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abstract:

In 1924 Beata Rank de domo Minzer (1886 – 1967) publishes an essay whose title translates as: The Role of a Woman in the Evolution of a Society. The text written by an eminent Polish born psychoanalyst is largely devoted to the (very early) reinterpretation of a specific bestiary developed by Freudians. In this constellation of figures, borrowed from the ancient imagery, a special place is occupied by female-animal hybrids and monsters: the Sphinx, Medusa, or Chimera. The main aim of this article is to trace how these character have been filtered through the prism of interpreting the écriture féminine - above all, in the spirit of Hélène Cixous, somehow foreshadowed by the early thought of Beata Rank. The considerations taken up in the text will be illustrated by chosen examples of oeuvres by contemporart Polish artists.

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Sphinx and Gorgons: The Evolution of the Psychoanalytic Bestiary – Reinterpretations

I would like to open this essay, which explores psychoanalytical tropes in art, with a certain associative constellation. The first frame of this kaleidoscope is filled with the mermaid characters of Golden and Silver, protagonists of the 2015 film *The Lure*, directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska from a screenplay by Robert Bolesto.[1] In this postmodern musical, a loose paraphrasing of a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, the young Sirens, or perhaps Mélusines, utter a spell-cum-counting-rhyme that invokes the figure of the Medusa. The grotesque, surreal, and dark dimension of this image resonates well with the paintings of Aleksandra Waliszewska, whose singular oeuvre adorned the walls of the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art until recently.[2] To survive in an unfriendly, traumatizing world, one can either become a monster, luring unsuspecting victims with song, or take a wholly different tack – silence. The latter option is explored in Smoczyńska's 2022 follow-up, *Silent Twins*, which received the Golden Lion at the Gdynia Film Festival. It ought to be noted that, from a psychoanalytical standpoint, both films are studies of duality in the literal sense, focused on twinning and mirror images.

In the spring of 2022, a different Golden Lion, a Leone d'Oro, was awarded to the acclaimed African American sculptor Simone Leigh. Displayed at the Biennale di Venezia's United States pavilion under the meaningful title *Sovereignty*, her exhibition featured the figure of the *Sphinx* (2022; Fig. 1), clearly alluding to the way that colonial imaginaries conceived the sexuality of Black women.[3] The Sphinx, ultimately, is a sweeping visual metaphor, covering the majority of herstories; these, in turn, were particularly prominent at 2022's Biennale, with curator Cecilia Alemani selecting noted English surrealist artist Leonora Carrington to serve as matron of the event.[4] Leigh's work – socially engaged and formally perfect – leads us to another association. Her statue of the *Sentinel* (Fig. 2),[5] depicting the African goddess Mami Wata, also known as "La Sirene," symbolically resonates with the 2008 Luciano Garbati sculpture *Medusa with the Head of Perseus* (Fig. 3). The similarities include the location of the two works. The bronze Mami Wata, with a snake coiled around her body and a concave "head" patterned after Zulu ceremonial figurines, was installed in 2020 in New Orleans' Egalité Circle, replacing a monument to General Robert E. Lee.[6] The concave "head" of the deity may also resemble the archetypal silent and "devouring" visage of the Great Goddess, the ur-mother,[7] and, to some extent, an inverted *Gorgoneion*. Garbati's sculpture,



Fig. 1. Simone Leigh, *Sphinx*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo Timothy Schenck. © Simone Leigh
Fig. 2. Simone Leigh, *Sentinel*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo Timothy Schenck. © Simone Leigh
Fig. 3. Luciano Garbati, *Medusa with the Head of Perseus*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

depicting the story of the Medusa *à rebours*, or, more precisely, offering its willful culmination, also in 2020, outside the courthouse where the trial of Harvey Weinstein was to be held. This original post-script to the story of one of the Gorgons, antithetical to tradition – it is enough to mention Benvenuto Cellini's beautiful, triumphant sculpture *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (1545) – was quickly hailed as an icon of the #MeToo movement.

