

According to Freud the "Uncanny" or "Unheimliche comes from repressed infantile complexes, from the castration complex, intra-uterine phantasies, etc."¹ 'In consequence Freud conceives at the heart of human subjectivity and of the unconscious other ways than castration. He does not totally cover into shade the link to alterity in the maternal womb: *'Intrauterine life and early infancy form a continuum to far greater extent than the striking caesura of the act of birth would lead us to believe. The psychic maternal object replaces for the child the biological foetal situation. We should nevertheless not forget that in the intrauterine life the mother was not an object, and that in this time there were no objects.'*² If he insists on the psychic need of the denial of the female sexual specificity, it is to preserve the narcissism of the male child according to the logic of the primacy of the phallus. And consequently, he problematizes the female subject as a lacking and threatening identity due to the fact that it reactivates the incestuous bond with the mother. He goes as far as to assert that the *'undoubted intellectual inferiority of so many women can rather be traced back to the inhibition of thought necessitated by sexual suppression.'*³

The arrival of the feminine to thought is thus not self evident. Nonetheless, Freud does not ignore this something of a world in common deposited in each one of us, even before birth. In the analysis of his dream of the three Parcae who spin the fates of men, he recognizes that one of the three women, the hostess in the dream, is the mother who gives life.⁴ The emotion awakened in us by 'the touch-and-emotion archaic figure of with-in the mother' can reveal itself spontaneously in unexpected moments.

We know the invitation which Freud made to us: *' If you want to know more about femininity, enquire from your own experiences of life or turn to the poets...'*⁵.

I would therefore attempt to read, inspired by the thought of the matrixial developed by Bracha Ettinger, some extracts of the letters exchanged between Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé. In the posthumous homage Freud paid to Lou, he stresses that *she was both the muse and the attentive mother of the famous poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who experienced such an amount of distress in life.*⁶ It is true that subjectivity as encounter held a significant place in the life and the work of Lou Andreas-Salome. She considers that the most positive she ever lived is *'a fundamental feeling of unsoundable community of destiny with all that is.'*⁷ Deeply convinced of the founding experience of establishing link, she advocates the widening of the territory in common by Eros and joins Freud on the

¹ Freud Sigmund, (1919) *The uncanny*, S.E. 17, 219-256

² Freud Sigmund, (1926) *Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety*, S.E. 20, 77-174

³ Freud Sigmund, (1908) « *Civilized» Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*, S.E. 9, 198-199

⁴ Freud Sigmund, (1900), *The Interpretation of Dreams*, The Material and Sources of dreams, S.E. 4, 135

⁵ Freud Sigmund, (1933) *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, S.E. 22, 135

⁶ Andreas-Salomé Lou, *Correspondance S. Freud*, hommage posthume de Freud, Gallimard, 1970, p.457-458

⁷ Andreas-Salomé Lou, *Looking Back. Memoirs*, ed. Ernst Pfeiffer, Paragon House, 1991

question of the construction of the social bond: *'in actuality culture is not content with such limited ties as these; we see that it endeavours to bind the members of the community to one another by libidinal ties as well, (...) and that it exacts a heavy toll of aim-inhibited libido in order to strengthen communities by bonds of friendship between the members.'*⁸

Twenty five years of friendship linked not only Rilke and Lou but also Freud and Lou. In 'Mein Dank an Freud' she honours Life who *'weaves our life, composes the poem of it'*⁹. Would she have had a share in the opening of Freud¹⁰ who in its famous 33e conference on femininity, establishes *'one particularly constant relation between femininity and instinctual life'*¹¹

The selected short extracts alternate the **'conscience to be one'** (separated or in fusion with the Other) and the **matrixial conscience** of a borderspace shared with an intimate unknown Other and of a 'co-emergence-in-distinction'. They start by evoking the phallic sphere related to the 'castration complex', then they move towards the matrixial sphere where plurality is originary and finish, finally, by giving to understand the ethical position of the separate subject.

Let us listen to what Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to Lou Andreas-Salomé on July 18, 1903:

Rilke to Lou Andreas-Salomé
Worpswede near Bremen
July 18, 1903

Dear Lou, I must tell you (...)

And once late in autumn a little old woman stood beside me one evening in the light of a shop window. She stood very still, and I thought that like me she was busy looking at the things displayed for sale, and so I scarcely paid her any mind. Finally, though, her presence began to make me uneasy, and, I don't know why, I suddenly looked down at her oddly clasped, worn-away hands. Very, very slowly an old, long, thin pencil emerged from those hands, it grew taller and taller and took a very long time to become completely visible, visible in all its wretchedness. I can't say exactly what it was that made this scene so terrible, but it seemed to me as if a whole destiny were being played out before me, a long destiny, a catastrophe that was building up fearfully to the moment when the pencil would cease growing and, trembling ever so slightly, topple out of the loneliness of those empty hands. Finally I understood that I was supposed to buy it ...

*Rainer*¹²

⁸ Freud Sigmund, (1930) *Civilization and its Discontents*, S.E. 21, 59-145

⁹ Andreas-Salomé Lou, *Open Letter to Freud*

¹⁰ Verougstraete Anne, *Lou Andreas-Salomé et Sigmund Freud*, l'Harmattan, 2005, p.139

¹¹ Freud Sigmund, (1933) *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, S.E. 22, 3-182

¹² Rilke Rainer Maria and Andreas-Salomé Lou, *The Correspondence*, W.W.Norton & Cy NY London, 2006, p.52

According to the phallic logic, the poet's glance is focused on a fixed point, the objects on display in a shop window. In the pane of glass in front of him, he becomes aware of the reflection of a little old woman. He observes her standing beside him; separated from him. Are they both trying to re-conquer the lost object - by mastery and control?

The pane of glass acts as a screen. Reflected in it, the goods on display capture their attention creating a feeling of similarity between them, and yet the poet is not at all affected or moved by the stranger standing beside him :

And once late in autumn a little old woman stood beside me one evening in the light of a shop window. She stood very still, and I thought that like me she was busy looking at the things displayed for sale, and so I scarcely paid her any mind.

But the proximity to the matrixial phantasy related to the encounter of the prenatal feminine in the Real, brings about a change (of state). The old - eventually archaic - woman is not standing in forceful proximity but in the fragile vulnerability in besidedness. Her presence becomes increasingly tangible. A deep concern, inner trouble becomes almost tangible. The poet is aware of a certain uneasiness within himself. Awakened from the anaesthesia of his disaffectedness, he consents to not knowing what is going on. His glance suddenly moves towards that which is worrying him. This unconscious movement results in an ' encounter-event':

Finally, though, her presence began to make me uneasy, and, I don't know why, I suddenly looked down at her oddly clasped, worn-away hands.

An experience of porousness and sharing is interlaced. It marks the threshold, both of a transgression and a point to stop. Bracha Ettinger calls 'borderlinking' these relations and processes of change and exchange in which the *non-I* is a *partner-in-difference* of the *I*.¹³ At the unstable border between the self and the other, the visible and the invisible, the familiar and the unfamiliar, it is a transsubjective psychic zone of affective and informative contact. In the space filled with an almost tangible presence between the anonymous intimate partial poet and the worn strangely-clasped hands of the intimate anonymous passer-by, existence itself blossoms. A certain awareness of co-emergence and co-fading in difference corresponds to the feminine dimension of subjectivity, since joint recordings of shared-but-singular and particular experiences re-evoked archaic phantasies of the link between the female invisible body specificity and the prenatal subject-to-be. *Traces of these contacts are at the basis of new joint and singular psychic alliances*.¹⁴ The concept of matrix developed by Bracha Ettinger covers 'a transforming borderspace of encounter (...) locus of a process of multidirectional change and exchange on the borderlines of perceptibility'¹⁵, directed towards the feminine in both men and women. The matrixial awareness experienced by Rainer Maria Rilke shows that men have also known an intrauterine existence :

¹³ Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, The Matrixial Gaze, Minneapolis London, 2006, p. 63

¹⁴ Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, The Matrixial Gaze, Minneapolis London, 2006, p.69

¹⁵ Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, The Matrixial Gaze, Minneapolis London, 2006, p.64

Very, very slowly an old, long, thin pencil emerged from those hands, it grew taller and taller and took a very long time to become completely visible, visible in all its wretchedness.

