

Oedipus and *Beyond* Oedipus.

From structuralism to poststructuralism

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1. Introduction

In this article I focus on the use of binary relations and oppositions and explore why in recent decades they have formed the Achilles' heel in a number of disciplines in the field of the human sciences. The prototype for this exploration is the myth of Oedipus and the numerous ways it illustrates the working of theory. Analysis of how binary oppositions have been used in the most diverse disciplines, such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, mythology and feminism, has proved to be a very successful technique to detect the functioning of large areas of western thought and ideology. Indeed, binaries as such never function in value free and neutral contexts, but always depend on larger sets that form the underpinnings of culture as such. I start by recounting how binaries have been used in structuralism, as part of the late sixties dream (see its different stages with Propp, 1928 (1958); Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Greimas, 1966; Barthes, 1970) to illustrate the functioning of the mind itself (section 2.1), and later on how this dream turned into a nightmare when structuralism turned into poststructuralism and revealed the hidden functioning of ideology (2.2.). Starting from the common Freudian notion of castration that dominated the imagination of the whole of the twentieth century (3), I then explore why the most recent developments in (feminine) psychoanalysis and the analysis of literature can claim to go BEYOND (4) the imagination of

cleavage, cutting and castration as necessary prices to be paid for achieving identity.

2. From structuralism to poststructuralism

2.1. Beyond any doubt, the most famous exercise in oppositional thinking conducted by structuralism was that of Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay on Oedipus (1955). It was the start of the public career of structuralist tenets and of the impact of thinking in terms of ‘binary oppositions’, as inspired by De Saussure’s structural theory of the linguistic sign. In Lévi-Strauss’ view a myth was a kind of communication, a coded message drafted by a whole culture and meant to be sent to its individual members. He decomposed its ‘content’ into series of ‘mythemes’, important relational messages that he arranged in columns according to certain common features which he found significant not only in the myth in question, but also in the beliefs of all primitive men, privileging thus the paradigmatic context over the syntagmatic. As he pointed out elsewhere (in a chapter called ‘Binary Operators’ in the last book of his four-volume *Mythologiques*): ‘Of course, all mythemes of whatever kind, must, generally speaking, lend themselves to binary operations, since such operations are an inherent feature of the means invented by nature to make possible the functioning of language and thought’ (1981: 559). The syntagmatic order of events that governed Sophocles’ Oedipus was left for a much broader cultural context in which this myth could be seen as ‘an orchestral score’ (1955: 432), a perspective that turned its concrete functioning into an idiosyncratic interpretation of the old comparative method.

Taken together, the first two columns of his analysis expressed the two parts of a logical binary opposition: the

overrating of blood relations versus the underrating of blood relations. The relationship between column three and column four was somewhat more difficult. Because the slain monsters placed in column three were in some versions said to be autochthonous (self-born, sprung from the earth) this column, in Lévi-Strauss' opinion, was thought to represent a 'denial of the autochthonous origin of man'. The fourth column referred to the difficulties in walking straight and standing upright, which Lévi-Strauss identified as a characteristic of men born from the earth, and led him to the conclusion that they pointed at the persistence of the autochthonous origin of man. Central to his analysis was the idea that mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution. For him, myth in general is a mode of human communication and the purpose of this particular myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions, relating an original problem (born from one or born from two?) to a derivative problem (born from different or born from the same?). Two opposed terms with no intermediary tend to search for a third which can function as their mediator and this dialectic process pervades the most important areas of human living, as was shown in his analysis of *La geste d'Asdiwal* (1959), where he revealed the functioning of four distinct levels of binary oppositions in geographic, cosmological, economic and sociological contexts (see below).

