

**Bracha L. Ettinger, Jacques Lacan and Tiresias:
The Other Sexual Difference**

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This essay is about Tiresias, the blind Theban prophet in the Oedipal trilogy and how he¹ animates what Israeli feminist psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger calls an Other sexual difference. This Other sexual difference must be distinguished from Oedipal (or phallic) sexual difference as theorized by Freud in terms of psychosexual development and later by Jacques Lacan, under the auspices of sexuation whereby there are two possible sexual positions—man and the Woman—demarcated by the phallic signifier. Tiresias appears in Greek mythology and plays an important role in Sophocles' *Antigone* and in *Oedipus the King* as seer. Tiresias also appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, among other literary and dramatic works. In this paper, I consider the significance of Tiresias to Ettinger's formulation of the Other (Feminine) sexual difference. The Other sexual difference is an unconscious time-space of emergence, fading and transformation. It involves an unconscious process whereby we are borderlinked to Others (whom Ettinger calls our non-I's²) in a matrixial web. The borderlinking is an encounter-event in the Real at the basis of what Ettinger calls Feminine sexual difference. As Griselda Pollock (2013) explains, the Other sexual difference “generates a specific proto-ethical dimension in all human subjectivity irrespective of later gender identifications as masculine or feminine subjects under the sign of the Phallus” (167).

Although Tiresias is an ancient Greek shape-shifter and not transgender by contemporary definitions, his centrality to Ettinger's writing on the transgression with-in-to the Feminine (Ettinger, 2000) is relevant to transgender cultural studies (Stryker and Zizura, 2013; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Transgender cultural studies is based, in part, on a study of somatechnical (Murray, 2016) transformations, transsexual transitions, desire and diverse embodiments – some of which resonate with Tiresian mythology. As such, there is an important convergence between Ettinger's feminist psychoanalytic theory and transgender studies that

can be narrativized through the character of Tiresias. Ettinger is, to the best of my knowledge, the first post-Lacanian feminist scholar to address the central importance of Tiresias in the Oedipal-trilogy. Certainly, Judith Butler names Tiresias in her discussion of the Oedipal-trilogy in *Antigone's Claim* and Hélène Cixous and Annette Kuhn mention the Theban prophet in their work on castration and decapitation (Cixous and Kuhn, 1981; Butler, 2000). But there is curious neglect of the character in the now substantive body of feminist psychoanalytic scholarship. Perhaps this is due to unacknowledged transphobia and the consequent neglect of trans-like characters in psychoanalytic studies of mythology. It may also be due to a reluctance to consider the interrelationship between feminist psychoanalytic theory and transgender studies.

My supposition is that Ettinger's theory of the matrixial-Feminine has something to offer transgender studies, if only because the character Tiresias, who changes sex, is central to what Ettinger refers to as the transgression with-in-to the Feminine. I have argued elsewhere that there is a discourse and an aesthetics particular to transgender that is not only submerged in psychoanalysis but rendered pathological or psychotic (Cavanagh, 2017). Although Ettinger is not a transgender studies scholar and, to the best of my knowledge, has not worked analytically with transgender clients, her conception of the transgression with-in to the Feminine gives us a template to think about Tiresian-like transitions. A Tiresian-like transition is not the same as a transsexual transition (but the latter may involve the former). It is, in Ettingerian terms, an entry into the matrixial whereby we co-emerge, transmutate and change with Others in unconscious and asymmetrical ways.

Tiresias indexes an Other sexual difference in Ettinger's formulation of the matrixial and this is, consequently, relevant to transgender studies. But the transgression of interest to Ettinger is matrixial. As such, it involves the "possibility of transgressing between male and female with-in a matrixial feminine dimension where Other and Outside are fatally engaged with I and inside..." (Ettinger, 2000: 198). The transgression with-in to the Feminine is not about becoming a woman in an identitarian sense but, rather, about entering into a Feminine dimension of expe-

rience that refuses binaries between outside and inside, self and Other, male and female and so on. Referring specifically to Tiresias, Ettinger asserts that the “transgression between male and female is not a passage to the radical Other nor transcending to the ultimately exterior, but a metamorphosing with-in-out of selves with-in-to the feminine that passes along the threads that turn, like a Mobius strip, the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside” (2000: 198). As I will explain in what follows, the Tiresian origin-story involves an encounter-event with copulating snakes, and Goddess Hera, in Peleponnese, that elicits a metamorphic change. For Ettinger, a metamorphosis is a borderlinking and co-affecting relation in the matrixial web whereby partial-subjects are changed in/by the encounter-event with an Other. As she explains, metamorphosis “draws a nonpsychotic yet *beyond-the-phallus* connection between the feminine and creation” (2006: 64). Metamorphosis is a co-affective borderlinking, which enables change akin to the Deleuzian notion of ‘becoming.’ The metamorphic transgression enables the subject to access a “surplus beyond” the phallic axis. This surplus is about the transformation of what Ettinger calls phallic limits into thresholds.

