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Staging Subjectivity: Love and Loneliness in the Scene of Painting with Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch

Abstract

This paper proposes a conversation between Charlotte Salomon (1917–43) and Edvard Munch that is premised on a reading of Charlotte Salomon's monumental project of 784 paintings forming a single work *Leben? oder Theater?* (1941–42) as itself a reading of potentialities for painting, as a staging of subjectivity in the work of Edvard Munch, notably in his assembling paintings to form the *Frieze of Life*. Drawing on both Mieke Bal's critical concept of "preposterous history" and my own project of "the virtual feminist museum" as a framework for tracing resonances that are never influences or descent in conventional art historical terms, this paper traces creative links between the serial paintings of these two artists across the shared thematic of loneliness and psychological extremity mediated by the legacy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Keywords: Edvard Munch, Charlotte Salomon, subjectivity, painting, loneliness, Friedrich Nietzsche.

> It was summer. There were trees and sky and sea. I saw nothing else. Only colours, paintbrush and you, and this. All people became too much for me. I had to go further into solitude, completely away from all people. Then maybe I could find—what I had to find: namely myself: a name for me. So I began the [work] *Life and Theatre.*
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> Charlotte Salomon, "Postscript," JHM 4930–4931; excluded from redacted work *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1943[1] (Watson 428)

In terms of artworks about love and loneliness, about the visual image as a staging of psychological and social condition of a subjectivity in crisis, the singular object that is *Leben? oder Theater? (Life? or Theatre?)* by the German Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon (1917–43) is a prime candidate. This year marks the centenary of the birth of a young woman who trained as an artist in Berlin in the mid-1930s, and painted her monumental artwork of 784 paintings in one year between 1941 and 1942 in exile in the South of France. She reviewed it six months later in early 1943, dividing it into three parts: a "Prologue," a "Main Part" and an "Epilogue" before handing it over for safekeeping to a doctor in Nice. Then in September 1943, Charlotte Salomon was hunted down by the Gestapo, deported and murdered in Auschwitz by the Third Reich on 10 October 1943, aged 26.

The paintings that form *Leben? oder Theater?* as a single project were created by artist who signed her work with the cipher CS, a visual and lexical veil that disguised both her gender and her ethnicity—both sites of her acute political vulnerability in her terrifying historical situation. Her work displays the artist's encounter with popular culture, with both the Expressionism of

[1] Charlotte Salomon's *Leben? oder Theater?* can be studied at http://www.charlotte-salomon.nl/collection/specials/charlotte-salomon/leben-oder-theater. JHM numbers in this text refer to the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam collection on this internet site. It also allows viewers to see the overlays and hear the musical motifs suggested for the paintings. I will refer readers to images I cannot reproduce by this coding. The "Postscript" from which I am quoting here is numbered JHM 4930–31.Original reads: "Wenn ich nicht Freude habe am leben und an der Arbeit nehme ich mir das Leben . . . Es war Sommer, Es gab Bäume, Und Himmel und Meer, etwas anderes sah ich nicht. Nur Farben, Pinsel, dich und dies. Alle Menschen wurden zuviel, ich mußte noch weiter in die Einsamkeit, ganz fort von allen Menschen, dann könnte ich vielleicht finden, was ich finden mußte—nämlich mich selbst: einen Name für mich—so fing ich das Leben und Theater an . . . Der Krieg tobte weiter und ich sass am der Meer und sah tief hinein in die Herzen der Menschen; ich war meine Mutter, meine Grossmütter, ja, alle Personnen, die vorkommen in meinem Stück war ich selbst. Alle Wege lernte ich gehen and wurde ich selbst." This text was translated by Julia Watson. I have made some adjustments to the translation to keep the German formulations in view even while the translations are correct. Redaction refers to the selection of 784 paintings out of a larger total which were not numbered as part of the final work, many of them having the images taped over, or their versos being used for works that were included and numbered in the redacted final version.

German silent cinema and with the sound and colour cinema that emerged in the 1930s, the period of her studies and artistic formation. Yet, Salomon's work was also in conversation with modernist art just as all modernism was being systematically excluded from Nazi Germany, showing its knowledge of Van Gogh, Chagall and, of course, Edvard Munch.

CS's interrogative title *Leben? oder Theater?* already invites us to muse on deeper connections between her grand painting project and Edvard Munch's *Frieze of Life.* Over time, Munch combined individual paintings dating from 1888–89 to constitute "a series of frequently treated synthetic depictions of life and love, suffering and death" that formed a "frieze" for exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1897 and in 1902 and 1904 at Blomquist's Gallery in Oslo, and again there in 1918. It was last shown in a massive retrospective in the National Galleries of Berlin and Oslo in 1927 (when Charlotte Salomon, born in Berlin, was but 10 years old) (Heller 26–27). From his writings, we learn that Munch was interested in a series at whose heart he placed "moods, impressions of life of the soul, and together they represent one aspect of the battle, between man and woman, that is called love" (Munch Museum Archives MS N 30; qtd. in Heller 33). More numerous (784 paintings in in total) but on a less monumental scale (32.5 x 25 cm each), the paintings of *Leben? oder Theater?* collectively pose a doubled question neither to life or death, nor to love and suffering—Munch's issues. Neither would or could Salomon's work interrogate any of these from the position of an anguished masculinity. From the no-place of feminine and artistic namelessness and what we could justly name the social death inflicted on a Jewish refugee and exile, Charlotte Salomon created not a frieze of life but an urgent philosophical inquiry into why women take their lives as escape from situations within the family home. Her artwork also investigated how, in her own politically threatened and sexually menaced domestic condition, she might choose to deflect the appeal of self-inflicted death by making an artwork to find a name: a choice to live was also a means to *find* a self.

The statement I have placed as an epigraph writes of undertaking this vast work to find a self and thereby a name. The words occur in fact in a painting, or, rather, a word-image object that forms a supplement to *Leben? oder Theater?*. Included in the two packages that were placed in hiding in Nice in February 1943 which contained 1325 paintings of which the redacted *Leben? oder Theater?* (namely the selected, sequenced, numbered whole divided into three parts and prefaced with a title, dedication, memorial and a prefatory pages) was the major part, 30 additional painted pages have been named by scholars as a "Postscript." As a result of the revelation of nineteen pages taken out of from the "Postscript" by

her surviving family, pages of which a transcript was made 1975 that was not made public until 2012, we now surmise that *Leben? oder Theater?* might have originally presented itself as both a love letter to the object of a one-sided passion that concerned life and not sex. It also presents itself as an explanation of why the artist undertook her project, and why it failed to save her from a desperate act: not suicide but attempted murder (Pollock, "Crimes"). The writing in the "Postscript" testifies to the precarious condition of the artist at the time of making her great art work and in the present of writing: in elective solitariness, forced statelessness as a persecuted refugee, psychologically traumatized not only by Nazi fascism in Germany and its military victories in June 1940 in France, where she had found precarious refuge after 1938, but by the recent and brutal account of many suicides in her family revealed to her in March 1940. Shortly thereafter she was a witness to the physical horror of her grandmother's bloody death when she jumped from a window in their apartment in Nice.

