



You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Spectral-fragile-(un)homely: The haunting presence of Francesca woodman in the House and Space2 series

Author: Anna Kisiel

Citation style: Kisiel Anna. (2017). Spectral-fragile-(un)homely: The haunting presence of Francesca woodman in the House and Space2 series. "AVANT" (Vol. VIII, No. 2 (2017), s. 145-156), doi 10.26913/80202017.0112.0011



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).



UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego



Spectral—Fragile—(Un)homely: The Haunting Presence of Francesca Woodman in the *House and Space²* Series

Anna Kisiel

University of Silesia in Katowice
kisiel.anna@outlook.com

Received 5 March 2017; accepted 8 October 2017.

Abstract

In the *House* and *Space²* photographic series, Francesca Woodman captures the environments that may be considered disruptive; still, it is a female model—in her inconstant poses, always partially blurred or hidden—that holds the viewer's attention. The pictures therefore evoke a twofold sense of obscurity, since their unfriendly interiors are occupied by the uncanny, semi-absent yet ceaselessly present, dis-appearing woman, who turns out to be Woodman herself. Woodman's spectral presence and the unhomely locations she haunts—being simultaneously the photographer and the object of her photographs—are examined in this article by means of Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial theory. Ettingerian psychoanalysis, juxtaposed with Roland Barthes, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan, provides the tools to challenge the dominant non-affirmative understanding of Woodman's self-portraits as works of disappearing and failing subjectivity: an understanding whose obvious point of support is found in the artist's biography. Instead, Ettinger's system makes it possible to look at this *oeuvre* through the prisms of fragility, homeliness, and the potential emergence of blurry, ghostly subjectivity. Moreover, the article examines the ways in which Woodman resists the divisions imposed on her and the medium she uses (such as the Barthesian triad of Operator, Spectator, and Spectrum, and the dichotomies of me / the Other and subject / object).

Keywords: Francesca Woodman; Bracha L. Ettinger; matrixial theory; the uncanny; homeliness; fragility; photography; blurry subjectivity.

Haunting Presence

The title alone of Francesca Woodman's black and white photograph *My House*, taken in Providence, Rhode Island in 1976, may be associated with a homely space of intimacy and security—the place one belongs to (Woodman in Townsend, 2006, p. 105). Yet, when we confront it with the picture, it seems that these connotations do not fit. Instead of a supposedly friendly interior, we encounter a messy, chaotic, and ruined room, with plastic wrap scattered all over the floor. The room is, however, not empty. Its corner is occupied by a woman, probably naked, with a black hand, her whole body covered with plastic wrap. We are unable to see her clearly, as the plastic blurs the boundaries of her flesh and makes her face invisible. Her semi-presence disturbs both the inconstant interior and us, since it questions the stable distinctions we are used to.

Woodman, an American photographer born in 1958 to an artistic family, started taking pictures at the age of thirteen. She was a promising artist, who did not achieve success during her lifetime. In 1981 she committed suicide. Although her artistic activity was short, and the photographer herself was very young, her *oeuvre* consists of complex and haunting images, whose key motifs constitute a specific viewing experience. Her photographs are mainly black and white self-portraits. One of their most characteristic features is blur, caused by either movement or a long exposure time. Another co-emerging motif is a female model, often nude, fusing with devastated or uncanny surroundings. Despite the inconstant scene, the woman herself frequently appears to be delicate and vulnerable. These elements contribute to the intriguing character of her pictures.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, Woodman's *House* and *Space*² photographic series will be explored with regard to the model's spectral existence and the locations she haunts. Second, the ways in which Woodman challenges the divisions imposed on her and the medium she uses will be investigated. I intend to examine Woodman's self-depictions and comment upon them by means of the tools provided by Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial theory, believing that this system enriches possible Barthesian, Freudian, and Lacanian readings of these photographs; the aforementioned theorists will simultaneously serve the purpose of contextualising the Ettingerian intervention in the fields of psychoanalysis and aesthetics. Woodman's *oeuvre* will be looked at through the prisms of fragility, homeliness, and the potential emergence of blurry subjectivity, grounded upon connectedness instead of separation, castration, and lack.