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Sphinxes, Gorgons, Chimeras, and Sirens "with a thousand faces"[8] – all of these enigmatic, hybrid monsters draw our gaze and pierce (Latin *punctum*) and blind (after Bataille) the eye, while at the same time warning us (Latin *monere*) about the existence of shadowy depths that Apollonian reason does not penetrate and which the *logos* cannot master. These negative images, or maybe anti-images, are exploited by classical psychoanalysis for its own purposes. This whole bestiary inhabits the Freudian "dark continent," the domain of *die Unheimlichkeit* (significantly, in German, as in Polish, "uncanniness," even "horror," are feminine nouns). It also haunts – "populates" does not seem the correct verb – the imagination of the surrealists, closely reading *Die Traumdeutung* and other of Freud's works (who, like every genius, sometimes made mistakes). This baseline bestiary that he outlined has been reworked over the years, by way of both academic study and literary creation. Contemporary psychoanalysis, (post)structuralism, the philosophy of difference, and feminist critique – in various configurations – constitute against its backdrop a shimmering palimpsest. The figures I have

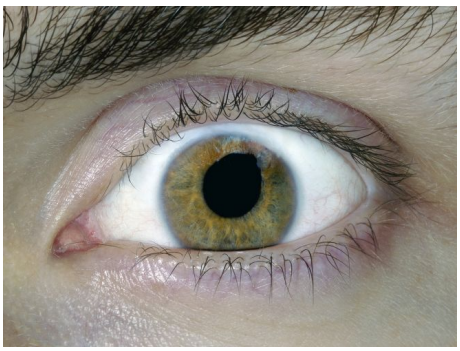


Fig. 4. Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Untitled*, 1993/2006. Courtesy of the artist, Raster Gallery and Lyles & King

chosen to serve as the motif of this essay are, without exception, amphibolic, a quality further emphasized by the fact that, in Polish, the Sphinx is a masculine noun (while its etymology suggests the roots trace back to the female anatomy, cf. the Latin *sphincter*).[9] It can be argued that both the Medusa and the Sphinx may be considered archetypal maternal figures, a claim that will be properly explained later in the essay. But it is not, especially in the newer interpretations, a motherhood situated within the phallocentric (after Irigaray) patriarchal idiom. These figures are analogs of great mother goddesses, often chthonic deities, and lunar, too, equipped with serpentine attributes. They bear similarity to the parthenogenetic Hera, the viperish Lamia, and – given the geographical contexts – the aforementioned Mami Wata, or the omnipotent Ishtar/Inanna. Olga Tokarczuk made the Assyrian/Mesopotamian deity a character in her *Anna In in the Tombs of the World*, paying tribute along the way to Enheduanna, Ishtar's priestess, the first person to sign their works with their own name.[10]The pre-Oedipal mother – the Sphinx – is, in turn, the daughter of the half-woman, half-snake Echidna, sister to other delightful creatures, Cerberus and Geryon, and, according to some versions of the myth, both the sister and daughter of Orthros. This incestuous aspect evidently rhymes, on two separate levels (the Sphinx and Jocasta), with the figure of Oedipus.

Before I outline the changes that psychoanalytical optics impressed upon the images of the aforementioned creatures, I would like to mention that Freud's classical intellectual formation – natural in the circles of educated Europeans at the time – was largely shaped by reading Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as the works of Theodor Gomperz and Jacob Bernays (the uncle of Sigmund's wife Martha). In this context, Jacques Le Rider's 2001 essay "Philologie grecque et formation de la théorie psychanalytique," published in the psychoanalysis

journal *Essaim*,[11] is a particularly valuable source of insight. Similarly interesting is Alf Hitenbeitel's 2018 book on Freud's academic correspondence with India's first psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose, especially its eighth chapter, "Thinking Goddesses, Mothers, Brothers and Snakes with Freud and Bose,"[12] exploring the mythological interests of the discipline's father. In it, Hiltenbeitel describes Freud's peculiar predilection for giving the names of monsters or animals to women he knew. The author reveals that, throughout their engagement, Freud called Martha Bernays "Mélusine."[13] By contrast, the young Freud allegedly called his previous fiancée, Gisele Fluss – whose surname is German for "river" – an "ichthyosaurus."[14] Interesting reading can also be found in the analysis of Freud's 1904 "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis" penned by Bernard This and cited by Hiltenbeitel,[15] which would later result in Freud's splendidly written letter to Romain Rolland.[16]

