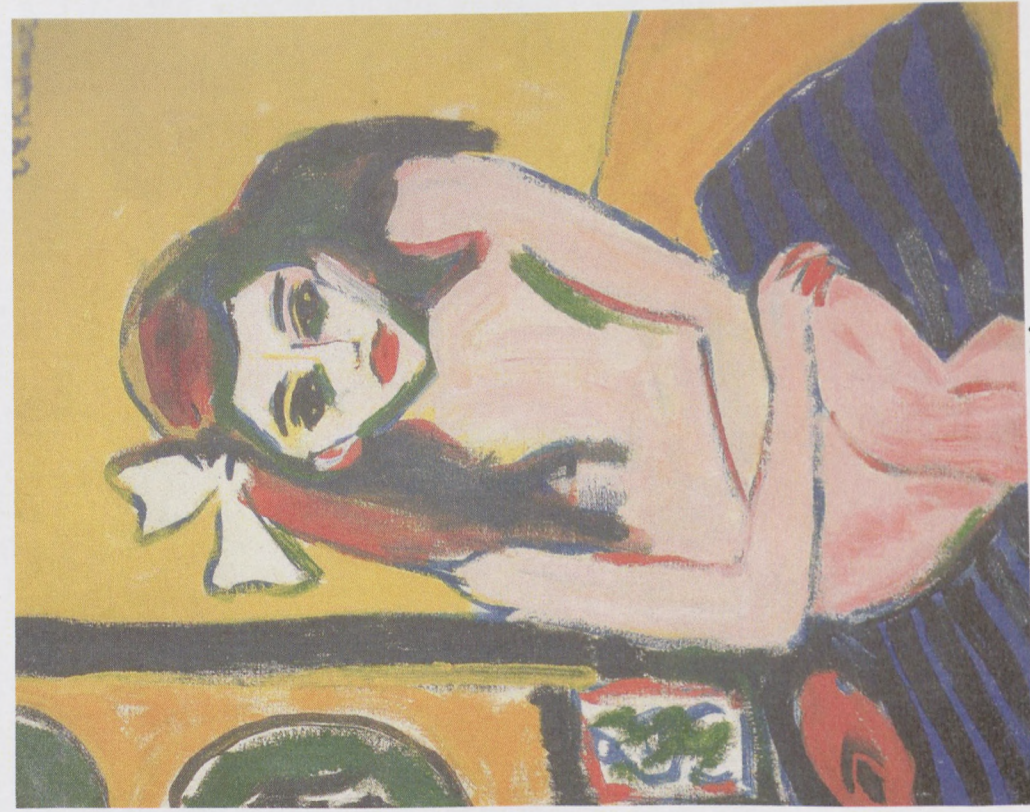


Figure 5.16

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Marcella*, 1910, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 61 cm

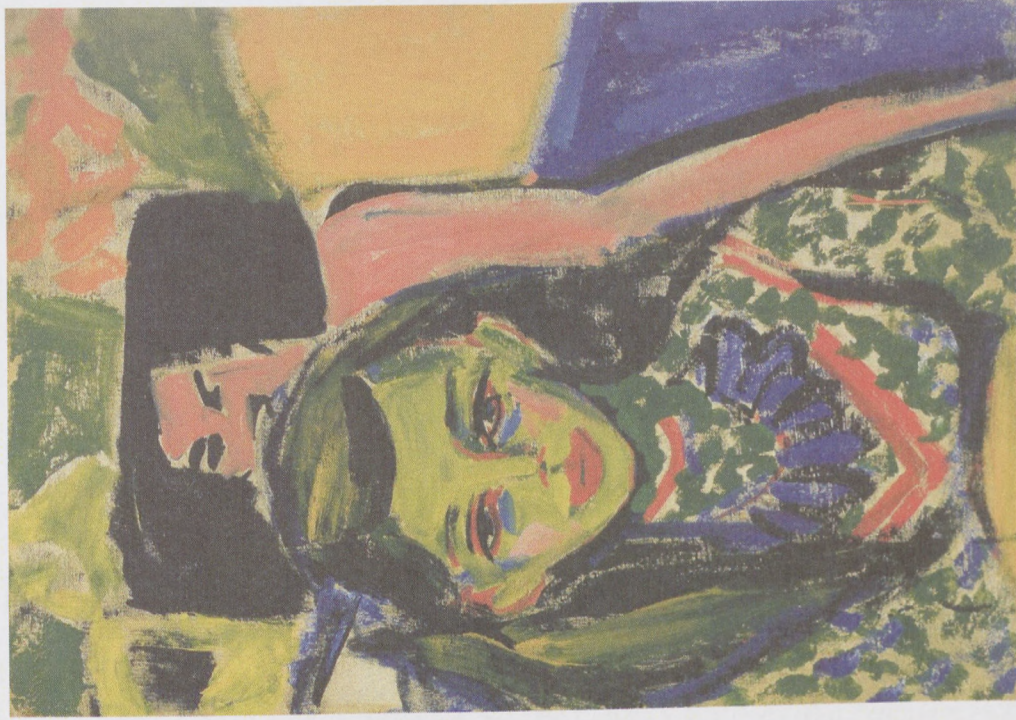


Figure 5.13

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Fränzi Before a Carved Stool*, 1910, oil on canvas, 71 x 49.5 cm



