5
ASTONISHING MARINE LIVING
Ellen Gallagher’s Ichthyosaurus at the Freud Museum
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Ichthyosaurus: codifying desire
This chapter considers the racialized politics of psychoanalysis, psychoanalytical explanations of the traumatic operations of racism, and Afro-futurist inspired myths of diasporic feminine identity brought to confluence through Ellen Gallagher’s installation Ichthyosaurus at the Freud Museum in London in 2005. Comprising two 16 mm films, sculptural objects and works on paper, Ichthyosaurus was Gallagher’s empathetic and complex engagement with Freud’s space of work and contemplation. The installation encompassed one work legible for its critique of a masculine-imperialist ideological formation of psychoanalysis, which can be extended to diacritically address Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic accounts of racialized sexual struggle. Other works bespeak the artist’s affinity with Sigmund Freud’s early interest in evolutionary models of the unconscious, and marine biology. Fifteen of Freud’s drawings of the lamprey, a primitive fish he studied between 1876 and 1877 to gain insight into the evolution of nervous systems, were displayed in conjunction with Gallagher’s installation. While Freud left his marine studies behind along with his youthful desire to be an oceanographer, Gallagher’s early research in marine biology effloresces in representations of radical maritime identity-formations in her ongoing series titled Watery Ecstatic (2001–), works from which featured in Ichthyosaurus.

In the Watery Ecstatic series, Gallagher looks to the sea as the birthplace of an evolved feminine aquatic. She pursues and reworks the myth of a Black Atlantis called ‘Dréxciya’, posed by the eponymous music collective. They describe the inhabitants of Dréxciya as an amphibious species of ‘Dréxciyans’, which evolved from the offspring of enslaved pregnant African women thrown from slave ships during the Atlantic crossing of the horrific Middle Passage, who somehow managed to give birth before drowning.¹ Gallagher’s pursuit of the myth offers feminine
identities which exclaim an audacious vitality, and one offered no account within
the Oedipal kinship relation that gives the psychoanalytic symbolic its intelligibility.

‘Ich’ was the code word the smitten adolescent Freud used to describe Gisela Fluss, a young girl upon whom he had a crush, in his early letters. The term refers
to Ichthyosaurus, a dolphin-like marine reptile that lived some two hundred million
years ago, having evolved from what was a land dwelling reptile, which slid back into
the water. The creature was viviparous, giving birth to live young, and the locations of
its fossils suggest it was a river-dweller, which sparked the obscure connection Freud
made between the creature and Gisela, whose surname Fluss also means ‘river’ in
German. A warping desire for secrecy codified Gisela Fluss outside of the category
human, and a warping desire also propels the Drexciyan evolution into an aquatic
species, but it is a survivalist one. For Amna Malik, how the Ichthyosaurus connects
with the installation’s politics of ‘race’ or psychoanalysis is not clear. Here, I show
that it is only by attending to the artist’s reference to the Afro-Futurist Drexciyan
myth in her Water Estatic series that the resonances become apparent at symbolic and
morphological levels. The interlaced themes of the Drexciyan evolutionary mutation,
traumatic memory, the early Freudian phylogenetic model of the unconscious, and
‘unknowable’ femininity are coordinates for Gallagher’s Ichthyosaurus, its cultural
politics located in a Black Atlantic. Her engagement with Afro-Futurist expression
allies with the material manifestations of Freud’s antiquarianism to unfold the
Freud Museum as a diaspora space. It is a place of historical exile, established
following Freud’s flight from the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938 on the eve
of the Holocaust. Gallagher’s engagement also underscores Freud’s heterogeneous,
boundary blurring viewpoints testified in his eclectic array of antiquities. However,
not without first pinpointing the question of psychoanalysis’s historical period in
imperialist modernism.