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In classical psychoanalysis, both the Sphinx and the Medusa – again: the strange mother of Pegasus and Chrysaor – mythological *femmes fatales*, are treated as the antithesis of that which is rational and, to some extent, incorporeal. Both of these characters are associated first and foremost with castration anxiety and, of course, the Thanatos instinct. "To decapitate = to castrate," states Freud in "*Das Medusenhaupt*," written in 1922 but published only in 1940, adding that "The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something" – specifically the taboo of female genitalia.[17] The Sphinx is also a threat, as it requires Oedipus (and every man) to solve a logic



Fig. 5. Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Selfie no. 8 b*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist, Raster Gallery and Lyles & King

riddle. Once the challenged man demonstrates mastery of the fatherly *logos*, the monstrous hybrid – one of the figures of the pre-Oedipal triad – self-destructs.

Out of necessity, I will forgo a more detailed analysis of the role played by these "beasts" in Freud's imaginarium; such an inquiry would extend beyond the scope of this essay. I must also "leap over" their mirror reflections in other psychoanalytical (and related) texts, often written from a "male" perspective. I use the mirror metaphor here for a reason, because the motif of mirror reflection, along with related notions including narcissism, doppelgängers, and distorted anamorphic reflections, warrant a separate study. An analysis covering this constellation ought, naturally, to include relevant references to the intellectual findings of the Lacanian school, Roger Caillois' concept of mimicry, Jacques Derrida's structuralist reading of the Gorgon (with particular emphasis placed on the concept of "otherness"), and the figure of Narcissus and his doppelgänger, coupled in the madness of thanatophobia, as described by Otto Rank.[18]

Likewise, an inquiry into how the figures in the Freudian bestiary are interpreted through the lens of the female gaze (Laura Mulvey) could also fill a separate text.[19] This intellectual web spans the findings of Hélène Cixous, Marie-Louise von Franz, Julia Kristeva (especially the concept of the "abject"), and Luce Irigaray,[20] as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who drew up their "anti-capitalist" anti-Oedipus figure.[21] I will go only so far as to propose a more general observation – that the subject of feminist-inflected criticism, vis-à-vis



Fig. 6. Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Skin Doll no. 2* , 2016. Courtesy of the artist, Raster Gallery and Lyles & King

"paternal" psychoanalysis, is the image of the woman conceived as a sort of antithesis, a derivative sex, or womanhood as defined through the struggle against pervasive lack. I will now briefly discuss three texts that are highly distinctive in this regard.

One of the first psychoanalytical texts to feature nascent traces of *écriture féminine* (although the concept had not yet been developed) is a 1924 essay penned by Beata Rank (*née* Mincer, nicknamed "Tola") titled "*Rola kobiety w ewolucji społeczeństwa*" [Role of the Woman in the Evolution of Society].[22] The eminent scholar – cited by Freud in his writings on *The Uncanny* (1919) and married to Otto Rank – introduces an original footnote to Freud's 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, with her inquiry into female collectives governed by the "lunar principle" (after Bachofen).[23] In it, she pays attention to the peculiar "monstrosity" of female participants of social revolts (the French Revolution in particular), finally discussing the figure of the Sphinx as a "male mother," an interpretation aligned with the prevalent idiom of the time. The text's most cognitively valuable aspect is the conclusion concerning the sublimation (although Rank does not use the term explicitly) of the figure of the deity – precisely a "deity" in her interpretation, rather than a monster. One highly suggestive passage says: "Seeking to overcome the mother and stamped by their zealous identification with the father, the sons strip her of her power. In recompense, they elevate her to the rank of goddess."[24]

The face of the snake-haired Gorgon, meanwhile, only brightens up in Cixous' 1975 essay "*Le Rire de la Méduse*" [The Laugh of the Medusa]. Drawing on Freud's aforementioned metaphor of "the dark continent" – which essentially equates the "geography" of female sexuality with the murkiness of the Uncanny, the domain of blind, unrestrained desires – Cixous boldly argues that "the Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable."[25] Rejecting the logic of phallogocentrism

– a concept introduced by Derrida – Cixous transforms the image of the unsightly and terrifying Gorgon into a figure of beauty and subversion, even a trickster to some extent. In her conception, the Medusa is "beautiful and she's laughing."[26] Is she perhaps amused – like the one placed outside the New York City courthouse – by the destructive zeal of Perseus?