style, which betrays the influence not only of Matisse and the Fauvists, but also of the African and South Sea Island carvings which Kirchner had recently encountered in the ethnological section of the Dresden museum.<sup>59</sup> The girl's stylised, mask-like face is outlined in thick brushstrokes of a vibrant green that is also used to convey the decoration on the painted wall hanging that features in the background of the painting. In other images, the young girls are even more closely associated with the non-European artefacts with which Kirchner elected to adorn his studio, the angularity of their childish bodies echoed in the linear forms of these artworks: Fränzi is depicted in front of a carved figure with a threatening black headdress (**Figure 5.13**), which occupies exactly the same position as the looming shadow in Munch's *Puberty*. For the artists of the Brücke group, the depiction of the apparently unstudied movements of these naked pubescent girls within the privileged domain of the modernist studio could thus serve as a key representational device through which to signify not only their own social and sexual liberation from bourgeois values, but also the freedom and spontaneity of their painterly production, a trope which is then additionally reinforced through the further association to what were at the time perceived as 'primitivist' art objects.<sup>60</sup>

Though Kirchner's adolescents may lack the profound defencelessness of Munch's, both the finished paintings and those accompanying drawings which reveal the circumstances of their making make, nonetheless, for uncomfortable viewing. Poised ambiguously between innocence and awareness, the young girls appear at once vulnerable and extremely childlike, yet also highly sexualised: while the contours of her naked body may remain curiously ill-defined, Marcella's heavily shaded eyes and painted red lips and fingernails seem, nonetheless, to endow the young girl with an eroticism that far exceeds her age. In an earlier sketch (**Figure 5.21**) she teeters awkwardly in a doorway, wearing only a pair of roller skates, her youth and the extreme slenderness of her child's body emphasised not only by the wheeled boots she sports, but also through contrast with the adult model who occupies the centre ground of the composition. A sketch by Erich Heckel (**Figure 5.24**) reveals the true subject of these images: Kirchner himself, who sprawls confidently on the studio cushions, legs splayed in a manner so as to draw the

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<sup>59</sup> For further discussion of Kirchner's encounter both with the work of Matisse and the collections of the Dresden museums, see Jill Lloyd & Magdalena M Moeller, eds., *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Dresden and Berlin Years*, exh. cat., (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> In making this point, I am indebted to Carol Duncan's seminal analysis of 'Virility and Male Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Art,' originally published in *Artforum* (December 1973), pp.30-39; reprinted in Carol Duncan, *Aesthetics and Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1993).



Figure 5.28  
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Senta and Marcella Nude with Roller Skates*, 1910,  
black chalk on paper, 44.4 x 35 cm



Figure 5.29

Erich Heckel, *Kirchner und Fränzi*, 1909,  
graphite on paper, 34 x 43.2 cm



viewer's eye irresistibly towards his groin, his gaze directed firmly at the body of his young model. Heckel's drawing thus makes explicit what Carol Duncan has convincingly argued to be implicitly asserted within the many paintings of the female nude executed by this particular coterie of modernist painters: an aggressively virile, masculine heterosexuality.<sup>61</sup> What makes this particular series of images so troubling to the twentieth-first-century viewer is the fact that in these instances it is not adult women, but rather socially marginal, and consequently especially vulnerable, young girls, who are positioned both as the object of, and sign for, this unbridled lust.<sup>62</sup>

Heckel's *Girl with Doll* of 1910 (**Figure 53**) once again registers the presence of the male artist, this time in the form of a pair of disembodied legs that hover in the background, reproduced from a portrait of Heckel painted by Kirchner earlier that same year. The composition is, however, ostensibly centred on the figure of the naked Fränzi, who reclines on a sofa in the traditional art historical pose of the recumbent nude. As in Kirchner's paintings, the young girl's face is stylised and mask-like, her eyes heavily shaded. The vivid red gash of her lips is echoed in the two slashes of paint that are used to convey her scarcely developed breasts. In her right hand, she clutches a doll, its clothing serving only to emphasise her nudity, the inky darkness of its skirt at once covering, yet also drawing attention to, her pubic region. Where Heckel's depiction of the naked Fränzi with a doll registers only its maker's prurient fascination with the emerging sexuality of his young model as a mysterious, primal force to be harnessed to his own artistic ends, Suzanne Valadon is able, in her pairing of naked adolescent girl and doll, to offer a more nuanced exploration of a young girl's journey towards sexual maturity. Valadon's depictions of adolescent girls appear rather to demonstrate the type of psychological

<sup>61</sup> Duncan, 'Virility and Domination.'

<sup>62</sup> This preoccupation with the figure of the adolescent girl is not unique to the work of the Brücke group, but can also be found in the work of Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) and Egon Schiele (1890-1918). Alessandra Comini has related the two artists' highly sexualised depictions of young girls to a range of other texts and images also circulating in turn-of-the-century Vienna, from the collection of photographs and postcards of young girls amassed by the poet and writer Peter Altenberg, to the Symbolist poetry of Stefan George and Arthur Rimbaud, to Frank Wedekind's play *Spring's Awakening* (written in 1891 and first performed in Berlin in 1906), to Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). For Comini, this preoccupation with the emerging sexuality of the young girl (a preoccupation which, she points out, was paralleled by a huge increase in child prostitution on the streets of Vienna) 'was one way of avoiding the challenge inherent in the so-called battles of the sexes then being waged on a heightened level because of recent advances in the realm of women's rights.' Alessandra Comini, 'Toys in Freud's Attic: Torment and Taboo in the Child and Adolescent Themes of Vienna's Image-Makers,' pp.167-188 in *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R Brown (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), p.175. For further discussion on how the figure of the seductive, working-class girl came to serve as a central metaphor for sexuality in fin-de-siècle Vienna, see also Sander Gilman, 'Male Stereotypes of Female Sexuality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna,' pp.39-58 in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985).