The rebounded gaze of the ‘dark continent’

The photo collage titled Odalisque (2005) (5.1), depicts Gallagher reclining in an
alcove on heavily patterned fabrics, propping her upper body on an elbow, wearing
loose harem pants and an anklet, with her feet bare. The image was placed in the
midst of Freud’s collection of antiquities, hung on the wall just behind a cloth-
covered table holding a replica Pharaoh mask and a statue of a reclining Buddha, the
pose of which Gallagher mimics in Odalisque. Supine next to the late Sigmund Freud,
who is represented as very much alive, she is an Orientalist fantasy for a senescent
Freud returned to the artistry of his younger self. Harking to Freud’s rendering of
Gisela Fluss into the unknowable ‘Ich’, Gallagher represents herself according to
the erasing terms of a colonial stereotype which controls and contains difference.
This stereotype uses, according to Edward Said, a ‘median category’ to control a
threat to an established order by casting it as a previously known thing. Gallagher
is elevated to face-to-face level with Freud, whose attention is concentrated on
pressing his hand against his drawing pad, while she warily regards him. Does
his unseen drawing feature the concubine’s gazeless narcotic reverie aided by the
substances on the shimmering tray? Yet her canny look reveals Gallagher to be
entirely cognisant and rather than his phallic gaze, we see Freud scrutinized by his
other, as compromised viewers of this fictional scene of her objectification. Herself
the object of a phallic gaze between viewer and image, Gallagher has manoeuvred
to become a protagonist by exercising a gaze which speaks of a different sphere of
identifications. Commanding the viewer to look at her looking at Freud, Gallagher
offers both a critique of Freudian psychoanalysis as a phallocentric Eurocentric
proposition and subversion from within its discourse.

His occasional draughtsmanship as a young scientist hardly offers an explanation
for why Gallagher cedes the role of artist to Freud. But through the reversal she
can reveal the non-exchangeability of their positions as Father of psychoanalysis
and black woman artist. The curtain is pulled back to show Gallagher ensnared in
the thematic of ‘dark continent’.\(^5\) Freud’s ‘dark continent’ dips into the European
colonialist lexicon to render femininity and primitivity substitutive, but as Lola Young contends, over-investing in the gender component misses its colonial and racial implications. 6 Gallagher mimics both the ‘dark continent’ trope and the subject position Mary Ann Doane argues the term erases, that of the black feminine subject, without which the European femininity Freud spoke of in a colonialist idiom would have no meaning. 7 She also reworks the photographic medium which offered Europeans the ethnographic visibility of Africa and the image of the colonized African woman as a metaphor for the penetration and conquest of the continent.

In her analysis of the significance of Freud’s ‘dark continent’ for feminist film studies, Doane argues that the structuring binaries of Freud’s colonialist imagination have sprouted a struggle in psychoanalytically informed feminist theory, with the tension between analyzing racial and sexual difference. Unlike sexual difference, the fabrication of ‘race’, as Hannah Arendt so illuminatingly demonstrates, has a discernible epistemological history. 8 Racial difference and sexual difference, sexuality and racialization are always interlinked but a sole focus on sexuality is the privilege of a normatively racialized subject. Additionally, the social sciences, the dominant discipline for investigating racism, have been slow to pick up a role for psychoanalysis, despite openings. For example, the pioneering feminist sociologist Colette Guillaumin argues that categories known as ‘races’ are a product of racism as an ideology and once constituted, are assigned operative signifiers. The ideology of race (racism) is, she tells us, ‘a universe of signs’. 9 And given the Lacanian focus on the signifier, psychoanalysis can productively interweave with social science towards understanding the psychic workings of race. 10 It is also worth stressing, as Michel Foucault does, that the period in which psychoanalysis emerged was that of intensifying state-directed biological racisms, furnished with eugenicist theories of perversion-heredity-degenerescence, and themes of blood purity. Psychoanalysis is, he acknowledges, to be credited with breaking from the neuropsychiatry of degenerescence and grounding sexuality in the symbolic order. 11 Foucault also recognizes that the psyche services the oppressive normalization which works the body over, securing as Judith Butler argues, a role for psychoanalysis in understanding the function of the unconscious in and of power, and in our occupation of and resignification of the injurious term. 12 The interrogation of its injurious terms can however be inhibited if ‘race’ is considered an extra-symbolic phenomenon. For example, Hortense J. Spillers claims “The individual in the collective traversed by “race”—and there are no known exceptions … is covered by it before language and its differential laws take hold”, to invoke a pre-symbolic, pre-imaginary articulation of race. 13 She turns to psychoanalytical terms to approach the psychic operations of race, situating its reality and politics in the Real by claiming, ‘its face as an aspect of the Real, brings to light its most persistent perversity’. 14 Drawing upon Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s readings, she characterizes the Real as ‘pure and simple’, ‘undifferentiated’, ‘non-human’, ‘without fissure’ and ‘always in the same place’, which, she claims seems to match the mythical behaviour of ‘race’, yet without further elucidation or enquiry into how psychoanalysis might allow us to understand the potency of ‘race’. 15 Spillers is concerned with the possibility of articulating the
interior intersubjectivity of subjects of difference, which she insists will come from
reading human performances in the life world, rather than a psychoanalytical model
for it. She charges that psychoanalytic discourse has yet to be shown to be effective
in illuminating the problematic of ‘race’ in the context of the United States and
the intellectual history of African Americans; and that we have yet to know how to
historicize the psychoanalytic object and objective and destabilize it through social
and cultural forms that are disjunctive to its originary imperatives.

Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks pursues a Lacanian analysis of ‘race’ and its mythical
relation to the Real, having identified race’ as the property of a historicizable
discourse. It is, she argues, produced and captured by a symbolical language which has
no access to the body in its otherness, though its legitimacy depends on the notion
of an extra-symbolic racial body.16 According to Seshadri-Crooks, the system of
race is based on an unconscious master signifier of Whiteness, which generates a
combinatory with its own set of determining inclusions and exclusions. It attempts
to signify the extra-symbolic aspect of the subject, by promising wholeness and
blocking access to lack, but it is merely a signifier that appears in the place which
should have remained empty, to connect to the fantasy that the subject could unite
with the ‘objet a’ and achieve wholeness and mastery.17 Yet she does not elaborate
on the distinguishing anatomy of a master signifier. Lacan emphasizes the signifier
but not a strand of master signifier.18 If a master signifier Whiteness, lodged in
the unconscious, needs to be anchored to a signified, it inhibits the ‘glissement’
or sliding of signifiers over the chain of signifieds. The ‘glissement’ is arrested in
the operations of the symptom, dream or unconscious manifestation, where the
signifier is tied to a particular significance.19 But this is a mythical stopping point
and something new always appears, and it is not established that the operations of
the unconscious manifestation can apply to a distinctive variety of master signifier.

Notwithstanding such divergent conceptual challenges posed by Spillers and
Seshadri-Crooks, the tension Doane observes between analyzing sexual and racial
difference frequently involves a privileging of the former but it does not render them
mutually exclusive. As Jean Walton insists, strikingly little has been made of the fantasy
of racial difference central to Joan Rivière’s foundational text ‘Womanliness as a
Masquerade’ amongst its subsequent discussants.20 The fantasy historicizes Rivière’s
analysis within its racist socio-symbolic, but hardly renders unusable its paradigm of
masquerade and non-essentialist gendering. Rivière established the masquerade of
femininity as that of a feminine whiteness structured in white patriarchy. In Odalisque,
where we might see Gallagher critically perform ‘black womanliness’ to underscore
the racialized politics of psychoanalysis, the masquerade is organized according to
phallocentric white patriarchy laced with instabilities.

