

# Screen-Practice: Artistic Expression Through the Matrixial Gaze

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### abstract

“Screen-Practice: Artistic Expression through the Matrixial Gaze” considers Bracha L. Ettinger’s psychoanalytic theory as well as an empirical study on media production. This research is concerned with modern and contemporary theories on the gaze, the screen and film theory. These gazes are phallogentric (Freud), symbiotic (Lacan), oppositional (hooks) and matrixial (Ettinger). This project will explore, within screen-practice and theory, the relations between screen-artist, screen-work and spectator in three categories of screen-practice: fiction film, documentary and virtual reality. It aims to answer the following question: how are the relations between the gaze and the screen evidenced through contemporary psychonalalysis?

KEY-WORDS: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, MATRIXIAL GAZE, SCREEN-PRACTICE, FEMINIST FILM THEORY

“THE PHALLIC GAZE EXCITES US WHILE THREATENING TO ANNIHILATE US IN ITS EMERGENCE ON THE SCREEN; THE SYMBIOTIC GAZE INVITES US TO SINK INSIDE IT WHILE THREATENING TO ANNIHILATE US TOGETHER WITH THE SCREEN.”

BRACHA L. ETTINGER, 2020.

### methodology

Bracha L. Ettinger is a contemporary philosopher, psychoanalyst and painter whose theory of the Matrix considers the womb as a symbolic signifier such as the Phallus. Ettinger does not dismiss Freud and Lacan’s contributions to modern psychoanalysis, but rather expands their concepts, defining a matrixial gaze. Art-work, for Ettinger, is a form of “transport-station of trauma”, which relates to her notion of memory of oblivion and her artistic work. Her articulation of the woman-artist explains her opposition to the binary perspective, as well as artistic expression: “The artist, who is working through traces coming from the immemorial, not only of herself but of Others (...) is a woman-artist even when she is a man” (Ettinger, 2020).

Matrixial theory, as a theoretical tool, contemplates what Mulvey defines as a “distancing awareness” between the gazes in film theory, as the gaze cannot create a cut between the subjects and the screen (where the male gaze serves to deny the female and Other of their subjectivity through objectivisation); as well as it cannot encompass a symbiosis of the subject(s) and the screen (as observed by Ettinger through connecting Lacan’s symbiotic gaze to social media and the screen). The matrixial gaze requires distance at the same time as it requires proximity to which it observes the film-screen.

Through her articulation of memory of oblivion, Bracha L. Ettinger’s matrixial gaze considers the effect of historical trauma upon the artist, art-work and viewer. It also reflects hooks’ repressed gaze and oppositional gaze, since Ettinger’s paintings have the objective to “make affect transmissible” (Massumi, 2000). Art-work does not only present the “station” of the trauma-event itself, as it “transports” the subject(s) through it.

“THE MATRIXIAL GAZE THRILLS US WHILE FRAGMENTING, SCATTERING, AND JOINING GRAINS TOGETHER AND TURNING US INTO WITNESSES; IT ENCHANTS US WHILE REDUCING US INTO PARTICLES AND PARTICIPATING IN A DRAMA WIDER THAN OUR INDIVIDUAL SELVES.”

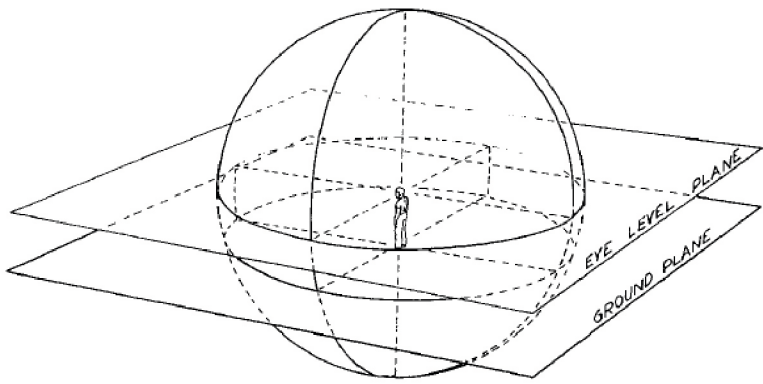
BRACHA L. ETTINGER, 2020.