As illustrated by this type of analysis, early structuralism heavily relied on binary oppositions, dialectical thinking and abstract categories, hence the accusation of anti-humanism which was levelled against it. And, since this pattern of research also could be seen as a quest for Eternal Man and universal structures embedded deep in the human mind, it was also critiqued as a hidden longing for a lost human wholeness. However, the most general conclusion of the early structural studies of Propp and

Lévi-Strauss, as Alan Dundes mentions, was that binary opposition is present in many genres (myth, folktale, proverb, riddle, curse) and that it could clearly claim a universal presence in human cultural artefacts. ‘The critical point is that binary opposition is in no way peculiar to myth. ...To be fair, since Lévi-Strauss is actually interested in the nature of human thought (rather than myth per se), perhaps it doesn’t matter that binary opposition as a distinctive feature is not confined to myth. Quite the contrary. If binary oppositional thought is a pan-human mental characteristic, that is well worth noting. But then we must not pretend that the presence of binary oppositions in a narrative necessarily identifies that narrative as a myth’. (1997)

Important notions to remember are: the search for universal stories, underlying paradigms typically binary in nature, the presence of male heroes and their quest for individual selfhood, the structure of myth in terms of large comparative contexts (‘scores’, fields of experience) that in fact rely more upon the structure of the world than upon the structure of myth itself.

2.2. Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of *La geste d’Asdiwal* in 1959, in which he revealed four distinct levels of lived experience to be analysed in terms of binary opposition, the geographic (east vs. west), cosmological (upper world vs. lower world), economic (land-hunting vs. sea-hunting) and sociological (patrilocal vs. matrilineal communities), showed how meaning is created not through individual words, but through differences and oppositional pairs. Barthes and Lévi-Strauss strongly argued that meaning had a differential nature and that the way we understand a society depends not so much on the meaning that individual words have, but much more on our understanding of the difference between the word and its ‘opposite’. Since ‘reality’ as such cannot be grasped in a direct way, we are only able to discover it through representations of it, on the level of ideas that interpret reality. These interpretations seem entirely ‘natural’, but

in fact are totally cultural. Meaning is culturally constructed and reflects ideological positions. Texts contain layers of meaning that are shaped and reinforced by the recurrent use of binary oppositions, whose effect is to persuade and manipulate the reader (Althusser). Many of our shared ways of thinking about the world involve stereotyped images that contribute to the creation of ideological positions. However, as signalled by Derrida in the early eighties, the making of their constitutive values and norms depends on choices and selections: within the functioning of binary pairs, one is always culturally marked as connoting more positive values, while the opposite is regarded in a less positive light. Therefore, reading the way a civilization has been constituted is an exercise in detecting the place and function of all items in a hierarchy of values. Binary oppositions create and reinforce dominant ideologies, while privileging one side of each opposing pair of ideas and judging them in terms of a marked 'presence' and 'absence'. Poststructuralism rejected the claim that definite and absolute truths about the world could be ascertained. In the case of Oedipus and myths generally, this position led to the idea that in no way could they be reduced to one single purpose and meaning. Since the 'death of the author' proclaimed by Barthes (1968) de-centered the importance of any given roots (humanist ideas as God, the mind, the human self, the unconscious) and authorship, and drew attention to the creative forces of the reader, new perspectives for new types of readers and reading practices became available, among which were the analysis of changing cultural values, norms and gender categories, as well as other forms of literature. And once the (hidden) hierarchy that structured binary oppositions was exposed, attention could be paid to the whole network of assumptions and presuppositions that produced the illusion of singular and marked presences (male as positively marked, female as negatively marked). Derrida used deconstructive

techniques to destabilize the ‘logocentric’ principles of the global network that had spread around western civilization and turned it into a fundamental patriarchal construction. As early as 1957, the year in which he published his *Mythologies*, Barthes had used binary opposition as an ironic comment on the way we continuously try to reduce diversity to a kind of centred construction, chaos to order. The final decades of the twentieth century saw how traditional humanism, formulated as it was in the time of the Enlightenment, when filtered through structuralism and then poststructuralism, lost a great number of the categories through which it was used to construct the world as it then was. The continual rewriting of the myth of Oedipus testified to this deconstructive process. Though in the Interbellum, one of the high points of Modernism, Oedipus and myth in general were still rewritten from totalizing and foundationalist perspectives belonging to the old humanist model, it was very soon to lose all relations with a world that relied upon rational explication and start to display postmodern sensibilities.