In keeping with modern conventions, female monstrosities are painted in somewhat brighter tones by Chinese American philosopher Yuan Yuan in his 2016 book *The Riddling between Oedipus and the Sphinx: Ontology, Hauntology, and Heterology of the Grotesque*.[27] However, in closing this part of the essay, I want to refer to the original but incredibly dark concept of the "monstrous-feminine," proposed by Barbara Creed in her 1993 *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. This concept, created from a cluster of words, was not, as the author emphasizes, coined as the simple obverse of "male monstrosity," manifestations of which can be found, for example, in gangster movies.[28] In a way, the scholar seeks to empower the female monster – in classical psychoanalysis the subject is inevitably male – granting it dignity by removing the victimizing clichés. Cinematic Gorgons, Sphinxes, witches, vampiresses, and avengers – all kinds of female xenomorphs described by Creed – elude the category of "victim" and wield powers that Freud – probably due to the mechanism of repression – dared not analyze. The transgressions committed by the heroines of horror films, who ultimately emerge triumphant



Fig. 7. Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Mama no. 31*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist, Raster Gallery and Lyles & King

from their bloody clashes, no longer serve the purposes of moralizing narratives. It is rather a cathartic ritual, as Creed argues after Kristeva, of embracing the corporeal, formless, decaying abjection which "does not respect borders, positions, rules."[29] In the so-conceived genre of the subversive monstrous-feminine, the author includes female figures from William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, Ridley Scott's *Alien*, David Cronenberg's *The Brood*, and Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (understandably, the list cannot include Luca Guadagnino's excellent 2018 remake, or the low-brow comedy-horror of Mitchell Lichtenstein's 2007 *Teeth*, a quite literal illustration of the vagina dentata trope described in the book). This gallery could also be expanded with the addition of one of Agnieszka Smoczyńska's mermaids, Golden, who chooses to remain true to her predatory nature, contesting the logic of the natural order.

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In closing, I will cite some examples of works from Polish twenty-first-century art that draw on the psychoanalytical bestiary, somewhat filtered through the lens of women's studies. They will serve as an illustration of the considerations above. Their common denominators are postmodernist hybridity, the rooting of artistic appropriations in culture, and reference to surrealist poetics. This is somewhat obvious in the context of a surrealist reading of psychoanalysis, given its comprehensiveness and creative richness.



Fig. 8. Mikołaj Sobczak, *Gorgon*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Polana Institute

In this regard, a poignant example can be found in the trope of the wounded eye, used by Aneta Grzeszykowska, which inevitably echoes the opening scene of Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. This literal *punctum* – the eye of the artist's brother pierced through with a needle (*Bez tytułu* [*Untitled*], 1993/2006; Fig. 4) – marks a distinctly Bataillean trope in her art, exploring the overlapping domains of the sacrum of (oculocentric) eroticism, sacrifice, and inevitable demise. In the rich tapestry of Grzeszykowska's work, there is a clear thread of the relationship between original and copy, as well as the simulacrum, which Rosalind Krauss called "a copy *without* an original."[30] It this context, we ought to bring up her appropriations[31] of themes and figures from Maya Deren's films, Cindy Sherman's photographic series *Untitled Film Stills*, or digitally simulated "photographs" of non-existent people. One particularly meaningful metaphor for the artist is the negative – which, I believe, extends the aforementioned definition of woman as a figure born of antithesis, negation, or absence. The notion of "lack" is also richly expressed in the backgrounds of her films, like hollow, dark maps of "continents" haunted by monsters. Some specific frames from the 2008 video *Ból głowy* [*Headache*] do indeed bring to mind the severed limbs of a Gorgon. A more direct reference to the saber-toothed Medusa, blinded by her own reflection, can be found in the *Selfies* series, steeped in a peculiar *delectatio morosa*,[32] in adoration of the abject, usually pushed beyond the limits of visibility (*Selfie #8b*, 2014; Fig. 5). These truly grotesque forms, reflecting the anatomy of the artist's individual body parts, were created from pig skin. In this case, we are also dealing with the sublimation of the harrowed victim (the physical animal body in the chaos of decay)

into a semantically capable construct. In other words, the *abattoir* is turned into the *musée*.