Unlike the long-lived and prolific Edvard Munch, who as an artist is now overshadowed by a biography that has come to obscure his works, reducing them to being only signs of his anguished psyche and tormented desires, Charlotte Salomon felt herself, and indeed was, artistically nameless during her lifetime: her work was never exhibited before 1961. But as in the case of Munch, because of her tragic death and her life of bereavement, biography can easily obscure the *artworking* of Charlotte Salomon, making transparently biographical the paintings crafted materially in one sustained period of intense creative activity between 1941 and 1942 to which she added overlays on transparent paper, writing words directly on the later ones, and ordered them as all of the following: a Brechtian play about love and music, a memorial book of the dead, a book with chapters.

I knew at once when I was invited to speak at the symposium about Edvard Munch and Emma Bovary on the occasion of the exhibition curated by Mieke Bal in 2017 that I would take up what Bal has taught us to read as resonances between artworks without the formal links determined by literary or art historical convention. I felt it would be an occasion to explore the hitherto unrecognized strings resonating between Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch that do not imply a simple stylistic inheritance of the Norwegian artist in Charlotte Salomon's work. Such resonances would operate on two planes: the painterly and the philosophical. The "preposterous" (another of Bal's gifts to us in cultural analysis and at history) connections between Munch and Salomon are triangulated by an obvious but tricky third party, the German philosopher of the Dionysian, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose name is now a signifier for

a radical moment in modern thought about art as much as about subjectivity (Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio* 1–8).

Nietzsche articulated a vision for life as an aesthetic project. Like Walter Benjamin, another key thinker relevant to our understanding of Charlotte Salomon's work as an event in culture, Nietzsche complicates any attempt to separate the poetic, the aesthetic and the philosophical. Both Nietzsche and Benjamin offered to modernist artists who were seeking ways of saying things through painting at the juncture of materiality and allusion, the concepts of the aphoristic and the allegorical. Both are modes of oblique, associational and resonant signification that leave us suspended between the figurative and the enigmatic excess that cannot be confined or identified with narrative and yet enables us to recognize narrativity as a necessary "stage" for the investigation of modern subjectivities. Both Edvard Munch and Charlotte Salomon share the capacity to arrest us at the level of marveling at their use of paint, their surfaces, their gestures, their materialization of vision, place and space, while demanding of us a distancing from such purely painterly pleasures because of a disturbing intensity of affective freight that involves reading figure, space and painted gesture as components of a production of something we might name at once novelistic and cinematic.

Artworks can function as readings of other artworks on many levels. I suggest Salomon's work performs a reading of what was offered to another artist by the existence of Munch's works with their deep sense of aesthetic inquiry into Nietzschean questions. Understanding artworks as readings of what other artworks make possible enables us to avoid biographical fixation while inviting an analysis of aesthetic practice as a *scene of subjectivity*. Using this case study of one of the painterly readers of Munch, namely Charlotte Salomon, who was an artist trying to make sense of the potential offered in a Nietzschean aesthetic by means of Munch's painting, I shall place a feminist and psychoanalytical lens over the question of *the scene of painting*. To do so means admitting to the forces of love, desire, hatred, shame, disgust and fury, but not as individualized or personalized conditions of a single historical personality. They are revealed to us by certain artistic and literary practices as modern affective conditions to which poets, composers and visual artists, and latterly cinema, give varied form in the century between Flaubert's novels and Munch and Charlotte Salomon's paintings. We discover their lineaments and shape through reading these aesthetic forms with our own affectability. Thus, we receive them also as a *scene of subjectivity*.

One of my great debts to Mieke Bal is the understanding of cultural analysis as a method of working with *concepts* (Bal, *Travelling Concepts*).

Concepts are generated in different theoretical and practical domains. By travelling from their originating discourse, they facilitate ways of thinking in different disciplines that thus escape the confines of theoretical orthodoxy or disciplinary dogma. In light of the liberating force of Bal's book *Travelling Concepts*, I came to recognize that my long-evolving project as a feminist cultural analyst and art historian had been the creation of concepts with which to think what was unthought in my discipline, namely the historical and cultural fact of the *co-creation of art by women and men*, which, I would argue, is the specific and distinctive ground of art in the modern period. This involved conceptualizing difference in all its complexity.

The current concept with which I have been working since 2001 is that of the virtual feminist museum (VFM) (Pollock, *Encounters*). The VFM is not a cybernetic platform alllowing infinite play with images on the internet. Understood in a philosophical sense, virtuality is the attribute of feminism, *pace* Bergson, Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz. I thereby pose feminism as still to come. Feminism is to be understood, therefore, as an unrealized virtuality without definition, even while some aspects of its unharvested potentiality have been historically actualized at different moments in varied forms (theology, political rights and votes, peace movements, philosophy, liberation, rights to the body, to desire, to transcend social gender, and so forth). No actualization ever exhausts its virtuality. Feminism cannot be confined to a historical narrative of periods or waves or generations or themes. It is clearly not yet done (Pollock, "Is Feminism a Trauma").

What characterizes virtual feminism's relation to, and its challenging of, the museum and the exhibition as a system of cultural knowledge is its play with non-canonical logics of association. Canonical logic links art by nation, style, descent, period and influence. In part, my VFM models itself on the daring and often opaque conjunctions we find in Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–29)—in feminist ways at odds, however, with Georges Didi-Huberman's recent interpretations and appropriations (Warburg; Didi-Huberman, *L'Image* and *Atlas*). The VFM is also indebted to the scene of psychoanalysis represented for us by the array of objects and images on the desk of Sigmund Freud. I have long pondered what it means that psychoanalysis was formulated in the presence of so many objects, so many images (Pollock, "The Object's Gaze").

