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# POINTURE

# Pointure

by ANN-MARIE TULLY

Edited by LEORA FARBER and ANN-MARIE TULLY

In describing the lace-like structure of human experience, the extraordinary Irish poet and scholar John O'Donohue points to the frailty of the human interface with the eternal, but also to an unexpected notion: that it is the ruptures in our lives, the openings – punctured, trimmed, mended, and at times raw – that are the most sublime. The recent *Pointure* exhibition<sup>1</sup> and colloquium<sup>2</sup> 'laced' together a broad range of artworks and theoretical papers that relate to artistic acts of stitching and notional derivations of this material phenomenon. In retrospect I am convinced that many, if not all, of the works and papers represented at these related events are variable manifestations in thought and deed of these themes of human fragility. In these essays and artworks, the acts of stitching, pricking, suturing, tearing, rupturing, cutting, embroidering, appliquéing, grafting, spinning and weaving, and a myriad other incarnations of this *practice of the ruptured mark*, demonstrate and invoke the incisive, deconstructive, cathartic and prophetic energy of the 'stitch'.

In both instances Derrida's probing rhetorical formulation – *pointure* – was employed as a 'loose' theoretical framework for these redolent notions of 'stitched' art practices in relation to human experience. *Pointure* is a theoretical maxim arising from Derrida's 1978 essay 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [Pointure]', in which he 'weaves together' and simultaneously 'unpicks' Heidegger and Shapiro's exploration of themes of presence in application to Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Oude Schöenen* (Old Shoes).<sup>3</sup> Within this scored parlance, *pointure* operates as a key metaphor. This mimetic word, literally relates to printing in terms of the 'small iron blade with a point, used to fix the page to be printed on to the tympan' as well as the 'the hole which it makes in the paper'; and serves the figurative purpose of opening the text for critique.<sup>4</sup> Shoemaking (in an intertextual gesture to van Gogh's shoes) is also referenced. Derrida notes that cobbling in its punctured and sewn form, as well as the lacing-eyelets on the shoe, is a practice synonymous with the term *pointure*.<sup>5</sup> The notion of *pointure* as a deconstructive trope is employed in the context of the *Pointure* exhibition and colloquium as a less reductive register through which to speak about complexes of visual culture involving *pointured* mediums and approaches, too often oversimplified into the terms of art/craft binaries. In this sense, *pointure* serves as a textual 'loom' for weaving together theory and practice, with the ease that one might lace a shoe. This extended conception of *pointure* is here entwined (by unisex design)<sup>6</sup> with Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's intrauterine-inspired matrixial theory – a 'maternal-feminine' model for human discourse.<sup>7</sup> In a leaning towards aesthetic application and revisionist thinking, matrixial theory and Derridian *pointure* share a common zeitgeist. Further to this Ettinger has on occasion also linked matrixial theory to the notion of weaving.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the articulation of '*pointure*-type' visual practices, often associated with 'women's work', matrixial theory represents significant possibilities, as it is not premised on the disavowal of the feminine, and allows for a complex 'weave' of

subjectivities within visual representation. This supplement brings together a diverse spectrum of thinking about the warp and weft of (and in) practice and being: Mary Corrigan invokes the potential of *pointure* to 'punch through' and entangle inside and outside in relation to Nandipha Mntambo's *Paso Doble* (2011); Michelle Fuller explores the permeability of a painterly translation of a 'bloody' inter-species encounter; Josephine Grindrod's paper investigates an intergenerational trauma explored through an Ettingerian model of 'weaving' together art and theory; Lucy McVade adds a further 'point' to the notion of *pointure*, with the inclusion of Roland Barthes's probing analytical tool, the *punctum*. This is an apt inclusion with regard to her discussion of the thematically incisive and liminal fashion film. Barthes's 'fashion forward' deliberations are seminal to the growth of fashion theory (a burgeoning theoretical discourse frequently enmeshed with contemporary art discourse); Nike Romano overlays being, practice and theory in a meditation on the matrix as a generative artistic and therapeutic conception; Gerhard Schoeman proposes the ghostly vacuum of the Derridian puncture-mark as the 'meta' and the 'physical' medium of Berni Searle's *Shimmer* (2011); James Sey's paper based on interactions with Bracha Ettinger translates the matrixial conception in relation to the *pointure* project; Jane Taylor's paper argues that aesthetic revolutions are instances of *pointure* – one visual language penetrating another – in relation to Masaccio's *Trinity* (1425–27); Andrea Thoma 'spins' a 'matrixial-scape' around her artistic meditation on place and dwelling; Ann-Marie Tully considers the 'sympathetic' potential of textile media in the artistic project of 'becoming animal'; and Wilhelm van Rensburg contemplates the currency of lace in contemporary art and cultural habitus.

1. I co-curated this exhibition with Jennifer Kopping at the University of Johannesburg Gallery in August 2012. The exhibition featured artists whose work demonstrates a critical engagement with '*pointure* practices'. See: <http://ann-marietully.blogspot.com/2011/08/pointure-curated-exhibition-about.html>.

2. I co-convened the colloquium *Pointure: Pointing, Puncturing Weaving and Lacing in Art Practice and Textual Discourse* with Leora Farber, in August 2012, with keynote addresses by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger and Jane Taylor.

3. Michael Payne, 'Reading Painting' in *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 220–1.

4. Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [Pointure]' [1978] in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Donald Preziosi (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 228.

5. Ibid.

6. It can be argued that *pointure*, in its 'penetrating' gesture bears a 'masculine signature'. This impression is propounded by the masculine authorship of this concept.

7. Griselda Pollock, 'Mother Trouble: The Maternal-Feminine in Phallic and Feminist Theory in Relation to Bracha Ettinger's Elaboration of Matrixial Ethics/Aesthetics' in *Studies in the Maternal* 1.1 (2009), 28. Pollock proposes that matrixial theory in its intrauterine web of subtle and fragile relations, presents a structure to 're-think' social interaction, aesthetics and ethics, without avoiding or disavowing feminine, histories, presence or relations.

8. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, 'Weaving a Woman Artist With-In the Matrixial Encounter-Event' in *Theory, Culture and Society* 21.1 (2004), 69–94.



## Interweaving the ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’ Signatures of Nandipha Mntambo’s *Paso Doble*

It is almost impossible to find photographs showing the interiors of Nandipha Mntambo’s cowhide sculptures. The catalogue for *Faena*<sup>1</sup> only presents images of the exteriors of the resin-set works, though when these hybrid sculptures/garments were displayed in the 1820 Settlers Monument Gallery and the Standard Bank Gallery visitors could peruse them from all angles. The grey undersides of the cowhides show the unsightly flipside to these appealing fur bodies-cum-garments, underscoring the desire/repulsion dialectic attached to these works. They also draw attention to the absence of a body – a female form – suggested through the silhouette. The interconnectedness between the surface and its underside evinces the interweaving between the seen and the unseen.

In his essay on the ‘Origin of the Work of Art’, Martin Heidegger proposes that it is only through art that a garment’s (or being-product’s) explicit appearance, which is the truth of its being, can be disclosed.<sup>2</sup> Challenging this idea, Jacques Derrida argues that ‘the “inside” of any (art) work is already inhabited by that which might have been bracketed as its “outside” signatures.’<sup>3</sup> Navigating away from the ontological status of art, these ideas can provide a productive prism through which to probe Mntambo’s practice, which is defined by the tension between inner and outer states. This interplay is not simply manifested in the physical character of her cowhide sculptures, but the way in which Mntambo makes use of external signs, such as the socially conditioned grammar of dress and performance, to reveal the unseen drivers underpinning them. In other words, Mntambo is always looking to get beneath the realm of appearances by replicating them. It is through the reproduction of fixed syntaxes that she erodes their stability, revealing an underlying truth not immediately available to the viewer. This approach resonates with Chus Martinez’s assertion that ‘art makes from the inside of knowledge; matter, language, images, form ... all tilting from the inside.’<sup>4</sup> My interest is to show how Mntambo disrupts the manner in which we derive knowledge, or inscribe (gender) positions in the language of dress and dance, from inside of those systems.

Mntambo withholds the ‘inner’ substance of her cowhide sculptures – the flesh of the animal and the absent form of the female frame that gives them their shape – although the putrid aroma of the skins and their hairy surfaces are redolent of a bodily presence. However, in the context of this paper and the theoretical framing of the *Pointure* colloquium I am more interested in probing Mntambo’s 2011 video *Paso Doble*, wherein the body – here, the bodies of two

dancers – is present, though Mntambo creates the conditions where the syntaxes of dance and dress work at ‘unwriting’ their presence and their subjectivities (though they are well-known performers, their identities are partially withheld). Lacing or re-lacing is a useful metaphor to define my approach. My work as a critic is centred on penetrating the surface, the appearance of an artwork and divulging its inner state or logic in such a way that these two states appear cohesive, linked – so that the meaning I assign appears to be in sync with its appearance. I follow this action but conclude by unravelling my musings, so as to demonstrate the underlying fragility of this process of textual and intellectual interweaving.

Fittingly, the term *Paso Doble*, means ‘double step’, referring to the gestural phrases that defines this traditional Spanish dance, which echoes the power interplay between matador and bull in a bull-fighting contest. The dance mirrors this dynamic of ‘dominance and ascendance and self-control comparable to the human conflict with nature.’<sup>5</sup> Significantly, this game is designed in favour of the matador, who manipulates the bull, though there is always the risk that he will be unable to take charge of the animal when it has become sufficiently enraged. The female dancer plays the victim and facilitator of this conspiracy by donning a red dress, evoking the flag that taunts the bull, while embodying the fury and rage that drives the bull towards its inevitable death. In this way she occupies the subject/object coupling. This garment demands our attention, ensuring the female dancer is an eye-catching object that flits around the stage, while the male figure, in his black and white attire is a more sombre presence, guiding her flights of fancy, her pretence at escape. Consequently, the gender dynamics are given expression through the dance. They are ingrained in the movements of the body in such a way that gender roles are almost inscribed into the reflexes of the muscles, so that gestures seem natural, and the roles biological. .

This work draws from a variety of predetermined conditions or, more specifically citational visual codes specific to dress and dance. Mntambo seems concerned with the ways art – performance – re-performs and re-inscribes social norms. For Derrida, the general condition of language is iteration, or ‘iterability’ which makes ‘theatrical utterances not an exception but an instance of the general condition of all utterances.’<sup>6</sup> As Judith Butler suggests, the law (social conventions) is dependent on being cited. She links Derrida’s concept of iterability to theories of the body, showing how the norms

that govern speech have come to inhabit the body in such a way that they appear natural; as a consequence of nature rather than imposed by culture.<sup>7</sup> This idea is reiterated in Mntambo’s practice, articulated via the cowhides, which make garments seem like natural extensions of the body rather than synthetic skins concealing the body.

Anthropologist Ernest Goffman concurs with Derrida’s notion of the language of theatre: it is ‘the quintessential repetition of our self-repetitions, the aesthetic extension of everyday life, a mirror, you might say, that nature holds up to nature,’ he states.<sup>8</sup> Goffman’s view on the nature of performance is largely determined by his ideological positioning; it is his status as an ‘outsider’ theorist that shapes his perception of performance.<sup>9</sup> This is in contrast with so-called insider theorists who work *within* the arts and are concerned with deliberate artistic performance. In this context, which reiterates the internal/external dynamic underpinning this paper, one is forced to ask at what point in *Paso Doble* does Mntambo deem it appropriate to break out of this cycle of repetition and thus carve out a position ‘outside’ the performance of iterability? In other words, when does the work reveal an internal condition that could be said to oppose its external appearance?

As a film of a performance, *Paso Doble*, immediately operates as a representation, in this case of a display of a commonplace dance idiom that has become an institutionalised and codified form.<sup>10</sup> Latin American dance is practiced in the context of couple-orientated ballroom dancing, where conforming to the rules is prized, though a large vocabulary of steps is available. So within certain parameters dancers may choose how they wish to combine particular sequences. Dancers are also free to interpret how they execute the steps. However, dance training enables individuals to ‘discipline the instinctive and culturally patterned everyday movements of the body.’<sup>11</sup> The ingrained nature of these kinetic patterns, which are practiced ad infinitum until they become unconscious gestures, not only entrenches visualisations of social relations and sexual behaviour, but as Judith Lynnee Hanna proposes, work towards erasing the dancer’s body which disappears into the movements and is eclipsed by the costume, signs and symbols of sexuality.<sup>12</sup> In other words, these syntaxes ‘unwrite’ the body’s presence.

Mntambo highlights this absence by cropping out the dancers’ upper bodies and focusing on their fast-paced footwork. In this way the performers appear as instruments or vessels for the codified signs of dance and dress that they carry. Quite subtly, Mntambo disturbs this



Nandipha Mntambo, *Paso Doble*, 2011, digital video, 9 min 11 sec. Collection: Jochen Zeitz

picture, so that the viewer is only aware of it, if at all, for a split second when the dancers’ faces come into view and their gender identity becomes uncertain. For while the dancers appear to be a male-female coupling they are in fact two women – Dada Masilo and Lulu Mlangeni. In a red dress Masilo represents the feminine figure; wearing an adaptation of the toreador’s costume Mlangeni parades as the male figure. However, Masilo’s shaven head disrupts expectations as does the ambiguity of Mlangeni’s gender.

