https://doi.org/10.18778/2353-6098.6.02

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Gazing at Eurydice: Authorship and Otherness in Bracha L. Ettinger

Abstract

A historical photograph of women and children from the Mizocz ghetto taken in 1942 just before their execution constitutes one of the most recurring motifs in Bracha L. Ettinger's visual art. By means of her artworks, Ettinger endeavours to retrieve these women's dignity and work through their traumas at a point when they are unable to do it themselves. Yet, one cannot ignore a number of questions that arise in the context of this kind of aesthetic practice; after all, Ettinger uses an archival photograph, taken by an anonymous photographer, and her acts of altering and decontextualising this "ready-made" material are aimed at producing a certain artistic effect. The objective of this article is to reflect on the issue of authorship in Bracha L. Ettinger's theory and art. Having introduced two Eurydicial artworks, I proceed to unravel the status of a matrixial artist-author. In order to do so, I analyse such notions as ready-made art, matrixial Otherness, trauma of the World, gaze, and appropriation.

Keywords: Bracha L. Ettinger, artist, otherness, Eurydice, Holocaust, matrixial theory, appropriation, ready-made

The Author and Her Others

One of the tropes that do not cease to occupy Bracha L. Ettinger's canvases is a historical photograph of women and children from the Mizocz ghetto taken in 1942 just before their execution. The photographer's identity is not confirmed, and we can only guess whether the picture was taken "as witness, as protest, [or] as trophy," to quote Griselda Pollock (2013: 25–26). The women and children in the picture were by no means selected to die due to their individual deeds – rather, their shooting was a result of collective responsibility. On the 13th of October, 1942, prisoners in the Mizocz ghetto, present-day Ukraine, revolted against the liquidation action; the following day, almost all the men, women, and children were taken to a ravine and executed.[1] The photographer's archival gesture humiliated the women and appropriated their image: it is the depiction of their nakedness and defencelessness that was recorded and preserved. As a consequence, we – the viewers – are doomed to lose in a struggle against submitting to an objectifying gaze. Aware of the problematic

[1] There are several known cases of prisoners who survived the slaughter. See: Parfeniuk and Suszek 2018: 407–408.

position of a viewer-voyeur, Bracha L. Ettinger endeavours to re-subjectify the Mizocz women posthumously via the medium of art. One of the means to do so is to initiate an interaction between the aforementioned photograph and a photocopier. In the artworks with the Eurydice motif – which are discussed in this article – the historical image is not merely copied, since Ettinger disturbs the work of the machine in the middle, before the "faithful" copy is completed. Partly giving in to the agency of the technology used, she cannot predict the outcome of such a procedure. The artistic effects are always unique, and yet they share such features as distortion and suspension; the Mizocz women become ghostly, not fully present but not yet absent, connoting mythical Eurydice at the exact moment when Orpheus turns to look at her. Brian Massumi comments upon this "Eurydicial" aspect of Ettinger's artistic practice: "The image has degenerated. But it hasn't disappeared. … [I]t has been caught appearing" (2006: 201). The next stage of artworking – which often takes years – consists in putting layers of paint on the manipulated picture. During this repetitive process, new layers come to existence; some of them hide the photographic content while others put emphasis on its chosen fragments. Finally, as much as any stage of these works may be called final, the painting becomes "less the image than the sensation of its remaining in its fading, re-arising: rhythm" (Massumi 2006: 203). Rhythmic and fluctuating, Ettinger's artworks are, thus, concerned not so much with actual content or historical knowledge as with affective data.

It seems that one of Ettinger's aims is to recover the dignity of the women from Mizocz. Humiliated before their death, now they are, in a sense, clothed in layers of paint, or partly hidden from the voyeuristic or fetishising looks of – first – perpetrators, and – then – spectators. Simultaneously, the Israeli painter-psychoanalyst provides these women with an intimate canvas space, understood as a homely site where their trauma can be worked through for – or rather instead of – them at a moment when they are not able to do so on their own.[2] Still, one cannot ignore the question of authorship in the case of such practice: on the most basic level, Ettinger uses the historical picture, taken by an anonymous photographer, in order to manipulate it artistically and achieve a particular aesthetic effect. Not only does she decontextualise the image, but she also covers the women from Mizocz with paint, frequently making them recognisable only to those who hold at least a partial knowledge of the series' background. I believe that it is impossible to grasp the complexity of authorship in Ettinger's artistic and theoretical works without turning to her approach to Otherness and an artist; these three notions tend to overlap in the Ettingerian universe to an extent that makes it difficult (and indeed futile) to define their exact borders.

