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# If You Do Well, Carry! The Difference of the Humane

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An Interview with Bracha L. Ettinger

BIRGIT M. KAISER AND KATHRIN THIELE

THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION EXPLORES THE stakes of the human(e) in the work of Bracha L. Ettinger. Ettinger has been working on this question throughout all of her art-workings as well as her theoretical work. Central elements to her feminist reworking of psychoanalytic approaches to (human) subjectivity are the insistence on the *matrixial* and *metramorphosis*, in which connectivity acquires primary importance, and supplements-questions Lacan's starting point of the cut and lack as constitutive of what becomes human. Taking the feminine matrixial as a model, Ettinger's conception of human subjectivity is always already relational—a transsubjective relationality, however, that is different from mere intersubjectivity. Relationality here crucially means also “*relations-without-relating* to the other based on re-attuning of *distances-in-proximity*” (Ettinger 2005, 65) and affective resonance. This invites the “possibility of *co-respons-ability with/for* the unknown Other,” which also implies that we “participate in the traumatic events of the other” (ibid., 89). This interview explores the question of the human and of humane-ness along the three interwoven axes of the aesthetic, the (micro)political, and the ethical that can be found in Ettinger's oeuvre. A longer, unpublished paper by Ettinger from 2013 (working title “Carriance—for Mexico”)<sup>1</sup> and thoughts she developed in various lectures between 2012 and 2016 served as background texts for our conversation. Inserting fragments from the text written between 2011

and 2013—and especially the quotes in Hebrew which include fragments from the New Testament and the Old Testament—proved necessary to flesh out some of the key issues that Ettinger raises in her thinking on the human(e) and to help illuminate and unpack the points that the conversation touches on. We decided to weave these fragments into our conversation as well as present them as a co-text running alongside—thereby also making transparent the conversation’s process of gestation. We would like to thank Bracha L. Ettinger for her generosity and for making available the images and film stills that are reproduced at different moments throughout the interview.

Arise, lift up/carry the lad, and hold him fast by thy hand.

—Genesis 21, 18

יח קומי שאי את-הנער וְהַחֲזִיקי אֶת-גְּדָךְ בוֹ בְּרֵאשִׁית כֹּא

Grosse, Glühende Wölbung  
mit dem sich  
hinaus- und hinweg-  
wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm:

der verkieselten Stirn eines Widders  
brenn ich dies Bild ein [...].

Wo-  
gegen  
rennt er nicht an?

Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.

—Paul Celan, *Atemwende*

**Birgit M. Kaiser:** When planning this special issue on the re-turn of and our return to the question of the human, we were delighted that you agreed to continue our conversation from 2011 and to explore this time explicitly the stakes of the question of humane-ness in relation to your work—as an artist, an analyst, and a feminist philosopher.<sup>2</sup> Last time, we spoke mostly about the multiple dimensions of the matrixial in your work, and therefore didn’t delve into the question of being human directly; so perhaps we can try to take up the thread where we left it six years ago in Berlin and move more explicitly into questions of humanness and humane-ness here. In 2011, we discussed how you argue in your work on the matrixial that human subjectivity trans-connects with others in transsubjective and subsubjective ways—in relation-without-relating, as you

call it—and we then already dwelled on the different layers of the poetic-aesthetic, political, and ethical in your art-working. At one point, we touched on your series *Autistwork* and you said that autistwork—I quote from our earlier conversation—“is a paradoxical notion: you enter yourself and you discover strings to the world. The poetic level is very real. One has to go there, inside, lose oneself and suddenly you find a world” (unpublished manuscript; for German, see Kaiser/Thiele 2012, 259). The title of the conversation’s German translation is taken from that figure: to “lose yourself and suddenly find a world,” which is possible as borderlinking in the matrixial sphere, even if our conscious being in the phallic-symbolic is not aware of this (for more details, see Ettinger 2005). In that light, you also stressed that being humane means that one “can reach another membrane of the cosmos, we can enter it like butterflies, [. . .] become ashen grains, oscillating color-lines, and we can also feel-see such a becoming-in-by an other when we are borderlinking to an other, we can feel-see-join and transform an ambient timespace of light, and in this dimension we are transconnected like ants or bees or birds” (Kaiser/Thiele 2012, 259). Perhaps we can take this as our starting point here: to lose oneself and find a world in ways that crucially also resonate with the nonhuman membranes of the cosmos.

**Kathrin Thiele:** And perhaps I may add to this before we begin: we know that in your lectures since 2013 you’ve been returning to Paul Celan’s poem “Vast, Glowing Vault” (“Große, Glühende Wölbung”) from the collection *Atemwende*, which ends on, “The world is gone, I must carry you,” and which in a way mirrors in reverse the statement, “to lose oneself and find a world.” Could we also begin from there? In your piece entitled “Carriage—for Mexico,” and in more recent lectures and texts, you have been thinking especially about the etymology of the word “to carry” in Hebrew in relation to what it means to be human(e), and what we can learn from this etymology about in/humane-ness. This seems to us quite intimately linked to the interest of our special issue, which aims to revisit the question of the human from multiple perspectives, hopefully opening up alternative or new approaches to the question. The world that is gone in Celan’s poem is a different one from the world found in/as *Autistwork*, if I understand correctly. Celan mourns the loss of world as innocent and stable foundation after the catastrophe of the Shoah, to which your work responds, yet with a new task—after the end of that “former” world, “to carry” becomes a (condition of) humane-ness. Could we begin by asking how your lectures have delineated this task of carrying as “finding a world”?

**Bracha L. Ettinger:** A double beginning then, but let me begin more directly from Paul Celan and from his “The world is gone. I must carry you,” that is: from art and from what I’ve called *carriage*. Art is where values, virtues, and ideals again and again arise. For me in art, creative emergence is not the

In Hebrew the grammatical “subject” is *NOSSE* [נושא]: carry and sustain; the “predicate” is *NASSOU* [נשוא]: carried by the carrier, and the grammatical “object” is *MOUSSA* [מושא]: the object-to-be-carrying. The *MASSA* [משא]: load and burden is also the desired. Even though the word “subject” literally means “carrier,” the “subject” is not associated with “carrier” but with its Latin and English equivalents. To suggest *subject as carrier* is therefore not “natural” in Hebrew, in spite of the literal meaning.

opposite of criticality; resistance, trust, and revelation are not in contradiction; they come together. Though we know that desire can be exploited by power, we don’t give up desire. Equally, trust can be exploited, but that is no reason to give up on it. It is possible to open zones where trust harmonizes with care-carrying—carriage—as responsibility-in-act, such that modes and degrees of carriage versus its lack allow us the poetic touching of the other. By carriage I don’t mean the psychoanalytical notions of Bion’s container/contained (see Bion 1970). Carriage—the subject *qua* care and carry—is different from containing, and it goes beyond it. In carriage, responsibility is linked to the arousal of a desire such that it becomes a value. Carriage as a psychic tendency becomes a virtue. It moves in the passage from primal impulse to a full-blown desire in the becoming symbolic of an attitude plus an act. In Hebrew, “to carry”—*LASETH* [לשאת] from the root N.Sh.A.—means also bear and tolerate. Like in

Celan, even if “the world is gone, I must carry you.” Or to say it differently: even if there is no point in it anymore, I will carry you. This is trust after the end of trust. It involves a subject based, as in Hebrew, on the same root or etymology: the subject is *NOSSE* [נושא] (again from the root N.Sh.A), meaning: “to carry.” By subject-in-carriage, I as artist then also intend the subject in painting, the heart of the painting’s space. The subject in painting is an object for the gaze offered by a material object, but which materializes a vision as an occasion for an affective investment. As such, it is *transject* and space. The subject-matter in the painting’s inner space carries, transports, and transmits, evokes, and creates an image, which is a space of encounter-event. When I wrote “[t]he heart is wound and space, wound-space” (Ettinger 2015, 362),<sup>3</sup> I meant the heart of the painting as well as mine. To trust you need to loosen and forget the ego-self. Then a world reappears.