Mieke Bal created an actual installation in the Munch Museum, forging a creative conversation between Edvard (Munch) and Emma (Bovary/Flaubert) by means of a focus on three dimensions discovered in the "figures" of loneliness, looking sideways and the cinematic that she discerned

in both novel and paintings by means of reading Flaubert through her own filmmaking. She thus effected a transformation of the scenes and valences of a great nineteenth century novel and a painter born in the nineteenth century who lived well into the twentieth and who was canonically placed under the flag of modernism, subsections Symbolism and Expressionism. She has set us a challenge, however, by placing a fictional feminine character who bears the title of a new kind of novel to inflect our reading of the masculine artist re-envisioned by the works he created, read sideways by looking *with* Emma Bovary. How to learn from entanglement of literature, visual art and moving image across the networks of masculinity and femininity in the long space of modernity? How did her installation radicalize our thinking about gender and class, subjectivity and aesthetic practice through curation as a medium?

By means of powerpoint in the lecture presentation at the symposium I was able to curate an installation in my virtual feminist museum introducing Edvard Munch to Charlotte Salomon and vice-versa alongside some intermediating others such as Van Gogh. Such a visual display is not possible in the context of this publication. The point of my virtual exhibition was to challenge formal art historical logics of descent and influence, while being allowed some space to bring together Salomon and Munch under a recognizable art historical analysis of what artworks do. We know that Charlotte Salomon, a German Jewish artist coming of age as an artist between 1936 and 1942, had reason to be aware of images by Edvard Munch, widely exhibited and written about in Germany, but also because his work belonged to a community of modernists collectively denounced by her nation's fascist regime in the same terms—*Entartung*, *degeneracy*—as her very existence, as a Jewish person, was being put at risk by that regime. Indeed the conflation between Jewishness and modernism in the art ideologies of Nazi Germany made any solidarity with modernism on the part of a Jewish artist such as Charlotte Salomon a declaration of both aesthetic fidelity and political resistance.

But this is a thin reason to add Charlotte Salomon to our deliberations about Munch. I have been working on Charlotte Salomon since 1994 and since 2001 composing a book on Salomon's single work of 1942–42. It is finally resolved and will appear in 2017 (Pollock, *Charlotte Salomon in the Theatre of Memory*). But it is not by chance that the Munch-Salomon connection has become interesting to me, and more so, in the light of what Ernst van Alphen opened up for the study of Salomon, and Mieke Bal for the approach to Munch. Bal's exhibition is a revelation of further possibilities. At once I see resonances around dissonant social gatherings, uncanny weddings, and women who die pre-

maturely, or, it seems, of an affliction that marriage cannot save. Had I the space (and the opportunity) I would like to curate four rooms. These would encircle a painting by Charlotte Salomon, the final image of her great work, showing a woman alone on the beach (fig. 1) with Munch's *Melancholy*, *Inger on the Beach* and *Young Girl on a Jetty* (fig. 2). The grouping would resonate and at the same time point up the difference, for CS's woman is on the seashore *painting*. Neither a sister, nor object of desire, nor subject of despair, this artist is shown, in the painting she placed at the work's conclusion, actually making the first stroke to begin her great project. Another "room" would include Munch's *Madonna*, *Vampire*, *The Kiss* with two works by Charlotte Salomon: a painting dreaming man and his vision of his "Madonna" (fig. 3 and 4). It would also include her painting of *Jealousy* (fig. 5). A third combination would be centred on CS's figure of a young woman seated on her bed with hands to her mouth. Around her head are written her thoughts: "I have had enough of these times." This appears in another version in a different colour scheme and invites the companionship of Munch's frozen naked adolescent, seated alone on a bed, protecting her young body behind which a dark shadow looms that logically is her cast shadow but which takes on its own menacing force of fear or otherness. The visual combinations assert difference yet solicit comparison as much because of how the scenes are painted as because of connections to the spaces of fantasy as much as the home.

What I am offering is not a thematic conversation, although issues of alienation, desire and fantasy are clearly part of what I am suggesting. The mini-exhibition is about the possibility of painting in such different registers that leave the viewer suspended between what we might read as an event and the image that suggests we are looking at a memory or a fantasy. Paint has to be freed in ways that I see in Munch and Salomon, differently. What makes the painterly forms and daring of Salomon possible is, I am proposing, something we now see in Munch. The existence of Munch's paintings, I could equally argue, makes some aspects of Charlotte Salomon legible to us now. As a result of the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*, and thus having seen more works by Munch together in the selections and configurations Bal has made in her curation, the connecting links between Munch and Salomon, I argue, circle around a painterly energy (hers in gouache, his in thinned oil paint) and an intensity of colour that is always seeking to make forms emerge, that is to *formulate*, while the very gestures and pleasures and intensities of applying paint undo the containment promised by form. The laying in of paint generates force fields of colour and hence of affective energy.

Psychoanalytically speaking, this non-dialectic dialectic—the will to form as it were and the impossibility of allowing its realization because the will must remain visible as a drive or pleasure in itself—inscribes into Munch's paintings the Dionysian as at once ecstatic and depressive, lively and deadly (Aby Warburg's brilliant insight) that is both present in Salomon's work, where we see formalization resisted or deflected by a deeper pleasure in the manipulation of paint itself (Agamben 97) (fig. 6). But to be more prosaically art historical, it was by encountering Munch's commissioned but posthumous portrait of Nietzsche of 1905 (fig. 7) that I first felt I had seen in art something that made intelligible some of the painterly processes and vocabularies with which Charlotte Salomon played at different points in her single work (Stawser II).

I have never been drawn to study the work of Edvard Munch. I never wanted to study Nietzsche. Yet here I am writing about both via a strange footnote to these cultural giants in the form of a single if massive artwork by a woman who was killed aged 26 in October 1943, the year after Edvard Munch turned 80, dying just three months later on 23 January 1944. Perhaps I was put off by the dominant narratives around Munch as a suffering genius that were at once reductively psychobiographical and celebratory, proposing as protypically modernist and intimate relation between art, masculinity and a culturally interesting form of mental suffering. One of my earliest texts, published in 1980, attacked the mythology of the prototypical anguished genius, Van Gogh (Pollock, "Artists, Mythologies and Media"). I addressed this critique to the discursive formation that was art history, and in so doing, identified art history as a discourse that produced specific, ideological effects. In its preferred forms—the monograph and the catalogue raisonné, and we could extend that to museums dedicated to one artist—art history as discourse performatively produces the *artistic subject for works of art* as its key *ideological effect*:

> The core, against which all attempts to investigate modes and systems of representation and historical conditions of production break is the monograph and catalogue raisonné, and the one-person show. There is more to this than collecting the diverse fragments in order to unite them under the name of a designated author . . . The preoccupation with an individual artist is symptomatic of the work accomplished by art history—namely *the production of an artistic subject for works of art.* (Pollock, "Artists, Mythologies and Media" 58)

The common sense view is that there must be an artist first who makes art. But there is art without this fiction of the singular creative individual

maker. It is the work of art history as a discipline to produce a subject (in the grammatical and psychoanalytical senses) for art—so that art becomes the circular index of its creative author. This has blocked the more extended analysis of the historical, social, psychoanalytical, material and phantasmatic dimensions of artistic practice and of the meanings produced and inscribed as representation. It is also the blockage in terms of gender inclusivity in art history. Woman is not a candidate for this neutral, universal, transcendent subject of creative activity:

> This subject is then construed as the exclusive source of meaning, i.e. of art, which removes art from historical and textual analysis by positing it only as the sign of a creative personality . . . The methodology combines the biographical study of the artist with the narrative analysis of the work which thus supports the mutual imbrication of life line and work line. (Pollock, "Artists, Mythologies and Media" 58–59)

This mutual creation of artist and *oeuvre*, then, functions as the cornerstone for the dominant art historical narrative and its masculinization of art that expands to embrace movement, style, period and nation. Or, in reverse, it works down from nation to period to style to *oeuvre* and master. In effect only those who, as "subjects," might be claimed as representatives of the nation as it was being formulated during the nineteenth century are selected for this function which is, in addition, a mirroring and confirmation of the narcissistic and idealizing subject positions of those who create, iterate and defend this discourse. Art history thus formulated, therefore, cannot but structurally reproduce a history that is white, Christian, heteronormative and masculine. Thus the discourse is problematic for those wishing to propose a social, semiotic, cultural, queer or feminist reading of visual and other representations as productive of meanings not tied to the concept of the originating author. It also militates against the idea that art is the expression of an ideologically sustained version of psychological subjectivity.

Yet of course, in the process of thinking about issues of gender and specifically in the condition of modernity from which we suppose new cultural forms emerged to register its transformations, we will inevitably have to consider issues of both agency and subjectivity, since these are some of the key grounds for new explorations of the impact of capitalist, urban, colonizing modernity. They were aesthetically articulated specifically by those self-fashionings, modes of living and aesthetic practices that have been filed away by canonical modernist art history because of their problematic divergence from the preferred formalist interpretations of the story of modern art. I am talking of Symbolism, late Romanticism and

narrative exploration in art. In the field of queer studies, I need to acknowledge the influence of the Spanish art historian Manuel Segade who developed a different methodology by tracing the manifestations of the myth and psychic condition of Narcissus at the turn of the century in Europe to track what he called the aesthetic formulations of masculine subjectivities that were illegible in the heroic story of mainstream modernism (*Narciso Fin del Siglo*). So, paradoxically, in order to resist reductive psycho-biography while acknowledging the cultural and historical dimension of the narrative of the self on trial in modernity, I shall have to begin with the analysis of the self-portrait.

The first *Self-Portrait* painted by Edvard Munch is dated 1881–82. It has all the hallmarks of an early, student work. A certain sternness and lack of expression is registered. The effect of wariness records the oddity of taking oneself as the object of analysis. The face is that part of ourselves we do not normally see. To watch oneself in a mirror, rather than catching a glimpse when checking our appearance, produces an alienating effect on the one hand, and a certain aggressiveness on the other. Is that me? Who is looking at me? In the self-portrait, the object of the gaze must offer itself to be looked at, making itself receptive and passive before a gaze not identical to him or her being painted in an intimacy this exercise exposes and disrupts. Painting oneself, an interrogative gaze attends to a face as if it were an apple or a jug (Chun 94–126).

Yet we, viewers and art historians, continuously read self-portraits as forms of disclosure and self-inscription. We anticipate a subjectivity displayed against the grain of the abdicated self visually interrogating its object in order to paint it. What we see here is the produced imaging of a young man of a certain age, holding himself still and blank while the eye shifts to study the dramatic configuration of light and dark, and the challenge of realizing it in paint, based on a classic mode using underpainting and chiaroscuro to build its form. An exercise in basic skills in oil paint, the work nonetheless prompts me to place it in a conversation with another event of 1881–82, namely the treatment of a young Viennese Jewish woman Berthe Pappenheim (1859–1936) by Dr Josef Breuer. The text written by Breuer to present a case study of hysteria was an initiating narrative in the discourse that his young colleague, Sigmund Freud, would name psychoanalysis: the talking cure as it was in fact named by Bertha Pappenheim, who invented the term (Breuer and Freud). The specific characteristics of the subsequent case studies of hysteria by Freud blended together hitherto distinct genres of writing (scientific treatise/fiction) in the attempt to create a form of writing for the new, non-Romantic narrative of subjectivity as psyche. According to Freud's discovery, subjectivity is split, divided

against its sense of self not by objective versus subjective difference, by what the ego cannot know, namely what actually determines what it does and feels and fantasizes: the unconscious. "Who am I?" ceases to be a question of identity. It is ontological and unanswerable—hence perhaps the need to paint the self over and over again. Deforming the scientific model of dispassionate observation while appropriating the novelistic language of fiction to create a new kind of portraiture of the new understanding of subjectivity, embedded in a nexus of complex intersubjective relations, psychoanalytical discourse was itself a symptom of a historical formation and its most reflexive mirror. Foucault's interpretation of psychoanalysis as the institution necessitated by the bourgeois regime of sexuality identified the core tension between the family as site of the social formation of the subject and the analytical consulting room as the space of removal from the family that the family made necessary, a space to escape the family, a space of forced isolation, where the subject is extracted from the web of relations to become, via accompanied time-travel into memory and anamnesis, a co-analyst of the self in a curiously non-dialogical exchange with an analyst who functions as the impassive, silent, mirroring surface: the Other and the avatar of all one's others.

In the proto-psychoanalytical space of his meetings with Berthe Pappenheim during the early 1880s, just as Munch made his first self-portraits, Breuer incited his patient to speak, to "rattle off" her memories which took the form, however, of scenarios, each burdened with some degree of displaced anxiety and affect, until pursuing each one to its preceding screen as it were, the originating scene of the trauma was finally uncovered. Repetition, displacement and sequence characterized the process of revealing the layered texture of each subjectivity, its historical formation, its historical formation in scenarios that, in the treatment, can only be told as stories. Narrativity and the cinematic co-emerge and undo each other.