In the myth, Tiresias turns into a Woman and enters into what Ettinger calls an Other axis of difference. While I focus on an Other sexual difference theorized by Ettinger in this chapter, let us remember that there are other dimensions of difference yet to be narrativized in psychoanalysis. It is an established fact that transpeople are subject to erasure, discrimination, and are denied access to public space: the transphobic bathroom laws in the US are but one contemporary example. But I am here concerned about the space of the clinic, the state of psychoanalytic theorizing and the Feminine (as an axis of difference) more generally. We have yet to account for the multiple harms engendered by the negation and expulsion of transpeople in psychoanalysis at the level of the International Psychoanalytic Association, its constituent organizations, the clinic, and its training curriculum. The collateral damage done by the omission and pathologization of transpeople under the auspices of Oedipal psycho-sexual development is increasingly well established (see, for example, the recent special issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* [2017])

on “Transgender and Psychoanalysis”). We can no longer ignore or sideline the contributions made by transgender scholars, artists, clinicians, and analysts to the psychoanalytic scene.

Bracha Ettinger

Ettinger began to publish her writings on the Feminine and the matrixial borderspace inspired by her art and her psychoanalytic work with patients in the 1990s. The corpus of her theory is inspired by the writings of Wilfred Bion, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Donald Winnicott (among others). Her theories of the matrixial, along with her painting and art notebooks, have been written about by Griselda Pollock, Catherine de Zegher, Jean-François Lyotard, Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Brian Massumi. She is now a professor at the European Graduate School in Switzerland, a practising artist and analyst. Her oeuvre is offered as a supplement to and extension of Lacan’s writing on feminine sexuality and subjectivity. Like other feminist psychoanalytic theorists including, but not limited to, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, Ettinger contends that there is a discourse and aesthetics particular to the Feminine that is submerged in Lacanian psychoanalysis and in modernity more generally.³ Ettinger’s writing on the matrixial borderspace (2006) is designed to give theoretical form to a missing discourse and aesthetics of the Feminine.

For Ettinger, the Feminine operates through affective and aesthetic fields. Building upon Lévinas, Ettinger explains that the Feminine is the “irreducible difference inside subjectivity: precisely what makes it human” (2006: 190). The matrixial borderspace is a Feminine sub-stratum that coexists alongside what she refers to as the phallic (Symbolic) stratum theorized by Lacan.⁴ The Other axis of sexual difference is foreclosed by the phallic signifier, but signifiable in an expanded sub-symbolic where (and when) we are attuned to Others and non-I’s in the matrixial web (Ettinger, 2006). The Other sexual difference in the matrixial is not about the One (and its binary oppositions between object and subject), but about “thinking transmissivity and co-affectivity” (Ettinger, 2006:

183). It is about the unthought time-space of borderlinking in the matrixial that is trans-subjective (as distinct from transgender to be discussed below). This dimension of difference is, for Ettinger, primordial, occurring before, alongside, and after Oedipal sex difference but irreducible to it. The Feminine axis of difference is not based on phallic cuts, splits and severance but, rather, severality. The Ettingerian Feminine is thus not reducible to male or female, masculinity or femininity in a sociological sense. The Other sexual difference is based on trans-connectivity and trace connections to Others known and unknown in familial and extra-familial matrixes. In the Feminine dimension, the subject is more than one and bound to others in asymmetrical difference. This is why she refers to partial-subjects, as opposed to individual subjects. Ettinger does not theorize individual subjects who can be said to relate in the terms offered-up by object relations theory. Her focus is on partial-subjects who exist in relation to Others and non-I's in a non-conscious matrixial borderspace.⁵

