

Lacan and his influence: Kevin Jones

Lacan was interested in art and its place as a signifying system in relation to the 'three orders' of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, in and through which the subject took up their subjective position in family and society. In describing this relation, Wright elaborates Lacan's 'dialectic between the eye and the gaze' in relation to the 'scopic drive' in which desire takes its place in the visual field. Lacan saw an opposition between the eye and the gaze, where the Imaginary fantasy of completeness in the gaze of the other is disrupted by the relation of the eye to the third term, the symbolic order that implies recognition of the lack of the lost object that causes desire (Wright, 1998). The opposition between the eye and the gaze represents the subjective division in the visual field (Dylan, 1996). The real threatens to disrupt both orders, appearing in the gap between the eye and the gaze (Wright, 1998).

Arguing against the reductive interpretations of classical psychoanalysis in relation to art, Lacan thought that it was not the place of psychoanalysis to interpret the psychology of the artist through the work of art or to provide the master key to explain its hidden content. Instead, the work of art can have something of the function of the analyst and produce the same unsettling effect as an analytic interpretation. He is less interested in what psychoanalysis can tell us about art than interested in what art can tell us about psychoanalysis (Wright 1998).

Often criticised as 'phallogocentric' Lacan's ideas have been enormously influential beyond psychoanalysis in a variety of fields including feminism, film theory, cultural studies and literary criticism. Famous for his flamboyant appearance he was also notorious for the labyrinthine density of his writings, his variable length sessions and attempt to systematise psychoanalytic knowledge and concepts through the use of a diversity of theoretical models including anthropology, linguistics and mathematical topology (Turkle, 1992). During the world wide revolutionary upsurge of May 1968 many Lacanian's were active in student and political movements. In relation to this tradition, Lacan continues to inform theorists such as Laclau, Butler and Žižek (2000), who have attempted to use Lacanian theory to conceptualise forms of political engagement that link psychoanalytic ideas to political struggles over class, race and sexuality, national identity and globalisation.

The most extensive engagement with Lacan in art therapy in relation to the engendered gaze has been in Schavarién's *Desire and the Female Therapist* (Schavarién, 1995). Maclagan has also written on the symbolic and its relation to works of art, which can be seen as attempt to bridge the subjective division opened up in the space between the symbolic and that which erupts and stalls representation (Maclagan, 2001).

References:

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See also: Sublimation art and psychoanalysis: Sublimation theories in art therapy: Sublime: Lacan: