

**Diana ROMANSKAITĖ**  
Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilnius, Lithuania

## AN INQUIRY INTO THE THEORY OF THE MATRIX: SUBJECTIVITY, GAZE, AND DESIRE IN KRISTINA INČIŪRAITĖ'S VIDEO *THE MEETING* (2012)<sup>1</sup>

**Summary.** This article deals with the Matrix theory of subjectivity, gaze, and desire by feminist scholar Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger. Matrixial framework is explored in comparison to Lacanian psychoanalysis. The essay denotes the differences between split Lacanian model of the subject and Matrixial subjectivity based on plurality and continuity. I argue that Lacanian model which grounds the subject in fundamental lack and loss of corporal reality is insufficient for explaining specifically feminine experience in terms of temporality and collective memory, whereas the Matrix theory provides a conceptual apparatus for positive female identification and alliances between the past and the present. Ettinger's Matrixial model is applied in the analysis of the 2012 video *The Meeting* by contemporary Lithuanian artist Kristina Inčiūraitė. I claim that the mode of desire in *The Meeting* is based on Matrixial gaze, which allows to formulate memory as co-created by two partners who share archaic knowledge of the Real, grounded in common relation to female sexual difference and intrauterine condition. Therefore, the article interprets the imagery of the town of Svetlogorsk in the video as coemerged mental images that affect each of the partners. I conclude that the Matrix theory overcomes the phallocentrism of classical psychoanalysis, allowing to reformulate the subject in terms of connectivity, compassion, and abilities to process Other's trauma through positive cultural change.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, video art, Bracha Ettinger, Jacques Lacan, Kristina Inčiūraitė, Matrix, Matrixial theory, memory.

### INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to imagine and remember places, events, and people which have never existed in our world? What influence does close contact with a person who lives several hundred kilometres away have on memory and reflection of one's life experience? Can images from the outer world, apprehended by senses and formed in our imagination, arise from primordial humanity earlier than conscious perceptions cultivated by civilisation? If so, is human mind able to comprehend them without collapsing? These questions stem from watching Lithuanian artist Kristina Inčiūraitė's 26-minute-long documentary video *The Meeting*. Its story carries us to a small town of Svetlogorsk in the Kaliningrad Region. In the background of decaying Soviet modernist architecture and wintry cold nature, a conversation between a local woman and the author is taking place. She pretends being a man who spent

his childhood in Svetlogorsk. The two speakers read their e-mail correspondence in Russian: their topics include everyday concerns, attitude to life, relationships with men. Emotionally difficult conditions are illustrated by metaphors of nature and music from Richard Wagner's operas. This article aims to examine Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's theory of the Matrix and apply it in the analysis of the video. Psychoanalytical methodology provides for a reflection upon the processes happening in the human psyche: constitution of personality and gender, ability to communicate with others, and self-awareness. I would like to substantiate the following theses:

1. Memory is connected to primordial feminine sexual difference, arising from universal intrauterine experience.
2. The video is based on Matrixial gaze, which allows collective Matrixial memory, expressed through mental images of Svetlogorsk, to form

in each character's imagination and leave traces in the topographies of their psyche.

This article is comprised of three chapters divided into eight parts. The first chapter presents Lacan's theory of subjectivity, which is grounded in splits and losses. The second one discusses the plurality of Matrixial subjectivity; here, transsubjectivity is understood as continuity of intrauterine relation. The maternal realm (connected with female sexual specificity, womb, and pregnancy) is signifiable and meaning-making in the Matrix. It opens possibilities to share unconscious or repressed psychic materials. The third and fourth part of the second chapter analyse the Matrixial gaze, allowing for conceptualisation of transmissibility and processing of traumatic mental events and continuity of time. The fifth part explores the recall of repressed memories and a compassionate and empathic response to Other's pain, enabled by the Matrixial dimension of the psyche. The last section analyses *The Meeting*. Ettinger's theoretical vocabulary is used to substantiate femininity as universal humanity that influences memory. To conclude, I summarise the material of the research and define further potential of the Matrix theory in art historical research.

## LACANIAN MODEL OF SUBJECTIVITY

### THE EXISTENCE OF A SPLIT SUBJECT: A CRACK BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THE CORPO-REAL.

Constitution of the Lacanian subject is based on essential inadequacy and incompleteness, seen by the analyst in sexual differentiation: to be born a woman or a man denies primordial androgyny, described in Aristophanes, myth about romantic love between two persons who complement each other.<sup>2</sup> So, fulfilment can be achieved only through heterosexual monogamous alliance and completeness of a particular gender role. The second lack is the subjugation of the subject to Other's (or signifier's) realm, which allows for realisation of the drives.<sup>3</sup> Hence, desire is determined by the social, and cravings of a person are enforced or acquired but unsatisfiable, because language creates a difference and discrepancy within the Real. The preparatory process for gaining access to it is called "pre-Oedipal territorialisation". During this phase, disorganised libidinal energies are allocated to erogenous zones and turned into drives: the mother participates in it as a cultural mediator caring for these body parts, but this way, the subject loses direct contact with one's libido, which is subordinated to prerogative of reproduction. Therefore, the child tries to acquire satisfaction through these zones, while