3. The myth of castration ...

When embarking upon one’s quest for the contemporary western imagination, one cannot fail to note the almost claustrophobic obsession with Oedipus as a theme. This obsession has been remarked upon by the Egyptian critic Nehad Selaiha, who points out in her *Egyptian Theatre: A Diary* (1993: 137) that it ‘(had) haunted or rather bedeviled, all treatment of Greek themes in Egyptian theatre. Indeed, from the First World War on, the Oedipus-theme was extremely popular, since it represented the hope of a better future ¹. The drama written by Saint-Georges de Bouhélier (*Oedipe, roi de Thèbes*, 1919) reflected the idealistic and prophetic visions he wanted his tragedy and tragedy in general to convey. In the poem written by

Pierre Jean Jouve, *Sueur de sang* (1933), Oedipus is just another name for Christ who assumes human pain, Colonus just another name for Golgotha². In his neo-classical opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (1926-1927), Igor Stravinsky insisted on the French libretto written by Jean Cocteau being translated into Latin by Jean Daniélou. Ritualistic staging, based upon liturgical incantation and tragic distancing, turned this production into a strange combination of epic impersonality and terrifying grandeur, not an illustration of a human(istic) search for understanding, but rather a dark longing for sacralization³. Especially the period between the two world wars seems to have used the myth of Oedipus to question old religious solutions. Towards the final years of the interbellum, the radical disbelief of André Gide (*Oedipe*, 1931) even provoked a statement of radical belief and Christian affirmation by Henri Ghéon (*Oedipe ou le crépuscule des dieux*, 1938), since, in his opinion, the myth of Oedipus was intended to prepare a tribute to a new god of Love who would put an end to all suffering.

What all these versions had in common was a longing for a clearly focused vision and interpretation of the world. All ideas and themes ended up obeying one explanatory concept that totalizes the action. This action runs across or testifies to the will of God living in an ancient or modern world, and supposes the existence of a reality that exists beyond language, present in categories such as ‘male’ and ‘female’, ‘truth’ and ‘order’. The world in which the story unfolds is one that can be known and is treated in a way that is isomorphic with human thought. It can thus be considered a totalizing, essentialist and foundationalist concept.

Conceived as a discipline belonging to the human sciences, Freudian psychoanalysis explained and rationalized human behaviour⁴. And yet what was sanctified and proclaimed as its perennial example was the psychological

development of the male child. Thus, many of the activities of the Vienna circles of art, medicine and psychoanalysis of the 1900s pointed the way for many decades of viewing the female as a hysterical, irrational and pathological case, exactly the opposite of male behaviour⁵, a perfect illustration of what binary opposition created in a patriarchal and logocentric tradition. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, working as a contemporary of Freud's, was deeply engaged in the study of perversion and incest (cf. Richard Strauss, *Salome*, 1905, *Elektra*, 1909). Symbolism had already alerted the West to the deeper and often threatening layers of the female personality (Gustave Moreau, *Oedipus et le Sphinx*, 1864; Ferdinand Khnopff, *Les Caresses*, 1896). Painters and writers belonging to the Vienna Sezession did just the same (Gustave Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka). After a number of notorious failures with female patients (Ida Bauer as Dora; Bertha Poppenheim as Anna O.⁶), Freud admitted he could not arrive at an adequate interpretation of female sexuality and psychology. He who considered himself an improved version of Oedipus could not interpret his Antigone. Generally speaking, in his opinion, the psychic and sexual development of the little girl was to be conceived in strict analogy to the development of the boy, and this reduction provided her with a completely derived identity, that of the failed male.

This contagion as a result of the omnipresence of Oedipus was not only harmful because its implicit (and often enough, very explicit) theory of biological determinism was intended to prove the apparent natural superiority of men, but also because it meant that the feminine was always implied and structurally dependent on the male model. As Griselda Pollock says in her *Beyond Oedipus: Feminist Thought, Psychoanalysis, and Mythical Figurations of the Feminine* (2006: 88): 'Moreover, the exclusive dominance of the Oedipal model makes it virtually impossible to

think with the feminine since its version of the feminine is already incorporated structurally as what cannot yield meaning except as absence or loss: Woman/Other/Thing, in Lacan's formulation. Almost all psychoanalytical theories of the feminine, therefore, operate within the walls of the Oedipal topos even if they overtly attempt to reevaluate aspects of femininity that they can only, revealingly, subordinate as the pre-Oedipal'.

