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Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma

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Abstract

Israeli/French artist and psychoanalytical theorist, Bracha Ettinger has declared: “In art today we are moving from phantasm to trauma. Contemporary aesthetics is moving from phallic structure to matrixial sphere.” In analysing the significance of this claim, this article will bring together the legacies of feminist, post-colonial cultural theories in relation to the current focus on trauma, memory and aesthetics in an international context. The understanding of the twentieth century as a century of catastrophe demands theoretical attention be given to concepts such as trauma, as artists with deep ethical commitments bring issues of traumatic legacies to the surface of cultural awareness and potentially provide through the aesthetic encounter a passage from the traces of trauma. This article introduces, explains and analyses the contribution of Bracha Ettinger as a major theoretician of trauma, aesthetics and above all sexual difference. In addition, it elaborates on her parallel concept of a matrixial aesthetic practice, enacted through a post-conceptual

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painting, that retunes the legacies of technologies of surveillance and documentation/archiving, as a means to effect the passage to a future that accepts the burden of sharing the trauma while processing and transforming it. The article demonstrates the dual functions of Ettingerian theories of a matrixial supplement to the phallogentric Imaginary and Symbolic in relation to the major challenges we face as we seek to understand, acknowledge and move on from the catastrophes that render our age post-traumatic.

Key Words: trauma, aesthetics, the matrixial feminine, contemporary Western painting

In art today we are moving from phantasy to trauma. Contemporary aesthetics is moving from the phallic structure to the matrixial sphere. We are carrying, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, enormous traumatic weight, and aesthetic wit(h)nessing in art brings it to culture's surface. Certain contemporary art practices bring to light matrixial alliances by confronting the limits of trauma's shareability and the *jouissance* of the Other. The beautiful as accessed via artworks in our era—and I emphasize again in our era, since we are living through the massive effects of transitive trauma that different artworks capture and shed light upon—the beautiful carries new possibilities for affective apprehending and produces new artistic effects where aesthetics converges with ethics even beyond the artist's intentions or conscious control. (Ettinger, 2006:147-148)

My epigraph is a passage from the theoretical writings of the painter Bracha L. Ettinger (b. 1948-, see Figure 1) from whose practice has emerged the concept of *aesthetic wit(h)nessing*. Ettinger creates a neologism by inserting the letter (h) into the word *witness*. Wit(h)ness now implies being *with* someone else (Johnson, 2010: 217-236). Ettinger does not, however, replace one word with another. She expands a word's conceptual range from the legal and testimonial meaning of bearing witness to the crime against the other, to *being with*, but not assimilated to, and to *being beside* the other in a gesture that is much more than mere ethical solidarity. There is risk; but there is also a sharing. Beyond art as testimony (given by the witness), Ettinger is proposing an aesthetic wit(h)nessing: a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter. Art becomes a keeper of historical memory for the injured other by creating the site for a novel trans-subjective and transhistorical process that is simultaneously witness and wit(h)ness.

I. Theoretical Introduction

What is the meaning of the epigraph from Ettinger who states: “In art today we are moving from phantasy to trauma.” *Fantasme* is the French psychoanalytical term for the English word *phantasy*. Clinically, *fantasme* must be distinguished from *fantaisie* which is the common French word for creative activity, imagination and day-dreaming and their fantastical products. Typically what is imagined is the opposite of reality. In psychoanalysis, however, phantasy/fantasme is a key aspect of the psyche’s operations and phantasy has its own effective, psychic reality.¹ So is Ettinger suggesting that art can no longer “imagine” (*fantaisie*) or that art is no longer associated only with the imaginary (phantasy)? What would it be for art to suspend its relation to phantasy and to imagination in terms of seeking encounters with the Real? How does this relate to trauma?

In his major study, *L’Imaginaire: Psychologie Phénoménologique de l’imagination* [*The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*], published in 1940, the French existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre theorized the faculty of the imagination as the ultimate locus of the ontological freedom in the human subject: imagining alone provides freedom to translate, transform and recreate the world at the juncture of the inner world of an individual and the external world impacting upon the subject (Sartre, 1940, 2004). According to Sartre, a consciousness that could not *imagine* would remain drowned in the real, unable to project possibility, difference, and above all change.

This conceptualisation of *l’imaginaire* understood as the imaginative faculty within consciousness, that underpins the role of art in Sartrean political aesthetics, must be distinguished from the *Imaginary* in the psychoanalytical apparatus theorized by Jacques

¹ For a very useful account of this distinction (and its misunderstanding), see Rose (1986: 1-23).

Lacan, beginning in the 1930s when Lacan first wrote a paper “Au delà du ‘principe de réalité’” (1936) and the first, lost, version of “The Mirror Phase.”² Trying to escape the Freudian idea of stages through which the human subject passes, Lacan postulated three registers on which subjectivity and meaning are organized: the Real, (which has nothing to do with reality, which can be known), cannot be known or represented, being prior to and beyond signification. It is the Symbolic’s intractable beyond. Then there is the Imaginary, the result and condition of the mirror phase, which “fantasises” relations to the world and forms of the emergent self through the image, identification and misrecognition. Finally, there is the Symbolic, the unconscious register of signifiers and language, which forms the basis for the conscious act of thought (Lacan, 1977b). For Lacan, the Imaginary derives its meaning from the function of the image in constituting the illusory bodily unity that founds the ego, territorializes the subject within a borrowed imago, and establishes the conditions for intersubjective identifications. The Imaginary is, however, fundamentally a condition of alienation and the formation of subjectivity around importations from the field of the other (persons) and culture.³

Initially Lacan argued that the Real lay totally beyond both meaning (the Symbolic) and phantasy (the Imaginary). In his later seminars, however, Lacan became less rigidly structuralist. Lacan allowed himself to research the potential psychic significance of the psychic space between trauma (the Real) and phantasy (the

² “The Mirror Phase” was delivered, in part, at the International Congress of Psychoanalysis at Marienbad in 1936. It appeared as “The Looking-Glass Phase” in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1937). A later version was delivered in 1949 and published in the *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 4 (October-December 1949): 449-455. It was printed in Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je” [“The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”], *Écrits* (Editions du Seuil, 1966), 89-97, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 1-7. See also Gallop (1985: 74-92).

³ For a superb account of Lacanian terms and their cultural implications, see Jameson (1978).

Imaginary). In that space of archaic, pre-subjective processes, our aesthetic capacities and the beginnings of sexuality are also generated (Ettinger, 1996: 92). In proposing that contemporary art is itself exploring this zone between the Imaginary and the Real, thus between phantasy and what is in fact the psychoanalytical understanding of structural trauma, Ettinger is not simply arguing the Adornian position that “after Auschwitz” historical reality was so traumatic in that reality that it has knocked out all metaphysical speculation, demanding that even philosophy be grounded in the unimaginable reality created by the Holocaust (Adorno, 1978).⁴ On the other hand, Ettinger might also appear to be suggesting that art is suffering from psychological regression from the Imaginary to the Real, i.e. from the founding conditions of the ego to what is completely outside of the Symbolic, unthinkable, unsayable, unimaginable. Julia Kristeva and Jacques Rancière might well agree, for different reasons, that the emergence of the object and the sublime in contemporary art can be symptomatically interpreted as psychologically regressive.⁵ Ettinger is not, however, identifying regression in art. Ettinger is pointing to contemporary artistic attentiveness to the pressure of what we must call the *historical* real, historical events whose pressure is traumatic. That means historical events—what has really happened and left its deep impact individually and collectively on culture—have been of an

⁴ Like Dominick LaCapra, but with a slightly different emphasis I think it important to draw a distinction between “structural trauma” posited by psychoanalysis as the events which happen to a subject prior to their being a psychic apparatus to mediate, process or translate the event, and historical trauma, extreme experiences that occur to a formed subject through specific catastrophes such as bereavement, war, torture, accident, abuse, rape and so forth. These two are often conflated with a loss of recognition of the role of the formative traumas of birth, loss of the loved object, “seduction,” castration (loss, abandonment, mutilation) on the manner in which the historical events of similar traumatic will be overdetermined. See Pollock (2009).

⁵ Julia Kristeva sees new forms of art such as installation as indicative of a psycho-cultural collapse into abjection and fragmentation in *Penwarden* (1995) and Rancière (2009: 67).

order of extremity that they have overwhelmed or exceeded our existing representational systems, available images, fantasies, words and thoughts. Traumatic events breach the limits of representation, not because of their inherent sublimity, but because their atrocity or extremity are without historical precedent. Beyond even our imagining, these events fall outside the existing terms, words, concepts, images, representations which we might use to make sense of them, even while their affects are registered everywhere. Thus the movement from phantasy or the imaginary to the real of trauma marks a historically generated crisis in the relations between representation (our form of knowing) and that which having happened has none the less no immediate image or concept to represent it. Innovation in aesthetic form seek to negotiate the abyss precisely since the aesthetic, according to Rancière is “an economy of affects” (Rancière, 2009: 112).

Instead of inventing and imagining within the realms of the already-known, serious art today, according to Ettinger, is that which confronts the weight of the historical real as traumatic—both “real” and as yet unrepresented. Thus it is in need of creative, poietic invention to confront and to process. The real would be the legacies of terror, horror, violence, human catastrophe and natural cataclysm that have turned history into trauma: events that overwhelm our capacities to “know” fully what it is that has happened. In place of the traditional metaphysical operations of art, the overwhelming nature of historical and contemporary realities demand a different kind of radical attention and press art to create new forms, new ways of imaging so that we can ultimately also speak of them. Does this mean all art becomes documentary? Not at all.

