

View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:

Visualising Psychoanalysis

source:

View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 35 (2023)

URL:

<https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2023/35-visualising-psychoanalysis/visualising-psychoanalysis>

doi:

<https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2023.35.2711>

publisher:

Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture

affiliation:

SWPS University

University of Warsaw

keywords:

eye; psychoanalysis; image; art; visual culture

abstract:

Introduction to the issue on visualising psychoanalysis, taking as its point of departure the cover photograph by Aneta Grzeszykowska depicting a wounded eye / I.

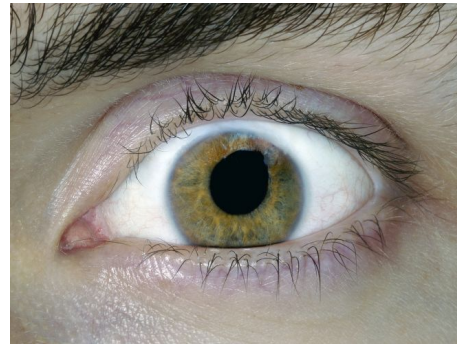
-

Visualising Psychoanalysis

It must not be forgotten, however, that psychoanalysis alone cannot offer a complete picture of the world.

Sigmund Freud, 1923

What does an image of a wounded eye tell us? What does it want from us? Does it refer to past violence enacted on the organ of vision, such that the eye has become a remnant of an embodied act? Was the eye wounded literally, was it punctured, or was the accident metaphorical, the exceptional violence of the image embodying some form of harm done to it? Does a wounded eye signal the story of a wounded I? If so, could one then inquire further as to what a path from what is seen to what is experienced (and then transmitted or communicated) might look like? Or, considering it from a different viewpoint, does the wounded eye suggest an aftermath, a deformed and distorted vision of the world? As is often the case with Aneta Grzeszykowska's art, her works function as riddles, images that demand deciphering, that guide us through a narrative with and about our own desires and repressions.



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

Yet, having asked these questions, and speculated upon the image and our own replies, we do know something about this particular eye. As a teenager, the artist unintentionally injured her younger brother's eye, thus causing an unnatural spilling out of the pupil into the iris. Apparently, she enacted this harm with a needle she was using to sew one of her dolls. The accident could just as likely have taken place while making a work of art. Rather than clarifying things, this kernel of information leads to more questions: did he lose his vision? Why does the artist, the

unintentional perpetrator of the injury, return to the incident (*Untitled*, 1993 / 2006) and attempt to interpret it by transforming it into art? Why does she share it with us, and position us as witnesses after the fact (*Nachträglichkeit*)? Once we accept the origin of the wound and the image, we are thrown into the midst of a familial narrative – or perhaps we may wish to consider it a “family romance,” as Freud would have it. In the space of psychoanalysis, the unintentionality of the harm becomes questionable: is this a classic case of sibling rivalry? A power struggle over who has the right to see and who doesn't? Moreover, do we also need to interrogate the artist's motivations in taking the photograph and exposing the image of her brother's wounded eye as an artwork? Nothing holds still once we agree to look through the psychoanalytic prism.

The narrative and questions do not end here. There is, of course, the image of the woman with a needle, the woman in her own world, thinking, reminiscing, in the private conscious and unconscious world of her own needs, wants, and demands, the woman doing harm, the woman enacting a puncture and a *punctum*. In this space, the figure of a woman deforming the visual apparatus – the organ and the perspective – has her own story to recount. It might be a story of female creativity against dominant modes of seeing and the role of being looked at, but it might also be the story of (visual) castration. The woman who deforms a worldview can be one definition of a woman artist.

The (imagined) tableau behind this picture might function as a polemical reference and critique of the famous scene from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*, in which a man's hand holding a straight razor cuts open a woman's eye – a scene considered an emblem of surrealism in cinema. Some have claimed that this opening to the film signals a sexual act as an act of violence / rape; others claimed that there are many more metaphors to be read from it, as well as a warning to the watcher that a kind of violence will also be done to them: their

conventional way of seeing will be targeted, dismembered, distorted, and transformed. This shocking opening sequence might assault and instruct us into the affective logic of the work. Does the complicated visceral nature of this filmic scene reverberate through us as we engage with Grzeszykowska's photograph?

There is an intriguing tension between the act of directly targeting the eye – making the puncture as plain as making one's point – and the extended time of psychoanalysis, the wandering of its interpretation, hardly ever arriving at a singular point, while seemingly moving forever in its direction. Of course, this is the point of psychoanalysis and its therapeutic: that the search for sense becomes the search for (one)self. In this issue of *View*, we are interested precisely in this tension, in the workings of psychoanalysis through images and in image-work deciphered through psychoanalytical figures, concepts, and clinical practice. The assumption behind this issue is that the subject's formation never takes place outside of the image-world, and so engagement with psychoanalytical theory and practice in visual studies and in diverse studies of the visual arts is not so much a matter of choice as an obligation.

We were interested in how psychoanalysis (theory and practice) has existed within a multi-disciplinary "image culture," where not only individuals but also communities are formed, deformed, and reformed by visual media and visual exchanges. We were curious to investigate the roles played by various images, the imagination, and the imaginary in psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice today, and the ways in which our contemporary understanding of the complexity of the human psyche and relationality depend upon the visual. As image-makers and receivers, how do we enact sublimation and repression? What are our defense mechanisms, dreams, and delusions, our memories and flashbacks, our needs, wants, and demands? And how are these played out through our encounters with the image-sphere: though the psychic processes of

displacement and condensation, through remembering, repeating and working-through, through witnessing, transference, and counter-transference, among others? Within the ever-changing psycho-social landscape of the world we live in, how has our personal, political, and cultural consciousness of intersectional subjectivities impacted our understanding of the image within psychoanalytic theory and practice, and the role they can play within our work for social equity and justice?