From historical to contemporary artworks, the appearance of clothing is perceived as stating a reality, reproducing that which occurs in real life, though it is also part of a discourse to underline allegory – ‘clothing signs make visible the structure and organisation of interaction within a specific social context.’<sup>13</sup> From this point of view clothing presents both fact and fiction. In *Paso Doble* the garments help support a fiction, while overstating facts.

Uncovering these fictional identities, exposing the masquerades, isn’t the most significant aspect of this work. Rather it is the manner in which Mntambo quietly destabilises the routine by directing attention to what occurs outside of the dance. A shadow on the floor in front of the dancers shows the two bodies conjoined as if they are a peculiar hybrid creature, a shape-shifter. This dark *doppelgänger* becomes the underlying truth that they cannot outrun: that the two performers are not separate entities. Self and other, the dominant and subservient players, nature and culture have become interwoven. The dance serves as a metaphor for an inner battle for ascendance and the friction between these binaries – if they are indeed binaries for there is a sense that male/female, nature/culture

couplings are conjoined.

‘[There are] moments when we are at war with ourselves ... performing as an animal has been an eye-opener. There are elements of myself that I don’t really understand, don’t necessarily like,’ observes Mntambo,<sup>14</sup> referring to the nature versus culture dialectic that underpins the works where she dresses up as a bull or wears cowhide garments. This observation has some bearing on *Paso Doble*. Mntambo appears to search for the boundary between nature and culture, restating the signs of gender in order to discover which are biological or socially imposed. ‘The relation between culture and nature presupposed by some models of gender “construction”,’ writes Butler, ‘implies a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart.’<sup>15</sup> From this point of view, nature is gendered as feminine (the passive surface) and culture (the dominant influence) as masculine. Through the shifting shadow on the floor in front of the dancers, Mntambo shows how the boundaries between the two are being re-negotiated. However, as this debate springs from this evasive chimera – the shadow of the dancers – there remains a lingering doubt about its significance; rather like assigning value or perceiving objects in a cloud floating in the sky. Ultimately, the meaning – the unseen qualities of the work – is generated externally by the viewer.

1. Mntambo’s 2011 Standard Bank Young Artist Award exhibition.

2. Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh’ in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, D. Preziosi (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 296–300.

3. Jacques Derrida, ‘Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [Pointure]’ in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*,

D. Preziosi (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 301–15.

4. Chus Martinez, ‘How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research’ in *The Book of Books*, dOCUMENTA (13) catalogue. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012.

5. Judith Lynnee Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 4.

6. Cited by Jannelle Reinelt, ‘The Politics of Discourse: Performativity meets Theatricality’ in *Performance: Critical concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Philip Auslander (ed.), London: Routledge, 2003, 156

7. *Ibid.*, 156

8. Cited by Bert O. States, ‘Performance as Metaphor’ in *Performance: Critical concepts in Literary, and Cultural Studies*, Philip Auslander (ed.), London: Routledge, 2003, 112.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Patricia Penny, ‘Dancing at the Interface of the Social and the Theatrical: Focus on the Participatory Patterns of Contemporary Competition Ballroom Dancers in Britain’ in *The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, 17.1, (Summer 1999), 53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1290877>.

11. Judith Lynnee Hanna, 4.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

13. Ruth P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture*. Colorado: Westview Press, 2001, 9.

14. Mntambo in conversation with Ruth Simbao in *Nandipha Mntambo*, Cape Town: Stevenson, 2001, 9–23.

15. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 4.



## Untying Ties that Bind

*Behind her, I was trying to accord my look so closely to hers that, with every passing second, I began to remember her memories.<sup>1</sup>*

I made the artwork *Ties that Bind* (2010–12) to narrate an intergenerational experience of trauma, knowing that catastrophic loss could profoundly impact the way that visioning takes place in the subject. The subsequent use of the work as case study to investigate psychoanalyst/artist Bracha L. Ettinger's notion of the feminine gaze and its implications for transformation<sup>2</sup> proved highly instructive. It involved a practice of 'weaving' both art and theory together to produce new signifiers for the specific kinds of non-cognitive knowledges that the processes of art-making facilitate.<sup>3</sup>

In her radical re-theorising of the role of the feminine, Ettinger offers another way of thinking about the gaze when she contrasts 'fascinance' – an aesthetic state of relatedness arising from the archaic feminine or 'matrixial sphere' – with Jacques Lacan's notion of the 'fascinum' as the unconscious element within an image which arrests life. She considers that when abrupt separation or split occurs, *fascinance* may turn into *fascinum*.<sup>4</sup>

Using Ettinger's ideas allows a reading of *Ties that Bind* as both a *manifestation of, and simultaneous shift in*, the gaze as unconscious response to trauma. Looking at the artwork through *fascinance's* diffused and affective mode allows new, formerly invisible, links to be traced between the seemingly most significant elements of the artwork and those not intended as centrally important. This suggests that in the making and reading of art a transformative relationship to unconscious knowledge – particularly that of the archaic feminine – is possible. As Ettinger suggests, through allowing new 'links' to be made and read, art may 'untie' psychic 'knots' or strictures of repressed pain in the subject and thus hold open the possibility of transformation.<sup>5</sup>

The artwork under discussion – an installation that describes the beginning of a child's life and the rending of its future – comprises two elements. *Substrate*, a long vitrine, holds a de-constructed, re-created photograph album, evoked through paintings and found and made objects. *Mother I–VII*, a cycle of paintings of a baby and her caretakers, as well as a textual

sign, hangs at eye level above, looking out. The narrative beneath concludes with a disembodied eye. The narrative above concludes by declaring: *True Love Never Dies*.

What does the viewer first look at, for and into? Their reading begins with the closed album in the vitrine. Pages are thereafter played out in multiple horizontal formats with sequence implied. Adhering or resting on the grounds of varied papers, coarse or fine, are painted images of the album's photographs, identical in scale and pose. The images depict a couple and their infant, loving, touching and mutually gazing. These forensically re-painted photographs permit entry into the frozen and suspensive time – both past and ever present – that trauma lodges in the psyche of the subject, revealing, through the repetitively descriptive,<sup>6</sup> the use of sight as an attempt to master unbearable psychic pain. Obsessively reworked, the photographs through which one visually moves to reach the artworks' final form – an eye-like sphere – speak to the *fascinum*, which, as unconscious *object* a born of rupture, holds arresting power.<sup>7</sup>

Found objects suggestive of retrieval – as 'real' as the re-made photographs whose sequence they destabilise as the chronology plays out – are placed at the exact centre of the glassed installation; the earlier flickering register of grey and buff and sepia tones through which the viewer has been transported shift into larger, starker shapes of tonal extremity – primitive grounds of black and white on which these objects lie. Drawing on the binary terms of the phallic<sup>8</sup> – absence or presence, like or as – for the associations they invite, these objects communicate through metaphor and metonymy. Thus a folded pad of sandpaper resting within multiple grounds of darkness, evokes other smaller, interior tales of identity lost; a reversed page of black carbon paper faintly numbered calculates a multiple cost; on another gridded, abrading surface a doomed shape looms. Beyond this determining moment the narrative disrupts itself, falters, stammers.<sup>9</sup> The images repeat brokenly, seeking to redeem earlier, more comprehensible experience. A thicker book offers up a shard, a fabric scrap. Effaced faces describe sites of holding now evacuated, the baby howls in the box-like pram. A glass phial holds tiny teeth and fate's toy dice. Dis(re)membered, a child's head tops a scaffold,

a gauze-like shape is rent asunder. Dots circumnavigate a hidden heart visible beneath the full stop of an eye. This eye – omnipotent symbol of the punitive, savage superego that may arise from trauma, attacking relatedness and psychic linking<sup>10</sup> – bears witness to its own destruction. Is this the only possible ending? How might the *fascinum's* dominance shift, persecutory pain transform?<sup>11</sup>

The fixedly descriptive images which the *fascinum* has occasioned and now exhibits may be seen to exist alongside other 'sub-symbolic'<sup>12</sup> representations which speak of *fascinance*. In the first section of the vitrine, non-figural<sup>13</sup> areas suggestive of landscape or spatial structures evoke analyst Christopher Bollas's 'unthought known'.<sup>14</sup> In the second section of the vitrine – through the 'thinking' in paint' which its fluidity allows<sup>15</sup> – the dissolution of form records the incoherence of loss, drawing up from the body's register, first site of pain, 'the relief of signification'.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the haptic is elicited through the 'skins' of the various papers used; sensual substrates with which to represent the fragile, barely visible shifting of trauma and its affects. Here the feminine 'outside and beyond' the phallic<sup>17</sup> may be glimpsed, returning the viewer to touch, to that which physically links together, to sense more archaic than that of sight.<sup>18</sup>

And above the vitrine on the wall, in the cycle of works titled *Mother I–VII* hung and reflecting at head height, seven intimate black-and-white paintings state and re-instate the baby's movement from total dependence to relative autonomy. The baby is recorded lying in her pram alone, then held sitting, then standing. In these images there is evidence of something unconstrained, even joyful, alluded to finally in the declaratory stance of the child holding her caregiver's hand. Relief at the baby's reconstituted capacity to be loved and to return the viewer's gaze, relief at the concluding sign's optimistic textual proposition, allows reliance on the directly represented and iconographic narrative to be resumed.

And yet, a more profound trace of the archaic feminine, not only manifest in the material processes and abstract images of the works' making, but also in the way that the repressions in its text<sup>19</sup> have been constituted, might be missed. One may overlook what might be



Josephine Grindrod, *Ties that Bind* (detail), 2010–12, mixed media, 360 x 60cm. Photo: Kelly Walsh

intuited in an image where the artwork, as site of insight, allows 'shifts' in its 'circuits' through the restored capacity for linking, and thus the production of new meanings.<sup>20</sup> *Ties that Bind* is structured so that the multiple paintings of the child with her carers above – who look out, at, and into the long vitrine beneath – may not be comprehended in a single glance. Rather, the work invites constant relays between the figures of the child and her caregivers and the vitrine, from left to right. In the visually diffused field a loosening of the frozen relations between things is made possible. In this mode, which Ettinger terms *metamorphosis*,<sup>21</sup> something that exists on the margins of the work is revealed; motives for making *Ties that Bind* may be understood and the unbidden questions I asked of it might be answered.

Ettinger's reminder that 'a subject does not only look with desire for an absent object ... Rather, from a matrixial angle, she looks with a longing desire for the affective looking-for' is pertinent here.<sup>22</sup> The artwork maps such a search. It records my need to understand the impacts of a catastrophic event on the subject who directly experienced it. It provides a record of the 'affective looking for', and thus reassurance about what might be drawn on for survival. In the knowledge thus perceived, which passes from artwork to viewer, a quietly recurrent, lovingly constant motif makes itself, an unthought, known. Residing beneath, existing alongside the artwork's anticipated subject of trauma's feared and vengeful eye, an other sign may be discerned by those who seek it.<sup>23</sup> The work reveals multiple images of a baby on its mothers' lap; lap as love and site of linking, as *extimate*,<sup>24</sup> as grounding plane.

This motif – made visible by attending to the artwork with the matrixial gaze of *fascinance* – may be read as evidence of the archaic feminine, carrying within it the memory of Isis, mother goddess, whose lap personified the throne of Egypt.<sup>25</sup> Her slain husband was first hidden in a box, a coffin, then cut into pieces and scattered through the land. Isis found and reassembled these remnants and restored the dismembered man to life. The artwork shows what can be surmounted. Love, true love. It never dies.

- Marguerite Duras cited in Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Fascinance and the Girl-to-m/Other Matrixial Feminine Difference' in *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, Griselda Pollock (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 84.
- Ettinger, 'Fascinance', 60–93, also Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Border Space*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2006). Griselda Pollock (ed.), 'Gleaning in History or Coming After/Behind the Reapers: The Feminine, The Stranger and The Matrix in the Work and Theory of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger' in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996, 266–89.
- Griselda Pollock, 'Does Art Think: How Can We Think the Feminine Aesthetically?' in *Art and Thought*, Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen (eds.), London: Blackwell, 2003, 135–7.
- Ettinger, 'Fascinance', 61.
- Ettinger, 'Fascinance', 85.
- Pollock, *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, 274, 281, 283–4.
- Ettinger, 'Fascinance', 60–1.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 274, 278–9.
- Hein Viljoen and Chris N. van der Merwe (eds.), *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, 1, 15.
- Edna O' Shaunessy, 'Relating to the Superego' in *Bion Today*, C. Mawson (ed.), East Sussex: Routledge, 2011, 176. Phyllis Greenacre, 'Vision, Headache and the Halo: Reactions to Stress in the Course of Superego Development' in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly of the Child* 16 (1947), 177–94.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 281.
- Pollock, 'Does Art Think', 132.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 274, 281.
- Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*:

- Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, London: Free Association Books, 1987, 277–83.
- James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Painting using the Language of Alchemy*, London: Routledge, 2000, 5.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 274.
- 'Feminine does not design the opposite of the masculine in a feminine/masculine dichotomy. Feminine is to be understood, matrixially, as a differential potentiality before and beyond this [phallic] dichotomy'. Ettinger, 'Fascinance', 68.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 281, 283, 287.
- Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, London: Routledge, 1999, 101.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 285.
- 'The metamorphic consciousness has no center, cannot hold a fixed gaze – or, if it has a center, constantly slides to the borderline, to the margins. Its gaze escapes the margins and returns to the margins. Through this process the limits, borderlines and thresholds conceived are continually transgressed or dissolved, thus allowing the creation of new ones'. Ettinger cited in Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 278–9.
- Ettinger, *The Matrixial Border Space*, 72.
- Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 268.
- Term used by Jacques Lacan to define phenomena that straddle the inside-outside binary. Ettinger uses the word to 'evoke that borderline that is the inner limit of the one and the outer edge of the other at one and the same time – the womb in late pregnancy, for instance'. Pollock, 'Gleaning in History', 288.
- Anthea Cotterell and Rachel Storm (eds.), *The Ultimate Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, New York: Hermes House, 1999, 290.