The woman of colour and the off-white man

Its exclusion of those ‘races’ and classes associated with the primitive from
psychoanalytic subjecthood historicizes psychoanalysis, but deconstruction offers
us the understanding that the excluded are its constitutive terrain.21 And this
terrain includes the racialized model of the Jew that Freud himself internalized and
transferred onto ‘woman’, according to Sander Gilman’s consideration of Freud’s
transformation of the rhetoric of Jews as a ‘race’ into that of gender. According
to Gilman, Freud translated the anti-Semitic discourse about the pathological body
of the ‘dark Jew’ which interpellated him and which was underpinned by popular
ethnological opinion that Jews were ‘black’, into a discourse about ‘blackness’ as the
inexplicability of woman.22 To secure his own position as ‘neutral scientist’, Freud
could know neither the essence of the male Jew, nor the essence of female sexuality
at a time when both were considered unknowable. The mystery of ‘woman’ was due
to a characteristic insincerity and secretiveness, paralleled in anti-Semitic descriptions
of the hidden nature of the Jew which were widely circulated at the turn of the
century.23 Read in the light of the racialization of its subjects in a particular historical
moment, Odalisque offers invested legibility of Freud authoring his masculine
whiteness by way of what, following Gilman, we could call a translation of his
own racialization, to become the persona of neutral male scientist engaged in the
observational sketching of his early days.

Gallagher’s masquerade in the position of subaltern as woman who cannot speak
is rendered through what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as the masculine-
imperialist ideological formation which shaped Freud’s initial desire to give the
hysterical voice of the daughter’s seduction.24 If Freudian psychoanalysis involves,
as Spillers claims, the patient and the one who is supposed to know, Gallagher is
precluded from knowing or being known through self-disclosure, yet is equipped
with a gaze that prevents Odalisque from reading as a simplistic representation of
the subaltern encountering a Freudian colonialist imaginary. Her subversive gaze is
the agency of the subject for whom, historically, as Spillers contends, racialization
has required her to earn, repeatedly, the linguistic right to a place in the social
economy.25 And her sexual difference marks this as resistance to phallocentrism in
both colonizing and colonized patriarchies.

The writing of Frantz Fanon, the inaugurating psychoanalyst of the traumatic
operations of racism, makes clear this necessity. In contrast to the a-historicity
psychoanalytic discourse is often charged with, Fanon focuses on the relationship
between psychic processes, attendant physical effects, and their structuring by
political forces.26 He fuses the psychoanalytical and materialist by interlinking
sexuality and fantasy with labour and economics and focuses on the interplay of
sexuality and racialization which constitute the subject within colonial societies. Yet
he carries Freud’s erasure of black feminine subjectivity into a stunting and vitriolic
script. ‘I know nothing about her’, he confesses of his experience of black women’s
psychosexuality and as Lola Young argues, does not even offer black women the
inner life of a psyche which he at least grants white women.27 As though in an act
of avoidance of the subject at large, Fanon relies on the textual rather than the
experiential and finds his case study for ‘The woman of colour and the white man’
in the autobiographical account of Mayotte Capécia in Je Suis Martiniquaise. Since she
does not divulge her dreams, he finds himself without access to her unconscious,
but proceeds nonetheless to characterize her entire motivation as a kind of white
penis envy.28
Locked in her grim desire for a white man, Capécia is nothing insofar as she has nothing by way of status to offer him. As she puts it, ‘I should have liked to be married, but to a white man. But a woman of colour is never altogether respectable in a white man’s eyes. Even when he loves her, I knew that’.29 Fanon always compellingly attends to the trauma of racism as experienced from the masculine perspective but he is dismissive and disdainful of the woman of colour, who is ‘revolting’ and ‘ridiculous’.30 Her sense of inferiority, he insists, drives the woman of colour to aspire to redeem the race by entering the white world. In this endeavour she enlists the assistance of what he terms ‘affective erotism’, a pathology of hypersensitivity which Fanon adumbrates as the woman of colour’s rejection of the man of colour. Its initiator is the man of colour because he might cause her to ‘lose’ whiteness, indeed like whites, she too finds ‘the Negro is a phobogenic object’.31 Analyzing the corrosive psychosexual interface between the woman of colour and the white man, his interest remains the traumatized psyche of the black man, whose hypersensitivity is initiated by the rejections of the woman of colour. He must step forth in the white world in search of the attentions of the white man and the protective qualities afforded by being like him. To conclude his chapter, Fanon returns to his case studies, ‘Nini and Mayotte Capécia: two types of behaviour that move us to thought. Are there no other possibilities? But those are pseudo possibilities that do not concern us’.32