Fig. 1. Screenshot from *The Meeting*. Courtesy of the author

substitutes are perceived as losses. In the course of the subject's constitution there will be a lot of such objects, which Lacan names "objets petit a".<sup>4</sup> They are identified "with some missing component of the subject's self, whether that loss is seen as primordial, as the result of a bodily organisation, or as the consequence of some other division".<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the child loses connection to her or his corpo-Real and has to compensate it with symbolic substitutes. In art historical research, objet petit a, later theorised as "the gaze", explains the luring and deceptive nature of paintings. The viewer becomes a subject of representation and is retroactively constituted as lacking and desiring. This way, the beautiful and the sublime arise not from one's spirituality, kindness, and other qualities which form humanity but from mourning and melancholy caused by unattainable objects. This framework also elucidates the mechanisms of ideology and manipulation, especially in the visual culture of advertising and mainstream media: the desired objects are constructed by dominant groups that define acceptable behavioural patterns and pleasures and create false identities based on societal expectations.

#### THE THREE REALMS OF THE PSYCHE.

Lacan proposes three orders of the structure of the psyche: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The Imaginary accounts for constitution of the ego, identification, and relationships based on resemblances. It is within this order that the so called mirror stage happens, when a child aged 6–18 months recognises herself in Other's gaze and "gains a sense of integrity, identity, and continuity which could not be ensured by her corporeal existence."<sup>6</sup> The Imaginary in art history refers to attitudes and values subconsciously internalised by identifying with artwork or film characters. This identification makes one feel better about oneself and enforces certain behaviour, e.g., gender roles. False and idealised recognition causes alienation and ambivalence regarding the perception of self and others and leads towards instability of judgments and affects. The Symbolic order is a closed system of signifiers. The meaning in it is created by differential relations between self-referencing elements. Stating that the unconscious

is structured like language, Lacan introduces uncertainty and incongruity into the concept of the subject. These parameters make her into a being without an identity. Lacan terms such "dissolution" of the subject *aphanisis*, formulated through re-interpretation of Freud's grandson's "fort-da" game. Throwing the toy further, the child exclaimed "fort", which meant his own "disappearance", and upon returning it, "da". The word "fort" becomes an elementary signifier, intervening between drives and the linguistic world. This word is incorporated into the psyche in its primitive and senseless form, whereas signifier "da" refers to it and not to drives. That makes the subject subordinated to socially determined desire and creates a sense of void and inadequacy in her.<sup>7</sup> Hence, because drives are repressed by language and desire is imposed by Other, love can only be narcissistic: completing and aiding the sense of integrity. The Symbolic in art points to the viewer's socially constructed identity, which accounts for appreciation of or aversion to an oeuvre.

The Real order is divided into the pre-discursive "Real" and "reality", which is generated by symbolic processes and is a surplus in a chain of meaning. The concept of the "Real" is relevant to this inquiry because it refers to the corporeal and the mother, which are repressed in the language and show up only as symptoms in the adult's psyche. The Real completely resists symbolisation but, at the same time, can only be mediated through the Imaginary and the Symbolic: distance from language presupposes that it is undifferentiated matter, a chaos-provoking horror. "Fantasy and dream are the means to meeting and articulating the 'Real'; otherwise, trauma—the shock of the Real—is a symbolic and imaginary result of thought."<sup>8</sup> So, it is a dimension of corporeality and symbiosis that returns to reality through manifestation of symptoms. The mother in the Real is not a legitimate subject but an object, satisfying demands which will become objets petit a in the symbolisation. She is a mediator in child's integration into culture, coordinated by the phallic function. The Real in the fine arts and films shows itself through grotesque and repulsive material associated with bodily fluids: "abject art", informed by Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as corporal

substances threatening ego boundaries due to their primordial nature in the constitution of subjectivity, deals with rejected materials such as blood or urine, and in a broader sense refers to people who are oppressed by and cast out of society. The homeless, drug users, and migrants are portrayed in documentaries by socially conscious artists trying to coincide the brutality of life with the artistic realm.

#### THE CONCLUSIONS OF LACANIAN THEORY ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT.

The process of Lacan's thinking reflects the interaction between psychoanalysis and structuralism. The formation of personality is defined by antithesis, the logic of splits: body and language, mother and child, individual and society. The latter defines the existence of a person and makes her a part of the system of relations with assigned social functions: the term "split subject" refers to inadequacy within oneself, internal conflicts, and relations based on mutual misunderstanding, which all become means to compensate for the losses experienced in childhood. Similarly, Lacanian concepts applied in interpretation of fine art and film rest on inadequacies experienced by the artist, the viewer, or characters. The subject of representation in Lacan's theory is by default male, thus analysis of an oeuvre or film will obligatorily reveal masculine wishes, hopes, projections, and fears regarding the feminine.

