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Shelia Cavanaugh

Tiresias and Psychoanalysis With/out Oedipus

Summary:

This article asks what psychoanalysis would look like had it been conceptualized from a Tiresian, as opposed to an Oedipal, perspective. Using Israeli feminist psychoanalytic theorist, Bracha L. Ettinger's (2006a) work on the matrixial borderspace, I show how there is an Other axis of sexual difference that conjures-up a transgender sex specific difference of relevance to trans studies and psychoanalysis. Ettinger's theory of the matrixial is a critical supplement to Jacques Lacan's work on Feminine sexuality where he, admittedly, has difficulty conceptualizing the Feminine dimension. There is a tendency in Lacanian psychoanalysis to theorize trans subjectivity in terms of psychosis. Moreover, some Lacanians view the Woman to be in closer proximity to psychosis than the man. My application of Ettinger's theorizing to Tiresias and ultimately, to trans sex specific theorizing, offers a way to think about gender variance and the Feminine in relation to an Other (non-phallic) axis of difference. Psychoanalytic theorists need to invest in non-Oedipal characters and myths, particularly those involving trans characters, to cultivate trans-positive and ultimately feminist analytic discussion and debate.

Tiresias, the one who ought to be the patron saint of psychoanalysis... (Lacan 2014, p. 183).

If psychoanalysis has a founding myth it is the story of *Oedipus the King*. Oedipus preoccupies Sigmund Freud to the point where he uses the Oedipal myth almost exclusively to understand the human psyche. As a result, we have sophisticated understandings of sexual difference within the domain of natal male masculine identification and phantasy, but only nascent understandings of an Other sexual difference beyond the phallus. Although Freud and Lacan give us important psychoanalytic tools to theorize desire, identification, phantasy, and Oedipal sexual difference, their focus on the phallic axis of difference has been subject to feminist psychoanalytic critique (Ettinger, 2006a). Specifically, the Feminine tends to be associated with passivity, as Freud tells us, or the Woman is said not to exist, as Lacan claims. While Lacanian feminists have explained that the Woman (who doesn't exist) is not a sexist equation made by Lacan, but a logical formulation structured by the real limit of language (Copjec 1994), her more fragile existence in the Symbolic has troubled many theorists seeking to understand the Feminine as something other than not-all. Moreover there are only rudimentary tools available to theorize transgender (trans) subjectivity outside psychosis in the Lacanian frame. If Antigone (in the Sophocles play by the same name) challenges heteronormative kinship structures as Judith Butler (2010) claims, and Tiresias^¾ the Theban diviner in both *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* ^¾ challenges cisgender norms of psycho-sexual development as I argue in what follows, these characters can push psychoanalytic theorizing beyond a normalizing frame. Oedipal dramas are not the only psychic struggles enacted on stage and the collateral damage done by the negation of an Other sex difference under the auspices of Oedipal psycho-sexual development is increasingly well established. It is incumbent upon psychoanalysis to invest in other non-Oedipal characters and myths,

particularly those involving trans characters. As Patricia Gherovici (2011) writes in her discussion of transsexuality and the clinic, “Psychoanalysis needs a sex change” (p. 3).

What would psychoanalysis look like if it were written from a Tiresian perspective? What knowledge does Tiresias possess that would trouble the existing order of psychoanalytic theory^{3/4} particularly those paradigms circumscribed by Oedipal stories without due regard for others in the family romance? In what follows, I answer these questions using Bracha L. Ettinger’s (2006a) formulation of the matrixial borderspace. Ettinger’s oeuvre gives us a critical supplement to Lacan’s analytic of sexuation. She gives sustained attention to Lacan’s later writings where he wrestles with questions about the Feminine and the Other *jouissance*. Ettinger is critical of Lacan’s premise that (a) Woman doesn’t exist but is, rather, a symptom of man or an object cause of desire and (b) that there is no sexual relation and thus an unavoidable sexual impasse between the sexes. Ettinger contends that there is a discourse and aesthetic particular to the Feminine that is submerged in psychoanalysis and in modernity more generally. In this Feminine axis of difference, Woman can be written (albeit in an expanded Symbolic) and there is a sexual relation, a co-affecting relation, where Others, as partners in difference, can be known.

Ettinger excavates an Other axis of sexual difference 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. From the perspective of the matrix, there is an Other axis of sexual difference that is primordial, occurring before, alongside and after Oedipal sex difference but irreducible to it. It involves attunement to a generative (birthing) corpo-Real bodily form that is not essentialist or pure or bio-certifiable. The corpo-Real calls to mind a Deleuzian assemblage that mutates and changes form but not in a haphazard way. The assemblage takes shape alongside and in keeping with co-emergent relations with Others as partners in difference. As will become clear in my discussion of Tiresias, Others and non-I’s are central to corpo-Reality in the matrixial. The corpo-Real is shaped by resonate vibrations of the m/Other (who is not necessarily a natal female birth-giving mother). Corpo-reality is about partial-subjective linkages to *sôma* (Greek for body), *techné* (Greek for craftsmanship), and *psyche* (a Greek God) of the body.