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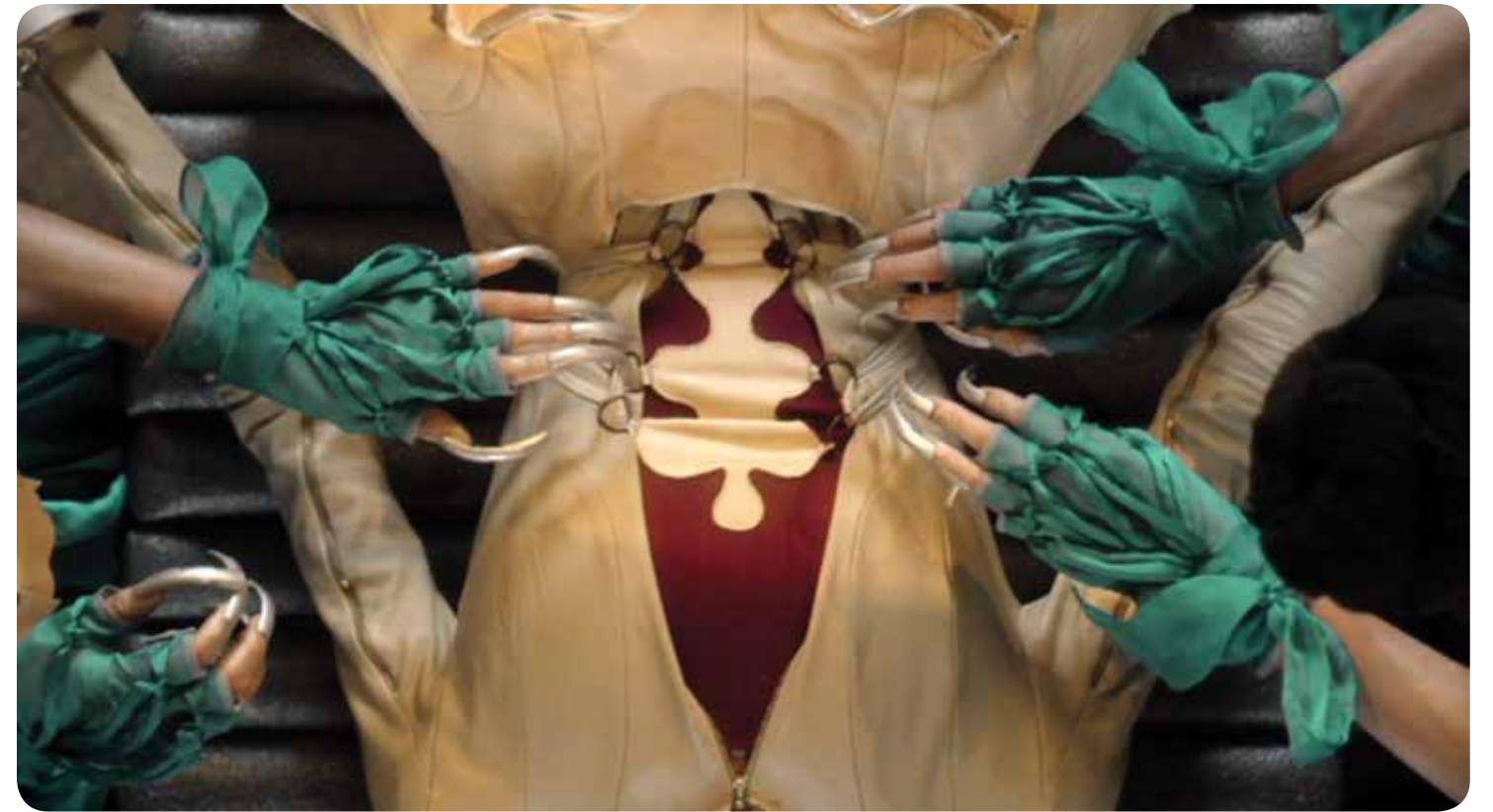
## In search of the *Punctum* in Contemporary South African Fashion Films

The introduction of the short fashion film by Nick Knight in 2000 created an arena for combining the dichotomy between commercialism and aesthetics in fashion, and, in so doing, effectively revolutionised the way in which fashion is communicated. These short films have introduced a new visual dimension to the narrative relationship between fashion and meaning, connecting links between fashion as a metaphor for modernity, reflecting current concerns and the visual impact of dislocated images into which many narratives, histories and themes are condensed. In this paper<sup>1</sup> I argue that Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum* has a very real presence in images, and that this presence is most vivid in fashion film. I argue this using director Jeana Theron's fashion film, *Anatomy of Fashion*,<sup>2</sup> which was created as a prelude to the Suzanne Heyns's 2011 Fashion Week collection, titled *Die Vorm*, shown at the Bus Factory in Newtown, Johannesburg. Nathalie Khan considers the fashion film as 'an integral part of the way fashion is represented on the Internet.'<sup>3</sup> While much has been written about fashion and fashion in film, very little has been written about fashion films. This is especially true in South Africa. The fashion film is a new platform for liminal art, fashion and sociological practice and research. In my analysis of *Anatomy of Fashion*, I trace the presence of the *punctum* through Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject and Bracha Ettinger's 'matrixial borderspace'.

Caroline Evans situates fashion at the centre of the late twentieth-century preoccupation with trauma and death. She discusses conceptual and stylistic design themes at the borders of beauty and horror, which articulate fear of alienation and loss.<sup>4</sup> Ghosts, shadows and wounds in Jacques Derrida's 'Restitutions' intersect with Evans's interrogation of nostalgia (return to the wound). Evans further explores disturbing themes such as darkness, decay, mutability and change expressed through fashion during the 1990s and the relation of such visual articulation to consumer culture and contemporary anxieties. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes and Kristeva, Evans uncovers a labyrinth of symbols and meanings to propose a new understanding of fashion's darker sides. She concludes that the 'new and still evolving, visual economy in which fashion

operates feeds on instability and alteration, always the defining characteristics of fashion. Now ... those characteristics typify the modern world, not just fashion, so that fashion becomes an emblem of modernity itself.'<sup>5</sup> Barthes's enduring and influential contribution to literary theory from the early 1960s lays the groundwork for narrative analysis, which he applied to the fashion image.<sup>6</sup> Drawing from his seminal work in the field of semiotics, Barthes examines the themes of presence and absence, and the relationship between history and death.<sup>7</sup> Kasia Houlihan, in her analysis, explores Barthes's concepts of the *stadium* and the *punctum*, which he proposes as being present in any image.<sup>8</sup> According to Houlihan, the *stadium* represents surface meaning (denotative), which is 'obvious to everyone' and is easily identified and processed. Houlihan also suggests that it is the *stadium* that attracts the viewer and provokes the desire to study and so derive meaning from the image, including an understanding of the self in relation to the image. In contrast, the *punctum* relates to an attribute of the image, which evokes a personal and disturbing experience for the viewer (connotative).<sup>9</sup> More importantly, because the *punctum* causes an (often unwanted) interaction with the unconscious, its nature is inseparable from the process of repression and repressed memories, which may account for the discomfort that it causes, and for its name, which is a Latin word derived from the Greek for trauma.<sup>10</sup> The concept of the abject is relevant to Barthes's *punctum* in that abjection is a conceivable response to the observation of a *punctum* in an image – because the *punctum* reminds the viewer of something that has been repressed, it challenges the viewer's definition of his/her identity and therefore the manner in which that identity interacts with others and the world. Such an unsettling realisation would be the kind of experience that the *punctum* might induce and the kind of experience that one may react to with abjection. Thus, it is in the destabilisation of a previously solid structure that the *punctum* finds intersection with the abject. Fashion's contingency upon concealing the abject body is subverted for example, in the work of Belgian designer Martin Margiela, a *bricoleur* of sorts, whose techniques involve deconstructing, recollecting and the stitching together of

moribund fabrics. In Margiela's designs, cut no longer follows the ideal proportions to cover the bodily flaws, but creates the space for the imprint of the individual body, reversing the relationship between the garment and the wearer, rupturing the laws of couture tradition and exaggerating the instance of abjection in relation to the female body.<sup>12</sup> Kristeva's discussion of abjection as a reaction to the resurfacing of something archaic and forgotten and as a marker to a time before humanity deemed the process of categorisation necessary, resonate with Barthes's concept of repression. According to Kristeva, an integral part of psychosexual development is the act of making the distinction between human and animal and categorising oneself and others necessarily. In doing so, an identity that is superior to the identified other is established. Subsequently, abjection would occur when this distinction is threatened and the repressed archaic memory resurfaces. The *punctum* elicited in viewers of fashion film where the body is represented as the site of a transgressive event can facilitate such a resurfacing and simultaneous abject reaction to it. In her concept of the Matrixial borderspace, Bracha Ettinger however, invites a more compassionate perspective that explores the unfolding of the sub-conscious processing and carrying of Sigmund Freud's 'archaic remnants' as trauma as a shared collective unconscious.<sup>13</sup> Ettinger allocates a psychic femininity to this phenomenon, a symbolic womb, which co-exists with the phallic dimension.<sup>14</sup> In the words of Griselda Pollock, '[T]he matrixial surfs beneath/ beside the phallic, offering a timespace for co-emerging and co-fading, borderlinking and borderspacing, over different times and different places.'<sup>15</sup> Ettinger's matrixial borderlinking sutures across the wound to interrupt trauma's persistent etching of repressed memory, darning and weaving together the indelible traces of the past into the becoming, a concept which could reconcile the viewer of the fashion film with the past and the future, trauma and healing. The rise of visual culture and online media conceivably enables an increase in abjection and instances of the *punctum*, given that both relate to visual responses. Susie Khamis and Alex Munt state that, 'the image no longer stands by itself, but is informed by multimedia;



Jeana Theron, *Anatomy of fashion*, 2011, digital still

it is usually integrated with text and music.'<sup>16</sup> If a single image is capable of preceding abjection and the *punctum*, as Kristeva and Barthes suggest, then surely the combination of images, sound, and text, as well as the level at which humanity is exposed to media could inevitably lead to instances of abjection in response to the *punctum*.

### *Anatomy of Fashion: A punctum Analysis*

*A corpse lies motionless on the slab in a cold, sterile operating table. The surgeons enter from either side of the room, their high heels echoing with every precise step. Gloves and masks are pulled on disguising, protecting, revealing and concealing. Diaphanous fabric flows as the two approach the body. False eyelashes and talon-like nails belie the masculinity of the two figures, eyes exchange glances as the task begins. The camera angle changes, drawing one into the scene, suggesting a participatory position: the observer is the third surgeon. Transported into this incisive gaze, discordant sounds echo menacingly. A 'power surge' creates a flash of light, as the talon-like nails of the 'vamp-surgeons' slice open the torso - red satin fabric exsanguinates, fold by fold.*

In Theron's fashion film the green surgical uniforms that imply gravity, power, trust and respect are subverted by the narcissistic image alluded to by long silver fingernails and heavily coated false eye-lashes. The repeated incongruities that mark this film act as an unsettling provocation, consistent with Evans's argument that images of death provoke 'instability' and 'uncertainty'. Abjection is evoked in the viewer in reaction to the image of cutting

and wounding in the film, however the visual impact of the surgeon's reassuring touch elicits the aura of a cathartic evisceration. As voluminous red silk fabric pulses from the open wound, the dual reaction of repulsion and disgust, described by Kristeva as a vortex that maintains the border between life and death, chaos and order, may emerge in the viewer, equating abjection to the horror of the unrepresentable. However, following a poignant silence, the constricted model takes a deep life giving breath, as *shekinah* light radiates through a pulsating heart, like fire, in orange and yellow hues. According to Jewish mythology this light personifies the feminine attributes of God's presence, physically manifesting in the time space continuum, suggesting restoration, consistent with Ettinger's notion of the matrixial borderspace. The frame slowly rotates to a vertical position suggestive of the resurrection, emphasising the viewer's recognition of death and the mystery of resurrection as the *punctum* of this film. Thus, Theron's film evidences the dichotomies between Kristeva's abject and Ettinger's matrixial intersecting in the instance of Barthes's notion of the *punctum*. Its vivid nature and use of imagery make it an ideal study in the intricacies of the very real concepts of the abject and the matrix. Finally, given the complex nature of these concepts and their practical applications in art, as well as the lack of academic attention devoted to fashion film, perhaps a more thorough exploration in the form of a full-length study is warranted.

1. A combined paper written by Maria Baltasar, Aimee Feinberg, Vicki Johnson, Louise McWade, Loren Philips and Yvette van den Berg (LISOF Honours Programme).
2. Jeana Theron, *Anatomy of Fashion*, 2011, online video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R3AOBmrPqM&feature=related>.
3. Nathalie Khan, 'Cutting the Fashion Body: Why the Fashion Image is no Longer Still' in *Fashion Theory – The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 16 (2012), 235–50.
4. Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, 4–7.
5. Caroline Evans, 'Yesterdays Emblems and Tomorrow's Commodities' in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 95–113.
6. Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, California: University of California Press, 1990.
7. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, London: Vintage Classics, 1993.
8. Kasia Houlihan, 'Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography', <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/barthescamera.htm>.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2005, 144.
13. Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006.
14. Griselda Pollock, 'Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?' in Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006, 6.
15. Susie Khamis and Alex Munt, 'The 3 Cs of Fashion Media Today: Convergence, Creativity and Control', [http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal\\_id=155](http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=155).