Just as the viewer is haunted by Woodman's partially absent yet ceaselessly present female figure, so is her photography by non-affirmative critiques, often labelling it as "suicide art." In "Francesca Woodman's Photography: Death and the Image One More Time," Peggy Phelan argues that Woodman's suicide may be her final artistic act. Analysing Woodman in the context of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Barthes's and Benjamin's views on the essence of photography, Phelan identifies her self-portraiture as "a way to rehearse her own death" (2002, p. 987). Margaret Sundell continues the psychoanalytical reading, proposing that the artist's works are repetitive narcissistic re-entries into the moment in which the self is in tension with its surroundings (1996, pp. 437–438).

This thesis is reconsidered in Jui-Ch'i Liu's "Francesca Woodman's Self-Images: Transforming Bodies in the Space of Femininity" (2004). Liu claims that there is one distinguishing and crucial element of the photographer's *oeuvre* which is not emphasised sufficiently in the aforementioned text—a desire and dynamic attempt to “[reunite] with the maternal source” (Liu, 2004, p. 27).¹ The tropes which resurface in the above readings are death, disappearance, and return to the maternal sphere, the last one connoting symbiosis, fusion, or psychosis in the psychoanalytical discourse. This article aspires to reconsider such approaches. Instead of remaining within the tradition of understanding Woodman's photographs as works of perishing or failing subjectivity (which can be easily supported when one takes the artist's biography into account), I will endeavour to indicate a different interpretative path, paved by Ettinger's theoretical writings.

Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial theory eludes—and questions the primacy of—the dichotomous frame of classical Phallus-grounded theories, yet without rejecting these systems. She develops the notion of the Matrix, returning to the Latin roots of the word, associating it with the womb (see Ettinger, 2006a, p. 64). The womb is identified in this theory as an archaic space of difference and encounter, whose participants influence each other. Within such a space, boundaries of the self either are not yet completely fixed or lose significance because of the experienced proximity. The Matrix is claimed to reflect these attributes of the womb, and it simultaneously transfers the female organ “from nature to culture” (Ettinger, 2006b, p. 181).² This founding concept of the Ettingerian system is defined as a prenatal signifier of originary feminine difference, and a psychic space of encounter of the *I* and the *non-I*. The Matrix does not form the binary opposition to the Phallus; rather, it is a supplementary signifier, expanding the scope of the Symbolic order.³ The underpinnings of this theoretical intervention are feminine corporeality (in particular, pregnancy and intrauterine experience), and Ettinger's clinical practice, experiences of belonging to the Second Generation after the Holocaust, and artistic activity. Inspired by the intrauterine sphere and maternity, Ettinger claims that the primary instance of subjectivity is an encounter, which is a notion that challenges the primacy of separation present in Freudian

¹ Liu describes Woodman's desire as “active” in order to emphasise the contrast between her photographs and Man Ray's *Retour à la raison* (which is argued to be a depiction of the female body passively absorbed by its surroundings); nevertheless, what is at stake is the desire for fusion—an attribute that in the phallogocentric thought is ascribed to the feminine (Liu, 2004, pp. 27–29).

² The relationship between “nature” and “culture,” or between the womb and the Matrix, echoes the relation between the penis and the Phallus in classical psychoanalysis. Ettinger clarifies: “The womb and the prenatal phase are the referents to the Real to which the imaginary Matrix corresponds. But as a concept, the Matrix is no more—but no less—related to the womb than the Phallus is related to the penis. That is, Matrix is a symbolic concept” (Ettinger, 1993 as cited in Pollock, 2006b, p. 17).