Trauma explodes the typical distinctions between fiction and fact, generating what has been called “a crisis of truth” (Felman & Laub, 1992). Its often literal reality refutes metaphysical representation; yet it demands to be “phrased” since in

formulation alone can we engage with it, transform it, live beside its legacies.⁶ It is, therefore, more a question of orientation, of attentiveness and of the need to seek, specifically through *aesthetic* practices, modes for acknowledging, but also for transforming, the traumatic weight that will haunt our cultures unless it is—and I use the Freudian economic metaphor—“worked through” (Freud, 1958). Ettinger’s observation does not, therefore, limit imagination and creativity in art. It calls for such capacities to become engaged, ethically as well as aesthetically, with the traumatic residues of Modernity and modernization and specifically with the genocidal and political violence of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries that Zygmunt Bauman (1989) argues must be understood as symptomatic of Modernity itself.

Ettinger’s statement continues, introducing the core concept of her theory: the *matrixial*. As a conceptualisation of the feminine, the Matrix does not oppose the Phallus. It supplements the necessary work performed by the Phallus as signifier, expanding the range of processes and dimensions that constitute human subjectivity. The supplement is “from the ladies’ side” that other space of the feminine that neither Sigmund Freud nor Lacan could imaginatively access: and they acknowledged that.⁷ Challenging

⁶ Jean François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, #22 “The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible. This state is signaled by what one ordinarily calls a feeling: ‘One cannot find the words,’ etc. . . . What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them” (1988: 13).

⁷ The phrase “from the ladies’ side” is from Jacques Lacan (1998). Lacan argued that there was a jouissance beyond the phallus but it could only be reported on ‘from the ladies’ side’ yet under the dominance of the phallus alone, the feminine subject cannot herself speak of it. This beyond the phallus dimension has been a crucial point of departure for Ettinger’s theorization of a supplementary signifier, the Matrix, through which the specificity of sexual difference (and more merely the difference of woman from man as posited by the phallic model of +/-) could begin to enter into the Imaginary and the Symbolic rather than remaining foreclosed (without a signifier) in the Real in the original Lacanian formulation of

the existing hegemony of the Phallus, portrayed in classic psychoanalytical theory as the one and only sovereign signifier ruling the Symbolic, the theory of the Matrix, first formally proposed by Ettinger in 1992, emerged in the artist's own artworking during the 1980s. The matrixial is a radically extended psychoanalytical theory about the ways in which we relate to the other and to the *jouissance* of the other. It is premised on the proposition that the specificity of feminine sexual difference makes a distinctive contribution to the formations and potentialities of human subjectivity in ways that supplement the phallic constitution theorized by classical psychoanalysis (Ettinger, 1992; Pollock, 2004). The Matrix differs from phallogocentric thought in so far as it posits a primordial connectivity between co-emerging partial subjective elements that predate the separations and cleavages of birth, weaning and castration, that are posited as the cause of the phallically constituted human subject. Thus with regard to the other, the Matrix proposes that from the long prenatal/prematernal partnership that defines and produces *human* becoming, an unknown other was always a partner-in-difference and co-emergent. Thus we cannot but share the pain or trauma, i.e. the events of the other. We cannot but bear it, transport it, and potentially create a future precisely by such sharing, by recognizing co-humanity rather than anxiously policing the boundaries of difference which are the hallmark of the phallic model. This is what Ettinger suggests when she suggests art plays a key role in re-generating such matrixial possibilities in contemporary culture:

Certain contemporary art practices bring to light matrixial alliances by confronting the limits of trauma's shareability and the *jouissance* of the Other. (Ettinger, 2006: 147)

Certain contemporary art practices ask us to consider the trauma of the Other—other people, other times, other histories, namely, what is

Woman-Other-Thing. See also Lacan dot com (n.d.). For Freud's acknowledgement of his own "failure" see Freud (1933).

not already mine, familiar and my own. But there are limits to the degree to which the Other's trauma can be shared. It is ineradicably other. Art can, however, seek the means to create matrixial alliances, to bring human subjects closer to the possibility of recognizing and being affected by the pain and hence the being of the other, and to assenting to carry some of its burden, to share a borderspace that may become a threshold. This is not sympathy; this is not empathy. This is not about making the viewer feel a good or better person, or a more sensitive one. It is about the specific ways that the aesthetic encounter created by art practice can open up a threshold between now and then, us and them to create a shared *borderspace* that acknowledges the gap between different beings, times and places, while ethically making each partner vulnerable to the other's trauma and making us want to know it and even able to process it precisely because of the different, matrixial nature of the difference between unknown but co-affecting partners in difference.

The beautiful as accessed via artworks in our era—and I emphasize again in our era, since we are living through the massive effects of transitive trauma that different artworks capture and shed light upon—the beautiful carries new possibilities for affective apprehending and produces new artistic effects where aesthetics converges with ethics even beyond the artist's intentions or conscious control. (Ettinger, 2006: 147)

Unexpectedly, Ettinger introduces the concept of the beautiful. For Ettinger, beauty is the ethical capacity of the aesthetic, its ability to stimulate what she names *response-ability*, the ability to respond to the humanness of the other, to her vulnerability, and to any risk of the threat to humanness compromised by the cruelty of violence. Far from Sartrean engagement, Ettinger does not place this effect as a result of the artist's intentions, her good will, her politics, her identity; instead this ethical capacity to respond to the other is a result of the way in which formal and aesthetic processes can generate affects by means of artworks that solicit fragilization

and sharing.

Affect is a psychoanalytical concept that refers to those responses to the outside world and to others that are not as specific as the emotions. I consciously feel emotions such happiness or anger in relation to good things and bad things (Green, 1999; Stein, 1999). But affect such as anxiety is more diffused and shapeless. I drown in melancholy; it is not a specific emotional response to a specific situation. It is more like the colouring of my entire psychic condition. Psychoanalytically, affect is in fact the legacy of pre-psychic archaic responses, originally linked with remains of our pre-human instincts when the body itself responded to shock and danger. As humans became more psychologically complex, so did the affects which are also shaped by the unconscious. Think of dreams. Awakening from a dream, I may carry through the day a general sensation of dread, of sadness or even of pleasure which exceeds the brief moment of experiencing a precise emotion and the affect is the trace of an entirely unconscious process: dreaming.⁸

Trauma studies are deeply concerned with the affects such as grief, melancholia, as well as shock and anxiety. Scholars in cultural studies have recently noted what they called an “affective turn,” an interest in the analysis of such affective conditions in art and culture. The affective turn challenges the dominance of structuralism and its “linguistic turn” that was associated with semiotics and deconstruction (Clough & Halley, 2007). In many areas of contemporary cultural and visual studies, a new intellectual focus on affect is emerging but not at the price of merely displacing the interest in signification and structuration through language (Berlant, 2004; Sedgwick, 2003). From within the framework of psychoanalysis, which seeks precisely to understand the articulations between trauma, image and thought, we can, and we need to, consider affect more fully in the fields of

⁸ On the very complex theorization of affect in psychoanalysis, see Green (1999) and Stein (1991).

aesthetics and art history. Through artistic practices we can analyse the life-enhancing affects to counter the weight of death-dealing affects in our post-traumatic cultures.

In the following paper, I aim to make these introductory and complex theoretical reflections more concrete by situating what Ettinger creates as a painter in relation to three issues: the image, the gaze and the possibility of a political aesthetics based on her feminist thought as it illuminates the art and visual culture of the traumatically-burdened legacies of recent histories each of us inherits through diverse historical tragedies worldwide. I want to do this by juxtaposing her work as an Israeli artist working on the personal and collective traces of the Holocaust/Shoah with a recent work by a younger Israeli filmmaker looking back at a repressed trauma of more recent episode in Israeli history.

II. Ari Folman in Lebanon 1982

In 2008, Israeli director, Ari Folman made an animated feature film, *Waltz with Bashir* (See Figure 2). In the film a middle-aged man realizes that he has no memory of a personally and historically significant event to which he was an unwitting witness. As a 19-year-old conscript to the Israel Defense Forces, Folman had participated in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982. The invasion aimed to drive the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, led by Yasser Arafat, out of Lebanon from where they were threatening Israel, or seeking to win justice for the displaced Palestinians, depending on your point of view. Through animated drawings, Folman recounts his journeys, assisted by other contemporaries including journalists and fellow soldiers and a psychoanalyst, to return in time to the traumatic moment of his arrested memory. His starting point is a dream image that had flashed into his memory after a friend told him that he, the friend, had suffered from repeated hallucinations and nightmares from these terrible events in 1982. Folman's enigmatic

dream-image concerns a seemingly idyllic memory of bathing in the Mediterranean Sea with fellow soldiers, before coming out of the water to rush down a narrow alleyway. He never arrives. It is night. It is frightening. He meets fleeing silent women who are evidently deeply distressed. But the scene is inexplicable. There is no arrival.

Through the unfolding of the film, Folman patiently excavates the memories of other people about the real historical events leading up the days when the Lebanese Armed Forces, dominated by a Christian Phalangist militia, entered the Palestinian refugee townships of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut between 16 and 18 December 1982 and killed any number between 328 and 3,500 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in revenge for the recent assassination of their revered leader Bashir Gemayel.

In making this film in 2008, therefore, Folman comes to confront what his own memory had refused: a sight whose traumatic impact was such that he had blocked it but which his film both suddenly disclosed and traumatically exposed to the viewers by a shocking switch from the languorous tones of his expressionist animated drawings to both colour archive photographs and the sound of shrieking mourners followed by muted images of bloated corpses, all drawn from the news footage of the immediate aftermath of the actual massacres in Sabra and Shatila.