One of the late self-portraits of the elderly Edvard Munch, titled *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* is dated 1940 and 1943 (fig. 8). That means it was being made between the moment CS began her first self-portrait, which is widely used on many book covers to stand for the artist, and when she painted this vision of her avatar with her painted fiction, the character *Charlotte Kann* (fig. 5). In *Leben? oder Theater?* Charlotte Salomon gave Brechtian names to the figures she painted who stood for but were not identical to historical members of her family and its social circle. *Charlotte Kann* appears as a child, an art student and a painter. This painting shows her in a moment of self-interrogation within a love triangle. The painted figure is reflecting what the painted text accompanying the image writes in an impersonal third person: is she jealous?

Munch's *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* (1940–43) which we now know almost too well, held a fascination for American painter Jasper Johns (b. 1930) who borrowed the pattern of the bedspread for several paintings which shared the title. There has been an exhibition on this topic at the Munch Museum a few months ago (Garells et al.). I learned of the connection through a lecture in the 1990s by my former colleague, Fred Orton, a specialist in the work of Jasper Johns who specifically wanted to fomulate a method of reading works by artists such as Johns in terms of the political pressure to veil and displace inscriptions of queer desire during the 1950s in the United States (Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns*). Avoiding psychologistic interpretation, Orton sought to "see" the material processes of Johns's painting practice as the only possible form in which a sexual subjectivity, a sexual and affective mode of existence and desire marginalized and oppressed in right-wing homophobic McCarthy's and Eisenhower's America, could be impressed into the field of signs. When asked about the relation between his work and Munch, Johns deflected the art historian searching for answers by indicating what interested him, which was objects and their relations, and activities associated with objects: "cutting, measuring, mixing, blending, consuming—creation and destruction moderated by ritualised manners" (Kennedy).

This is in fact a rather psychoanalytical answer precisely in the attention to the pleasures or emotions experienced in gestures; formalized gestures, social gestures, mediated by displacement of the figures of those social gestures onto the agency of objects. Might we then call that activity fetishism, in its original sense: a belief in the potency of what is not human to affect the human? This flips us back to the fetishism of the commodity, the effacement of the human within the exchanges that include the person in the capitalist system so perfectly given an enigmatically emptied visual form through Edouard Manet's painting *Bar at the Folies Bergère* (London: Courtauld Institute Gallery), painted in 1881 and exhibited in 1882, the period of Munch's first self-inscriptions, and which is clearly in Munch's mind as he makes this painting and in Johns's as he makes that comment.

In the *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* the elderly man is positioned in space, frontally and full length. A clock is without hands and thus only a face towers over him, forming a powerful dark vertical form to his right. I refuse to endow it with the meaning of a coffin. The axis is wrong. The opposing side of the painting uses an object—the bed—an object that marks the deadly horizontal axis in the painting while its bedspread bearing a design in red and black both produces the flat plane of the bed and begins to undo such volume and flatten itself in alignment with the surface of the painting. Behind the man, painted in ochre and

Naples yellow is the indication of a back wall, broken up with painted versions of paintings, themselves imagined as flat against the wall. This mini-exhibition is dominated by a faceless figure in red: red so often associated with a female figure amongst others. Then this space is opened, no doubt in honour of Velázquez (*Las Meninas*, 1656, Madrid Museo Nacional del Prado) by means of introducing an open door breaching the flat back wall of the painting to project the space from which someone enters the space of the painting from deep beyond. Shielded but not obscured by the door, a full-length female nude is painted as the upright form overseeing, overlooking the bed. She adds a twist, a third figure on the vertical, when nude women are in the conventions of art history usually horizontal. When they are not, they are called fatal women.

Description as Bal has taught us invites us to travel around a work, naming what has been placed on the canvas, noticing that nothing is without significance because it is there, part of the semiotic whole that is the painted object demanding our work in reading the signs. So, what has description engendered on the journey around this painting? A sense of how it is structured, how opposition is crucial to its dynamic, how betweenness is made visible as a result. But also, it is asking about the figure in space, in a space that contains images, that has a point of entry and of exit. Yet, the presence of a bed introduces another set of terms, consciousness and unconsciousness, clothed and naked, the bed as the locus of sleep but also sex, disappointment, loneliness and death. If we rush to the concept of sex and death by means of the symbolic signifier, the clock, we must ask: where are its hands ticking away time, setting the schedule for mortality? It has no hands. The bed is covered, its night-time functions overlaid with this striking reference to pattern, to a system of signs more ancient than the modes of oil painting and its capacity for naturalizing figuration.

In one sense, there are four figures in this work, each with a different status: the clock is a figure of uprightness and it too has a face and a body, but no legs. The standing man is clearly a figure with a face whose features are both in the process of forming and of dissolving. The body is held in an expressively gestureless posture and threatens to turn into an object within this room of objects while retaining its difference to highlight its subjective anguish. There is a portrayed figure in the frame of the painting at the back without facial specification and then there is a nude woman, pale like a ghost, hands behind her back, almost walking forward, in terms of the pose, head to one side.

In an earlier reading of Charlotte Salomon and Van Gogh, I have argued that the former shows herself to be creative interpreter Van Gogh's use of space as a sign of subjective emplacement. As a retrospective, if

not preposterous, reading of Van Gogh, Salomon's work reveals a dimension that we might not appreciate without our recognition of her work as such a reading of Van Gogh's legacy. I suggest that, *a posteriori*, her "Van Gogh" gave her permission for a radical play with personally invested, narrative, subjectivizing *space* in painting (Pollock,"Mapping the 'Bios'"). Van Gogh's position *vis-à-vis* modernism's more rigorous and anti-romantic engagement with pictorial structure is eccentric. Fred Orton and I have pointed to Van Gogh's almost phenomenological use of lived, experienced space to fashion a kind of pictorial space that supports an exploration of subjectivity (*Vincent van Gogh: Artist of His Time*). It is precisely Van Gogh's eccentric position *vis-à-vis* modernism's more rigorous and anti-romantic engagement with pictorial structure that held open a space for a nonetheless modernist exploration of subjectivity—not in terms of the expressionist stylization of extremity typical of the German followers of Van Gogh—but by means of the production of narrative pictorial space to hold oblique inscriptions of subjectivity.