They are pseudo possibilities since they concern women who remain for Fanon, pseudo subjects, and this is not simply because he has only come to know them through the pages of a book. In Fanon’s diminishing and blaming account, Gallagher’s feminine subject in Odalisque would be ‘revolting’ and ‘ridiculous’, with no room for resistance. Since he only conceptualizes women as potential or actual childbearers, Young suggests that Mayotte and the other women of colour he dismisses may be read as subjects who resist the powerlessness of their situation by refusing to be objects of exchange within the community, and this may be part of Fanon’s rage.33

Watery Ecstatic. Astonishing marine living

If Odalisque faces psychoanalytic discourse with its historical repressions, other works in Ichthyosaurus unfold a bolder vista of resistant identifications through cultural and social forms beyond the foundational imperatives of psychoanalysis. A photogravure of Abu Simbel, which hangs in the library of the Freud Museum was replaced, for the duration of the installation, by Gallagher’s Abu Simbel (2005). This is a reproduction of the photogravure of Abu Simbel overlaid with bling sequins, a collage of figures and a space ship evocative of that which featured in avant-garde jazz musician Sun Ra’s film Space is the Place (5.2 and 5.2a). Sun Ra’s creative resistance of black liberation, with its ecstatic epiphany, articulated outer space as a realm beyond, ethically, politically, and aesthetically, racist, post-slavery 1970s United States.34 Sun Ra and his Arkestra performed at the Egyptian pyramids in 1971 and perhaps the reworked Abu Simbel photogravure fancifully has them travelling through the region in their mythical music-powered spacecraft. Gallagher describes her work as ‘a tricked-out, multi-directional flow from Freud to ancient Egypt to

Sun Ra to George Clinton. She reorients the photogravure image towards African diaspora cultural production and Sun Ra’s Afro-Egyptian myth, and locates Freud’s appeal to Egypt in a history of parallels drawn between African and Jewish diasporas, by their thinkers.

In *Freud and the Non-European*, Edward Said on the one hand charges that antique Egyptian history interested Freud for its use by European scholarship, and on the other recognizes that in his last work Freud insists on Moses, founder of Judaism, as Egyptian. For Said, there is something compelling in Freud’s insistence, and the openings maintained by his excavations of the non-Jewish foundations of Judaism and its Arabic past stand in contrast to their erasure in a contemporary official Israel and Jewish identity. Moreover, though Said attributes the shadow of anti-Semitism to Freud’s comparatively milder insistence on Jews as the remnants of Mediterranean civilization and thus as Europeans, he overlooks how this manoeuvre speaks to a coeval discourse of Hellenism versus Hebraism. In *Ulysses* James Joyce’s experiments with binary blurring extend to Matthew Arnold’s hierarchical dyad of Hellenism and Hebraism, ‘Woman’s reason. Jewgreek is Greekjew. Extremes meet’. Similarly, Freud attempts a reconciliation of the Arnoldian opposition of Greek national culture and Jewish nomadism. His interest in the cultures of the ancient world for Griselda Pollock ‘spoke to and of his desire and his childhood dreams framed in a still potent Jewish heritage within a Germano-Christian culture’. As such, it could be considered the interest of a diasporic trans-national subject, during a period in which diasporic peoples were, as Nicholas Mirzoeff insists, seen as a disruption to the natural economy of the nation state and an excess to be disposed of through colonial resettlement, migration, and ultimately, extermination. If as Mirzoeff contends, the nineteenth-century national museum and the disinterested category of art both, in their creation of a visual rhetoric of nationality, excluded diasporic peoples, then Freud’s quarters in Vienna and later in London were the sites of a subversive non-nationalizing, deterritorializing antiquarianism and connoisseurship.