Figure 5.30  
Erich Heckel, *Girl with Doll (Fränzi)*, 1910, oil on canvas, 65 x 70 cm



attentiveness to the complexities of the situation of the female subject poised between girlhood and womanhood that had, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, been the hallmark of Berthe Morisot's representations of her daughter, Julie. In a painting of Gilberte executed the year after *The Abandoned Doll* (Figure 53) she again depicts her great-niece naked. While both the bedstead and the striped coverlet appear to be the same as those featured in the previous painting, Gilberte herself looks noticeably older. The girlish bow in her hair has vanished, to be replaced with a more sophisticated chignon. Wholly engrossed in her book, she appears unaware of the presence of the spectator. Suzanne Valadon's portrayal of this moment of private preoccupation would thus seem to resonate with Morisot's earlier depiction of *Julie Daydreaming*. Yet Valadon, in her enquiries into adolescence as a key transitional moment in the life of the feminine subject, is able to draw upon an imaginative and iconographic resource then unavailable to the upper-middle-class Berthe Morisot: the naked female body. Opening up a space somewhere in between Morisot's explorations of female adolescence as a time of internal transformation and reverie, and the highly sexualised images of pubescent girls painted by the *Brücke* group, paintings such as *The Abandoned Doll* and *Gilberte nue* thus offer an unprecedented interrogation of the young girl's passage to adult femininity.

In the most extended consideration of the painting published to date, Patricia Mathews has suggested that *The Abandoned Doll* 'elucidates the way in which a young girl's indoctrination into the order of womanhood inevitably implied an induction into the order of appearing and the assumption of the masquerade of femininity':

The subject turns away from her mother's nurturing attention to concentrate instead on her own appearance in a mirror. The bow in her hair might be seen as early training for her later role as attractive woman (woman who "appears"), conveyed through the object of the doll itself. Indeed, the bow could represent both a sign of childhood innocence as well as the necessary "dressing up" of the woman in order to attract the male, a role conditioned already in childhood to which the pretty doll as model for young girls attests.<sup>63</sup>

Like the 'male gaze', the idea of the 'masquerade' has assumed wide currency within feminist cultural theory. It is a concept that is inviting in its seemingly general applicability, and is here taken to have something to do with the performance of a socially prescribed gender role.<sup>64</sup> For Patricia Mathews, *The Abandoned Doll* thus exposes the cultural

<sup>63</sup> Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, p.204.

<sup>64</sup> The notion that 'womanliness could be assumed and worn as a masquerade' was, however, originally formulated by lay analyst Joan Riviere as part of the ongoing psychoanalytic debate concerning the evolution of the Oedipus complex in women during the 1920s; see Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade,'





Figure 5.31

Suzanne Valadon, *Gilberte nue assise sur un lit à la couverture rayée*, 1922, oil on canvas, 104 x 79 cm



production of gender as a ‘construction and a process rather than an inherent given.’<sup>65</sup> In her reading, it is Gilberte who is the central subject of the painting, ‘psychologically rejecting her childhood attachment to the mother’ in order to enter into the world of adult femininity. Marie Coca as mother is relegated to the ‘traditional role of caretaker’: ‘initiating the daughter into the realm of appearances, her attention to her child’s body sets an example for the attention women give their own bodies as vessels of attraction and seduction.’<sup>66</sup>

In an endeavour to come to some more complex understanding of those aspects of the girl-to-mother, and mother-to-girl, relationship that find visual expression in *The Abandoned Doll*, I should like to turn initially to the writings of Luce Irigaray. In an essay entitled ‘Gesture in Psychoanalysis,’ Irigaray reconsiders Freud’s famous tale of his eighteen-month-old grandson, Ernst, playing with a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it while his mother was absent from the room. In the first part of his game, ‘what he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering an expressive “o-o-o-o”’, a sound which is taken by Freud and the child’s mother to represent the German word *fort* (gone).<sup>67</sup> In a second part of the game, Ernst then pulled the reel back out of the cot, hailing its reappearance with a joyful exclamation of ‘*da*’, meaning ‘here’. Freud interprets this repeated act of throwing away and then retrieving the reel together with its attendant vocalisations as the means by which his young grandson attempted to conquer the anxiety occasioned by the absence of his mother: ‘he compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach.’<sup>68</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he goes on to question why the little boy should choose to repeat such a distressing experience, coming to the conclusion that this type of repetitive play permits

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originally published in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929); reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald & Cora Kaplan (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

The concept of the masquerade has subsequently been widely mobilised in feminist film theory, notably by Mary Ann Doane in ‘Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,’ originally published in *Screen* 23.3-4 (1982); reprinted in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991). For a careful tracking of the take-up of the term in film theory together with a lucid reading of the potentialities of Riviere’s essay, see also John Fletcher, ‘Versions of the Masquerade,’ *Screen* 29.3 (1989), pp.43-72.

<sup>65</sup> Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, p.205.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* This line of argument is taken still further by Paula Birnbaum, who suggests that, ‘without specific evidence of the mother/daughter relationship depicted in *The Abandoned Doll*, one might just as well argue that the older woman could be a madam indoctrinating a young girl in the prostitutional protocols of those clients who request adolescent partners.’ Birnbaum, ‘Femmes Artistes Modernes,’ p.450.