³ For a study of the matrixial feminine difference and its resistance to the phallic binary logic, see Pollock (2009, pp. 9–10). For a thorough examination of the evolution of the concept of the Matrix in Ettinger's work and its various aspects, see Pollock (2006b, pp. 12–21).

and Lacanian paradigms. In her view, the subjectivising process is foundationally affirmative before—but also beyond—the postnatal period, during which a series of cuts prevails in shaping the *I* (see Ettinger, 2006a, pp. 84–85).⁴ Thereby, *subjectivity-as-encounter*—as Ettinger names it—implies transmission, shareability, and intimate transformation between two (or more) subjects. Ettinger delineates this paradoxical subjectivising stratum as follows: “In subjectivity-as-encounter—where an-other is not an absolute separate Other—[relations-without-relating] turn both of us into partial-subjects, still uncognized, thoughtlessly known to each other, matrixially knowing each other, in painful fragility” (Ettinger, 2006c, p. 144). The issue of encounter is tightly linked to Ettinger’s artistic practice. Ettinger claims that an encounter with art may generate the possibility of proximity and participation, and associates such a meeting with *wit(h)nessing*—a sense of unexpected and irreducible closeness provoked by the artwork in the sphere not mastered by phallic paradigms (Ettinger, 2006c, pp. 148–151). The matrixial is then an almost-unbounded space of connectivity which, however, cannot be mistakenly taken for symbiosis and fusion, as they exclude any possibility of subjectivity.⁵ This stratum may become accessible only through precarious acts of fragilising, opening, and exposing oneself to the Other (Ettinger, 2006c, p. 152).

The dominant view on Woodman’s art can be challenged by means of Ettinger’s theory, whose postulates provoke an affirmative assessment of it.⁶ Having briefly introduced the main assumptions of the matrixial psychoanalysis, in the following sections I will employ several Ettingerian concepts for the purpose of examining the *House* and *Space*² series; I will also juxtapose these concepts with Barthes, Freud, and Lacan to broaden both interpretative and theoretical frameworks. *Self-fragilisation* may be seen as one of the conditions of re-entering the matrixial borderspace; it is an act of becoming vulnerable when facing the Other, opening one’s boundaries, and, in a sense, preparing for a transformation, implicit in a matrixial encounter. This notion is inextricably linked to *resistance*, which in Ettingerian terminology covers withstanding the phallic urge to set clear borders between

⁴ It does not, however, mean that the matrixial stratum of subjectivity disappears after birth, which would imply that the Matrix is exclusively prenatal. Rather, it gives way to the phallic subjectifying stratum while co-existing with it (Ettinger, 2006a, pp. 84–85). It can occasionally resurface in certain conditions, for instance provoked by *wit(h)nessing*, which is going to be briefly discussed below.

⁵ Griselda Pollock clarifies that the matrixial borderspace is grounded upon two (or more) subjects “sharing space but never fusing, encountering but never dissolving their boundaries, jointly eventing without ever knowing fully the other’s event” (Pollock, 2009, p. 14).

⁶ A remarkable affirmative re-reading of Woodman’s art is proposed by Claire Raymond in *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime* (2010). Questioning the validity of looking at Woodman’s *oeuvre* through the prism of her death, Raymond instead focuses on the American photographer as a *sui generis* theoretician of the Kantian notion of the sublime, in a sense that “[her] photographs are not passive receptacles of aesthetic theory but rather interrogate, alter, and generate that theory” (Raymond, 2016, p. 3). In her study of Woodman’s exploration of the medium of photography and the recurring motifs of blur, space / architecture, gendered flesh, and the gaze, Raymond turns also to Bracha L. Ettinger; however, the matrixial theory becomes a briefly mentioned context rather than a tool (see Raymond, 2016, p. 32). The matrixial approach—if adopted to a greater degree—takes us to a new territory in the reception of Woodman’s work.

self and the Other, and, often, to objectify the Other. Finally, Ettinger's re-reading of Freudian *uncanny*—a term that becomes one of the foundations of the theory of the Matrix—will be commented upon in the context of matrixial subjectivity.