Gallagher finds another source for emphatic dialogue in the young Freud’s research in marine biology and his drawings of the nervous system of lamprey. The installation engenders interplay between Freud’s early interest in evolutionary mechanisms in the origins of the mind and Gallagher’s interest in the Middle Passage as both originary and evolutionary futurist myth which works to transcend historical discourses of racist taxonomy. If as Doane argues, the trope of ‘dark continent’ casts the figure of black woman outside of femininity, Gallagher’s works cast the figure outside of the category human, in a risky play with injurious signifiers of the black body. Francette Pacteu contends that in a phallocentric Eurocentric regime the difference between black and white women is ‘one of degree’, but there are many instances where racial difference is articulated as one of species. For example, reading Ernest Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*, Toni Morrison draws attention to how the white protagonist likens his sexual encounter with a black woman to one with ‘nurse shark’, to reassure and flatter his white wife by reaching for a notion of the black woman as not even mammal but fish. Consider then, the risk in
proposing a species of evolved aquatic descendants of enslaved African women. The etymology of ‘ecstatic’ in the Greek terms ekastis, meaning astonishing, and existanai, that is, to derange or displace, offers an apt description of the marine life Gallagher’s *Watery Ecstatic* series represents.

Gallagher has referenced and titled works after the Detroit techno music collective, Drexciya, who pose an outlandish claim about the traumatic Atlantic crossing of the Middle Passage. What if pregnant enslaved African women who were thrown overboard for being disruptive cargo during their labour, still managed to give birth? And what if their offspring were born an aquatic species in the Atlantic through an extraordinary and accelerated evolution, which returned them to a marine vitality? Drexciya propose a masculine warrior myth, ‘Did they migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River Basin and to the Great Lakes of Michigan? Do they walk amongst us? Are they more advanced than us?’[46] However, Gallagher appropriates this myth to create a feminine aquatic cyborg identity resonant with the African American science fiction writer Octavia Butler’s post-human alien life forms which rearticulate the terms of *black* feminine subjectivity at a threshold between determination and unknowability. Gallagher’s interrogations of the injurious term of ‘race’ necessitate that it be written, following Jacques Derrida, as *black*, or put under erasure to signify the inaccuracy of the signifying unit and its simultaneous retention as a site of critical resignification.[47] Many of Gallagher’s works play on debasing signifiers of ‘blackness’ and differently invested, idealizing signifiers of ‘whiteness’, which are in some works unmoored from signifieds, and in others clumped in the burden of racial signification as the excess of determination. Teeming forms which reference the injurious lexicon of ‘blackface’ minstrelsy, popping eyes, flipped wigs, extended tongues and distended lips, return to disorder the denial of imperialist histories within the modernist white space. There is however an absence of representations of the black body and the images inscribe the enslaved body’s obliteration and replacement with ‘white’ imaginings of ‘blackness’.

*Watery Ecstatic* re-imagines the myth of other than human life engendered by reworking death, the trauma of the Middle Passage, of slavery and of post-slavery, in an Afrofuturist survivalist culture of resistance. The young Freud limited his coastal field trips to the Irish sea, but had he glimpsed Gallagher’s amphibious *black* Atlantic in the waves, in what symbolic could he have placed them? In a footnote submerged beneath the body text of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, he quotes a verse from Ariel’s song, from *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies; Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change Into something rich and strange.[48]
Freud proposed totemism’s twin prohibitions of murder and incest as the foundation of moral law, through his myth of the murder of the Father of the primal horde. Though the memory of the murder itself might fade, for Freud ‘the less it itself was recollected, the more numerous must have been the substitutes to which it gave rise’.49 Yet the dead primal father is transformed into nothing as rich and strange as Gallagher’s mythical Drexciyans. What on earth could the Oedipal drama, foundation of the moral law in the incest taboo and the kinship relation that gives the psychoanalytic symbolic its intelligibility, mean for Gallagher’s feminine aquatic narrative? The enslaved subjects of the Middle Passage were positioned outside of the moral law and precluded kinship within the family structure, prior to any imaginary evolution into a radically non-oedipal aquatic species.50