Although Ettinger uses the metaphor of the mother-to-be and the subject-to-be in the pre-birth encounter as a model to think about the matrixial borderspace, the matrix should not be used as a synonym for maternity. Indeed, the matrixial is an axis of difference that transcends conception, gestation, and birth. The female bodily specificity that Ettinger refers to in her writing on the matrixial involves corporeality but is not reducible to it. The matrixial is “the site, physically, imaginatively, and symbolically, where a feminine difference emerges, and through which a ‘woman’ is interlaced as a figure that is not confined to one-body, but is rather a hybrid ‘webbing’ of links between several subjectivities, who by virtue of that webbing become partial” (Ettinger, 2006:141). As Griselda Pollock notes, the matrix is a signifier of “transformative transferential potentialities in a shareable resonance sphere” (Ettinger, as quoted by Pollock, 2006: 21). We are always with Others in “reciprocity without symmetry, creating joint compassionate and eroticized aerials, to be further shaped by following traces of their further affective irradiation” (Ettinger 2000: 199). What Ettinger calls erotic aerials intercept aesthetic traces relevant to a shared matrixial web. In other words, a transgression

with-in-to the Feminine is aesthetic and leaves trace-like imprints linking several partial-subjects in a shared web. It is the transformative capacities of the matrixial that the character Tiresias helps us to understand. By focusing on Tiresias and Ettinger's feminist psychoanalytic theory of the matrixial, I am not suggesting that those who are transgender, by contemporary standards, are ultimately 'women' or 'feminine' (although some are). Those who are transgender, like those of us who are not transgender, are all differently gendered in what Ettinger calls the phallic landscape. As Ettinger explains, access to the Feminine dimension of experience is open to everyone regardless of gender or sexual positioning in the phallic stratum of difference theorized by Lacan.

Tiresias animates, and helps us to understand, the trans-subjective elements of human experience explicated by Ettinger. While the linguistic similarity between 'transgender' (or 'transsexuality') and 'trans-subjectivity' in Ettinger's theorization is significant, they are, in fact, different concepts. Transgender usually refers to those who dis-identify with their sex assignment at birth and/or to those who are gender variant. Transsexuality often refers to those who undergo social and/or medically assisted transitions which may involve gender confirming surgeries, hormone therapies, hormone blockers, etc. In Ettinger's formulation, 'trans-subjectivity' does not have anything to do with gender. Nor does it refer to transpeople. Rather, trans-subjectivity refers to our status as partial-subjects in the matrixial web. In essence, the trans-subjective is used by Ettinger to account for the matrixial elements of the partial-subject in the Feminine sub-stratum (defined below). Trans-subjectivity should also not be confused with intersubjectivity because intersubjectivity depends upon singular subjects (in the phallic landscape) who can relate to one another in conscious ways. We are not singular subjects in matrixial terms but, as stated above, partial-subjects. Ettinger defines the partial-subject as several (more than One) and also refers to 'subjectivity-as-encounter' in the matrixial order of things. In the trans-subjective weave, partial-subjects are co-affected by Others in non-symmetrical ways and thus partners in difference. Trans-subjectivity also involves 'co-emergence' and 'co-fading' in/through/by metramorphosis (defined below). It thus con-

tains transformative potentiality which is relevant to transgender studies.

Tiresias and the Oedipal Legacy

Before I advance my argument, let me offer a brief biographical sketch of Tiresias, the ancient Greek mystic. The origin story told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* begins as follows: Tiresias comes across two snakes copulating on Mount Kyllene in Peloponnese. Somehow upset by the intercoiled snakes, Tiresias kills the female snake with his staff. Hera, the Goddess of women, marriage and fertility is furious. As a Goddess well known for acting upon impulse, she turns Tiresias into a woman in body and mind as punishment. But the curse may have been a blessing in disguise. By all accounts, Tiresias adjusts well to life as a woman. Tiresias marries, has three daughters, becomes a renowned prostitute and priestess. Seven years later, Tiresias encounters two mating snakes again. Having learned Hera's lesson, Tiresias leaves them be and his masculinity is magically restored. We are to assume that by respecting not only the female snake but the act of copulation itself – a Feminine dimension – Tiresias frees himself from Hera's spell.