The film is suggesting that Folman came to realize that, as part of the Israeli army, which had permitted the enraged Lebanese Armed Forces into these Palestinian areas, he had himself blocked the roads and passages surrounding the areas of the Palestinian refugee cities so that they could not escape the violent and atrocious massacre in which hundreds or perhaps thousands women and children died in the terrible heat of the Middle Eastern city streets. An Israeli commission of enquiry in 1983 found Israel indirectly responsible for this massacre, and Ariel Sharon personally culpable for not having taken protective measures to prevent a foreseeable atrocity. It transpired in the end, that the

assassination of Bashir had, in fact, been carried out by a dissident member of Bashir Gemayel's own Lebanese Armed Forces distressed by his plans to make peace with Israel following his election.

To summarise: we have a film made up of animated drawings and with very affecting and beautifully selected contemporary music, about the recovery of memory by a man with traumatic amnesia. His amnesia concerns a moment of indirect responsibility for the perpetration of a undoubted crime against innocent men, women and children. What does the recovered memory mean to him? We do not know.

The film, however, as a publicly disseminated cultural product, becomes an allegory by which Israeli society is forced to confront what it has collectively allowed to become forgotten: the Lebanese War and, at the heart of that war, a massacre of civilians "permitted" on Israel's watch when Israel was in military control of Beirut. Thus it appears that Folman's film is one of the first Israeli artworks to confront contemporary Israelis with this terrible episode in their recent history, and indicts Israeli soldiers for the passive perpetration of a humanitarian crime. The film shows this history in a form that both demands collective recognition of national complicity in the massacre. But it poses a new question: what does this "recovered memory" mean now in terms of Israeli national identity and in terms of world citizens for whom the pain of any other human being must be a real concern beyond national, cultural, ethnic or personal identities? How do we understand the legacies of the past, notably their suppression, in relation to the present struggles against violence and for a peace that must actively be created out of multiple shards of indisputable but contradictory traumas?

Made and screened before the Israeli invasion of Gaza in January 2009, *Operation Cast Iron*, which also involved documented atrocities on both sides against helpless civilians while Israel sought to defend itself against a military threat, Hamas, lodged within the civilian population of Gaza, the film *Waltz with*

Bashir becomes more than a personal journey to recover individual memory and self-knowledge. It restores to Israeli public consciousness a painful and shameful episode in a nation's embattled history, not as a simple indictment, but as dilemma in a many-layered register of infecting traumas. Furthermore, it raises the spectre of the past to confront the present in ways that are excruciatingly painful not only for Israeli citizens, not only for Jewish people across the world in the Diaspora, but for all of us who live in societies in which the line between perpetrators and victims is not always clear, and where the distinction between self-defence and crimes against others can be blurred.

For many viewers of the film, however, the final scenes in the film aroused considerable and even heated debate. Why? As I have said, the otherwise animated film ends with the switch to colour news photographs and filmed footage of the aftermath of the massacre. The viewer is led from the fantasy scenarios of the reconstruction of memory to images that have the effect of indexing a historical event that is traumatically difficult to witness, even as a spectator in the cinema decades later. The pace of the film changes, and the audience is precipitated by the switch into a different kind of viewing, made possible by the status of archive news footage, colour photography, naturalistic sound, and then the eerie silence of the wandering news cameras surveying the dead. What is the effect of showing noisy images of intense human grief followed by silent shots of utter atrocity? Initially photojournalist reportage serves as evidence or proof. Someone was there to record these scenes and they and their recorded images serve as eye-witness documents. In 1982, such photographs and films belong to a pre-digital moment when analogue indexicality fostered a credibility no longer available to such imagery.

But what are the ethics of showing these images *again*, of exposing the dead in their final vulnerability and abjected condition to the gaze of the world even within a film such as Folman's that aims to use them to excavate a national amnesia for the contemporary, dissident purpose? Does looking at images of

atrocities violate the privacy of others in their mutilated death? Does it make all viewers voyeurs? Do images of violence and violation play inescapably into sadism even while they appear merely to report on the facts of a terrible event? Should images like this ever be shown? Or was it necessary, in Folman's film, to produce this shocking disjunction between the stylized animation with its cool music and the brute reality of history, of killing, of violence enacted on the vulnerable? Was it precisely the switch that could create the necessary affect of horror? Did the change from the limitless digital freedom of graphic invention to the specific indexicality of the analogue photographic document re-create, cinematically, the trauma of what Folman saw but refused to remember in 1982 and what the film wanted to force contemporary viewers in 2008 to confront, as *traumatically as possible*, yet without producing traumatic amnesia again.

Furthermore, what are we to make of the potentially explosive issue of the way in which these photographs of piled corpses, as archive documents of a past event, placed at the end of the film, evoke the visual memory of so many other, widely shown, documentaries about the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis in concentration and extermination camps? The most terrible images of the archive footage used by war reporters in 1945 and in subsequent documentaries about the Holocaust are the images of piles of dead bodies discovered littering the abandoned concentration camps of Germany.

Death is one of the most human of events. The way we handle death and the dead body has since the origins of human cultures been the very sign of human difference from near primate relatives. Animals discard the dead. The moment archaeologists and palaeontologists find any signs of burial rituals in excavated sites, any signs that our ancestors marked the passing of the human from life into death, we know we are in the realm of human culture as opposed to pre-human life. Such rituals indicate that ancient humans imagined that the concept of being human survived the threshold of organic death. We bury, burn, or drown our dead

with accompanying rituals. These seek a means to extend the concept of the human passed the threshold of ending of life. Human culture is defined by knowing death.

Thus one of the deepest crimes against humanity is to deprive people of the singular humanness of their own death. To leave corpses unburied, and perhaps to expose the person in their ultimate vulnerability to the unguarded gaze of the other is considered a deep taboo. In a photograph of dead bodies, however, the bodies are just that: *dead bodies*. We confront not human death but as humans, we look on at the traumatic horror of not-being.

Moreover, we must always remember that such photographs from the concentration camps also show, in this naked vulnerability, someone's loved ones, fathers, brothers, mothers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, and so forth. Not bodies but persons imbricated in now destroyed networks of belonging and identity. Someone exposed to these images may recognize a family member or cherished friend. Every archive image of atrocity republished, therefore, raises an ethical problem. The photograph is evidence and proof of an event, crime, and atrocity. But it is also a *representation* within which a person has been captured at the moment at which the atrocity of having been killed in a war steals from them their last precious identity as a singular person whose final property is their own death.

In Folman's final scenes, I want to point out a double atrocity. The first is the manner of killing: being gunned down by cruel and vicious opponents, the Lebanese Armed Forces, under the indifferent or unknowing eyes of the Israel Defense Forces. The second is manner of that death being exposed, in sometimes necessary ways, as evidence of the crime, without the compensation of equal care or compassion for the crime against the humanity of the individual that results from their death being thus photographed, published, distributed, and used by others for their own purposes. In Folman's case, photographs of killed Palestinian people are re-shown to make young Israelis, who may have been seduced up to this point in the film by the aesthetic

appeal of such a cool animated film, confront a historical reality that they must recognize, like the teenage Folman, as their own. They must come to see themselves in the position to which Ari Folman has taken them, which is to say, aligned with the othering gaze of the camera at the dead bodies. Seeing the results of a massacre Folman did not personally perpetuate, none the less, contaminated him with the crime he failed to witness. The trauma of what had happened and what he had to see after the event had been sufficient to produce amnesia: the memory could not be integrated into his own understanding of the person he thought he was. As trauma, the sight was blotted out. He did not allow openness, or what Bracha Ettinger will name fragilization of his identity and subjectivity. He will not, trans-subjectively take onto himself some traces of the annulled subjectivity of the massacred people.

Let me clear. It is a good thing that Folman has made a film about Israel's role in the Sabra and Shatila massacres of 1982. It is a good thing that he has brought this repressed historical event to the surface of Israeli society now. It is a good thing that he tried to devise an aesthetic form that used animation to stage the dreamy process of recovering memory after traumatic amnesia. It is a good thing that he decided to switch from the dreamy process of animation to confront his audience with a terrible reality indexed by the horrific photographs of actual scenes he himself had once witnessed as a real scene of the violent death of the innocent. It is even possible that it is a good thing that he has dared to make a film that, in its sequencing of images, evokes, with these final photographs, the familiar endpoint of films about Nazi atrocities in which Jewish men, women and children were the predominant victims. This is not to equate what Israel did in Lebanon or Gaza with the Nazis. This must be very clear. But I do think that using the structure or the narrative sequencing of his film in this way, Folman wanted to allow a "resonance" between the two scenes in order to jolt the Israelis out of their culturally maintained sense of perpetual victimhood as a result of the Holocaust against the Jews

of Europe. The Israelis need to recognize that they, like anyone else, like all of us, can also participate in perpetrating atrocities, even under the guise of legitimate wars of self-defence, or worse, by inattention to what is happening under our noses. Despite anyone's history as victim, we are each always capable to perpetration of ill against other others. This must be the lesson of history. Until identities, formed by national, ethnic, religious, social and gendered boundaries, are loosened sufficiently, or even transgressed, we will not put a stop to the violence that we all in, some ways, perpetrate against others. Even if we do not shoot or destroy, we may all kill something of the human dignity of others, even in the everyday exchanges in societies of inequality, power, envy and anxiety. Democracy is not merely a political system; it is a state of political subjectivity or subjectivisation, towards which we must work not only practically, but also affectively

The key point I want to draw out from this initial discussion of Ari Folman is both the question of trauma, memory and history in art but also the more challenging concept of art as compassion. This concept might take us beyond the tired alternations between amnesia and anamnesis (the return of memory), trauma and recovered memory which as we have seen is still about self and other and blame and guilt.