**KT:** What a wonderfully rich beginning—you are already addressing central issues that we want to unravel in our conversation here. So, from the start, you stress the link of your notion of carriage to art, as a space and a practice that invites and evokes the possibility of trust after the end of trust, after the loss of the world that Celan had noted. What you call “co/in-habit(u)ating with one another” (Ettinger 2015, 356)<sup>4</sup> is—if I understand you

correctly—something that art cultivates? In view of the violence around us—violence that is seemingly unleashed and depressingly evident as systemic at the start of this century—this is a hopeful gesture, yet one which also stresses the transformation that we need to undergo, a transformation in how we see ourselves, or in who we are.

**BLE:** Senseless cruelty and senseless violence will always remain unexplained. There will be no real understanding of it, only retroactive sufficient explanation. Yet, we must try to understand it. We can't say that victims of senseless killing died for this or that *reason*. Killing remains senseless—and yet, the life and the death of a victim of senseless violence can and has to enter meaning, a meaning not *just about* the past but *for* a possible future, for the change that might appear. A meaning that can combat the blind repetition of senseless cruelty and disturb the flowing of the inhumane. Art labors slowly. Art has to do with primary meanings and imaginable futures for the humane; its inner space as subject-matter divulges a subject-toward-birth, bathed, then, in carriage. Imagine a subject whose surplus of force will work for responsibility, not for domination, not for arbitrary destruction, not for death, with and in spite of and in view of the residues and traces of the horrible that are circulating, as if by radiation, in our time-space, in our present traumatic and post-traumatic era. A subject who will consider that care-carry is a symbolic value. In the visual arts that I am attracted to—like in my own paintings—what arises as beauty is proto-ethical. The passage-space, where rejected and abandoned traces from inside and outside meet my touch as I am not rejecting them, is painful. Erasing them while giving them—and it—birth. As painting. The actual, material *paintural* imprints, like language in poetry, work with whatever has infiltrated my psyche, but painting stirs the spirit through colors, lines, resonance and light. In its depth-space, traces work with the just born imprints for a time of encounter-eventing that becomes a space evoked in and by the visible in the painting. In each painting, in between its layers, and in ensembles of paintings when they coincide—the subject space appears and carries its magic. A space of transmission of waves—intermingled with traces of trauma and with new imprints—reveals itself in the painting. It then functions as a subjective-object, a transject, so that what is in it kindles a possibility in you through what for me is beauty.

Now, when I express this also in terms of matrixiality, a subject whose meaning and sense is derived from a feminine-maternal-matrixial carriage (this feminine subjectivity in both women *and* men) is capable of wit(h)nessing without desecration, without abusing a trust. For me, a real witnessing through painting passes via wit(h)nessing first: dwelling with your subject-matter, taking your time, giving yourself time, remaining with it, in your body; only thus compassion becomes real. Value and beauty then do not derive from



Film still from Bracha L. Ettinger, *Ein-Raham – Crazy Woman* (videoart film, HD, 16:06 min. in loop, 2014 [2012]).

domineering, nor from nihilizing. The other's spirit, like that of Eurydice, like yours, is looking—like Celan's mother in one of his poems—for rays of light. If you agree to enter the light of such searching of light even in the darkness, the painting will reveal to you how a psyche-soul can trust the other and life today. Today—*after the death of trust*. Our generation inherited and also lives through and by a colossal requiem.

**BMK:** To go a little further into this, the notion of carriage that you introduced in your recent work builds on the matrixial, but it seems to address more directly the ethico-political import of “borderlinking” for our contemporary times. A time “after” the Shoah, a time “after” colonialization, but “after” in the sense of finally “taking into account” these catastrophes; yet also in a time of continued structural racism and increasing violence in the early twenty-first century. The matrixial always had and has proto-ethical dimensions, but carriage seems to specify this in new ways, both in its theoretical and artistic/aesthetic dimensions?

**BLE:** The “after” as I understand it here (in “after” the death of trust, for example) enters the now, yes, and the future “with,” *with* that which the “after” indicates. I insist on the duration of dwelling and wit(h)nessing to achieve compassion, on the process of co/in-habit(u)ation and on the awareness to this process. To carry is also to en-dure: to sustain and support. We are here, hence we have been carried. Each one of us. This doesn't mean that we have to carry children. But we have been carried. We have experienced transconnectedness. Each one of us. This means that we are free to consider each experiencing body

as a support for sublimation, which gives us the freedom of more choices in our journey. Symbolically, imprints from the female body can enter subjectivity no matter what gender you belong to—I care-carry *ergo sum*. Caring has here at least the same value as thinking. Being involves symbolic carrying of the non-I. With that in mind, let's consider for a moment the biblical story of Cain and Abel in light of their mother Eve's pain and its sublimation. After Cain—whose name in Hebrew means possession, envy, and jealousy, but also lamentation, nest, and nestling—and after Abel, Eve, with one son a killer and one son murdered, trusted life enough to carry *again*. She carries another son and named him *Shet*. Only from this third child of hers, humanity could continue. In Hebrew, Shet is written like Seth (again the root N.Sh.A) that means *carry*. And “Carry” (Seth) was then Enosh's [אנוש] ancestor (Enosh being Seth's son according to the biblical story), and *ENOSH* [אנוש] means *human* in Hebrew. And it is with Enosh, whose name's root letters (A.N.Sh) are also again the same as those of “carry = subject” (N.Sh.A) but in a different order, that for the first time the Name of God that signifies the continuity of past, present, and future—*YHWH* [יהוה]—appears.

Thus, not only are we all born, and every new beginning involves birth (and I am thinking here of Hannah Arendt's expression of birth as beginning), but we have also all been carried, such that every beginning involves an other's pregnancy with us. I suggest to rethink *subject*, *human*, and *trust* through the sublimation into culture of the matrixial corporeality imprinted in us by each one's singular mother-as-subject. I, the one who came into life, have been transconnected to a female-body-psyche

**1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.**

Galatians 6

נסיון אותך ברוח של ענוה; והזהר שלא תבוא גם אתה לידי תורת המשיח. שאם איש את מעמסת רעהו וכך תקימו את בעוד שאינו כלום, הריהו משלה את עצמו. אם אדם חושב את עצמו למשהו בלי תלות בזולת, מעשיו ואז הסבה לתהלתו תהיה בו כל עצמו אחד את יבחן כל שכן כל אחד ישא את הנטל שלו 5

(non-I) with whom psychic strings, particles and imprints were shared and exchanged, entangled. To rethink the human subject as impregnated by an *I and non-I* transjectivity, and thus to recognize the human subject as nestling, co-inhabiting, co-inhabituating, co-emerging, and co-arising with-and-inside-and-outside of an other, is to recognize the importance of



