

Colourline painting by Bracha L. Ettinger: the *transject* as abstract-realist artwork in an analogue-dialogue with *the (un)heimliche*

Sofie Van Loo

We must imagine Eurydice asking Orpheus to breath-look at a future with a touching gaze, so that the breathing of her eyes would join co-re-birth with-in com-passionate co-response-ability during fascinane and by this open access to a virtual breathing gaze arising from her future.¹

Bracha L. Ettinger

Bracha L. Ettinger has invented a colourline painting with a sideways, scanning glance.² The gaze of her Eurydice opens a *subsymbolic*, *borderlinking* and *differenciating/differentiating time-space* wherein the relations between colour, light and line, abstraction and figuration produce a new kind of abstract art, an abstract realism.³ Ettinger's *trans(sub)jective* abstraction doesn't fall in a (re)presentational or conceptual art, nor in a metaphoric, mythic, symbolic or narrative imagination.⁴ Her various purple, violet, lilac and red colourlines, always subtly tuned to each other between red and blue scanning stripes and trembling white shades, are entangled in pictorial resonances with greys and parchment-coloured in-between images.⁵ Recently, these images have been transformed into a full screen abstract colourline painting. Ettinger's red and purple paintings of her *Eurydice and Ophelia* serie (1, (2002-2009) [image 1], 2, (2002-2009) [image 2], 3 (2002-2009)) and the painting *No Title Yet 1* (2003-2009) (co-)create different breathing-lights and atmospherological transpiritments compared to earlier *Eurydice* paintings. In the full screen colourline paintings in red and purple may appear a small self-portrait in the right top in *Eurydice and Ophelia* nr. 1 and a small self-portrait in the middle in *Eurydice and Ophelia* nr. 2, an image which disappears in both paintings almost immediately after you have seen it. In the last painting may appear a figure who looks like a walking male person with his hands in his pockets, and possibly many other connecting particles-some-bodies, although the viewer is gazing at the same time at a full screen abstract painting in which

different colourlines produce a colourline painting with subtized and further subtizing *colour-lights*. Bracha L. Ettinger's art is indeed not illusionistic or kinetic art. She writes: 'Painting, borderlinking and transcriptum take place when colour stops to function as colour-pigment and becomes a colour-light. It then joins the colour light that I see and through which I see the other and the world.'⁶ Her atmospherological and translighening figures or eye-heads, which are very different than the *eye-balloon* (1878) of the painter Odilon Redon, but also her own ghostly figures, blind-gazes and gazing-backs in earlier paintings of her various *Eurydice* and *Matrix Family Album* series could be perceived as integral parts of a transcaping portrait and transcaping (cosmic) landscape art⁷: linked particles-portraits touch linked particles-worlds-on-earth and these are in touch with particles-galaxies and possible particles-stars(dust). Her colourline painting can be called *transjective* abstraction or art as transject, which I understand as a new way to deal with abstraction and realism in art beyond conceptual and political (re)presentational art and beyond formalistic/mimetic versions of transformation. Could we declare that Bracha L. Ettinger has transformed her painting with some colourlines into a colourline painting in red and purple in her most recent paintings, a process that already was happening in, for example, the electrifying and vibrating paintings *Eurydice 44* (2002-06), *Eurydice 45* (2002-06), *Eurydice 46* (2001-06), three paintings in which different colour-lines become an intense abstract colourline painting in purple and violet?

Bracha L. Ettinger has introduced an art of colourlines, a pictorial sensitivity that is embodied in fine, horizontal brush strokes that neither result in monochromous areas of colourfields like in Yves Klein's work, nor in lines that enclose colours by encircling them (Piet Mondrian), nor in areas of colour that push the lines over the edge, which was the case in, for example, the late paintings by the modernist Paul Klee. Unlike Klee, Ettinger does not seek to cleanse her art from the line, or to juxtapose the line with colour. Nor does she redefine a lyrical, geometrical abstraction such as found in the work of Wassily Kandinsky. Ettinger has (probably) faced similar colourfields in purple and violet to those which Mark Rothko faced in especially his late works, but she seems to begin her *artworking* where Rothko stopped his. Ettinger herself mentions the artists Leonardo Da Vinci and Max Ernst.⁸ Da Vinci's Madonna paintings in particular could indeed be compared to her art from her aesthetic/psychoanalytical matrixial perspective, on the level of maternity for instance, and on the level of painting. Da Vinci, famous for his *sfumato*