The Other sex difference is, for Ettinger, a corpo-Real sex difference that is neither essentialist or pure, but rather hybrid and transgressive. The ‘corpo-Real’ differs from ‘corporeality’ insofar as it involves phantasy, desire and multiple Others and non-I’s (known and unknown) in a matrixial web (not reducible to the familial). It is thus an ideal template for understanding trans sex specific embodiment and transphenomenology. This is a corpo-Reality linked to the Lacanian register of the Real (to be distinguished from a reality). The corpo-Real also appeals to an Other sex difference that is matrixial. 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 2006a, p.183). It isn’t about *having* or *being* the phallus, for example, but about the unthought time-space of borderlinking in the Real. In the matrixial dimension it does not make sense to posit an essential truth about the body or the subject. In the matrixial the body is best understood as a co-affecting and co-emergent relation to Others and non I’s in a Real borderspace of an encounter-event that is metamorphic. 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. This is not a ‘metaphoric’ change or a ‘metamorphosis’ so much as it is a corpo-Real borderlinking event in the matrixial that is subjectifying. Just as Tiresias is changed into a Woman by Hera for killing copulating snakes, metamorphosis retains something of the Feminine dimension that recalls Others in difference – be it the serpents, the deity, or the co-affecting time-space encounter in between. Ettinger (2006a) sometimes refers to the non-I as a site of transmission to be distinguished from an Other as subject. Given the porousness of the matrixial web as it pertains to partial-subjects, transitivity is about subjectivity as encounter (not regression).

For Ettinger, the Feminine is about borderlinking to ‘Woman’ who is, again, not a person or a gendered identity. In the matrixial substratum Woman “digs an-other area of difference with its specific apparatus, processes, and functions” (1997, p. 367). The Ettingerian Woman is a co-affecting and co-emergent borderlinking to Others (as partial subjects) in a matrixial borderspace. In fact, Ettinger writes that a father

and son can be a Woman. The relation is a metamorphic borderlinking and thus a Woman. Metamorphosis “draws a nonpsychotic yet *beyond-the-phallus* connection between the feminine and creation” (2006a, p. 64). It involves becoming and transgression with known and unknown Others in distance, proximity and difference. 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, p. 119). The Other (Feminine) 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” (2001, p. 110). It is felt “in/by the Real” (Ettinger 1997, p. 401). The borderlinking is an encounter-event in the Real at the basis of what Ettinger calls Feminine sexual difference.[1]

This matrixial difference is responsive to un-cognized memories of the early mother-to-be/late fetal sexual relations that leave trace inscriptions, mediate affects, and produces internal sensations that operate in the matrixial substratum. We might understand Ettinger’s affective trace inscriptions of *jouissance* in terms of Lacan’s markers, or what he calls invasive signifiers, imprinted on the subject’s body by the Other. Becoming is thus a Feminine enterprise predicated upon co-emergence in distance and proximity in a trans-subjective borderspace. We might also speak of a “borderline coming-into-being” (Ettinger 2007, p. 119), one that is both connective and differentiating and ultimately subjectifying in body and soul-psyche in the trans-subjective sphere, where partial subjects border-link to their non-I’s and others in a generative and copoietic space as a Feminine Eros particular to the matrixial.

Although Ettinger is not a trans studies scholar and to the best of my knowledge has not worked analytically with trans clients, she offers an understanding of an Other sex difference that is highly relevant to trans studies and to theories of subjectivity in general. Ettinger’s work offers a way to understand what American trans studies scholar Susan Stryker (2008) calls transgender phenomenon. The mythical character of Tiresias is, for me, a symbol of this Other sexual difference. This is not because Tiresias is trans but because they[2] bring Sophoclean characters, like Oedipus and Creon (and other Graeco-Roman characters in, for example, Homer’s *Odyssey* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), knowledge of (partial-)subjective interconnections between (and within) generations normally refused in phallic and cisgender (non-trans) ways of being and knowing. The Other sex difference involves an unconscious process whereby we are borderlinked to Others in a matrixial web. It is a sexual difference based on transitivity (to be distinguished from regressive or infantile confusion between subject and object). In essence, it conceives of the subject as more than One and bound to others in difference, distance and proximity. This Feminine (or matrixial) sex difference is before, alongside and after phallic sexual difference where identities make sense. It is not based on phallic cuts, splits and severance whereby it is possible to imagine a singular and unified subject. Rather, it is based on trans-connectivity, co-affectivity, and co-emergence in non-symmetrical and incongruent relations of becoming. There is, in this axis of difference, knowledge of Others and of what Ettinger calls an aggregated subjectivity (to be distinguished from intersubjectivity). Aggregated subjectivity involves trace connections to Others known and unknown in familial and extra-familial matrixes. Ettinger writes about metamorphic borderlinkages between partial subjects whereby compassion and ethics are predicated upon shared yet different experiences in togetherness.

2. Tiresias – The Sophoclean Character

Feminist psychoanalytic theorists have been searching for alternatives to Oedipus for quite some time but without attention to Tiresian-like characters. Much focus has been devoted to (a) Antigone, the daughter of Jocasta and Oedipus, born of an incestuous union, in the Sophoclean tragedy by the same name; (b) to a lesser extent, Jocasta, mother and wife of Oedipus, and (c) Eurydice, wife of Creon the King, who kills herself because she cannot live with her husband’s insensitivity to her son’s pleas to let Antigone, his fiancé,

give her brother Polynices burial rites – all characters in Sophocles’s plays. Judith Butler (2010, 2000), Bracha Ettinger (2010), Luce Irigaray (2010), Julia Kristeva (2010), Griselda Pollock (2010), and Fanny Söderbäck (2010) among others have all written brilliantly on Antigone. But significantly less has been written about Tiresias and their prophetic insight into Antigone’s traumatic familial legacy. Despite their clairvoyance, knowledge of masculine *and* feminine sexual pleasure (jouissance), and long life, Tiresias is largely absent from feminist theorizing (outside the Classics, of course) with the exception of a brief mention by Hélène Cixous and Annette Kuhn (1981) and one important article written by Ettinger (2000).