In one sense, these questions about the justice of using the archive images of dead people faces every artist or filmmaker who wants to confront the traumatic events of history when making any kind of art work using the archival. The transformed image—something shown and seen and subject to imaginary identification or misrecognition—becomes, as aesthetic event, the occasion for an encounter, which is not just a return to site of trauma. If the past, and its suffering others, are to touch us, the viewers, to transform us, to make us different as a result of the aesthetically created encounter, such an encounter must risk being *traumatising* by releasing affects not immediately containable. Is there a way beyond this dilemma? Can we reconnect with atrocious pasts in non-traumatising ways that forge different kinds of subjectivities as

a result of the aesthetic processing of the remnants of the past?

III. A Step Back into an Earlier Historical Moment: Trauma and the Image

I am concerned here with the politics of representation and the political aesthetics of resistance. I want to introduce a scene from an earlier film made to commemorate the victims of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. Made in 1955, *Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais aimed, however, to arouse the viewers of Europe in 1955 not only to remember the past, but to become alert to the continuing menace of totalitarianism in their own societies. Not buried under the ruins of the crematoria at Auschwitz, Resnais believed the concentrationary “plague” was still at work in the French colonial war against Algerian independence.

To achieve his ends, Resnais has stated that he had to make a very formalist, aesthetically self-conscious film rather than an ordinary documentary if he was to awaken the forgetfulness of the world to the constant menace of totalitarianism in the mid 1950s. Thus, in *Night and Fog*, Resnais devised a series of disjunctions, interruptions and collisions between different kinds of images and different moments in time. His film moves between the present and the past, between colour filming in the present and black and white archive footage, using a poetic voice-over commenting on the image-track, enhanced by specially composed and dissonant music. At the end of the film, which begins with the victory of the Nazis in 1933, and then traces the building of the camps, the outbreak of war, invasions and occupation, round-ups, tortures, extermination, and ends with liberation of the concentration camps by the Allies, the film tries to find a means of presenting the unrepresentable at the core of the Nazi horror, namely the process of extermination of millions of people by gassing them to death. Here, I suggest, the film stumbled in a way that is significant for

feminist studies in general and my argument in particular.

In the archive upon which filmmakers and historians draw for evidence of what happened, here are no actual images of the gas chambers at work. How could there be? As a filmmaker, Resnais had to construct a narrative using the images that do exist but they come from other kinds of killing processes used by the Nazis before the mass industrial murder in gas chambers and gas vans began. For instance, punishment executions or mass shooting of Jewish populations in the Soviet Union following the German invasion in 1941.

What troubles me, however, is the fact that the photographs Resnais selected to try and tell the story of the extermination of Jewish and Romany populations, with few exceptions, represent the killing of women and children, forced to undress in the open air and open sight of their killers before being shot. Two things are odd: that such images exist and that they conjoin women and dying, and naked women and sadistic murder. Why is this significant: that such images exist and that Resnais used them again?

These are no news images of such massacres taken later by independent journalists such as those used by Folman in his film because there were no witnesses to the gas chamber murders.⁹ Those images of the massacres that exist are perpetrator images, taken to record the actual process of killing. Recent historical research into the locations and photographers of the two groups of images used by Resnais (and others) has identified the photographs taken by a German soldier in the Gendarmerie on 14 October 1942 at Mizocz, Rovno, Ukraine as part of a series of seven of which five are extant. They represent the sequence of a

⁹ There are in fact four surviving photographs taken by a member of the Special Units (Sonderkommando), prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers. Taken clandestinely from inside the gas chamber they show bodies being burnt in the open air when the crematoria failed to function adequately. On these images see Didi-Huberman (2008).

punishment massacre of the women and children of the 1700 inhabitants of the Mizocz ghetto in which a revolt had taken place on 13 October¹⁰ (See Figure 3).

The second photograph is part of a different series taken of a massacre Liepaja, Latvia on 15-17 December 1941 by Carl Strott who forced the women to run nakedly before his camera after undressing (he photographed this) and before being shot on the edge of a mass grave (he also photographed this and the women are mostly dressed in their undergarments) (Arad, 1990: 193). Thus nakedness was part of the pre-killing torture as was being photographed. The images all create a viewing position that is violently other to the women captured by the camera's gaze in ways in which the sadistic predatoriness of a sexualised gaze is overdetermined by racist ideology and the extraordinary, gendered conditions of wartime. Whether the photographer wished to document an atrocity from outrage or discontent or because of the pornographic occasion of looking at naked women during a long military campaign, or whatever other motivations we might have to contemplate, **our** encounter with the images in watching this film momentarily aligns us with the originating perpetrator position—even a dissident one, which was a masculine, heterosexual one, and possibly/probably a racist point of view. Even if we begin to recoil once realizing what we are seeing, making sense of the image's denotation already aligns us with that perpetrating gaze. Whatever our own subjectivities and politics, the reading of the image prior to our taking a position in relation to what it shows requires us to process its denotational signs: what are we seeing? Naked women and clothed men. Is this novel or in fact, is this not a recurring trope in Western art?

¹⁰ Photographs in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum W/S #17875-79 (File #431.863). Sergeant Hille gave the photographs to the Czech lawyer for whom he worked as a doorman after the war, who handed them to the Czech government. They thus entered the public domain and Hille's statements were confirmed in 1961 by Josef Paur also of the Gendarmerie.

These images have to be recognized as the perverse actualization of one of the most famous of modernist paintings, which outraged its own peace-time Parisian public in 1863 by the juxtaposition of clothed men with a naked woman, Édouard Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1863). In Picasso's attempted memorial to the Korean War in 1951, where armed soldiers line up to aim their rifles at a huddled group of naked women, some with children, we see again and again that both the phallogocentric structures of sexual difference and masculine hetero-sexuality are performed in the photographing of a fascist destruction of the European culture from which these artistic tropes are being drawn. A deep phallic logic that runs through high art to modern pornography sustains the selection of scenes in perpetrator images that were photographed and then preserved, collected, disseminated and used in the compilation documentary by Resnais.

In his usage of one of the images from the Mizocz massacre, Resnais chose to move in, cropping the original photograph. This allows the filmmaker to pick out the face of one woman, turned towards the photographer in desperate appeal or rebuke for his inhumanity, introducing into the mass of passively lined-up profiled bodies a moment of dissonance, shattering mere voyeuristic appropriation of the naked women by the irruption of her appeal: the face as "face," as the call of the other to my ethical response.¹¹

IV. Femininity and Death

But why are these images of women being killed so often used to represent the invisible horror of the unimaginably horrible death?

¹¹ The trio of a woman cradling her child's head, a woman looking away and this appealing face form the core of the prolonged painterly contemplation of how we can look back in the work of French-Israeli artist Bracha L. Ettinger. See Pollock (2007: 165-197).

Here we need a digression into feminist cultural theory. Elisabeth Bronfen has argued persuasively that the image of beautiful dead woman, in western visual culture has since the later eighteenth century become a means both to confront and disavow death. The image of the beautiful but dead woman is the aestheticized means by which appalling knowledge of human mortality can be disavowed by the masculine subject who ceaselessly produces and contemplates images of beautiful dead women. Bronfen argues that the recurring image of the beautiful dead woman in Western art, literature, and opera, enables the masculine subject (those who have made the paintings and drawings, written the poems and plays) to disavow a confrontation with his own mortality even while the fact of making such images indicates the constant return of the repressed knowledge of death (Bronfen, 1992). Bronfen writes:

Over representations of the dead feminine body, culture can [both] repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death which it fails to foreclose even as it cannot express it directly. If symptoms are failed repressions, representations are symptoms that visualise even as they conceal what is too dangerous to articulate openly but too fascinating to repress successfully. They repress by localizing death away from the self, at the body of a beautiful woman, at the same time as this representation lets the repressed return, albeit in a disguised manner. (Bronfen, 1992: xi)

The image of the beautiful woman who is dead but also beautiful makes death bearable to he who is neither a woman nor dead as an image only because, at a deeper mythic level in phallogocentric cultures, the feminine is already linked with the cycle of life and death. She represents both the white goddess of life and the black goddess of death (Freud, 1958b).¹² It is my contention

¹² Freud writes of Venus being in fact the Goddess of Death as man is born to woman and is received back into her, the earth.

that this deep, archaic association in phallogocentric myth between femininity and death is what has over-determined the recurring selection of images of women being killed and that this conflation of femininity and death became the bearable “face” of the horror of mass murder in the Holocaust (Pollock, 2008, in press).

The photographs of Jewish woman from Mizocz and Liepaja about to be shot used by Resnais in his film to stand in for the unrepresented horror of mass industrial murder exist, therefore, at the terrible intersection of real, enacted fascist sadism (they were killing women and children and photographing the murder) and a more general phallogocentric voyeurism encoded in many aspects of western representations from high culture to photojournalism. Both are the product of a sexual politics within fascism of all sorts and in phallogocentric cultural apparatuses and technologies in general. Repeated by Resnais in showing the Mizocz and Liepaja photographs of women and children in their humiliated vulnerability just before a horrible death, the relations between violence and eroticism are re-enacted in ways that deflect from the human trauma of what we are seeing. They stem from, and re-absorb the event into pre-existing tropes which use eroticised or humiliated femininity to deflect from the encounter with death.

Can we imagine another way to return to the scene of horror as a scene of human suffering that solicits another kind of gazing, another kind of response, and which mobilises the feminine differently as the means of enjoin shareability and response-ability rather than the fetishization of death through aestheticization?