In terms of the logocentric tradition discussed by Derrida and the emphasis he put upon all notions pertaining to categories of 'presence' (cf. his privileging of speech over writing), the masculine has always been favoured over the feminine, simply because of the clearly visible presence of the male penis as opposed to the 'absence' of female genitals. Singling out this particular Greek myth as an example that could illustrate his psychoanalytic ideas, Freud determined for more than a century what had to be understood by male and female identity. However, this illustration of the human mind through the exclusive structure of the Oedipus myth also brought further consequences along with it: Oedipus not only served as a perfect illustration of phallic pleasure and the fear of castration; his daughter Antigone could be chosen to illustrate the inexplicable female and Jocasta the polluting mother.

Among French poststructuralists, it is certainly Cixous who is best known for her relentless zeal in deeply questioning hierarchical oppositions. As one of the feminist 'thinkers of difference' she refused to remain trapped in Freud's oppressive construction that obliged femininity to remain enclosed as the unknowable object in a male vision on art and science. In *The name of Oidipus. Song of the forbidden body* (1977), she rewrote in the greatest possible detail the part played by Iocasta. This radically new play conveyed a totally different vision of the world which was created through a profound and elaborate rethinking of all major presuppositions⁷. Roughly speaking, one

could say that the classical tragedy was ‘de-constructed’ and that another interpretation of the *libido* was introduced to question the traditional mythological patterns. Many deep structures belonging to the levels of language and text (for instance, processes like focalizing, causality and Episierung) and to the construction of space and time were deeply affected. By constructing a radically new semantic universe that reflected the choices and the values of Iocasta, the wife of Oedipus, she was able to elaborate a totally different way of constructing identity and sexuality, which was not based upon the Freudian interpretation of the castration complex⁸. Her text consisted of a prologue and twelve lyric songs, small lyric scenes, monologues and (dream)scenes, memories from a distant past leading without transition to a dramatic present, to be staged in many possible variations and successions of scenes. As a mother, who knows everything that ever happened, Iocasta asks* Oedipus to trust her and to believe in her love for him⁹.

Elaborating an old myth in a radical way also involved reconsidering Aristotelian poetics and their well-known compositional schemes. Cixous questioned the long-established emphasis on unity and its linear construction and broke into the linguistic and scenic reality of the text. Just like Brecht, the other great ‘dis-organizer’ of text and scene, she used all possible epic and lyric means to dislocate that well-known (male) tragic climax. It was Camille Paglia who, in her *Sexual Personae* (1990), emphasized the connection between the male genre of tragedy and the male will to work slowly but surely towards one decisive end.

Yet, Cixous also needed to re-define the basic categories and semantic fields which shaped the new mythical heroine¹⁰. Iocasta constantly encourages her son not to be afraid of the mother and invites him to explore the depths of a mother’s love. Once Oedipus can succeed in recognizing the value of this

maternal love, all fear of castration will come to an end, as will the terrifying mechanisms which inspire fear of the generalized Female and which urge him to exhibit strong macho behaviour. But this Oedipus is not ready for the new mythological part he has to play and cannot forget his feelings of guilt; it is only when Iocasta dies as a result of this failure that he disposes of his earlier cultural programming and discovers his new name and identity. Only after her death does he discover that he can freely explore his subconscious and get in touch with the female principle in his inner Self, without fear of the regulations (the Law) which have turned him into a Western man. Not the threat of a castrating father, but the acceptance of the complete female nature, is what gets the child out of the primary narcissist stage and helps it to finally accept the mother as the fully recognized origin of life and love.