### the gaze

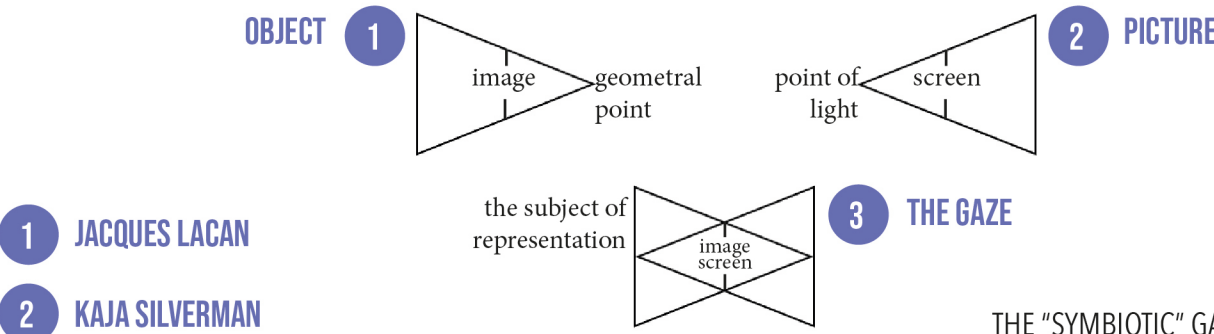
A frame delimits the art-work’s borders, configuring the space for the art-work to be viewed upon (Simmel, 1994). It is also used to separate very clearly the body of the artist and viewer from that of the art-work itself. The frame defines a medium: in film, it reflects the film-work and the screen. Each one of these entities – artist, art-work and viewer – carry a gaze which allows for interpretation, as a reflection of subjectivity intertwined in each entity. In Bracha L. Ettinger’s psychoanalysis, these separate bodies share a subjectivity which has more aspects in common than in-difference.

- 1 KAREN WONDERS
- 2 OLIVER GRAU



SPHERICAL FIELD OF VISION, 1993.

Matrixial theory considers that “subjectivity is an encounter with the Other” (Ettinger, 2020), as the matrixial gaze is an alternative school of thought to resist the dangers of the phallogentric gaze, which through the extremities of the castration complex result in dehumanising the Other (Mulvey, 1975; hooks, 1992); and resists the symbiotic gaze present in social media and new technologies, where the subject(s) are annihilated through an overstimulation of senses provoked by the screen (Silverman, 1996; Ettinger, 2020). While Silverman uses Lacan’s symbiotic gaze as triangular, Ettinger considers the matrixial sphere for a space of emanation of the gaze. Lacan’s symbiotic gaze, according to Ettinger, does not differentiate the screen from the subject, threatening the subject’s proprioception. Even more so in a contemporary society which is dominated by screens seeking the viewer and user’s attention.



THE “SYMBIOTIC” GAZE, 1996.

According to Pollock, we must be aware of the dangers of the phallic model: “racism, xenophobia, fascism are premised on an extremity of the castration paradigm” (Pollock, 2004). Laura Mulvey (1975) considers that the female representation on-screen occupies the place of a “wound” (Mulvey, 1975) due to the Freudian castration complex. Other theorists consider that the ‘woman’ is defined by a “lack” (Silverman, 1996; Pollock, 2004). bell hooks criticises the binary male/female system of analysis by claiming that black female spectators created a critical space where ‘woman as image, man as bearer of the look’ was continually deconstructed (hooks, 1992), developing an oppositional gaze towards cinema. This oppositional gaze advocates for a “change in reality” (hooks, 1992), which dialogues with Bracha L. Ettinger’s matrixial gaze.

### artistic investigation

In this research, these theories on the gaze will be explored through the artistic investigation of a fiction film, a documentary and a virtual reality production. These three categories relate to Ettinger’s matrixial gaze in order to evidence the traces of a woman-artist, as well evidencing screen-practice through theory. The fiction film will represent on-screen Lusophone women; the documentary will represent Ettinger’s paintings named Eurydice; the virtual reality experience will explore the myth of Eurydice in-between her deaths.

The expected outcome of this work aims to discover how the relations between artist, art-work and viewer are revealed through screen-practice by analysing the development, production and result of the three different modes. Each has their own relation to the screen and narrative which will be outlined and analysed. The choice of Eurydice as a mytheme is related to Ettinger’s conversation with Levinas (1997), as well as Ettinger’s work as a painter. As an artist, Ettinger produced a series of paintings named Eurydice, which are based on a traumatic photograph taken in Ukraine, which features the mass execution of naked Jewish women by Nazi soldiers following the orders of Hitler into the Soviet Union. Through fragments, replication, grains typical to the movement of New European Painting, Ettinger’s Eurydice series bring forward the lost gazes of the women she observes in the original photograph, resisting while at the same time confronting the phallogentric gaze which participated in killing them.



“[...] THE WAYS IN WHICH SCREEN TECHNOLOGY WAS USED IN PRACTICE WERE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE TECHNOLOGY ITSELF. FURTHERMORE, IT WAS THIS PRACTICE WHICH PROVIDED A FRAMEWORK IN WHICH TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION BECAME POSSIBLE.”

CHARLES MUSSER, 1984.

### questions

HOW CAN THE MATRIXIAL GAZE BE APPLIED TO THE PROCESS OF SCREEN-PRACTICE?

ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY FILM THEORY, HOW ARE THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ARTIST, ART-WORK AND VIEWER INTERTWINED IN PRACTICAL SCREEN-WORK?

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS EVIDENCED BY THE MATRIXIAL GAZE IN THE EXERCISE OF FICTION FILM, DOCUMENTARY AND VIRTUAL REALITY?

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