But all was not well for long. Hera and her husband Zeus were fighting over who – man or woman – experiences more sexual pleasure in lovemaking. Zeus insists it is the woman while Hera insists it is the man. Being unable to reach consensus they consult Tiresias who is said, in the myth, to have experiential knowledge of both masculine and feminine sexual pleasures. Tiresias answers to the Olympian court: “Of ten parts a man enjoys one only, but a woman enjoys the full ten parts in her heart” (Hard, 1997: 171). Hera was incensed by the Tiresian testimony and again moved to fury. She strikes Tiresias blind. Zeus takes pity on Tiresias but cannot undo his wife's spell. Instead, the masculine-god gives Tiresias the gift of prophesy, second sight, and long life. Over the course of his long-life, Tiresias faithfully serves the Greek god Apollo. The blind-seer relays Apollo's words to the Lacanian letter. From a Lacanian perspective, we may infer that Tiresias, like a good analyst, attends to the particularity of the word and to the speaker's discourse.

In fact, Tiresian wisdom is known and respected throughout the

Theban kingdom. His counsel is sought by king Oedipus and king Creon but both refuse Tiresian guidance and suffer for it. Tiresias is, as a result, troubled by the impossibility of his job as prognosticator. Tiresias knows that hostility, denial, ignorance, and projective-identification on the part of the kings incite war. After telling Creon that, in order to save his kingdom, he must sacrifice his own son, Tiresias laments to the king's daughter:

... Anyone who practices the art of prophesy is a fool. If he reveals offensive things
he will reap resentment from all who hear his omens;
but if, out of pity for those who come to him, he lies,
he wrongs the gods. Only Phoebus should
tell the gods' will to men, for he has no one to fear (Euripides, 1994: 111).

Exasperated by the plight of Oedipus and his refusal to see in *Oedipus the King*, Tiresias says, "How terrible – to see the truth when the truth is only plain to him who sees!" (Sophocles, 1984). Tiresias discourages Oedipus from pursuing the truth – that he is the enemy he seeks (the one who killed his royal predecessor) – because he is cognizant of the tragedy awaiting King Oedipus who learns too late in life that he is not who he thought he was. Oedipus is not son of King Polybus and Queen Merope, but son of King Laius (whom he has killed) and Queen Jocasta (whom he marries). Tiresias knows that knowledge of patricide and incest will be too much for Oedipus and Jocasta to bear. But Oedipus, like a petulant child, insists upon knowing a truth he cannot handle. Upon hearing the truth he gouges his eyes out with his mother's broach.

For the psychoanalytic record, Tiresias is also never wrong. Let us consider his oracular resume and demonstrated capacity to handle male protagonists in crisis: in Homer's *Odyssey*, Tiresias tells Odysseus how he may navigate treacherous waters en route home from the battle of Troy. In Euripides's *Phoenician Woman* Tiresias foretells that Oedipus's sons will ultimately kill each other in their warring anger and greed. In

Antigone, Creon the King is less than thrilled to hear from Tiresias that he must withdraw his indictment against Antigone to save his family. Like Oedipus before him, the King cannot accept Tiresian wisdom until it is too late; as a result his loved ones die and the Kingdom falls.

The Feminine in Lacan and Ettinger

At a conference on feminine sexuality at the University of Amsterdam in 1960, and later published in *Écrits* (2002), Lacan said that we should not be fooled by the myth of Tiresias. In Ettinger's assessment, Lacan intimates that the Theban character cannot know anything more about Feminine sexuality than we do, which is nothing. Ettinger's concern with Lacan is that he depicts Feminine sexuality as unknowable. For her, Lacan is mistaken in assuming that the structure of language and thus, the unconscious, prohibits us from knowing anything about Feminine sexuality. This, she insists, is only true in the phallic (Symbolic) stratum. While Lacan acknowledges limits to what can be known about the Woman due to what he calls a Real problem of language and logic, Ettinger's scholarship attempts to turn those limits into thresholds whereby something can be known about the Feminine – albeit in an expanded Symbolic which she calls the sub-symbolic (or sub-stratum). The Feminine sub-stratum does not generate signifiers (word-images) in Lacanian terms: it is Real. But from a matrixial perspective, the Feminine can be apprehended.