V. Ettinger's *Eurydices*

So far, I have used one contemporary and one historical cinematic example of the artistic “reframing” of the documentary image of atrocity as an introduction to the aesthetic politics of the painting practice of Bracha L. Ettinger, with whose thoughts I began. Ettinger's work refers to the photographic archive of

atrocities. But she does not work from photographs. Ettinger works *with*, not from images that function as the traumatic ready-mades of history: photographs, documents, and more recently her own paintings. Over twenty years Ettinger has returned in her work to one of the photographs of the frieze of women from Mizocz that appears in Resnais' film and subsequently in so many museums and anthologies. Ettinger too is drawn to the centre of this frieze of women approaching summary execution. She pauses at a tall woman whose face is obscured as she is looking ahead and hence away, refusing to connect with our looking. Ettinger notes a mother gently curving her hand around the head of the baby she is cradling in her arms. Ettinger registers the pathos of the older women's tired and sagging bodies unbearably exposed. Ettinger calls our attention to other mothers with their children in their arms, meditating on the probable maternal pain at their own powerlessness to protect their children from this terrible premature dying. Ettinger responds above all to the woman who turns from the dismal procession to challenge the gaze of whoever was watching: the perpetrator photographing her in 1943, and to appeal to those of us looking now.

In her notebooks, published in 1992, reflecting on her prolonged contemplation of this tall woman with her averted face, Bracha L. Ettinger wrote, firstly in 1990 of the pain we feel when we are excluded by such an averted gaze. Of course, we want to be seen by the image.

I want her to look at me! That woman, her back turned to me. The image haunts me. It's my aunt, I say, no, my aunt's the other one, with the baby. The baby! It could be mine. What are they looking at? What do they see? I want them to turn toward me. Once, just once. I want to see their faces. The hidden face and the veiled face are two moments calling to each other: moments of catastrophe. (Ettinger, 1993: 67)

But then she realizes:

This woman has more to look at than the watchers of the painting . . . but what she looks at is inhuman. (Ettinger, 1993: 85)

In her paintings, however, Ettinger does not reproduce this image. Ettinger's paintings are abstract. Thus I want to explore how Ettinger has used the practice of abstract painting, itself ostensibly displaced by the postmodern return to representation, the image and new media, in order to remake the inhumanity of the dying of these women from a ravine in the Ukraine into the possibility of a humanizing gazing, aesthetic wit(h)nessing of trauma? Can abstract painting, therefore, be about the gaze and not about the image even as it evokes the existence of the trauma in an image it must remake as something else?

This possibility is intimately connected to Ettinger's innovative, matrixial reconceptualization of a feminine sexual difference that lies beyond the phallogocentric concept of sexual difference in which the feminine is only the lacking other of the masculine? Let me remind you that according to phallogocentric theories of the subject the feminine can only be a negative function: not-man, lack, absence, the thing, the real, death; the negativity of the feminine sustains, however, the illusory sovereignty of the phallus through identification with which the masculine subject is affirmed in the illusion of having the phallus and hence of presence. It would be difficult briefly to explain Ettinger's complex post-Lacanian theory that was translated from painting into post-Lacanian psychoanalytical terminology and I cannot undertake it fully here. I want to suggest how it works through an *art historical* assessment of her abstract painting that does not show, like Folman and Resnais, the naked image of the dying women, but rather materializes history through the trace of trauma meeting the gesture of the painter.

Ettinger's reworking of the original document of the Holocaust is not documentary and it does not set up the relations between painting and photography which have their place in

twentieth century Western art history since Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter. So how does the document function in her practice? Firstly, the iconography of the original photograph is almost impossible to recognize in any of Ettinger's paintings had I not betrayed her painting already by showing you the historical photograph. That photograph is not a source or a referent for her painting. It functions rather as a Duchampian ready-made. Because it actually exists, it indexes both a historical real and is specific form of violence performed through the phallic gaze. In her painted space, the image of death in Mizocz no longer functions as an image for us to look at. This is because the semiotic dimension of the ready-made as photographic image has been remade through its initial subordination to, and translation by, a different photo-mechanical process that introduces the counterpoint to the semiotic, the aesthetic. Ettinger adapted the process of photocopying to her own ends. The found image is firstly reworked by being passed through the blind, light-reading, electro-magnetic reconfiguration performed by the photocopy machine. Ettinger interrupts the machine, however, before its new simulacrum of its source-image can be heat-sealed. All she gleans from the machine, therefore, is a charged scattering of black dust that is like a ghost of an image. What appears on her paper is an ashen deposit that hovers on its surface; it is an apparition appearing and disappearing in the same moment. In its new materiality, what was once a photograph is now but a fragile trace of a past with which we can never fully reconnect. Transformed into this material apparition on paper, and often overlaid by other traces, the affective quality of the past may invite us to incline towards the pain the photograph once indexed. Altered by her processing in an interrupted photocopy machine and through subsequent years of many campaigns of over-painting, this ready-made document of history is been transformed.

As a recreated material trace it functions more like one end of a string, stretching between two points, between then and now, opening the space not only between past and present, but also

between past and future. Substantially and materially altered, dissolved and rescued in black grains evoking forgetfulness as much as loyalty to a memory, what has been created by Ettinger allows us, in the present, to revisit these feminine spectres of the past as figures whom Ettinger names *Eurydice*, after the dead wife of the mythic poet Orpheus whom he tried to resurrect, but killed by looking back. Ettinger's *Eurydices* are suspended between two deaths: the inhuman death which awaited them in the ravine in 1943 (after this photograph was shot) and the metaphorical killing by the Orphic Gaze, the looking back that kills a second time which always awaits them once their suffering was captured, voyeuristically, by a photograph that may be exposed over and over again. Thus if we look back at the naked photograph, and when we look at them, we are compelled, even momentarily, to do so down the sights of the perpetrator photographer's gaze, a gaze that cannot but kill again. We participate in reducing their humanity to an image through the photographic recording of their dying. So how can looking back **not** kill? How can we meet Eurydice, but not with Orpheus's deadly retrospect?

For Ettinger, it is precisely the possibility of painting as the aesthetic mode of thought—from Raffaello Sanzio (Raphael) and Leonardo da Vinci through to the modernism of late Claude Monet and Mark Rothko—that can create an aesthetically encountered space that is connected to the spaces of subjectivity. Ettinger names this a *borderspace*. A *borderspace* is not a boundary, a limit, an edge, a division. But is not a site of fusion or confusion. It is space shared between minimally differentiated partial subjects who, while they can never know each other, can, none the less, affect each other and share, each in different ways, a single event. In this borderspace emerges another kind of process: *borderlinking* and another kind of gazing, the *matrixial gaze*. The *matrixial gaze* is not about looking and seeing, looking and knowing, sight and power, vision and desire. It relates to the complex relays between the multi-channelled formative, prenatal and immediately post-natal sensorium which will include the eroticised field of vision out

of which primordial subjectivity emerges. Before focussed seeing and spatialised awareness, there sprouted in the becoming human subject an unseeing feeling with, or sensing of, an unknown but co-emerging other.¹³ What Ettinger names as the phallic mode of subjectivity—which she does not condemn, for it is vital for most human activities—involves clearly defined entities, divided by impermeable boundaries, always functioning in subject-object relations. Psychosis represents its radical breakdown. In the Matrixial sphere, however, which supplements and shifts the phallic mode without ever knocking it out, the “I” is not yet understood as a full and discrete subject confronting the other as “you”—object of knowledge, desire, hatred, etc. Partial elements of my subjectivity may be affected by partial elements of an unknown other’s subjectivity so that we can trans-subjectively (even across gaps of time such as that between now and the ravine in Mizocz) rather than intersubjectively share an event whose resonance, however, at ends of the virtual strings that we might imagine linking us in this trans-subjective borderspace, will be different for each partner-in-difference.

Many in art history may work with the typical model of communication. This suggests that a complete meaning is conceived by me and is transmitted via a message using a known

¹³ This argument can also be compared to the propositions of Luce Irigaray about the origins of colour in the phenomenology of intra-uterine life without sight. Irigaray contests Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s rigorously post-natal understanding of the foundational concepts of his phenomenology of perception in her brilliant re-reading of his text on the Chiasm (Irigaray, 1993: 151-184), notably: “Color resuscitates in me all of that prior life, the preconceptual, the preobjective, the presubjective, the *ground* of the visible where seeing and seen are not yet distinguished . . .” (1993: 156). Ettinger would contest the idea of the later stages of prenatal life as pre-subjective. It is precisely here that she intervenes to suggest that the co-emerging and co-affecting severality that is the becoming mother and the becoming infant form a subjectivizing dimension that can later be gleaned, imagined and thought, as a premise for ethical as well as political relations with non-Is as opposed to the phallically constitute not-I.

communication system such as language or art to another who receives and decodes my message. Translated into art historical terms, the artist creates a meaning from within him/herself, and puts it in the art work. The viewer sees the art work which functions as a vehicle for the meaning originating inside the artist and the viewer decodes the artist's meaning (or misses it entirely). In Ettingerian aesthetics, this model does not function. Rather she suggests that in artworking "something" happens from which the artwork emerges. The artist is also a site interwoven with the world, others, her own and her unknown others. That "something" may or may not be entirely the artist's own personal event for there are strings into the world and reaching back through generations. The artwork is thus to be understood not as the vehicle for a pre-created message. It is instead a screen on which this event—personal (from the inside) or historical (from the outside), from past and present—is projected and unconsciously shaped. Towards this screen (itself a created borderspace) the viewer inclines without knowing the event that has made the work emerge. This borderspace that is opened can, none the less, generate affects and responsiveness that is in part coming from in me, an unknown other to this work and its event, and from the others and the histories I carry, known or unknown. The aesthetic event is thus an encounter of bits and pieces of many subjects, past and present, known and unknown whose effect is like a vibrating string that transmits affects to each of its anchoring points. These affects and even meanings have something in common, but are not the same. Their effect is to bring these disparate subjective entities into poetic and creative co-emergence at this threshold of creation. The art work is thus understood as an event; it is also a (potential) encounter. The encounter may not happen for every viewer. No one can predict the outcome of the encounter. Nothing may resonate for any viewers on this occasion. Something may generate affects for some subjects. But the invitation is there to make one's own borders fragile enough to register the being, pain or jouissance of the other and not to attempt to master it as an object or a

communication.