The work titled Watery Ecstatic (2005) (5.3 and 5.3a) was hung in the place above Freud’s couch usually occupied by a print of André Brouillet’s painting Léon du Mardi, Salpêtrière, which depicts a woman in a hysterical faint being held by the assistant of Jean-Martin Charcot, who lectures to an all-male medical assembly. Rendered in watercolour, ink, oil, varnish and collage on paper, Watery Ecstatic depicts an uncanny creature, simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. It is evocative of a sea anemone which sits like a swollen ochre globe on a cluster of egg-like forms and extends a skirt of plump pink tentacles. The imagery implies knowability but does not accurately illustrate any known life form and so preserves unknowability. The anemone-like form floats in the upper central space of the white sheet of paper and long curling green watercolour ribbons extend from beneath and behind its pink tentacles, dotted with tiny signs of black faces framed with collaged long white spikes of hair, and embellished with cut out discs overlaid with letters ‘o’ and the odd letter ‘e’. Reading as feminine, the faces in Watery Ecstatic are like encodings on the tentacles, at first suggesting ghostly genetic traces. In her perceptive reading of Ichthyosaurus, Amna Malik notes that Gallagher has expressed interest in the idea of an unconsciously transmitted trauma which ‘lives in patterns or is passed around like a virus’.51 Gallagher’s assertion might seem to plug into biological or essentialist notions of trauma as a kind of genetically inscribed, transgenerational ‘race’ memory, yet her emphasis is on the structure of trauma rather than its inherence. Moreover, by attending to the iconography of Watery Ecstatic we can find the terms of an alternative symbolic sphere for engagement with trauma.

All of the elements of Watery Ecstatic are co-dependently linked in a systemic marine form that evades taxonomy. Gallagher’s reworking of the Drexciyan myth casts it as not only a feminine and pre-oedipal one in a Freudian sense, but in Watery Ecstatic, offers it a prenatal psycho-spatial realm. The signs of black faces have not achieved separation from their marine life support system where sameness co-exists with alterity. The imagery of the painting can on a topographical, symbolic level be offered legibility through Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger’s writings on the matrixial sphere as a complex psychic sphere of encounters, ‘imprints of traumatic encounters not of me, but of my non-I(s), transmitted to me and transcribed’.52 The matrixial sphere does not idealize pregnancy or denote an organ but a psychic apparatus modelled on this site of feminine/prenatal encounter. Perhaps where

5.3a Installation view at the Freud Museum, London, 2005 Photo: Mike Bruce.
initially in *Watery Ecstatic* we see an unclassifiable organism, we can also recognize a
cartography of the ethics of a pre-oedipal matrixial psychic zone. This is a psychic
sphere for processing trauma, where the m/Other processes events too traumatic
for the fragile foetal ego.

In the matrixial psychic sphere, my imprints will be transcribed in the other,
and to begin with in the m/Other, thus my others will process traumatic
events for me, like my m/Other processed archaic events for my premature
and fragile subjectivity.\(^{53}\)

Issuing from the traumatized, pregnant female bodily specificity which initiates
the Drexiyan survivalist myth, Gallagher narrates a web of interlinked feminine
subjectivities alive in a marine uncanny, and in an act of commemoration which
marks a place of maternal absence as one of her horrific elimination.