Skin, marking the boundary between the experienced interior and the perceived exterior, seems to be Grzeszykowska's favorite "fetish"; the truly baroque folds in some of the works from the *Skinformer* series may, in turn, evoke connotations with the serpentine exuberance of the Gorgon's countenance. The artist's imaginarium is inhabited by other hybrids (such as *SkinDoll #2*, 2016; Fig. 6), sometimes explicitly associated with the part-lion/part-human figure of the Sphinx. I will, at least for now, close this short study of selected works from the *oeuvre* of Grzeszykowska, an artist undoubtedly possessing extensive knowledge, with an image from one of her newer series, entitled *Mama* (2018; Fig. 7).[33] Here, the real blends with the hyperreal and the phantom; the order of the daughter melds with the order of the mother, who is her own (sculpted) copy; and adolescence merges with adulthood. In this photographic *mise-en-abyme*, the riddle of the Sphinx echoes in a loop.

In lieu of a conclusion – or to offer a visual conclusion – I would like to mention a painting by Mikołaj Sobczak, serving as a sort of bookend for the artistic efforts of Aleksandra Waliszewska mentioned earlier in the text, and as a counterpoint to Aneta Grzeszykowska's non-painting projects. His 2019 *Gorgona* [Gorgon] (Fig. 8) can also be read as a cultural palimpsest, a postmodernist text that is, to quote Roland Barthes, "a tissue of quotations," or a psychoanalytical box. Sublimated into cool blues, the scene of the murder of Holofernes – an oblique reframing of Caravaggio's composition – simultaneously becomes an illustration of Medusa's retribution against Perseus, from whose blood no Pegasus will be born; and further, of the revenge taken by heroine against ennobled hero. Charlotte Corday kills Marat; the serpentine Mami Wata knocks General Lee off the pedestal. Sobczak's Judith-Gorgon is of course related to the Judith from Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings,

returning with the tenacity of the repressed and taking symbolic vengeance on her tormentor. Artemisia, her fingers wounded from torture, falls silent for a long time, but the face-mask adorning her golden medallion has its mouth uncovered.[34]

1 *The Lure*, directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, written by Robert Bolesto (WFDiF, Platige Image, Telewizja Polska, 2015). See also: *The Silent Twins*, directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, written by Andrea Seigel, from a novel by Marjorie Wallace (42, Kindred Spirit, Madants, 2022).

2 *Opowieści okrutne. Aleksandra Waliszewska i symbolizm Wschodu i Północy*, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, Warsaw, June 3 – October 2, 2022, curated by Alison M. Gingeras and Natalia Sielewicz. The exhibition's narrative paths, titled *Spellbound Landscapes: The Woods and the Wetlands* and *On Matriarchy*, include multiple Siren-like figures and other female "monsters." The added value of the exhibition comes from the fact that Waliszewska's works were embedded in the broader context of the works of European modernists.

3 Exhibition catalog for Simone Leigh, *Sovereignty*, https://simoneleighvenice2022.org/sovereignty/ (accessed September 20, 2022).

4 59. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. La Biennale di Venezia, *Il Latte dei sogni/The Milk of Dreams*, Venice, April 23 – November 27, 2022, curated by Cecilia Alemani.

5 The version of *Sentinel* reproduced in this essay was displayed at the US pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale.

6 "Mami Wata is a water deity shared by many African cultures, while the spoon shape is an important symbol of status in the Zulu culture." Shanti Escalante-De Mattei, "Simone Leigh Statue on Former Site of Robert E. Lee Monument in New Orleans Due to Come Down In August," *ARTnews*, January 24, 2022, www.artnews.com/art-news/news/simone-leigh-statue-replaces-robert-e-lee-monument-new-orleans-1234616508 (accessed September 21, 2022).