The aim of this article is to address the issue of authorship in Bracha L. Ettinger, taking into consideration selected notions from the matrixial theory – a feminine supplement to the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. I intend to explore an inspiring interaction between Ettinger's matrixial psychoanalysis and her artistic practice, keeping in mind her conviction that "[w]hile painting produces theory, theory casts light on painting in a backward projection" (Ettinger 2006b: 94). I wish to identify both the prospects and potential threats of Ettinger's theoretical perspective on authorship and her own authorial practice. In order to do so, I take two Eurydicial artworks

[2] In this paragraph, I have hinted at several issues and themes that are already explored in other articles. For an analysis of a potential trans-historical encounter with the bodies of the Mizocz women and its ethical implications, and for Ettinger's peculiar procedure of "clothing" and protecting these women, see: Kisiel 2019. The importance of trusting the artist and the (un)necessity of historical knowledge in the context of Ettinger's art and theory are tackled in: Kisiel 2018. Theoretical underpinnings of the statement concerning the possibility of working through trauma of, for, and instead of the Other are explored in: Ettinger 2006c, and contextualised in, among others: Kisiel 2016, 2018.

– *Eurydice*, No. 5, and an untitled 1985 sketch[3] – as my starting points, and then proceed to discuss the status of an author, turning to such issues and terms as (ready-made) art, the artist's Others, shareability, trauma of the World, and appropriation.[4] I am convinced that Ettinger's general remarks on artists and her own interventions in the field of aesthetics support the thesis that a matrixial artist-author is a subject capable of entering into a compassionate relation with his or her Other(s), which, in turn, has important resonances for potential viewers.

Eurydicial "Ready-mades"

The question of tension between ready-made content and authorship is inevitable when one faces Ettinger's Eurydicial art. *Eurydice*, No. 5 (1992–1994)[5] reveals a fragment of the photograph that recurs in the whole series. In this play of light and shades, of the canvas and Ettinger's dark brush strokes, several figures are distinguishable. One of the women standing in a row looks in the viewer's direction and another carries a baby in her arms. Among them, a face of a little girl hugging yet another woman can be noticed. The people from the original photograph have almost disappeared; only the central woman who looks away is easily spotted. The historical image is juxtaposed here with a page taken from a French-Hebrew dictionary. One of the entries is *vivante/morte*, which grasps the Eurydice-like position of the women in Ettinger's art, that is, their suspension between presence and absence, life and death.[6] In the lower part of the image, purple paint strokes are suspended in their act of veiling the picture. Undoubtedly, this is the fragment of *Eurydice*, No. 5 that most directly indicates the painter's authorial gesture, or – perhaps – her authoritative gesture, if we acknowledge a degree of violence and abruptness in it. An untitled sketch from 1985[7] uses the Mizocz photograph as well, yet it also invites more agencies within its borders. The frame is similar to, but slightly wider, than that of *Eurydice*, No. 5, and we cannot speak about the light/dark contrast anymore since the main colours of the sketch are black and purple. The little girl mentioned above becomes the most important figure of the artwork as she is "doubled" and appears on both sides of the painting. This time, however, alongside the Mizocz

[3] I discuss these two artworks in slightly different contexts in three papers. For a discussion on *Eurydice*, No. 5 alongside other paintings from the series, with an emphasis put on such tropes as proximity, traumatic repetition, suspension, and visibility, see: Kisiel 2018. For a discussion on *Eurydice*, No. 5 in the context of the archive's insufficiency and Orpheus's deadly gaze, see: Kisiel 2020. For a discussion on the untitled sketch in the context of a Levinasian response, see: Kisiel 2019.