Ettinger is critical of the way Lacan defines Woman as not-all, as object and as symptom of man. She reasons that he can only apprehend the Woman from the phallic angle. It is vital, she believes, to re-write the Woman in terms that can address her as several in a matrixial sense. The post-Lacanian Ettingerian formulation of Woman views her as a co-affecting and co-emergent borderlinking to Others (as partial subjects) in a matrixial borderspace. The Ettingerian Woman is best characterized as an assemblage, a co-affecting encounter-event between partial-subjects in a given matrixial web. Moreover, as Griselda Pollock writes, Ettinger's conception of Woman can be understood as “different conditions of subjective co-emergence[s]” (Pollock 2006: 31). In the matrixial substratum, Woman “digs an-other area of difference with its specific

apparatus, processes, and functions” (Ettinger, 1997: 367) that resonates in aesthetic fields through erotic aeriels and aesthetic traces in a shared web. The Woman is, for Ettinger, not out of Symbolic bounds but can be apprehended in a matrixial sub-symbolic. In Griselda Pollock’s reading, “Woman means different conditions: not just object or subject but the structure of transitivity” (Pollock, 2004: 46).

In her article “Transgressing with-in-to the Feminine,” Ettinger revisits the myth of Tiresias to counter Lacan’s claim at the now famous Amsterdam conference that we can know nothing of the Feminine dimension (Ettinger, 2000). She explains that Lacanian psychoanalysis is bound to a phallic axis of difference while there is, in her formulation, an Other sexual difference that is matrixial (Feminine) and applicable to everyone. There is, for Ettinger, a Woman in the matrixial Feminine dimension that can be symbolized. For the Israeli psychoanalyst, a Woman is not a self-subject but a non-regressive transitive relation. In the matrix Woman is a “border-Other, a becoming in-ter-with the Other, never a radical alterity” (Ettinger, 2001: 129). Ettinger also explains that the Woman is the “co-emerging partial self and Other, or a different kind of relations to the Other” (Ettinger 2006: 72). As she reminds us, a father and son can be a Woman. Feminine cognizance of a non-I (or Other) in-relation to the I (as partial-subject) is, for Ettinger, based on a matrixial trans-sensitivity open to everyone. It is, for her, a feature of that which makes us human (and thus grounds for ethics). There is no one isolated subject in a matrixial web, only a Woman, defined as a condition of co-emergent relations between at least two partial-subjects. The matrixial Woman apprehends Others (as non-I’s) as partners in difference.

While Lacan contends that a man (who experiences only phallic jouissance) cannot become a Woman (who experiences phallic jouissance along with an Other jouissance), Ettinger asks how Tiresias (or any partial-subject for that matter) cannot know something of/about the Other Feminine jouissance. Ettinger’s point is not that Tiresias can become a woman in a sociological sense (although he can) but, rather, that the story of Tiresias can tell us something about the transgression with-in-to the Feminine. Tiresias transgresses the difference between masculine and

feminine sexual positions in the phallic axis theorized by Lacan. This places him in the matrixial-Feminine dimension. Ettinger explains:

Under the matrixial light, the transgression in the figure of Tiresias between man and woman is not a transgression of a frontier between known maleness and unknown femaleness. Rather, since the matrixial *I* carries traces of experiences of the matrixial *non-I*, inasmuch as *I know in the other* and my *other knows in me*, non-knowledge of the feminine, in the matrixial borderspace, is impossible, by virtue of the transgression itself (Ettinger, 2000: 189).

Ettinger reasons that the Tiresian transgression with-in-to the Feminine involves a metamorphic engagement with an Other (as non-I). The Other sexual difference is, as explained above, transitive. A man can thus become a Woman. But more than this, from Ettinger's standpoint, it is impossible for anyone to not know something about the Woman (as co-affecting assemblage) in the Feminine dimension.

Sex difference in the matrixial is not about the One (and its binary oppositions between object and subject), but about "thinking transmissivity and co-affectivity" (Ettinger, 2006: 183). It isn't about *having* (man) or *being* (Woman) the phallus, for example, but about the unthought time-space of borderlinking in the Real. Ettinger explains that the sexual coefficient in the matrixial is not between individuated subjects and their Others (intersubjectivity), but between the Other in the subject and the subject in the Other (trans-subjectivity). Tiresias is, for Ettinger, a matrixial figure because he transgresses sexual positioning in Lacanian terms. She writes "what I would like to emphasize is that this kind of transgression between the sexes is a transgression with-in-to the feminine in a matrixial borderspace – whatever its direction [transition] is" (Ettinger, 2000: 206).