7 On the "enveloping, embracing, devouring" aspect of the imago of the (over)protective mother, the chthonic goddess, and Anima more broadly, see: Carl G. Jung, "The Syzygy: Anima and Animus," in: idem, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, trans. Richard F. C. Hull (New York City, NY: Pantheon Books, 1959), 11–22.

8 Here, I am referencing Joseph Campbell's seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).

9 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London–New York City, NY: Routledge, 2007), 26.

10 Olga Tokarczuk, *Anna In w grobowcach świata* (Kraków: Znak, 2006).

11 Jacques Le Rider, "Philologie grecque et formation de la théorie psychanalytique. Sigmund Freud et Theodor Gomperz," *Essaim. Revue de Psychanalyse* vol. 7, no. 1 (2001), 203–217, www.cairn.info/revue-essaim-2001-1-page-203.htm (accessed August 20, 2022).

12 Alf Hiltenbeitel, "Thinking Goddesses, Mothers, Brothers and Snakes with Freud and Bose," in: idem, *Freud's India: Sigmund Freud and India's First Psychoanalyst Girindrasekhar Bose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 219–252.

13 Ibid., 220. Hiltenbeitel refers here to the sprawling, three-volume biography of Freud written by Ernest Jones. See: Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York City: Basic Books, 1953).

14 Hiltenbeitel, "Thinking Goddesses," 220. The scholar cites that detail after: Martin Wangh, "The Genetic Sources of Freud's Difference with Romain Rolland on the Matter of Religious Feelings," in: *Fantasy, Myth, and Reality: Essays in Honor of Jacob A. Arlow* , eds. Harold P. Blum, Yale Kramer, Arlene K. Richards, and Arnold D. Richards (Madison, WI: International Universities Press, 1988), 159–185.

15 Hiltenbeitel, "Thinking Goddesses," 230.

16 Sigmund Freud, "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis. An Open Letter to Romain Rolland on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday," in: idem, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, eds. James Strachey, Anna Freud, and Carrie Lee Rothgeb (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 239–248. The whole Winter 1969 issue of *American Imago* was dedicated to exploring this difficult epiphany. See, among others: John A. Abbott, "Freud's Repressed Feelings about Athena on the Acropolis," *American Imago* vol. 26, no. 4 (1969), 355–362; Max Schur, "The Background of Freud's 'Disturbance' on the Acropolis," ibid., 303–323.

17 "To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something." Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head" (excerpt), trans. James Strachey, in: *The Medusa Reader*, eds. Marjorie B. Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (New York City, NY–London: Routledge, 2003), 84.

18 Otto Rank, *Der Doppelgänger. Eine psychoanalytische Studie* (Leipzig–Vienna–Zürich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1925); Roger Caillois, *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, trans. John Shepley, *October* no. 31 (1984), 16–32; Roger Caillois, *Méduse et Cie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960); Jacques Derrida, "Glas (excerpt)," trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand, in: *The Medusa Reader*, op. cit., 128–130. Jacques Lacan writes about mimicry, connected, to an extent, to the "splitting" of the subject and its adaptation to its environment, in: Jacques Lacan "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* vol. 13, no. 4 (1949), 449–455. In turn, this "splitting" and its link to the concept of the doppelgänger, only briefly explored in "Le stade du miroir," was developed more broadly in his 1973 "Anamorphosis." There, Lacan mentions Holbein's acclaimed 1533 portrait of Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, currently held by London's National Gallery and commonly known as *The Ambassadors*, which famously features an anamorphic skull in the bottom part. See: Jacques Lacan, "Anamorphosis," in: idem, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York City, NY–London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 79–90. I devoted considerable space to mirror reflections and their contribution to the metaphorics of the (post)modern subject in my essay which attempted to interpret the works of Maya Deren through a psychoanalytically colored interpretation: Małgorzata Stępnik, "Lustra, maski, sobowtóry... Maya Deren i jej siostry w maskaradzie," in: idem, *Outsiderzy, mistyfikatorzy, eskapiści w sztuce XX wieku. Studium postaw twórczych* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2016), 103–133.