# Strategies of Play: Re-Imagining Early Childhood Experience through Art-Making

What does one do with early childhood? Or rather, what does early childhood do with us? How do we engage early childhood loss when it is about that which we are at a loss for words? How can we represent it?<sup>1</sup>

I have been mulling over Judith Butler's questions as I work towards the completion of my MFA project entitled *Evidence of Things Unseen*. This will take the form of an installation that embodies the notion of the matrix as a productive space out of which new possibilities are generated in an ongoing state of becoming. In this paper, I refer to my own practice as a case-study through which I lace together Donald Woods Winnicott's object-relations theory<sup>2</sup> and Bracha Ettinger's theory of subjectivity-as-encounter entitled the 'matrixial borderspace',<sup>3</sup> with a view to examining the possibility of re-imagining early childhood experience through the process of art-making.

My research evolves out of an intuitive process in which theory and practice emerge in an ever-shifting web of interwoven threads. This open-ended approach requires strategies that have the capacity to hold spontaneous exploration in such a way that it does not dissolve into un-contained chaos. I utilise the grid, the process of play and mapping as mechanisms that engage the complex relationship between chaos and containment, a concern that runs throughout the work.

The grid is notable in its joint spatial and temporal operation,<sup>4</sup> a paradox that opens up a transformative potential that moves beyond the binary limitations of zeros and ones with which the grid is often associated. The engagement with traces of the grid is a recurring theme that seeks to disrupt ideals of perfection and order without replacing or destroying the grid entirely. Rather, it is through the rupture of the grid that a potential that allows a certain give, or 'forgiveness of' the grid emerges. It is in notions of interplay, intersection and overlap that I attempt to reveal a space/place that generates and compassion, co-emergence, becoming and interconnection. For example in *Untitled 1*, I attempt to dissolve the dichotomy between figure and ground through the use of complex layering that reveals an ambiguous tension between space and depth. In this painting the grid appears to merge with and emerge from the ground, and draws attention to the dynamic relationship between revealing and and occlusion.

The matrix is a useful manifestation of the grid because it serves as a point of origin and not simply a device that maps what is already there. The matrix is a shifting structure that expands the scope of the grid by inscribing the possibility of that which one cannot see yet constantly experiences.<sup>5</sup> In *Untitled 2*, I explore the relationship between the visible and invisible by puncturing the surface of my paintings with laser-cut sections of a honeycomb grid. The hexagonal fissures are the threshold between the internal and the external, and offer glimpses of the inner life of the painting. Reminiscent of the crystalline formations found inside rocks, these cavities reveal an interior made of reflective materials that include mirrors, pins and residues of glitter paste.<sup>6</sup> The conflation of diffracted light, simultaneous double-sided views of the front and back of the painting, as well as fleeting glimpses of the viewer reflected in the mirrors, is a critical device that I utilise in order to draw attention to notions of the gaze. The struggle between being seen and unseen is critical to my enquiry as I activate the traces of part-narratives, part-memories both conscious and unconscious through art-making. Winnicott's theory of the maternal gaze highlights the crucial role that the mother plays in reflecting back the moods and emotions presented by the baby.<sup>7</sup> I seek to recover fragments of the reciprocal gaze in my project and engage Ettinger's theory of the matrixial gaze<sup>8</sup> which offers a transformative potential for artist and viewer.<sup>9</sup> The process of play also offers a transformative opportunity that links the past with the present.<sup>10</sup> Play is an inherently spontaneous and transitional experience that requires risk-taking in that its outcome cannot be predetermined. The studio transforms into a space of play where I engage with materials that are arranged in workstations reminiscent of early learning classrooms. I refer to crystallographer and educationalist Friedrich Froebel's kindergarten<sup>12</sup> system of early childhood education that is based on the notion of learning through play. Froebel was concerned with the connections between all forms of life and encouraged children to imagine themselves as individuals that are part of humanity as a whole. His theory evolved out of his work with rocks and crystals about which he wrote the following:

... even in these so-called lifeless stones and fragments of rock ... there lay germs of transforming, developing energy and activity ...

my rocks and crystals served me as a mirror wherein I might decry mankind, and man's development and history ... Nature and man now seemed to me mutually to explain each other, through all their numberless various stages of development.<sup>13</sup>

Materiality and making create the space in which my learning occurs. I work with everyday materials that are associated with women's craft practices and with children's play. Through repurposing these materials and objects I elevate their status. I attempt to 'redeem' these materials and place them centre-stage to encourage viewers to see them as objects or materials of potential and worth. For example, I find the materiality of tissue paper interesting because it is partially transparent and thus reveals the layers below, forming new relationships through overlap and intersection. When used to wrap gifts, this fragile material assumes the form of the object it covers, thereby performing the complex task of simultaneously concealing yet revealing the surprise. This paradox evokes the feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence that one may experience when 'opening-up' oneself to feelings of absence and loss. Synonymous with children's craft practices, decoration, parties and dress-up, glitter enchants, celebrates, allures and bedazzles. However, as a material it tends to be undervalued. In *Untitled 3*, I attempt to 'redeem' glitter from the perception of being a cheap and superficial throwaway material. I explore the tension between surface and depth as it manifests in an optical play that pulsates between the firmly embedded grains of glitter and the shifting sparkle of the diffracted light. Reminiscent of the night sky, this painting evokes a vertiginous feeling for the viewer who has to navigate this ambiguous depth of field. The large format emphasises the smallness of the individual in the face of the universe and explores the relationship between the micro and the macro. The twinkly surface draws attention to the notion of severalty as opposed to fusion when, on close inspection, the viewer observes the individual discrete units, which appear from a distance as a merged mass. The hexagon is a shape that recurs throughout my body of work and represents a 'natural mirror'. Froebel-style metaphysical enquiry entails recognition that the modular hexagonal unit serves as part of a whole. The hexagon also represents the carbon molecule that is the



Nike Romano, *Untitled 4* (detail), 2012, wood, paint, glitter, sticky tape, sweetie papers and tipped pen, 180 x 180cm. Photo: Mario Todeschini

essential building block of all organic life on earth and indeed the universe.<sup>14</sup>

The small cut outs that are scattered throughout my works are reminiscent of the counters of a board game, and I treat them as such, as I construct imaginary molecular structures that allude to the bonding of atoms at a fundamental physical (and metaphysical) level. This playful activity is an enactment of the child's desire to exercise agency in constructing his or her world.<sup>15</sup>

Mapping provides an effective visual and structural device that reveals the paradox of attempting to plot absence and loss through the drawing, redrawing and linking of the co-ordinates that make up my world. In *Untitled 4*, I construct an imaginary map that plots part-memories, narratives and encounters as I attempt, in Butler's words to 'engage early childhood loss when it is about that which we are at a loss for words.' Using rudimentary sticky tape, I create interconnected starbursts that expand in multiple directions. These constellations symbolise memories and the absence of memories and thereby require the grid to perform a complex role that moves beyond Cartesian notions of time and space to a matrixial space-time which, in Ettinger's words, 'links the time of too-early to the time of too-late and plants them in the world's time.'<sup>16</sup> There is a tension between my desire to tie up the loose ends into a neat package of resolution and the need for the project to expand organically. As each encounter transforms

that which has preceded it, new and ongoing possibilities of becoming are constantly being generated.

1. Judith Butler, 'Bracha's Eurydice' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21.1 (February 2004), 95.
2. 'Object-relations theory' refers to a set of psychoanalytic developmental and structural hypotheses that place the child's need to relate to others at the centre of human psychological motivation.
3. Ettinger defines the matrixial borderspace as 'an unconscious borderspace of simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the I and an uncognized non-I, neither fused nor rejected, which share and transmit joint hybrid and diffracted objects via conductible border links.' Bracha Ettinger, 'Trans-Subjective Transferral Borderspace' in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, Brian Massumi (ed.), Routledge: London, 2002, 223.
4. Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids' in *October*, 9, (Summer 1985), 50-64.
5. This is an uncanny description of the prebirth, intrauterine experience and draws attention to Ettinger's engagement with the term matrix, the etymology of which is the Latin word for uterus. Griselda Pollock argues that Ettinger uses the term matrix because 'it also has served, metaphorically and mathematically to signify a certain complex, or originary composite of elements.' See *Studies in the Maternal*, 1.1 (2009).
6. A matrix is also defined as a mass of fine-grained rock in which gems, crystals, or fossils are embedded.
7. Winnicott argues that the mother's ability to mirror the child is a precursor to the healthy emotional development of selfhood.
8. Ettinger argues that the artist/artwork can be understood both as symptom/patient and as a cure/doctor, thus enabling artworks to be symptomatic as well as productive of the new. Bracha Ettinger, 'Trans-Subjective Transferral Borderspace' in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, Brian Massumi (ed.), Routledge: London, 2002, 215.
9. Heather Tuffery writes 'the matrixial gaze offers the opportunity to consider the possibilities of creating,

re-establishing and working with lost, broken and unavailable gazes within image making in which an illusion of the reciprocal gaze can manifest. Heather Tuffery, 'Are you looking at me? The Reciprocal Gaze and Art Psychotherapy' in *Art Therapy Online* 1.3 (2011), 9.

10. Winnicott argues that the space of play creates a transitional space that mediates between a child's inner reality and objects and phenomena related to the external world and that the transitional space is critical for facilitating the process whereby the child begins to discover itself through individuation and separation from the mother or primary caregiver.

11. The term 'kindergarten' signifies both a garden for children, a location where they can observe and interact with nature, and also a garden of children, where they themselves can grow and develop in freedom from arbitrary political and social imperatives. <http://www.froebelweb.org/>

12. Ibid.

13. Buckyballs were detected definitively in space for the first time using the Spitzer telescope in 2010. Mike Werner, project scientist for Spitzer telescope at NASA says, 'Buckyballs may be an important form of carbon, an essential building block for life, throughout the cosmos.' [http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2012/feb/HQ\\_12-057\\_Spitzer\\_Buckyballs.html](http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2012/feb/HQ_12-057_Spitzer_Buckyballs.html).

14. In the form of the lattice, the hexagon recalls the grid in nature, at a visible and an invisible level. The use of this shape and form is an attempt to trace a links between seemingly disparate entities and embodies the notion of the matrix as a connective tissue that binds together the various threads and in so doing creates new constellations of meaning.



## Time Slows and Expands: Interlacing Black and Gold in Berni Searle's *Shimmer*

In this paper, the interlacing of black and gold, life and death, presence and absence, appearance and disappearance, and light and darkness in Berni Searle's neo-baroque exhibition *Shimmer* (2011) is explored. There are multiple departures and returns, with the first departure point being Jacques Derrida's metaphor of *pointure*, which has several connotations including to prick, make a hole, stitch. Deriving his metaphor from the work of shoemaking which, in the context of Derrida's reading of Van Gogh's painting *Old Shoes* (1886), also involves the work of mourning – making a hole is inseparable from lacing or making meaning. Hole and meaning – as well as other 'opposites' – are interlaced or interwoven. *Pointure* involves 'relation' and 'restitution', returning something to its 'original' relation to something else. Except that in Derrida's reading, tracing the 'origin' of Van Gogh's un-laced and un-paired shoes, means tracing the ghost.<sup>1</sup>

*Shimmer* is haunted by ghosts, holes, pricks and (missed) relations. As with Searle's previous work, the images in *Shimmer*, sometimes still, other times moving, operate according to a dialectics of reversal, according to which something is transformed into its opposite and back again. That which is solid becomes fluid, emptiness is transmuted into fullness, while the fleetingness of time is frozen. The reversal involves a loop (also related to shoelaces), which complicates the notion of orig(inal) or beginning – as always already gone. 'It's just gone. It's coming round again. It's just gone again.'<sup>2</sup> The images in *Shimmer* are evocative of a baroque aesthetics, according to which dynamic relations between opposites such as light and dark are concrete, tangible qualities directed at the imagination. Here gravity and grace, matter and spirit are placed 'in a relation of contradictory dynamism'<sup>3</sup> and 'infinite mediation',<sup>4</sup> which the seventeenth-century astronomer Johannes Kepler conceived of in terms of the oxymoron and the ellipse. In *Shimmer*, time stands still and flows away. Then it returns. The effect is meditative, absorptive – in Michael Fried's sense of 'lived time',<sup>5</sup> not 'time wasted' but 'time filled'.<sup>6</sup> Lived time is infinite, even if only for a moment. Infinite time is folded, as in baroque art, when outside is interlaced and folded with inside, and a fold is 'folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern'.<sup>7</sup> In *Shimmer*, black and gold surfaces are subtle folded and interlaced, reflective and absorptive, wrinkled with time. Historian Michel Pastoureau argues that, contrary to its negative position in western metaphysics, in Europe black has always stood

for powerfully opposing ideas, including good and bad. In the beginning was black, and black illuminates the sun (symbolised by the colour gold) and the light, which are the source of life. Light gives perspective and focus to what is there; it also casts shadows, which create depth and obscure. Light can be blinding while the shimmering obscurity of shadows can be revealing. Light bounces off an object or a reflective surface, like gold paint and black lace, and it emanates from them. The source of light is dark(ness), which also means light is dark in itself.