<sup>67</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920] in *On Metapsychology*. *Penguin Freud Library* 11, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, reprinted 1991), p.284.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.285.

children to reproduce unpleasurable experiences that have made a great impression on them, thereby giving them a greater feeling of control over those experiences. For Freud, Ernst's game with the wooden reel accordingly serves as 'convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.'<sup>69</sup>

In her re-reading of this childish game, Luce Irigaray argues that the sex of the child concerned is of particular significance:

Not every substitution is possible, especially when sexual difference is involved. In Freud's text, then, the child is a boy. And Freud never wrote that it might have been a girl. My hypothesis is that it couldn't have been a girl. Why? A girl does not do the same things when her mother goes away. She does not play with a string and a reel that symbolise her mother, because her mother is of the same sex as she is and cannot have the object status of a reel. The mother is of the same subjective identity as she is.<sup>70</sup>

Irigaray proposes that a female child does not attempt to master the anxiety caused by the absence of her mother by controlling the disappearance and reappearance of an inanimate, substitute object. When a little girl misses her mother, she throws herself down on the ground in mute distress: 'she is lost, she loses the power and the will to live, she neither speaks nor eats.'<sup>71</sup> Eventually, she may dance, spinning wordlessly round and round, thus creating 'a vital subjective space open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the present other.'<sup>72</sup> Alternatively, she may play with a doll:

lavishing maternal affection on a quasi subject, and thus managing to organise a kind of symbolic space; playing with dolls is not simply a game girls are forced to play, it also signifies a difference in subjective status in the separation from the mother. For mother and daughter, the mother is a subject that cannot easily be reduced to an object, and a doll is not an object in the way that a reel, a toy car, a gun, etc. are objects and tools used for symbolisation.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.287.

<sup>70</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' [1985] in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University, 1993), pp.89-104, p.97. Irigaray's observations concerning the gestural processes of the little girl have proved suggestive for a feminist analysis of the material processes and practices of art making; see in particular Hilary Robinson, 'Louise Bourgeois's "Cells": Gesturing Towards the Mother,' pp.21-30 in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Ian Cole (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996) and Griselda Pollock's discussion of the work of Helen Frankenthaler and Lee Krasner in 'Killing Men and Dying Women: A Woman's Touch in the Cold Zone of American Painting in the 1950s,' pp.221-94 in Fred Orton & Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*



Luce Irigaray's observations thus take us beyond any sociologically derived understanding of the role of play in the social conditioning of young children ('the pretty doll as model for young girls') towards a psychoanalytically informed consideration of the asymmetrical effects of sexual difference in shaping and forming the human subject. While psychoanalytic orthodoxy demands that, in order to enter into the domain of language and culture, all children, irrespective of their sex, must give up their first attachment to the mother and identify instead with the Name of the Father, in the image of the little girl playing with her doll, singing softly to herself, or else simply whirling around and around in silence, Irigaray hints at another, specifically feminine, negotiation of maternal loss and separation, and hence another possible passage to sexed and speaking subjectivity:

Girls do not enter into language in the same way as boys. If they are too worn down by grief they never speak at all. Otherwise they enter language by producing a space, a path, a river, a dance, a rhythm, a song... Girls describe a space around themselves rather than displacing a substitute object from one place to another. [...] They do not speak about an introjected him or an introjected her, but talk *with* (sometimes in) a silence and with the other-mother in any case. [...] Mother and daughter turn around each other, they go up and down while encircling themselves but they also delineate the two entities that they are: in the lips, the hands, the eyes.<sup>74</sup>

Luce Irigaray thus acknowledges the particular nature of the girl-child's relationship to the mother, a relationship which she understands to be based upon the proximity of two distinct yet intimately related individuals who share the same bodily specificity. 'In a way,' she writes, 'the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, in the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth and to her sexual identity.'<sup>75</sup>

As Irigaray herself emphasises, however, this relation lacks any inscription within the existing symbolic order. Her writings underscore the profound damage wreaked on the female subject by this non-acknowledgement of feminine sexual difference. In a signifying system that is governed exclusively by the phallus:

The womb, unthought of in its place of the first sojourn in which we become bodies, is fantasised by many men to be a devouring mouth, a cloaca or anal and urethral outfall, a phallic threat, at best reproductive. And in the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, this womb merges with woman's sex [*sexe*] as a whole. There are no words to talk about it, except filthy, mutilating words. The corresponding affects will therefore be anxiety, phobia,

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.98.

disgust, a haunting fear of castration. How can one not feel them on returning to what has always been denied, disavowed, sacrificed to build an exclusively masculine symbolic world?<sup>76</sup>

Luce Irigaray challenges the preclusion of both the womb and the placenta—of female bodily specificity—from the sphere of language and thought. She proposes that the first relationship to the mother takes place ‘in a primal womb, our first nourishing earth, first waters, first envelopes, where the child was *whole*, the mother *whole* through the mediation of her blood. They were bound together, albeit in an asymmetrical relationship, before any cutting, any cutting up of their bodies into fragments.’<sup>77</sup> Though she thus dares to dispute the persisting exclusion of the intrauterine relation from the domain of subjectivity by mainstream psychoanalytical theory, and to speculate on the significance of the primary relation to the mother and the maternal body, Irigaray’s conceptualisation of that relation does, however, ultimately remain caught within the snares of a phallic logic which provides that the human subject can only come into being through a series of separations and losses: in her analysis, mother and infant are understood to be initially ‘bound together’, and then subsequently rent apart—not by the threat of castration, as is classically argued, but rather through the cutting of the umbilical cord.<sup>78</sup>