Tiresias appears in Greek mythology and makes an important debut in *Antigone* and in *Oedipus the King*; in Homer’s *Odyssey*; in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*; in T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*; and in Euripides’ *Phoenician Woman*. Tiresias is a Theban diviner who is famous for having lived as both a man and as a woman. They were the son of Everes, a shepherd, and Chariclo, a nymph. Tiresias is a liminal character straddling many binary divisions including (but not limited to) sex (male and female) and gender (masculinity and femininity); mortality and the immortality of the Gods; seeing and (symbolic) blindness, and past and future. Tiresias survives the liminal spaces they occupy and can tell us something about an Other sex difference theorized by Ettinger (2006a). The diviner lives alongside seven generations of Thebans, over 300 years. Although Tiresias is ultimately killed by the Greek God Apollo after drinking water from a tainted spring, they survive the turn-in-to-death and, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Tiresias continues to deliver prophecies from the underworld. They live alongside the dead in trans-generational continuity. Among all the Sophocles characters, Tiresias comes closest to incarnating the Other sexual difference as excavated by Ettinger (2006a).

Tiresias is, in Greek mythology, a highly respected figure with insight into the future. As told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, Tiresias came across two snakes copulating near Mount Kyllene in Pelloponese. Somehow upset by the mating snakes, Tiresias kills the female snake with their staff. In some versions of the myth they kill the male snake, in others they kills both. It may be that Tiresias could not bear two snakes appearing as One and makes a cut. Regardless, Hera, the Goddess of women, marriage and fertility is furious. Well known for acting upon impulse, she turns Tiresias into a woman in body and mind as punishment. In the process, Tiresias is also given the gift of prophesy and long-life.

As Luc Brisson (2002) notes in his discussion of Graeco-Roman antiquity, Tiresias seems to have “acquired...divinatory power only by acting aggressively toward snakes, the guardians of the primordial powers that lurk within Gaia, Earth” (p. 140). There are multiple versions of the myth, but let us refer to A. D. Melville’s 1986 translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

For once in a green copse when two huge snakes
Were mating, he attacked them with his stick
And was transformed (a miracle!) from man
To woman; and spent seven autumns so...(pp. 60-61)

It is difficult to know if Tiresias experiences life as a woman punishing. Although the change was delivered as retribution it came with divine powers. It must also be noted that Tiresias adjusts well to life as a woman. They marry and have three daughters: Manto (who was also given the gift of prophecy), Historis, and Daphne. Tiresias also becomes a renowned prostitute and priestess^{3/4} a female priest administering religious rites to Hera.

Seven years later Tiresias again encounters two mating snakes in the eighth autumn:

Till in the eight he saw the snake once more
And said ‘If striking you has magic power
To change the striker to the other sex,
I’ll strike you now again.’ He struck the snakes
And so regained the shape he had at birth...(Ovid 1986, p. 61).

It is important to note that in other versions of the myth Tiresias kills only the male snake. In others, they leave the copulating snakes be without injury. But in all cases, Tiresias regains a male anatomical form (though Elliot – centuries later — refers to Tiresias as a ‘man with sagging breasts’). Might Tiresias, upon the second encounter with the copulating snakes, be more at ease with the Feminine symbolized by the snake? Or perhaps they are no longer bothered by the procreative act whereby two serpents entwined appear as One? Whatever Tiresias did with respect to the snakes upon this second encounter, it is fair to say that it was guided by a Feminine principle that pleases Hera because she undoes the spell.

But all was not well for long. Juno and Jove (Greek Gods in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*) were in an ‘idle mood’ discussing the difference between feminine and masculine jouissance:

The pair were gaily joking, and Jove said
‘You women get more pleasure out of love
Than we men do, I’m sure.’ She disagreed.
So they resolved to get the views of wise
Tiresias. He knew both sides of love...
Asked then to give his judgement on the joke,
He found for Jove; and Juno (so it’s said)
Took umbrage beyond reason, out of all
Proportion, and condemned her judge to live
In the black night of blindness evermore...(Ovid 1986, p. 61).

Again, in other versions of the Tiresian myth, Hera and Zeus fight over the question of sex and pleasure. Some say that Tiresias made their report to the Olympian court: ‘Of ten parts a man enjoys one only, but a woman enjoys the full ten parts in her heart.’ Hera (like Juno) was moved to fury and struck Tiresias blind. Zeus, like Jove, takes pity on Tiresias but neither can undo the spell of blindness. Zeus gives Tiresias the gift of prophesy, second sight and long life in recompense. In Ovid’s version it is clear:

...no god
Has right to undo what any god has done)
For his lost sight gave him the gift to see
What things should come, the power of prophesy,
An honour to relieve that penalty (Ovid 1986, p. 61).

As the legend goes, Tiresias’s life spans seven Theban generations and the character serves the God Apollo. Tiresias became a respected and sought after prophet¾ even as those seeking Tiresian council like, for example, Oedipus and Creon (to be discussed below), ultimately refuse it or accept it too late (after insult and injury).