#### MATRIXIAL SUBJECTIVITY AS COLLABORATIVE EXISTENCE

##### THE DEFINITION OF THE MATRIX AND ITS CONCEPTUAL VOCABULARY.

The Matrix is a dimension of the human psyche, existing besides the phallic, which is needed to gain access to language and the social sphere.<sup>9</sup> The Matrix is grounded in the ontologically primal female sexual difference, arising from universal intrauterine experience. This model could be imagined as a paradigm where humanity is co-created—it is a trans-subjective realm of shared affects, which contrasts with the logic of classical psychoanalysis and its singularity of gendered subjectivity bound to symbolic castration and perpetual search for the lost objects of desire. The feminine paves the way for a shared

space of *subjectivity-as-encounter*, where unknown partial subjects (and their grains) never fully merge or reject each other but feel and process elements of each other differently at the level of the corpo-Real. This process of generating signification and *jouissance* of the woman is a web named *metramorphosis*: it weaves matrixial events into the Real and signifies them in the Symbolic. Other is neither objectified nor controlled in this communicative web, and both subjects are transformed by each other's psychic matter: "Perceived boundaries are dissolved into becoming new boundaries; forms are transgressed; borderlines are surpassed and transformed into becoming thresholds; conductible borderlinks are conceived, transformed, and dissolved."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, during metramorphosis psychic energy is reorganised and distributed: it transforms partners into partial subjects sharing experiences, affects, and fantasy through *borderlinks*. That makes a non-phallic mechanism of desire, different from castration, possible. Relying on Ettinger's model of the prenatal, we can imagine this process as asymmetrical relations between becoming-mother and becoming-subject-child, which constitute an *encounter-event*. Ontogenetic, intergenerational memory, trauma, and fantasy of the maternal corpo-Real are transmitted by it. Metramorphosis happens in the Real, so it is a non-cognitive activity of the unconscious, but its results reach and articulate in the Symbolic through mental images and signifiers. Ettinger defines *borderspace* as a psychic sphere connected to primordial femininity, which invokes an encounter-event with Other that is unknown to "me". It is conceptualised as an ever-changing renewal, links, and rapports between partners. Transmission of affects changes each partner differently. In the borderspace psychic sphere, an unknown Other feels and assimilates the pain of 'I' in the matrixial net: accumulated affects and intensities transform each of the individuals. *Co-poiesis* is an ethical and aesthetical potentiality of matrixial events in the borderspace. It is a construction of a shared affective world. *Co-poiesis*, unlike *autopoiesis*, is not about autonomic functions of an organism and sustainability of its systems: it poses a threat of vulnerability and fragmentation of identity. Traces of psychic matter from



matrixial subjects are transmitted through strings and wavelengths, engendering different levels and frequencies of transformative trans-subjective nets. Their structure is permeable to affects. "The matrixial exposure of the becoming-m/Other is an openness to the uncognized world and to unknown but intimate others by a compassionate Eros that is not a sexual libido in the usual sense."<sup>11</sup> This implicates that relationships are not based on love and hate or, in Freud's terms, the opposition of Eros and Thanatos. Matrixial exchange arises from hospitality and kindness experienced in the Real of a maternal body: "Not death, but the *non-life*, as *the not yet emerged*, the *not yet becoming alive*, is accessed and intended."<sup>12</sup> This means that the artist is a mediator between the existential "being in the world" and the viewer: she evokes feelings related to the human condition, such as the trauma of birth. Thus Ettinger emphasises the healing and empathetic nature of artistic creativity, in which one's own or Other's survived (or even not yet experienced) trauma becomes a threshold of new affects.

#### PRENATAL RELATION AS A MODEL OF MATRIXIAL SUBJECTIVITY.

Classical psychoanalysis positions maternal subjectivity beyond language. It argues that relation of mother and child is symbiotic. This makes her

influence on an adult and disobedience to the Law of the biological or symbolic Father the source of perversions and psychosis. However, referring to clinical trials, Ettinger states that a child has minimum capabilities of possessing fantasy and sustaining mutual and *assymetrical* relations with a mother. The latter helps in gaining empathy and accepting otherness. For example, the child of a psychotic mother should also be psychotic, assuming that the allotment of meaning for the unprocessed sensorial material of the child occurs in her psyche's alpha function. In this way her sensorial material (beta elements) changes to psychic (alpha elements), which the child will introject into her developing fantasy. In practice this hypothesis fails and "she is also transformed by the infant's matrixial functions and the elaborated materials are transformed once more upon reception."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in the Matrixial model, the making of signification and human connection happens in the prenatal state, earlier than the establishment of phallic desire and symbolic substitutes compensating for the loss of *objets petit a*. The womb is not a receptive organ or container for the constitution of the child. It does not remind of rejection of maternal and dislodgment of it to forever lost time: "The pre-subject that thus emerges in jointness develops primal trans-subjectivity before being a 'separate', 'whole' subject."<sup>14</sup> This means that



Fig. 2. Screenshot. Courtesy of the author

abilities to understand feelings of others arise from traces of an archaic relation in the psyche, inscribing objective knowledge (Ettinger names it “trans-subjectivity”) in a non-cognitive way. Consequently, humans are unified neither by striving to satisfy the demands of the Real, which were repressed in the language, nor by reaching fulfilment and wholeness through narcissistic identification with others, as Lacan theorised. Ahistoric memory of *jouissance*, unfolding in intimate relationships or artistic creation, is the basis of humanity.