The work of Bracha Ettinger moves us beyond this impasse. Ettinger posits the prenatal relation not as a lost symbiotic paradise, from which the subject remains forever and definitively exiled, but rather as a field of primordial *encounter* in which the affective traces of a shared yet unknown event may be transmitted between and inscribed across several *partial* subjects. In this ‘matrixial borderspace’, the perceived boundaries between mother-to-be and infant-to-be are continually transgressed and transformed into thresholds and, ‘subjectivity-as-encounter emerges, where the Other-mother is never an absolute Other, absolutely separate, and where the first difference for a woman (a female child) is from another woman (a female grown up).’<sup>79</sup> Although every human subject has shared in this archaic space of co-becoming and co-affection, as Ettinger here emphasises, the prenatal encounter with the sexual specificity of the female body may have particular import for those embodied as female, in that it re-conceptualises the sexual difference of

<sup>76</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’ [1981], trans. David Macey, pp.36–46 in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.41.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, pp.38–39.

<sup>78</sup> For Irigaray, ‘the unavoidable and irreparable wound is the cutting of the umbilical cord. When his father or his mother threatens Oedipus with a knife or with scissors, he or she forgets that the cord has already been cut, and that it is enough to take note of that fact,’ *ibid.*, pp.40–41.

<sup>79</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Fascinace and the Girl-to-m/Other Matrixial Difference,’ pp.60–93 in *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2006), p.79.

the girl-child as a difference ‘from another female—a woman-m/ Other figure—and not from men, boys or the father.’<sup>80</sup> Matrixial theory thus acknowledges a supplementary, girl-to-m/Other sex difference that ‘comes before Oedipus (from a developmental viewpoint) and that remains beside Oedipus (from a structural viewpoint),’<sup>81</sup> and which is marked by *co-emergence*, *distance-in-proximity* and *resemblance-in-difference*, rather than by fusion or symbiosis.

I want to turn now to a specific paper by Bracha Ettinger, in which she outlines a scenario in which the ‘girl in the process of becoming a woman’ seeks both to relate to, and to differentiate herself from, another woman, a figure of mature feminine desire and desirability whom Ettinger names the *ffAM*—the *femme-fatale-Autre-Mère*, pronounced phonetically ‘femme’, i.e. woman.<sup>82</sup> This scenario does not have to do with gender identification, but rather garners up the traces of an originary, feminine sex difference, and brings them into play in the formation of adult femininity. Ettinger elaborates this scenario through intertwined readings of Freud’s ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria’ and Marguerite Duras’s 1964 novel *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. Her theorisation of this supplementary girl-to-m/Other feminine difference is thus of particular significance to my consideration of *The Abandoned Doll* in that it enables me both to supplement existing analyses of the representation of socially prescribed gender roles within the painting (as per Mathews’s interpretation) and to sidestep the continuing emphasis on the significance of the earliest relations of the female infant to the mother within psychoanalytic feminism (as per the Irigarayan model), and to attend in addition to the potential meaning of the adult woman for the adolescent girl/becoming woman.

The opening pages of Duras’s novel describe a ball attended by the nineteen-year-old Lol Stein and her fiancé Michael Richardson. There they encounter an unknown, older woman and her daughter. The young couple appear equally captivated by the woman:

Who was she? They later learned: Anne-Marie Stretter. Was she beautiful? How old was she? What had she, Anne-Marie Stretter, experienced that other women had missed? By what mysterious path had she arrived at what appeared to be a gay, a dazzling pessimism?<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>82</sup> Ettinger first began to explore this scenario in a presentation given to the seminar of Jacques-Alain Miller at University of Paris VIII on 7 June 2000, which was initially published as ‘Plaiting and the Primal Scene of Being-In-Severality’ in *Almanac of Psychoanalysis* 3 (2003), pp.91-112, and then subsequently revised and extended as ‘Fascinace and the Girl-to-m/Other Matrixial Difference’ in *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, ed. Pollock.

<sup>83</sup> Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* [1964], trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Pantheon, 1964), p.6.



Michael Richardson feels compelled to approach this woman, seemingly abandoning Lol Stein on the edge of the dance floor. He spends the rest of the evening with Anne-Marie Stretter, their mutual attraction obvious to everyone, most especially Lol. Bracha Ettinger contends that Lol's reaction to this scene is not one of jealousy or anger at being so publicly humiliated by her fiancé. She suggests that the adolescent Lol relates to Anne-Marie Stretter neither as the object of Michael Richardson's desire nor as an object of lesbian sexual desire, but rather remains differently enraptured by this mysterious, yet clearly profoundly desirable and desiring, mature woman—who is, crucially, also a mother:

the girl needs to find ways, and many times she fails again and again to find them, for sharing in the secrets of femininity with a m/Other whose fascination she must catch in/for their shareable space. She looks for a Woman-Mother figure whom she might adore and whose secrets she would be able to share on condition that such a m/Other might open herself to allow such a sharing and accommodate her gaze.<sup>84</sup>

Ettinger emphasises, however, that this fascination with the other woman—a fascination which she also discerns in both Dora's relations with Frau K and her rapt contemplation of the Dresden Madonna—'should not be confused with the process of identification with a woman', but, as a repetition-with-a-difference of the originary matrixial encounter with the archaic m/Other, may rather be considered an unconscious move that 'operates on a *level of partial subjectivity* that transgresses individual boundaries.'<sup>85</sup> The scenario she describes thus implicates several co-emerging, partial subjects, who affect one another in a non-symmetrical yet reciprocal manner. In *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, the enigmatic ballroom encounter between Michael Richardson, Lol Stein and Anne-Marie Stretter is seen differently to transfix and transform all of its participants:

In the first light of dawn, when night was gone, Tatiana had seen how all three of them had aged. Although Michael Richardson was younger than this woman, he had overtaken her, and together—with Lol—all three of them had aged years and years, grown centuries older.<sup>86</sup>

Yet, as Marguerite Duras makes clear, throughout this long night, Lol does not appear to suffer. It is only when her own mother bursts into the ballroom, 'insulting and reviling' Anne-Marie Stretter and Michael Richardson, that her pain begins:

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<sup>84</sup> Ettinger, 'Fascinace and Matrixial Feminine Difference,' p.67.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>86</sup> Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, p.9.