As Luc Brisson (2002) explains, ‘dual sex’ characters (like Tiresias) experiencing a successive change of sex, as opposed to a concurrent embodiment of both sexes, are appointed mediators and diviners in Graeco-Roman traditions (p. 115). Ed Madden (2008) also explains that Tiresian-poetics, in the Classics, are figurations of sexual difference. “The effect of the Tiresian, it seems, is simultaneously the sexualization of acts of signification and the signification of sex as itself a signifying system” (Madden 2008, p. 16). In other words, their poetics demand an Other sexual positioning in relation to language, one that is not phallic or beholden to the One of the phallic premise. Something of this Other sexual positioning is intended by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Of his Tiresian character in the poem, he writes in a footnote: “all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias” (Eliot 2001, p. 23). But this ‘one woman’ is not, in my view, to be read in phallic terms. ‘Woman’ is here meant to signify something of an Other sex difference beyond (or more precisely before) sex and gender identity become thinkable. Tiresias, the central character in Eliot’s poem, is the one who can see into the structure of the verse. [3] I read Eliot’s reference to ‘one woman’ as an early formulation of Ettinger’s (2006a) theory of the matrixial where Woman is a *being* in relations of affiliation. As Lacan would agree, there’s such a thing as One...[but this One] is not simple” (1998, p.

66). In Ettingerian terms, Woman is a transitive relation as opposed to an individual subject. Transitivity, in her formulation *is* a sex difference.

Tiresian figures in the classical and modern periods have been variously depicted as offering a metaphoric sexual doubling, a prosthetic voice-over (whereby there is a *being in* the narrative trajectory), and as a vehicle for a no longer 'individual' voice (Madden 2008, p. 278) which enacts this co-affecting relation that is transitive. In all instances, Tiresian figures offer a way of seeing, being and knowing born of a non-phallic sexual positioning. This sexual difference coheres and mutates across, beyond and within time and space. Tiresian figures thus conjure-up something more than intergenerational familial ties. They 'become' in a time-space nexus of an Other Feminine (non-phallic) order of difference. The matrixial nexes is a pre-linguistic encounter-event that is out of phallic (cisgender) time and place. As such, it is a matrixial interval where Tiresias, as a liminal figure, resides and exists. This is not a state of arrest (or psychosis) as understood in phallic terms. It is a Feminine or trans sex specific transgression that animates an Other axis of sexual difference pertinent to everyone. To invite synergy with Ettinger's work, I refer to this axis as the matrixial Feminine but others are welcome to redefine the axis in trans sex specific terms that are less likely to be reducible to femininity or to an essential (and thus cisgender) womanhood.

3. Tiresian Knowledge

Tiresian knowledge is tragically negated in the city of Thebes, striving to see itself as a democracy beholden to individual actors. In *Oedipus the King* Tiresias has the unpleasant task of telling Oedipus that he killed his father and married his mother. In *Antigone*, Creon the King is less than thrilled to hear that he must withdraw his indictment against Antigone, effectively forbidding her (by death) to bury her brother in Theban soil.

Tiresian divinations are not only about life and love and death (marked by a phallic limit), but the matrixial (Feminine) web, its co-affecting relations and trace-connections to Others of generations past. In other terms, their knowledge is about the matrixial familial and extra-familial web, which is Feminine (to be distinguished from feminine as a gendered form of knowledge or being). Knowledge of the Feminine dimension is not always well received in the budding Greek city-state. Although routinely sought out, Tiresian poetics are usually ignored or refused in anger and incredulity. For example, when Tiresias is summoned to shed light on the man who killed Laius, they are reticent to reveal the truth. Tiresias says to Oedipus, King of Thebes:

Just send me home. You bear your burdens,
I'll bear mine. It's better that way,
please believe me (Sophocles 1982, p. 177).

Oedipus does not accept Tiresias's generous (and wise) advice. He resorts to name-calling. Referring to Tiresias as 'unlawful' and 'unfriendly', Oedipus persists in scornful cross-examination:

What? You know and you won't tell?
You're bent on betraying us, destroying Thebes...
you scum of the earth, you'd enrage a heart of stone!
You won't talk? Nothing moves you?

Out with I, once and for all! (Sophocles 1982, p. 177-178).

Tiresias is indignant:

You criticize my temper...unaware
of the one *you* live with, you revile me (p. 178).

Oedipus rages on and accuses Tiresias of 'hatching the plot' of killing Laius with their own bare hands. Only then does Tiresias reveal the truth, that Oedipus slayed his own father and married his mother:

You are the curse, the corruption of the land!
...I say you are the murderer you hunt
...you and your loved ones live together in infamy,
you cannot see how far you've gone in guilt (pp. 179-180).

Oedipus remains ignorant and obstinate. He accuses Tiresias of envy, of undermining his Kingship. Oedipus damns Tiresian knowledge and affective attunement with the natural world in the process:

...so hungry to overthrow me
he sets this wizard on me, this scheming quack,
this fortune-teller peddling lies, eyes peeled
for his own profit – seer blind in his craft...
you and your birds, your gods – nothing (p. 182).

But as with each play featuring the great Theban seer, Tiresias is never wrong.[4] Their intentions are above reproach. Tiresias defends their own knowledge, second sight and powers of prophesy against (Oedipal) blind corruption:

So you mock my blindness? Let me tell you this.
You with your precious eyes,
you're blind to the corruption of your life,
to the house you live in, those you live with —
who *are* your parents? Do you know? All unknowing
you are the scourge of your own flesh and blood,
the dead below the earth and the living here above,
and the double lash of your mother and your father's curse
will whip you from this land one day, their football
treading you down in terror, darkness shrouding
your eyes that now can see the light! (p. 183).