Art can thus create an occasion for the emergence into aesthetic encounter of aspects of our subjectivities that are open to responding to the other we do not know and receiving and processing aspects of the trauma, including death, of the other. In particular, after the postmodern era in which the photographic and now the digital image has come to dominate contemporary art so thoroughly, *painting*, abandoned for so many decades as a major practice of contemporary art, can create through colour, pulse, rhythm and space, the threshold between the human pain of the past and the human compassion of the present. At a simple level, Ettinger's abstract painting of layered colour and pulsing marks might be said to clothe the naked pain of the dying women with the blessed veil of affecting colour: reds and purples enhancing but also assuaging the violence they suffered and our grief in encountering their pain.

The manner in which Ettinger applies the paint needs our attention.

It is first of all completely abstract, machinic (in the Deleuzian sense and not automatist in the surreal sense) in its application, attending only to the regularized movement of the hand across a surface. Her touch progressively builds up coloured veils that screen the others evoked in material traces of photocopied dust from any the sadistic, voyeuristic photographic gaze; this occurs by what Ettinger has termed *metramorphosis*. Neither metaphor nor metonym, the figures of signification typical of phallogocentric discourse, *metramorphosis* (combining the Greek words for *womb* and for *change*) is a generative figure that produces a non-visual matrixial gaze. In metramorphosis, the Oedipal, mastering eye cannot find a centre, and thus cannot centre a subject of its mastering gaze. But Ettinger does not frustrate the mastering gaze with something like Richterian blur nor does she attempt to defeat vision, a phallic binary gesture itself. For the matrixial gaze that moves decentred across and within an aesthetic field incites a subjective affect, a psychological process, and an ethical response.

Through the matrixial gaze that approaches me in painting, I am transformed by *it* only in so far as *it* is transformed by me. The metamorphosis, through which borderlines between various subjects and objects between partial subjects become thresholds is a process of *bringing-into-being-together*, or a *becoming-woman-with* inasmuch as any “becoming” is a “becoming-woman.” (Ettinger, 1995: 47-48)¹⁴

Here Ettinger is referring to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the idea of becoming as becoming-woman to whom her work is very close. Thus in front of the collection of her paintings, we find ourselves diffused, dispersed, swimming in the pulsating play and vibrations of colour between visibility and invisibility. We are invited to participate by means of resonance in its dispersed, humanising field, a field where affects and feelings are prompted by a modernist concept of colour as a field but also as the enmeshment of threads that sustain the possibility of sharing with the trauma of the unknown other who can become a partner in this aesthetic event without abolishing difference. The effects of the metamorphic process of painting has resonances with what Rosalind Krauss identified as the optical unconscious in modernist art. Ettinger writes, quoting Krauss:

In that open space of conjunction of presence and absence, where transgressions of figurality, where “a rhythm, or beat, or pulse . . . acts against the stability of visual space in a way that is destructive and devolutionary [where] the beat has the power to decompose and dissolves the very coherence of form in which visuality may be thought to depend,” where inside/outside pulsational scansion leads to absence and repetition as primary meaning-engendering instances, the matrixial gaze creates ontogenetic inter-connectivity as a sub-symbolic meaning of borderlinks and shareability (within a space of plurality and partiality), leading to the enigma of meaning of *shareability of trauma*

¹⁴ A later revised version printed in 2007.

*and fantasy and the co-response-ability with the unknown
Other.* (as cited in Ettinger, 1995: 50)

VI. Ettinger and Contemporary Painting

Let me finally do some art history. After creating desolated landscapes of disaster at the beginning of the 1980s, Bracha Ettinger had renounced painting in order to invent a new language for her art “after painting.” She began by using found documents from public and family archives of photographs, texts by Freud and Lacan, drawings by Freud’s analysands, which she passed repeatedly through an photocopy machine, layering a single, heavily textured paper with several images from diverse historical sources so that traces of many histories mingled across time and space on this newly created co-inhabited ground created by a non-manual but material tracing.

Her process for making these “encounters” itself is an art historical intervention that goes beyond collage, montage, assemblage and Rauschenbergian combines, all of which open up the space of art to the things of the world. The blind electromagnetic machine was regularly interrupted, however, before the dusting of black grains could be fixed by heat. The machine’s use of light and electromagnetically charged grains mimic the dark and light masses of the submitted photographs without reproducing the image, but its black dust can suggest the ash of cremated people. Ettinger created apparitions, spectres, traces of the past that were both emerging to meet us again and disappearing at the same time. Then she would revisit these accumulated images with gestures more like writing than painting as if an entirely new alphabet needed to be found through the work of the drawing hand. Ettinger’s working processes were initially explored as a passage away from gestural and minimally figurative oil painting on canvas, and from the painting of landscapes of annihilation populated with haunting figurations of tortured bodies and pain. Using the blind gaze of photocopier as

both a device for distancing the very history by which she was personally and traumatically overwhelmed in the images that appeared incessantly from her own hand, and a means of creating a transport for and from the traumatic weight of this history inhabiting her, she created by means of the interrupted photocopier, a new aesthetic field of co-inhabited passages and traces that brought together many histories and memories from the peoples sharing Palestine/Israel or Israel/Europe.

One source was a collection of aerial photographs taken by German Luftwaffe (airforce) in 1917 of the land of Palästina: seen from a distance and from above, from a military reconnaissance plane during this world war, such images signify military industrial modernity and its gaze. Its distanced vision erases the people living on the ground, be they Jewish, Muslim, Christian from East and West. Ettinger's many layered papers embody the co-inhabited memory space of this land claimed now by both Israelis and Palestinians.

At first, this material process created a historically charged ground for the return of paint-loaded gestural writing, at once alphabetical, hieroglyphic and abstract. She called these markings, on the multiply layered papers, hand-thoughts. A large brush with its heavy, black ink or the fine brush trailing wounding lines of incising red paint, charged the apparitions from the past that had been fragilized in partial passage through the photocopy machine with present intensities learnt from attentive study of late abstract expressionist painting from Claude Monet, to Paul Klee, Max Ernst, and Mark Rothko.

Gradually through the 1990s, a richly coloured and classical use of oil painting and coloured glazes returned to these works on paper, at first as veils or screens of colour touching certain areas. Colour was itself reconstrued through the resonances with both mechanical scansion and machinic, rhythmic hand movements by which it was laid on in repeated traverses across the surface where a screen of coloured markings accumulated without reference to the underlying images themselves yet the accumulation of colored

gestures began to build a supplementary layer of meaning.¹⁵ The artist renounced the expressionist gesture in favour of a sensual rather than a visual scanning of the surface so beautifully described by Deleuzian philosopher Brian Massumi:

When the gaze rests on the appearing-disappearing part-painting, it delivers the rhythm to feeling. When it rests on a next appearing-disappearing-part-painting, it delivers a rhythm to feeling. As in trauma, the fact that the visual figures have little resemblance to each other does not preclude their triggering a reliving. The parts and the paintings couple not because they look alike, but because they feel alike. If there is resemblance, it is in the feeling; it is of relived feeling to itself. (Massumi, 2000: 14)

In the realm of visible, Ettinger's art work in its varied media is produced by suspending the mastery of visualization, without abandoning what Jean-François Lyotard, following Marcel Duchamp, called "apparition." "Apparition means that something that is other occurs" (Lyotard, 1989: 241). What is the "otherness" that "occurs" by means of this procedure?

Like a psychoanalyst, whose conscious attention is suspended during analysis by a form of reverie all the better for the analyst to incline unconsciously towards and resonate with the undertone and the unspoken registered in the analysand's voice, body, gesture, rhythm, silence, hesitation, blockage, when painting Ettinger suspends the creative intention of making an image in order to *be with, incline towards, be hospitable to*, the ready-re-made image. This happens over long periods of time (each painting takes many years to complete), as she visits, scans its surface in different traverses, waiting to see what each encounter yields at the co-emerging borderspace this practice seeks to sustain without either abdicating control or asserting it.

In a mode that calls to mind British poet John Keats' idea of

¹⁵ On this colour as the colour of grief and longing, see Pollock (2000: 45-70).

the artist practising “negative capability”: withdrawing the mastering mind in order to let the otherness of the created emerge, Bracha Ettinger creates the conditions for co-emergence at a co-emerging borderspace.¹⁶ At this specific overlay and interweave of psychoanalytic process and aesthetic process, Ettinger created what she calls *artworking*. This term is affiliated to Freud’s dreamwork, or work of mourning, or working through, that is his use of work to insist on the economy of psychological working-through, which takes times and needs the regular, open space of encounter to occur, unpredictably, even while transformation is always anticipated, hoped for, and welcomed.

Ettinger has created a process to recover something of the mystery (always a life/death mystery) of appearing—becoming visible and thus knowable—through the use of the most anti-auratic machinery: the photocopier. Lyotard writes of this work:

The work is a wager through which it is proven that the instruments of reproduction and representation are materials and means as apt to enact apparition as a brush, a pencil, or photography.