[4] Bracha L. Ettinger's painting technique calls to mind the legacy of such artists as Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, or Gerhard Richter. However, Ettinger's indebtedness or relation to these artists has already been discussed, primarily by Griselda Pollock, a prominent art historian and feminist scholar. For Pollock's placement of Ettinger's *oeuvre* in art history, see: Pollock 2010; therein, Pollock recalls the tradition of abstract painting, elaborates on differences between Ettinger's and Richter's aesthetic practices, provides a detailed description of the sources Ettinger uses in her works, and identifies the original photograph in Ettinger's art as "a Duchampian ready-made" (2010: 856). For Pollock's juxtaposition of Andy Warhol's pop-art – portrayed as symptomatic of "modernity's … unfinished business" (2000: 50) – with Ettinger's trauma-informed art, see: Pollock 2000.

[5] Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice*, No. 5, 1992–1994, oil painting, carbon toner, photocopic dust, pigment and ashes on paper mounted on canvas, 47 x 27 cm. Collection Israel Museum, Jerusalem. © Courtesy of the artist.

[6] Ettinger's artistic technique and the ambiguity of presence and absence in her works may connote Jacques Derrida's notion of the spectre and its reliance on conjuration/conjurement. Since the spectre designates a breach in spatiality and temporality, suspending and deconstructing any attempt to capture it, it is subjected to the simultaneous gesture of summoning it and casting it away (Derrida 2006: 49–60).

[7] Bracha L. Ettinger, *No Title-Sketch*, 1985, carbon toner, photocopic dust, pigment and ashes on paper, 27.3 x 23.1 cm. © Courtesy of the artist.

women, the artwork hosts Ettinger's parents from the pre-war photo taken in the streets of Łódź in 1936. Finally, another motif resurfaces here: the red letters that originate in Gustaf Dalman's 1925 book with aerial photographs of Palestine (*Hundert Deutsche Fliegerbilder aus Palaestina*).[8] A historical photograph, an image from a family album, two books – the amount of ready-made material to be found within these two frames, being merely samples of Ettinger's massive *oeuvre*, cannot be ignored. How, then, can we define authorship here?

In "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Sigmund Freud proposes a distinction between ready-made writings and creative writings, which Ettinger transfers to the field of artistic production in order to question it (Ettinger 2006a: 72–73, 90). At this point, let us focus on Freud. The founding father of psychoanalysis reflects predominantly on the latter type of writings. As he proposes, the origin of creativity can be discovered in children's play and fantasy, and, thus, it is associated with the activity of daydreaming (Freud 1983). Interestingly enough, while Freud does not take ready-made works into consideration for the most of his essay and seems rather to disregard them, he does leave the discussion on his division open. In the last lines, he not only implies that ready-made assigned artists are somewhat independent and able to leave traces of themselves in their works, but also suggests that there may exist a certain collective mythology. He writes: "[I]t is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity" (1983: 28, emphasis original). Therefore, Freud leaves some space for rethinking the distinction between ready-made and original art; he does not require understanding these notions in a strict sense. Still, when we consider Ettinger's artistic pieces, it is difficult not to perceive them as ready-mades, given the amount of foreign content. It may seem that Ettinger's artistic production to a large extent relies on a thoughtful act of collaging pre-obtained material. To gain a more comprehensive perspective on Ettinger's idea of an aesthetic process and the value of an artist in it, first we need to look at the rudiments of her matrixial theory, including the notion of the matrix and the issue of Otherness in the matrixial borderspace.