Oedipus is slow to absorb the Tiresian truth. By the end of the play he understands his incestuous and patricidal acts, but he remains blind to the plight of Others in his familial web. In Colonus, Oedipus dies a terrible death. Alone and in exile he passes without having made amends with his sons (who kill each other in a blood-bath), Creon (his uncle), his beloved city of Thebes and those who live in his Kingdom.

Creon the King of Thebes (who replaces Oedipus) in *Antigone* doesn't fare much better. After refusing to let Antigone give her brother Polynices his burial rites, Creon finds himself in a downward spiral. His son (who is engaged to Antigone) and wife (who loves her son above all else) turn on Creon and beg him to recant. He promises to bury Antigone alive should she attempt to bury Polynices. But his edict is unpopular and the chorus senses trouble brewing in the Kingdom. Antigone insists that her brother is unique and irreplaceable. She is, as sister, duty-bound to bury him and does so (twice) despite the King's orders. Tiresias, reading the "murderous fury whirring in those wings [of the birds in the sanctuary]" (Sophocles 1984, p. 111) like tea-leaves, knows that trouble lies ahead. The Theban seer with advice Creon never before this day failed to heed, comes to the palace. Tiresias warns Creon of stubborn pride. To Creon he urges,

No, Yield to the dead!
Never stab the fighter when he's down.
Where's the glory, killing the dead twice over (Sophocles 1982, p. 112).

Like Oedipus before him, Creon is outraged and lashes out at Tiresias. The King at the edge of a tragic fall refers to Tiresias's speech as "obscene advice with rhetoric" (p. 112) for financial-gain. Tiresias then urges Creon to learn his lesson well and by heart:

...you've robbed the gods below the earth,
keeping a dead body here in the bright air,
unburied, unsung, unhallowed by the rites.

You, you have no business with the dead,
nor do the gods above – this is violence
you have forced upon the heavens.
And so the avengers, the dark destroyers late
but true to the mark, now lie in wait for you,
the Furies sent by the gods and the god of death
to strike you down with the pains that you perfected (p. 115).

Although Creon ultimately takes Tiresias's advice, he deliberates too long. Antigone hangs herself and his son Haemon dies by his own sword (meant for his father). Creon understands^¾ only too late^¾ the error of his ways. He gazes upon the blood of his own son and laments: "Look at us, the killer, the killed/ Father and son, the same blood – the misery!" (Sophocles 1982, p. 126). Shortly thereafter, the Messenger tells him that his wife, Eurydice, took her own life in utter despair. Having lost both sons (Haemon and Megareus) to the egregious acts of her husband she swears down on his head. Creon is, by the end of the play, reduced to existential nothingness, "I'm no one. Nothing" (Sophocles 1984, p. 126). His final words are reminiscent of the Oedipal life-story: "Whatever I touch goes wrong – once more/ a crushing fate's come down upon my head!" (p. 127).

Both Kings fall despite being given sound, life-saving advice by Tiresias. Tiresias uses their gifts wisely but is troubled by ignorance and resistance to what, following Ettinger (2006a), we may call matrixial knowledge expressed by those seeking their counsel. After telling Creon that in order to save his kingdom he must sacrifice Menoceus in the *Phoenician Woman* by Euripides, his very own son (named after his grandfather), Tiresias laments to their daughter:

It's a thankless job, being a prophet.
Interpret things the way 'they' do not like, they turn on you:
If you falsify results to save them pain –
Well, then you antagonize the gods.
Apollo should do his own dirty work:
Speak to men direct. Then they'd have to take notice (Euripides, *The Phoenician Woman*).

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 pain to him who sees!" (Sophocles, 1984, p. 176). Tiresias endures threats and insults by Oedipus who, like a petulant child, is unable to accept what is not only inevitable but sound advice.

Creon, like Oedipus, is overdetermined by what Lacan calls the paternal metaphor which is not only the 'law of the land' but the discourse of the master. Unlike Tiresias, who follows the God Apollo along with what they have gleaned of the Feminine dimension (which necessitates a non-phallic relation to language and to the question of being in the Lacanian analytic), the Kings are cursed by their inability to see beyond a phallic premise. More revealing is the fact that Oedipus cannot resolve what Freud calls the Oedipal complex. In

order to work through the Freudian Oedipal complex the subject must find a way to resolve or, at least negotiate, incestuous, aggressive, and anti-social desires in modern civilization. The complex carries with it significant affective force that is unconscious and formative. But Oedipus, stubborn as he is, wants to override the societal prohibition on incest and patricide. He does this by refusing to know a truth about his familial legacy.

As we see in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus's life doesn't end well. He certainly doesn't set a good therapeutic example! Nor does he respect his kin. Apart from the fact that he kills his father and marries his mother, he disowns his sons Polynices and Eteocles who are at war with one another for what was once their father's throne. Refusing Antigone's advice to yield to his sons and relent upon his anger, to the older Polynices he says: "Die by your own blood brother's hand – die!" (Sophocles 1984, p. 365). While his daughter is left to contend with her traumatic legacy, Oedipus remains unforgiving to the bitter end. As Tiresias foretells: "No man will ever be rooted from the earth as brutally as you [Oedipus]" (p. 183). Oedipus does not understand that his inability to yield to the Other is the source of his downfall. His enemy isn't Creon who he fears plots against him or his sons who are alleged to have neglected him in old age, or even the alleged murderer at large rumored to have killed King Laius. The killer at large is none other than Oedipus himself. Oedipus dies alone, in pain and self-chosen exile.

