

***PROTO-ÉTICA MATRICIAL. ENSAYOS FILOSÓFICOS SOBRE  
EL ARTE Y EL PSICOANÁLISIS***  
***[MATRIX PROTO-ETHICS. PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS ON ART  
AND PSYCHOANALYSIS]***  
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This book is a compilation of four texts. It means the first occasion for Spanish readers to confront the thought of Bracha Ettinger and her main philosophical-psychoanalytic theses; an opportunity to assess whether, and in what sense, they contribute to contemporary critical debates. Therefore, we will not find in this book the development of a systematic reflection; in these collected articles Ettinger's main concepts are addressed from different perspectives and with various accents, not without some repetitions.

Ettinger tries to reach fields as diverse as feminism, ethics and aesthetics from the strength of outpouring (or absorption) that Lacanism has. Indeed, Lacanian psychoanalysis is not an element among others in Ettinger's text, but the theoretical, and supposedly practical, source from which to extend her net. Therefore, it can be said from the beginning that Ettinger's book is concerned by the recurring ambivalence of these kinds of proposals: to some, Lacanism represents a commendable effort to break the shackles of the clinic and psychoanalytic institution and holds a fruitful dialogue with various fields of thought; Ettinger's texts could be an example of that. To others, Lacanism would be rather a recurring attempt to parasitise foreign discourses, obscuring them, moreover, with a jargon impossible to understand for the unskilled; some of this is also found in Ettinger's texts. The latter can be illustrated by the profuse coining of new vocabulary, formed by composition, hybridation and wriggling, very much in line with Lacan. At all times Ettinger tries to move forward on that risky edge between creativity and abuse, between the invention of a necessary language to illuminate the otherness, and the unnecessary and exclusionary encryption (more like a sign of identity than an invitation to dialogue). It is not clear whether Ettinger manages to keep her balance on that edge, but trying to prove it would be out of place in a review. At all events, given that Ettinger places her work manifestly on a Lacanian heritage, Manfred Frank's provocative but accurate words should be considered: "Lacan's work has been presented to fraudsters and delirious as a source of their incoherent fantasies, the same

way that served to the few serious attempts to achieve clarity over the fundamental ideas of Lacan, as basis of interpretations most of them independent.” The purpose of this quotation is by no means to take part in advance, but to highlight an ambivalence that affects all the discourses that expect to be legitimised by the enigmatic writing of Lacan. The judgement stays with the readers.

The main topics in Ettinger’s texts can be summarised with sufficient accuracy as follows: an idea of sexual difference, a variation of the ethics of care or compassion, and a proposal of approach to the art object. The first two axes are better strengthened. In comparison, the aesthetic matter, even being specifically addressed in the last article, remains a bit disconnected, giving the impression that Ettinger is trying to justify, with Lacanian ostentation, her own pictorial work. The idea of sexual difference is, with no doubt, the one that has a major relevance in Ettinger’s reflection. It is there where, taking advantage of the prolific encounter of psychoanalysis and feminism of the difference, Ettinger elaborates her concept of matriciality, a concept that nourishes a whole other question considered by the author. The matricial refers, as can be foreseen, to the uterine experience or process. Not always, or not exclusively, to the actual reproductive experience, but to the gestating virtuality, to the welcoming, carrying and developing dimension that it is related to that organ. From there, the notion of matrix enables Ettinger to mix in the same receptacle (to use the same matrix metaphor) a dense ensemble of layers and vectors. It easily becomes fairly puzzling. In any case, the matricial experience calls the canonical Lacanian division between imaginary, symbolic and real elements; fantasy, discourses and *jouissance*. But even before that threefold partition, matriciality can only be understood from the deepness and overdetermination of stratum that psychoanalysis, from its very origin, discovers in any psychosomatic matter. Moreover, with the matricial we attend to both, the expected-bore and the expecting-bearing; and above all, understanding both sides in their procedural bond, as coming protosubjectivities, carrying each other, one the other, one in the other. Matrix is all the time a place of relationship and communication, and even not being Ettinger’s terms, everything is played in this interface that puts in contact the building of a subject and the deconstruction that being a mother inevitably implies.