The main distinction between Ettinger’s model and the Lacanian one is the plurality of matrixial subjectivity. Matrixial theory states that sense is composed of several individuals’ experiences and feelings: “Thus a rigorously if utterly sensual proto-psychic space must be opened composed of at least two temporalities and non-originary complexes of repetition and re-staging.”<sup>15</sup> The role of sensorics refers to the earliest experience of the corpo-Real, which, in Lacan’s opinion, is unsignifiable and traumatic, whereas two temporalities indicate the intergenerational and cyclic nature of matrixial connection. This implies that in the matrixial encounter-event one of the individuals is in the process of *becoming m/Other*, at the same time renewing her or his own pre-subjective state and psychic material transferred by the mother, while the unknown other is *becoming infans* and receives this information which will be signified in the Symbolic and the Imaginary by means of fantasy and thought. Therefore, the mother in this model is not a mediator in the process of passing into the structure organised by phallic signifier. She is the creator of meaning and transmitter of authentic and ethic humanity, forming culture based on gentleness: “The non-phallic ‘I and the non-I’ encounter, moreover, refers to moments of partial subjectivity, emerging before either partner becomes an object for the other subject (and its drives) in psychic terms.”<sup>16</sup> So the matrixial relation is not based on binary oppositions such as symbiosis or rejection. It expresses the irreducible difference of the Other, which can be embraced by the psyche functioning in the principle of shareability.

#### THE TRANSMISSION OF PSYCHIC EVENTS WITHIN MATRIXIAL GAZE.

Matrixial gaze, or matrixial objet petit a, emerges from prenatal processing of sensorical information and is connected to an ethical relation to Other instead of a desire for the lost object. In the trans-subjective borderspace, it operates not on internal drives but as “erotic antennae of the psyche.”<sup>17</sup> Matrixial gaze is not visual in the strict sense, so it is not about knowledge and power. It is about senses and a phenomenological perception of the world: “Here, not an object is lost, but a link is ebbing and flowing with coemergence and cofading of I and non-I.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Matrix is about intensities and flows of interconnected subjects: the model of this activity is based on prenatal condition of being joined to and separated from the mother, when “I conjoint in the Real the trauma and *jouissance* of the body of non-I.”<sup>19</sup> It inscribes and incorporates into memory the imprints of *Thing-events* of the m/Other, which engender responsibility and an ethical response to Other. It creates a difference from the Lacanian concept of the Thing, which, in his opinion, could not be comprehended in the Symbolic and in the unconscious—structured like language—so, it exists beyond its borders and is not represented. The Lacanian Thing is equated with the material reality and, lastly, with “woman”: Ettinger names this condensation-based principle of cultural repression “*Woman-m/Other-Thing*”. In her view, the Real of the Thing is reached through affective aeriels of the psyche (“antennae”, as Ettinger calls them), this way Matrixial gaze “threatens us with disintegration while allowing our participation in a drama wider than that of our individual selves.”<sup>20</sup> During metramorphosis, these memories are transferred onto sub-symbolic nets between the partners of an encounter-event. Hence the main quality of Matrixial gaze is continuity between the Real and the Symbolic, whereas Lacanian conception of the gaze expresses a cut between them, which evokes incongruity and alienation: in this framework, integral self-awareness and reconciliation with hurtful events of the past are not possible.

Ettinger’s theory can be applied in a reflection on the relationship between the artist, the viewer, and

the artwork. Based on the suggestion that abilities to communicate with others and humanity itself emerge from the archaic prenatal bond with the mother that is more profound than the chain of separations, losses, and conflicts constituting the subject in classical psychoanalysis, the artwork is perceived as a part of subjectivity, a borderspace which is a “screen on which this event—personal (from the inside) or historical (from the outside), from past and present—is projected and unconsciously shaped.”<sup>21</sup> Here, independently from artistic intentions, a trans-subjective field is opened and transmits affects that enable an emotional and ethical response to the pain of others. Matrixial vocabulary reveals psychic phenomena existing “beyond the phallus” (e.g., feelings, memories, and experiences which are perceived as abnormalities and signs of inadjustments to the patriarchal order in classical psychoanalysis); the identity, self-awareness, and models of relationships of women and women artists.

#### THE CONTINUITY OF MATRIXIAL DESIRE AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN ART.

The subjects' relation with Other in the Matrix is based on shared experience of *jouissance* and Thing of the corpo-Real. These psychic elements build bridges between past, present, and future, reconstructing self-image. In the Lacanian framework, *jouissance* is an unattainable satisfaction, because the economy of desire is structured around the lack of phallic signifier, whereas corporal pleasure is lost because of splits, otherwise known as “castrations”: reduction of libido to drives in the culturally sanctioned erogenous zones, failures of the child to “be the phallus” for the mother, and the function of the father which finally detaches him or her from the mother and provides a symbolic mandate. In Ettinger's model, premises of plural subjectivity and acknowledgment of female sexual difference condition the feeling of self or Other's *jouissance*. “Metramorphosis is a co-poietic activity in a web that ‘remembers’ these swerves and relations, inscribes affective traces of *jouissance* and imprints of trauma and encounter, and conducts such traces from non-I to I, from one encounter to further encounters.”<sup>22</sup> Information transmitted in these encounters is not cognitive, but connected to