Fragilisation in the *House* Series

House #3, taken in Providence, Rhode Island in 1976, corresponding in style and themes to the previously mentioned *My House* photograph, is one of Woodman's pictures in which seemingly clear-cut distinctions become vague (Woodman in Townsend, 2006, p. 107). The eponymous house is dilapidated, as if abandoned, and on the floor we can see broken pieces. These items and strong, contrasting light produce the feeling of inconstancy, although the image itself is sharp. In fact, only one element of the whole scene is blurred: a woman, hidden under the window frame. She is covered with fragments of wallpaper, whereas a long exposure time, along with the model's movement, creates an impression of her merging with the surroundings. Such a linkage constitutes a sense of belonging—or rather of an attempt to belong—to the place. This peculiar urge to connect with the environment appears to reflect the desire to resist the limitations of the body, which in this case is the female body. We may thus assume that the photograph captures the search for subjectivity in a vulnerable and inconstant sphere. Such a struggle to transcend one's corporeality is far from being passive, since the model's movement responsible for the creation of the blurry photograph is not the only dynamic element of it. When the viewer looks closely⁷ at the shades that compose the woman's dim face, he or she notices her eyes, gazing at the camera. The model resists both the passivity of fusing with the surroundings and the possibility of becoming an object of the image: she is not merely to be looked at, as she gazes back at the viewer, mastering the space within the photographic frame and affirming her relentless presence.

This subjectifying act witnessed in the picture places Woodman in opposition to Roland Barthes's assumption that the portrait-taking activity may be linked with objectification: namely, that it represents the disquieting moment when the model is "neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he [or she] is becoming an object" (Barthes, 1981, p. 14). Thus, in Barthes's thought, the depicted person is a phantom unable to control the viewers' possible interpretations: a phantom experiencing "a micro-version of death" (1981, p. 14).⁸ The artist also seems to disagree with the Barthesian triad of Spectator, Operator, and Spectrum imposed on photography. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggests that the Operator's—that is, the photographer's—attitude towards picture-taking may be associated with

⁷ For further reflections on the activity of looking at Woodman's photographs, see Simon (2010, pp. 28–35). The author argues that the size of Woodman's self-depictions requires a closer look from the viewer and thus creates a different—more intimate—viewing experience.

⁸ There is, however, one element that Barthes considers pleasurable in the whole act—namely, it is the sound that the camera produces when the picture is being taken. As the theorist insists, it interrupts the deadly pose (Barthes, 1981, p. 15).

the physical process of looking through the optical device, and thus enforcing his or her vision (1981, pp. 9–10). Even though he emphasises that he has never explored this perspective, his understanding of the issue appears to be strikingly simplifying: the artist is reduced to the viewfinder's gaze. It becomes even more inaccurate when Woodman's *oeuvre* is taken into consideration, for she cannot be restricted to the Operator's perspective. In fact, she is also the Spectrum, described by Barthes as the object captured in the photograph, whose name in his nomenclature not without reason implies spectrality, theatricality, and passing. He explains the assigned name by indicating its reference to the spectacle, which "adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (Barthes, 1981, p. 9). When asked about the reason why she appeared in most of her works, Woodman said, "It's a matter of convenience, I'm always available" (Rankin, 1998, p. 35). Yet, it may not be the only factor. Her appearance in self-depictions is the trace of the seemingly explicit boundaries between the artist and the model which are becoming blurry. It is no longer a binary choice: she fuses these two perspectives.⁹ Still, we must not forget the third element of the Barthesian triad—the Spectator. Woodman, who simultaneously embodies the aforementioned figures, is the one who gazes at the effects of such cooperation as well. Therefore, she goes beyond the division; she not only encompasses but also transcends each element of the triad.