Trust and trustworthiness, faith or belief and fidelity will be understood here not from CREDO but from the root *AMEN* [אמן], as: *EMUN* [אמון]: trust, *EMUNA* [אמונה]: faith and *NE'EMANUT* [נאמנות] fidelity or faithfulness. From the same root come also *OMNA* [אומנה]: point of support, *AMANA* [אמנה]: contract, *OMEN* [אומן]: foster-parent, *OMENET* [אומנת]: nurse, foster parent, *AMUN* [אמון]: trainee, *AMON—EMUNA* [אמון - אמונה]: faith, *LEAMEN* [לאמן]: to train, but also: to treat maternally, *LE'EMON* [לאמון]: teach and transmit, *AMINUT* [אמינות]: honesty, truthfulness, *AMIN* [אמין]: trustworthy; all carrying this surprising hidden source in them: *EM* [אם]—mother and matrix, with the hidden factor of pregnancy and bringing into birth which entails *sustainability* in time. The time patterned upon pregnancy-maternality to begin with, the time of *duration-continuity*, *MESHECH* [משך], all time-space-states of *encounter-evening - pregnancy time* [הריוני זמן]. [from a notebook]

our net of strings to the structuring of each individual self. The sphere of our being-toward-birth is an unconscious facet of each human subject as such. Each subject at every moment and each duration in co-emergence is informed and infused by the borderlinking (what I named *reliance-par-le-bord* or *bordureliance* in *Regard et espace-de-bord matrixiels*) (Ettinger 1999) in-to the maternal subjectivity, which is to be respected. *I am* thence *I was carried*. *I carry* therefore *I am* a being-toward-birth, at every moment possibly creative of a joint space. I don't intend any necessity to carry a child. I intend care-carrying as a symbolic human value patterned—or rather mattered—upon the linking-with the mother, whatever gender you identify yourself with. I have always already been wit(h)nessed by an-other, a m/other, and the sublimation of singular borderlinkages suggests possible schemas and routes. *The world is gone. I must carry you*. Caring-carrying-sustaining-bearing-lifting-subjectivizing in and out of the poem, in and out of the painting, in and out of our-selves, in the matter, in the psyche, in the soul, in the spirit, in social acting-for one another; starting from com-passion and wit(h)nessing,

transported in matter, and arriving at a human action and at witnessing. Such schemas are in us and in the cosmos.

KT: “I carry *ergo sum*”—transforming the common *cogito ergo sum*. You offer an alternative starting point here for the question of (human) subjectivity, one that is different from the Cartesian Subject. Descartes, and the reception of Cartesian philosophy, has linked the subject to rationality, but even more perhaps to individuality and autonomy—that is at least how “Subject” has been developed in the Western, rationalist thought tradition and how it is still very often considered, and also how it underlies common notions of humanness.

**BLE:** Descartes regards wonder as the first of all the passions. Now, I regard trust as equally first, if not even more primary. I understand trust and trustworthiness, faith or belief and even fidelity not via *credo*, as in Latin, but rather via the Hebrew etymology *AMEN* [אמן]. To suggest trust between one human being and another as subjectivizing and emanating from the maternal invites us to another glimpse at the Hebrew language. The potentiality for ethical resistance and artistic transformation is hidden there, too. “Art” and “trust” have the same etymology (A.M.N, אמן). My reading of God’s words to Cain, to which we can turn later in more detail, reminds me of Jesus’s last speech, as reported by Paul in Galatians 6:1-10 (*New International Version*; אל הגלטים פרק ו אגרת שאול אל). There, we find that if you will carry one another you will carry yourself, and this entails, Jesus continues, respect and fidelity to those who had transmitted their knowledge to you and enabled a community of belief. If we want to redefine the humane we cannot leave this enormous question, the question of trust, to

<p>A M N ן מ ן א</p> <p>believe, trust, to give credit to artist; art.</p> <p>Amen, so be it, surely; truth, faith, mother, matron, parent, muller; to train, teach, instruct, to educate, practice</p> <p>be trained, taught;</p> <p>nurse, be fostered, nursed</p> <p>be trustworthy</p> <p>found true</p> <p>verified</p> <p>so be it. agree consent אמן</p> <p>indeed truly surely אמנם</p> <p>artistry skill masterful אמנות</p> <p>emun trust = emet=true אמון=אמת</p> <p>confidence loyalty honesty אמון</p> <p>fidelity; security, firmness</p> <p>faithful reliable איש אמונים</p> <p>reliance לאמון ראוי</p> <p>belief creed trust religion אמונים</p> <p>[from a notebook]</p>
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the domain of religion alone. Carriage—as “I carry, therefore I am”—is thus over time. It is linked to the idea of *MESHECH* [משך], which means continuity and duration, but also tarrying as in staying longer than intended, or delay in leaving a place—or even a *dwelling-tarryance*, in wonder. Carriage is thus over time, as in a time patterned upon pregnancy, this corporeal maternity, the time of *duration-continuity with*, *MESHECH* [משך] as time-space-states of *encounter-venting with*, which is a time of *being-toward-birth*. Curiously, we also find, then, another derivation from this same root: namely the word *art* (*AMANUT* [אמנות]) and with it the word *artist* (*AMAN, AMANIT*; [אמן, אמנית]), found already in the Bible and the ancient Kabbalah. Art then has an archaic meaning of creation, emanating most probably from the etymology of mother and matrix (both *AM* [אם]), which indicates creation-begetting-gestating, both sustaining in time-space-duration of encounter-events, and as a symbolic metaphor for different kinds of work for transformation of laboring.

From here, we can go back to *ENOSH* [אנוש; human] as *NOSSE* [נושא; carry/sustain] in the maternal *AMANA* [אמנה; contract] of *EMUN* [אמון; trust]. This

is the unconscious potentiality that can be reactivated just as much—and against—the often assumed potentiality of sacrifice. The Real of jointness-in-different/ciation that awakens in the duration of the connectivity between the pre-subject, the becoming-subject and its becoming-mother who carries, engenders imaginary possibilities and symbolic structures, in which one principally has to be alive and not self-sacrificed to carry the other; where the individual subject is infused with the knowledge of its own transjective and transsubjective links. Maternal configurations, thus, is not foreclosed from subjectivity but contribute to it. “I carry the other” is always already a part of “I with an-other,” and “I with an-other” is always a dimension in the I-as-subject and in the other-as-subject, even when the “other” is in parallel an object for the subject. The instance-modality and process in the subject, which I name carriage, is the one intended by trust after the end of trust. As an artist, my capacity to engage with the abandoned other depends on this kind of engaged dwelling with my subject-matters. A contingent encounter that becomes encounter-event in the continuity-duration of a real—a symbolic carriage materialized—indicates and involves a specific kind of trust. The important exchanges that take place in the duration of real and symbolic carriage evolve at the level I call the subreal. Transjectivity really occurs, in subreality. We sense resonance beyond the senses.

**BMK:** This is crucial, as you here unfold the transjective processes of the subject as foundationally “with an-other” and therefore the very possibility of activating trust, precisely after the end of trust or the end of the world that we spoke of above. Carriage as a duration and process, relational and in the most profound ways “with”—or as you say, “wit(h)nessing.” But before we continue with carriage as a modality of the subject—which responds not only to Descartes’s *I think, therefore I am*, but also more broadly to the meanings of *subject* in Cartesian and Western metaphysics—I’d like us to pause for just a moment and further unfold the lineage of Eve, Cain, Abel, Shet, and Enosh that you mentioned. How does it connect to the Hebrew etymology of *ENOSH* as human that you just pointed out?