sensorial experience: this aspect relates the Matrix to phenomenological philosophy, which proposes the unity of consciousness and the world, and to apperception, which engenders intersubjective relations. In art, traces of the Real are transferred to the artist and the viewers: painting becomes a screen which accounts for “the co-emergence or co-fading of several subjects, partial-subjects, partial-objects, and their links with one another and with others' traumatic Thing-events.”<sup>23</sup> This means that the visual psychic sphere is conceptualised as a space for communication in which cultural boundaries are transgressed and change happens. In the Lacanian model, the repressed remnant of the Real (objet petit a) residing in an oeuvre lures the viewer and retroactively constitutes her as lacking and desiring, whereas the Matrixial model focuses on the continuity of human psychic activity and the potential for improving oneself: the object of desire is not lost, because it was never “mine” in a control-based subject-object relation. “The desire to join-in-difference and differentiate-in-co-emerging with the Other does not promise peace and harmony, because joining is first of all a joining with-in the other's trauma that echoes back to my archaic traumas: joining the other matrixially is always joining the m/Other and risking mental fragmentation and vulnerability.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore the Matrix reveals psychic processes which were unnoticed or overall incomprehensible in classical psychoanalysis: primal compassion and ability to be affected by feelings which in their deepest level are both mine and my life-giver's.

#### MEMORIES FROM THE VOID.

How does the Matrixial framework change the perception of memory? In Ettinger's view, an artwork is a transitional space where memory imprints of the artist, the viewer, or the Other are inscribed. In classical psychoanalysis, they are deemed completely lost, reappearing only as psychological symptoms. As Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham observe, the mental crypt<sup>25</sup> is a place in the unconscious where the lost object of love and narcissistic satisfaction is sheltered. A person does not have any recollection of it, so it does not evoke melancholy: the crypt is more connected to the mourning of and

identification with this object. This way, the psychic apparatus can invest in the traces of Other's trauma and sustain her or his "phantom".<sup>26</sup> Thus artistic creation becomes a *transcriptum* where memories which are not perceived cognitively are transmitted to each other and relation of compassion takes place: the painting "produces an image, a sign, a symbol, or text where the forsaken Event and the Thing that enveloped the trauma and were enveloped by originary repression will make sense for the first time."<sup>27</sup> Ettinger presupposes that the mutual but asymmetrical relation is grounded in the structure of the psyche, where primordial subjectivity formed from the archaic mother and the subject-in-process (i.e., the child). So, a person has the potential to respond to others' pain empathetically: "Sense doesn't dwell in the celibate subject but is created by different designs of rapport in co-emergence and by gradual changes in borderlinks."<sup>28</sup> Consequently, an artwork is an encounter where identities with stable and clear boundaries fragment into partial subjects and objects for each other and share a matrixial objet petit a. Its desire is based on female sexual difference and not on the model of splits. In the process of metamorphosis, psychic material is shared. Ontogenetic corpo-Real memory is articulated in the discourse through sub-symbolic nets: an oeuvre "extricates the trauma of the matrixial other out of

'pure absence' or 'pure sensibility', out of its timelessness into lines of time, and the effect of beauty is to allow wit(h)nessing with non-visible events of encounter to emerge inside the field of vision and affect you."<sup>29</sup> This means that a matrixial subject can have an authentic relation with others and be open to accept her or his own weaknesses and wounds. It enables them to view their personal and global history from an observer's perspective, to possess and be affected by knowledge beyond difference-making language. All in all, it amounts to experiencing the world intentionally and existentially.

### MATRIXIAL MEMORY IN *THE MEETING*

Kristina Inčiūraitė is a Lithuanian artist who works mainly with video—experimental, documentary films and video installations—as well as with photography and performance. She often engages in collaborative projects investigating various communities. In her work, she explores performative and temporary identities and their relation to socio-political, cultural, and psychological contexts. The female subject in her creations is an active storyteller and meaning-maker that defines specific localities and the ways we perceive memory. Her video *The Meeting* is based on real-life communication with a stranger; here, reality interconnects with fiction.



Fig. 3. Screenshot. Courtesy of the author



A Lacanian interpretation of the video would concentrate on the illusory nature of the interlocutrices' relationship, their seemingly demanding everyday troubles, and the melancholy of the imagery, which reveals the inability to match expectations to the limited opportunities in Svetlogorsk. The Symbolic, expressed in the dreary scenery of the town and embodied by the obsolete Soviet architecture, is an immutable system of societal relations, in which conflict and misunderstanding are the norm. Inčiūraitė masquerades as a man and tells feigned stories about "his" childhood, whereas her conversation partner discloses increasingly personal and intimate details about her family, plans, and romantic life. This means that the psychic reality is inspired by Other's narcissistic mirroring and bogus identification, which fulfills one's lack of integrity. Their correspondence comes to an end as abruptly as it started—the author of the video disappears without unveiling the motives of this artistic project. In Lacanian terms, a woman's subjectivity is defined by lack. Language, governed by the phallic signifier, situates her as "not full" (not having the phallus), so, in order to gain an identity and a stable position in the society, she has to pretend by engaging in a "masquerade". This term refers to an excessive concern with external looks: cosmetics, wardrobe, and frivolous behaviour, such as flirting. Through them, a woman occupies the position of "being the phallus" and the object of desire. In the video, the author's intentions are quite the opposite as she pretends to be a man. Thus she has a symbolic mandate with its privileges and an ability to influence the town dweller. Memorial imagery of Svetlogorsk from the phallic angle is restricted to physical and mental splits between the subjects, their psychic realities, and irretrievable loss of the past, objectified in the decaying buildings.