Tiresias also reveals something of the Feminine dimension pertinent to desire and *jouissance*. Although Ettinger does not focus on Tiresian desire, she does write about matrixial desire. Matrixial desire is to borderlink and to differentiate within a "transgressive encounter-event

and for the entirety of movements which create and fulfill such encounter-events, which, in passing by transformation would leave imprints for upcoming later transgressive encounter-events” (Ettinger, 2007: 119). For Ettinger, borderlinking in the Feminine sub-stratum is ongoing and never, finally complete. In the matrixial, no one undergoes a transgression alone. Significantly, Tiresias does not instigate his own transition, it is caused by Hera (as partner-in-difference). He enters into a transgressive space whereby there is an event-encounter with Goddess-Hera and, of course, the snakes. There is also a borderlinking with the God Apollo to whom Tiresias is faithful. It must be remembered that Tiresias is a prophet, a seer, and possesses knowledge outside the bounds of his own mortal and personal experience. Tiresian knowledge of, for example, incest and patricide in the House of Oedipus is not born out of his own experience. In fact, it is miraculous. Tiresian wisdom exceeds what can be known by any other character in the Sophocles trilogy.

As T. S. Eliot wrote in a footnote to *The Waste Land* (2001), “all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees is, in fact, the substance of the poem” (23). It is not surprising that Ettinger should choose Tiresias as a character who can transgress with-in-to the Feminine dimension but who can, also, tap into another axis of knowledge. Ettinger explains that “Matrixial desire is an aspiration and an inspiration from a feminine *jouissance* toward the edges of a wider Symbolic” (2006: 113). In other words, there is for Ettinger a ‘feeling knowledge’ that exceeds the phallic Symbolic. Lacan and Ettinger agree that Feminine *jouissance* is characterized by a unique orientation to knowledge and logic. Ettinger reasons that matrixial desire is attuned to the trans-subjective field and is, ultimately, knowledge of transgression and borderlinking. It is, in other words, knowledge of the Feminine dimension. My supposition is that Tiresias is also a matrixial figure in Ettinger’s formulation because he can see what Oedipus cannot. Not only does the Tiresian truth – that Oedipus killed his father and married his mother – lead to dramatic climax in the play, but it gestures to the boundaries of what can be known, at least without tragedy, in the phallic stratum represented in the play by the city of Thebes.

Tiresias is also a matrixial figure because he is bound to Others whom he does not repudiate. Unlike Oedipus, Tiresias avows his connections to Others (like, for example, Apollo), even as the God causes him pain. There is, in Ettingerian terms, a non-Oedipal sublimation and investment in Others that is Feminine. Tiresias embodies this non-Oedipal sublimation. Ettinger explains that the Other sexual difference “produces for men and women a different, non-Oedipal sublimation where, in the search for *non-I(s)*, the *jouissance* is of the borderlinking itself” (Ettinger, 2001: 110). This Feminine difference is symbolized by Tiresias, his transgression with-in-to the Feminine and his divine knowledge of an Other (Godlike) order of difference. Indeed, Tiresias turns the House of Oedipus on its head. Griselda Pollock writes that Feminine desire might “signify something of profound importance for discussions of human subjectivity and indeed sociality” (Pollock, 2006: 22). Likewise, Tiresias and transgender studies might signify something of profound importance to psychoanalysis.

Oedipus

Ettinger’s writing on Tiresias and the matrixial gives us a new perspective on the Oedipal-life-tragedy which is germane to much psychoanalytic theorizing. As evidenced in *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus cannot tolerate or recognize Others in his familial web – at least not very well. He abandons his adopted parents on the road to Thebes, misrecognizes his birth parents, begets offspring by his mother, who are also his siblings, and in his old age at Colonus, treats Antigone, his daughter-sister, like a nurse maid. I think we can agree that Oedipus has more than his fair share of family troubles. It is an unacknowledged fact that he does not set a good therapeutic example. Apart from the fact that he kills his father and marries his mother, he disowns his sons who are at war with each other for what was originally their father’s throne. Refusing Antigone’s advice to yield to his sons and relent upon his anger, to the older Polynices, Oedipus says: “Die by your own blood brother’s hand – die!” (Sophocles, 1984: 365). Antigone is left to contend with her father-brother’s traumatic legacy and tragically, takes her own life to give her brother, Polynices, a proper burial.

Oedipus eventually dies in exile at Colonus. As Tiresias told the Theban king years before his actual death: “No man will ever be rooted from the earth as brutally as you [Oedipus]” (Sophocles, 1984: 183). The Tiresian truth comes to pass and Oedipus dies a painful death in Colonus.