What is significant about the Tiresian presence in these stories and myths is not the fact that Tiresias is a trans-like character, but rather the knowledge the character possesses of the Other sexual difference, knowledge others, like Oedipus, more firmly entrenched in the phallic domain cannot see, let alone tolerate. Having said this, I want to be clear about the fact that a trans-identification is not a Rosetta stone or unencumbered road to the Feminine dimension. Nor am I suggesting that trans subjectivity is somehow better or more evolved than non-trans (cisgender) subjectivity. The Other sex difference is not an analytic code for trans identifications. Quite the contrary! A matrixial sex difference pre-dates the individual subject to what Lacan calls the cut of language. It is a transitive sex difference that is irreducible to singular subjects. Ettinger (2006a) writes about partial-subjects and aggregated subjectivities in the matrixial substratum. There are no identities as such.

What I am calling trans subjectivity may, however, prompt one to consider another sexuating axis of difference because there is an acute awareness of the *Other sex* in the one. My suggestion is that in addition to attaining a trans identity (in the phallic), one who is trans navigates a complicated matrixial terrain whereby they are almost-conscious of an Other in the One. The difference of the Other is not felt to be external to the subject. Rather, the difference of the Other is apprehended as a trace-like imprint which is somatized as a corpo-Reality. This trans sex specific identification involves a somatization of the *Other sex* in the body, not just as a *transgender* identification but as a phenomenological experience that is corpo-Real (thus involving the play of phantasy and desire in/on the body). The Other sex (that is Woman) may be conjured up through an identification with 'man' or 'Woman' in a phallic identificatory sense but she cannot be apprehended *as* identification (she is more than One). In a matrixial sense, the Other sex is always Woman as a condition of severality, she is a being-in-relation. This is, of course, somewhat compatible with the Lacanian claim that Woman is the other sex for both men and women. The difference, however, lies in the way the two theorists understand Woman and her capacity to be written. While Lacan maintains that Woman doesn't exist, in part, because she cannot be written, Ettinger believes she can be written, albeit in an expanded Symbolic attentive to the Feminine dimension. My theoretical wager is that for those who inscribe a trans identity (regardless of gender identity and natal sex assignment at birth), there is an acute awareness of, and attunement to, the Other, an Other Ettinger calls Feminine.

Of course, those of us who are cisgender must also negotiate the Other sex difference, but are less inclined to inscribe it on the body in a signifying way. For trans subjects there may be a no-longer unconscious knowledge of an aggregated subjectivity in the matrixial sub-stratum. But again, this engagement with an Other sex difference is open to everyone regardless of gender identity, sex embodiment and trans status. There are a variety of ways to embody or to signify the *Other sex* in the One. Transgender is but *one* way. Art, for Ettinger, is another way. Lacan writes that the Other "must have some relationship with what

appears of the other sex” (Lacan 1998, p. 69), at least from the masculine position. Ettinger builds upon this premise and elaborates upon it in her discussion of Tiresias: “...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, p. 206).

4. Bracha Ettinger’s Critique of Jacques Lacan

Lacan is well-known to have said at conference on female sexuality that we should not be fooled by the myth of Tiresias. The character cannot know anything more about Feminine sexuality than we do which is nothing. In Lacanian terms, it is structurally impossible to know anything about Feminine sexuality (the Other *jouissance*) because the structure of language and thus the unconscious prohibits us from knowing anything about it. This is a Real problem of language and logic. In his discussion of the unconscious, Lacan writes that there is “no access to the opposite sex as Other except via the so-called partial drives wherein the subject seeks an object to take the place of the loss of life he has sustained due to the fact that he is sexed” (2006, p. 720). For him, Feminine *jouissance* is not only a mystery but out of Symbolic bounds. Moreover, Woman is not-all (not all subject to the phallic premise), and thus in excess of the Symbolic. She is absence. In Ettinger’s (2006a) formulation she is, in Lacanian discourse, reduced to ‘Woman-Other-Thing.’ Lacan is thus insistent that even Tiresias^¾ who lives as both a man and a woman^¾ cannot tell us anything about the Feminine or the non-existent sexual rapport.

In her discussion of transgressing with-in-to the Feminine, Ettinger (2000) revisits the myth of Tiresias to counter Lacan’s claim that we can know nothing of the Feminine dimension. She suggests that Lacan can only see Tiresias through a phallic axis of difference while there is, in her formulation, an Other axis of difference that is matrixial (and thus Feminine). She writes: “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, p. 189, emphasis in original). In other words, it is impossible, from a matrixial angle, to *not* know something of Woman and the Feminine dimension. For Ettinger, a sexual relation *is* possible in the matrixial stratum. Sexual relations are, for Ettinger, possible and not inevitably marked by the Lacanian sexual impasse. Tiresias is, as I will argue along with Ettinger (2000), well poised to reveal something of the Feminine dimension foreclosed by Oedipal narratives. Griselda Pollock contends that Ettinger’s major theoretical innovation is to allow us to think beyond Oedipus, beyond the “Oedipal concept of woman as the castrated or abjected other, the desired incestuous mother or the passive unwanted sister” (2008, p. 31).

Tiresian poetics and Tiresian knowledge are, from an Ettingerian perspective, responsive to ‘Woman.’ For Ettinger, female sex specificity is not a ‘Woman.’ Ettinger does not speak of “woman-as-mother, nor of the womb as an ‘organ’ whose ‘natural’ existence ‘makes’ a sexual difference” (2006a, p. 180). Woman doesn’t exist in the confines of any one-body. Woman emerges^¾ not as a unitary figure, but as an intricate weave trans-connecting two (or more) partial-subjects. The Woman is, for Ettinger, a border-creature or, rather, a “*border-Other, a becoming in-ter-with the Other, an im-pure becoming-between in jointness*” (2001, p. 72, emphasis in original). Tiresias incarnates a modality of being that is not One (comprised of the masculine position) or, conversely, not-all (comprised of the Feminine position) in Lacanian terms. Tiresias exists in an Other Feminine dimension where they resonate with Others in difference in the matrixial time-space continuum. As Ettinger explains, in the Feminine zone the “matrixial stratum draws a phenomenological field of I with/for *some* other(s)” (2006a, p. 116).