What is remarkable is that in this painting, in all of these sometimes retouched “developments”, traces of figures (in the sense of figurative) persist. These traces are refracted, diffracted through time. In the beds of movings and tremblings, in the overprints, or in what should be called *scriptures*. Traces of writing, erasures of trembling. (Lyotard, 2004: 101)

Christine Buci-Glucksmann invokes Walter Benjamin in her discussion of the paintings of Ettinger using his comments on

¹⁶ John Keats letter to George and Thomas Keats, 28 December 1817: “I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Wu, 2005: 1351).

Chinese aesthetics as her link. Chinese aesthetics, according to Benjamin, create “an image beyond reference and context that becomes an image-thought in which a multitude of signs and planes melt into a kind of suspension—a gauze veil—or into a reflexive musical mirror with its resonances” (Buci-Glucksmann, 1995: 59). Trace, erasure, veil, resonance indicate a process that touches, or causes to tremble, what it never masters as representation. What Ettinger creates is, according to Buci-Glucksmann, “an image of absence.” In one sense, it is a materialisation of forgetting and erasure characteristic both of traumatic immemory and cultural foreclosure, what Ettinger names with the paradox: *la mémoire de l’oubli: the memory of the forgetting*. Buci-Glucksmann writes:

Images without witness, bearers of an *annulled gaze* upon individual and historical *violent-ness*. . . . As if seeing were conjugated with non-seeing, seeing through, in the virtual unfixableness of these composite, superimposed images, these image-thoughts. Painting was then nothing but trace (trait). (1995: 60)

In Ettinger’s use of found images, notably photographs to put through the photocopier and to make the support for her paintings to the archival turn of the 1980s, her painting makes us aware of an opening up, a destabilising, an allusiveness that refutes the closure of representation in favour of a creative instability that is the opposite of formal structuring and figurative conventions. Repetition of the image-archive, translated already into suspended tracing, trembling on ingrained and painted surfaces, undoes the search for one to one meaning. The image-trace becomes, however, increasingly familiar to any viewer of Ettinger’s paintings, and hence functions differently because Ettinger works in series (There are over forty *Eurydices*. See Figure 4-11). Through fidelity, rather than repetition, the visitor to an exhibition of Ettinger’s work begins to sense her loyalty to her Eurydice figures, what I call the three graces of catastrophe from Mizocz. Equally, the historical

photographic image also becomes defamiliarized by the constant re-art-working. The series supports the transport effected through the varying forms of the material work of colour and mark. The series creates an affective halo, resonating around the suggestive, not indexical, links to pathos, to trauma, history, compassion. The series builds up our yearning for connection that even defies the absoluteness of death.

The original photograph is a document of a terrible death. The paintings do not avoid that knowledge that the artwork is seeking an encounter with trauma; but Ettinger's work asks of we who come after, the gleaners of this terrible harvest: "what must we become in the knowledge that this has happened to our co-others?" It is much more than a question of how can we avoid forgetting, of how can we avoid commemoration as a means of forgetting. How shall any of us live with the knowledge of the trauma of the other, the deaths that marked the beginning of a new kind of dying for human beings—dying from political violence at the hands of fellow beings? How shall we live now?

Repetition of the elements of a freighted, history-bearing archive/album by means of the rhythms of the lightly loaded, finely tuned brush laid down as the hand blindly, repetitiously, rhythmically traverses a surface that becomes the joint threshold for the painting gesture and remnants of barely discernible "events" animates its own created space. Thus "painting" marks it with both a pulse of time and a duration that is encoded in the final density of increasingly impenetrable colour that meets the eye. The paintings are always about time: time spent with the work, time spent making it, time lived and experienced while working over the many years through which the paintings arrive. But they are also about touch, that is about approaching, yearning for connection that can come through painting's special relation between light and colour. This connection is the matrixial moment in opposition to the phallic process which demands either that the other is like me, and can be assimilated, or that the other is different and is to be repudiated, feared, and even destroyed.

Let me finally place this project in a critical and contemporary art context. Is Ettinger alone in returning to painting, to painting history, to thinking about painting and its transformation of the modernist other, the photograph? In 2007, Ralph Rugoff of the Hayward Gallery in London staged a survey exhibition of contemporary painting that confronts or engages with photography called *The Painting of Modern Life*. In Rugoff's exhibition, however, modern life appeared to be entirely untouched by the histories of tragedy and trauma apparent in a show curated ten years earlier at the Centre Pompidou titled *Face à l'Histoire* curated by Chris Dercon in 1996 (Rugoff, 2007). Yet history could not but insist in the three artists who framed the project: Andy Warhol playing veils of colour over screen-printed newspaper images or photographs, Luc Tuymans and Gerhard Richter.

Iconic of Tuymans' work that addresses the "belatedness" of painting in the current era of new media by mismatching the understated and often banal method of his painting to the horrific enormity of the subject it might reference, *The Gas Chamber* (1986, Collection Over Holland) by Luc Tuymans (b. 1958) is not in any way a painting of the gas chamber at Dachau visited by the artist or the one at Majdanek known to us through the most troubling passage in Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955). Patches of paint float on a surface alternating with bare canvas to configure a kind of schematic trace or punctuations of pictorial space that are evocative and empty at the same time. Showing us a gas chamber as a room like many a basement, Tuymans wanted us to see the banal and everyday in the horrific. However, disturbing, this self-consciously low-keyed painting risks negativity, wanting the image because of its immense and treacherous freight, but killing its affectivity, referentiality and historicity.

Born in 1932 and raised in East Germany, living in the West since 1961, Gerhard Richter is considered one of *the* history painters of the later twentieth century, who has long considered the relations between a displaced painting and the power of the

photographic album in the modernist century. Like a modernist Warburg, Richter works with and on the photographic archive of the German twentieth century. His work is also full of paint's modernist self-assertion, its obligation to declare itself as a medium on a flat surface. Paint disturbs and undoes the gaze of and at the photographic referents in Richter's painting (See Fig. 12). The famous blur effect blocks the viewer's desire to find the searing contingency of a once-possible reality. The eye of the viewer of a Richter painting is strained by the blur that is even more acute in the fifteen painting series *October 18, 1977* (1988) of the news photographs of the dead members of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group imprisoned in Stammheim.

In this series, photography and death are confronted as the traumatising encounter for the German democratic state that was challenged in the 1970s by the rage of its violently dissident younger generation. The major series of Richter works I have spent time contemplating come from a different moment in German history. *November, December, and January* (1989) is a vast triptych painted over three months following 9 November 1989 when Germany, divided at the end of World War II in 1945, was re-united after the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall. This date, curiously coincided with and blocked out another event in German history. 9-11 November was the date of the so-called *Kristallnacht*, the ominous and terrifying racist pogrom against Jewish Germans in 1938 that preceded the genocidal assault by Nazism on the Jews of all Europe.

In Richter's paintings, I encounter works that were clearly claiming to be historical. Their sheer scale imposes their presence on the viewer. Richter's paintings were, for me, however, mute works; as landscapes of almost geologically accumulated paint, they registered a moment in the history of a modern Germany inhabited by an after-life it can neither acknowledge nor relinquish. Richter's painting action of dragging squeegees and other non-standard painting instruments across vast canvases, breaking up and through previous layers and strata, building sediments and

excrescences, crevices and pools, creates a geological effect that makes his canvas become a landscape—of paint; that effect is its image. The painting, incited by a meditation on history does not evoke or register a *historical* event. When painting from a photograph, Richter’s method distorts his source and in his abstract mode, the density of paint allows no apparition. When encountering the painting, the viewer is rendered insignificant and is obliged to scrutinize, in vain, the encrusted and obliterated surfaces that dwarf him or her. There is a feeling of impossible solidification, and of a deadly despair.¹⁷

With Ettinger, unlike the situation with Richter, I encounter the past. I am offered a “transport- station of trauma,” a re-diffusion of its elements. Richter works with repetitious painterly action that accumulates to effect a kind of entombment as the trauma is encrypted. The work is thus profoundly melancholic. The paintings testify to an impossible, stymied, unprocessed mourning and little can emerge, or even to exist except the suffocating density of paint.

The British abstract painter Bridget Riley has spoken of her search for an understanding of the basis of colour in abstraction. She finally recognized that it was its *instability* (Riley, 1988). We see this instability in Ettinger’s latest paintings when she has been encouraged by her conversation with the later work of Monet and his dedicated study of water as the very moment that colour can be seen as light and light as the movement of the world. Flickering is a way of making the very space, texture, surface and affect of painting lively. Ettinger’s paintings are, I suggest, radically different from Tuymans’ bleached dissolution of paint’s expressive power or Richter’s abstract monumentality. Above all, her work, irrespective of scale, seeks to open up the “inner space of painting” to a feeling of a future, of a becoming, not merely by conceptually linking the

¹⁷ For a major series of critical essays on Richter’s work, see Buchloh (2009). Mourning is acknowledged by many authors to be a recurrent dimension of Richter’s work.

present with the past. In the affective resonance generated through a material process and a deep sense of the lively potential of painting, her work seeks compassionately to re-encounter and to transform by clothing the naked horror of trauma and loss with the affective cloth of life-inspiring light through colour. Life-affects rather than death-horrors can be produced poetically in painting by the manner in which it uses materials such as colour to create light coming as if from within, and animating that inner space so that, beyond the abstract veils of colour creating an ever richer, more vibrant surface, new images metamorphose on the other side of the abstractness of the paint and the dusty trace of the past. Even while confronting the traumatic death of others, as in the image from Mizocz, a sense of shared human life is being brought forth through a different, materialising and affective process, even though the artist shares with these other artists like Tuymans and Richter, a strong sense of modernist painting's still unharvested material possibilities and relevant for dealing with major historical traumas. Ettinger's work performs what I have called *differencing*. Its density does not require size to achieve its scale. Ettinger's paintings are small. This is not because the artist is a woman. Rather this artist has created a new mode of working that is non-phallic and non-monumental. Mourning, painting, remembering, fantasising open onto other processes for transformation of the residues of history, trauma and the relations of memory to futurity.