It was only then that she realised, vaguely, that something was drawing to a close, without quite knowing what that would be. The screen which her mother formed between them and her was her first inkling of it. With a powerful shove of her hand, she knocked her mother down. [...] Lol cried out for the first time.<sup>87</sup>

In Ettinger's reading, Lol's mother's abrupt intrusion serves prematurely and traumatically to sever the girl from this matrixial moment of co-emergence with and differentiation from another woman-mother figure, leading her repeatedly to seek out a similar scene:

An encounter that had "pushed out" the subject too early from its parameters of time, place and scene is doomed to be relived. In repetition it is relived, performed or phantasised, leaving the girl once more (Dora and here Lol) mesmerised and breathless, astonishing and languishing, not for the woman, not for the man, but for the blinding, puzzling and slippery *encounter*. She wants the encounter-event to take its full time and space and to complete its course so that it will include her and so that she will differentiate herself inside it and from it to become both a separate subject *and* a partial subject in a matrixial borderspace. But the almost-missed yet never-ending encounter aborts the girl and sets her on the routes of wandering and repetitive exiles. It subjectivises her as an orphan to the matrixial sphere, from now on and once again and perpetually.<sup>88</sup>

According to Bracha Ettinger, in those instances where the adolescent girl is denied the possibility of sharing in the matrixial sphere via such an encounter with the *femme-fatale-autre-Mère*, then the result may be, as in Dora's case, hysteria, or even, as in the case of Lol Stein, who subsequently tries—and repeatedly fails—to replicate that encounter by observing the clandestine meetings between her old school friend Tatiana Karl and her lover Jack Hold, a psychotic unravelling.

Might we, then, suggest that such a transformative encounter between Girl and m/Other is, on some level, sustained by/within *The Abandoned Doll*? In Suzanne Valadon's painting, mother and daughter do not look directly at one another, but nonetheless seem attuned each to the other's presence: Gilberte gazes down at her own reflection in a small hand mirror, while Marie Coca's eyes follow those of her daughter; each appears differently preoccupied with this reflected image of the girl's emerging femininity. *The Abandoned Doll* thus seems to draw the viewer into 'a move of fascination that belongs to femininity, a move composed of a fascination of a girl towards a woman-mother figure, who is fascinated too by the daughter-girl and who allows her sufficient proximity to sustain the

<sup>87</sup> Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, p.9.

<sup>88</sup> Ettinger, 'Fascinance and Matrixial Feminine Difference,' p.69.

illusion of inclusion in her mature elusive femininity.<sup>89</sup> This moment of co-affective encounter is, furthermore, staged by/in the presence of another woman-m/Other figure, older than either of those here represented, and an artist. With/in this particular painting, I propose, Suzanne Valadon becomes an ‘artist-woman’ in the specifically matrixial sense proposed by Bracha Ettinger, which I discussed at greater length in the previous chapter, who ‘opens pathways and deepens metramorphoses in the matrixial field.’<sup>90</sup>

Valadon seats her niece and great-niece on a brass bedstead, topped with a thick eiderdown of a vibrant red, shot through with turquoise stripes. This expanse of saturated colour stands out vividly against the more muted tones that are used elsewhere in the painting: though Valadon’s love of surface pattern is still to be glimpsed in the geometric design of the floor rug, the background walls are not filled with busy floral motifs (as in both *The Blue Room* and *The Future Unveiled*), but are rather constructed from brushed layers of paint that graduate from a warm ochre in the space beside the bed, through to blue and green in the area behind the bedstead, and thence to a dark bottle green that is used to denote both the furthest reaches of the bedroom and the floorboards that rise up sharply from beneath the two figures’ feet. Marie Coca is clothed; Gilberte naked, save for the bow in her hair and the ivory bracelet on her right arm (adornments which recall ‘Olympia’s’ orchid and golden bangle). Her skin tone is built up out of a hatched network of pink, yellow and greyish green brushstrokes, contained by a thick black outline that fixes and defines the contours and boundaries of her developing body. The texture of these visible brush marks contrasts with the uniform application of the matt black paint that is used to denote her mother’s dress. Marie Coca’s hand appears from out of this mass of amorphous black, clutching a towel that she uses to dry—or perhaps to cover—her daughter’s unclothed body. This white towel, its folds indicated in a vivid cobalt blue, forms a striking accent against both the black of Marie Coca’s dress and the warmer skin tones of her daughter’s exposed flesh. Noticeably rougher and looser in its brushwork, it is situated at the compositional centre point of the painting, serving not only as a bridge between different factures and the different surfaces they represent, but also, flowing between the bodies of mother and daughter, acting as a painterly trace of the transformative borderspace that is shared between these two co-emerging feminine subjects.

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>90</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event,’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 21.1 (2004), pp.69-93, p.90.