Tiresias is responsive to Others and bestows Feminine knowledge of difference in togetherness that has ethical implications. Matrixial links join citizens and exiles alike in the Greek city-state. Tiresias is the bearer of difficult knowledge in the city of Thebes, an emerging democracy predicated upon individual rights and patriarchy, the nomenclature of the family and kingdom. While Freud thought *Oedipus the King* had an impressive following because it reveals a universal incestuous desire to bed one's mother, the play is, in my reading, a classic because it reveals the tragic outcome associated with the negation of the Feminine dimension in the city of Thebes. This is a negation Tiresias could see and foretold clearly. It must also be stressed that the tragedy in each play is born of exile, excommunication and war between cities. Incest and patricide come after the fact. The tragedy is to be found in the loss of family, friends, residents (citizens, refugees and exiles alike), and homeland: not in a universal inclination to incest and patricide.

5. The Tiresian Project

The incredible emphasis placed on Oedipal psycho-sexual development at the expense of other ways of being in relation to what Lacan calls a 'phallic premise' needs to be augmented by stories about those who are non-Oedipal. The rigidity by which we impose Oedipal ideals upon others makes it difficult to understand trans subjectivity and natal female subjectivity (which are, of course, not mutually exclusive). Moreover, it also affects those who are natal male (cisgender) and masculine. As Butler (2010) notes, even Oedipus himself seems to regard gender as a sort of curse (p. 136) and imposes gender variance upon his children in punishing ways. As Butler convincingly argues in her discussion of *Oedipus at Colonus*, he condemns his sons through the "trope of an orientaling gender inversion" (p. 136); praises his daughters, Ismene and Antigone, for having "quite literally taken the place of their brothers" (*ibid.*), and Antigone (Oedipus's daughter and sister) takes the place, by the end of the play, "of nearly every man in her family" (p. 137).

Oedipus is not just heterosexual in his lust for his mother and masculine in his over-identification with his father (as indicated by his literal usurpation of his father's position as King), he is, in my reading, suffering at the hands of an un-symbolized loss, a Feminine loss connected to others in his matrixial web. What does his very public transgression of the incest taboo reveal if not a yearning for an Other sex difference that would allow him to avow connections to his parents^¾both natal and adopted^¾ and to his siblings (who are also his biological children) from whom he was separated as an infant and then again later as an adult?

No one has more trouble with psycho-sexual development than Oedipus. Although we have learned much from Oedipus, it is time to give other characters a place at the psychoanalytic table. Not only is what Freud called the Oedipal complex important to psycho-sexual development, but from a matrixial perspective it is equally necessary to negotiate what I would like to provisionally call a Tiresian position. The Tiresian position may also be understood as a project, a desire, a poetics or a way of being in excess of the signifier and thus the Symbolic (but firmly existent in the sub-Symbolic). The Tiresian position (to be distinguished from a complex) enables the subject to work through a set of psychical struggles that are less about phallic cuts and severance (as in the phallic model), and more about what Ettinger calls borderlinking and metramorphosis (as in the matrixial model). It is important to note that the matrixial desire for borderlinking is also about differentiation. The matrixial sex difference isn't about amalgamation but co-emergence in differentiation. In other words, a Tiresian poetic would maintain a connection to Others, as partners in difference, but this connection would be best characterized as an unstable assemblage. Not unlike Haraway's (1991) cyborg or even Jasbir Puar's (2007) notion of assemblage, the Feminine dimension is not pure or innocent. It is hybrid and subject to its own unique sub-set of horrors including regression and what Ettinger calls fragilization (2009).

The Tiresian position would involve subjectifying turns with-in-to-the-Feminine axis of difference which may or may not involves trans sex specific transitions, medical interventions or hormone therapy. It may involve aesthetic and affective (non-normative) relations to Others in the phallic geo-political terrain. The Tiresian affair may be transphenomenological, but not particular to trans identified subjects. The Tiresian project would ignite the Feminine matrixial elements of the subject in familial and extra-familial webs. It may correspond to and coincide with Oedipal struggles but would not be reducible to them. It would involve desire, phantasy and trauma, like all psychical struggles do, but unique in one fundamental way: it embraces “some-thing of the other-woman-thing-object/*objet a* from an angle supplied by a nonmale side” (Ettinger 2006a, p. 62).

Tiresian desire, like matrixial desire, is about borderlinking to ‘Woman’ (who is not a person but a complex border-creature). Tiresian 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, p. 119). Becoming is thus a Feminine enterprise predicated upon co-emergence in distance and proximity in a trans-subjective borderspace. We might also speak of a “borderline coming-into-being” (*ibid.*), one that is both connective and differentiating and ultimately subjectifying. This becoming (as co-affecting event) occurs in a time-space matrixial nexus where partial subjects borderlink to their non-I’s and others in a generative and copoietic space ignited by a Feminine Eros particular to the matrixial.