While for Barthes the Spectrum is at risk of being objectified or losing control entirely, the matrixial angle excludes these options. The encounter between the viewer and the Spectrum of the photograph can be portrayed by Ettinger's notion of *self-fragilisation*. It is an integral process of entering the matrixial stratum, in which "the subject encounters the other, and realizes its vulnerability, while resisting its own tendency to turn the other into an object and to return to its own paranoid abjectivity and narcissistic passive aggressivity" (Ettinger, 2009, p. 4). Consequently, this process creates a chance to relate to the *non-I* not "as an intruder," but rather as "a *partner-in-difference* of the *I*" (Ettinger, 2006a, pp. 64–65; emphasis in the original). Vulnerability and partialisation in the matrixial sense transform borders of the self—and, simultaneously, of art—into thresholds, making the Other a co-subject, instead of an object (Ettinger, 2006a, p. 56). Self-fragilisation eventuates in transcending the limits of sole witnessing; instead, one engages in *wit(h)nessing*. The subject is able to *resist* clear-cut boundaries and, as a result, to share and transform in the matrixial sphere of encounter. The notion of matrixial *resistance* differs from the general understanding of the word, since it is neither passive nor aggressive. As Ettinger claims, "[t]he subject must resist its own tendency to manipulate, appropriate, control and

⁹ Claire Raymond proposes an interesting reading of Woodman's ambiguous status. Comparing *House #3* to works by Victorian women photographers Julia Margaret Cameron and Clementina Hawarden depicting children, Raymond notes that Woodman challenges the theme of the maternal gaze (Raymond, 2016, pp. 22–24). We read that "in Woodman's image the daughter seems to be trying to protect herself, belatedly, from the audience. Woodman, the photographer of this portrait as well as the subject, complicates matters of self-protection in the image. In this transference and duality of roles, she enacts the maternal gaze and acts the daughter's body, picturing the daughter as sacrificial object in the controlled time frame of the photograph, that image to which she herself is the first implicit witness" (Raymond, 2016, p. 24).

abandon, and engage itself in an active struggle against its own paranoia, if ‘its’ I and non-I are to continue coemerging” (2009, p. 19). Therefore, these two contradictory paths cannot be reconciled, as resistance has an affirmative charge: it is “a working for, not against: a re-working for trust, again and again” (Ettinger, 2009, p. 19). This process is hence associated with both self-fragilisation and intimate proximity: proximity with oneself and openness towards others simultaneously. To resist is to relinquish one’s boundaries and restrictions imposed by phallic aspects of one’s subjectivity; this is the act of surrendering to the matrixial intimacy. Returning to *House #3*, the woman in the picture does not simply reconcile; she engages in the creation of a private sphere. In an Ettingerian sense, she resists the imposed limitations, simultaneously endeavouring to transcend them. The female makes herself vulnerable, challenging her own bodily boundaries and opening herself for the experience of being together. Her resistance is not directed against the Other, nor is it passive; rather, it supports the trans-formation of blurry and fragile subjectivity.

The theme of fragilising oneself in an unstable yet intimate space is continued in *House #4* from 1976 (Woodman in Townsend, 2006, p. 108). The unnatural, defamiliarised perspective and the seemingly crooked walls create a claustrophobic impression. The central female figure is fuzzy and partly hidden behind the mantel of a fireplace. Even though in this situation we do not encounter her gaze, the image is dynamic in itself, for the model is captured in an act of quasi-fusing with the scene.¹⁰ Therefore, the house once more becomes the vehicle to transcend the self. The model is blurred and in a sense partialised by the mantel. Yet, there is one constant element visible—contrarily to the rest of the body, her feet are sharp, being the only body parts resisting the complete disappearance. This detail leads us to the crucial matrixial implication: blurry subjectivity does not depend on losing oneself. The matrixial stratum is based on wit(h)nessing—the act of sharing and transforming each other—and, thus, on becoming vulnerable. However, in the matrixial stratum it is not an act against the self, but rather an opportunity, since self-fragilisation is a dynamic path towards *subjectivity-as-encounter*: subjectivity constituted in togetherness.