That an artist, CS, whom we otherwise find hard to locate in art history, could appropriate as a possible position for her own creative defiance not only the inventiveness of Van Gogh's psychologization of space, but also the tenacious restaging of remembered places figured through an untrained but intuitively creative freedom with colour and drawing, helps us create different questions to ask of modernist painting and to map out different pathways through its many possibilities. The affiliation affirmed by Charlotte Salomon has the effect of making visible to us now that spaces of memory and notably of the everyday were core elements of *his oeuvre*.[2] To flowers and boots as signs of Van Goghness that she invokes in a painting that declares her artistic allegiances (JHM 4351), we can add the painting of one's home and its interiors, as well as intimate spaces like the bedroom. Is it too wild a suggestion to see as indirect support for CS's paintings of scenes such as a child's bedroom Van Gogh's painting of his Arles bedroom (*Bedroom in the Yellow House*, 1888, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 92.3 cm, Chicago Art Institute)? One tiny scene in a painting in the Prologue takes us back to a "Berlin Childhood" (Walter Benjamin's title) and the moment of the reporting of the death/suicide of the child's mother. There, in faded and almost dissipating pallor, sits a child on a bed (*Leben? oder Theater?* JHM 4180).

[2] On Van Gogh's unconventional pictorial space and his attachment to place see my forthcoming *Reading Van Gogh: Memories of Place and Space* (London: Thames and Hudson).

Finally, I want to bring us back to Munch, Salomon and Nietzsche, by means of CS's trip to Venice. From the vantage point of France in 1941, Salomon painted a childhood visit made during the 1920s to the lagoon city which was not a painting of purely biographical memory. It served also as a statement of artistic identity. Venice was a city of significance to Friedrich Nietzsche who not only lived there, but wrote a major poem *Venedig*. Salomon quotes lines from his other Venice poem *Mein Glück*:

Lass erst die Schatten dunkeln
Und wachsen bis zur braunen lauen Nacht!

Let now the shadows darken
And grow into a mellow, brown night! (my translation)

This is Salomon's memory version: "Und warte nur—lass erst die Schatten dunkeln vorüber bis zur lauen, braunen Nacht," misquoted on the transparency that annotates a full page painting of the grandparents, the father and the beloved governess Hase as they stand awestruck before Basilica of San Marco (JHM 4199). As in Nietzsche's poem, the scene is set in early evening, with slightly darkening but intense blue sky while lighted gondolas bob on the Grand Canal in ways that evoke a second Nietzsche poem, "Venedig," which refers specifically to Gondolas, Light and Music.

Did the ten year-old Charlotte Salomon herself already know either of Nietzsche's "Venice" or his poetry? I would argue that the Nietzschean overlay evokes perhaps what she might have come to know of her dead mother's fascination with this philosopher, evidenced in an excluded image, thus forging a link. But more importantly, it is part of the dialogue with a character CS names *Amadeus Daberlohn*, who models himself on the prophetic figure of Nietzsche, and whose musical philosophy so oft repeated: "Learn to sing O my soul" is a mangling of the poet's famous lines from "Venedig"/"Venice":

An der Brücke stand
Jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang:
Goldener Tropfen quoll's
Über die zitternde Fläche weg.
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik—
Trunken schwamm's in die Dämmrung hinaus . . .
Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,

Sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
Heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
Zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
Hörte jemand ihr zu?

At the bridge
Recently I stood in brown night.
From far away came singing;
Of golden drops it welled
Away over the trembling surface.
Gondolas, lights, music—
Drunken it floated out into the dusk.

My soul, a lyre,
Sang to itself, invisibly touched,
secretly a gondola song,
trembling with coloured bliss.
Was anyone listening to it? (Lösel: 60)

Here the disquiet of a creative and lonely man confronted with the problem of isolation seems to be the necessary condition of creativity. In the personal sphere his craving for friends is movingly expressed in his letters which betray his estrangement from fellow-men and searching for communication. In his poetry he appears solitary. One of this most stately poems, which shows utter alientation from the world, bears the legend: "Lonely." The motif of loneliness appears in most of Nietzsche's poems. The soul and not the conscious self sings, inspired by what Nietzsche terms the Dionysian, the intoxicating principle of boundless but sensitized living which stands in as the dynamic and necessary other to the lucid world of the rational Apollo.

The Venice introduced pictorially by Charlotte Salomon as memory into the artist's childhood formation is thus the Venice imagined by Nietzsche, Wagner, Mahler and Mann. But the quality it introduces is loneliness . . . perhaps that which most drew certain men like Munch to Niezsche in his articulation of a passionate sense of life and the desolation of non-connection. Yet there is the final turn from the loneliness for the isolated, persecuted young woman created what I name her theatre of memory through the movement of her brush and liquid of gouache on paper, a turn through a tortured and remembered love which took the form of a passionate immersion in a contradictory philosophy of choosing life by having dared to encounter death—a social death of a stateless refugee and camp inmate and the imaginative encounters with the dead through painting the journeys of three women to suicide.

This takes us to the heart of Charlotte Salomon's philosophical project that required over 400 paintings to elaborate through the invocation and performance of a character called *Amadeus Daberlohn* who was the conduit for the Nietzschean aesthetic suspended between musical joy and the experience of solitude and almost-death. At second hand, rehearsing borrowed words preached at her in the face of her seeming indifference, Charlotte Salomon painting as CS had also to find a visual mode for her aesthetic work. What has been named Dionysian painting, painting in her case sung to music, painting created with a singing soul, opens the space of painting to subjectivity that is not the expression of a single harrowed biographical subject, but a condition filtered through her singular re-inscription of the resources offered by artists and poets across a shared text we might name the modern.

The Nietzschean link serves as a strange and uncertain bridge between two artists, Edvard Munch and Charlotte Salomon. Their relation lies in the manner by which painting itself conveys its own philosophical underpinnings that make possible an inquiry into conditions of loneliness and exile from the world in different forms, genders, locations and histories. Where would Charlotte Salomon have found something like this? Or perhaps that is the typical art historian's question. It is not that she found it or had to find anything. It is that *I see* something resonant when I put her paintings in conversation with those of Munch that enables me to attend to the psychologically dense materiality of both of these artists and the energy with which paint is applied to a surface so as to become a work that renders the *scene of painting* the *scene of subjectivity* while holding in suspension those other questions of gender, sexuality, religious difference and age.