Returning to Derrida's metaphor of *pointure*, light and darkness are interlaced, which also points to the deferral implicit in the work of mourning, implied by Searle's use of black lace: instead of resolution, repetition; instead of something solid to hold onto, its ghost. I am reminded of Johannes Vermeer's painting *The Lace-maker* (1669–70), a picture of total absorption, reaching back to Penelope's mournfully/hopefully woven shroud. Lacing, weaving and the work of mourning: for what is mourning if not absorption in loss, a hole, which turns it around and around? Black and gold mutually illuminate each other, like the light and darkness in Caravaggio's paintings of resurrection and death, beauty and decay, transcendence and fallenness, immersion and severing, insight and blindness. The heart of the sun is black and, in alchemical terms, black (the colour of mud and excrement) is the *materia prima* of gold – 'an ancient symbol of the life force, perhaps its innermost emblem, seemingly substantialising the light which is its body', to quote critic Donald Kuspit.<sup>8</sup> Black and gold, like life and death, or light and darkness, are interlaced: the one grows out of the other. Appropriately *Interlaced* is also the title of a video-installation that was shown on Searle's 2011 travelling solo exhibition in Belgium, Holland and France.

In *Statues*, from the series 'Sketches for Shimmer', images and colours shift, flow, swirl and dissolve into one another, like cream in coffee, dye in water or dust or snow in the air. The transformation is continuous but like the protracted formation of stars what it entails is obscure. Time slows and expands, like the lingering ballet of the astronaut twirling weightlessly in space in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Making connections, puncturing and lacing, relating and returning take time, but, in *Shimmer*, restitutions are fleeting, fluid. One thing shades into another and empties out. Darkness never abates. Illumination, clarity and the shape of things, both earthly and celestial,

shimmer darkly – no more than an arrangement of images. Doubt and darkness are inseparable from *Shimmer's* melancholy texture. Melancholy is part and parcel of alchemy, which is another word for transformation. The alchemy of transformation and the dialectics of melancholic inspiration and debilitation are consistent throughout Searle's oeuvre. As James Elkins writes: 'Alchemy is at home in depression, uncertainty, and melancholy.'<sup>9</sup> It is a productive irony that one can be at home in homelessness or that homelessness is a condition of being at home. Being adrift may distil rootedness.

In *Shimmer*, home is interwoven with the politics of migration. 'Migration is the situation of our time,' writes theorist Mieke Bal. 'But it is also an experience of time; as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling, provisional present, with its pleasures and violence.'<sup>10</sup> One switches to the BBC or CNN on the television set, only to be overwhelmed by streaming images of civil unrest, war, destruction and displacement – in Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Libya and Syria. Everywhere people are forced en masse to leave their homes due to violence. They cross borders, legally or illegally. Home is invaded by migrating masses. So xenophobia and xenophobic violence increase.

Yet with migration and rootlessness also comes potential freedom. Artists and theorists currently celebrate mobility and heterogeneity, a global, nomadic lifestyle. The local is opened up and transformed by foreign influences. Every site is recognised as a complex, fluid network of different times and shifting points of view. Self is transgressed by the other. Yet this is the difference between art and life, or even theory and practice, because in life and practice homelessness is more often than not pure torture, unease and anxiety. Migration may be fashionable in theory and art but it can be unbearable in life.

Nevertheless, in art and theory – in thinking – homelessness is critical. In order to change one thing into another one must appreciate its 'unhousedness'.<sup>11</sup> Without appreciating the value of unhousedness and exile one cannot shift, and without shifting, one cannot produce art or rethink morality. Walter Benjamin called the moral force in art 'the expressionless' – that which shatters the false appearance of totality and interrupts the order of things (the always-same). Interruption produces renewed mobility; an open mind, where judgement is suspended. As a combination of migration and absorption, mobility and stillness Searle's video-work



Berni Searle, *Interlaced*, 2011, 3-channel HD video, 8 min 30 sec. Image courtesy Stevenson Cape Town and Johannesburg

*Interlaced*, reminds one that art can afford distance from which to see things up close, however briefly. Distance, as a pause in time, opens up time. In *Interlaced*, images slowly transform in time, distance is almost imperceptibly interlaced with proximity, and time, interrupting and integrating, is embedded and embodied.

Pastoureau notes that in the medieval era, black was the chosen colour for courtiers' habits and represented a seal of royal luxury. Among other locations for *Interlaced*, Searle chose the centuries-old Town Hall of the medieval city of Bruges, home of Hans Memling and Jan van Eyck and setting of the dark comedy-drama of folly and redemption *In Bruges* (2008). 'Filmed within Bruges,' writes Julie McGee, '*Interlaced* necessarily excavates and navigates the medieval city's embedded histories'.<sup>12</sup> *Interlaced's* multilayered alchemy is evocative of James Lee Byars's *The Golden Tower with Changing Tops* (1989), as well as the 'black gold' of the slave trade.<sup>13</sup> The interlacing of spiritual and economic transfigurations complicates the exchange of art as 'filthy lucre'.

Past and memory haunt Searle's *Lull* (2009), which forms part of the series 'Black Smoke Rising' (2010). My memory of first seeing it in 2011 haunted my viewing of it again in the context of *Shimmer*. It still haunts me. The DVD-ROM begins with the artist seen from behind, sitting on a swing roughly assembled from rope and a cut open tyre hanging from an invisible branch of a tree – reminiscent of Nina Simone's haunting line 'strange fruit blowing in the Southern breeze'. The silhouetted figure with her back to us is absorptive, in Fried's sense of the word, invisible in her visibility, like lace. In front of her is a blue lake, reeds and trees. She appears to have left the scene, but is, in fact, obscured by the leaves of a small tree.

Like the ghosts of Martin Heidegger's peasant woman, Van Gogh, or of Heidegger, Meyer Shapiro and Derrida interlaced in Van Gogh's *Old Shoes* – she remains a spectre in/of the scene/ seen. Now one sees a whole tyre hanging from a single rope. The tyre is a recurring motif in *Black Smoke Rising*: Derridean hole, 'lacing point', haunted empty place. Evocative of pictures of lynchings drifting back to us from the depths of time, 'like bodies dumped in a river',<sup>14</sup> as well as the practice of necklacing during disturbances between the ANC and Inkatha in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s – the tyre burns, falls off the rope, leaving behind rope, than nothing but black smoke. Then the haunting begins again.

Searle's video etches itself into the viewer's memory; it forms part of a seamless, 'interlaced field' in which one pictorial frame is seamlessly interwoven with another, yet, the video also punctures the screen. Video is the medium of memory, memory of memory, trace of a trace. Smoke is a metonymy of memory and of experience. Fire evokes alchemy and purification but also produces black, suffocating smoke. Something is revealed and obscured, destroyed and created. The burning tyre is a black hole in the picture, a burning presence of absence. It is a second ghost, next to the other ghost of the artist just barely visible in the pixelated field. Bal writes of video: 'Through this medium, we can grasp, perceive, and experience traces of the lives [and deaths, GS] of those who live [and die, GS] among us, but of whom we know so little.'<sup>15</sup> We grasp, perceive, and experience, we miss it all over again. Time, like gold, slips through our fingers. Time runs out, in the exact moment of re-cognition. We see and remember only 'in the darkness of the lived moment',<sup>16</sup> intricate and impervious as black smoke, lace or gold paint. We return to the other, which is

spectrally interlaced with the hole that punctures us, like Roland Barthes's *punctum*, with the time of our own unforeseen, future deaths.

1. Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]' in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 255–382.

2. *Ibid.*, 382.

3. Fernand Halryn, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*, New York: Zone Books 1993, 215.

4. *Ibid.*, 214.

5. Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 54.

6. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 51.

7. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 6.

8. Donald Kuspit, 'Alive in the Alchemical Emptiness: Jannis Kounellis's Art' in *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s*, New York: Da Capo, 1993, 177.

9. James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 155.

10. Mieke Bal, 'Heterochrony in the Act: The Migratory Politics of Time', <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/m.g.bal/bestander/Bal%20Paper%20Heterochrony%20READER%20OPMAAK.pdf>.

11. Ronald Suri Roberts, 'The Last Jewish Intellectual' in *The Sunday Independent*, 25 February 2011.

12. Julie McGee, 'Interlaced', in Berni Searle: *Interlaced*, Mirjam Westen (ed.), Arnhem: Museum voor Moderne Kunst, 2011, 22.

13. Michel Dewilde, 'The Infinite Disguising' in Berni Searle: *Interlaced*, Mirjam Westen (ed.), Arnhem: Museum voor Moderne Kunst, 2011, 50.

14. Richard Lacayo, 'Blood at the Root' in *Time* 1555.15 (17 April 2000), 53.

15. Bal, 'Heterochrony in the Act', 1.

16. Ernst Bloch in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, 393.



## Trauma, the Palimpsest and Liminality in the work of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger

Celebrated Israeli-born international artist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger recently brought a body of work to South Africa to show in Johannesburg, entitled *Lichtenberg Flower and Medusa*, as part of an exhibition and colloquium event entitled *Pointure: Puncturing, Weaving and Lacing in Art Practice and Textual Discourse*.

The event turns on a very current and dynamic field: the theoretical restoration of the processes of puncturing, weaving and lacing from a somewhat marginalised and craft-oriented position in art practice, to a position of some intellectual weight, commencing partly from Jacques Derrida's 1978 discussion of Martin Heidegger and Vincent Van Gogh in the essay 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]'.<sup>1</sup> Derrida's primary argument in the essay hinges on the significance of the trope of 'pointing' in the archaic sense of puncturing in order to admit laces or strings for weaving and binding – or, in the case of the essay, holes in the cobbler's shoes to admit shoelaces, specifically the shoes in the painting by Van Gogh. Behind the trope is an argument about puncturing a surface – a representational surface like a painting or a text – with meaning, and aesthetic meaning in particular. In this sense part of the meaning of works of art is to be found in the ways in which the medium of the artwork or the language of the text acts as a kind of suture. These representational gestures therefore introduce a necessary puncture or point to the medium in order to tie it together with meaning.

In a similar vein, Ettinger's work is centrally concerned with the idea of separation and connection – the separation of self from Others that characterises trauma, and the connection between self and Others that occurs in the encounter with the work of art. The artist is also renowned for breaking down the artificial barriers between theoretical thought and artistic practice in her oeuvre. As a trained psychoanalyst, she focuses her work on the nature of the relationship between the subject and its Others, developing a critical and an aesthetic approach in the same space in order to do so. Crucially, that focus is a feminist one, in that her work deals in a series of plangently tangential ways with the nature of a (feminine) aesthetic subjectivity in relation to its Others, a relation the artist herself terms variously a 'transjectivity', or a relation taking place within a 'matrixial borderspace'.<sup>2</sup> This liminal notion of a 'borderspace' is an unconscious non-place within which she suggests a different way of understanding the idea, common in psychoanalytic discourse, of a phallic lack in every subject, organised around the desire of the Other. While they are not equivalent, the idea of a 'matrixial' experience of subjectivity, organised around the womb-like psychic space of the matrix, enables an inter-subjective relation which transcends the terms of traumatic lack installed by the figure of the

phallus, and replaces it with a 'transjectivity' in which an ethico-aesthetic relation, as well as a willing psychic 'fragilisation' is essential for the relationship between the self and its others. This same fragilisation is necessary for the engagement between artist, viewer and work of art.

These theoretical frames form part of a creative world in which the artist produces works that are an aesthetic meditation on the ideas and experiences of trauma, loss, reconnection and the layering and relaying of experience and subjectivity. Since the 1980s her work has largely taken two forms: paintings and artist's notebooks. The paintings adopt a particular technique, that of repeatedly repainting and working over an original photocopied or digitally scanned image or set of images – sometimes maps, sometimes aerial or family photographs, sometimes found images, all of which recede as a spectral residue beneath layers of reworked and reapplied paint, additional scans and copies, photocopier dust and other detritic or dendritic materials and images. Gesturing towards the psychoanalytic oeuvre that informs the artist's work, one might call these images truly 'palimpsestuous'. The notebooks, which proliferate in every aspect of Ettinger's creative and personal life, as sketchbooks, journals, memoirs, visual experiments, accompany and provide a different kind of framing for her exhibitions. These artist's notebooks are both a supplement, and an aesthetic and psychological 'accursed share', to use Georges Bataille's<sup>3</sup> term, a necessary and yet unassimilable excess which forms a bridge between the more formal structures of canvas and paint on one hand and the language of the psyche on the other. The notebooks take time to sink in. Visually cryptic, even idiosyncratic, they contain traces of an entire aesthetic life. Sketches of memory, text, snatches of quotation, drifting thoughts, suggestions of visual imagery, splashes of colour, all are here, in various shapes and sizes and states of repair. They resemble fetish objects, recalling the faith put into such recording in notebooks by Freud as a true and faithful rendition by the analyst of the analysand's inner life.