The slow unfolding of the scene is accompanied by a feeling of uncanny. Is it the apparition of the child as a substitute to the lacking penis of the mother or the emergence of the absolute wretchedness of the nascent child which has something so terrible? As Freud often suggested, anxiety and the return of the repressed go hand in hand. In this move, superimpositions are making themselves felt. Oscillations of the touch, variations of the pressure, fluctuations of the movements. An originary repressed comes back to the surface. The erotic antennae of the psyche allow themselves to vividly sense the pain and/or pleasure which is unbearable intensified by the impression.

The old pencil emerging gradually, carries with it in the present, traces of ancient scripture :

I can't say exactly what it was that made this scene so terrible, but it seemed to me as if a whole destiny were being played out before me, a long destiny, a catastrophe that was building up fearfully to the moment when the pencil would cease growing and, trembling ever so slightly, topple out of the loneliness of those empty hands.¹⁶

A secret and uncanny weight emerges behind the strange aesthetic experience. That which is not homely and known, which comes from elsewhere, is frightening. A remote and yet familiar experience, unrecognised yet recognizable. Experience which concerns the relation-without-relating to the maternal corporeal "thing" and to the archaic events, forever mysterious and out of touch, having however opened to the touch. The I's passivity is transformed by the non-I's activity in jointness-in-differentiating by the passage through channels of trans-sensitive borderlinking.¹⁷

The frightening effect of this scene seems to hold to the appearance of trauma. We know that Rilke had to replace in the maternal affection an older sister who died in a young age. In the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge he describes how, by compassion for his mother, he sometimes adopted a female sexual identity. Without being deceived, he lent himself to the destroying play of his refused masculinity, trying to thwart the prohibition to be born :

It occurred to us that there had been a time when Mama wanted me to be a little girl and not this boy that I actually was. I had somehow guessed this, and the idea came to me of sometimes knocking on Mama's door in the afternoon. When she asked who was there I was happy to call out 'Sophie' from outside, making my little voice so dainty that it tickled my throat. And when I went in (the small, girlish smock that I usually wore, with the sleeves completely rolled up) I was simply 'Sophie', Mama's little Sophie, who was busy about the house and who had to braid Mama's hair, so that there could be no confusion with bad Malte, if he should ever come back. His return was by no means desired¹⁸

¹⁶ In his letter of 4.XII.1896 Freud also sees himself as borne by somebody else than himself. He writes to Fliess that biology and his person are a bearing territory to him, a basis: he wants to ground 'his column to his pedestal'.

¹⁷ Bracha L. Ettinger, *From proto-ethical compassion to responsibility*, in Revue « Athena », éd. Versus Aureus, Lithuania, 2006 NR.2, p. 110

¹⁸ Rilke Rainer Maria, *The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* translated Burton Pike, p.73

The opening to the other and to the world does not go only through primary affects of rejection and abjection but also through fascination and primary compassion. All through the lasting process of encounter-event, it's not a cause to its anxiety that Rilke is looking for, but what comes towards him, and a quality of hospitality. Wit(h)ness of the passage through the trauma of otherness, he cautions the action of the old woman and yet surrenders to fascination of what the glance has initiated, at the border of Reality. Could and should we say that he recognizes an initially non frightening experience, impregnated by movement? Progressively he consents to a certain fading of trembling movements and accepts the loneliness of his existence in the emptiness of the loss of the origin. Bracha Ettinger holds that *'the matrixial 'aesthetical' yet proto-ethical com-compassion, arised inside maternal compassionate hospitality in meeting with primary infantile compassion, can't be 'obliged'; but as a psychic move this is precisely what inflexes the individuated subject toward responsibility where each unicity of being can, and often does indeed, rather choose relations of cruelty or abandonment.'*¹⁹

In the poet, once more aware of himself as an individuated subject, a capacity is born. He understands that the pencil can be the instrument for writing the poetic images which emerge in him by the particular state of consciousness of free associations. As no other Rilke hears the call of hurt and defeated existences: the pencil intimates him to tell them, to receive them in his poetic speech that unites and pays the price for them. He realizes that by the gesture of writing, during which an ordinary pencil can be the instrument of realising poetic thoughts, he gives a certain concrete shape to that first invisible relation to the Other he carries in him. Embracing the otherness of himself and of the world, and endorsing it, he makes us encounter our own otherness:

Finally I understood that I was supposed to buy it ...