Her figuration of the musican and poet *Amadeus Daberlohn* represents for Salomon the survivor-victim of the great trauma of the early twentieth century, the Great War as they named the First World War. That was the event that Walter Benjamin thought had changed the conditions of subjectivity because it changed the conditions of narrative itself. History had made storytelling no longer possible. In his essay "The Storyteller" Benjamin wrote: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body" (Benjamin 84). But the other force that undid the tradition of the story was, according to Benjamin, the rise of the novel, engendered by the printing press that transposed the oral story into the written book. The story, Benjamin argues, carries experience, one's own or others' into a shared form of learned wisdom

quite different from the novel. The novel carries "the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living" (Benjamin 84). He specifically references the German form of the *Bildungsroman* (Thomas Mann on his mind?) which might also convey a story of experience. But he argues: "By integrating the social process with the development of a person, it bestows the most frangible justification on the order determining it. The legitimacy it provides stands in direct opposition to reality. Particularly in the *Bildungsroman*, it is this inadequacy that is actualized" (Benjamin 88).

These thoughts of Walter Benjamin resonate here with those of a close friend in exile in France during the 1930s, Hannah Arendt. In her final but unfinished project, three volumes on thinking, *The Life of the Mind* (1981) Arendt argued that storytelling was a vital dimension for any form of self-recognition, what she defined as being a who and not a what, who-ness only occuring in a relay with a life being told and being heard back from such a telling, mediated often by another or the otherness of one's own created form, perhaps. Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero extends Arendt's critique of the limits of philosophical and political thought by adding the notion of narration as integral to the recognition of this singularity in plurality. Storytelling thus becomes a new kind of political scene. In glossing Cavarero's reading of the politicizing process involved in women telling stories in consciousness-raising groups that shaped the early Women's Movement as an example, her translator, Paul A. Kottman explains:

> What makes narration a political act is not simply that this narration involves the struggle of a collective subjectivity, but rather than it makes clear the *fragility of the unique*. The uniqueness and the unity of a self, which is disclosed through that self's actions and words, and which is then narrated as a unique and unified life-story, does not display any of the general characteristics of traditional subjectivity: interiority, psychology, agency, self-presence, mastery and so forth. Rather the "narratable self" is a unique *existent*, "who" someone is. (Kottman x; emphasis added)

Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Cavarero argues that human singularity involves recognizing ourselves as narratable selves, which paradoxically involves receiving back our story through the mediation of an Other (Cavarero 20–21).

I want to suggest, therefore, that artists who have been positioned by scholars in the mode of bleeding into paint, expressing their suffering by depositing their psyches on the canvas or paper are not at all involved in such uni-directdional activity. The very question of subjectivity itself is

posed by staging the failure of narrative connection in the spaces of painting that propose and disrupt intersubjective relay. In the case of artists, the action with which I began, the alienating of the self into the seen that can then look back from the other space of the canvas becomes a theatre of subjectivity because it is scene of painting.

What makes Charlotte Salomon's work modern is not the apparent ease with which her paintings can be made into *mise-en-scène* for realist drama and cinematic representation—which has unfortunately been too often the case with films, operas and novels. It is that she grasped what the cinematic was doing in relation to the tensions between telling and showing *in painting*. As an artist coming of age at the point of transition from musically accompanied to synchronized sound and colour cinema that would make possible a new form, the musical, she was already immersed in a precinematic form of painting, culled from Expressionism and Symbolism: a form of painting pressing at the limits of the single frame, and seeking the serial as a combination of formal, painterly gesture and narrative space. Munch's *Frieze of Life* paintings have theatrical qualities. Bal argues many are also cinematic. Munch also painted settings in which figures were positioned in dramatic and disturbed relations to each other and to events about which they did not communicate. Death has happened or desire is being incited and denied.

Charlotte Salomon becomes the name of a reader of both the potentialities of the cinematic and the specificities of a Nietzschean imaginary where vitality is registered in flows of painting and painterly lines that nonetheless fix and hold the isolated subjects in their formal, ritualized gestures of unfulfilled exchange. Emotion or, rather, affect as a force that breaches and undoes the boundary of the imagined Apollonian self spreads into certain flows of colour that do not articulate the forms beneath their imaginary surfaces. This is why when I saw Munch's *Portrait of Nietzsche*, I could recognize the possibility of CS as a painter. I saw also the way in which a later artist's work could perform a reading through which a way of seeing what was being unknowingly read itself emerged into a form of intelligibility that required us to create the spaces of exchange, the possibility of preposterous understanding as *Emma & Edvard* enabled a staging of Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch.

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Fig. 1. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *The Final Painting: CS Beginning to Paint* (painting no. 558, JHM 4925). *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam.