In these two forms of the painting and the notebook, suggests Nicholas Bourriaud, Ettinger responds with depth to the contemporary 'crisis of inscription':

*If there's a notion that finds itself in crisis today, it is indeed that of inscription. How do we inscribe something? And where? In what manner? Here is what doesn't seem obvious anymore in the era of the touch screen .... [A]n entire scriptural economy has been insidiously calling itself into question. The whole gamut of the traceable and its modes of reception find themselves, in turn, affected: the pages of a*

*book, the canvas on its mount ...*<sup>4</sup>

In discussing Ettinger's working method of constantly reworked, repainted and palimpsestuous reprographic images, Bourriaud makes the point that the process is one of the reinscription of an auratic quality to the paintings, as well as a deep embeddedness in them of the experience of trauma. In Ettinger's early works the holocaust is referenced in the spectral presence of survivors of the camps, some from her own family, figures whose visual identity has faded as layers of scanning, colour and the detritus of the creative process has withdrawn them from the gaze, withdrawn them into a matrixial space within the canvas. Similarly, in the long series of iterations of paintings, notebooks and installations around the figure of Eurydice – some of which were exhibited in Johannesburg – the artist recalls, in parlaying the myth into her art, how the trauma of an irrecoverable loss is compensated for only by love and by art, in the form of Orpheus's music. It is no accident that Eurydice is recalled from the underworld only by love and by art; for any artist as familiar with psychoanalysis as Ettinger the metaphor must be resonant indeed. And yet, says Bourriaud,

*Ettinger's art does not address the holocaust, or the past, but rather the living traumatism that it has engendered, which is, as such, always present: its subject is the expungement of memory in 'figurative' dimension and the persistence of the symptom, in its brisk living state ... [H]er work arises out of a ... general study of the shock, by means of active remembrance.*<sup>5</sup>

This realisation of the presentness, in a symptomatic way, of traumatic memory, is dealt with in Ettinger's art not as a wound or as a lack, but as an encounter between the viewer and the work in which both are intertwined as subjects and objects in a palimpsestuous and matrixial space. Bourriaud calls the domain of this encounter that of the *hors*, the 'out-off', or the work of art as the signifier of an 'outside' to any encounter with the Other, recalling Bataille's theory of heterology. For Christine Buci-Glucksmann, the artist's work on trauma and melancholy has evinced an unexpected progression, prefigured by the Eurydice metaphor:

*The whole of Bracha Ettinger's work has made the transition from a melancholic ephemeral – that of the photocopy, of the annulled and unvisited gaze of the images of absence, of a grey, neutral world that has almost been plunged into a mourning intensified by the power of words – to an affirmative ephemeral that will sweep her into a coloured abstraction*



Bracha L. Ettinger, detail from artist's notebooks

*haunted by the white shadows of Eurydice. It is as though painting had succeeded in re-opening time, in emerging from the crypt of a historical survival, and in creating a dynamics of the gaze by using an other gaze that no longer exists.*<sup>6</sup>

This alternative understanding of the gaze, usually a function of the compact between artist, viewer and work of art, but also the defining function in the separation of self and other and the power relations between them, brings to the painting a sense of what Ettinger calls a 'proto-ethics': 'Affective knowledge is proto-ethical. The passage to ethics demands a decision from the subject about affective arousal, but a proto-ethical stance is prior to such arousal. In the encounter with the work of art, such an ethics and the aesthetic sense are not the same.'<sup>7</sup> The coupling of the ethical potential of the subjective encounter with the work of art is not achieved easily, but through an openness characteristic of the artist's theory of the encounter of the subject and its others in the matrixial borderspace – the transjective encounter which is a counter to the will to master. In bending the forces of colour and light in her paintings to the service of this proto-ethical encounter, Ettinger situates the work, as Bourriaud indicates, in the space of the outside, the *hors*. This liminal, threshold space is one where the fragility, and fragilisation, of the encounter with the work can be maintained and explored. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning explain it thus:

*The threshold shifts. It vibrates. It is not figure or form. Not this history, this or that memory.*

*It resonates with all it touches. But it cannot quite be seen. For Ettinger, painting is not about seeing. It is felt, it touches, it moves, it resonates. To paint the outside is about a feeling-with, a thinking-feeling that occurs in a relational field, across works in the making ... The outside is intercessor. It is felt more than seen. Thought in the feeling. 'Painting's thoughts are not the gaze's thoughts' says Ettinger. It is force before it is form, participant, enabler, disturbance before it is figure.*<sup>8</sup>

Ettinger's work thus holds in a fluid, liminal field a different kind of encounter between viewer and work, between the aesthetic affect and the ethical decision to enter the field of the work, with its allusion to trauma, loss and a matrixial recuperation.

The revelation about trauma that haunts her work, therefore, as well as the snatches of dream, text and affect which inhabit the transjective objects that are the notebooks, should resonate strongly in South Africa. The proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are generally instituted in South Africa as a symbolic historical point – an organised and archived attempt to encounter the trauma of apartheid. Within the legislative boundaries of the TRC, the dispensing of expiation and the symbolic encounter between victim and oppressor became a therapeutic process for the nation analogous to the treatment of a symptom. Yet, the analogy may have been false. True analytic therapy comes with a full and free working through of repressed material – a process ruled inadmissible by the rule of South African constitutional law,

which outlawed hate speech. The unanswered questions elided by the shortcomings of the TRC process have been tangentially and yet symptomatically addressed by a work of art in recent times, Brett Murray's *The Spear*, which has engendered the kind of public discourse about our race trauma that the TRC decided, in the interests of 'nation-building', to scrupulously avoid. Ettinger's body of work indicates how that process of engagement with trauma and the encounter between the subject and its others can be thought through and painted in a much more considered and multi-layered way than that achieved by the symptomatic discourse of racial animosity around *The Spear*.

1. Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]' in *The Art of History: A Critical Anthology*, Donald Presiozi (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 301–15.

2. Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

3. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, New York: Zone Books, 2007.

4. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Bracha Ettinger: Figures of Hors*. Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

5. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Bracha Ettinger: Figures of Hors*. Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

6. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'Eurydice's Becoming-World' in *Le Cabinet de Bracha*, exhibition catalogue, Musee D'Angers, 2011, 229.

7. Bracha Ettinger, unpublished interview with the author, 2012.

8. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, 'No Title Yet' in *Le Cabinet de Bracha*, exhibition catalogue, Musee D'Angers, 2011, 223.



# The (Woven) Lining: Invisibility and Visibility in a Visual and Textual Exploration of the Cinematic in Art

Bracha Ettinger has developed the idea of the matrix as 'a different site of sexual difference', which is not about oppositions (of the phallic I and woman as Other) but an interweaving of different 'textualities'. She calls this process of interlaced, shifting concepts 'metramorphosis'.<sup>1</sup> With the matrix, Ettinger uses the womb as image/site where togetherness-in-difference can be found. Ettinger's theorisation of the matrixial space informs the oscillation of abstraction and figuration within my practice and offers a reading that allows for the feminine to be. The concept of 'metramorphosis' enables the 'I and non-I' to co-exist, to make way for a 'this as well as that'-absence shares space with presence.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I focus on notions of visibility and invisibility as a means to reflect on how presence and absence of figuration are negotiated in a body of my work, *Thought Dwellings*, which juxtaposes painting, photography and video to explore differentiated time-space relations where place is experienced as 'nomadic dwelling'.<sup>3</sup>

Relations between abstraction and figuration have always woven their way through my painting. From figure as figure, to figure as text, to figure as line, to figure as gesture, to photographed (filmed) figure – there is 'presencing'<sup>4</sup> of the figure as a way of reflecting Dasein<sup>5</sup> (being-in the world), which co-involves a space of absence. In my *Lines of Light* paintings, space becomes abstraction, colour defines space, 'lines of light' move across the canvas where actual abstract space incorporates the potential of figuration as projection, as virtuality, as invisible lining within the visibility of the colour bands – this involves the idea of the cinematic, of movement within 'un-moving' images.<sup>6</sup>

The presence of the figure in my photography and video points to what has been,<sup>7</sup> indicating the world out-there. Again there is movement, as multiple contour lines in the photographs – some of these are submitted to erasure, to a 'burning'<sup>8</sup> through over or underexposure – or as moving images and/or sound in the video work. Within this togetherness of difference, an awareness of various time flows or qualities of duration emerges that owes to Henri Bergson's idea of 'duration as multiplicity',<sup>9</sup> and is reflected in the juxtaposition of diverse visual signifiers.<sup>9</sup> Where is the body of the maker/viewer in this? 'Moving between images'<sup>10</sup> – as does the nomad between 'smooth' and 'striated' space,

between the close proximity of the haptic and the long-distance vistas of the striated.<sup>11</sup> This movement evokes a 'state of becoming'.<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizomatic expansion has marked the conceptual and practical development of *Thought Dwellings* where individual artworks are understood as floating signifiers that can be orchestrated in ever-changing constellations. The idea of absence and presence involves a reflection on time, an awareness of the present and its juxtaposition with the recollection of the past – I am indebted to Deleuze's concept of the time-image, in particular the crystal image as a 'point of indiscernibility' where presence (as actuality) and absence (as virtuality) co-exist.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the temporal dimension of the actual and the virtual, one needs to consider their implication in terms of visibility. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the visible and the invisible allows for an interpretation of presence and absence (of figuration) as togetherness:

In 'Eye and Mind', the invisible is not the nonvisible. The word 'invisible' is perfectly chosen. The lines of visible things are doubled by a lining of invisibility that is in the visible. Merleau-Ponty stresses this, and by doing so decentres the aesthetic task and desire away from the pursuit of an invisibility that would be a separate reality ...<sup>14</sup>

This possibility of alternation, of movement between the visible and the invisible, is a main concern within my practice. One could argue that within the abstraction of the *Lines of Light* series of paintings, the invisible refers to figuration as the indexical quality of the everyday, as inner lining or memory, but also, in a Deleuzian sense, as possibility – a virtuality that co-exists within the actuality of the painted colour bands. Likewise, within the (indexical) figuration of photography and video, abstraction co-habits – at times within the visible as bands or lines of (colour) light, at times abstraction starts to engulf the image through erasure (over or under-exposure). Similarly, the white lines in the paintings refer to non-colour, to light as absence – another form of erasure.<sup>15</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's thinking the phenomenology of perception is linked to embodiment where consciousness of the world around is mediated by the body/flesh.<sup>16</sup> Vision is for him 'anti-Platonic' and takes part, as do the other senses,

in the process of perception, which he does not want to be reduced to 'disembodied' cognition. His understanding of vision involves a realm that is both tactile and visual and does not subscribe to a 'dichotomous logic of the visible and invisible'.<sup>17</sup> By contrasting Merleau-Ponty's concept of light, flesh and invisible with her own position, Luce Irigaray articulates a notion of vision and touch where 'the tangible invisible is a non-reflexive indetermination of flesh in/between flesh'.<sup>18</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu observes:

For Merleau-Ponty, light appears not as a transcendent ideality, but is an ideality that is inextricable from its unrepresentable carnal meaning ... By way of contrast Irigaray states 'I see only by the touch of light'. This is light which, before it is accountable in terms of the look of the seer, has a tangibility that conducts me without knowledge to the no-thing-ness of my carnality.<sup>19</sup>

For this study, Bracha Ettinger's concept of the matrix as co-existence of self and other is highly relevant, so is her art practice, which has greatly influenced her theorisation and represents a complex and deeply moving body of work that *speaks* to me as artist/researcher just as much as her theory confirms my concerns with presence and absence of the figurative dimension.<sup>20</sup>

In her art, Ettinger engages with the figure and its absence, often by interweaving diverse visual and textual signifiers, which seem to be visible and simultaneously invisible. Some of the figures are repeated in different images, obliterated, covered and through this process, revealed in their vulnerability and their strength. At times lines run across the image, as movement, as (colour) light, but also as whiteness or non-light – as absence.

Of particular interest here is her 'Eurydice' series, based on a 'matrixial figure' that has 'moved between shadow and light' involving a 'remembrance of the forgotten and the unforgettable'.<sup>21</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann sees these paintings to 'stand between two worlds' tending to a 'reinvention' of abstraction.<sup>22</sup> Ettinger contrasts the matrixial realm of the womb with the Law of the Father (the Symbolic Order of the Phallus).<sup>23</sup> She sees the former as a 'prenatal symbolic space' where the relation between the (phallic) One and (woman) as other



Andrea Thoma, *White Lines/Pink, Blue and Brown*, 2010, oil, 2 x 160 x 140cm; *Train journey/Inntal*, 2010, digital photograph, 100 x 67cm. Photo: Andrea Thoma

is replaced by a togetherness-in-difference of 'several ones before the One':

Matrix is not about the Woman, but about feminine dimension of plurality and difference of the several in joint subjectivity via metramorphosis ... The emergence of the phallic I entails loss, and so does the emergence of the matrixial I and non-I ... Within the matrixial network, what is lost to the one can be inscribed as traces in the other ...<sup>24</sup>

The orchestration of diverse elements, as 'several ones' rather than One and the other is an inherent strategy in my visual thinking – painting is next to photography is next to video – hence my affinity with Ettinger's 'metramorphosis' allowing to 'include rather, than exclude'.<sup>25</sup> Through this discussion, I explore how through an interweaving of diverse visual methods in search of the cinematic, presence and absence can be thought not as antagonism of one versus the other, but as movement between Ettinger's '*I and non-I*' where the proximity of the smooth and the distance of the striated are interlaced, offering multiple takes on the visible and its invisible lining.

1. See Griselda Pollock, 'Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference' in *The Matrixial Borderspace: Bracha L. Ettinger*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 6.

2. Ettinger sees 'Metamorphosis' as the 'becoming threshold of borderlines'. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, *Matrix – Borderlines*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, 13.

3. 'Nomadic dwelling' relates to Martin Heidegger's dwelling in nearness within the nomad's experience of place. See Andrea Thoma, 'The Making of Place to Enable Memory' in *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*, 5.1/2, 2006, 83–93.