Tiresian poetics, akin to what trans studies scholars call ‘trans genre’ (Ciecko 1998; Prosser 1998; Petrilli 2005; Salah 2014), are about writing this Other, trans-specific sex difference. It is, from a Tiresian perspective, no longer sufficient to think in terms of a binary, phallic (and thus cisgender) sexual difference. There are other axis of sexual difference including, but not limited to, the Other sex difference theorized by Ettinger. She supplants Lacan’s equation ‘Phallus = Symbol’ with “Phallus + Matrixial (+ possibly other concepts) = Symbol” (1992 p. 190). That which is Tiresian engages those ‘other concepts.’ While I suggest that a trans-specific sex difference maps on to this Other sexual difference theorized by Ettinger, it may take other forms and tap into other matrixes of sexual difference yet to be cognized.

There is, in the Tiresian position, an unconscious knowledge-memory of what Ettinger calls “an other value” (2006a, p. 63) beyond (and before) the phallus. This is not a memory of the gestating female body, but of a borderlinking to it that is an aesthetic experience of becoming in a shared borderspace. There are, according to Ettinger, phantasies “relating to non-Oedipal sexual difference and interconnectivity” (2006a, p. 69) that are not well theorized in psychoanalysis. Tiresias prompts us to consider what Ettinger (2006a) calls matrixial borderlinking but also, from the vantage point of trans studies, a trans-specific sex difference. Moreover, the Tiresian touches upon the way we labour to bring meaning and signification to matrixial links, to trace-connections in what Ettinger calls an expanded Symbolic. The Tiresian position involves “an-other partial-subject whose links to the I undergo transformations” (Ettinger 2006a, p. 63). The concern here is not with castrating cuts but with an aggregated subjectivity where the subject is not One but borderlinked to others and non-I’s in a shared borderspace.

Transgender identifications are distinguished by the way they involve a somatization of the *Other sex* in the body, not just as identification but as a phenomenological, aesthetic and affective experience. But those of us who are cisgender must also negotiate what Ettinger calls trans-subjectivity and sub-subjectivity, both of which involve an Other sex difference. In other words, we all experience and negotiate co-affecting webs in the matrixial borderspace. In Ettingerian terms, we are all in-ter-with Others known and unknown. As partial subjects in our various webs we become and co-fade, change, co-emerge and trans-mutate with our non-I’s and Others. From the vantage point of the matrixial we must find ethical ways to become and recede with and alongside others. Transgender makes matrixial links visible. More specifically, those who forge an identity with the *Other sex* seek to map an Other, trans sex specific difference onto the body as identity and as phenomenological experience. The difference of the Other (who is, according to Lacan, first the m/Other) is somatized and embodied as a link. What I am calling the Tiresian position is an ontological question of *being* whereby the subject must negotiate otherness and difference within the self. While there

are numerous and varied ways of coming to terms with (or indeed disavowing this primordial sex difference), trans subjectivity is one viable way to live in relation to that which precedes and exceeds the (phallic) Symbolic's register.

The Tiresian position is offered as an occasion to think with trans studies about psychical life after, beyond and alongside Oedipus. My intention is to inscribe an axis of sexual difference that isn't reducible to a phallic premise or negated by a cisgender psychoanalytic landscape.

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Notes:

[1] I heed Judith Butler's (2004) caution against framing the Feminine as having a "monopoly on non-identity" (p. 98). My use of the Feminine isn't intended to be reductive but rather to be consistent with Ettinger's original formulation. I am reassured by the fact that Ettinger defines the 'Feminine' as non-identity and leaves room to formulate other non-Feminine axis of difference irreducible to the phallic axis of difference.

[2] I use a gender neutral 'they' and 'their' to refer to Tiresias because the character is not exclusively 'she' or 'her' or 'he' and 'him.'

[3] *The Waste Land* is a difficult poem to interpret because it violates existing linguistic techniques and formulas. As literary critic Gorham Munson writes, Eliot is an "experimenter and tries to pierce into uncharted regions of technic and form. He tries to arrange the non-representative properties of literature *in vacuo*, to devise what Mr. Eliot in his essay on Jonson calls a 'creative fiction'" (p. 157). That Tiresias can see into the structure of the poem tells us something about how work isn't about 'man' or 'woman', or indeed both, as subject or symptom, of a barren waste land, but rather about the problem of *being* in sex.

[4] The only exception appears to be in Euripides's *Bacchae* where Tiresias is subject to satire and mocked.

Bio:

Sheila L. Cavanagh is a professor at York University in Toronto and an analytic candidate in the Lacan School of Psychoanalysis in Berkeley. Her scholarship is in queer theory, transgender studies, feminist theory, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Cavanagh edited a special double issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* on psychoanalysis (2017), co-edited *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (2013), and is co-editing a special issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* on the psychoanalysis of Bracha L. Ettinger. Her first book *Sexing the Teacher: School Sex Scandals and Queer Pedagogies* was given honorable mention by the Canadian Women's Studies Association. Cavanagh's second book *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* is a GLBT Indie Book Award finalist and recipient of the CWSA/ACEF Outstanding Scholarship Prize Honourable Mention. She is completing her third book titled *Bracha L. Ettinger & Jacques Lacan*. Cavanagh has been published in *The Psychoanalytic Review*; *MAMSIE: Studies in the Maternal*; *European Journal of psychoanalysis*; *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*; and *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*. Her research has been presented at the Freud Museum, the Anna Freud Centre, the Tampa Bay Psychoanalytic Association, the Toronto Psychoanalytic Society, and at multiple psychoanalytic conferences affiliated with the International Psychoanalytic Association and the New Lacan School.