In the opinion of Griselda Pollock in her *Beyond Oedipus: Feminist Thought, Psychoanalysis, and Mythical Figurations of the Feminine* (2006: 88), the procedure most likely to free western thought from the constraints of the patriarchal binary oppositions¹¹ is to divert the 'exclusive focus on Oedipus in the extended legend to that of other members of his family through whom we might recover this lost potential of a feminine difference, not reducible to the binary opposition'. 'Moreover', 'she argues, 'the exclusive dominance of the Oedipal model makes it virtually impossible to think with the feminine since its version of the feminine is already incorporated structurally as what cannot yield meaning except as absence or loss: Woman/Other/Thing, in Lacan's formulation. Almost all psychoanalytical theories of the feminine, therefore, operate within the walls of the Oedipal topos even if they overtly attempt to reevaluate aspects of femininity that they can only, revealingly, subordinate as the pre-Oedipal'.***

4. ...and BEYOND

Kristéva, Cixous and Irigaray have been labelled ‘thinkers of difference’, feminist theoreticians who have all been influenced by various strands of poststructuralist reflection and deconstruction. Their ‘écriture féminine’ referred to an aesthetic way of writing based upon the specificity of the female libido, with special reference to bodily dimensions. Theirs was a method for analysing the oedipal structure of the whole patriarchal culture, revealing that the oedipal complex should not be seen in terms of a universal law, but as a historical instrument in the constitution of a patriarchal culture. Yet Pollock (2006: 89) points at a radically different and new point of departure: ‘It is important to stress here that although both Julia Kristeva’s thesis on the chora and the semiotic and Luce Irigaray’s philosophical and psychoanalytical theses on a psycho-corporeal sexual difference have been hugely influential, and while the texts of both intimate radical possibilities, neither work beyond Oedipus on a structural level’.

In her *‘Lacan, Irigaray, and Beyond: Antigones and the Politics of Psychoanalysis’* (2006: 121-140) Miriam Leonard even speaks of ‘the whole move “beyond Oedipus”’. Both Leonard and Pollock, who published their articles in a recent book called *Laughing with Medusa. Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (ed. by Vanda Zajko & Miriam Leonard, 2006), rely upon a common heritage, Judith Butler’s analysis of the position of Antigone (*Antigone’s Claim. Kinship between Life and Death*, 2000) and Bracha Ettinger’s definition of the ‘Matrix’ (as exemplified in her ‘paintings’ of Eurydice¹²). No longer engaged in the traditional hetero-normative ordering of sexual difference, Butler analyses the position of Antigone and focuses, according to Pollock (2006: 93), on ‘the impossible no-place in kinship structures of the woman, Antigone, who is both daughter and sister to her father-brother, both aunt and sister to her nephew-

brother, both daughter and granddaughter to her mother-grandmother. Antigone has been subject to a radical, feminist rereading as a figuration of non-filial, non-familial affiliation sought beyond the family plot that Butler reveals as the foundational and continuing metaphor for philosophy, ethics, and political science'. Such a position clearly escapes the traditional western habit of phrasing and ordering everything in pairs of marked and less marked/unmarked notions and introduces different and heterogeneous contexts as means of interpreting identities.

Ettinger, in books and essays with new coinages such as *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006), *Matrixial Trans-Subjectivity* (2005) or *Trans-subjective Transferential Borderspace* (2002), is concerned to create a radically new vocabulary: she constantly refers to the crossing of 'thresholds', 'borderlines', and to practising 'transgressions'. In order to cope with the 'strange' position occupied by, for instance, Polyneikes, she introduces two neological paradoxes called 'partnership-in-difference' and 'separation-in-jointness': Antigone's pain/trauma arises 'from the tearing away into total separateness of her principal partner-in-difference, until this moment separated-in-jointedness', a complete rephrasing of the position occupied by Antigone's brother/nephew. The background of her vision is based upon a definition of 'subjectivity as encounter' (as formulated by E. Lévinas) and all her efforts result in the creation and exploration of the notion of 'Matrix', a dimension that dives underneath the phallic model. Globally, her new theory is based upon anamnesis of the matrixial space -space condition (connectivity within the matrix)- and also upon the capacity of all humans to sense and feel what humanity and connectivity with the other mean, an attitude that cannot survive if the other is abused so that it always has to postulate castration and cleavage as primary elements in the constitution of the subject. In this matrixial philosophy, that

she expressly does not oppose to the old oedipal model, but rather positions underneath or beside it, she attempts to create a new sensibility that approaches sexual difference from a non-phallic point of view.