What Ettinger’s oeuvre adds to psychoanalysis is a way for us to see how the plight of Oedipus is structured not only by a disavowal of his traumatic life-legacy (involving patricide and incest), but of the Feminine. Oedipus lusts for his mother and over-identifies with his father, as indicated by his literal usurpation of his father’s marital-bed and position as king. While Freud thought *Oedipus the King* had an impressive following because it reveals universal incestuous and patricidal desire – hence the Oedipal complex – the play is, in my Ettingerian reading, a classic because it reveals the tragic outcome associated with the negation of an Other sexual difference. Oedipus is primarily suffering from an unsymbolized loss; a Feminine loss involving others in the matrixial web. What does his very public transgression of the incest taboo reveal if not a yearning for a way to borderlink with others from whom he has been separated? Oedipus could not apprehend his kin who stand-in for Others (non-I’s) in the Feminine dimension. Tiresias could see this lack of apprehension and knew it would lead to tragedy. Let us be clear about the fact that the tragedy in each of the three Sophoclean plays is born of exile, excommunication and war between cities: incest and patricide come after the fact. In other words, Oedipus is primarily affected by the traumatic rupture to his familial web and exile from his city-home. His position as King and patriarch prevent him from recognizing Others in his family and country to whom, from a matrixial perspective, he is ultimately bound.

Conclusion

I appreciate the role Oedipus has played in the choreography of psychoanalysis, but it is high time to make room on the psychoanalytic stage for other characters, like Tiresias, who tap into Other axis of difference. The mythology of Tiresias gives life and form to a configuration of Feminine difference that supplements the Lacanian formulation of sexuation.

Whether we accept Ettinger's critique of Lacanian writing on Feminine sexuality or, alternatively, choose to theorize a Feminine dimension of experience within Lacanian (phallic) parameters, it is important to embrace non-Oedipal characters, myths and stories in psychoanalytic theory. The Tiresian transgression with-in-to the Feminine is, in my Ettingerian reading, beyond the Lacanian limit mediated by the phallic structure. The transgression is, more precisely, into the matrixial order of things where no One is alone.

The story of Tiresias prompts us to consider an Other sexual difference relevant to a trans-psychoanalytic (Cavanagh, 2017) turn in the clinic. Tiresias is ideally positioned to tell us something in retrospect about what Ettinger calls the matrixial order of difference that is, like the phallic order of difference, sexual. In other terms, we are not lone actors on the stage of life but several and co-affecting in Ettingerian terms. By evoking Tiresias as emblematic of the Other sexual difference, we should not assume that transgender is a Rosetta Stone or unencumbered road to matrixial ethics or to an otherness beyond the phallus. As explained above, the matrixial is available to everyone regardless of gender, transgender status, and sexual orientation. Transgender life experience may, however, prompt us to consider another axis of Feminine difference because there can be an acute awareness of the Other sex in the One. As Ettinger explains, there are multiple ways to write the Woman in the matrixial. Transgender subjectivity may be one such way at least for those identifying as trans-Feminine or with the Tiresian-transgression with-in-to the Feminine.

Notes

- 1) I am using the masculine pronoun to reference Tiresias because the prophet lives most of his life as a man.
- 2) Ettinger refers to the non-I in the metamorphic encounter-event as a site of transmission to be distinguished from an Other as subject.
- 3) Ettinger (2006) offers her theorization of the Other sexual difference as an alternative to the formulation of the semiotic and the Chora (which

means womb and uterus) developed by Julia Kristeva. Although both the Chora and the Matrix are anchored to maternal encounters, Ettinger contends that the Chora cannot be symbolized in Kristeva's theory. The Chora is, for Kristeva, a precondition for the semiotic and ultimately a basis for language but is, for Ettinger, confined to psychotic discourse or to poetic discourse.

4) Ettinger refers to the Other (Feminine) axis of difference as a sub-stratum that coexists alongside what she calls the phallic axis of difference. The phallic axis of difference is the stratum whereby identity, intersubjectivity and sexual positioning (as man or as Woman) make sense. In the Feminine sub-stratum we are all trans-subjective because we are moored by Others and non-I's, partners in difference particular to a given matrixial web.

5) The I and the non-I are names for the partial-subject and its Other. "The I is a pulsating pole of co-poiesis. The I and non-I are pulsating poles of co-poiesis along a shared psychic string" (2006: 193). Together, these fields with their multiple I's and non-I's form matrixial webs.

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