**BLE:** Well, while the Latin term *subjectus* is linked ultimately to Aristotle’s meaning, *hupokeimenon*, to its being “material from which things are made” and “subject of attributes and predicates” and to subjugation—this is very different in Hebrew where, as I said already, “subject” does not indicate being subjugated, but on the contrary: CARRY! Bear! Support! My choice to excavate the Hebrew etymology of subject-*NOSSE* and trust-*EMUN* is not coincidental; it is not philological either. I turn to the Bible, the cradle of Judeo-Christian Western thought, to attend to a few sentences whose conventional translation into the different European languages—translations that certainly already reflected their classical interpretative understanding—veiled their literal

meaning, and in so doing dispossessed us from potential cultural senses that might have been supported by the feminine-maternal-female corpo-Reality and Imaginary. Reading them in a different, feminine light, I invite you to another aesthetic, symbolic, and ethical trajectory. In attending to etymology, I want to indicate in no way that one language is better or more profound than another. No language is better than any other. I am here to share this one both because the thought I develop leans on the treasure of the languages I am using and because in any language each word carries its roots and its mysterious

1 And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain, and said: "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."  
5 but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the LORD said unto Cain: "Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance/*FACE* fallen?" / The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen

7 If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up/*carry/bear*? and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it."

7 If you are doing what is good, shouldn't you hold your head high? And if you don't do what is good, sin is crouching at the door—it wants you, but you can rule over it."

8 And Cain spoke unto Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain: "Where is Abel thy brother?" And he said: "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"

13 And Cain said unto the LORD: "My punishment/sin/crime is greater than I can bear/carry."

25 And Adam knew his wife again; and she bore a son, and called his name Seth: "for God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel; for Cain slew him."

26 And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh; then began men to call upon the name of the LORD/Yehowa. {S}

א ויהאדם, ידע את-חנה אשתו; ותלד את-קין, ותאמר, קניתי איש את-יהוה  
ה ואל-קין ואל-מנחתו, לא שעה; ויחר לקין מאד, ויפל פניו  
ו יאמר יהוה, אל-קין: למה תרה לה, ולמה יפלו פניו

ז הלווא אם-מיטיב, שאת, ואם לא מיטיב, לפתח חטאת רבין; ואלה, תשוקתו, ואתה, תמשל בו

ח ויאמר קין, אל-הבל אחיו; ויהי בהיותם בשדה, ויגם קין אל-הבל אחיו ויהרגהו  
ט ויאמר יהוה אל-קין, אי הבל אחיך; ויאמר לא ידעתי, השמר אחי אנכי

יג ויאמר קין, אל-יהוה: גדול עוני, מנשא

כה וידע אדם עוד, את-אשתו, ותלד בן, ותקרא את-שמו שת: כי שת-לי אלהים, זרע אחר--  
תחת הבל, כי הרגו קין

כו ולשת גם-הוא ילד-בן, ויקרא את-שמו {אנוש; אז הוחל, לקרא בשם יהוה. {ס

trajectories, personal and cultural, and thus also dreams and ghosts. Each word has also virtual potentiality. A word awakens the roads not taken from its etymology; it allows us to restart another journey.

Let's take this slowly, let's look at *Beresbit* (Genesis 4), where we find this: God accepts Abel's offering of an object of sacrifice and rejects Cain's offering. Humiliation and envy breed anger, hate, and murderous violence. As I already mentioned before, Cain (with its root K.I.N [קין]) in Hebrew relates to "buying," "property," and "possession" (*KANA* [קנה], *KINIAN* [קנין]), to envy and jealousy (*KINAH* [קנאה]); but, in an almost opposite direction, as the Hebrew often admits and the Kabbalistic way of reading invites to investigate, the roots of the signifier lead also to: "nest," "nesting," "nestling" (*KEN* [קן], *LEKANEN* [לקנן]) and to "lament," "mourning," and "lamentation," even to "requiem" (*LEKONEN* [לקונן], *KINA* [קינה]). The different meanings revealed together by the words lead to a different, unconscious potentiality and can serve as a critique.

Now, if what arouses hate, violence, and murder is envy and jealousy, is not the Bible informed by psychoanalysis? . . . is it not very Melanie Kleinian psychoanalysis . . . If Cain is envious because Abel's offering of sacrifice is accepted by God, then Cain identifies himself with the *object of sacrifice* and feels its rejection as a rejection of his own being. Here, God gives what seems to me to be the first divine ethical instruction in the word *ShETH* [שאת], but this kind of suggestion is omitted from the common interpretations and translations of this passage. As we read in Genesis 4:7: *HALO IM TEITIV ShETH* (בראשית ד פסוק ז הלו אם תיטיב, שאת): commonly translated as, "If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up?" or as, "If you are doing what is good, shouldn't you hold your head high?" I've checked many translations of this phrase and

in all of them we more or less find that *ShETH* [שאת] is understood as *lift*, as in *lift your head high* or *lift the sacrifice to God*, or *lift the subject's spirit* as the sacrifice was accepted by God. However, if this is what the words meant, then there would be no ethical instruction, no ethical choice here, and the first ethical instruction (as well as choice) will appear only afterwards. Why then—I ask myself—would the word of choice, that is "if" [אם; *IM*], appear twice and especially at the very beginning of the passage, already before the sentence makes its demand upon its addressee?

It is usually read as if God proposed a deal according to some well-established economy: If you will do good, you will

7 If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up and if thou doest not do well, sin coucheth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it. / If you are doing what is good, shouldn't you hold your head high? And if you don't do what is good, sin is crouching at the door—it wants you, but you can rule over it.

ז הלו אם תיטיב, שאת, ואם לא תיטיב,  
לקתח חטאת רביץ; ואליך,  
תשוקתו, ואתה, תמשל-בו .

observe that your sacrifice was elevated up to God, who will compensate you with a blessing, and the human being will thus be lifted up. This understanding locates man's free choice and God's instruction in the abstract demand of "doing good"—and postponing the ethical moment. But let me give you this sentence now in my own translation, which puts the first ethical commandment delivered to the human being already at the *beginning* of the sentence; this will delineate the terms of a human being's free choice differently.

**BMK:** So, if you permit me to interrupt and see if I understand correctly: you are proposing not only a different translation of *ShETH* [תשא]—commonly translated in this context as "to lift," which you suggest translating according to its other etymological possibilities, namely as "to carry"—but you are also making a point of the fact that the importance of the word of choice, "if," is being overlooked in those common translations? While you read it as a crucial moment at the beginning of the sentence? That the moment of choice as a suggestion, lies actually somewhere else than in the "doing good" that common interpretations of this passage highlight?

**BLE:** Exactly. I say that the "if" is related to the Sheth. So, the "doing good" is not open but rendered precise. The literal and figurative meaning of *ShETH* [תשא] is to bear, to tolerate, to lift, to suffer. But to begin with: *to carry*. The grammatical time of the sentence in Hebrew is future tense, but a kind of future, which in biblical language signifies also the past, that is, a verb that intends *both past and future*. "*If you will be doing what is good: carry.*" Or rather: Sheth [שאת]—carry—in the past and in the future. Then the sentence continues: And if you don't do what is good—so, if you don't carry your brother, your fellow human being—sin is crouching at the door: temptation of rage, violence, and in twentieth-century terms: destructive death drive directed at the other, the desire to abandon and betray, the desire to possess and appropriate the other, not-carry. This temptation is always lurking in the dark: "it wants you, but you can rule over it." You have *this* choice, your freedom is here: *if*—and at first sight this seems paradoxical—*you carry!* And again, this of course doesn't mean that we have to carry children . . . it means that we can think together carrying with freedom. Read from this angle, we can say that God rejected the identification of the single person with the *object* of sacrifice! It is not sacrifice that the spirit looks for when God com-poses, poses in con-junction, what otherwise looks like antithetic entities. Here comes the first ethical idea as modeled upon maternal femininity: *freedom of choice equals a responsibility*. "What do I carry?" becomes to each human being a worthy question. The mastery of temptation to iniquity comes second. The human being is a carrier: *NOSSE* [נושא]. And only caring-for and carrying the other—or realizing what happens when you are not doing so—will turn the Adam-blood-and-earth-being into the Enosh-being. Its

humane-ness is there. Freedom is *for* carriage. In the text, when this happens, the transformation of God-*ELOHIM* [אלוהים] to God-*YHWH* [יהוה] happens, too. We can now hear the link between “subject” and “bear-carry” through its etymology. Accordingly, I announce the *subject* qua *carry* through the maternal-matrixial time-space of an encounter-event, and link it to this humanizing notion: *carriage as feminine*. From this angle I am suggesting the idea of *trust after the end of trust*. And accordingly, more power will be valued in terms of more responsibility, not more possessions.