What a world of difference it makes to the western imagination when feminine subjectivity can be seen beyond the Oedipal castrating consciousness, no longer as the abjected other or the always incestuous mother. As mentioned by Pollock: ‘The Oedipal or castration paradigm defines subjectivity as the effect of accumulated cuts and cleavages caught up and retrospectively defined by castration that posits the subject as the discrete, territorialized celibate One, cut away from a non subjective continuum or archaic Other. The matrixial paradigm suggests that, we can trace elements of another dimension or subjective stratum in which subjectivity is generated not by cut and an economy of loss and absence, but by *encounter*, *severality*, and *sharing* from the inception with an unknown, partial Other that is never fused, never lost, never had, never absent, but constantly sensed, into and from which its partner in difference, separated in jointness, fades and retunes.’ (Pollock, 2006: 96)

CONCLUSIONS

Globally, this article addresses how western identity has been created as a result of a limited number of (Greek) myths and epistemological notions (dialectic vs. non-dialectic; unity vs. multiplicity; phallic vs. non-phallic, and hence: presence vs. absence, in the sense of non-existence). Since reality as such cannot be experienced, humans have to use language and think in and through language, as the only possible window to look through. Language is also a means which allows us to model ‘reality’ and shape it in an understandable way. The subject itself, as explicitly belonging to language, only gets its meaning in and through language. Yet, in the evolution of the west, one

had to wait until the late sixties, when Derrida made us see that the system that organized oppositional pairs was not value-free, but on the contrary deeply engaged with ideology. The cultural system that is at work through language creates oppositional pairs that are constructed on a hierarchical basis: man/woman, white/black, culture/nature, mind/body, sun/moon, active/passive. These are not real or ‘natural’ oppositions, but culturally constructed ones. This ideological underpinning also impacts on the implementation of narrative notions such as subject and object, the hero and the false hero: what formalist investigations of the folk tale (Propp) and structural analysis of every narrative (Greimas) rather naively use as key notions. The positions occupied by Subject and Object, are not unified and homogeneous notions, but rather rationalized umbrellas for the presentation of male action and male desire.

The theory of literature is an important weapon that forces us to consider what paradigmatic instruments we use, what selections of problems we choose, and ultimately what kind of worldview we adopt and privilege. The examples I have adopted from the Oedipus myth are situated on a sliding scale that departs from structuralism and its propensity to privilege binary opposition as a working tool. However, this sliding scale also reveals that in recent last decades many theoreticians and intellectuals have adopted a quite different basic instrument: the specific feminine semiotic space or *chora* studied by Kristéva, Irigaray’s feminine presence as ‘fluid’, Butler’s ‘non-normative family’, and Ettinger’s ‘partnership-in-difference’ and ‘separation-in-jointness’.

All these new approaches clearly show that the millennia-old Oedipal myth/legend/tale has recently been subjected to another ‘myth’, one that leaves behind all dominating ideas of polarity, cleavage, presence and castration for a new model, one that circles around the notion of plurality, difference, fluidity,

intrauterine and hence prenatal feminine encounter. Hence the whole idea is that the subject no longer has to aim at restrictive identities and at fixed cultural images. On the contrary, at the dawn of a new millennium, it has to deconstruct and deterritorialize former essentialist positions. This is part of a post-modern, post-dramatic, post-colonial, post-historical worldview that reminds us of a new paradigm that support contemporary theory of literature. This approach makes us doubt all former dichotomies, not only man/woman, but also east/west, and stimulates us to contribute to a different world and culture, a world BEYOND Oedipus and castration, beyond the traditional male gaze.