The matrixial viewpoint provides a more thorough look into the process of subjectivisation. The video starts with a scene of the stormy Baltic Sea on a windy and cold afternoon in Svetlogorsk. An extract from an e-mail correspondence of this seaside town's resident is read in Russian; however, her name is not known to the viewers. The subject-matter of the e-mail is willingness to continue communication: it

is not clear whether they are written at the beginning of contact or point to a sudden termination of it. In the psychoanalytical sense, the character is a symbolic subject operating a language, which creates a divide between her authentic reality and wishes and their expression in the linguistic system. An image of the restless sea is her fantasy, constituting desire: "The real Other toward whose desire the subject aspires in phantasy is the mythic m/Other."<sup>30</sup> So the visual realm of the video could be interpreted as the Real which, unlike Lacanian parameters of trauma and unreachability, is open to change and contact with Other. Uncontrollable and inexpressible in words bodily *jouissance* unfolds in the choppy sea, while the affects are reinforced by the music from Wagner's operas. The sense of hearing is more archaic than the scopic drives: "It does not only link multisensorial resonances to each other, but it also generates transsensorial phenomena of synesthesia in each participant."<sup>31</sup> In the background of majestic trumpet sounds, the scene of the video progresses from the sea to a close-up of an elevator. Beside it, a rusty and snowy street lamp post highlights its massiveness. The elevator is composed of large metal slabs linked by wires: we can see the construction parts through windows in the middle. It is a relic of functionalist Soviet architecture; in the past, it embodied progress, whereas today it is abandoned and neglected. As the eye of the camera moves up, we identify with the town dweller whose dreams are interrupted by the abrupt ending of the shot and immersion into complete visual darkness. This episode reveals the wounds of the character, an unconscious pain caused by unfulfilled aspirations: "In the phantasy the barrier of space and time, and not ontology, intervenes between the subject and lost object."<sup>32</sup> A new shot begins with Inčiūraitė's reading of her letter to the resident. She tells about her boredom and loneliness in the time of a dreary winter: her thoughts flashback to her childhood, when she allegedly spent summers in Svetlogorsk. An elevator near the sea shore remains in her memories. Inčiūraitė does not reveal herself but takes up a fictional identity of a man, which her pen pal does not doubt or question. A matrixial bond develops, arising from archaic prenatal experience:

both identities fragment into partial subjects and objects for each other, and their traces form plural subjectivity as an encounter where, by the means of metramorphosis, the psychic material in the Real is shared and transmitted. It develops new meanings and changes the partners. Matrixial relations are based on compassion and responsibility: imprints of primordial femininity in the psyche make them possible. These relations manifest in extremely close bonds, such as between a client and a therapist or in the aesthetic experience of observing or creating art. The connection is asymmetrical: the dweller's desire for kindness and intimate bond places her in the role of becoming-child, whereas Inčiūraitė is in the position of becoming-woman and provides material for the inspiration of her fantasy. So, femininity is the main contributor to humanity itself, irrespectively of gender. Empathy and sensitivity of the author's response changed her pen-pal's fantasy: the elevator in the present does not symbolise loss anymore but reminds of a possibility of joyful moments, such as a sense of belonging with unknown people from afar. "Thus, a matrixial borderspace is a mutating copoietic net where co-creativity might occur."<sup>33</sup> Co-poiesis in the video is elaborated in the new images of the town, so it could be said that the women construct their own world. From that moment, the camera moves not vertically but horizontally: it shows the streets of Svetlogorsk, a bridge, a beach, and sea birds, while the dweller tells about her leisure time and future plans. Horizontality expresses continuity of time and connection between the partners: a split between the past and the present does not exist in the Matrix, the reality is not perceived hierarchically (as satisfying or denying demands) but as a multi-layered story where the pain of one's failures and wounds can be accepted and reduced. The dweller mentions her daughter, whom she will leave for a three-day journey to a university in Poland. This points to the archaic, intergenerational nature of matrixial nets, where concern for others lays at the foundation of the psyche. This also denies the Freudian conception of the Oedipal organisation of desire, where women devalue their sex and feel self-humiliation and hate caused by an anatomical difference. The mental relation between the three women is based on unselfish and asexual matrixial