**KT:** So, at this moment we are truly back with the question of ethics then, right? A different ethics, however, from the one that relies on a “doing good,” which would be an instruction that follows a linear causal logic, an imperative that already knows what’s good and then only asks it—demands it—from its subjects. Rather, in your interpretation, reading the “if” in such a transformative manner differently, there’s no human and/or humane-ness without the ethical instruction, or demand, or imperative “to carry”?

**BLE:** An ethics that conjugates *freedom with carriage and self-fragilization*. Human freedom *from* subjugation is achieved by symbolic carrying, taking responsibility for the human kernel-to-kernel resonance and its modulations, borderlinking and borderspacing. Not subjugation, but carrying—this is the meaning of *subject*. The proto-ethical load of my aesthetic-artistic gesture is made explicit here. Womb-space inside the work and between works. Remember the Lacanian attraction to the imaginary of the vacuole to describe the dynamics of the *object a*? In a moment, if we have time, we can also pay attention to the dynamics of the *lamella* and to Freud’s death drive. But with the idea of carriage in mind, life drive enters the picture, working for a future. Requiem *and* carriage, not death drive alone.

Listen to this Kabbalistic phrase, where the words carry ambiguity between past time and future time and between my face and the face of the other:

והאומר יהי רצון “מלפני” ולא אמר “לפני”: לפי שיש פנים לפנים אשר מהם פנים ניראים ופנים שאינם ניראים

He who recites: “May it be Your Will *from before me / from in front of me / from before my face (MILFANEY)*” and does not say “*before / in front of me / before my face (LIFNEY)*” – because there are faces / sides or modalities to the face / *inside* of the face, whence there are visible faces and invisible faces.” [from a notebook]

Poetic-artistic engagement can take us with-and-beyond destruction even while engaging with traces of a senseless destruction.

Carriage draws its meaning from our passage into life, and from a forever beforeness. Being carried, the imprints of the passage via the m/Other who carried, are intermingled with imprints from our own becoming as carried-cared-for beings. I hear the time-space of

*carriance already in the idea of the name S(h)ETH.* Sheth supposes a kind of engagement with the other and the world, even when one is alone, even without relations, even when the other is no more, even when the world has gone, even from before we are humane. Carriance is beyond relationality, it is nonreactive, unconditional, and yet responsive, *communicating*. A *before* Abraham, *before* Moses, *before* the Law—it doesn't obey desires and oppositions that the law establishes. *Before* not in terms of mythological narrative, but as a pole in the schemas of the subject. Not just *LIFNEI* [לפני; before] or *LEFANAI* [לפני; in front of me]—literally meaning *before my face*—but *MILEFNEI-MILEFANAI* [מלפני; *from a before / from the before of the in-front-of-my-face*], which I understand as an indication of a kind of invisible source that is symbolizable, a *time before our human time*, literally signifying *even from the before of my facing something*. The time of the sacred perhaps, the sacred in and for the human—as that which is before the human and in front of her face. Whatever I can bear can be subjectivized and humane.

**BMK:** With your permission I'd like to link this back once more to our earlier conversation in 2011 on the ethical dimensions of your theory of matrixiality, to give the argument that you make here a slightly different twist still. In our earlier conversation, you stressed that “the social, and the political, and the cultural are not the ethical; they are not the aesthetical; and they are not art” (Kaiser/Thiele 2012, 246). You emphasized the proto-ethical as relevant to aesthetics and art. Also the notion of carriance and your art-working with and on it are in conversation with Celan's “I must carry”—so, can you say more about how the aesthetic and the ethical (or proto-ethical) are related here? Or asked otherwise: Could we speak about this issue again, the relation of art to ethics and politics, or the relation of the social, the ethical, and the aesthetic—now in view of your practicing and thinking on carriance?

**BLE:** Let me connect this to what I just said about the time of the “before” as inside-and-beside the now for a being-toward-birth. The time of the human subject is always already pregnant with the impression of loss. And the question of art, like that of the human subject—and art is for the human being—is always also the question of this loss. But with a vision, inside a vision, that has to be unfolded. Loss of trust, and then trusting anew, in the human, in the future, is about symbolic humane-ness in the being-toward-birth as idea. *From before* as carriance is on the side of Eve—Hava [חַוָּה] in Hebrew—mother of the living, source of the word “life.” When God addresses Cain, when God addresses Hagar, it is in Her nursing-maternal voice that God speaks, in the sense that signifiers born in Her Imaginary and Real are symbolized to express *ShETH* [שֵׁת] as an idea. All the commandments will come only later. However, perhaps with Eve traditionally relegated to the “class” of Nature, the



possible sublimation-symbolization of carriage to become an idea and have a value as an idea—even though voiced by the divine voice—had difficulties coming to light: it was foreclosed.

Every human being (and not only human beings) passively carries traces of memories that concern her and have been transmitted to her via the shareable space in which she participates, knowingly and unknowingly. Co-memorizing our time—when the witnesses disappear and only witnesses to witnesses can speak, and when the virtual reality of manipulated, augmented images can hide images of reality and work toward the emptying of their meaning—enters the secret of art, of some art, or what I consider as art, which is a space for the transmission as it works toward a future for a being-toward-birth. When art that evokes trans-memory invents a womb-space for imagining encounter and depth, a healing transformation can occur. Compassion is beauty. Art opens such a space inside a physical site, although this site remains different from it. Suddenly, a yearning desire arises when an object (*MOUSSA* [מושא]) of-for a yearning-desire, different from the object or subject-matter of the memory (*NASSOU* [נשוא]), which has a different musicality and a long breath, can work as compassion in a duration. The underlying etymology of *endurance* and *duration* is revealing. I think here of the metamorphosis, as according to Goethe, of plants. The *subject of desire* that emerges can't fuse with the *subject of identity*, which, like an object, can become too frozen.

The depth of space of carriage-dwelling in art-working brings together traces from different times joined by new imprints to arouse a human desire. Arousal of compassion, resulting from the work, might lead to generosity, which might influence justice.