4. 'Heidegger's) clearing is where we encounter those beings we are not, and are granted access to the being we are ... Any being that is concealed is at the same time brought into the open in its concealment ... Truth happens when the counterplay of world and earth is unconcealed ... with the presencing of being, through an unconcealment that is at the same time a concealment'. See Jonathan Dronsfeld, 'The Work of Art' in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, Bret W. Davis (ed.), Durham: Acumen, 2010, 133–4.

5. Heidegger's 'Dasein' refers to an existence that is conscious of its own 'Being'. David Farnell Krell (ed.) *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, London: Routledge, 1978, 48.

6. John Rajchman suggests the need to consider the influence of the cinematic, of the Deleuzian 'movement- and time-image', within so called 'un-moving' images. John Rajchman, 'Deleuze's Time, or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art' in *Art and the Moving Image*, Tanya Leighton (ed.), London: Tate Publishing, 2008, 317–8.

7. See Roland Barthes's discussion of the indexical quality of photography. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Vintage, 1993.

8. See Georges Didi-Huberman's discussion of the 'burning' light of an image, as absence or erasure. Georges Didi-Huberman, 'L'Image Brûle' in *Penser par les Images*, Laurent Zimmermann (ed.), Paris: Editions Cecile Defaut, 2006, 11–52.

9. Bergson asks: 'What is duration within us? A qualitative multiplicity, with no likeness to number ... a pure heterogeneity within which there are no distinct qualities ... the moments of inner duration are not external to one another'. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1910, 226

10. For a detailed appraisal of medium specificity in a post-medium context, see Andrea Thoma, 'The Conundrum of Medium Specificity' in *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, 4.5, 2009, 523–34.

11. Andrea Thoma, 'Moving Between Images: The Orchestration of Diverse Time-Space Constructs in Fine Art Practice', *International Journal of the Image*, 1.2, 2011 15–26.

12. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the notion of nomadic existence and the immersion in smooth space as opposed to striated space. The latter relates to 'long-distance vision' and to 'the constitution of a central perspective', whereas smooth space is 'close vision *par excellence*' that can involve the visual and auditory as much as it is related to tactility. In their reading of Wilhelm Worringer, this oscillation between different qualities of space is further differentiated by the dichotomy of 'abstract line-concrete line'. Gilles

Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London: Athlone, 1988, 493–96.

13. 'A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both.' Ibid., 293.

14. Deleuze's 'time-image' is developed from a Bergsonian vision of recollection, duration and actuality and its visualisation in the crystal. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, London: Athlone, 1989, 79.

15. Galen A. Johnson, 'Ontology and Painting: Eye and Mind' in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Galen A. Johnson (ed.), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 52–3.

16. Ettinger writes: 'White space. The "minus" (–) of all that is more than one. Matrix, blind earth.' Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, *Matrix Halala(lapsus): Notes on Painting*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993.

17. Johnson discusses Merleau-Ponty's term 'Flesh' considering it a 'doubling with difference (*écart*) between self and world'. Galen A. Johnson, 49.

18. Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, Oxon: Routledge, 1998, 41.

19. Ibid., 72.

20. Ibid., 69.

21. However, one needs to state a difference in motivation. My concerns with absence and presence are informed by philosophical queries of how one might reflect on (Heideggerian) Dasein, whereas Ettinger's agenda is deeply embedded within the urgency, as Griselda Pollock stresses, to 'work through' images, which touch on the trauma of the Holocaust where absence refers to loss, caused by the unspeakable horror of the Shoa. Griselda Pollock, 'After the Reapers: Gleaning the Past, the Feminine and Another Future, from the Work of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger' in *Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: Halala – Autistwork*, Aix en Provence: Arfiac, 1995, 136.

22. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'Eurydice's Becoming World' in *Le cabinet de Bracha: Carnets, Dessins, Peintures, Scanographies 1981–2011*, Angers: Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers, 2011, 227–8.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 59.

25. Bracha Lichtenberg, *Matrix – Borderlines*, 18.



# The Shamanic Seam: Transnatured Humanities and Sutured Animal Bodies in Contemporary Visual Practice.

Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass assert that ‘Clothing is a ghost that, even when discarded, still has the power to haunt’.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I ‘prick the surface’ of this indexically motivated mystic notion of the stitched mark. Artists such as Christian Boltanski and Nick Cave have drawn attention to the sympathetic resonance of garments lost, dispossessed and discarded, as well as the transmogriying and performative potential of sewn and embroidered textile forms. While contextualising the mythic roots of the anthropological investment in the stitch, I focus here on the animal (*aniborg*) character of much contemporary textile art and fashion where the ‘warp’ of human flesh and the ‘weft’ of animal bodies and signifiers thereof meet under the confluence of ‘textile enchantment’.

## The Ghost in the Stitch: Weaving and Warping the World

The artisanal and artistic acts of stitching, pricking, suturing, tearing, rupturing, cutting, embroidering, appliquéing, grafting, spinning and weaving, and a myriad other incarnations of this *practice of the ruptured mark*, demonstrate the enduring cathartic and prophetic energy of the stitch. In the act of configuring things previously unseen or fragmented into holistic form, through an often-violent gesture that opens, binds, and can injure its maker, the *ancient practice of the seam* is imbued with a shamanic and supernatural sensibility.

The attachment of mystic sensibility to material practice is evidenced in the plethora of myth around spinning and weaving. The economic power available to women in pre-industrial life from spinning or weaving found ready translation into notions of mystic power in feminine figures such as Homer’s Penelope.<sup>2</sup> Penelope weaves a shroud for Odysseus’s father Laertes and tentatively promises that when it is completed she will accept one of the suitors that surround her during the absence of her husband.<sup>3</sup> With the intention of ‘buying time’ for the return of her husband Odysseus, every night Penelope unravels the weaving of the day.<sup>4</sup> In this nightly unravelling Penelope employs ‘sympathetic magic’ and demonstrates an influence over the ontological world.<sup>5</sup> The warp and weft of the shroud signify time and space in this magical cloak (and in this resemble later mythical garments of physical power, such as cloaks of invisibility). In unravelling these cosmic forces, Penelope literally arrests time in an act of love and longing for her husband.<sup>6</sup> Since the shroud is also a death robe for her father-in-law, Penelope’s actions prefigure death in the movement towards completion, and restore life in the deconstructive gesture.<sup>7</sup> Renaissance re-writings of Penelope represent her as spinning rather

than weaving and thus connect this beguiling practice with the perceived threat of a malign power over mortality in the predominantly feminine practice of spinning in the Renaissance world.<sup>8</sup> The association of spinning with witchcraft in the Catholic western world took on an ominous and misogynistic character, but is nonetheless the root of cultural confluences of mortality with the idea of spun thread.<sup>9</sup>

## The Ghost in the Stitch: A Cobbled Rhetoric

‘Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [“Pointure”]’ (1978),<sup>10</sup> Derrida’s deconstructive exploration of Heidegger’s ‘Origin of the Work of Art’ (1950)<sup>11</sup> employs a rhetorical reference to shoemaking or cobbling. Derrida employs this figurative device in a ‘cobbled’ polylogue that critiques Heidegger’s philosophical exploration of themes of presence in Van Gogh’s painting, *Oude Schöenen (Old Shoes)* (1886), and also reflects on Meyer Shapiro’s critique of Heidegger’s theses entitled ‘The Still Life as Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh’ (1968).<sup>12</sup> This reference to cobbling and shoemaking is drawn from the spectre of Van Gogh’s shoes and ‘ties’ the term *pointure* into the text as a metaphoric fulcrum. *Pointure* is synonymous with shoemaking, referring in the commonplace sense to the size of a shoe, but also by word association to the puncturing-action of cobbling.<sup>13</sup> The related notion of lacing the two sides of a shoe is also present in this panoply of metaphors: ‘relation’ and ‘restitution’ of things otherwise separate (painting and language).<sup>14</sup> In ‘spinning out’ the notion of ‘lacing a shoe’, Derrida points to the French translation of the word ‘lace’, ‘*le lacet*’, which can also mean ‘trap’ or ‘snare’.<sup>15</sup> In this sense Van Gogh’s empty shoes with open laces represent an empty trap, a vacuum of presence to delve into – *where only ghosts can be found*. ‘Ghost’ is the most poignant metaphor in ‘Restitutions’ (pointing to the desires of art viewers).<sup>16</sup> For Heidegger the empty shoes resonate with the ghost of a peasant woman and in their ‘unfilled’ presence point to the ontology of all beings, *non-being*, while for Shapiro they remain an indexical portrait of Van Gogh.<sup>17</sup> It would seem that whether one looks to historical myth or contemporary theory the notion of supernatural fecundity is a resident feature of the punctured mark and the variable linking media that join and close these openings of human origin. The notion of *pointure* as a critical modality (probing, piercing and configuring) can be aptly re-purposed for ‘framing’ contemporary textile related art practices outside of the reductive terms of art/craft binaries. The Derridian association of the term *pointure* with the traditionally masculine profession of

shoemaking also serves as a useful counterpoint to the predominantly feminine overtones of stitching discourse; stressing rather the broad anthropological significance of *pointured* contemporary art practices.

## Textile that ‘Becomes Animal’

Deleuze and Guattari position supernatural therianthropic beings emerging from contagion as a rhetorical conception aligned with their theory of ‘becoming animal’.<sup>18</sup> They cite the vampire or werewolf as an example of contagious hybrid/animal transformations.<sup>19</sup> They also discuss theological conceptions of ‘becoming animal’ including the idea that a subject can imagine themselves to have transformed into an animal.<sup>20</sup> This perceived animal transformation is relevant to this discussion of material and *‘pointured’* forms. Further to the reference to supernatural chimerical beings, the sorcerer is also an analogy through which Deleuze and Guattari construct their notion of ‘becoming animal’.<sup>21</sup> In cultural terms the sorcerer or shamanic figure is traditionally adorned in animal artefacts, sewn and intermingled with enchanted embroidery motifs often representing animal figures. The belief in the ‘power’ of textile and embroidery signifiers bearing animal signs or indexes to ward off evil spirits and ‘channel the energies’ of animal totems is a ubiquitous anthropological feature.<sup>22</sup> Human/animal transformations, whether undertaken by shamans, madmen or artists are predominantly manifest through the conspicuous and symbolically communicative method of dress and adornment. Alison Lurie notes that clothes do more than just protect the fragile body from the elements, also serving as a language of signifiers.<sup>23</sup> She notes that belief in the sympathetic magic of material elements is still present in contemporary life, visible in the belief in objects such as wedding rings and ‘lucky’ items of clothing.<sup>24</sup> Lurie’s point that ‘articles of clothing, may be treated as if they had manna, the impersonal supernatural force that tends to concentrate itself in objects’ is in confluence with Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the contagious nature of becomings – that contagion is at work in the ‘becoming significant’ of a garment which may have been worn at, or made for a fortuitous event.<sup>25</sup> This agreement on the latent potential of dress provides some reasoning for the frequent employment of animal related dress and adornment in conspicuous ‘animal becomings’ in contemporary visual culture.<sup>26</sup>

## ‘Textiled’ Animal Enchantments: Homeopathic and Contagious Magic in the ‘Fan-Generated’ Imagery of Lady Gaga and the Work of Nandipha

## Mntambo and Marion Laval-Jeantet

James Frazer, the British social anthropologist and folklorist proposed that the two generating principles of sympathetic magic are Homeopathic magic (the Law of Similarity) and Contagious magic (the Law of Contact).<sup>27</sup> Homeopathic magic is imitative and performance oriented, mimicking (often through textile and material means) the desired outcome; while contagious magic involves direct contact with the target.<sup>28</sup> Frazer notes that ‘both principles may be involved in one and the same custom’.<sup>29</sup> These anthropological categories are useful to consider in relation to textile human animal transformations in contemporary visual culture and art.

In numerous origin cultures ‘magical’ objects are made by women, whose ‘miraculous’ fertility (a malignant notion subscribed to well into the eighteenth century when conception was firmly linked to sexual intercourse) connected the female gender with witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>30</sup> Embroidery is often embroiled in this conflation of women and witchcraft: amongst the Ghiliak people of Siberia men reportedly steer clear of women embroidering due to their belief that the loops forged by ‘witch embroiderers’ can ensnare the souls of people standing in their presence.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation of the pop star and provocateur Lady Gaga’s into a unicorn (also known as ‘the Gagacorn’) is reminiscent of a homeopathic mode of textile sympathetic magic; evoking notions of feminine propensity for mysticism and animality. This uncanny image, generated through the synthetic sculptural staging of fashion items, attains its mystical quality through a *pointured* resemblance to mythic creatures. The horned headdress in this image references the unicorn, while drawing on an archetypal reverence for the ability of horned and antlered animals shed and re-grow horns.<sup>32</sup> Horns, antlers and the like occur frequently in abstracted homeopathic textile motifs.