19 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), 6–18.

20 In the context of research into French feminist critique, see especially: Krystyna Kłosińska, *Feministyczna krytyka literacka* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010). See also: Katarzyna Szopa, *Poetyka rozkwitania. Różnica płciowa w filozofii Luce Irigaray* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018); Tomasz Kitliński, *Obcy jest w nas. Kochać według Julii Kristevej* (Kraków: Aureus, 2001).

21 See, for example: Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974); Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982); Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud in His Time and*

Ours, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption* (Toronto: Inner City Books: 1999); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). One particularly intriguing finding from Deleuze and Guattari pertains to the ontology of the modern, fluctuating subject, or, one could say: a self incessantly reconstituting itself from mirror shards. As they explain: "It is a strange subject, however, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs, but always remaining peripheral to the desiring-machines, being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnering here, there, and everywhere a reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state." Ibid., 18.

22 Beata Rank, "Rola kobiety w ewolucji społeczeństwa," in: *Psychoanaliza w Polsce 1909–1946*, vol. 1, ed. Lena Magnone (Warsaw: Kronos – Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego, 2016), 309–324.

23 Ibid., 315ff. In her essay, Rank draws on Johann J. Bachofen's seminal opus, *An English Translation of Bachofen's Mutterrecht (Mother Right): A Study of the Religious and Juridical Aspects of Gynecocracy in the Ancient World* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

24 Rank, "Rola kobiety," 324.

25 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (excerpt), trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in: *The Medusa Reader*, op. cit., 133. Writing this essay, I drew on the English translation of Cixous' text. For a deeper analysis of the essay, see, for example: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Cixous sans frontières" in: *Du féminin*, ed. Mireille Calle (Quebec: Éditions le Griffon d'Argile, 1992), 65–81; Agata Araszkiewicz, "Mowa jabłka i ekonomia utraty. Sposoby czytania (pisania) tekstów Hélène Cixous," *AVANT: pismo awangardy filozoficzno-naukowej* vol. 11, no. 3 (2020), 1–16.

26 Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 133.

27 Yuan Yuan, *The Riddling between Oedipus and the Sphinx: Ontology, Hauntology, and Heterology of the Grotesque* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016).

28 Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 3.

29 The Kristeva passage comes from *The Powers of Horror*, 4. The "dogma of castration" is explored by Creed, along lines similar to Cixous, in the second part of her book, titled "Medusa's Head. Psychoanalytic Theory and the Femme Castratrice." See especially:

Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 111.

30 Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman, 1975–1993* (New York City, NY: Rizzoli, 1993), 17.

31 In the context of Grzeszykowska's references to the works of acclaimed female "icons" of the art world, see, for example: Małgorzata Stępnik, "Aneta Grzeszykowska. 3 kolaże z serii 'Love Book' (#5) (#7) (#16)," in: *[A]symetrie. Sztuka współczesna w kontekście muzeum*, exh. cat., eds. Marcin Lachowski and Zbigniew Sobczuk (Lublin: Lubelskie Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, 2015), 71. See also: Adam Mazur, "Obiekt częściowy. Synteza twórczości Anety Grzeszykowskiej," *Konteksty* no. 3–4 (2016), 423–428.

32 On the use of the term *delectatio morosa*, see the exhibition catalogue for Aneta Grzeszykowska's showcase at the Labirynt gallery in Lublin, *Uporczywe upodobanie* (2017), curated by Paulina Kempisty and Aleksandra Skrabek, https://labirynt.com/uporczyweupodobanie (accessed September 12, 2022).

33 The *Mama* series is explored in several texts, including: Stach Szabłowski, "Fetysz, czyli Mama, 'Mama' i córka," *Przekrój*, July 22, 2019, https://przekroj.pl/kultura/fetysz-czyli-mama-mama-i-corka-stach-szablowski (accessed March 13, 2023).

34 Here, I am referencing the pendant that can be seen hanging from Gentileschi's neck in one of her self-portraits: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (*La Pittura*), ca. 1638–1639, Royal Collection, Windsor.

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