Despite Ettinger’s neological drive, in her idea of matriciality some articulations that come from the past could be found. First of all, obviously, the matter of the intrauterine experience as the last frontier of the

unconscious, which cannot stop being inquired by psychoanalysis. Secondly, the black continent of femininity receives a new cartography, not based on the lack (of phallus) but in the matrix as a void or place impossible to be understood as a negative. In fact, the matricial gaze gathers these two phallus-logocentric psychoanalysis' limits (and safety locks), admitting at the same time that psychoanalysis itself has opened a path "beyond the Phallus" as an inner turmoil. Similarly, Ettinger recovers, without making it explicit, a topic from the second wave of feminism. It was Simone de Beauvoir who already said that male dominance was erected over a denial of the undeniable: the knowledge of being engendered by a woman's body, the fact of being originated in an inconceivable intimacy with the feminine. Perhaps the most interesting Ettinger's contribution would be the conversion of the Lacanian's Thing (*das Ding*) into matrix: if the first one can only indicate a massive *jouissance*, undifferentiated and destructive (the absolute limit of the phallus desire), matricial should make it possible to discern and convert the *jouissance* implicated in this primary incest into thinkable and creative footprints. The Thing-Matrix, the same origin thought from the two sides of the sexual difference: as a male *jouissance*, an unapproachable opacity; as a female *jouissance*, a doable memory. Ettinger's discourse, despite its apparent sophistication, fails in convincing us to go beyond pointing at this displacement, but this failure does not dismiss the gesture.

Thus, there is no doubt that Ettinger tries to progress in the exploration of a specifically feminine *jouissance*, which Lacan only insinuates in enigmatic formulas, always on the verge of imposture. In his last contributions, Lacan did not know or want to detach femininity from a notably mythicised halo. By contrast, the matricial gaze achieves to better incarnate that mysterious feminine *jouissance*, which remains unknown even by women. With that, Ettinger meets the essential somatic root that *jouissance* must have, placing it in a corporal feminine difference that cannot be placed under the phallus shadow. But she also answers for the specific "criterion" of the feminine *jouissance*, as Lacan announces: the lack of discrimination between an irreducible singularity and an endless universality (at least until now). So, the experience of the meeting between Me and non-Me in matrix is unique, and at the same time, everybody has gone through matrix, comes from it. With that, Ettinger uses the card that Lacan played, and that card is a joker: answering to the feminist appeal, matrix differentiates the feminine; but this femininity is not reachable by the woman, neither by women, at least as a demarcation regard-

ing men. For this very reason, it would be fair to say that Ettinger makes little progress relative to Lacan's impasse. The matriciality poses a series of questions that remain little or no answered, but that cannot be eluded. It is clear that matricial fundamentally refers to the experience of having-been-carried that every individual has, and its footprint can be recovered creatively through an ethics of carrying (the others). But, what happens with the fact that just some people can, in some way, "repeat" the matricial relationship from the position of the "mother/Other-for-coming"? Or by any chance everybody can? Or maybe not everybody repeats the same repetition? There is little reflection about the repetition necessarily involved in the ethics of matriciality; how many repetitions, what kind of repetitions.

Supposedly, the matricial gaze allows to include a large spectrum of subjectivations (obviously not only the ordinary mother/child one), being this its major conceptual virtue. But the Ettinger's text raises many questions that can never be discerned. This means that matrix substitutes phallus, but Ettinger avoids the problem that the latter has always posed for the psychoanalytical discourse: How to understand what is organ, image and symbol at once. Indeed, matricial can be completely far from the phallic, but, since the Platonic's *khora*, it is trapped in the same game of the literal and the metaphorical. This game can be played in many ways, but it must be played. It is not necessary to turn to the last Lacan. Even his first distinction between privation, castration and frustration would be useful. There is not much to gain in escaping from the phallic taxonomy if it means falling down into an undefined matricial magma.

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