Let me be clear. I am not arguing that *The Abandoned Doll* should be considered either a knowing expression or a literal portrayal of matrixial-feminine difference: as I emphasised in the previous chapter, from a matrixial perspective, the work of art can no longer be understood solely as a representational or mimetic image, but may potentially also become the site of a shared and transformative encounter via which ‘matrixial affects, events, materials and modes of becoming [can] infiltrate just into the non-conscious margins of the Symbolic.’<sup>91</sup> In allowing my gaze to wander through the painting in this manner, and to linger on certain saturations of colour, or shifts in facture, I thus open myself up to an affective encounter that is intuited not at the level of figuration, but that rather appears to flicker momentarily into partial visibility by way of the specific materiality of Suzanne Valadon’s painting practice. Bracha Ettinger writes of a particular matrixial aesthetic affect that she names *fascinace*:

I call the transformational potentiality of a matrixial link (gaze or voice): *fascinace*. *Fascinace* is an aesthetic affect that operates in the prolongation and delaying of the time of encounter-event and allows for a working-through of matrixial differentiating-in-jointness and copoiesis.<sup>92</sup>

The matrixial concept of *fascinace* is developed from and supplements the phallic concept of *fascinum*, as outlined by Jacques Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. In *The Four Fundamentals*, Lacan presents the gaze as *fascinum*:

The evil eye is the *fascinum*, it is that which has the effect of arresting movement and, literally, of killing life. At the moment the subject stops, suspending his gesture, he is mortified. The anti-life, anti-movement of this terminal point is the *fascinum*, and it is precisely one of the dimensions in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly. [...] The subject is strictly speaking determined by the very separation that determines the break of the *a*, that is to say, the fascinator element introduced by the gaze.<sup>93</sup>

As Bracha Ettinger glosses, ‘*fascinum* is the unconscious element in the image that stops and freezes life. The gaze inside an image has such an arresting power because, as an unconscious *objet a*, it is a production of castration.’<sup>94</sup> The matrixial gaze of *fascinace*, on the other hand, is not a lost and lacking part object created during the primal split of the subject from the m/Other (as per the Lacanian model), but rather a borderline trace of the

<sup>91</sup> Bracha L Ettinger, ‘Art as the Transport-Station of Trauma,’ in *Artworking 1985-1999*, exh. cat., (Ghent & Amsterdam: Ludion, 2000), p.97.

<sup>92</sup> Ettinger, ‘*Fascinace* and Matrixial Feminine Difference,’ p.61.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1964], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, intro. David Macey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p.118.

<sup>94</sup> Ettinger, ‘*Fascinace* and Matrixial Feminine Difference,’ p.60.

originary matrixial encounter between subject-to-be and m/Other-to-be that is, necessarily, shared between and inscribed across several, co-emerging partial subjects. It is thus to be understood not as an *objet a*, but a *link a*. Its transformational potentiality may be reawakened in the duration of a particular kind of prolonged aesthetic contemplation, which does not have to do with active seeing or mastery, but that I rather understand in terms of a certain stillness before and receptiveness to the work of art. It may be helpful here to recall the figure of Dora, who ‘went alone’ to the ‘famous picture gallery’ in Dresden, where she ‘remained for two hours in front of the Sistine Madonna, rapt in silent admiration.’ Yet, when Freud asked her to describe what had pleased her so much about the picture, ‘she could find no clear answer to make. At last she said: “The Madonna”.’<sup>95</sup> Bracha Ettinger proposes that the painting served for the adolescent Dora the function of *fascinace*:

More than *looking at* the Madonna, Dora was caught in the illusion that art images “know” how to create, namely, that the gaze is reciprocal. Therefore, it was the Madonna who was looking at Dora and was fascinated by her. Such was this moment of matrixial *fascinace* where a few feminine figures met.<sup>96</sup>

For Ettinger, Dora’s ‘silent admiration’ of the Dresden Madonna—an admiration which appears to resist or evade any attempt at narrative explanation—can be considered neither an expression of homosexual desire for, nor an identification with, the female figure represented in the painting. This aesthetic encounter rather takes place at the level of a ‘dispersed, partial, and interwoven subjectivity where psychic elements diffused from one unconscious to the other create a shareable unconscious field.’<sup>97</sup> As Dora gazes in fascination at this woman-m/Other figure—a figure who appears to turn her own fascinated gaze upon the Girl—the boundaries between girl and woman, viewer and artwork, are momentarily lowered and each becomes a partial participant in a trans-subjective encounter that echoes and carries inside it the traces of the originary matrixial encounter with the archaic m/Other.

Over the past forty years, a great deal of feminist energy has been directed towards the analysis of what matrixial theory now clarifies as the ‘phallic, post-Oedipal gaze, [...] a

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<sup>95</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria’ [1905 (1901)] in *Case Histories I*. *Penguin Freud Library* 8, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, reprinted 1991), pp.135-6.