We proudly open this issue with **Viewpoint**, and a conversation between Heather Agyepong and Joanne Morra which is an exchange of images and words, afterimages and afterthoughts, feelings and frameworks, bodies and spirits. Agyepong's art practice orbits around the experiences of mental health and crisis, individual and collective wellbeing, invisibility and exposure, the inscriptions of memory and the responses of the body, strategies of participation, resistance, and the act of witnessing. Her investigations are enacted by means of lens-based media and performance. Joanne Morra offers a plethora of references, a constellation that invites viewers to engage with themselves as subjects and objects of care-full reflection.

In **Close-Up** we share with you a Polish translation of an incredibly inspiring essay by visual culture scholar Joan Copjec. In it, she offers a (psycho)analysis of Kara Walker's silhouettes, cut-out narratives of an attachment, if not an addiction, to the history of Black pain, which departs intriguingly from Freud's complex engagement with the inescapable Jewishness of the figure of Moses in *Moses and Monotheism*. Following this is an engrossing article by Maria Walsh, in which she offers two carefully analyzed case studies, of Mary Kelly's and Jeamin Cha's art practices, as a means of proposing ways in which artistic practice and the art image can be understood to function therapeutically. The author points to a shift from indebtedness to a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework in the 1970s–1990s, to the emergence of what she calls a "relational framework" within the

present context. Moreover, Walsh presents a thought-provoking theorization of how the screen forms a kind of mediated psychoanalytic-therapeutic space within which experiences of conflicts and anxieties are challenged. Katarzyna Oczkowska, in her article "The Gaze I Am Photographed Through," proposes an analysis of Agnieszka Brzeżańska's early photographic works from the series *How To Shine in Public*, created in Tokyo from 1997–2001. The author discusses the artist's strategy of writing with light in the context of *écriture féminine* and *parler femme* – which began as a French form of feminist deconstruction of psychoanalysis. Both Lacan's rereading of Freud's work, and its reformulation by contemporary feminists, serve to contextualize the visual field of Brzeżańska's photographs. This article corresponds in a curious way with a noteworthy reinterpretation of the evolution of the psychoanalytic bestiary, as presented by Małgorzata Stępnik in her text "The Sphinx and Gorgons." The author takes as her point of departure the 1924 essay by eminent female psychoanalyst Beata Rank (*née* Minzer) entitled "The Role of a Woman in the Evolution of a Society." This essay is devoted to the reinterpretation of a specific bestiary developed by Freudians, in which female-animal hybrids and monsters play a crucial role. In her article, Stępnik follows these characters' recurring presence in feminist critical reflection and artistic practice. The **Close-Up** section of the journal concludes with Misha Twitchin's fascinating reading of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* through the dynamics of both transference and translation. The author concentrates on the complexity of the literal and metaphorical relationships between the visualization and conceptualization of word-image space in the psychoanalytical project.

Panorama brings together two reflections that grow from experiences broader than the solely academic. Psychoanalyst Katarzyna Przyłuska's therapeutic notes provide a point of departure for her fascinating study entitled *Excreta: Psychoanalysis as Coprophany*, in which she discusses

the visual lives of feces. Using the metaphor of coprophany, the author refers to the work of acknowledging the presence and agency of feces. The article works to render the therapeutic experience as well as the process of integrating culturally repressed content. Jakub Momro shares an excerpt from his engaging larger project *Protocols of Peculiarities*, in which he discusses the various “images in a skull” of a psychotic individual or the “psychotic imagination,” and a structure of psychotic dissociation. His reflections swirl around an incessantly pressing question: why do so many great projects of psychoanalysis lose sight of their clashes with the images of psychosis?

In the subsequent section, readers will find two very different **Perspectives**: on the one hand, Gavin Edmonds presents us with a beguiling work of detection that considers and discloses how coded structures of psychic representation might be seen to operate in another realm, and what they might share with artistic practice. His focus is on the dreamwork and a painting by Peter Paul Rubens, where he traces and reveals a detail from one artwork to another, noting its presence and altered meaning. Edmonds is an artist who shares with us his associative method and its fascinating outcome. On the other hand, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, feminist photography theorist, critic, and curator, discusses the changing role of psychoanalytical theory in her brilliant work with photography.

Last but not least, in **Snapshots** we share with you two takes on two very different cinematic undertakings. Ernst van Alphen discusses Argentinean artist and filmmaker Sebastián Díaz Morales’ *Smashing Monuments* (2022), a work commissioned by *documenta 15*, on the intricate relationships of members of the Indonesian art collective ruangrupa with urban monuments in Jakarta. Twenty years since Nan Goldin’s *Devil’s Playground* gathered over 90,000 viewers at the CCA in Warsaw, Katarzyna Bojarska looks at *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* (2022), Laura Poitras’ documentary on Goldin’s histories of life, addiction, art, and activism. The author follows the analogies and

parallels between the two amazing feminist portraitists and their courageous revolt against social and state injustice and oppression.

Inviting authors and artists to participate in this thematic issue, we have been open to experiment, willing to breach the boundaries of what is considered academic writing or reflection, and eager to hear the most precarious voices and tones. In these times of distress and ongoing crisis, when to live is already a great deal of work, not to mention the work itself, we are extremely grateful to all who have shared their work with us, and to those who will spend time reading and looking.

Editorial Team