Maternal-matrixial conception presupposes no symmetry when some kind of alter-memoration is reached. What I can't bear—you might be able to carry, and not: either contain or reject. Imagine a world where whoever says "I" is a *carrier*, that is: *response-able*, not reactive. Whoever takes upon itself the symbolic *ShETH* [שאת] enters a feminine-maternal-matrixial zone of ethics that is beyond gender and social function. To carry is the primal mode upon which responsibility for the other is patterned—or rather, I prefer—*mattered*. The earliest ethical manifesto was pronounced then, in my view, by the instruction issued by the divine voice in the enigmatic indication: *ShETH* [שאת]. This indication even *makes* it divine. Subject-carry *NOSSE* [נושא], in conjunction with the human being *ENOSH* [אנוש], is interlinked in the feminine-maternal instance *EM* [אמ]) through a proto-ethical modus of trust *EMUN* [אמון] that is not less primary than paranoia. *Such trust-caring-nursing-supporting* borderlinking leads to, and is led by, compassion and respect. The subjective agency is not power as such but com-passion-for-response-ability. If in desire the subject is born in the passage between signifiers, and if their harmonization correlates with the desire of a subject

based upon a lack (Lacan), the meaning of each word in the atmosphere of the signifying web I am weaving here, sometimes lost in interpretation and in translation, indicates, then, not lack of an object or other but borderlinking (*reliance-par-le-bord*) to the other as subject and as object.

Surrealism depended on free association to get to the unconscious; repressed signifiers were saved from oblivion by freely associating. But subreality can't be brought to intelligibility by free association. It demands *attunement* via invisible strings with subjects, objects, and transjects that concern us, few at a time, not in a mass, in which we are already non-consciously engaged. The non-conscious here includes virtualities and primary elements in us and in the cosmos. Subreality, which admits a kind of "quantum-like" resonance of I/non-I elements, depends on our capacity to self-fragilize—to reach some awareness of that level of transconnectedness between different elements in between me and the other, me and the cosmos, beyond the threshold of our sense-perception. Transjectivity that enters the subject doesn't *replace* subjectivity but modifies it. Matrixiality does not oppose solitude and aloneness. Often, even the contrary is true: listening to that which is not "you" and which doesn't reflect your identity demands silence, slowing-down, blind gazing, awe, respect, compassion; allowing wondering, tolerating anxiety; welcoming the contingent and the unknown. If by self-fragilization we reach caring and carrying and encountering the other's vulnerability, then vulnerability and care, carrying and self-fragilization, form and inform a knot of resistance and as such can enter the domains of community and, hopefully, of the political.

In my painting, I feel it as healing—even when it is painful—when I sense that it has discerned subreal strings and when to the painful subject-matters I succeed to join a bliss arising from abstract relations, like in Monet or even Vermeer. There is a healing thread in the history of art, in Paul Klee, Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, Lygia Clark, Eva Hesse, and others. Even the most stubborn images can go through metamorphosis and indicate other paths not taken. Painting, like music, is "thinking" when it evokes transformation-sublimation, and cracks the limits of fixated cultural imagination. Beauty lies in this approximation to death while working toward birthing. While working on my videos *MaMemento Fluidus—MaMedusa* and *Ein Raham*, I was dealing with the emergence of my own shell shock related to the rescue and evacuation operation that destiny called upon me to organize many years ago,<sup>5</sup> while simultaneously working on the subject-matter of drowned women, refugees of nowadays, or prisoners of the past—those women who were force-marched from Stutthof to the Baltic Sea and put on a ship, which then was machine-gunned. My maternal aunts, Helka, Etkka, and Saba (Fried) were transported to Auschwitz with my paternal grandparents Bracha and Shlomo Lichtenberg. Toward the end of the war, the sisters were force-marched and imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp. Helka was force-marched to the Baltic Sea and put with others on a boat that was machine-gunned and caught fire,



Film still from Bracha L. Ettinger, *Ein-Raham – Crazy Woman* (videoart film, HD, 16:06 min. in loop, 2014 [2012]).

and drowned.<sup>6</sup> In the video art films, like in the parallel series of paintings (*Eurydice—Medusa—Pieta*), I keep associating seawater with amniotic water and with ashes: in the open sea. Artworking toward subject-space-depth.

Painting transforms traumatic traces when its kernel corresponds to ours: I feel in it, it thinks in me, I know in it, and it trusts the potential viewer. A painting transforms the internal space and can work in the reality when its kernels “communicate” with other kernels, but only when its force—which is beauty, which is a kind of love—calls us to join in its internal moves. Nuances of borderlinking-borderspacing touch-create a psychic-mental space within the physical space *in and beyond* the visible. A painting works when you enter with it into resonance—an alliance. Yet, when these ideas are applied to fields larger than art, the matrixial’s potential for resistance risks appropriation.

The strings are feminine-matrixial when an affective touch links between subject and object. For that reason, its translation to the social, cultural, and political domains can’t be general or automatic. In the political domain, which is a domain of power games, any idea, image, and word can be easily distorted. The aesthetic and the ethical domains are different—but both can inform the domain of politics and hopefully influence it, even if this will take time. The alliance or contract (*AMANA* [אמנה]) by way of trust (*AMON* or *EMUN* [אמון]) in caring, fostering, parenting a non-I (*OMEN/ET* [אומנת]/[אומנת]) entails an emotional-psychic shareable space. Here, I and non-I need trust-fidelity as the virtue of the encounter-event. Change is slow and gradual, and it effects the trajectories of elements that absorb more and more meanings of carriage. Then the recontextualization of the past doesn’t lead to amnesia as a way to un-seize horror. The angel of art sees the future even as she flies backward.

Eurydice, like the poet's mother in Celan, is looking for grains of light. The visual then works toward compassion and respect by beauty and by the sublime.

**KT:** Maybe we can continue a little longer with this in the direction of the theme of this special issue, in which we want to reopen the question concerning the human or thinking (in) a different humanism that includes the question of "subjectivity" and how to attend to "our" in/human(e) realities. I'd like to draw us to the question of the human(e) as it appears in your work in relation to its feminist import.

**BLE:** Well, in the ethics raised by the feminine-maternal-matrixial Eros, I add a third term to the Enosh-human as a subject thought by means of "to carry": the third term is trust, and I do so via the Hebrew root A.M.N. Crucially, trust and mother [AM – אמ—pronounced *em* in Hebrew] share the same root. Mother is part of this idea as concept and contains its truth-value as rooted in the real. "I have made, and I will carry." What kind of "God" says this? What kind of femaleness is called here to be heard? Surely not the physical womb but the resonance its impression leaves in us as subject, space-subject, and subject-space, awaiting symbolic relief for the idea of subjectivity as such.

Where carriage is not at the horizon, the world is gone. "And I will carry" gives a sense of the trust we can hope for, where the m/Other, as a subject of response-ability must be respected. And when the world is gone, carriage must be reintroduced, not by God, but by the subject (in Hebrew *HA'NOSSE HA'ENOSHI* [הנושא האנושי]) who is humane and by borderlinking *will give witness to the witnesses*. In painting you might work on a subject-matter even without having witnessed in reality the event that it indicates. It is interesting to see that the issue of *AMEN* ([אמן]) so be it; expressing a consent from the root A.M.N.: "trust") first arises in the Bible in a terrible context, precisely, paradoxically, by the betrayal of the female person. Its misuse as putting the woman against herself indicates the appropriation of the term by patriarchal society and its exploitation. *AMEN* arose in the context of a community that identified itself with a jealous man-husband, whose possession and envy of his woman's fertility express themselves in the destructive desire to damage her potentially maternal body. A primal womb-envy? Not only is she the possession of her husband; she is forced to say *AMEN* to what she doesn't believe in, in order to be safe. She is punished by the heads of the community for her husband's paranoia, which is directed toward her. To the violence toward her fertile body, to the sacrifice of her own body, she is forced to say "amen." This is an example of a misuse of the term and of a foreclosure of its feminine etymology.