VII. Back to Theory

The Matrix concerns the fundamental fact of human subjectivity. Always, from its most archaic stirrings human subjectivity was an encounter between several co-affecting partners in a shared borderspace. The fact of being born is preceded by long encounter between more than one. If we acknowledge the matrixial dimension of subjectivity, which stems from the

specificity of feminine sexual difference, then we must also acknowledge that the violence done to any other human being is at the same time a menace to my own humanity because my humanness was from the beginning shared. We live in a world driven by intense greed, self-interest, national, racial, religious and ethnic divisions which have generated new kinds of wars and new kinds of violence: what Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero names *horrorism*: systematic and planned violence against the vulnerable (Cavarero, 2009).

If, as Ettinger asks us to contemplate, subjectivity, is foundationally several, our prolonged archaic, prenatal co-emergence into life in the presence of an unknown other lays down in each of our psyches the deep foundations of our future, mature human capacity for ethical responsiveness to others and our potentiality for compassion. The true horrors of the atrocities committed against defenceless others, wherever it occurs, is not only that their precious lives have been violently destroyed, bereaving families, destabilizing communities, erasing cultures. Acts of violence against others violate what is the gift of feminine sexual difference to humanity: a foundational sense that in becoming me, I became human always **with another to whose trauma and jouissance I may be creatively connected**. That is to say that my humanity, which is a product of co-emergence, co-affection, co-poiesis, may be brutally compromised when any other human being's humanity is violated. I will become less and less human in so far as I passively stand by or actively contribute to violence or to the violation of the right to a fully human life—safe, dignified, sufficient. Whether people are starving, or forced to migrate, or to sell their labour or their sex in order to survive, this is not human life. I suggest that we will come to recognise that certain kinds of feminist thought and its aesthetic practice can contribute to fundamental changes in the continuing tendency towards violence in our worlds through activating the ethical responsiveness to all others via the aesthetic “encounter-event” postulated by Ettinger. It is here a radically new possibility occurs: art as compassion.

VIII. Epilogue

I hope in this paper I have made more concrete the larger theoretical issues with which I am currently working around trauma, history, memory and the aesthetic. I hope I have shown the continuity of these researches with my long-standing feminist interventions in art's histories and with the political and ethical responsibilities of both art and art history. The challenges we have to meet as we become more aware of the complexity of history and its memories and the complexity of art and its potentiality are enormous; but so is the weight of the past on our shoulders and the fears for the nature of our futures, if we do not take seriously the feminist critiques of what seems now almost uncontested phallogentric, capitalist systems: cultures of death rather than cultures of life.



Figure 1. Bracha L. Ettinger in her studio, Paris, 1989 (photo: C. Abitbol).
Courtesy of the artist.

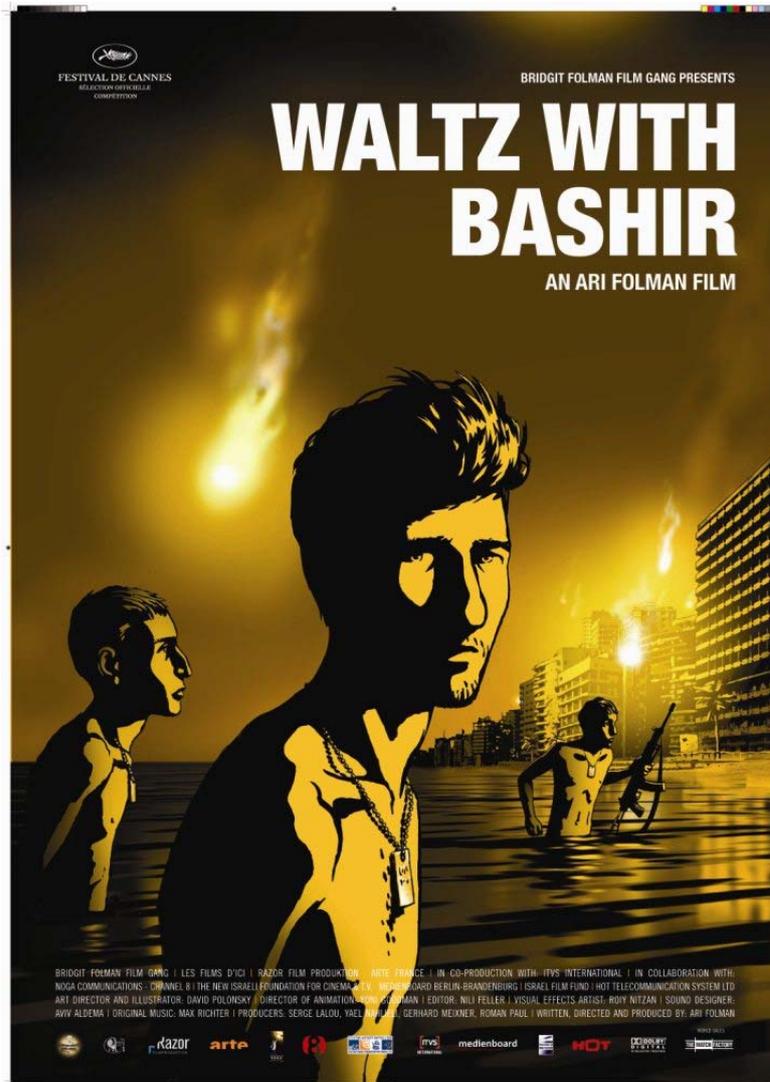


Figure 2. Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir* (poster).



Figure 3. *Women and Children before an execution by German soldiers, Mizocz, Rovno, Ukraine 14 October 1942*, photographed by Sergeant Hille of the German Gendarmerie, USHMM photograph no. W/S 17877; photograph used by Alain Resnais in *Night and Fog* (France, 1955) Public Domain.



Figure4. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice n. 5*, 1992-94, oil and photocopied dust on paper mounted on canvas, 47x 27 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice n. 14*, 1994-98, oil and photocopied dust on paper mounted on canvas, 51.5x 20 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

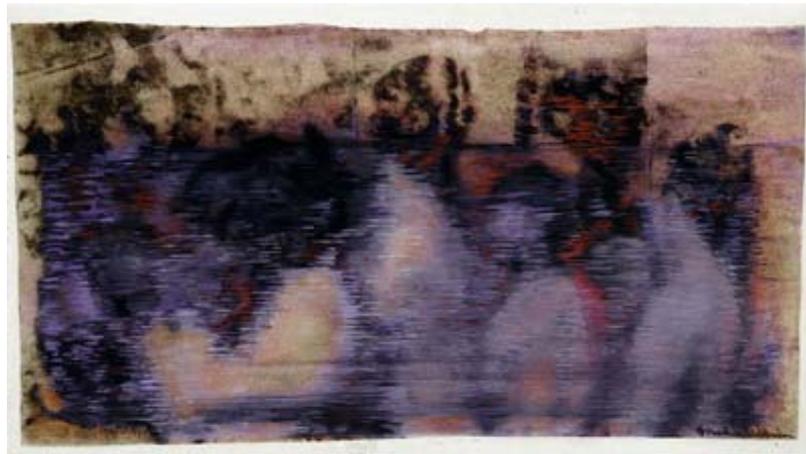


Figure 6. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice n. 23*, 1994-98, oil and photocopied dust on paper mounted on canvas, 25x47.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice n. 29*, 1994-2001, oil on paper mounted on canvas, 28.7x51.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice n. 30*, 1994-2001, oil and mixed media on paper mounted on canvas, 28.3x38.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 9. Installation of Bracha L. Ettinger's paintings in her studio, Tel Aviv 2009. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 10. Detail of installation of *Eurydice* and *No Title Yet* paintings by Bracha L. Ettinger in the Freud Museum, London, June-July 2009. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 11. Installation of Bracha L. Ettinger paintings in *Resonance, Overlay, Interweave*, Freud Museum, London, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 12. Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) *November*, 1989, oil on canvas, 320x400 cm, St. Louis Art Museum. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

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創傷時代的美學感同與見證

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摘要

以色列／法國籍藝術家與精神分析理論家艾亭格爾曾言：「在今日的藝術，我們正從幻象轉移到創傷；當代美學正從陽具崇拜的結構進入母體界思維。」本文分析艾亭格爾這一席話的意義，試圖結合女性主義及後殖民文化理論的發展成果，來討論當今國際社會所關注的創傷、記憶與美學議題。要理解二十世紀作為一個災難的世紀，需要以理論來關注創傷等概念，一如深負倫理責任感的藝術家，以創傷產生的影響之議題，喚起文化上的覺醒，並且經由藝術作品傳遞的美，潛在地提供尋找創傷痕跡的路徑。本文將介紹、闡釋、並分析艾亭格爾作為一個創傷、美學與性別差異理論家的貢獻。此外，文章也深入探討她所同時發展的母體界美學實踐的概念，透過後觀念繪畫，重新改變監控、記錄和存檔等技術的結果，作為通往一個願意接受、分擔、處理並轉化創傷的未來的管道。從我們試圖去瞭解、承認，並走出那導致我們處於後創傷時代的災難所要面對的主要挑戰，本文論證艾亭格爾母體界理論具有對陽具中心主義的想像界和象徵界增補之雙重功能。

關鍵詞：創傷、美學、母體界陰性、當代西洋繪畫