- ¹ Françoise Dury, *Oedipe dans la littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres*, in: *Les Etudes Classiques* LIV, 1986, 1, p. 59-79.
- ² Pierre Jean Jouve, *Les Noces* suivi de *Sueur de Sang*, Paris, 1964, Gallimard (cf. Jean Starobinski, Préface, p. 24, mentions 'l'élaboration du paysage spirituel').
- ³ In the introduction to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* by Esa-Pekka Salonen (Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, 1991), Wolfgang Dömling discusses the creation of the *OR*: 'At a somewhat later date Stravinsky intimated that religious experiences had been the principal motivation behind his decision to set to work on the piece. In September 1925 he had appeared as soloist at a concert given by the International Society for New Music as part of Venice Festival and "had prayed in a little church, before an old miraculous icon", as an apparent result of which an abscess on his finger was miraculously healed. On returning to Nice, he bought a "book about St. Francis and decided after reading it to use the language that is also the language of the Western Church, and shortly after that I chose the archetypal drama of purification", in other words, the Oedipus legend' (p.7).
- ⁴ Driek van der Sterren, *Oedipus. Nach den Tragödien des Sophokles. Eine psychoanalytische Studie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1986 (1948), Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag; Didier Anzieu, *Oedipe avant le complexe ou de l'interprétation psychanalytique des mythes*, in: *Les temps modernes* XXII, 1966, 245, p. 675-715 (severely criticized by Jean-Pierre Vernant, „Oedipe“ sans complexe, in: Jean-Pierre Vernant & Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en grèce ancienne*, Paris, 1972, Maspero, pp. 75-98).
- ⁵ O. Weininger, *Sexe et caractère*, Lausanne, 1975, (1903); S. Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, London, 1994.
- ⁶ L. Martens (*Hofmannsthal's Elektra*, in: *German Quarterly*, 60, 1987, pp. 38-51) argues that Hofmannsthal actually read the work of Freud and Breuer before composing his *Elektra*; moreover, in his opinion, Anna O (ps. for Bertha Pappenheim, also a patient of Breuer's) can be seen as a model for his *Elektra*. Cf. M. Worbs, *Nervenkunst. Literatur und Psychoanalyse im Wien der Jahrhundertwende*, 1983, Frankfurt am Main; Ph. M. Ward, *Hofmannsthal, Elektra and the representation of women's behaviour through myth*, in: *German Life and Letters*, 53, 2000,

pp. 37-55. Cf. Sigmund Freud & Jozef Breuer, *Studien über Hysterie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1970 (1895), Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

- ⁷ Cf. Mieke Kolk, *Spreken om het leven. Vrouwelijke subjectiviteit in het postmoderne theater*, Amsterdam, 1995, Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- ⁸ Cf. Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother / Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, 1989, Indiana University Press.
- ⁹ A comparable kind of plea for understanding and peace can be found at the end of *Oedipe, roi de Thèbe*, by Saint-Georges de Bouhélier (1919), when Jocaste starts to dance in the middle of crying masses.
- ¹⁰ In her book *Hélène Cixous. Authorship. Autobiography and Love*, Cambridge, 1996, Polity Press, p. 59, Susan Sellers mentions the female longing for remembering as fundamentally different from the male will to know: ‘This capacity to remember what might otherwise be effaced is an important component of Cixous’ vision of *écriture féminine* and is evoked in other texts written at this time. In *Le nom d’Oedipe* (‘The Name of Oedipus’), remembering is linked to the mystery of origin. Woman’s intimate knowledge of the origin is contrasted with Oedipus’ desire which perversely involves renouncing life: “my whole life for the answer” .
- ¹¹ Here, one remembers Harold Bloom (*The Anxiety of Influence* 1973) and Gilbert & Gubar (1979), who analyzed the history of western literature in terms of a constant oedipal battle between fathers and sons. Other attempts have been made to break free from the constraints. De Lauretis (1984) analyzed the oedipal plot of many narrative structures and created a different version of it by reading the story through the eyes of the Sphinx. Silverman (1988) focused on the mother-daughter relationship, while describing the mother as a source both of desire and identification. Hirsch (1989) gave Iocasta a special voice with which to address especially her daughter, freeing her from her position of being only a mother and evoking her, as is the case with many non-western female authors, as female subject in poly-voiced situations (as a mother, daughter and mistress of herself).
- ¹² See Judith Butler on Bracha Ettinger’s Eurydice, in: Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Minneapolis & London, 2006, University of Minnesota Press, *Foreword*, pp. VII-XII.

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