The destruction of an-other who is matrixially connected to me (by contingency or by choice) are also a self-destruction; we hurt in our bond, but we might feel this in deferral. Horizontal as well as vertical

trans-inscriptions, or cross-inscriptions, do occur. Responsibility in bearing them leads to freedom *and* tolerance. Linked traces are spread in space and in time. Artworks that show this paradox—that freedom is possible *in* responsibility and responsibility births freedom—as a wonder, as beauty, are rare. I think of some films by Andrei Tarkovsky, I think of Paul Celan, of Anna Akhmatova, of Goya, of Caravaggio, of Duras. Touched by an angel, their works, like wings, carry a mystical chariot by way of revealing, covering, separating, and conjoining the kernel of the humane. In reality, then, appears an object that is a transject—both material and spiritual. Such is the subject-object of a painting, to me.

In his work on ethics, Levinas gives Abel the ethical priority in that the subject is already always a Cain. I-as-Cain, each human being, has already interiorized Abel and is thus carrying the guilt of the other's fate, to the point of even becoming sacrificial in response to the ethical call arising from the other. In this idea, even in love death drive primes. For Levinas, man after the Shoah is like a survivor who is always guilty. The I is always a Cain. Wherever there is a trauma, there are feelings of shame and guilt.

Yet, for Eve, is there not something more? Both the killer and the victim are her sons. Hers is another kind of sorrow—her condition doesn't allow the defense by way of split or absorption. She is im-pure. The difficult path to compassion begins with Eve's com-passion. If the other can never be your total Other, there *is* an Other of the Other—in the feminine. Transcendence is therefore translucence—in the feminine. The sorrow, shame, and guilt of carrying the living and the dead can be sublimated. The conditions for the ethical attitude do not depend only upon recognizing that you are already a Cain, but also upon recognizing that you are also already an Eve as well as that you are indebted to Eve, to her birthing and her lamentation. Today's psychoanalysis and dynamic psychotherapy destroyed this debt and eliminated this respect. The maternal became a site of abjected traces, a waste bin.

As for my art-working, since 2008 I felt a change, a new stage, a new challenge. For many years, through the figure of Eurydice I am handling the subjects of the death inflicted on mothers and children. Years ago, until 1988, I dealt somehow with traces from my own shell shock hidden in the technique of pigment and ashes and in the figure of burnt light aircrafts. Then I let it fade away. Came the twenty years of *Eurydice*. In the last nine years, since 2008, and most strongly since 2010, after the exhibitions at the Freud Museum in London (curated by Griselda Pollock) and at the Tapies Foundation in Barcelona (curated by Catherine de Zegher), which contained many of the *Eurydice* paintings as well as notebooks, I felt the urge to return to the subject-matter of the shipwreck, accompanied by the urgency to work around the theme of "Stutthof." Here too—shipwreck in water by fire and drowned people. I started by photographing a tiny water pool, a spring of two square meters in the Judea Desert, and portraits

of my parents. I digitally turned the image of the spring into an ocean. From some nine still photos only, the sea and the abyss appeared. Calm and stormy. Blue and rose. Only a few oil paintings are finished from this series up until now. Three were presented at the *14th Istanbul Biennial* in 2015, and three in *Colori* at GAM, Torino (the first curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in collaboration with G. Pollock and the second by CCB alone). There are some twenty more oil paintings in different stages in the studio, that you are looking at, a big number of drawings, and three video works that I showed in Ireland, Mexico and Moscow. New concepts, that appeared in my notebooks in these last nine years, slowly entered my theoretical writing. Memories were scribbled in the notebooks, too; dreams, nightmares, flashbacks. The visual work says more. It has its own language. Each “frame” in the video is composed of endless transparent frames. Each painting—transparent thin layer upon layer, slowly—knows more than me and much before me. A lot of what I “know” I cannot express in words. The abstract in the painting has its own language.

Hundreds of times I looked at the photo of the naked women with children on their way to be shot before I dared to say: this one carries a child, this one is pregnant, this one is looking at the baby who is carried by this one. All these mothers. . . .

Carrying as well as miscarrying, bearing and unbearing, these are the crossed primordial configurations to be all symbolized *in the humane*. To give ethical priority to the suggestion “carry!” affirms a special Eros of the being-toward-birth that overwhelms and includes loss and unbirthing as well. And a part of this ethics is the deep respect for the female person and her corporeality. Matrixiality affirms that no phallic regulation can apply to the zone where female corporeality is attended to in sorrow and joy. This shareability is *not* in the phallic scope. Abel’s eyes are still looking at us from the grave. We have to learn how to look at Eve’s eyes. Painting allows you to open the wounds of the world and stay with—and not control and not appropriate—the pain of the world. Painting allows you to stay with the horror and the sorrow without running away. This is one of the ways art humanizes us: it keeps us near the unbearable for as long as it takes to begin to see. *What* it does it by is called Beauty. Beauty is in the painting, the “object,” not only the “process.”

If we look at the Hebrew again, you see that Cain doesn’t complain about the punishment, as the English translation has had it, but he rather admits his guilt, sorrow, and regret. Cain in fact says: “my *sin*,” “my *iniquity*,” and not “my *punishment*,” as the classical translation goes. My sin (*AVON* [אָוון]) is bigger than my capacity to carry (*MINESO* [מִנְשׂוּא]). This makes him the prisoner of his fate. Only the I-subject as carrier is free—the freedom from shame and guilt, for the one who wishes to remain humane, is rooted in metaphorical carrying of the brother. “I who didn’t carry the other carries a weight I can hardly bear” indicates a pain that is humane. This dialogue is important not as a

mythological story, but as an ethical proposal: I am always already guilty, and subjugated to this guilt, unless unless I care-carry my sisters *in the now*. I am what I am now capable of “carrying”—not “containing,” not “accumulating.” To care-carry an-other in need and feel her pain is perhaps the true basis for freedom, in the humane, by way of the feminine. Re-visiting (literally *re-specting*) the feminine-maternal, we can imagine a horizon beyond the Ethics of Sacrifice (sacrificing/being sacrificed).

Humanizing means turning such a potential engrained in our real into a symbolic zone in which the destiny of ethics is appraised. Co-inhabit(u)ation in the humane and the linkage to the Other under this feminine function is perhaps the divine in the human to which we can return as a metaphor: *I must carry you* can be a crucial intervention of the feminine. It has its price though, and each time a different one. Awareness of this perspective, sublimated for the contact with traces of the human other, dead or alive, brings us also to the Madonna in each Pietà. And if we take the Madonna and the Pietà not as figure(s) in a religious narrative but as figures in an external or an internal unconscious schema, we realize that the Madonna in the Pietà struggles from with-in us to transform the sublimation of the choice of carrying, miscarrying and discarrying. Sorrow, not anxiety. The sorrow of compassion is so close to anxiety. Where the paternal function fails, there is still hope in enlarging our basis for human values through the feminine-maternal-matrixial spectrum. There, where the paternal-male represents culture while the maternal-female was represented as nature, the female modes of sublimation were delegitimized and her body became subjected to outside control. For me, in the last series of paintings the feminine enters the abstract dimension in terms of strings and morphed colors. The abstract must again and again do its work of resonance and healing with traces of a photographic image or of memory, but also with the fore-images that sustain my working of the color as light and is related to the human soul and to the cosmos.

**BMK:** You move us now again very importantly from sacrifice to hope; hope (still) emerging from “trust after the end of trust.” To speak of trust, in the way you suggest it—as *EMUN*, etymologically embedded in *AM* for mother and connecting it to the human as “carrier”—is very timely; in these necropolitical times, with ever increasing international mistrust, but also with the deep-seated racism and resurgent sexism that we see on the rise again.