Matrixial Encounters

Bracha L. Ettinger's intervention in the psychoanalytic field originates in the womb – an inspiration for introducing a supplementary feminine dimension into the phallocentric system. Ettinger proposes the Latin-based notion of the matrix (see: 2006a: 64), which in her theory stands for both an-Other sphere of subjectivity formation and a signifier of non-phallic difference. Claimed to be non-gendered and non-Oedipal, the matrixial difference is nevertheless pronounced feminine, as it is based on the prenatal/pregnancy encounters and maternity.[9] These experiences point to extreme – but not totally boundless – togetherness, which allows for partial sharing of affective data and mutual influencing. Thus, what the matrix as a notion promises in the psychoanalytic discourse is a shift of focus from a defining series of cuts, losses, and separation to the originary subjectifying force of intimacy, shareability, and compassion (Pollock 2006). The matrix, however, is not supposed to defy or jettison the male signifier found in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. On the contrary, Ettinger recognises the value of the phallus, but observes its insufficiency. As she argues,

> In the prenatal phase, the matrixial stratum is more active in the process of subjectivizing than the phallic stratum, whereas in the postnatal life it is the phallic stratum that dominates while the matrixial one recedes. Thus, the matrixial *objet a* is not a derivation of the phallic *objet a*, neither is it its

[8] Rosi Huhn writes more about this book and its implications; see: 2012: 43–55.

[9] See: Ettinger 2006e: 140–41. For a study of the matrixial feminine difference, see: Pollock 2009: 9–10. For Pollock's take on the notion of the matrix, see: Pollock 2006: 12–21.

> "opposite." Rather, it has an autonomous source in the feminine difference. (Ettinger 2006a: 84–85, emphasis original)

The concept of the phallus, then, fails to encompass the complexity of subjectivity formation, and the matrixial theory aims at filling this gap.

The notion of the matrix allows Ettinger to propose a new subjectivising stratum and to rethink the *I*/*non-I* dualism, which – as is demonstrated further on – is of major importance in her take on artistic authorship. Within the matrixial realm, the subject's formation cannot be reduced to the binary logic of a split. What Ettinger postulates is a supplementary dimension: that of *subjectivity-as-encounter*. It is pronounced a primary subjectivising instance as it refers to the universal event of prenatal existence in the womb of one's mother (Ettinger 2006d: 181; Pollock 2006: 3, 14). In order to retrieve this maternal and originary space-time, one needs to fragilise oneself – to re-open one's borders to the Other and their traumas, pains, memories, and affective experiences. The threat of such vulnerability is unquestionable – one gives in to disruptive closeness without any promises or prospects (Ettinger 2009: 8–9, 18). As Ettinger notes, "In subjectivity-as-encounter – where an-other is not an absolute separate Other – [relations-without-relating] turn both of us into partial-subjects, still uncognized, thoughtlessly known to each other, matrixially knowing each other, in painful fragility" (2006e: 144). What we can gather from this passage is a shift in perception of Otherness. The Other ceases to be radical, distant, external, or impenetrable, and instead is portrayed as an affectively intimate *border-Other*,[10] who may be incomprehensible, and yet carries sense and knowledge during an encounter.

At this point, a psychoanalytic reflection meets an aesthetic experience. If the Other ceases to be radically separate, then trauma and memory are no longer entirely individual phenomena; artistic practice is claimed to open up a space in which the traces of painful experiences of *non-I*s can be brought to the surface and shared. Ettinger argues that "[m]atrixial aesthetic effects attest that imprints interweave between the artist, the viewer, and the world, that something branching off from others engraves traces in me, and something that relinquishes me, or is to me mentally unbearable, nevertheless accesses others" (2006e: 149; see also: 2006e: 153). This statement alludes to the features of matrixial artists and their relation with Otherness. An artist is implied here to be prone to receiving the *trauma of the world*, as Ettinger calls it, and transferring its traces into his or her artwork (2006c: 169; see: 2006c). Thus, the artwork carries both its maker's individual experiences and memories, and imprints of traumas he or she has not necessarily gone through personally. An artist is then a *wit(h)ness with-out an event* – he or she processes something for the Other, leaves its residues in the work of art, and allows for further working through of the disruptive data (2006e: 148–50). That is why from the matrixial perspective an artist is a crucial agent in dealing with trauma – it is an artist who facilitates the chance encounter between the *I* and the *non-I* by means of utilising the painful knowledge not originating in him- or herself but transferred by his or her aesthetic interventions.