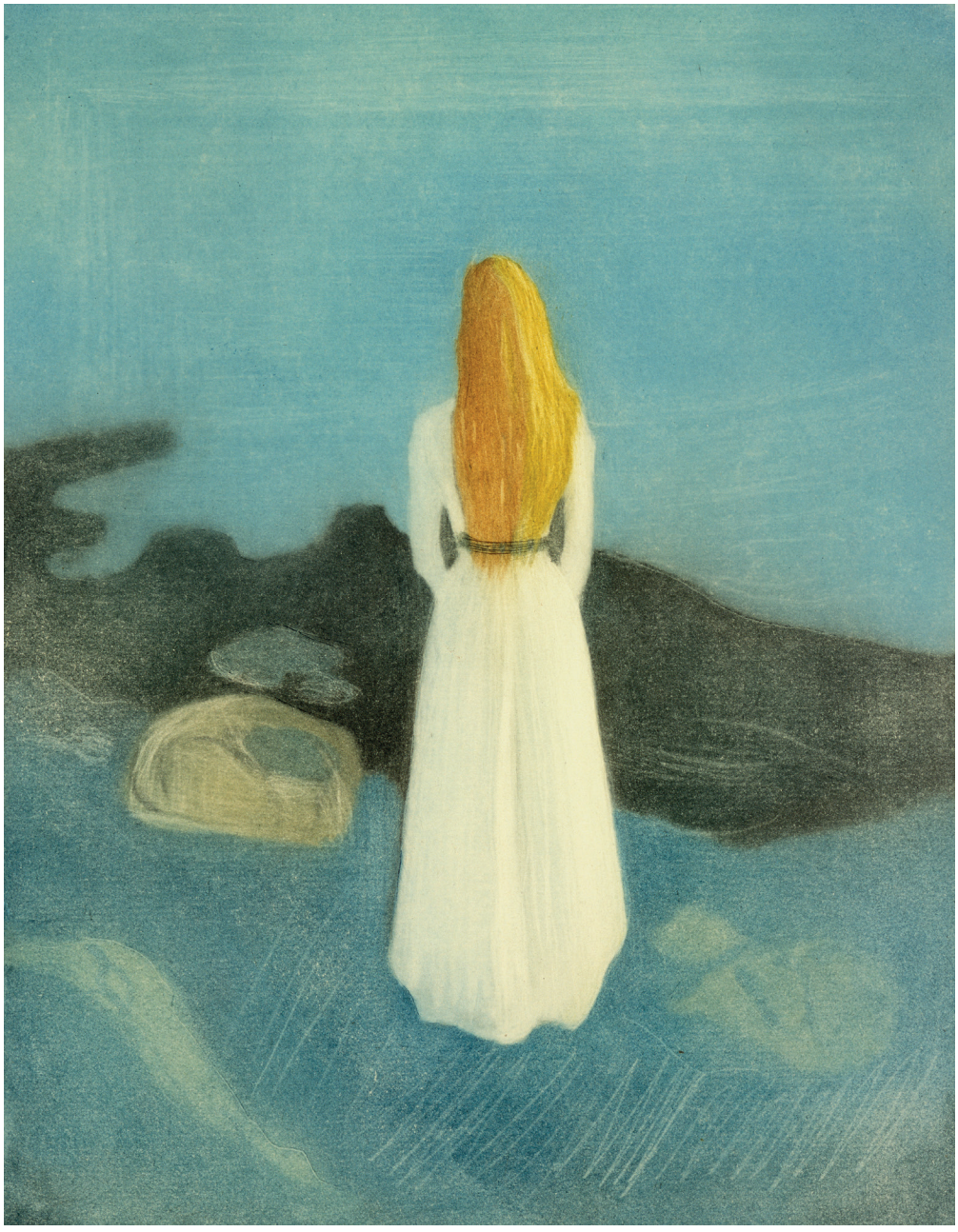

Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *Young Girl on a Jetty*, 1896, coloured etching and scraped aquatint, 219 x 288 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 3. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Amadeus Daberlohn after Listening to Paulinka Bimbam Singing Gluck* (main part painting, no. 208, JHM 4587), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: "The blood courses hotly through his veins."

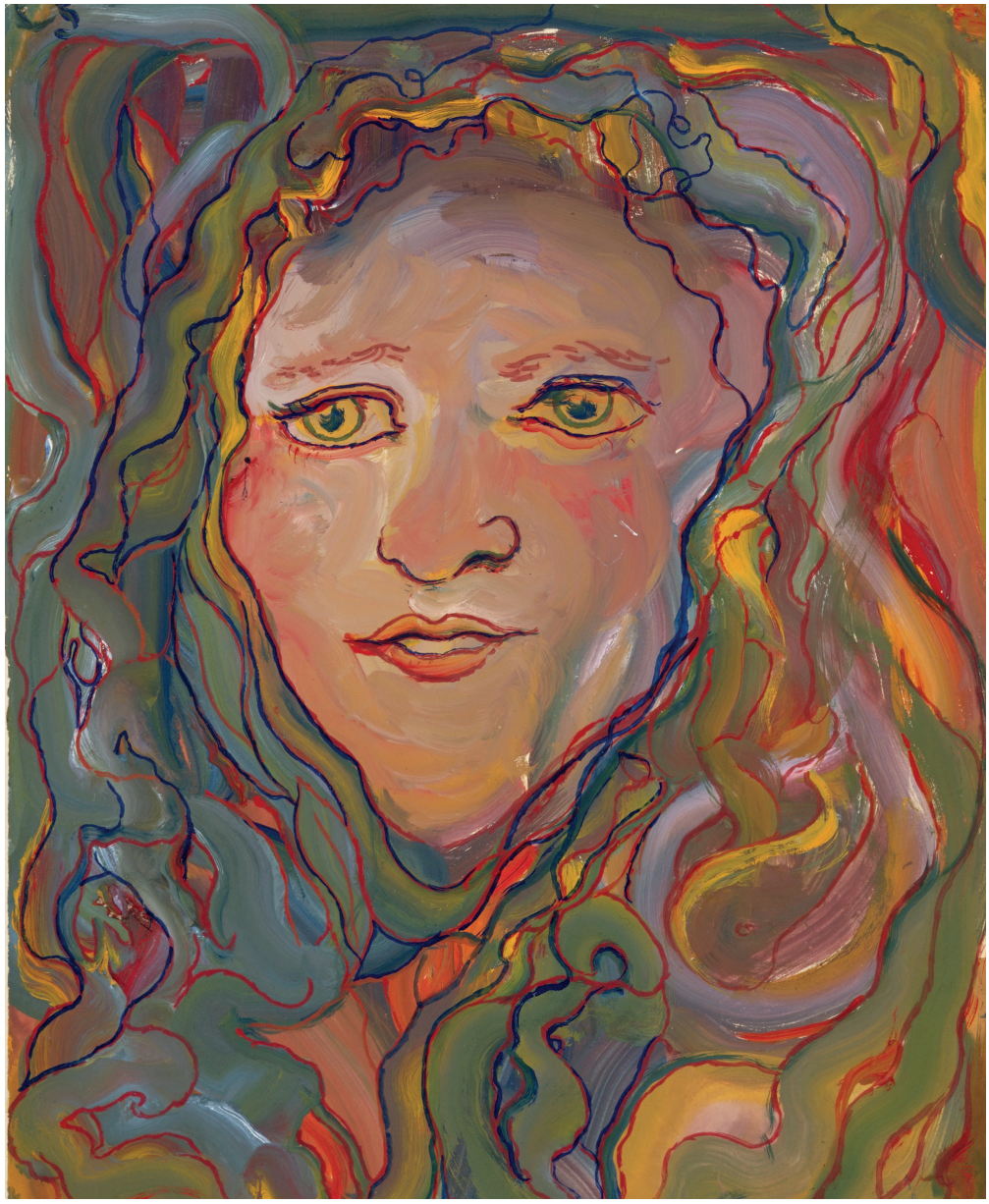

Fig. 4. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Amadeus Daberlohn Has a Vision of Paulinka Bimbam while Having a Mask Made of His Face* (painting no. 212, not numbered, JHM 4591), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: "While his face is being worked on, the following is taking place in his mind: the vision dominating his senses blends colour and music: out of a confusion of swirling lines a theatrical mask of Paulinka takes shape."

Fig. 5. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Jealous Charlotte* (main part painting, no. 261, JHM 4639), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: "Charlotte is not sure of her emotions. Is it jealousy or something else growing within her where her love is concerned?"

Fig. 6. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *The Night Struggle* (epilogue painting, no. 506, JHM 4884), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam.

Fig. 7. Edvard Munch, *Portrait of German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche*, 1906, oil on canvas, 201 x 160 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 8. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940–43, oil on canvas, 120.5 x 149.5 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.