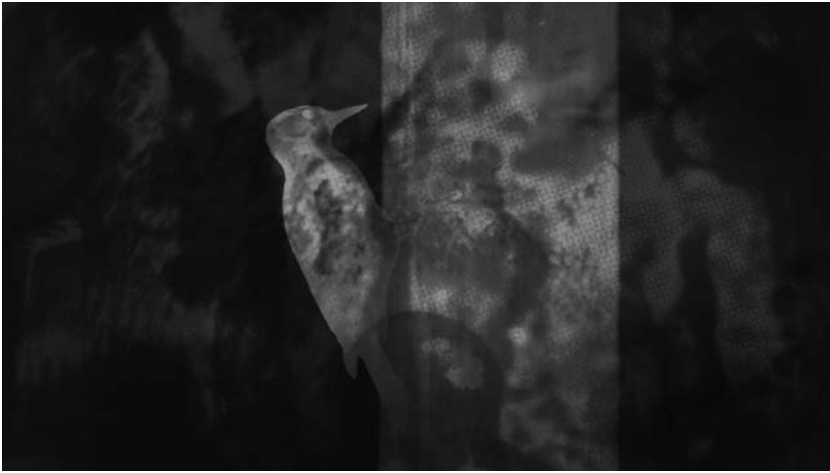
**BLE:** The crisis of humanity is marked and perpetuated by the generalized understanding of what a *subject* is and by the *impossibility-to-trust* that characterizes the contemporary times. What does *trust* mean after the historical events that entailed and stamped the *end of trust*? Where does one restart in

view of the betrayal of the big Other (be it national, institutional, economic, religious, paternal)? Its failure gnawed at the idea of trust to such an extent that we are almost totally ignorant of the kinds of *truth or realities that can emerge from the affective-mind-state of trust*. Imbued as we are with the kinds of truth and realities that emerge from suspicion and paranoia and install them, as well as from virtually augmented “realities” intended for an instant relief and creating false truths—in my view a different perspective restarts with the feminine-maternal-matrixial horizon.

The ignored Hebrew etymology supports my understanding of a subject ported by the *time-space-duration of pregnancy-like encounter-events* and inspired by feminine-maternal subjectivizing processes. *Subject*—*NOSSE* [נושא]—is subject as *carrier, carry-bear, and care-support*. And *trust*—*EMUN* [אמוּן]—is related etymologically to *mother* and *matrix, caring-nursing-supporting* and *alliance*. The subjectivizing processes that these words carry and their ethical status concern each subject, no matter what gender it adopts, inasmuch as each one of us, who came to life, came to life since she was carried inside a female body for a long-enough duration. Such real *carrying* is not reclaimed back. The ethical subject in my spirit distances us from the logic and morals of power with its accumulated “goods” and turns us toward the logic and ethics of care and caring and compassion. Responsibility and respect emanating from care-carrying and trusting enlarge the capacity to elaborate the *traces of the trauma* of one another. We can take into care the shock of the other.

I hope that one day we’ll be able to recognize the rights of what silently carries us: the ocean, the forest, the night. What silently carries us, whether object, subject, or environment, must not be exhausted. The right of the ocean for clear water, the right of the water for its cycles, the right of the trees for fresh air, the right of the forest to multiply its trees. Through subreal strings, we are transconnected. We can account for this transmissibility. To care for the air that carries us. To respect. As humans, we also have the obligation toward the endurance of the possibility for carriage as such. The sublime is more important today than ever, when I am in wonder, lost in front of that which is more enormous, more immense than me, and which carries me and which I need to support: the bees and the butterflies no less than the ocean and the mountains. If the sublime was that which gives me the feeling of awe as something that is *versus* me—mountains and skylight *versus* me, even when engulfing me and containing me—more than ever is it important to realize now that there is more to life than one’s self in the mirror. To give the outside a transjective status by way of engaging to protect and bear, where the subject is a matter-space that carries—this is one of the themes of the *MaMemento Fluidus—MaMedusa* video. Today, when the abstract meets the figure in order to affect it, it is possible to





Film still from Bracha L. Ettinger, *Ein-Raham – Eurydice* (videoart film, HD, 19:57 min. in loop, 2014 [2012]).

think of beauty-with-sublimity; which also means rethinking beauty and rethinking the sublime, and to overcome the split between “abstraction and empathy” and move toward abstraction with compassion.<sup>7</sup>

I want to once more return to Celan who says: “There is no witness to the witnesses,” and, “The world is gone, I must carry you,” in order to add this: At the end of the night—there was no carrier to the carrier. At the end of the night, **you** must carry when you can dare, in sorrow and in joy, participate in the transformation of unbearable traces, so that from *the ceremony of the loss of center* and in an era of the surface we will move to a new understanding of space, subject, subject-space of carriage and depth.

Tel Aviv, October 2016

## NOTES

1. “Carriage - for Mexico” served as a basis for a long series of lectures, among them at Tel Aviv-Jaffa Academic Institute, *Feminine Presence: Symposium*, October 28, 2013; Summer School, IPAK.Center, Belgrade, Serbia, August 23–24, 2014; Museo Leopoldo Flores, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Toluca, November 14, 2014; Instituto Francés de América Latina, Mexico City, November 18, 2014 and Universidad de Guanajuato, November 25, 2014.
2. The conversation from 2011 is published in German translation as “Sich verlieren und plötzlich eine Welt finden: Bracha L. Ettinger im Gespräch mit Birgit M. Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele” (see Kaiser/Thiele 2012).
3. A few pages later in that text we can read: “After the catastrophe. The humane must reappear—in wit(h)nessing. There. Here. To bear, to carry—how to create

this potentiality? Inspiration includes you and me in its space. How to know-carry, what am I to bear? Who will bear further? [. . .] Wondering upon the grain of light within light, wondering upon the grain of light within darkness. Dwelling and passing through the kernel-eye-water-spring of this space grasped when a kernel with its others borderlinks and resonates. Co/in-habit(u)ating with one another, making a home from this space, even in the water. The nestling-nesting passion of the floating bird-eye is a soul-space. It enters you as you enter it. A space, as free (*halal panui*—הלל פנוי) it carries. Here, with a touch of the brush-pencil, *I must* and *I choose*—become one” (Ettinger 2015, 356).

4. See also “The Heimlich” (1997), reprinted in Ettinger 2005, 157–62.
5. For more detail, see (in Hebrew) [https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/אילת\\_המשחתת\\_טיבוע](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/אילת_המשחתת_טיבוע) (last accessed October 5, 2017), and [אילת\\_המשחתת\\_נפגעי\\_בחילוץ\\_13\\_שיטת\\_פעילות](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/אילת_המשחתת_נפגעי_בחילוץ_13_שיטת_פעילות) (last accessed October 5, 2017).
6. For more detail on the death-marches from Stutthof, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stutthof\\_concentration\\_camp#Death\\_march](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stutthof_concentration_camp#Death_march) (last accessed October 5, 2017).
7. In *Abstraction and Empathy*, Wilhelm Worringer writes that the dimension of empathy must vanish from the sphere of abstraction in the visual creation. He presents a split between empathy that concerns the human, and abstraction that concerns the inanimated. In a series of papers, Ettinger addressed this basic problem and came up with an abstraction that relates to the animated and the human, in the move from empathy to compassion in art (see, e.g., Ettinger 2017; also Worringer 1997).

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