Eros and revealing fragility. Inčiūraitė supports her companion by praising her diligence and further inquiring about her personal life. Mental images of the town become increasingly diverse and filled with new places reminding of past events. This engenders the Matrixial gaze, which "is a vacillating trace of an almost-missed rapport (relation of borderlinking, encounter) with a non-I."<sup>34</sup> The dweller's story about her family (parents and sister), collective child-rearing points to matrixial objet petit a—a common knowledge of being born together and a desire to share fantasy with Other, whose role is taken by Inčiūraitė. The latter also shares her thoughts on her alleged family: a daughter and an ex-wife. In a conventional assessment this would be seen as lying to gain trust and build a fake relation with a person living a few hundred kilometres away. However, in the model of plural subjectivity, the author becomes the dweller's continuation and reflection and assists in revealing the feelings buried in her mental crypt, reconstructing her life events, and providing them with new meanings. With the help of Inčiūraitė, she finds out the reasons of her conflicted relation to her husband and develops better capabilities of self-awareness. Images arise in her memory: a café and a couple chatting nearby as well as the stormy sea episode, symbolising her anger at and resentment of unsuccessful relations. Matrixial nets transmit psychic affects of both pen-pals. Their intensities and flows arise from a shared experience of the Thing in the archaic Real, whereas primordial compassion turns wanderings through the past into a solid narrative of a person who makes mistakes and is ever-changing. "Thus we can speak in the matrixial borderspace of a wit(h)ness-Thing that is carried to the screen of vision and appears in the image not behind a veil, but as its veil."<sup>35</sup> That is, Ettinger defines the Thing not as foreclosed by discourse and visual representations of the Imaginary but as attainable through structural femininity of the psyche. The veil becomes a carrier of one's desires and fantasies: it makes the image a reflection of one's self. The video ends with Inčiūraitė saying farewell and terminating the contact without revealing her genuine identity. This allows us to acknowledge the transience of the self and the world. Events formed in both partners' psyches, shared, experienced, and processed

together, stay in their memories as an unforgettable *encounter-event*. Therefore, memory in the video manifests in the mental imagery of Svetlogorsk, reconstructing the feelings of both women.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ettinger's model of the Matrix is not an inversion of classical psychoanalysis, proposing femininity as counterbalance to the male-centred paradigm. Its logic, structure, and functions are based on shareability, integrity, and continuity, enabling us to reflect on humans and their relations, otherness, and artistic creation in positive terms, which are needed in the time when the society is divided by racism, sexism, and homophobia grounded in distinctions and rejections of identities. The Matrix conceptualises psychic activities emerging from stratum more archaic than the Symbolic order, whereas new terms coined by Ettinger expand the conceptions of spirituality and the unconscious. The Matrix allows us to imagine memory as a shared space carrying transitive ahistorical trauma: in it, Other becomes a wit(h)ness who is able to reconstruct the events of the past and evoke a positive change in the subject. Inčiūraitė's video *The Meeting* reveals the discrepancy-connecting nature of matrixial memory, where the past, the present, and the future are ever-changing flows of affects between two partners and help them accept painful experiences and create scenarios for new possibilities. Female subjectivity redefined by the Matrix engenders positive, change-inducing meanings in relation to ethics and aesthetics, which enable us to visualise temporality in terms of personal growth instead of conflicts or losses within oneself or the society, as proposed by Lacanian terminology. By *borderlinking* with a stranger, Inčiūraitė suggests that communication is a healing process consisting both of verbal information and inarticulated psychic matter that forms our mental imagery of the external world. Affectivity of these images is charged with stories from both persons' psychic realities. Rooted in the intrauterine, the matrixial model of subjectivity enriches the reception of the video with a trans-subjective dimension, linking the viewer and the questions on the universal human condition.

## References

- Ettinger, Bracha L. "Copoiesis." *Ephemera*, No. 4 (2005): 703–713.
- Ettinger, Bracha L. "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity." *Theory, Culture and Society* 23 (2006): 218–222.
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg. "The feminine/prenatal weaving in matrixial subjectivity-as-encounter." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 7: 3 (2009): 367–405.
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg. "Trans-subjective transferential borderspace." In *A Shock To Thought (Expression after Deleuze and Guattari)*, edited by Brian Massumi. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 215–239.
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg. "Traumatic Wit(h)ness-Thing and Matrixial Co/in-habit(u)ating." *Parallax* 5: 1 (1999): 89–98.
- Ettinger, Bracha. *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Lewis, Charlton T., and Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. Accessed March 1, 2019. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dmatrix>
- McGowan, Todd. *The Real Gaze. Film Theory after Lacan*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma." *EurAmerica* 40: 4 (2010): 829–886.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Thinking the Feminine. Aesthetic Practice as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metamorphosis." *Theory, Culture and Society* 21: 5 (2004).
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978.
- Zherebkina, Irina. "Jacques'as Lacanas: feministinis įvadas." *Athena* 6 (2010): 119–138.
- Žukauskaitė, Audronė. *Anapus signifikanto principo. Dekonstrukcija, psichoanalizė, ideologijos kritika*. Vilnius: Aidai, 2001.
- Žukauskaitė, Audronė. "Realybės grimasos" J. Lacano psichoanalizėje." *Problemos* 55 (1999): 52–67.

## Notes

- 1 The article was written with a support grant from the Research Council of Lithuania. Contract No. 09.3.3-LMT-K-712-10-0023.
- 2 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 205.
- 3 Ibid., 203.
- 4 "Objet petit autre", "autre" (from French "other") refers to an unattainable object of desire, whereas "Autre", "The Big Other"—to the realm of socialisation.
- 5 Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 155–156.
- 6 Audronė Žukauskaitė, *Anapus signifikanto principo. Dekonstrukcija, psichoanalizė, ideologijos kritika* (Vilnius: Aidai, 2001), 79.