Homeliness in the *Space²* Series

In the pictures analysed above, one of the essential elements is the process of connecting with the surroundings. The photograph from the *Space²* series taken in Providence, Rhode Island in 1976 presents a different experience (Woodman in Townsend, 2006, p. 121). The background is no longer chaotic or fragmented—it is simplified. As a result, a woman becomes the main concern. In the picture, she does not try to establish a linkage with the environment. Yet, due to her movement, her head is completely blurred, hence

¹⁰ Raymond provides us with a *sui generis* backstage insight into this photograph, informing us that the mantel was not originally in the room—it was brought there by Woodman and Sloan Rankin (Raymond, 2016, p. 27). The author concludes that “Woodman, the ‘ghost,’ actually *taps the architectonic rhetoric of haunting*, prepossessingly possessing the house” (Raymond, 2016, p. 27; emphasis mine). Therefore, the picture appears to be dynamic on a number of levels.

the impossibility to see the model's face—a body part usually associated with one's identity. Looking at one's own portrait is identified by Roland Barthes as different from looking at a mirror. Via the medium of photography, he argues, a person sees himself or herself as someone else, which may cause anxiety (Barthes, 1981, pp. 12–13).¹¹ A similar dualism, yet interpreted differently, can be traced in Jacques Lacan's mirror stage. When a becoming subject recognises its face in the mirror for the first time, together with the full spectrum of its body, it acknowledges the reflection as other than itself, and yet identifies with this picture.¹² In Emmanuel Levinas, in turn, the face establishes the ethical relationship with the Other; the encounter with the fragile, naked face of the Other is interpreted as the first one, introducing responsibility, but not partnership or dialogue (see Levinas, 1969). For all three theorists, the face is presented as a fundamental element of the process of becoming a subject; in *Space²*, however, it is the face that loses clarity. In this photograph Francesca Woodman captures the invisible—an image she is not able to see in the mirror. This phenomenon corresponds to Lacan's notion of the Real, an “indivisible brute materiality” (Homer, 2005, p. 82). Since the Real eludes representation, Lacan notes that the encounter with it is “essentially the missed encounter” (Lacan, 1981, p. 55), which cannot be symbolised, comprehended, or mastered. Via the medium of photography, Woodman appears to gain a momentary access to the impossible image of her face in movement. What we wit(h)ness is, to use Ettinger's expression, an “almost-impossible encounter” (2006c, p. 152) with the Real of the blurred faciality. Woodman does not allow mis-recognition or objectification in her spectral project; instead, via the rehearsal of her body and the visual possibilities of the medium, she tries to grasp that which goes beyond representation.¹³

Where does Woodman's entanglement in the play of dis-appearance lead us? In another picture from the *Space²* series, taken between 1975 and 1976, we re-encounter a female model, whose naked body is captured in a standstill, including hands and feet (Woodman in Townsend, 2006, p. 118). Yet, her face is blurred due to the rapid movement of her head, similarly to the previously shown photograph from the same series. She poses in an empty room, except for the receptacle resembling an aquarium, within which most of her body remains. She clings to the glass wall and only her left hand reaches out to touch the outer surface. The transparent box is to make her fully visible, but she does not try to hide. Simultaneously, she does not attempt to appropriate the space. Rather, she examines its boundaries with her hands and skin. Neither present nor absent but somewhere in between, her ghostly figure resists the stability and lucidity of the occupied place.

¹¹ Barthes further associates such disquietude with a theme of the double, as a disturbing mythic element of the pre-photographic times.

¹² See Lacan (2006, pp. 75–81). For more information about photography in the context of Lacan, see Iskin (1997, pp. 43–66).

¹³ Interestingly, Griselda Pollock diagnoses Bracha L. Ettinger's art as “[directing] us aesthetically away from content towards *gesture*” (2013, p. 3; emphasis in the original), which appears to be applicable also to Francesca Woodman's images, concerned less with representation and more with a rehearsal of boundaries of the medium of photography and her own corporeality as a model.