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and aerial perspective, whose art is often analysed only from the point of view of Venetian *colorito*, combined somethings on the level of *colore/colorito* and *disegno* in his art, which was rather rare, because they were/are experienced and thought of as rival systems in his time (and in most contemporary interpretations of his time).⁹ Da Vinci, Ernst and Ettinger have in common that they paint visionarily the mystery of connected traces of the gaze of silence from/ with-in/with-out the touch(ing) of the m/other, although Da Vinci's art is of course imbedded in a renaissance humanist-religious-metaphoric-inspired context and Ernst's art could be analysed from the point of view of a surrealism and a fascinating kind of abstract expressionism. Ettinger shifts the surreal and abstract expressionism into a contemporary *borderlinking* and *differenciating-differentiating* art or a *transjective* abstraction exactly by her colourline painting which could be interpreted as a psychocorporeal threshold-realism and as an enlarged realism (cfr. Ettinger's *enlarged subjectivity*)¹⁰. Bracha L. Ettinger makes colour and line different while relating them, in colourlines, and by doing that, her colourline painting solves in fact a complex relating problem between the renaissance concepts 'line/disegno' and 'colore/colorito', which were and still often are interpreted as rivaling systems opposed to each other and which fundamentally still haunt contemporary, 'western(ized)' art and theory in an often disguised way. Her painting can be analysed as a fragilizing of the hiatus/hiati of a phallic disegno (but maybe also of a phallic colorito) towards a matrixial colorito with purple, violet and red colourlines (but maybe also a matrixial disegno), the matrixial gaze of Eurydice, without (con)fusing it with or rejecting a partly realized, partly virtual new phallic gaze, a responding of a non-symbolic Orpheus and Hamlet, which triggers a virtual *(co)response-ability* of the traces of the sexual different gazes of both sexes (and this from different directions and angles).

Bracha L. Ettinger makes clear that there is no pure matrixial gaze or object, but a hybrid one, which signifies that there are (border)links realized and still possible between (the traces of) a matrixial gaze/objects/links a and (the traces of) a phallic gaze/objects/objets a, even if they are and can be differentiated further from each other: 'The matrix is not the opposite of the Phallus, it is rather a supplementary perspective. It grants a different meaning'¹¹ and 'it [the matrix] co-exists and alternates with awareness of the phallic dimension'¹². Ettinger differentiates in her essay 'The Matrixial Gaze': 'The matrixial objet a is not a derivation of the phallic objet a, neither is it its "opposite"'.

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Rather, it has an autonomous source in feminine difference. It either precedes (probably) or co-exists with the phallic objet a.¹³ However, both co-exist on the level of the artwork:

Art bears the traces of the phallic and matrixial objet(s) a of its creation. The work of art we create, and the work of art in which we take part as viewers, is not only the gaze approaching us. The matrixial gaze is what metamorphoses us into partial-objects and partial-subjects in a matrix larger than our separate one-selves.¹⁴

Bracha L. Ettinger's transjective colourline painting and 'matrixial borderlinking and differentiating/differentiating' time-space in fact turns-over the postmodern unheimlich artwork which was disconnecting from every 'heimlich' potential.¹⁵ The uncanny image of late-postmodernism mimics the 'unheimliche' on an often pseudo-heimlich way, namely in terms of a reconstruction of this 'unheimliche', which was rather an odd thing to do, especially because this had to trigger a banalization of the same or a different 'unheimliche' in order that a conceptual, rational and/or politicized 'home' could be reconstructed beyond the artwork, but a home that wasn't 'imaged'. These unheimlich so-called homes are placed and spaced as endless repetitions of 'outsides-as-outsights'. The invisible has been reconstructed through postmodern art often on an empty stage with a focus on props confronting the living death of a mass production of generalized and fused so-called individual identities. There has been masked something that cannot be hidden anymore: a promised, hoped 'historical', transmodernist reconstruction following on a deconstructivist, conceptual postmodernism has failed in this way, in fact could become an aesthetized strategic weapon of destruction of/ for 'the other' that can kill too, although from a seemingly 'safe' distance. Contemporary art desires to go 'inside-insight/inwards' again, although it often doesn't want to deal with this 'outside-outsights' anymore, but in a quite different way than was the case during the discourse of the postmodern, so-called 'autonomous artwork'. This often seems to happen by landscaping the artwork in a romantic and/or political-ecological way, which could be called a post-postmodern issue confronting the problem again of the abstract and realism from a different angle, a problem that in fact Ettinger solved in and through her art by shifting the '(un)heimliche'. Bracha L. Ettinger read Freud's 'uncanny' from the perspective of the potential of a matrixial gaze:

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Our reading of Freud's "The uncanny" allows us to conclude that the unconscious subject is formed not only by lost phallic part-objects and the split-off or fused phallic Others, but also by matrixial transformations in the co-emerging I and non-I and their matrixial objects.¹⁶

And she writes further:

Even if the difference between the two remains in an always too early which is always too late for the Phallus, a matrixial difference is produced with-in and is accompanied by a matrixial affect that is in itself a channel for the inscription of different passages from Thing to object. Matrixial affects arise in the process of creating and viewing art, and matrixial phenomena inside and alongside the uncanny bear witness to their working-through.¹⁷

This doesn't signify that there can't be imagined a new phallic gaze from here, maybe even the possibility of 'an enough/ enoughness', which could be a new phallic gaze inspired and triggered by, and also connecting with the matrixial borderlinking and differentiating/differentiating gaze. And this responding of a new phallic gaze may inspire a new matrixial co-responding gaze too, in my interpretation in the same artwork and/or in different artworks time-spaced together. This new phallic gaze is already present or at least suggested in Ettinger's recent paintings: ghostly images don't create necessarily monsters, Orpheus-Hamlet have been touched by Eurydice-Ophelia (and the other way around). Painting has become mature, offers a new point of view on the realizations and possibilities of a sexual relation between an affective-non-cognitive time-space and an affectivated-cognitive time-space that doesn't disconnect from the affective-non-cognitive realizations and potentiality.

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Image 1: Eurydice and Ophelia 1, 2002-2009
oil on paper mounted on canvas, 51.5 x 20 cm

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Studies in The Maternal, 1 (2) 2009, www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk



Image 2: Eurydice and Ophelia no. 2, 2002-2009
oil on paper mounted on canvas, 27.6 x 18 cm

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Sofie Van Loo curated the group exhibition *Gorge(l). Oppression and Relief in Art* (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp 2006-2007) with artworks by Bracha L. Ettinger, Orla Barry, Peter Buggenhout, Alda Snopek, Pé Vermeersch, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Robert Seidel, Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman, Louise Bourgeois, Marlene Dumas, James Ensor and many others. As a freelance curator, Van Loo curated the group exhibition, *The Aerials of Sublime Transscapes* (Lokaal 01, Breda-Antwerp 2008) with works by Bracha L. Ettinger, Johan De Wilde, Peter Buggenhout, Jakrawal Nilthamrong, Ori Gersht, Nogah Engler, Amal Kenawy, Alda Snopek, Maryam Najd and many others, and *Trigger* (2008-09, One-Twenty Gallery, Ghent) with Julia Spínola, Frederic Geurts, Johan De Wilde, Ariel Schlesinger and Adriaan Verwée. She is working on a PhD on contemporary art and Bracha L. Ettinger's concepts 'borderlinking', 'differentiation/differentiation', 'transsubjectivity' and the artwork as 'transject'. She teaches art and research at the Karel De Grote Hogeschool/Sint-Lucas Antwerp and Transmedia/Sint-Lucas Brussels.

¹Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Compassionate co-response-ability. Initiation in Jointness and the link x of Matrixial Virtuality', in [exh.cat.] *Gorge(l).Oppression and relief in art*, ed. by Sofie Van Loo (Ghent: MER, 2006), p. 19.

² Sofie Van Loo, 'Colour-line-painting in purple and violet and the matrixial concepts "borderlinking-in-differentiation, and borderlinking-in-differentiation" painted by Bracha L. Ettinger: a new paradox in 21st century art and theory, a (border)linking between re-spiration and en-spirit-ment toward trans-spirit-ment', *Challenging cultures of death: Mercy not sacrifice* [conference], Trinity College, Dublin, 3rd November 2007; see also *Eros resonating between passion and "com-passion" in some "borderlinking-in-differentiating borderlinking-in-differentiating" paintings by Titian and Bracha L. Ettinger: an artistic dialogue between the 16th and the 20th/ 21st centuries*, ed. by Paul Vandenbroeck (Antwerp: Annual Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, 2006), pp. 163-215.

³ Bracha L. Ettinger thinks the matrixial metamorphic process as a 'borderlinking-in-differentiation' ('binding-in-difference/ bounding-in-difference') or a 'becoming different-in-jointness', a 'sharing with-in-difference', 'a bounding in difference in a psychic web', a 'sphere of transsubjectivity' and she analyses 'borderlinking-in-differentiation' as an 'individuating process, a becoming of uniqueness'.

