

Open Circle Theater

Orpheus

Program Notes by Roxanne Ray

In the United States, advertising, art, and public life are all overwhelmingly visual. They are all also key to the marketing efforts that fuel our capitalist economy. Visual communication is likewise irresistible between people too – as we ourselves see in regard to Orpheus and Eurydice. In ordinary society, it's impossible for Orpheus not to exercise his “male gaze” (as Laura Mulvey has famously termed it), or for Eurydice not “to-be-looked-at.”

But advertising's sale of eternal youth, health, and beauty run up against Death. Though images of an Underworld or an Afterlife may imply eternal life of some kind, Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* shows how death also interrupts the “visual pleasure” that propels our ad-based economic life.

And with the often gendered nature of the visual gaze – with men often doing the looking, and women and the young often being the object viewed – death interrupts the role of gender and sexuality in visually-oriented power.

Yet, paradoxically, Cocteau's Orphic Zone of Death is full of hierarchy, tribunals, and punishments. With the Zone's pronouncement, one system of power overtakes another. In this *Orpheus*, as in Cocteau's original 1950 film, we have the “visual pleasure” of seeing Orpheus and Eurydice deprived of this very same pleasure. Thank you for joining us in our exploration of these paradoxes of art, love, and justice.