While observing the space in the above picture, we may recall Freud's famous notion of the *uncanny*. The interior, in particular the cuboid, is far from being intimate or cosy; instead, it is raw and revealing. Despite such striking transparency, the viewer can experience twofold unease. On the one hand, one can feel that this scene ought not to be gazed at—that somehow the act of looking violates undefined privacy, balancing on the edge of voyeurism. On the other, the face of the woman remains concealed, leaving the spectator unfulfilled. Yet, as Freud notes, referring to the etymology of the uncanny, "*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*" (2001, p. 226; emphasis in the original). When discussing the ambiguity of the term, in both language and psychoanalysis, Freud claims that uncanniness is not about fear in itself; it concerns the return of something that should have been left in the state of being unremembered: a repressed experience that used to be familiar. He clarifies it on the example of some people's fear of waking up in a coffin, realising they have been buried alive: "And yet psycho-analysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence" (2001, p. 244). Freud therefore makes a difference between experiences that cause anxiety twice—before repression and as a result of it—and ones that provoke anxiety only when repressed. The other type is connected with the female body, identified as at the same time homely, originary, and universal—as it is the site where all human beings emerge—and uncanny (Freud, 2001, p. 245).

The uncanny has a major influence on two Ettingerian notions—the matrixial complex and matrixial co-subjectivity. When discussing the Freudian distinction into two types of experiences causing anxiety, Ettinger points out that in the latter one, associated with feminine corporeality, we can trace the matrixial—or maternal womb / intrauterine—complex (Ettinger, 2006a, p. 47). Having linked this concept to the matrixial phantasy, the theorist observes:

While *castration phantasy* is *frightening at the point of the emergence of the original experience before its repression*, the *matrixial phantasy* (from *matrice*, for womb) is not frightening at the point of its original emergence, but becomes frightening when the experience is repressed. . . . Thus for both complexes the same affect, that of anxiety, accompanies the return of the repressed. (Ettinger, 2006a, p. 47; emphasis in the original)

This excerpt demonstrates Ettinger's indebtedness to Freud's account of the uncanny, but also her attempts to fill the blank spots of classical psychoanalysis concerning femininity.¹⁴ The ambiguous structure of the uncanny is also implicit in the Ettingerian notion of matrixial subjectivity. As it has been mentioned before, one of Ettinger's inspirations is the intrauterine phase along with the encounter-event of pregnancy. Griselda Pollock stresses that

¹⁴ For Ettinger's analysis of the uncanny in Freud and its significance for the matrixial theory, see Ettinger (2006a, pp. 41–90).

[t]here is nothing cosy about the situation of matrixial co-subjectivity. It is the pathway of transmitted trauma, hatred, anxiety, or fear as much as it can become the basis for theorizing the way in which *what is not me can none the less affect me*, and in which *I can handle affects that are not mine*. (2006a, p. 109; emphasis mine)

Matrixial subjectivity is thus not blissful and friendly *per se*, but distressing, as it provides the opportunity to sense the traces of the Other's experiences. This originary type of subjectivity formation—beyond and before Oedipus and castration—is grounded upon encounter, proximity, fragility, and openness, precariously close to fusion. It is ambiguously *Un-heimlich*: both homely and disruptive, simultaneously humanising and traumatising, and never singular, as it is made possible only in togetherness.

Spectral Togetherness

This article has explored Francesca Woodman's spectral art, with special emphasis put on such issues as resistance to distinctions (including the Barthesian triad, and dichotomies of me vs. the Other and subject vs. object) and the emergence of another kind of subjectivity. Barthes's search for the essence of photography, Lacanian mirror phase, Levinasian reflections on an encounter with the face, and Freud's conceptualisation of the uncanny have paved the way for challenging the dominant readings Woodman's indefinite, ghostly images from *House* and *Space²* series are subject to. I have turned to Bracha L. Ettinger's reconsideration of psychoanalysis in such notions as self-fragilisation, resistance, and matrixial subjectivity so as to show that Woodman's disruptive photographs can—and, indeed, should—be interpreted in an affirmative frame, since they can provide the space for blurry subjectivity based on togetherness, non-passivity, and vulnerability.