<sup>96</sup> Ettinger, ‘*Fascinace* and Matrixial Feminine Difference,’ p.62.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p.63.

conscious, alienating, cultural tool of power, in the service of the Ego.<sup>98</sup> This critique of a voyeuristic or sadistic ‘male gaze’, originating within feminist film theory during the 1970s, has come to define the terms in which it has been possible to think about the art historical genre of the female nude. Feminist social historians of art have shown the representation of the artist and the model in the studio to be one of the core signs of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European modernism. They have analysed how the depiction of the body of the naked model within this symbolic space could signify not only the artist’s formal experimentation—serving as the site of his self-conscious engagement with both the art of the past and that of his avant-garde contemporaries and rivals—but may also be considered a form of self-representation, acting as a crucial statement of his sexual and social liberation from the constraints of bourgeois morality and domestic life. They have identified how this trope of the artist and the model in the studio inscribes a binary opposition that identifies the male artist as the proprietor of an aestheticising and eroticising gaze, and positions the female model as the passive object of that gaze: as Griselda Pollock neatly summarises, in the many paintings of the artist and the model in the studio produced by painters including Matisse and Kirchner in the early years of the twentieth century, ‘a social and a sexual hierarchy are pictured: the artist is canonically male (signifying the fusion of culture with masculinity); *his* material is female (the assimilation of nature, matter and femininity).’<sup>99</sup> As I suggested in the previous chapter, this stringent critique of masculinised modernism has provided the framework for existing feminist interpretations of Suzanne Valadon’s paintings, which have been positioned as a point of resistance to ‘the patriarchal enframing inherent in the conventions of the objectified nude, especially as it is manipulated by early twentieth-century artists.’<sup>100</sup>

In order to move beyond this valorisation of Valadon as the liberator of women’s bodies from patriarchal traditions of representation, this chapter has adopted a two-fold strategy. Firstly, it has provided a more considered art historical analysis of the nature of Suzanne Valadon’s dialogue with the work of her modernist predecessors and contemporaries. By setting a selected number of drawings and paintings by Valadon in

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<sup>98</sup> Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts & Histories Network, 1995), pp.10-11. In this major exposition of existing psychoanalytical theories of the gaze, Ettinger differentiates between ‘the post-Oedipal “active” gaze emanating from “armed eyes” and linked to gender identification, and the pre-Oedipal “passive” gaze as an *objet a* linked to lost archaic part-objects,’ both phallic concepts which she seeks to relativise and supplement via the concept of the gaze as a *matrixial objet a/link a*.

<sup>99</sup> Griselda Pollock, ‘Painting, Feminism, History,’ pp.138-76 in *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, eds. Michèle Barrett & Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp.138-40. The earliest, and still significant, analysis of this trope is Carol Duncan’s ‘Virility and Male Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting.’

<sup>100</sup> Mathews, ‘Returning the Gaze,’ p.428.



conversation with works by both an older generation of Impressionist artists (Manet, Renoir, Degas, Cassatt, Morisot) and her peers (Vallotton, Kirchner, Heckel), and by considering the particular strategies she used to promote and sell her work, it has revealed Suzanne Valadon to be a knowing player in the avant-gardist game of ‘reference, deference and difference’<sup>101</sup> that came to be played out across the genre of the female nude in the closing years of the nineteenth, and early years of the twentieth, centuries. Secondly, it has explored the possibilities that Bracha Ettinger’s Matrixial theory of trans-subjectivity holds in releasing us from the eroticised model of male gazing and female body objects inherited from the feminist critique of early-twentieth-century modernism, and in understanding otherwise what might be produced in the specificity of Suzanne Valadon’s interrogation of the place of the female body within modernist painting.

Moving beyond those earlier, woman-identified readings which proposed that, in their unique inscription of a female gaze, Valadon’s representations of the female nude constituted a point of proto-feminist resistance to the objectification of the woman’s body within the male-dominated arena of early-twentieth-century modernist painting, this chapter has argued that a different kind of gaze may be inscribed in certain of Suzanne Valadon’s paintings. From a matrixial perspective, ‘a subject does not look with desire for an absent object (*objet a*), as Lacan would have it, or for a gaze that is forever castrated and castrating. Rather, [...] the becoming-subject looks for a matrixial erotic binding and connecting, for reproduction and co-production of moments of *fascinace*.’<sup>102</sup> As a *link a*, the matrixial gaze of *fascinace* thus does not have to do with a discrete individual who inverts a gendered hierarchy in order to look ‘like a woman’, but rather has the potential to open new channels of connectivity between artist and model, viewer and artwork, who each become partial participants in a shared and transformative, matrixial aesthetic encounter.

The concept of *fascinace* builds upon Ettinger’s initial theorisation of a matrixial gaze in order to address the issue of how the originary, matrixial encounter between subject-to-be and mother-to-be might give rise not only to a supplementary aesthetic dimension in the visual field, but may in addition contribute to the great lacuna in psychoanalytical thinking around the formation of adult femininity. With the idea of *fascinace*, Ettinger acknowledges a process by which the girl can find her way to feminine maturity, not through hatred and rejection of the mother, but rather through a process of co-emergence

<sup>101</sup> Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, p.14.

<sup>102</sup> Ettinger, ‘*Fascinace* and Matrixial Feminine Difference,’ p.72.

with a desiring and desirable mature woman-m/Other figure. In proposing that *The Abandoned Doll* may, like Marguerite Duras's novel, stage something of this prolonged time and space of encounter between the girl becoming a woman and the woman remembering the girl beneath her own becoming, I am thus led, via Ettinger's re-reading of Freud's treatment of the young hysteric Dora, back to the other scenario that has structured this thesis: that of the doctor/patient which became psychoanalysis. At once offering an historical tracking of how the dual scenarios of doctor/patient and artist/model were transformed by two key developments at the fin-de-siècle—the emergence of psychoanalysis in relation to hysteria and the growing participation of women as artists in the field of modernist painting—this thesis has also examined how the shifting encounter between femininities in the process of self-redefinition and modernism in both its psychological and aesthetic guises which took place in the early years of the twentieth century might serve as a site across which to read for the traces of a sexual difference of and from the maternal feminine, a difference only now finds some theoretical acknowledgement through Bracha Ettinger's radical re-envisaging of that early Freudian moment.

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