Let us listen now to the reply of Lou Andres-Salomé:

{Westend near Berlin}Rüsternallee 36.
July 22, 1903

Dear Rainer,

As I read your last letter there were moments when what you described made such an impact on me, came alive through the smallest physical detail and yet grew beyond it into the tremendously human, that I forgot about you completely. And I felt that odd process of "ensouling" that can emanate even from impressions of misery when they come not just straight from life but channelled through the life of that person creating them, transmuting them. For you are wrong when you say that you merely suffered through all these things as a

¹⁹Bracha L.Ettinger, *From proto-ethical compassion to responsibility*, in Revue « Athena », éd. Versus Aureus, Lithuania, 2006 NR.2, p. 111

helpless accessory without repeating them in some higher process. They are all there : no longer only in you, now also in me, and external to both of us living things with a voice all their own (...)

Lou²⁰

Although she does not theorize the matrixial in her reply to Rilke's letter, Lou Andreas-Salomé places herself in the complex zone along which unconscious (transferential) dimensions in the encounter cause very subtle dynamics of borderlinking. She surpasses the rhythmic movement of presence and absence in order to reveal that the emergence of meaning depends '*on shareability and jointness and on the changes of the distance-in-proximity.*'²¹

She perceives the organic links and waves which connect the poet's singular experience to what goes beyond him with a view to acquiring a vast human dimension :

As I read your last letter there were moments when what you described made such an impact on me, came alive through the smallest physical detail and yet grew beyond it into the tremendously human, that I forgot about you completely.

The matrixial dimension reveals a new perspective of the *impossibility of not-sharing in the Thing-event.*²² We hear Lou affirming the trauma and the community in a single movement. Could that odd process of "ensouling" felt by her be of the kind of diffuse matrixial affects of minimal pleasure-with-displeasure? *Response-ability, vulnerability, fascination, awe, compassion and fragilizing self-relinquishment are forever bound within the matrixial nets composed of psychic-mental strings and shared threads and working-through in metramorphosis*²³, writes Bracha Ettinger :

And I felt that odd process of "ensouling" that can emanate even from impressions of misery when they come not just straight from life but channelled through the life of that person creating them, transmuting them.

In its function as '*passeur*' to the Symbolic, metramorphosis acts from the shareable borderspace to create and redistribute the traces of these joint transformations of the encounters.²⁴

Lou allows herself to enter the dance. She gives Rilke an echo of the transforming effect of what he writes to her has on her. Noticing that the one is already in the other, although in discontinuity and in an asymmetric way, she clarifies the matrixial weaving:

²⁰ Rilke Rainer M and Andreas-Salomé Lou, *The Correspondence*, W.W.Norton & Cy NY London, 2006, p.57

²¹ Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Foreword Butler-Pollock, Minneapolis London, 2006, p.70

²² Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Foreword Butler-Pollock, Minneapolis London, 2006, p.74

²³ Bracha L.Ettinger, *From proto-ethical compassion to responsibility*, in Revue « Athena », éd. Versus Aureus, Lithuania, 2006 NR.2, p. 116

²⁴ Ettinger Bracha L., *The Matrixial Borderspace*, *The Matrixial Gaze*, Minneapolis London, 2006, p.64

For you are wrong when you say that you merely suffered through all these things as a helpless accessory without repeating them in some higher process.

The traces of all things which the poet has ever experienced, journeyed through in his life, and that are partially 'cross-inscribed' in multiple small matrixial weavings, that return - displaced, redistributed, and artistically augmented:

They are all there : no longer only in you, now also in me, and external to both of us living things with a voice all their own (...)