Having unravelled Ettinger's line of thinking, we can immediately notice that the Freudian understanding of ready-mades is at odds with the matrixial logic. The Israeli artist-psychoanalyst points to this contradiction herself; she reconsiders the clear distinction between ready-made and creative art, arguing that in the matrixial sphere, the distinct borders between these two practices blur. In Ettinger's view, "[f]rom the matrixial angle, the *ready-made* borrowing of the other's myths and inanimate objects, and the *originals* stemming from the self, are not on opposite aesthetic poles. They are in the same basket: both suckle on the mythic prediscursive zone" (2006a: 90, emphasis

[10] On the matrixial woman as a border-Other and art, see: Ettinger 2006d: 193–94.

original). In the matrixial stratum – founded on participation, transformation, and collectivity – there is no difference if we consider the origins of art. Such a multiplicity, furthermore, contributes to a paradigm shift; while in Freud's and Lacan's accounts, trauma and other affective data originating in the subject cannot be shared, being internal and individual experiences inaccessible even to the very subject stricken with them, in the matrix "there is *an impossibility of not sharing* them" (Ettinger 2006a: 90, emphasis original).

As we can assume from the presented images, Ettinger has several Others whose traumas are shared in her works of art. The most intimate ones are Bluma Lichtenberg (Fried) and Uziel Lichtenberg. The 1936 photograph captures not only parents-to-be, but also survivors-to-be, as their history has shown – they managed to escape Poland and arrive in Palestine, having survived Nazi camps and ghettoes in several countries.[11] In this context, Ettinger can be identified as a member of the second generation after the Holocaust and, thus, as an indirect witness to her parents' war traumas. The fate of the women from Mizocz differs from that of Ettinger's parents. What is more, the death of the Mizocz Eurydices was documented, but they remained nameless, despite this gesture of twisted commemoration. Yet, Ettinger's artistic intervention offers a symbolic meeting place to the victims and the survivors.

Gazing at Eurydice

Burdened with disruptive content, the images hosting the Mizocz women can, nevertheless, be considered ethically dubious. First of all, the women are decontextualised. Their surroundings are absent, but also – depending on the artwork – particular women are chosen to appear on the canvas while others are cut out; some of the women present in the historical photograph never reach the surface of the paintings. Furthermore, the appearances of the women are artistically manipulated. When discussing the medium of photography, Susan Sontag observes that "[b]eautifying is one classic operation of the camera, and it tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown" (Sontag 2004: 81).[12] Here, the issue is even more ambiguous, as the aestheticising process may be argued to take place twice – in the original use of the camera and in Ettinger's intervention. In the *Eurydice* series, Ettinger employs such techniques as cropping, putting layers of paint, or juxtaposing their bodies with other images. In some paintings, the women are altered to such an extent that they become as if ahistorical, extracted from their tragic moment of being on the verge of death. Thus, they might be easier to identify with, or even appropriated. At this point, it may prove useful to refer to Dominick LaCapra's term of *empathic unsettlement*, introduced to characterise a reaction of secondary witnesses to trauma.[13] He notes that it is a valuable reaction, since empathy is a "virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (2001: 78). Simultaneously, LaCapra argues that if the clear-cut boundary between the actual witness touched by the trauma and the secondary witness is not maintained, the secondary witness may falsely identify with the victim, which can result in an appropriation of the pain of the Other (2001: 78–79). For LaCapra, it is necessary to be empathetic and open in order to grasp the Other's trauma, but one has to both affirm the distance between oneself and the Other, and be careful not to appropriate the Other's

[11] See: "Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: Chronology," in: Zegher and Pollock 2012: 249.

[12] For a discussion on Bracha L. Ettinger's alternative understanding of beauty in contemporary, post-traumatic art, see: Pollock 2010.

[13] The notion of emphatic unsettlement is used repeatedly in LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, yet it is mentioned for the first time in: LaCapra 2001: xi.

position.[14] In this context, the situation of the Mizocz women in Ettinger's paintings becomes even more complex. The question that remains is: are these women appropriated, or are they retrieved?