- 7 Silverman, 167–174.
- 8 Audronė Žukauskaitė, 'Realybės grimasos' J. Lacano psichoanalizėje, *Problemos* 55, 1999, 52–67, 62.
- 9 The word "Matrix" (from Latin *matrix*—mother or womb) has several meanings: it refers to "a mother in respect to propagation", "a breeding animal", "the womb", or "a source, origin, cause". The meaning of "the womb" is used here in relation to the context. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, accessed March 1, 2019, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Dmatrix>
- 10 Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Trans-subjective transferential borderspace" in *A Shock To Thought (Expression after Deleuze and Guattari)*, ed. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 224.
- 11 Bracha L. Ettinger, "Copoiesis," *Ephemeria* 4 (2005). 709.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, "The feminine/prenatal weaving in matrixial subjectivity-as-encounter," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 7:3 (2009), 397.
- 14 Bracha L. Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity," *Theory, Culture and Society* 23 (2006), 220.
- 15 Griselda Pollock, "Thinking the Feminine. Aesthetic Practise as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metamorphosis," *Theory, Culture and Society* 21: 5 (2004), 26.
- 16 Ibid., 30.
- 17 Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze: From Phantasm to Trauma, from Phallic Structure to Matrixial Sphere," *Parallax*, (2001) vol.7, no. 4, 89–114, 90.
- 18 Ibid., 90.
- 19 Ibid., 104.
- 20 Ibid., 112.
- 21 Griselda Pollock, "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma," *EurAmerica* 4 (2010), 859.
- 22 Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 144.
- 23 Ibid., 145.
- 24 Ibid., 147.
- 25 Crypt (in psychoanalysis): a psychic space where uncognised knowledge of the object relations with parental figures is buried and safeguarded.
- 26 Ibid., 164.
- 27 Ibid., 168.
- 28 Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Traumatic Wit(h)ness-Thing and Matrixial Co/in-habit(u)ating," *Parallax* 1 (1999), 93.
- 29 Ibid., 92.
- 30 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 104.
- 31 Ibid., 186.
- 32 Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze. Film Theory after Lacan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 24.
- 33 Ettinger, "Copoiesis," 705.
- 34 Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze", 90.
- 35 Ibid., 105.

**Diana ROMANSKAITĖ**

*Vilniaus dailės akademija, Vilnius, Lietuva*

## MATRICOS TEORIJOS TYRIMAS: SUBJEKTYVUMAS, ŽVILGSNIS IR GEISMAS KRISTINOS INČIŪRAITĖS VIDEOFILME *SUSITIKIMAS* (2012)

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama psichoanalitinė Matricos subjektyvumo, žvilgsnio ir geismo teorija, suformuluota feministės, klinikinės psichologijos daktarės Brachos Lichtenberg Ettinger. Jos modelis tyrinėjamas lakoniškos psichoanalizės kontekste. Straipsnyje atskleidžiami skirtumai tarp skilusio lakoniško subjekto ir Matricos paradigmos, besiremiančios pliuralumu ir tęstinumu. Teigiama, kad lakoniško subjektyvumo modelio, paremto fundamentalia stoka ir kūniškos tikrovės praradimu, nepakanka specifinei moteriškai patirčiai paaiškinti laiko ir kolektyvinės atminties atžvilgiu, o Matricos teorija suteikia galimybę pozityviai moteriškai identifikacijai ir tolydumui tarp praeities ir dabarties. Matricos modelis taikomas analizuojant šiuolaikinės lietuvių menininkės Kristinos Inčiūraitės videofilmą *Susitikimas* (2012). Bandoma pagrįsti, kad *Susitikimo* geismo mechanizmas paremtas Matricos žvilgsniu, leidžiančiu suformuluoti atmintį kaip kuriamą dviejų partnerių, besidalinančių archajišku tikrovės žinojimu, kylančiu iš moters seksualinio skirtumo ir prenatalinės būsenos. Taigi, straipsnyje siekiama įrodyti hipotezę, kad Svetlogorsko miestelio vaizdai videofilme yra tarp dviejų partnerių susiformavę afektyvūs ir besikeičiantys mentaliniai vaizdiniai.



Reziumuojama, kad matricos teorija oponuoja klasikinės psichoanalizės falocentrizmui ir leidžia performuluoti subjektivumą per tęstinumą, atjautą ir gebėjimą reaguoti į Kito traumą, taip sukuriant pozityvų kultūrinį pokytį.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** psichoanalizė, videomenas, Bracha Ettinger, Jacques Lacan, Kristina Inčiūraitė, Matrica, Matricos teorija, atmintis.

*Gauta 2019-02-01*

*Parengta spaudai 2019-06-03*

95

• AN INQUIRY INTO THE THEORY OF THE MATRIX: SUBJECTIVITY, GAZE, AND DESIRE IN KRISTINA INČIŪRAITĖ'S VIDEO *THE MEETING* (2012) •

---

Diana ROMANSKAITĖ

Art History and Theory MA student at Vilnius Academy of Arts

Vilnius Academy of Arts, Maironio g. 6, Vilnius LT-01124

E-mail: diana.romanskaite@gmail.com