Some of Gallagher’s works which were not included in *Ichthyosaur* also offer an
extra-Oedipal kinship relation. *Kabuki* is one of five animated films that comprise
the series *Murmur*, made in collaboration with Edgar Clejine, which explore the
concerns of the *Watery Ecstatic* series. In *Kabuki*, a single ‘wiglady’ forms, according
to Gallagher, ‘a fractal composition of herself’, before ‘becoming a migratory flock’,
rendered through computer animation and rotoscope.\(^{54}\) The ‘wiglady’ references
flipped wigs taken from ‘blackface’ minstrelsy’s debasing signifying lexicon but here,
they flock, loop and descend into Drexiya. The repetition of the wiglady motif to
produce a swarming mass, and repeated images frequently feature in Gallagher’s
work, begs mention of Freud’s conception of repetition-compulsion, in *Beyond the
Pleasure Principle*. The survivalist myth of Drexiya attests to a traumatic witnessing
of the murderous horror of the Middle Passage, but the repetition-compulsion
goes beyond the death drive and its paradoxical operation of life preservation, to a
communitarian, sexual-life instinct, Eros.

In Dancehall culture the DJ calls, ‘come again.’ And the Selector must rewind
the track, so it all happens again … The point is not to begin again. Rather, it’s
to continue in a heightened fashion … The game begins when you start and it’s
over when you finish, but other players enter and leave the field continuously.
You must understand repetition in terms of pure pleasure to cotton to
repetition as a figure of black culture.\(^{55}\)

Gallagher’s *Watery Ecstatic* and *Kabuki* do not attempt restitution or an idealizing
origin myth, but offer instead mutability and potential through a resignification of
the signifiers behind the wounding racist image, which strain to be cast adrift from
their signifieds.

What will the legacy of Oedipus be for those who are formed in situations,
where positions are hardly clear because of divorce and remarriage, because
of migration, exile and refugee status, because of global displacements of
various kinds, move from one family to another, move from a family to no
family, move from no family to a family, or in which they live, psychically, at
the crossroads of the family, or in multiply layered family situations where
the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply
occupied or displaced, where the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds.56

Both the daughter and half-sister of Oedipus, Antigone sacrifices herself to her
incestuous kinship through the act of burying her dead brother prohibited by the
state. For Butler, Antigone’s predicament offers an allegory for the crisis of kinship.
Her impossible situation represents the deformation and displacement of kinship
in its ideal form, and raises the question of ‘what makes our lives possible for those
of us who confound kinship in the rearticulation of its terms? What new schemes
of intelligibility make our lives legitimate and recognizable?57 Lacan’s reading of
Antigone centres on the function of the beautiful in the aim of desire and instates an
uncompromising adherence to desire rather than a wish to ‘do good’ as the ethics of
the analyst. Antigone sacrifices her own being to preserve the family Até, that is, the
family limit, a limit that human life can only briefly cross.58 Her desire aims beyond
this limit, which Lacan also describes as the separation of being from language,
and through her sacrifice she chooses to be the guardian of her brother’s Being. By
contrast with Lacan’s isolation of Being from its historical drama, Judith Butler reads
Antigone for the radical ambiguity of the terms of her kinship, her confounding
position in a web of equivocal relations, and to amplify her as a non-conformity
to the symbolic law.59 Antigone is concurrently entangled within and outside of
the normative terms of kinship and her act refuses heterosexuality in its normative
sense.

Configuring the realm of deterritorialized women and children, Gallagher’s
Drexciyan myth both resonates with and exceeds Antigone’s nonconformity to
idealized, normalizing, heterosexist forms of kinship, and the moral law. Butler avers
that Antigone’s legacy is an insistence on publicly grieving a prohibited grief, on
speaking the unspeakable and on executing a proscribed action as one who has no
right to act. Her legacy for kinship as the precondition of the human is radical,
for she occasions a ‘new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis,
the one that happens when the less than human speaks, when gender is displaced,
and kinship founders on its own founding laws’.60 Gallagher’s *Watery Ecstatic* series
unfolds the topology of an extra-Oedipal realm of being and its non-conformist,
non-heterosexist feminine kinship inscribes a black feminine presence in the
historic project of European modernity, which testifies to the horrific obliteration
of historical subjects. Her visual practice of resignifying the site of injury and the
injurious term of ‘race’ is a labour towards its destruction.

**Note**