Nandipha Mntambo’s work *Europa* (2008) – a performative/photographic transformation into a human/bovine creature – also operates through a homeopathic model, whereby the ‘magical transformation’ is achieved through fashioned mimesis. However, the ears and horns, grafted to the figure’s head, appear to be real animal elements. This human contact with non-human organic material represents contagious sympathetic magic, whereby the ‘wearer’ is ‘infected’ and ‘transformed’ through contact.<sup>33</sup> Mntambo’s series, ‘Silent Embrace’ (2007) where the artist uses cowhide in a moulding process that leaves traces of her form in the animal substrate is replete with references to contagious ‘magical transfer’. The law of similarity is also present in these works in that the cowhide resembles human form, and is emblematic of the bovine origins of the medium. Marion Laval-Jeantet’s performance *Que le cheval vive en moi* (May the horse live in me) (2011) is equally invested in both modes of sympathetic magic. In this performance the artist wears ‘cobbled’ stilts fitted with horse hooves. These horse-stilts constitute the laws of similarity and contagion. The latter is further manifest in the artist’s act of injecting herself with horse blood and interacting with the donor creature.<sup>34</sup> Despite the unsettling impression of

the artist’s hybrid chemistry (the effect of which is not readily visible), the cobbled horse-stilts are the major textile or *pointured* contribution to this ‘horse haunting’ event. They are also what lingers on in the viewer’s imagination, and are a testament to the potency of textile and material animal elements in the artistic project of ‘becoming animal’.

1. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 4.
2. *Ibid.*, 104–6.
3. *Ibid.*, 110.
4. *Ibid.*
5. The term ‘sympathetic magic’ is an anthropological term referring to the practice and belief in ‘magical’ cause-and-effect through resemblance and contact. I employ this term cautiously. James G. Frazer’s definition of sympathetic magic is a key concept in relation to historical beliefs and Deleuzian cultural theory of ‘becoming animal’. I am also mindful of critiques of Frazer’s work.
6. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 110.
7. *Ibid.*, 116.
8. *Ibid.*, 105.
9. *Ibid.*, 117. The ancient Greeks believed that life took the form of a mystic thread, and that the three Moirai, or Fates, spun, measured and cut it.
10. Jacques Derrida, ‘Restitutions of the truth in pointing [“Pointure”]’ in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Donald Preziosi (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 301–15.
11. Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, 284–95.
12. Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh’, in *The Art of Art history: A Critical Anthology*, 296–300.
13. Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 228.
14. *Ibid.*, 229.
15. *Ibid.*, 230.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, ‘Becoming Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming Imperceptible’ in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London: Continuum, 1988, 241.
19. *Ibid.*, 242.
20. *Ibid.*, 252–3. In all these instances of fantastical and more reasoned possibilities of human/animal transformation (becoming animal), Deleuze and Guattari point to a connection between animal beings and human beings in terms of participation and alliance, which alters the original form of individuation irreconcilably. In terms of art practice the experience of an animal transformation generally differs from a supernatural experience of sensory inter-species transport.
21. *Ibid.*, 246.
22. Sheila Paine, *Embroidered Textiles: A World Guide to Traditional Patterns*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1998, 158.
23. Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, Hamlyn: Great Britain, 1983, 7.
24. *Ibid.*, 10.
25. *Ibid.* See also Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Becoming Intense’, 241.
26. I employ the term ‘conspicuous’ to align the notion of ‘dressing-for-animal-transformation’ with the Marxist critic Thorstein Veblen’s notion of ‘conspicuous consumption’. See Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Classes*, New York: Macmillan, 1912.
27. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [1890], London: Macmillan, 1955, 114.
28. *Ibid.*, 115.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Sheila Paine, *Embroidered Textiles*, 188.
31. *Ibid.* 188. The Ghiliak verb ‘*tcagott*’ has two meanings: to embroider patterns and to cast spells.
32. Sheila Paine, *Embroidered Textiles*, 152.
33. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 115.
34. ‘Que le cheval vive en moi (May the horse live in me)’, <http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2011/08/que-le-cheval-vive-en-moi-may.php>.

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**BELOW AND BOTTOM**  
Marion Laval-Jeantet,  
*Que le cheval vive en moi*  
(May the horse live in me),  
2011, performance. Image  
courtesy the artist





## Negotiated Property: Lace in Contemporary Art

This article is an exploration of ideas prompted by the recent *Pointure* exhibition at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery. It shifts the gaze from those contemporary works on exhibition that involve, predominantly, the use of *embroidery*, to those singular works<sup>1</sup> that use *lace*.

The *pointure* of lace-making may well be found in (and beyond) the 'pricking' of the 'ground', or background pattern, of lace. Pricking in this regard constitutes the positioning of the pins on a pillow, usually made of velvet, to form the coordinates of the pattern. Next, the various strands of thread are entwined around and through these pins to form the pattern, which is then taken off the pins and separated from the ground to exist, virtually independently, in space. Traditionally lace is defined as interlocking structures in patterns that permit light to pass through them – 'stitches in air' – creating an interaction of networks.<sup>2</sup> John O'Donohue expands this trope when he uses lace as a metaphor for spiritual wisdom, likening it to those 'sudden apertures in our patterned lives' that enable such sagacity.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, lace is also seen in terms of its decorative uses as accoutrement in the world of effete and/or erotic fashion.

Lace in contemporary art, on the other hand, is conceived of in a radically different way with regard to the medium, the technique, the shapes it assumes (art works in their own right, not mere decoration for garments), as well as the way in which it is interpreted and explained. Contemporary artists, for instance, apply traditional lace-making techniques to unusual materials, and, conversely, apply new techniques and technologies to traditional materials.<sup>4</sup> Making explicit this process of 'stitched artistic practice' or 'the practice of the ruptured mark'<sup>5</sup> is the aim of this article. These practices, Ann-Marie Tully maintains, result in what she calls 'ghosts, shadows, wounds', aspects also mentioned by many of the artists featured in the exhibition, signifying 'mortality, temporality, myth'.<sup>6</sup> I argue that, in addition to these interpretations, one should also explain the myriad ways in which the 'lines' interact in the lace work, or the patterns it assumes, because these are seemingly endlessly negotiated in lace-making, giving it distinctive properties.

The notion of negotiated property emanates from the lace collection in the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG). The art collection at JAG came under critical scrutiny with the centenary celebrations of the gallery in November 2010.<sup>7</sup> The lace collection has enjoyed less scrutiny. Florence Phillips and the JAG lace collection have attained legendary status over the years, especially in view of the publication of Jillian Carman's seminal book on the history of

JAG and the role Lady Phillips played in its foundation.<sup>8</sup> What is interesting however, is the fact that Lady Phillips viewed her donation of lace to the gallery as 'negotiated property',<sup>9</sup> often using it as bargaining chip to 'get her way' with regard to the manner in which the lace works were to be displayed, and to a lesser extent, and less successfully, with regard to the opening of a craft/industrial school attached to the gallery focusing on lace-making, among other things. My proposition is that one use the concept of 'negotiated property' to investigate the role of lace in contemporary art in order to explain how the meaning of this art form, 'negotiating', so to speak, new 'properties' for itself.

The materials most associated with lace are cotton, wool, silk, linen and polyester. Unusual fibers are, however, being used in lace-making by contemporary artists: rubber, glass, printed fabric, paper, Teflon fibre, porcelain, fibre-optic cables, elastic bands, metal, hair, shoelaces, blood, oil paint, wire and so on. In addition, new lace-making techniques used by contemporary artists include laser-cut lace, scissor cut-outs, commercially manufactured netting, kiln-fired lace structures, flame working, deconstructing/unpicking/unravelling techniques, stop-frame animation, collage/found objects used in lace-making, video-based and computer-generated techniques for making lace, sculptured and/or architectural lace structures, lace installations, and happenings or performances. Contemporary artists are devising new techniques for conventional lace-making and by using unusual materials, are extending the traditional properties of lace at the same time.

The new meanings that emanate from this process is that lace is 'knotting new histories and geographies', thereby forging a new identity for itself. The lace of Florence Phillips traversed the globe in its time: from the United Kingdom to Johannesburg and back to the UK, where it was briefly conserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In this way, new examples of lace techniques were added to her collection, and pieces of lace from her collection were acquired by the museum, and eventually permanently returned to Johannesburg. At the same time, her collection became infamous through its association with Phillips who used it to get her way, giving and retrieving, donating and reclaiming the lace for protracted periods of time. In the same vein, another global trajectory of lace can be explored: its traversal between the UK and other parts of Africa and back again to the UK, as was the case with the famous Nottingham Lace that travelled to Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> In the same way that Yinka Shonibare uses African printed textiles to reconstruct Victorian dress, Godfried Donkor, a Ghanain artist, uses

Nottingham lace to reconstruct the lace dress featured in Goya's painting, *The Duchess of Alba*, thereby 'returning' the lace to the country of its origin, and negotiating a new identity for contemporary African fashion. New global patterns created by the exchange of lace as a commercial commodity, for example between South Africa and Australia, are emerging. Kim Liebermann recently installed some of her contemporary lace work at the Powerhouse Museum in Sidney, Australia.<sup>11</sup> She follows, in a metaphorical sense, one aspect (or property) of lace, namely, the 'network interaction' part of its conventional definition, demonstrating in and through her own lace-making practice, the theme of human connectedness, traversing personal/individual, national and international spaces and time frames.<sup>12</sup> This theme may well be theorised in terms of Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics'.

In addition to this, I propose a reading of lace in contemporary art that shows it as entirely transformed, from being just an accoutrement in the fashion world, into diverse art forms, architectural structures, happenings and performances, massive sculptures and radically new artworks. Artists working with lace use various other materials alongside it, and develop innovative and fluid techniques in order to create new meanings, or to negotiate new properties for/about/with lace.

This negotiation is undertaken by an impressive array of contemporary artists who have greatly extended our understanding of the significance of lace by using innovative processes and novel materials. Barbara Zucker (USA), uses rubber with lace, Bennett Bataille (USA) uses glass, Erna van Sambeek (USA) uses printed fabric, Annet Couwenberg (Netherlands) and Mandy Coppes (SA) use paper, Janet Echelman (USA) uses Teflon fibre, Henk Wolvers (Netherlands) uses porcelain, Niels van Eijk (Netherlands) uses fibre-optic cables, Shane Walterer (Belgium) uses elastic bands, Cal Lane (Canada) uses metal, Elana Herzog (Canada) uses carpets and bedspreads, Carson Fox (USA) uses hair, Sheila Pepe (USA) uses shoelaces, Merryann Singer (SA) uses blood, Penny Siopis (SA) uses oil paint, Jonna Slappendel (Netherlands) uses wire, and so on.

In terms of new-lace making techniques: Stefanus Rademeyer (SA) uses a computer-generated technique to design lace patterns, Barbara Zucker uses laser-cut techniques, Erna van Sambeek (Netherlands) uses scissor cut-outs, Janet Echelman uses commercially manufactured netting, Henk Wolvers uses kiln-firing techniques, Eugene van Veldhoven (Netherlands) uses flame working, Erna Herzog (USA) uses unpicking techniques, Anne Wilson (USA) uses stop-frame animation, Kim

Liebermann (SA) uses collage, Andrew Putter (SA) uses video-recording techniques for his performances around lace,<sup>13</sup> Piper Shepard (USA) uses sculpting techniques.

In Andrew Putter's performance, in which he directs a group of art students to choose Dutch seventeenth-century portraits with lace collars worn by the sitters, the students select new poses and make their own paper lace collars that they wear with aplomb, in order to negotiate new identities for themselves and the worlds in which they live. An art workshop by Jonna Slappendel, who uses found bits of wire to instruct Soweto children in an alternative lace-making technique called 'wild klos' (a type of uninhibited bobbin lace-making), represents another way to negotiate the properties of lace and the identities of the children who participate in her workshops.

The examples of the use of lace-making in contemporary art certainly do create their own 'ghosts, shadows and/or wounds' that can be explained in terms of a psychoanalytical reading of the works,<sup>14</sup> but I argue that these new combinations of process and materials have the potential for an alternative reading of the practice of *pointure* in contemporary art focused on lace-making.

1. Most noticeable, in the work of Kim Lieberman on exhibition.
2. Allison Griffiths, *The Lace Collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery*, Johannesburg: JAG, 1993.
3. John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*, London: Bantam Books, 1997, 66.
4. David Revere McFadden, *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting: Process + Materials 1*, New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2007; David Revere McFadden, *Pricked: Extreme Embroidery: Process + Materials 2*, New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2007; Nadine Kathe Monem (ed.), *Contemporary Textiles: The Fabric of Fine Art*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008.
5. Ann-Marie Tully, *Pointure*, electronic catalogue, 2012, 9.
6. *Ibid.*, 12.
7. Jillian Carman (ed.), *1910–2010, One Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery*, Pretoria: Design-Magazine Publishers, 2010.
8. Jillian Carman, *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine: Florence Phillips and the Making of the Johannesburg Art Gallery*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2006.
9. *Ibid.*, 107.
10. Courtney J. Martin, 'Net from the Warp: Nottingham Lace' in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 24 (2008), 120–5.
11. Lindie Ward (ed.), *Love Lace: Powerhouse Museum International Lace Award*, catalogue, Sidney: Power House Publishing, 2011.
12. Wilhelm van Rensburg, 'Mapping Connections' in *Human Constellations*, Kim Lieberman (ed.), Johannesburg: Gallery AOP, 15–19.
13. Andrew Putter, 'Sketch Assembly: Merry Company at GIPCA' in *South African Art Times*, (November 2010), 42–3.
14. Tully, 9.

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**BELOW**  
Kim Lieberman, *The Incredible Chain of Events* (detail), 2007–8, handmade lace and bronze figures, 109 x 100cm x 100cm.  
Photo: Richard Markham

**BOTTOM**  
Walter Oltmann, *Mother and Child II* (detail), 2008, aluminium wire, 400 x 250cm.  
Image courtesy the artist and Goodman Gallery