As I propose, even though it is marked by the *Nazi gaze*, the original photograph may be viewed differently when being subject to Ettinger's artistic reworking. Marianne Hirsch postulates that the information about authors of the Holocaust photographs is by no means irrelevant as they are made in particular circumstances and, thus, contribute to a specific viewing experience (2012: 133). A kind of image Hirsch finds herself particularly interested in – as it is the most accurate example of the Nazi gaze – is one in which the victims and the perpetrators face each other, but also "in which the *photographer*, the *perpetrator*, and the *spectator* share the same space of looking at the victim" (2012: 134, emphasis mine). This description is partly true with regard to the photograph of the Mizocz women. One cannot be certain where exactly the soldiers are (there are only two soldiers within the picture frame); most of the women standing in the row look ahead or at other women, and it is impossible to guess from the image alone whether the soldiers are in front of them or near the anonymous photographer. As we have observed, one of the women is looking in a different direction, and because of that she seems to respond to the Nazi gaze in the most striking manner.[15] Still, viewers need to come to terms with the fact that most probably the photographer is also the perpetrator, so the position they occupy corresponds to that of the executioner. Having realised the place we are in, we – the viewers – might react as follows: "Too late to help, utterly impotent, we nevertheless search for ways to *take responsibility* for what we are seeing, to *experience*, from a remove, even as we try to redefine, if not repair, these ruptures" (Hirsch 2012: 138, emphasis mine). Ettinger's work deals with the Nazi gaze, for she manipulates the image taken presumably by one of the perpetrators. Nevertheless, if we look at her activity through the matrixial lens, we may come to the conclusion that the gaze undergoes a change here. As I would like to argue, in the case of Ettinger's art, the gaze viewers can engage in is rather a *com-passionate gaze*:[16] a gaze that can be portrayed as hospitable and respectful, responsible and engaging. Such a gaze makes it impossible to objectify the intimate Other; finally, it entails suffering in the experience of trauma that the Other cannot work through. Ettinger's *Eurydices* open the space in which a viewer can gaze at the women's bodies in com-passion, acknowledging the perpetrator's position but going beyond it in order to reach the women's fragility and shards of trauma.

Even if, as I have tried to show, the gaze is com-passionate, it is difficult to deny its "barbaric" aspect, to use Theodor W. Adorno's expression. In *Prisms*, Adorno famously proclaims that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1983: 34). He returns to the issue in *Negative Dialectics*, noting that while it is not accurate to ask about the capacity to write poems after the Shoah, there is a more fundamental issue that has to be tackled, namely, "whether after Auschwitz

[14] LaCapra also argues that if one has not experienced the traumatic event directly, one cannot experience trauma, as it would be an abuse (LaCapra 2001: 102). I discuss the differences between LaCapra's approach and Ettinger's matrixial theory in more detail in my article: Kisiel 2016.

[15] In this article, I hint at the possibility of theorising the response of the mentioned woman to the Nazi gaze, as she seems to be gazing back at the perpetrator and – consequently – at the viewer. Susan Sontag proposes an entirely different perspective on the photographed people's gaze in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. We read: "Engulfed by the image, which is so accusatory, one could fantasize that the soldiers [from the photograph analysed by Sontag – A.K.] might turn and talk to us. But no, no one is looking out of the picture. … These dead are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses – and in us. Why should they seek our gaze? What would they have to say to us? 'We' – this 'we' is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through – don't understand" (Sontag 2004: 125). However, the trope of the Eurydicial woman's gaze provides a topic for a different discussion.

[16] For a scrutiny of the notion of *com-passion*, see: Ettinger 2009.