Francesca Woodman returns, over and over again, to the spaces that seem to be neither homely nor friendly, and yet there is something familiar in them. Never complete, always almost-present, almost-in-flesh, she haunts these locations in order to establish linkages with them. Although she sacrifices a part of her-self while becoming a spectral, fragile, and un-homely figure, what she gains is a tangible connection with the sphere in which seemingly stable borderlines—of her body, of space, of art, of the discourse—lose relevance.

References

- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography*. (R. Howard, Trans.). New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Ettinger, B. L. (1993). Woman-other-thing: A matrixial touch. In B. L. Ettinger. *Matrix – Borderlines* (pp. 11–18). Oxford, UK: Museum of Modern Art.
- Ettinger, B. L. (2006a). The matrixial gaze. In B. L. Ettinger, *The matrixial borderspace* (pp. 41–90). B. Massumi (Ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Ettinger, B. L. (2006b). Weaving a woman artist with-in the matrixial encounter-event. In B. L. Ettinger, *The matrixial borderspace* (pp. 173–198). B. Massumi (Ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ettinger, B. L. (2006c). Wit(h)nessing trauma and the matrixial gaze. In B. L. Ettinger, *The matrixial borderspace* (pp. 123–155). B. Massumi (Ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ettinger, B. L. (2009). Fragilization and resistance. *Studies in the Maternal*, 1(2). Retrieved April 16, 2013 from http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/back_issues/issue_two/documents/Bracha1.pdf
- Freud, S. (2001). The ‘uncanny’. In S. Freud, *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917–1919)* (pp. 219–252). (J. Strachey & A. Freud, Trans.). London, UK: Vintage Books, Hogarth Press, and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Homer, S. (2005). *Jacques Lacan*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Iskin, R. E. (1997). In the light of images and the shadow of technology: Lacan, photography and subjectivity. *Discourse*, 19(3): 43–66.
- Lacan, J. (1981). Tché and automaton. In J. Lacan, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*. J.-A. Miller, (Ed.). (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company: 53–64.
- Lacan, J. (2006). The mirror stage as formative of the *I* function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience. In J. Lacan, *Écrits* (pp. 75–81). (B. Fink, H. Fink, & R. Grigg, Trans.). London, UK: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Liu, J.-C. (2004). Francesca Woodman’s self-images: Transforming bodies in the space of femininity. *Woman’s Art Journal*, 25(1), 26–31.
- Phelan, P. (2002). Francesca Woodman’s photography: Death and the image one more time. *Signs*, 27(4), 979–1004.
- Pollock, G. (2006a). Beyond Oedipus: Feminist thought, psychoanalysis, and mythical figurations of the feminine. In V. Zajko & M. Leonard (Eds.), *Laughing with Medusa: Classical myth and feminist thought* (pp. 67–117). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Pollock, G. (2006b). Introduction. Femininity: Aporia or sexual difference? In B. L. Ettinger, *The matrixial borderspace* (pp. 1–38). B. Massumi (Ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pollock, G. (2009). Mother trouble: The maternal-feminine in phallic and feminist theory in relation to Bracha Ettinger’s elaboration of matrixial ethics/aesthetics. *Studies in the Maternal*, 1(1). Retrieved November 29, 2013 from http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/back_issues/issue_one/GriseldaPollock.pdf
- Pollock, G. (2013). *After-affects / after-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Rankin, S. (1998). Peach mumble—Ideas cooking. In H. Chandès (Ed.), *Francesca Woodman* (pp. 33–40). Paris, France: Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain and Scalo.
- Raymond, C. (2016). *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian sublime*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Simon, J. (2010). An intimate mode of looking: Francesca Woodman's photographs. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 3, 28–35.
- Sundell, M. (1996). Vanishing points: The photography of Francesca Woodman. In M. C. de Zegher, (Ed.), *Inside the visible: An elliptical traverse of 20th century art in, of, and from the feminine* (pp. 435–439). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Townsend, C. (2006). *Francesca Woodman*. London, UK: Phaidon Press.