⁴ Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze (1998)', in *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 149-150: 'Art evokes further instances of transsubjectivity that embrace and produce new partial subjects. It makes almost-impossible new borderlinking available out of elements and links that are already available partially and piecemeal. These elements will be transformed in ways that cannot be conceived of prior to the artwork itself, as they shift with-in-the-screen of vision inside the painting'. See Ettinger's notebooks for the concepts 'transject/transjection/transjectivity', published in [exh.cat.] *Bracha Ettinger. Resonance/Overlay/Interweave. In the Freudian Space of Memory and Migration, II. The Installation*, curated by Griselda Pollock (London: The Freud Museum, 3 June-26 July 2009), p. 13. In Ettinger's lecture

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on 'new knowledge' at the Stadsschouwburg, Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Appel, 10 February 2009) and her lectures for conferences in York, Dublin and Helsinki (2009-10) she mentioned these concepts. I analyse(d) 'the artwork as transject/ the transjective artwork' in terms of abstraction and in context of the renaissance concepts *colorito/disegno* and its afterworkings in contemporary art and departing from the colourline-paintings of Bracha L. Ettinger and her concepts 'borderlinking/ differenciation-differentiation' and 'transsubjectivity' in four guest lectures at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts, Ghent (May 19th, May 26th and June 2nd 2008), and in a lecture 'Bracha L. Ettinger's *kleurlijnen-schilderkunst en kunstwerk als transject*' at the conference *MaterieBeeld*, Ghent, Sint-Lucas, 14 December 2008 (published 2009).

⁵ For an analysis of Ettinger's small archive of photographs and her use of the photocopier to create images which are not 'an original, neither a copy', and surmounted on the canvas, see Griselda Pollock, 'The graces of catastrophe: Matrixial time and aesthetic space confront the archive of disaster', in Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum. Time, space and the archive*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 174-176; Brian Massumi, 'Painting: The voice of the grain', in [exh.cat.] *Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger. Artworking 1985-1999 (Borderline)* (Brussels: Palace of Fine Arts, 2000), p. 9.

⁶ Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Fragilization and Resistance' in [exh.cat.] *Fragilization and Resistance*, curated and ed. by Tero Nauha and Akseli Virtanen (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Fine Art, 2009), p. 115.

⁷ See for 'transcape' and difference with 'landscape': Sofie Van Loo, [exh.text.] 'The Aerials of Sublime Transscapes' (Breda/Antwerp: Lokaal 01, 2008).

⁸ Max Ernst's *frottage* method, an automatic method in which he took a drawing tool to make a rubbing over a textured surface, could be compared with the method how Ettinger used pigment, photocopied dust and 'image-ed and textured' paper surmounted on the canvas.

⁹ Rein Undusk, 'Disegno e colore: arthistorical reflections on the structuring of space', http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/kp5_03_undusk.pdf, p. 45: 'Moshe Barasch has shown that one difference between the Florentine and Venetian schools was that, while Florentines treated light and colour separately, Venetians tended to conceive of them as interrelated elements (Barasch 1978, p. 101).'

¹⁰ I don't refer to a realism in the sense of a (re)presentational objective art or a photorealism, neither do I interpret abstract-realism as a neo-magic realism or as a follower of the new realism in the sense of Pierre Restany and Yves Klein, but I interpret Ettinger's recent paintings as an abstract realism or *transjective* art which functions besides and after artistic processes of *transsubjective* and *borderlinking-in-differenciating* transformations. The abstract-realist or transjective artwork doesn't function on the level of subjects and objects, but on the level of *transjects* as transformed and transforming *transsubjects*. In fact the differentiation between subjects and objects doesn't matter anymore, which doesn't mean either that *a transject* or *a transsubject* is the fusion of (pre-)subjects and (pre-)objects, because there is no need to speak anymore of subjects and objects connected or disconnected from each other, a certain environment or a so-called origin/fundament. This new abstract-realism or transjective art is in my interpretation not a metaphysical abstraction, but it is rather its transformation. Neither is it linked to the realism which Richard Rorty tries to get rid of in his pragmatic-contingent theory. This transjective art is an abstract-realism which in fact could dialogue with for example Rorty's pragmatism (to a certain degree), it even could be

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interpreted as a trigger of a social and political pragmatism beyond strategic powergames. But I think this is only further possible and imaginable if *the trans(sub)jective* artistic is not translated into universal/unifying methods or strategies by social and political theories and is not installed in other art by a social-political theme or in a traditional conceptual or realist way. This signifies to me that each artwork, each essay on art, each arttheory, each political and social text/ theory in the first place has to be touched affectively itself and transform these affects in order it can work effectively, become imagination itself, instead of trying to translate or (re)present imagination strategically or grasp it in order to inject it into another field.

¹¹ Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Metramorphic borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace', in *Rethinking Borders*, ed. by John C. Welchman (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), p. 125.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bracha L. Ettinger, 'The Matrixial Gaze', in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 85.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁵ On the 'unheimliche' see *ibid.*, pp. 45-48, 62-63; on the 'heimlich', see Bracha L. Ettinger, 'The Heimlich', in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, pp. 157-161.

¹⁶ Bracha L. Ettinger, 'The Matrixial Gaze', p. 83.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

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