you can go on living" (2004: 363). As a daughter of Holocaust survivors, Ettinger most probably has faced the latter dilemma. Still, when examining her art, we can – or even ought to – ask questions about its potential "barbaric" qualities.[17] To begin with, Ettinger has not experienced the Holocaust personally, being a secondary witness. As has been noted, LaCapra warns us about the secondary witnesses' over-identification with the victims, leading to potential appropriation. Moreover, Ettinger's parents are survivors, having been able to establish a family and to deal with the new reality. Her position is, therefore, different from that of relatives of victims, or of survivors who could not manage to "go on living." When we, in turn, consider the photograph used in Ettinger's art, we need to keep in mind that it may – or may not – present someone from her parents' family, but we bear no actual knowledge of Ettinger's relation with the women. Last but not least, the author of this picture is probably a Nazi photographer, capturing the women's bodies without their agreement; as Ettinger cannot obtain it in any way, the question of consent applies to her as well. Although the above remarks and doubts cannot be addressed with certainty, we are obliged to acknowledge their existence. Nevertheless, as I have tried to emphasise in this section, it is the humanising capacity of an author that is of primary importance in Ettinger's artistic practice. Namely, a matrixial author-artist is argued to participate in changing the gaze of a spectator, and such a responsible role necessarily has to be compassionate and de-objectifying rather than appropriative or morally questionable.

A Matrixial Artist-Author

In this article, I endeavoured to combine Bracha L. Ettinger's artistic and psychoanalytic activity in order to explore the position of an author in the matrixial universe. In the theory of the matrix, an author (or, more specifically, an artist-author) mediates traumas that originate not only in him or her, but also in his or her intimate – yet not necessarily known – Others. The produced artwork is, thus, informed by the Other, but it does not mean that the Other's traumas are fully or easily accessible and comprehensible; the artwork carries only affective traces of disruptive data. Matrixially speaking, an author senses these traces, transforms them, and transfers them further, making them shareable. Certain problematic implications of such an act should not be ignored (as demonstrated in the discussion of Ettinger's Eurydicial artworks). Still, this practice allows for dealing with traumas that cannot be handled by those directly affected, and thus one cannot fail to notice its ethical aspects. Ettinger argues:

> If, because of the highly traumatic value of events, *I* cannot psychically contain "my" wounds at all, then in the matrixial psychic sphere "my" imprints will be transscribed for potential remembering by the Other. Thus my others will process traumatic events for me, just as my archaic m/Other had metabolized archaic events for my premature and fragile partial-subjectivity. (2006c: 167–68, emphasis original)

[17] Griselda Pollock rejects the possibility of reading Ettinger's art through the prism of "barbarism" or potential ethical doubts. We read: "[C]ontemporary critics, who look too quickly and with prejudice, are liable to make mistaken judgments about the ethics of the *use* of historical photographs from the Holocaust or the family album, when the nature of this project involves no *use* at all. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's work depends upon the potentiality of Painting – the category – and painting, the activity of a repeating bodily activity that encodes the duration of its making in the archaeology of its own surface and enshrines the time taken to create the space of 'almost missed encounter'" (Pollock 2000: 52, emphasis original). While, indeed, the question of the use of historical and personal photographs is rethought by Ettinger (in both theory and art), I believe one cannot close the discussion on possible "barbaric" qualities of Ettinger's art, as such a discussion contributes to a broader set of reflections: those on the capacity to "go on living" in the post-Shoah reality. In this context, clear-cut judgements that do not take the arguments of the other side into consideration are reductive.

A matrixial artist-subject contributes to working through and carrying (on) traumas for and instead of the Other by means of changing the gaze; by that, he or she renders it possible for a potential viewer to encounter the border-Other. Finally, in the space within which the Other is no longer radical, the boundaries between ready-made and "creative" art are also disturbed, or at least irrelevant, since what is privileged here is the creative metamorphosis disclosing the affective capacity of artistic practice. Gazing at Eurydice is a perilous task, as she vanishes the very same moment she appears before our eyes; our persistence, however, makes it possible for us to regain the humanising connection with those who have been neglected and whose bodies or experiences have been appropriated.

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Il. 1. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice*, No. 5, 1992–1994, oil painting, carbon toner, photocopic dust, pigment and ashes on paper mounted on canvas, 47 x 27 cm. Collection Israel Museum, Jerusalem. © Courtesy of the artist.

Il. 2. Bracha L. Ettinger, *No Title-Sketch*, 1985, carbon toner, photocopic dust, pigment and ashes on paper, 27.3 x 23.1 cm. © Courtesy of the artist.